



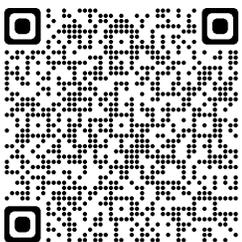
Gratitude & Grace by Sara Bushell

Last year, office cubicles were empty. Schools had empty hallways. Our own church and Parish Hall were still, devoid of passing of the peace and chatting over coffee. Yet, as Tim Gunn would say, we made it work. We got our jobs done, our school's children learned, and we continued to worship. It was not ideal and for many of us, it left us feeling lonely, isolated, and stressed.

The pandemic times were like a prolonged season of Lent, during which we all gave up seeing each other in person, a sacrifice for the health of our community. The absence of our relatives, friends, co-workers, even familiar strangers in the routines of our daily lives provided a stark "come to Jesus" moment, if you will, for some of us that perhaps we had taken the ability to gather, to hug, and to be in shared space for granted. In the same way, the impending doom of running out of toilet paper made us wonder what we did before toilet paper, what acceptable substitutes might be out there, how much toilet paper we use in a year, etc. Or, maybe that was just me.

We looked for acceptable substitutes for in-person gatherings and tried celebrating, mourning, meeting, and playing on FaceTime and Zoom. What we learned was what science already knew: that something magical happens when we stand next to each other. When two or more gather together, our bodies begin to sync biologically. Our hearts attempt to beat together and we start to breathe at the same pace. There may never be a true substitute, despite all of our technology, for being in the same place at the same time. We are truly communal creatures.

That's why our institutions of work, scholarship, and worship still remain now that the pandemic is subsiding. It was never about the buildings. You, the People of Grace, are the church, just as Jesus said. There's something magical that happens when we stand next to each other, singing, listening, and praying. I'm giving to Grace in gratitude that we are able to come together once again and because I can't possibly fit all of y'all in my house every Sunday, I'm giving to maintain the brick and mortar of our building. Our beautiful doors swing open nearly every day to welcome us in and provide a shared space for the magic, for each and every one of you.



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