



# Table Graces

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## TABLE GRACES OF WALTER BERGMANN 1923-2010

Walter Bergmann loved me. I never questioned it, although I don't remember hearing the words. Wasn't much of a hugger either. But he did hand out pats – awkward, unavoidable, one-handed mini-hugs; tactile “I love you's” that never meant much until after they stopped. May I tell you about his last two pats?

I had been busy googling Alzheimer symptoms, as if that would help, while he had been busy dying. “He's not responding,” my sisters said, “you should come.” When I got there he was done with swallowing, eye contact, and responses to verbal cues. But he had one pat left, when I unclasped the folded hands. With that pat, I was a teenager, in our dining room, when he happened to walk through as Mum and I were looking at a sewing project I was working on. She said, “Walter, look what our daughter made.” He stopped there, at the corner of the table that held the old Singer, patted my shoulder, and said, “Isn't that something,” with shy pride as if I might have been the first Mennonite girl ever to wield a needle and thread. Fact is, I nearly failed home-economics. But his approving affirmation contributed to a stubborn refusal to quit stitching until I had sewn my own wedding dress and five bridesmaid's dresses. His final pat said it one more time, important encouragement for us all when we face all those temptations to give up, “Isn't that something. You can do it. Persevere. You have need of endurance.”

He doled out pat number two at the last meal we shared, if you could call it that. We'd arranged for him to live in a skilled nursing facility, where they dispensed care, compassion, and lovely meals, too, three times a day, in the dining room just a short walk down the hallway. Only they informed us he wasn't eating, so I decided to drive up and stay with him for a day. Maybe it was time for me to be the encourager, and it would be nice to see their old

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friends again. Dad, however, shuffled past eager widows with not even a nod, straight to the table where the only other single man sat. This man asked questions about our family's finances, which would have been the first time I heard Dad talk about that topic should he have answered, while soup bowls appeared in front of us. Yikes, Dad. This is where you sit every day? But, I would be polite. This must be what it's like to be a child-parent. If I set a good example, maybe Dad would remember the fine art of small talk. So I spewed energetic chitchat, and neglected to notice that the cook had stood up to pray. But Dad noticed, and his hand reached over to give me an authoritative pat.

With pat number two, I was a recalcitrant toddler, my little hand in his on our way to the church basement bathroom, for a woodshed lesson on fidgeting during prayer. I was a rebellious child, dutifully ignored while he stood to pray before breakfast, to teach that respect is always due the Heavenly One. I was a busy teenager, properly forced to sit at the table after dinner until he'd read the Bible and I'd taken my turn praying aloud, after Mum. I was a distressed wife and mother, seeking advice during a time of turmoil, being told, "Don't forget the work of prayer." So, at our last supper, his firm pat spoke loud and clear, "Someone is approaching the Throne of the Most High. This, now, is important. Stop talking and pray."

After Dad retired from teaching in 1979, the year Bob and I married, God gave him a job as chaplain of a senior's center. Official graces before meals was more than a formality to him, and over the years he wrote out by hand, a bit shaky but very neatly, this collection of "Table Graces." He didn't collect or compose them just for the ears of the elderly he cared so much about, for as I type I hear the octogenarian voice grow strong and confident at the head of the table, reciting one of the familiar prayers he'd tucked away in his heart. I hope you'll enjoy them, and I pray you too will be reminded about the work of prayer.

~Ruth Froese

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We thank Thee Lord for, for this our food  
That You have given for our good.  
We ask that we may not forget  
To share with those less fortunate;  
And may we ever grateful be  
For all we have doth come from Thee. ~Walter Bergman

~Amen~

Father, we thy children cherish  
All the blessings from Thy hand.  
Thou dost still Thy children nourish  
With the gifts that Thou hast planned.  
Bread and drink Thou dost bestow;  
From our lips let praise o'erflow. ~Esther Horch

~Amen~

As we have gathered here to dine  
We thank Thee Lord, for we are Thine  
You grant us what our bodies need  
And that, which well, our soul doth plead

So as we leave this hall again,  
And go about our tasks at hand,  
May honour to Your Name be given,  
For manna that you send from Heaven. ~Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

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We thank Thee, Lord for this our food,  
For life and health and every good'  
Let manna to our souls be given,  
The Bread of Life sent down from Heaven. ~John Cennick

~Amen~

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. ~Thomas Ken

~Amen~

Thank the Lord with joyful heart  
Who doth wondrous things impart,  
For His goodness rich and pure  
Shall forever more endure. ~unknown

~Amen~

O God who supplies the needs of mankind  
With so much variety that we find  
Help us not to forget the needs of others  
Around this globe, our sisters and brothers,  
Who lack that which we take for granted;  
May we share of our bounty that you have handed,  
You have given enough for all to claim;  
That together with them, we may bless Your Name. ~Walter Bergmann, M.C.C. prayer

~Amen~

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God is great and God is good  
And we thank Him for this food.  
By His mercy we are led  
By His hand we all are fed  
Thank you Lord for daily bread. ~unknown

~Amen~

Lord, bless these gifts that come from Thee;  
Let this food for our nourishment be.  
Grant us protection from want and death;  
As long as we dwell here on earth.

But this our daily food alone  
Is not enough for life to own;  
Thy precious Word, our soul doth feed  
Gives us for living what we need. ~translated from "Herr Segne Uns Die Gaben Dein" in *Gesangbuch  
der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde*

~Amen~

Five thousand Lord, by Thee were fed  
With but a little fish and bread  
Your thanks to God did multiply  
Enough for all to satisfy.  
So as we gather here to dine,  
Help us give thanks, for we are Thine. ~freely translated from "Funf Tausend Menschen" in  
*Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde*

~Amen~

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We thank Thee, then, O Father,  
For all things bright and good.  
The seedtime and the harvest,  
Our life, our health, our food;  
No gift have we to offer,  
For all Thy love imparts,  
But that which Thou desirest,  
Our humble, thankful hearts. ~by Mathias Claudius, translated by Jane Campbell

~Amen~

Let us to God our Father,  
Give thanks and all our ardor,  
For all these generous tokens  
That He to us bestows.

Our body soul and spirit  
From Him we do inherit,  
Those He will keep intact,  
And never will neglect. ~From "Nun Lasst Uns Gott dem Herren" by Ludwig Heibold, translated by Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

Lord for your blessing we implore,  
Food for our body, that You restore,  
Through Your great power and might.  
And on our pilgrim journey here,  
Feed us Your Word that is so dear,  
So that our soul may grow aright. ~from "Herr Segne diese Gaben" by Bernhard Harder, translated by Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

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While on our pilgrim journey  
Our needs You do supply;  
Food for the daily journey,  
With grace You multiply.

We thank Thee for this bounty  
To which we may apply,  
As we share here in unity  
Our needs to satisfy. ~Walter Bergmann, 1992

~Amen~

(Seven) hungry mouths sit down to dine  
Around our table regularly three times,  
Awaiting from your gracious hands  
That which has lovingly been planned.  
To God we owe our thanks each day,  
Receive our praise as now we pray. ~Walter Bergmann, 1992 (With a note that the number in  
brackets can be changed to suit the number in the family)

~Amen~

We thank Thee, God, for nourishment,  
With which Thou dost to us attend,  
And furthermore we ask Thee Lord  
That body and soul be restored.

May we be fed with Thy rich word  
Which satisfies us now henceforth  
And then, dear God, may Thou supply  
After this time eternal life. ~Erasmus Alber, "Wir Danken Gott fur Seione Gaben," translated by  
Walter Bergmann (1992)

~Amen~

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Lord, bless our family gathering here,  
May Jesus' joy to us be near;  
These bounties bless, and grant that we,  
May spend this day to honor Thee. ~Helen Reimer Bergman

~Amen~

On the second Sunday in the month of May,  
We celebrate blossom and Mother's Day.  
We remember the present and the past,  
Memories of our mothers that will last.

They set by example in deed and in word  
A life that is pleasing to the Lord.  
We have gathered here to dine,  
May God bless our mothers is our prayer divine. ~Walter Bergmann, 1995

~Amen~

Grant us O Lord, our daily bread,  
Keep us from want and wastefulness,  
Protect us through Your loving Son,  
God, our Father, on Highest throne.

Dear Lord, open your generous hand;  
Let us your grace and goodness know,  
Feed us as children who depend  
On You for food and sustenance. ~by Nicolas Herman (died 1561), freely translated by  
Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

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For these gifts that Thou dost so richly bestow,  
Father in heaven may we thankful be!  
It is only by grace that we do owe,  
That which we now receive from Thee.

May we always remember with grateful hearts  
The love that you so freely give;  
Your grace and truth that you impart  
As long as we on earth do live. ~Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

Thank the Lord with bounteous measure  
He doth fill our fruitful land!  
All we own and all we treasure  
Is the gift of His good hand.

Thank the Lord for life He gave us,  
Gives us food and fruitage rare;  
O, who would not sing His praises  
Glad His goodness to declare. ~by G. R. Fischer, translated by C. E. Krebie

~Amen~

Be present at our table, Lord,  
Be here and everywhere adored;  
These mercies bless and grant that we  
May feast in Paradise with Thee. ~unknown

~Amen~

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With thanks O God we do accept  
The gifts that you so freely give  
And recognize that we are kept  
By Your good hand as here we live.

You give us that for which we long  
In health, for body, soul, and spirit;  
And hope for that which lies beyond  
Which we in faith do here inherit. ~Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

We thank You Lord for Your great love  
We thank You for this food,  
We pray that it will make us strong  
To do what's right and good. ~Ruth McNaughton Hinds in "We Want to Give"

~Amen~

We thank Thee God our Father,  
As we have come together  
To fellowship and dine  
And praise Your Name divine;  
May we not take for granted  
That which to us You've handed  
Receive from us Your thanks today  
As we do pause afore to pray. ~Walter Bergmann

~Amen~

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On this happy occasion we thank Thee, Lord,  
For Your blessings to us that You accord;  
The greatest gift that to us was given  
Your Son who came down to earth from heaven.

You supply us so richly with what we need:  
Food for our soul, as Your Word we read;  
For physical needs enough and to spare,  
Our cup overflows, so that we can share.

We have gathered here to partake of this bounty;  
May we go forth from here to extol and expound Thee,  
Receive Thou our thanks in our worship and praise,  
For all we receive from Your bountiful grace. ~Walter Bergmann, 1994, in Calgary

~Amen~

We thank You Lord for happy hearts,  
For rain and sunny weather.  
We thank You Lord for this our food,  
And that we are together.  
Be with us Lord both night and day,  
And guide us in our work and play. ~Noon Prayer by Carl Hiebert, "Us Little People" in *Mennonite Children*, 1998.

~Amen~

For health and strength and daily food  
We give Thee praise, O Lord, Amen. ~unknown

~Amen~

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Father, we thank Thee for the light  
And for the blessings of the night  
For rest and food, and loving care,  
And all that makes the world so fair.

Help us to do the things we should,  
To be to others kind and good,  
In all we do, in work or play,  
To grow more loving every day. ~"Morning Hymn", *Canadian Readers Book II*, (Toronto, Ont: T. Nelson & Sons, W.J.Gage & Co. Ltd.) 1925.

~Amen~

Thou art the bread of life,  
O Lord to me,  
Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me;  
Give me to eat and live  
with Thee above,  
Teach me to love Thy truth for Thou art love. ~Alexander Groves

~Amen~

Bless this house, bless this food,  
Bless our being together.  
Keep us safe, keep us pure,  
Keep us sharing together.  
Help us to know and do Your will,  
To love and serve You always.  
Bless this house, bless this food,  
Bless our being together. ~"Mealtime Blessings," *Worship Together*, (Fresno, CA: Board of Faith & Life, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren) 1995.

~Amen~

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We thank You God of love  
For all Your tender care,  
Your creatures all, both great and small  
Are nurtured everywhere.

We thank You God of love  
For life, for health, for grace,  
Our gratitude for love and food,  
We bring with thanks and praise. ~John Regehr, "We Thank You God of Love," *Worship Together*,  
(Fresno, CA: Board of Faith & Life, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren) 1995.

~Amen~

To God Who gives our daily bread  
A thankful song we raise  
And pray that He who sends us food  
May fill our hearts with praise. ~Thomas Tallis (1505-1585)

~Amen~

Martha went home the eleventh of May.  
Eighty-three years God gave her light of day  
Together with Mary she lived very happily  
Alongside they worked and enjoyed company  
Fellowship with family shared over and over  
Friendships all strengthened in suitable weather  
The length of our wait we know not what will be  
Till we join her to worship in eternity. ~Walter Bergmann, 2006.

~Amen~

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Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest  
Let these gifts to us be blessed. unknown

~Amen~

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing,  
He chastens and hastens His will to make known;  
The wicked oppressing cease from distressing,  
Sing praises to His name, He forgets not His own. ~Source unknown, translated by  
Theodore Baker (1851-1934)

~Amen~

Lord, bless this food that now we take  
To do us good for Jesus sake. ~unknown

~Amen~

Lord for friendships many a year  
That have for us been very dear  
We give thanks for all our blessings here  
For food and fellowship these days  
We enjoy with delight in so many ways  
The least we can do is give thanks and praise. ~Walter Bergmann, 2003.

~Amen~

Cover photo, "Grace" by Eric Enstrom.