

I once was lost, but now...

by Richard Fowler

Did you hear the story of the man who left his \$400,000 violin on the train?¹

To his great relief, musician Stephen Morris's 310-year-old violin was returned to him after he was contacted by a member of the public. Later he gave an interview on BBC news. To my surprise, he played a tune. The irony was not lost on me when he began to play.

The tune was the famous "Amazing Grace". As he played, I mouthed the words: "I once was lost but now I'm found..." An apt choice for such a story. But not just for this story.

This stirring, spiritual song has been the anthem for so many throughout history. Since it was written in 1772 by John Newton, these words have been the emotional echo of hearts from protestors in the Civil Rights movement, to the day Nelson Mandela walked free from prison. It was sung when the Berlin Wall came down, and after 11 September 2001, to comfort a mourning world. Its words have been the source of comfort and strength for so many who at times felt lost and needed a spiritual idea to help them find their way.

This summer, as I drove through a humble Buckinghamshire town called Olney, I was shocked to read on its welcome sign: "Welcome to Olney, the home of Amazing Grace". It was hard to imagine this insignificant town was the birth of words that would be sung the world over. Written by a man who was himself once lost.

John Newton was a slave trader. On one sea journey in 1748, he encountered such a violent storm that it threatened to sink his ship. It was in this moment, lost and powerless, that he cried out to God to save him. That night, after

the storm had passed, he sensed that there was a God who hears and answers prayers, who could save even the worst of men. Later, Newton changed from his lifestyle of profiting from the suffering of others to serving others—this man who was once lost was now found.

This is the grace the song speaks of—receiving an undeserved fresh start and new beginning—leading to a transformed life.

Maybe you feel lost in life right now, in need of a transformation. Maybe life has been cruel to you, or you've been cruel to others. Life may not make sense for you at the moment; you may not see a way forward. If so, I invite you to read the words of this song and see if it can help you find a way forward.

Amazing grace,
how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart
to fear
And grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers,
toils and snares
We have already come.
'Twas grace that brought us safe
thus far
And grace will lead us home.

NOTE

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-50280238/musician-stephen-morris-shock-as-lost-250000-violin-returned>

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