

Serene Jones. *Call it Grace: Finding Meaning in a Fractured World*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2020 (reprint edition). 336 pages. \$18.

Call it Grace is the candid life story of the author, woven with theology. It is a memoir of life and a memoir of how Serene Jones' theology developed throughout her life. Jones engages the reader with evocative memories—personal and those received from family—as well as theological conundrums. Often, these are traumatic, or reflect a fractured world. The book is a journey, often a struggle, to see grace in life and the world. It is challenging in its honesty; yet the general lack of honesty surrounding trauma and abuse is indicative of the *need* for this work. Jones's candor is brave and avoids platitudinal theology. Preachers can take note of the content of the book and the author's methodology of weaving life and theology together.

Jones, the current president of Union Theological Seminary, is the daughter of a theology professor, and was raised in the Disciples of Christ tradition. The book is divided into four sections, which are referred to as stations. These stations move through time, following Jones's life, and the stations also tell about her theological development. The first station is sin and grace. She discusses her early "prairie theology" developed from the plains of Oklahoma. Jones writes about racist, sexist, and abusive memories and events that took place in her life and in her family's complex heritage. At the same time, a family copy of Calvin's *Institutes*, passed down through generations, led her to claim the often underdeveloped grace and love aspects of Calvin's theology. Through Calvin, she holds up the contemporaneous realities of sin and grace as a mystery. Intergenerational trauma and abuse reflect the theological assertion that all are saints and sinners. The second station is destiny and freedom. This section especially explores memories related to race and class. The skillful development of these memories shows how the past impacts the present, sometimes in haunting ways. She tells how people can be caught in sin they did not choose, and yet they are still responsible for the sin. Her father's work with Barth and Niebuhr, as well as her discovery of Latin American liberation theology, form significant theological partners for this section.

Station three explores hatred and forgiveness. It begins by recounting a near-death experience caused by sickness in India. It was during this near-death experience that Jones identified with the everyday existence of suffering people around the world. The hatred side of the station is developed through personal and family experiences surrounding the Oklahoma bombing. The aftermath of the bombing led to a perceived abandonment of theology and belief. Jones struggled with what she held to be true during this time, and whether forgiveness was possible. Forgiveness was also discussed in connection to her divorce. All the while, Baldwin, Thurman, and Cone became theological interlocutors in the struggle for meaning. The final station is redeeming life and death. Here, she names the four pillars of her theology as breath, justice, mercy, and love. She continues to connect her rich theological thinking with stories, especially as she narrates the loss of her mother amid her mother's sickness and confession of an affair. Jones writes explicitly about the interconnectedness of life and theology in this section with Irigaray.

Call it Grace is a moving and powerful book. It challenges the reader to see fractured broken sin and grace as ongoing realities. Preachers can learn from Jones' honest theology and willingness to speak truthfully about trauma and abuse. She models how to think theologically about difficult topics in ways that are real to life. Jones does not hold racism, classism, sexism, and theological elitism at a distance. She confesses her human limitations and her desire to be an agent of good in the world. Jones offers a mode of theological storytelling and theological

meaning-making that can be employed in pulpits and congregations. Beliefs are held in conversation with life in a way that traumatic events, doubts, and limitations inform faith. She maintains that the theological imagination can help us re-imagine much-needed grace and hope.

Readers familiar with Jones's past publications will come to greater understandings of her works, even as *Call it Grace* is accessible to new readers. The work could be read in church settings or academic institutions. Throughout the book, Jones names redeeming grace as the present love of God in the world today. One significant memory that she recounts is the story of her grandmother finding grace in a cool jug of water. *Call is Grace* is itself a work of grace. The book is itself a cool jug of water.

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