**An excerpt from**  *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning.

When I get honest, I admit I am a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt, I hope and get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I am trusting and suspicious. I am honest and I still play games. Aristotle said I am a rational animal; I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer.

To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, … As Thomas Merton put it, "A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God."

…For grace proclaims the awesome truth that all is gift.

All that is good is ours not by right but by the sheer bounty of a gracious God. ..We have been given God in our souls and Christ in our flesh. We have the power to believe where others deny, to hope where others despair, to love where others hurt.

This and so much more is sheer gift; it is not reward for our faithfulness, our generous disposition, or our heroic life of prayer. Even our fidelity is a gift, "If we but turn to God," said St. Augustine, "that itself is a gift of God."

**A reading from the prophet Ezekial**

Thus says the Lord:

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.
**Thanks be to God.**

**Let us read Psalm 121 responsively**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—

 from where will my help come?

My help comes from you O Lord,

 The One who made heaven and earth.

**You will not let my foot be moved;**

 **You who keep me will not slumber.**

**You who keeps Israel**

 **will neither slumber nor sleep**.

The Lord is our keeper;

 the Lord is our shade at our right hand.

The sun shall not strike us by day,

 nor the moon by night.

**The Lord will keep us from all evil;**

 **You, O God will keep our lives.**

**The Lord will keep**

 **our going out and our coming in**

 **from this time on and forevermore**.

**Thanks be to God.**

**A reading from Paul’s s**

**econd letter to the church in Corinth**

 I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows.

And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth.

But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

**Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.**

Thanks be to God.