

Hi, I'm Anne Poarch, and I'm very grateful to be here with you on Mother's Day. I'm also very grateful to call Reverend April Greenwood my friend. A few years ago I started a bicycle tour business called Basket & Bike. We lead a beautiful historic and nature-rich tour along the Virginia Capital Trail and our best stop is right here at Westover Church. We tell a story of the ecological formation of the James River, through the native Americans who lived here for thousands of years before the first settlers. To the first settlers who arrived in 1607, and the first Africans to arrive here in chains in 1619. We talk about how these three cultures came together along the banks of this mighty river, right outside your church, and came together to form a civilization that would, quite frankly, change the world. Now when we enter the church I tell them, I have a final story I want to tell you but it didn't take place here in Virginia. It took place in England or really in the Atlantic Ocean. Some of you may know this story. In the mid-1700s, not long after this church was finished, a slave trader named John Newton was on the high seas, or really off the coast of Ireland. His ship encountered a horrendous storm and not a praying man, he did get on his knees and pray for the safety of his ship. Now it was full of Africans. The ship found its way to safety. After that John Newton started reading the Bible. He didn't convert immediately but over time, this slave trader gave up slave trading. His experience on that boat, that night, he called an epiphany. He said a warmth of light flooded him, and he felt grace and that he could be forgiven for his deeds. He ended up going into the seminary and became a mentor to William Wilberforce who pushed abolishing slavery through Parliament in 1807. In the mid-1770s, Newton penned the words to a song that we all know and love, which has become a gospel spiritual that we sing so often based on that experience on the ship. I hope that wherever you are you will just join right in with me and sing, **Amazing Grace**.

Anne Poarch

- 1 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.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!
- 3 The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.
- 4 When we've been there ten thousand
years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

