181. LANTERN WALK - NOVEMBER 9, 2026

Hey there, Grace Harbor – it's Dan. Welcome back!

Before we jump in, I wanted to give you a quick heads up on some changes that are coming to the podcast.

Starting today, I'll be releasing weekly episodes on Mondays – with the occasional bonus episode thrown in. It's been fun to be on a daily rhythm over the last year, but I know it's a lot for busy families. So, this is going to make it a lot easier to keep up with everything that's happening here in town.

And speaking of the town, I can't tell you the number of families who have told me they love it when their kids ask for Grace Harbor. And so, while we're absolutely going to continue to practice disciplines like gratitude, intention setting, and especially prayer, starting this week, the Family Prayer Podcast has a new name: Grace Harbor Stories!

Now, if you're already subscribed to the podcast, you don't need to do anything. Your app will update the details, and episodes should continue to show up like they always do. And if you haven't subscribed yet, now is the perfect time to do that!

Ok, so let me tell you about last night. Ella invited families to come down to Maker's Garden, which is the art studio and plant shop she opened when she moved back to town after art school.

She had advertised it as a craft night but told everyone to wear their walking shoes. Our family loves crafts, we love walks, and we love Ella, so we weren't going to miss it. It sounded like a nice change of pace after reflecting on All Saints Day the weekend before.

When we got there, her place looked *so* cool. She had brought a bunch of plants in from the greenhouse, which made the space feel like a garden. She'd borrowed a fog machine from the theater, which produced a low layer that rippled across the floor, almost making it feel like we were walking through clouds. And the whole room was lit by a bunch of paper lanterns hanging around the studio, which gave it a warm orange glow.

Ella opened by telling us that during college, she'd studied over in Germany one fall. While there, she experienced a tradition that she knew she wanted to bring back to Grace Harbor someday.

The tradition is called the St. Martin's Day Lantern Walk – or Laternelaufen in German.

The annual event is held to honor the memory of a man named St. Martin of Tours, who lived way back in the 300s. I wasn't familiar with St. Martin because my church tradition doesn't celebrate many of these kinds of festivals, but he has a really interesting story, and Ella shared it with us as the evening unfolded.

"Back when he was a young man," she started, "perhaps

as young as a teenager, Martin served as a soldier in the Roman Army. One very cold day, he was riding along on his horse when he passed a poor man dressed in thin rags. He saw that the man was shivering from the cold. Martin had been learning about Jesus since he was a kid, and he had compassion on the man and wanted to do something to help. So, he used his sword to cut his red army cloak in two, and he gave half to the man to help him keep warm."

She told us that a few years later, Martin would leave the army and become a monk, dedicating himself to a life of prayer and service. He later became an important leader in the church, and so some church traditions hold annual celebrations in his honor.

In certain countries – like Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and others – it's become part of the celebration to retell the story of Martin sharing his cloak and then have a walking parade of children carrying homemade lanterns through town.

And so, our activity for the evening was to make paper lanterns and then have our own lantern walk through Grace Harbor. Ella had white paper bags for everyone, as well as an assortment of markers, paints, and colored bits of paper.

As everyone was getting started on their lanterns, my daughter's friend Fern asked a question. "Miss Ella, why lanterns? I mean, what do lanterns have to do with the story?"

“That’s a great question, Fern!” Ella said. “I actually asked my host family in Germany the same thing, and they said that no one really knows. It’s just what they do. But I wonder if anyone here has any ideas.”

She looked around the room and got mostly shrugs. So she said, “Well, here’s what I think it could mean. When you carry a lantern, it’s impossible to keep the light just for yourself. You end up sharing it with anyone and everyone around you. So, to me, the lanterns are a symbol of the love of Christ that Martin shared and that we can share too.”

Why don’t you all take a few moments and share how you would decorate your paper lantern. Would you draw or paint something specific, or would it be more abstract? What colors would you use? If you need more time, feel free to pause the podcast, and I’ll be right here when you get back.

[PAUSE]

After a couple minutes of work, Fern suddenly crumpled up her paper bag.

“Is something wrong?” Ella asked her.

“I wanted to make a *cool* lantern, but it just looked silly,” Fern said, a little disappointed.

“Oh, then that’s perfect!” Ella replied, and she waved Fern over to look at one of the lanterns Ella had made that

was hanging nearby.

“Is that… a goose?!” Fern asked.

“Yes!” Ella said. “That’s the next part of Martin’s story I wanted to share with you. As I told you earlier, after leaving the army, Martin became a monk, and stories about him started to spread. When a new leader was needed to serve as bishop in a city called Tours in what is now France, the people there wanted Martin.”

“Other bishops didn’t think Martin would be a very good leader. For one thing, he didn’t look the part. Apparently he was quite scruffy. The people also knew that he really loved his quiet life as a monk, and it would take a lot to convince him to take the job.”

“But the people had their hearts set on Martin, so they invited him to visit, hoping to persuade him. Now, this is where things get a bit silly, and it’s probably just a funny part of the tale that someone made up, but the story goes that when Martin got to town and realized what was happening, he tried to run away and hide. The problem was, he hid in a barn, and he startled a flock of geese that started honking loudly. This led the searching crowd right to him! And, just as the people had hoped and prayed, Martin ended up agreeing to be their leader. So, you see, a silly lantern fits right in!”

By the time the lanterns were done, quite a few had geese on them! Ella had us all line up at the door, and she handed out small battery-powered candles to go in the

lanterns.

Suddenly, there was a loud knock at the door, and we all jumped! Ella opened the door, and standing there, dressed in a red coat and holding the reins of one of the horses from his farm was Fern's dad, Ted.

"Dad! You said Mom had to bring us because you were busy!" Fern cried.

"I'm not Dad. I'm Martin," he replied with a wink. "Is everyone ready for the lantern walk?"

"Yeah!" we all shouted back, and Ted… I mean Martin… mounted his horse and led us on a loop through the surrounding streets.

In the time since we had arrived at the studio, the fog had rolled in, matching the vibe Ella had set inside. It only drove home the meaning she had shared with us, as the lanterns lit up the mist. And especially as we walked down one of the darker streets, the lanterns were the only way we knew how to stick together and not run into things. It made me realize just how much the light and love of Jesus is needed, and *we* get to help share it with the world around us.

A highlight of the walk was probably when we passed by the pond, and we heard the Quackersons call out in the foggy darkness. Ted, as Martin, shouted, "Not again!" That got us all laughing.

We made our way back to the studio where there were cookies and hot chocolate waiting. As we enjoyed the treats, Ella offered one last bit of Martin's story.

"So, the night after Martin gave away half his cloak, he had a dream. In the dream, he saw Jesus holding that same piece of cloak, and he was telling a group of angels that when Martin had given his cloak to the poor man, it was the same as if he had shared it with Jesus himself."

We all sat silent for a moment. Then one of the Henderson boys turned to their mother and spoke up with a serious look on his face, "Mom, I've got an old coat in my closet that doesn't fit anymore. Do you think it would fit Jesus?"

"I'm sure it would," she replied with a chuckle. And by the time everyone was heading home, the kids had dreamed up a spontaneous winter coat drive, and Ella helped them make fliers!

That's exactly the kind of thing Jesus was talking about when he taught that anything we do to serve those in need, we're doing it for him as well.

Now, Ella hosted the event on Sunday evening because it's typically easier for families, but the actual St. Martin's Day is this Wednesday, and there are a couple ways you can celebrate where you are.

First, you can make your own paper lantern and even do a lantern walk. The lantern can be as simple as a paper bag, like Ella gave us, or you can find more elaborate

versions online if you’re into crafting.

Second, you can honor Martin’s story by sharing with others, and by letting others share with you. Try setting the intention to see when and how you might do it, because both giving and receiving are a part of how we show God’s love to each other.

Ok, let’s close in prayer. If you want to, you can close your eyes and fold your hands.

Dear God, we thank you for the example of St. Martin, who saw a need and met it out of compassion for his neighbor. This is something we can do in our own way, sharing the love of Jesus with the people around us, whether we’re giving or receiving. Amen.

Ok, Grace Harbor, have a great week, and I’ll catch you next Monday.

© 2026 Defining Grace, LLC | Written by Dan Wunderlich