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FACE TO FACE “Sanctifying Grace” August 2018

By Rev. Jim Wagner Friendship Village Columbus

PRAYER: Please join me in the “Prayer to the Holy Spirit”, found on page 48.

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful …”

INTRODUCTION:

Let us begin with a story … a true story about my best friend in high school whose name is Dick. Dick and his family are Roman Catholic … devout Catholics!

For many years Dick and his father owned and operated a highly successful marina on a lake in Northwest Ohio.

Over the years since high school graduation, Dick and I kept in touch, but not in

a regular sort of way. One day out of the blue, he telephoned to say he was coming to the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, TN for a Boat Dealers Convention.

At that time, I was living and working in Nashville. Could the two of us get together for a breakfast reunion at the hotel for lots of good coffee, lots of good food, and lots of good conversation?

So, we did! As I recall Dick was very excited about his boat business and

eagerly laid out his plans to expand by opening a satellite store on another lake.

But then...right in the middle of a sentence, he paused, looked at me and said,

“Hey, that’s enough about me, what’s happening in your life and why are

you living in Nashville?”

So, I proceeded to inform him that I had moved there from Ohio, where I

had been a United Methodist Pastor, but was now employed by the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church as the Director of the Upper

Room Prayer and Healing Ministries, with the additional duty as Executive

Director of the Disciplined Order of Christ.

(Surely, I thought, all that will really impress Dick.)

His response: “Oh … well … OK … but tell me what do you really do?”

My response went something like this: “Dick, if I could put it all in one sentence,

you might say that I am in the business of spiritual growth and that I encourage

Christians to be more intentional about their spiritual life.”

With that his head dropped a bit. A look of guilt crossed his face. He said,

“I’m sorry to say that my spiritual life is nothing to brag about these days.

It begins exactly every Sunday morning at 7:01 a.m. when the Mass starts and

it ends exactly at 7:45 a.m. when the Priest turns to the people and says:

‘Go the Mass is ended’.”

Then he paused and said, “But, it’s a funny thing, rather uncanny you might say.

In those 44 minutes in church every week,

I am more clear-headed … I make more sound business decisions,

and I am able to think better than at any other time the rest of the week.”

So … I ask you: what does God’s grace have to do with my best friend in high school whose name is Dick?

THE TITLE OF MY TALK IS **[^] SANCTIFYING GRACE.**

MY NAME IS **[^] JIM WAGNER.**

HANDOUT: I invite you to follow along in your handout, as well as my

references to Bible verses.

During our time together, you and I have heard over and over and over about

**[^] God’s Grace.**

Recall that first talk on grace … **[^] Prevenient Grace.**

This is the grace of God that knows us, loves us, and desires a

personal relationship with each of us long before we even become

consciously aware of God. Prevenient grace prepares our souls for

an active, conscious awareness of God.

Psalm 71: 6, 9

“My Lord and my God, you cut the cord

when I came from my Mother’s womb.

I have depended on you from the day I was born.

So do not cast me off in old age. Do not abandon me

when my strength is spent.”

Then we heard about **[^] Justifying Grace** …

the grace of God that loves us and accepts us just the way we are (warts and all). Justifying Grace is God’s amazing gift inviting us to respond

by a personal decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

The result: we are received, welcomed, saved, forgiven, and justified,

not by our good works; but rather by our personal faith and trust in Christ.

Following that we were told some of the ways God uses to communicate and share grace with us on a daily basis. Recall that talk titled **[^] “Means of Grace,”**

with a strong emphasis on worship and the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Who can tell me the title of the next grace talk? Right! **[^] “Obstacles to Grace”**

Those are the personal blocks we put up that prevent God’s grace from flowing abundantly and freely.

AND WHAT IS THE PRIMARY OBSTACLE TO GRACE? SIN!

PERSONAL SIN AND THE MULTITUDE OF WAYS WE FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

So … perhaps some of you are thinking enough said about GRACE; let’s move on

to the next subject. How many of you have seen those TV commercials where they show an amazing product, give you the price PLUS shipping charges, and then say LOUDLY, “BUT WAIT … THERE’S MORE”?

Well, guess what? That’s exactly how it is with God’s grace. Just as soon as you

become aware of God’s operative grace in your life, the Holy Spirit pops up and says, “BUT WAIT … THERE’S MORE!” In other words, God not only desires

to love us and save us by grace, God also wants to TRANSFORM us by grace.

This is what we mean by GOD’S SANCTIFYING GRACE!

Some of you may have heard about the United Methodist Church for All People,

an inner city church in Columbus, close to German Village. The Call to Worship every Sunday of the year is:

GOD LOVES YOU JUST THE WAY YOU ARE,

BUT GOD ISN’T FINISHED WITH YOU YET!

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GRACE?

No … grace is grace. The grace of God is the undeserved, unmerited, unearned.

God is GRACEFUL … GRACIOUS … GRACE-GIVING.

That may explain why the best loved hymn for many Christians is

AMAZING GRACE!

**[^] Prevenient … Justifying … Sanctifying are adjectives that attempt to describe the actions of God at various stages of spiritual development** in the human experience**.** (REPEAT)

Right now, let’s take a closer look at this word “sanctifying.” The Latin word for HOLY is SANCTUS. From SANCTUS we get the English

words: sacred, sanctuary, sanctify, and sanctification.

**[^] Sanctifying Grace:**

* **[^] God’s Holy Spirit** persistently and patiently **[^] making all of life** and all of life’s relationships **HOLY and SACRED**.
* God’s Holy Spirit **[^] leading us toward Christian maturity**.
* God’s Holy Spirit **[^] moving us on to spiritual perfection**.
* God’s Holy Spirit **[^] re-forming and re-shaping us** into the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

And what happens when you and I cooperate with God’s sanctifying grace?

We begin to experience what the Apostle Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5: 17:

“If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation;

the old has passed away. Behold the new has come.”

Does that mean that sanctification can happen instantly or over-night?

Usually not. Instantaneous sanctification is quite rare. The more common Christian experience is a gradual, growing process … a life-long spiritual journey.

Christian conversion is a process. In other words, **[^] Christ wants to do a total**

**make-over with everyone who pledges allegiance to him.** (Repeat)

Sometimes this spiritual growth is steady, progressive and consistent. At other times our spiritual development can be unsteady, stagnant, and inconsistent.

To be honest, I find myself in this latter category, same as my high school friend Dick. On the one hand, we could say that Dick’s participation in Mass and in the

Sacrament of Holy Communion every week are certainly means of grace.

Plus, we could also say that it is God’s sanctifying grace in Dick’s life that

motivates him to get out of bed early every Sunday morning and get to church.

To say this another way: Sanctifying Grace is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer every day in every way from the moment of personal commitment to Christ to eternal life in the Resurrection with Christ.

Even though we may continue to experience mistakes, ignorance, sins, temptations, and human shortcomings; nevertheless, the sanctifying grace of God will not let us go and is constantly present forgiving, renewing, empowering, motivating, guiding and perfecting us in the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Morton Kelsey, an Episcopal Priest and noted author, gives us a way to measure

this sanctifying process of the Holy Spirit:

**[^] “The sign of health in my spiritual life is how much love is flowing through me.”** (Repeat)

Question: How much love is flowing through you today? (Repeat)

Not...how much love are you receiving, keeping, or planning to take home with you? Rather, how much love is flowing through you right now to each of God’s

uniquely created, human beings sitting next to you in this very room?

Jesus was quite clear about this when he said to his disciples:

“This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you.

No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends.

You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” John 15: 12-14

To summarize everything I have said so far …

SANCTIFYING GRACE IS GOD’S PERSISTENT PRESENCE

MAKING ALL OF LIFE AND ALL OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS

HOLY AND SACRED, CHARACTERIZED BEST BY THE

LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

(TRANS) But wait … wait … there’s more! There is something

else we need to consider, something very significant.

**[^]** GOD’S SANCTIFYING GRACE CAN DO LITTLE GOOD IN OUR LIVES

WITHOUT HUMAN COOPERATION.

“So work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

for it is God who is at work in you,

enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Philippians 2: 12-13 (NRSV)

Here we have the Biblical formula … God working inward;

human response working outward.

Notice the initiative is with God, always with God;

response and cooperation with God are required on our part.

**[^ blank screen]** Recall in the Talk on Discipleship, we were reminded that a disciple is a pupil, a learner, a follower and that the way a disciple learns and follows is by practicing certain disciplines taught or modeled in the life of the Master Teacher.

Here is the way Maxie Dunnam explains this concept in his “The Workbook on

Spiritual Disciplines,”

“Discipline for the Christian is the way we train ourselves

or allow the Holy Spirit to train us to be like Jesus,

to appropriate his spirit, and to cultivate his power

to live his life in the world.”

My paraphrase of Maxie’s statement:

The spiritual disciplines we practice are the ways that allow the

Holy Spirit to train us to be more like Jesus.

Here’s the bottom line:

**For maximum effectiveness in spiritual growth, [^] God’s grace must have a disciplined life of cooperation.** (Repeat)

As you evaluate your present pattern of more disciplined living, here is a personal training plan that will enable you to be a more effective disciple of Jesus. You could begin with these six disciplines:

1. The discipline of **[^] piety.**

Giving personal attention to developing a life-style of prayer and recommitting your life to Jesus every day upon waking up.

1. The discipline of an active **[^] church membership.**

Serious and regular participation in the life and ministry of your church, especially worship and Holy Communion. For those of us living in retirement communities, that means showing-up and supporting the spiritual opportunities provided every week.

1. The discipline of **[^] study.**

Daily Bible study and reading other religious literature.

1. The discipline of **[^] action.**

“Faith without works is dead.” When you get home review your notes on two related talks: Christian Action & Changing Our World.

1. The discipline of **[^] spiritual friendship.**

Having a spiritual friend, pairing up with another Christian regularly to help each other discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in your lives.

1. The discipline of **[^] being in a small group of Christians.**

Sharing, supporting, encouraging each other in your spiritual journey.

In the Emmaus movement these are called reunion groups or share groups.

Later, you will hear more about these accountability groups.

TO REPEAT: THE SANCTIFYING GRACE OF GOD MUST HAVE A

DISCIPLINED LIFE OF COOPERATION FOR

MAXIMUM EFFECTIVENESS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

**[^ blank screen]** Perhaps you are thinking that all sounds rather difficult, if not impossible.

But wait...there’s more! Here is the good news! We are not alone; we are not spiritual orphans. The very last sentence recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 28: 20 are these reassuring words of Jesus before he ascended into heaven: “And remember I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Furthermore, to assist each of us on our spiritual journeys, the Holy Spirit freely gives us spiritual gifts to help us grow and to be used for the common good of the church, the Body of Christ. (See Romans 12: 6-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, 28; Ephesians 4: 11).

Then as a Christian matures, these positive attributes known as fruit of the Spirit begin to emerge. As recorded in Galatians 5: 22:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

I began by telling you a true story. Now I close with another true story about God’s grace.

Several years ago, I was in the city of Baltimore, MD to conduct a one-day spiritual retreat with a group of Christians in a downtown church. As I was

setting up the room and arranging my materials, in walked (slowly walked) an elderly woman leaning heavily on an aluminum walker. Instantly I realized

she had made a great effort to be present and I prayed that she would not be

disappointed.

Later that morning, as I was presenting a Bible study on growing in the mind and spirit of Christ, this dear Lady totally interrupted with a very appropriate and pointed question:

“What I want to know is how do you get Christians to do what you are talking about. I live in a retirement home where we watch a lot of TV. So many preachers I see on TV are stuck on spiritual obstetrics.”

Not sure what she was talking about I asked her:

“What do you mean by spiritual obstetrics?”

Her response: “Oh, you know what I mean, born again, born again.

They give no attention to growing up after you are born again.”

Then after a momentary pause, she continued:

“I guess what I am asking is this, how to you get Christians

to move out of the spiritual nursery and into spiritual maturity?”

THINK ABOUT THAT! It matters not how old we are, there are no wrinkles on our soul. God always has something more for each of us. **[^]** The Sanctifying Grace of God invites us, enables us, and expects us to move out of the spiritual nursery and into spiritual maturity every day that we have the breath of life.

My favorite verse from the hymn “Amazing Grace”:

Through many dangers toils and snares,

I have already come;

’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

**[^]** De Colores! **[^ blank screen]**

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Psalm 71: 6, 9

2 Corinthians 5: 17

John 15: 12-14

Philippians 2: 12-13

James 2: 17

Matthew 28: 20

Romans 12: 6-8

1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, 28

Ephesians 4: 11

Galatians 5: 22

BOOK REFERENCE:

Maxie Dunnam, *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines*, The Upper Room, Publisher.