MEANS OF GRACE – Matthew Van Winkle

**[^ blackscreen ]** Please turn to page 48 in your purple worship book and join with me in the prayer to the Holy Spirit.

It was a day that seemed to begin like any other.

The sun came up—warmth filled the air.

As I prepared for the events of the day, nothing gave any indication that something extraordinary would happen, rather, all signs pointed to it being quire routine.

I had a job to do...obligations to fulfill...after all, it was Sunday, and I am a pastor.

At the conclusion of the worship service, a parishioner came up to me and said he had some questions about baptism.

We spoke for a while, when, without warning to me or his wife, this man said  
 that he wanted to be baptized.

After discussing the options and making sure he understood the meaning of his decision, we prepared to perform the baptism two weeks later.

Again, on a Sunday—and again, after the worship service was concluded...

We gathered at his home.

I say we because it was this man, his family, myself... and the entire church  
 congregation.

We gathered around the pond at his farm.

After giving instructions to those gathered... and making a few remarks, this  
 man and I entered the pond.

We waded out to about waist deep.

A few more words... and then I asked him: “Are you ready?”

With a bold voice I proclaimed:

**“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy  
 Ghost”**

As I submerged him under the surface of the water, sunlight glistening on  
 the ripples that ran across the surface like lightning across the sky...  
 ...it was then that I wondered...

...is this what John saw when he baptized Jesus?

With an explosion he came up from under the water.

Born again and cleansed by the redemptive power of Christ.

Suddenly I became aware of the sheer awesomeness of the moment.

I became aware of the sacredness of the moment.

I became aware of the power of the moment.

I became aware that I was blessed to be a part of God working in this man’s   
 life.

I became aware that this—truly—was not just a ritual, but a Means of

Grace.

The title of this talk is **[^]** Means of Grace, and I am **[^]** Matthew Van Winkle.

So what exactly are means of grace?

How many means of grace are there?

How will I be able to tell if I’m experiencing one of the means of grace?

Am I experiencing one right now?

The answers to these questions... and many more are about to be yours.

Get ready.

Get set.

Here... we... go!

The **[^]** means of grace are defined as follows: (write this down)

***The Means of Grace are* [^] *sacred moments where Christ is re-presented,   
 or becomes present to us anew.*** (Repeat, repeat)

Well, I have provided you with the definition for what the means of grace  
 are, however it still doesn’t seem quite as clear as it could be.

Let’s take a look a little closer to what constitutes a means of grace:

**[^]** Sacred moments.

It is important for us to first understand what a sacred moment is if   
 we are to properly understand why they’re important as a means of  
 grace.

(write this down)

Sacred moments are **[^]** moments where we feel close to God. (repeat)

**[^]** Sacraments are sacred moments that Jesus gave to us by clear

Instruction… and example… in the Scriptures.

(I’ll say that again so you can write it down.) (Repeat, repeat)

The number of sacraments celebrated within the church varies according to   
 the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination.

Simply put, different Christian churches recognize different sacraments.

For example:

Baptism

Communion

Confirmation

Marriage

Confession & Reconciliation

Extreme Unction (or “Last Rites”)

Ordination

…and (even) Foot Washing…

…are all seen as sacraments in different denominations. If you are not sure  
 which ones your church recognizes, ask your pastor.

**[^ blank screen ]** What is important for us to know is that Christians must have an attitude of  
 love and humility (***that’s love and humility***) toward the different practices  
 of various traditions.

Illustration:

For myself, I grew up in one particular Christian tradition, and then spent several years exploring others… only to finally end up where I currently am… which is different from the place where I started.

Each tradition I explored placed its own emphasis, or importance, on the sacraments differently.

Oh yeah, one more thing…

It’s important before we go any further that you understand this:

(write this down)

**[^]** All sacraments are sacred moments, but not all sacred moments are  
 sacraments.

Does that make sense?

Simply put, when observing the sacraments, you are experiencing a  
 sacred moment.

This is true because when we are fully engaged and participating in  
 the sacraments, we are able to be close to God.

However, when you experience a sacred moment it does not  
 necessarily occur when observing a sacrament.

Sacred moments can occur at any time or in any place; inside a  
 church building or out in the world… I’ll talk more about this later.

Now, I would like to take a few moments and talk about two sacraments in particular.

These two sacraments which I’m going to talk about are observed and  
 accepted by Christians universally, though between denominations the  
 method and frequency may vary.

The first of these two sacraments that I will talk about is **[^]** baptism (baptism)

Before I talk about baptism I want to explain t you why it is that I’m talking about  
baptism first.

Baptism first is because baptism **[^]** marked the beginning of Jesus public ministry.

Do you remember the story?

Perhaps this will jog your memory; it comes from Luke 3:21-22 (repeat)

**Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had  
 been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the  
 Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a  
 voice came from heaven, “you are my beloved son; with you I am  
 well pleased.”**

Sound familiar?

You may also remember hearing about John the Baptist, a.k.a. John the Baptizer.

One account of his role in Jesus baptism can be found beginning in   
Matthew 3:1-3 (repeat)  
 **in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,   
 “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was   
 spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “the voice of one crying in  
 the wilderness: ‘prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”**

Also look at Mark 1:8 (repeat)  
this is where John says: **“…I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize  
you with the Holy Spirit.”**John said this because he wanted to make it very clear that the baptism Jesus  
would bring is more powerful than the one he did.

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| [show symbol of baptism] (Shell and water) |

So…Consider this question:

Who can baptize?

Let me ask that a different way.

Who is called baptize?

Jesus **[^]** entrusted the Ministry of baptism to his disciples (repeat)

You have probably heard it before, but listen to it again:

**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in  
 the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And  
 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**

That is the Great Commission…

and it is found in Matthew 28:19-20 (repeat)

Write this down:

*Christian baptism* **[^]** *marks our new identify in Christ.* (Repeat, repeat, repeat)

In the history of the Christian church, baptism has been **[^]** experienced in different   
modes, and at different ages.

Simply put, baptism is done differently by different people.

Let’s talk for a moment about the three modes of baptism.

Title this portion of your notes **[^] Three Modes of Baptism**.

**[^] Immersion** (repeat): meaning **[^]** to put under the water (repeat)  
 This is when the individual is immersed, or submerged under  
 the water, before being raised up.

One interpretation of this says that it symbolizes being buried  
 with Christ (immersed under the water) and raised with Christ  
 (raised up out of the water) to walk in newness of life.

See Romans 6:3-4 (repeat)

Another interpretation of this says that it symbolizes death of  
 the old life (immersed under the water) and born again as a   
 new person in Christ (raised above the water).

**[^] Pouring** (repeat): this method, or mode, is **[^]** used frequently where  
 large bodies of water are not available.

Pouring is seen as another form of anointing.

See Exodus 29:7 (repeat) and Psalm 133:2 (repeat).

Early Christian art, most notably that which is found during the  
 third century, depicts John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus.

**[^] Sprinkling** (repeat): this is **[^]** washing by the sprinkling of water (repeat)

Ezekiel 36:26 (repeat)

**I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from  
 all your uncleanliness…**

A new Testament reference is found in…

1 Corinthians 6:11 (repeat)

Another place where different Christian traditions very relates to the appropriate   
**[^]** age for baptism.

In some traditions, a person only gets baptized when they are considered  
 to be old enough to understand what baptism means.

In other traditions babies, infants, or toddlers are baptized.

In some traditions baptism can be done privately, while in others, it must  
 be done publicly, and accompanied by a profession of faith.

This being said, generally speaking in the baptism of **[^]** adults, we celebrate  
 God’s love and justifying grace together in one act.

God’s offer of a relationship is accepted, and the person being   
 baptized is cleansed and incorporated into Christ’s body.

Furthermore, in the baptizing of **[^]** infants and children, we celebrate God’s

Unconditional love and promise for their lives.

As a pastor, I have performed baptisms using immersion and sprinkling.

For example, one month a couple of years ago, I baptized an infant with  
 sprinkling in my church, and then later in the month, I baptized an adult   
 by full immersion in a farm pond. (You may remember the pond story!)

**[^ blank screen ]** If you have questions about baptism, jot them down on an index card. You should  
have some at your table. Later today, Pastor Scott and myself will take some time answering questions that you might have. Just remember, this is not intended to be a “stump the pastor” section—unless the question is directed specifically to Pastor Scott! Your table leader will explain more about this later.

Next… Let’s talk about the second of the two universally recognized sacraments:

**[^]** Communion.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (repeat)

**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on  
the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he  
broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”**

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| [show symbol of communion] Bread |

**In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new  
covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

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| [show symbol of communion] Bread |

**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s  
death until he comes.**

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| [show symbol of communion] Cup |

There are **[^]** different words used to describe communion, and they can all be used  
interchangeably, depending, again, on your individual denominational tradition.

Here are a few:

**[^]** Holy communion  
 **[^]** the Lord’s table  
 **[^]** the Lord’s supper  
 **[^]** the Eucharist (which means grateful)  
 **[^]** the Divine liturgy (Eastern orthodox)  
 **[^]** the mass (Roman Catholic and some Lutherans)

The sacrament of Holy Communion was **[^]** instituted by Jesus during his last supper  
with his disciples.

He commanded them to continue sharing the bread and cup of the new  
 covenant in remembrance of him. See Luke 22:19-20 (repeat)

In the first supper after the resurrection, Jesus **[^]** shared a meal with the travelers   
on the road to Emmaus… And their eyes were opened.

This story…

Our Emmaus story…  
 Is that story.

It can be found in Luke 24:13-35

Since the time of the earliest Christians, disciples have shared in the sacramental meal where the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is re-presented to all who come to receive in faith.

Please see Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (repeat)

Simply put, when we come to the Lord’s Table, we come to the banquet table of God.

If you are looking to get into a much deeper study of Baptism and Communion…  
 I recommend you get the following book:

The Sacraments In Biblical Perspective, by Ronald P. Byars (repeat)

In it, these two sacraments are explored in great depth to provide  
 greater understanding of their biblical perspective and basis.

**[^]**

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| [TAKE BREAK HERE] |

**[^]**

Welcome back.

Before the break, we considered the two sacraments that Christians universally agree are a means of grace.

Again, as I said before, while it is true that **[^]** every sacrament is a sacred  
 moment, we cannot call every sacred moment a sacrament.

If you did not write this down before—DO IT NOW! (repeat)

Now, in addition to the sacraments, regardless of how your individual church defines  
them, there are many other means of grace we can describe as **[^]** sacred moments.

Some sacred moments **[^]** come as a ***complete surprise***. (repeat)

Can you think of a time in your life when this has happened?

Have you ever just been minding your own business, when suddenly,  
 Christ becomes revealed to you in a sunset, or sunrise?

Perhaps you are at the grocery store, or mall, and witnessed a   
 random act of kindness; and therein experienced a sacred moment.

These are just examples, but you get the idea.

Other sacred moments can **[^]** come by divine appointment.

When someone asks, “What does God have to do with it?”…

The answer is EVERYTHING!

One sacred moment the church celebrates is **[^]** **confirmation** (repeat)

Confirmation is when the church celebrates the spiritual growth and conscious choice of the confirmed.

That is a fancy way of saying in confirmation; the church celebrates the  
 deliberate decision—or confirmation—of an individual, after proper   
 preparation, to become part of Christ’s church.

Confirmation marks the decision to accept the relationship offered by God

…begun in baptism

…affirmed now in a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ

…and it signals an individual’s commitments to take responsibility for  
 living the life of a disciple.

Some people call it becoming a “Church Grown-Up”

As a symbol for confirmation I have this…

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| [show symbol of confirmation] Bible |

In the priesthood of all believers talk given by ***Wes Raynor*** you learned that in baptism, every Christian is called to a life of **[^]** ministry.

Every Christian is called to be a disciple; a member of the body of Christ.

However, not every Christian is called to **[^]** ordination.

Ordination, in its various forms, becomes manifest in the areas of   
 word, sacrament, service, and order.

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| [show symbol of ordination] Stole |

The church can celebrate and confirm a person’s call to ministry in a variety of ways…

…and there are many different pathways an individual can follow to ordination.

This being said, ordination is the sacred moment when a congregation   
 marks the transition of those called to pastoral leadership…

…or some form of specialized ministry within the body of Christ.

In other words, vocational ministry.

As we talk about sacred moments, it’s important that we not forget **[^]** marriage and singleness.

The grace of God empowers us to live a loving and productive life, both in our singleness and, for some, in marriage.

As a symbol for marriage I have brought this…

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| [show symbol for marriage] worship book |

Every Christian is called to a life of ministry, and every Christian is also called to meaningful and loving relationships.

**[^]** Persons called to singleness can experience abundant grace and joy.

(Repeat)

**[^]** Persons called to marriage can also experience abundant grace and joy.

(Repeat)

I frequently get asked, ***“Pastor Matt… What are the requirements for marriage?  
Who is allowed to get married?”***

Ladies, if you have questions like these I would recommend that you make an   
 appointment to speak to your local pastor.

Just like when we talked about the methods and modes of baptism, and  
 every denomination has its own preference for them… so too, here, each  
 denomination has its own set of preferences and requirements for marriage.

I would like to take a moment and speak more about **[^]** divine appointments with God.

As I said before, divine appointments with God can be sacred moments.

These sacred moments may be found in the daily practices…

**Say daily practices with me: *daily practices***… that help connect us to God.

Title this part of your notes **[^]** **Six Daily Practices**.

…and ladies… …these can and should be done in some way each day!

1. **[^]** Prayer (repeat)   
    Talking daily with God  
    It can be done kneeling at your bedside, over meals, or in the shower
2. **[^]** Searching the Scripture (repeat)  
    Not just reading, but studying your Bible daily.  
    This should be begun with prayer, by the way.
3. **[^]** Worship (repeat)  
    Worshiping God is praising God.  
    • You don’t have to be in a church to have been to church.  
      
    Can be done inside or outside—in a church building or in a car.  
    **God does not care where—just that you did!**  
    FYI: This goes hand-in-hand with prayer also.
4. **[^]** Finding spiritual friends and participating actively in the body of Christ  
   (repeat)  
    Network, network, network.  
     
    Think Christian fellowship and friendship!  
      
    The more Christian contacts you have, the easier it is to do things  
    with them.  
     
    Take the initiative!  
    Remember: there is ***NO SUCH THING AS A PASSIVE CHRISTIAN!***
5. **[^]** Fasting (repeat)  
    Note: I said fasting, not dieting.  
     
    Fasting is not only for food. It is anything that we abstain from or do  
    without. (food, TV, Facebook, etc.)

Fasting is a time of physical and spiritual cleansing.  
 I highly recommend it to anyone.

That being said… before (repeat) you fast… talk with someone who  
 know how.  
 I would start with your local Pastor.  
  
 AND if you plan to fast from food… talk to your doctor first to  
 make sure that you understand any health risks involved for you.  
  
 Also a final thought about fasting: it is easier when you do it with   
 someone else.  
 Jesus said that whenever two or three are gathered in his   
 name, he will be among them—that holds true here also!

6. **[^]** Generosity (repeat)  
 Give as has been given unto you.  
  
  
  
If you have questions about these daily practices, again, write them down and we can discuss them later.

**[^]**

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| [TAKE BREAK HERE] |

**[^]**

You should understand that **[^]** sacred moments also occur in the shared experiences of **[^]** **confession**, **forgiveness**, **healing**, and **reconciliation**.

These are means of grace that restore us to physical health, spiritual health,   
 true freedom, and Christian community.

The **[^]** Greek word for healing in the Gospels is the same word that is used for salvation: **sozo** (repeat)  
 Luke 7:50; 9:24 (repeat)

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| [show symbol for healing] oil and water |

**[^]** All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort (repeat)

Did you hear that ladies? **(Show of hands)**

All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: **[^]** spiritual, physical,  
 emotional, mental, or relational.

Remember—God wants to make us whole!

Luke 7:18-23 (repeat)

**[^]** Healing formed an essential part of the ministry of Jesus and the disciples.

Mark 6:13 (repeat)

**And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were  
 sick and healed them.**

That was physical healing—what about mind and soul? Spiritual healing?

Here it is:

**[^]** Confession and forgiveness relate to the spiritual healing within the body of Christ.

Confess before God and one another—and forgive one another:

**BECAUSE OF CHRIST—GOD HAS ALRADY FORGIVEN YOU!**

Now ladies, I want you to listen to him about to say.

Do I have your attention? Better yet, write this down:

**[^]** The ministry of healing belongs to the entire church and should not be left  
 to just a few people. (Repeat)

Every authentic healing ministry has Jesus Christ clearly present from the start.

Also, every authentic healing ministry acknowledges Jesus Christ as the true  
 healer.

Healing ministries which struggle—or are not authentic—are those which   
 forget about Jesus.

Okay… Now you are healed. Now what?

**[^]** **Reconciliation!**

Reconciliation is the **[^]** restoration of a relationship (repeat)  
 This is the will of God and the mission of God in the world.

If you don’t believe me, look up 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (repeat)

Understand as well, that God calls us to be open to receive his amazing grace in both human relationships and in nature.

**[^]** In human relationships, that is, in situations like the birth of a child,   
 the return of a loved one, or even simply a random act of kindness.

In nature, specifically, in the beauty of a flower or a sunset, the grandeur of a   
 mountain peak or the mystery of a valley stream, the birth of a kitten, or the   
 playfulness of the newborn colt.

Get the idea?

**Write this down:**

**[^]** To make room for the new life in Christ, something old has to die. (repeat) (repeat)

In John 15:1-2 (repeat), Jesus says:

**“I am the true fine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”**

Ladies, God prunes away the dead branches and the unproductive parts of our life to make us more fruitful and productive.

Please put your pens down.

**[^]** We will now move to the sanctuary for special service of Holy Communion.  
 We are going to do so, that we might share in the sacramental meal that   
 represents the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to us.

Just like the first disciples, we will go to the Lord’s Table with all our human   
 weakness and brokenness.

Let’s go by table and in silence please.

Come. **[^ blackscreen ]**

Scripture References:

Luke 3: 21-22

Matthew 3: 1-3

Mark 1: 8

Matthew 28: 19-20

Romans 6: 3-4

Exodus 29: 7

Psalm 133: 2

Ezekiel 36: 26

1 Corinthians 6: 11

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

Luke 22: 19-20

Luke 24: 13-35

Acts 2: 42

1 Corinthians 10: 16

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

Luke 7: 50; 9: 24

Luke 7: 18-23

Mark 6: 13

John 15: 1-2