**Means of Grace**

New Ark Emmaus

*Please turn to page 48 in your worship book and join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.*

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and We shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy Your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Good morning! Fasten your seat belts, ladies. This is going to be a very long talk. In fact, I think you need some preparation for this. Lift your hands, rotate your wrists a bit. Now, flex your fingers. That’s good. You’re all warmed up to take lots of notes.

You think I’m kidding, but I’m not. This may rival the longest sermon you’ve ever heard. This talk is so long, that we will be taking a break, and we will even have lunch and come back here before this talk is over.

**My name is Cheryl Evans, and the title of this talk is Means of Grace.**

When this talk is over, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. On your table, there should be 3 x 5 cards which you can use to jot down questions you’d like to have answered. We’ll collect those when we go to lunch, so that Shawn and I will have time to look over the questions. This question and answer time will be for you; to clear up anything you need to hear discussed in greater detail. It is NOT intended for a “Stump the Pastor” time. You may want to have a card available to you, so you can write your question as it occurs to you during the talk. We will also entertain questions from the floor, if time allows.

“Means of Grace” may be a new concept to you. It is another Grace term that comes to us from John Wesley, who was the founder of Methodism. **The Means of Grace are sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present to us in new ways.**

There are many different kinds of sacred moments. The first type of sacred moment I want to talk about are those moments called Sacraments. The number of sacraments celebrated within the church varies according to the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination. While we will be working from a United Methodist perspective, it is not the purpose of this talk to say that one way or another is the “right” way. We will be treating all differing traditions with respect.

**Most Christian denominations recognize two sacraments: baptism and The Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.** These two sacraments are so recognized because they are the two that were instituted or experienced by Christ. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. He submitted to this, despite John’s objections “so that the scriptures might be fulfilled.” After his baptism, he retreated into the desert for 40 days before assuming the full role of his ministry. Jesus himself instituted The Lord’s Supper on the last night when he was gathered with his Disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. We say this enacted on Thursday night in the video we watched before entering our time of silence.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said to his disciples “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In Matthew 26:27, these words and actions of Jesus are recorded: Then he took a cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying “Drink from it, all of you.”

Some churches consider other rites or practices to be sacraments as well. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), The Roman Catholic church has celebrated seven sacraments. In addition to baptism and the Lord’s supper these include: penance, marriage, holy orders (ordination), confirmation and healing (extreme unction or last rites).

Other denominations have added foot washing to the list of sacraments.

Christians need to have an attitude of love and humility toward the different practices of various traditions. John Wesley said “We may not all believe alike, but we can all love alike.” We may disagree on important matters like the method used for Christian baptism. However, we can still find the foundation for our fellowship in Jesus Christ and treat one another with genuine respect –as members of the Body of Christ. (I Cor. 12: 1-14; 40)

**Now, we will turn our attention** to the two sacraments observed by most Christians: baptism and Holy Communion.

**Baptism is defined as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual work of grace.**

John the Baptist’s battle cry in his ministry was “REPENT”. He utilized baptism as a symbol of that repentance, and the marking of a new start in life. But he made it clear that this was just the beginning. He said “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming…he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” This is recorded in all four gospels. Scripture references for this are: Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1: 26, 33.

Jesus entrusted the ministry of baptism to his disciples. (We read about that in Matthew 28:19-20) At Pentecost, the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire gave birth to the church. (We read about that in Acts, chapter 2) The promise of baptism is “for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone to whom the Lord our God calls.” (Acts 2:38-39)

* **Christian baptism marks our new identity in Christ**
* **Baptism marks each person as a member of the Body of Christ**
* **The congregation echoes God’s acceptance by promising its support for the newly baptized on their spiritual journey**
* **The congregation is reminded of their own baptismal vows.**

**The modes of baptism include**

* Immersion, which sysmbolizes being buried with Christ and raised with Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)
* Pouring (where large bodies of water were not available) which was also another form of anointing (Ex.29:7 and Psalm 133:2) Third century Christian art shows John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus.
* Sprinkling (washing by sprinkling water) “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean…” Ezek 36:25)

The age for baptism varies among Christial traditions. When adults are baptized, we celebrate both God’s love and justifying grace together in one act. The adult is capable of repentance, and so God’s offer of relationship is accepted, and the person is considered cleansed and is incorporated into Christ’s body. In the baptism of infants and children, congregations celebrate God’s unconditional love and bring the child into the Body of Christ. The congregation makes promises in both cases to support each person in their spiritual growth and to live lives that encourage them to grow in Christ. Through this commitment of parents or guardians and the congregation, God’s love is made real and the action begun in the baptism of children comes to completion in confirmation, when the child accepts Christ and determines for him/herself to walk in the Christian life.

**Now let’s look at Holy Communion.** Various Christian traditions refer to this sacrament by different names. Those names include Holy Communion, The Lord’s Table, The Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist or the Mass (terms used by Orthodox, Roman Catholic and some Lutheran traditions)

* **Jesus himself instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion** during his last supper with his disciples, and he commanded them to continue sharing the bread and cup of the new covenant in remembrance of him. (Luke 22: 19-20)
* **In the first supper after the Resurrection,** Jesus shared a meal with the travelers on the road to Emmaus. When he broke the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24: 13-35)
* **Since the time of the earliest Christians,** disciples have shared in this sacramental meal that re-presents the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who come to receive in faith (Acts 2:42, I Cor 11: 23-26)
* **When we come to the Lord’s Table,** we come to the banquet table of God
* **We experience the inward and spiritual grace** conveyed to us through these outward and visible elements of bread and juice or wine.
* **At this table all are welcome and all are fed**
* **At this table we can catch a glimpse of the way God intends** for the world to be—with all of God’s children sharing the bread of live and the cup of salvation together in a spirit of gratitude and love for God and for one another.

(First Emmaus walk in Columbus-eccumenical. Pain over communion issue)

**BREAK**

Before the break we considered the two sacraments that most Christians agree are means of grace, in other words, they are ways that God meets our deepest human needs. While every sacrament is a sacred moment, we cannot call every sacred moment a sacrament. God calls to us and comes to us through a variety of ways. We need to be sure that we are committed to taking advantage of the Means of Grace at every opportunity. I like the way another writer put it: “Put yourself in a position to be blessed.”

* **Some sacred moments come as a surprise.** God may come to us in an infinite variety of ways: through the birth of a child, the beauty of a sunset, a timely visit from a Christian friend. We may even hear messages from God through books we read, or through movies and television programs—depending on what you are reading or watching of course! Each means of grace connects to the living God and provides us with the grace we need at that moment.
* Other sacred moments can come by divine appointment. These are moments intentionally experienced. God has given the church special ways to remember and experience Jesus Christ. There are various rites, ceremonies and ordinances, like worship, morning and evening prayer, giving money to the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned, going on mission trips, serving the elderly…the list can go on and on. There are many opportunities to experience the blessings God has to offer us.
* In the sacred moment of Confirmation, the church celebrates the spiritual growth and conscious choice of the one being confirmed. Confirmation marks that person’s decision to accept the relationship offered by God, begun in baptism and affirmed now in a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

(Personal story)

**In infant baptism, God and the Christian community say,** “You are marked as a beloved child of God. You belong to this family, and you are loved. In confirmation the confirmand says “You are my God. I love you and I want to live my life in relationship with you and with this family of faith.”

Confirmation signals a transition to a new level of personal responsibility for one’s own faith. Just as a *bar mitzvah,* or *bat mitzvah* for Jesus marks the transition from childhood to young adulthood, confirmation marks the transition from spiritual childhood to the personal acceptance of responsibility for living as a disciple of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1-16). It is important to note that various Christian traditions view confirmation differently, and some traditions do not have such a ritual.

**In the Priesthood of All Believers** talk, you learned that in baptism, every Christian is called to a life of ministry.

* Every Christian has spiritual gifts that equip him or her for ministry (Eph. 1:11-13)
* Every Christian has a calling and a ministry that is essential to the health and well-being of the Body of Christ
* Every Christian has a spiritual gift, and every gift is needed (I Cor 12:P12-27

(example of a dead church, example of an alive church)

(Flora Wuellner- difference between working our of skill and work-

ing out of spiritual gifts)

Every Christian is called to be a disciple and a member of the Body of

Christ, the church. However, not every Christian is called to ordi-

nation.

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

* Anointing with oil
* Services of installation
* Laying on of hands and blessing
* Consecration to a particular task or ministry

Even if these means are not used, the church can encourage persons to explore their spiritual gifts and encourage them to use those gifts in service to the Body of Christ. Such churches are alive and vibrant as people experience the joy of living and giving their gifts.

(Point out the availability of spiritual gift inventories)

* **Ordination is the sacred moment** when the church marks the transition of those called to pastoral leadership or some other form of specialized ministry within the body of Christ (Luke 2:41-52; Matt 4:18-22; 28:19; John 6:66-68; Joshua 24:15; Rom. 12:1-2 and Acts 6: 1-6

Ordination confirms those called

* To be set apart for the specialized ministry of preaching and teaching the Word;
* Administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper
* Caring for the worship order and nurture of the church.

In the United Methodist Church there are two orders in the ordained ministry. Elders are Ordained for the administering of the sacraments and caring for the order of the church. Deacons are ordained for Servant Leadership and support for the Elders in the church.

**The stole work by ordained persons symbolized the yoke of Christ.**

To distinguish between elders and deacons, deacons wear diagonal stoles, often embellished with the bowl and basin, symbolizing the model of servant hood demonstrated by Christ at the last supper, when he washed the feet of his disciples.

Denominations and faith traditions differ in how they view marriage. For some, it is considered a sacrament.

**The grace of God empowers us all to live a loving and productive life. God’s call in terms of relationship varies from person to person. Some are called to a life of singleness.** All are called to a life of ministry, and every Christian is called to meaningful and loving relationships. We find our true selves as we share our lives with one another in Christian community, and we all can experience abundant grace and joy regardless of whether we live married or single lives.

* In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus responds to a question about marriage saying “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife…
* Christian marriage is characterized by mutuality, love and the intimate knowledge that comes from a shared life. (Eph 5: 21-31)
* Christian marriage is intended to be a means of grace for the children, the extended families and the whole of society. Each spouse is to represent Christ to his or her mate, family and community.

Henri Nouwen wrote, “Marriage is not a lifelong attraction of two individuals to each other, but a call for two people to witness together God’s love.

The intention for marriage sometimes falls far short of that reality for any number of reasons. In the Roman Catholic church, divorce is frowned upon, but even in that church, divorce is allowed under certain circumstances. There is nothing that requires any person to remain in an abusive, or life-diminishing relationship.

**Other sacred moments are divine appointments with God.** These moments can be found in the daily practices that help us connect to God. Such practices as

* Prayer: Jesus invested time daily with God in prayer, providing an important spiritual for us. (Luke 6:12; 9:18; 11:1; Mark 1:35; 6:46) Prayer means living each moment with our hearts open to God, and like Paul, we are called to pray for others (Eph 3:14-19; Phil. 4:6-7)

***(Call attention to the 72-hour Prayer Vigil chart and to pages in the Worship book for additional help with prayer and meditation.***

* Searching the scripture
* Worship. If we do not center our lives in the worship of God, we will begin to worship false gods. (Deut. 5:6-14; Heb. 10:19-25)
* Spending time with spiritual friends
* Participating actively in the body of Christ. Jesus invested time with his disciples. Regular participation in Christian community is an essential means of grace. It provides spiritual nurture and support. (Heb. 10:25)

Some other daily practices that can enhance the spiritual life are:

* Fasting. Fasting is taught by both the Old and the New Testaments. (Isa 58:5-7; Matt 4:2-11) This discipline can be understood as fasting from the things of earth to allow time for fasting on the things of the Spirit. **(R)** When fasting is men-tioned, most people think of fasting from food, but fasting can also involve fasting from any activities that hinder our relation-ship with God. We can fast from television, our computers, from complaining, from gossiping, from any behavior that is hindering us in our relationship with God. (example in The Artist’s Way—fasting from reading.)
* Generosity. Jesus invested time and energy in serving and helping others. He willingly sacrificed all power and position in heaven in order to take the lowest position of service (Phil. 2:5-11) Jesus also had much to way about giving money. The way a person spends his/her money reveals his/her heart. (Luke 12:32-34; Matt. 25: 14-29)

Sacred moments occur in the shared experiences of confession, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. These means of grace have the purpose of restoring us to physical and spiritual health, true freedom and Christian community.

**The ministry of healing** was central to the ministry of Jesus. This ministry has diminished in the life of many churches largely because of persons who have abused it. Some use such a ministry as a way to show their own power and glory and have even cheapened it my manipulating technology to provide sensational experiences that are not real. Thus, there is now a lot of mistrust and apprehension around the subject of healing ministry. This is unfortunate. Jesus said that his disciples would accomplish all that he did, and more. So let’s look at this important means of grace and see if we can discover an authentic way to offer it.

* **The Greek word for healing** in the Gospels is the same word used for salvation: *sozo =*(Luke 7:50; 9:24)
* **Everyone needs healing and wholeness** of some sort, whether it be spiritual, physical, emotional, mental or relational. God wants to make us whole. (Luke 7:18-23; Matt 12:15-21)
* **In every authentic healing ministry,** Jesus Christ is clearly present and acknowledged as the healer. Christ is the only authentic and authoritative means of grace for the forgiveness of sin, physical healing or inner spiritual healing and human wholeness (Matt. 9:2-8)

Related to healing is the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the restoration of a relationship between persons or between groups, and even nations. Reconciliation is the will of God and the mission of God in the world. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

* SECOND BREAK

**We are called to open ourselves to God’s amazing grace in an infinite variety of ways.** We can experience that grace in many ways, in situations like the birth of a child, the return of a loved one or the surprise of a random act of kindness. In nature, through the beauty of a flower or a sunset, the grandeur of a mountain peak, the birth of a kitten, the playfulness of a newborn colt---the list of the treasures God gives us to enjoy goes on and on. We have only to open our eyes and look for them. We will see them everywhere.

**To make room for a new life in Christ, something old has to die.**

Letting go is making room.

* John 15:1-2 makes clear that God prunes away the dead branches and unproductive parts of our life in order to make us more fruitful and productive.

Now we will move to the sanctuary for a special service of Hoy Communion—to share in this sacramental meal where the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be re-presented to us in a special way. Just like the first disciples, who took this meal for the very first time, we go to the Lord’s Table as we are, with all of our human weakness, frailties and brokenness.

**Please go in silence and sit with your table group. The assistants will direct us.**

**De Colores!**