**JUSTIFYING GRACE Rev. Bill Koppert**

Please turn to page 48 in your Worship Booklet and share with me 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. (You may be seated)

I don’t know about you, but I am sure glad I am not in the dating game at my age! Certainly, I still have to not take my spouse for granted; I pay the price when I do that! I’m thinking about the time, when I was dating her. I remember well, after these many years, important times in that process when I was “pursuing” her. We were at different colleges many miles apart. To keep in touch, we wrote letters regularly. We also talked by phone – on the pay phone down the hall in the college dorm – had to keep plenty of quarter on hand! And when you ran out the operator would come on and say – “your time is up” Click!

I remember one time distinctly in our dating of some three years. She had met another fellow at OSU. I was not sure of our relationship; it was very rocky at that time. It was the only time in my life that I literally could not sleep the entire night! But I was relentless, and thank God she said yes, some months later when I finally got up the nerve to ask her to marry me!

I share this because I think it is pertains to the way God pursues us, and invites us to a relationship with Him as our Heavenly Father. I wonder if God ever has spent a sleepless night??? The One Who created us, calls us to a relationship, even as Jesus invited the Disciples to follow Him, and to share in His ministry.

This Title of this Talk is **Justifying Grace**, and my name is Bill Koppert. I had the privilege to attend the Walk to Emmaus in 1992 in Reynoldsburg, Ohio and sat at the Table of Luke.

What is Justifying Grace? It is always good to begin at the beginning. In Genesis 1 & 2 we have the story of Creation. As God created each day he said of his creation that it was good. God said that is was very good about each of his creations until he got to man. As one pundit put it, he did not have to say to the kitty cat, don’t jump in the water. God didn’t have to say to the fish, don’t jump out of the sea. It wasn’t until the creation of Adam and Eve that he even uttered the word **don’t.** And we have been saying that to our children ever since

God, beginning with our creation is His image, offers us a relationship of unconditional love and grace. We need that love and grace because from the beginning, with Adam and Eve, we have made wrong choices throughout our lives. Those wrong choices separate and diminish us. Like Cain and Abel, we quarrel among ourselves from time to time. It is the history of humankind. Like the prodigal son, we go astray in search of that which we think will make us happy and content. But in the story of the prodigal son the main character is not the son, it is the father. Do you remember what he did? He broke all the laws of propriety and decorum when he chose to run out and greet his son upon his return. He even gave him a party. God’s love and grace are always greater than all our wrong choices.

And because we are created in the image of God, we will never find the joy and fullness of life apart from him. Nothing else will satisfy the hunger and longing in our souls.

The central theme of all Scripture is God calling us back into a relationship for which we were created. In Matthew 11:28 we hear Jesus saying, *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*

Do you remember the story of Zacchaeus? Here was a wealthy man, one who had the money to buy all he wanted. And yet, he climbed a sycamore tree because of what he had heard about Jesus, he wanted to see him. You remember how Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus’ house. We do not hear that Jesus berated him because of his lifestyle, his cheating others as he collected the taxes. But, in Jesus presence, in Jesus acceptance, Zacchaeus became a changed man, and offered to not only repay all he had defrauded, but to repay times four. And half of his possessions would be given to the poor. Just because he had opened the door of his house, and his heart, to Jesus. When those around Jesus grumbled that he had gone to the house of a sinner, Jesus replied*, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”*

God offers us a personal relationship of self giving love, not rules and laws. 1 John 4:7-12 puts this amazing gift of God in this way.

*”Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.   
Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.   
God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.* *In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* *Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.* *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. John Wesley, in his sermon on Justifying Grace had this to say, “The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins.” This is what is being offered to us, to restore us to wholeness, to the relationship which God intends for us with him. Forgiveness.

And what will we say? **Justifying Grace is our eyes being opened to His grace**. It’s our saying yes to Jesus’ offer. Have you known a moment of profound forgiveness? Think of the Prodigal Son again – how must he have felt as his father welcomed him home? We too can experience that acceptance, that forgiveness – wiping the slate clean, when we accept God’s offer for ourselves.

In my life, I have struggled with the temptation of being self sufficient. The “I can do it myself” syndrome. On a day to day basis we don’t want to be dependent on others. One reason I know I do this is pride. I feel that I have earned my way, therefore, I am deserving of what I get. This is a big hindrance for me as I approach my Creator. For I know that nothing I can do can earn my way into a right relationship with my Lord. The apostle Paul reminds me of this as I read Romans 3:21-28. Paul talks of all having sinned. Then he says, *“Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.**For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.“* Paul continues this understanding in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

This salvation, this saving act of God, is instantaneous and continuous.

* I was saved by grace
* I am saved by grace
* I will be saved by grace

This is known in Scripture as salvation, healing, conversion, having one’s sins forgiven, being born again.

**Christianity is a relationship, not a religion**.

This is God’s action in our life. God through Jesus showed us His love for us. Paul says in Romans 5:6-8 *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.   
Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.   
But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”*

God, reaching down to us, restores the “vertical” relationship with Him, And in that same action, God restores through the sacrifice of Christ our relationships with one another – the “horizontal”

Our conversion continues as we continue to say yes to Jesus every day as we:

* + - understand ourselves better
    - acknowledge our need for Christ
    - understand God better
    - seek God's will in our lives
    - practice essential spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible-reading, meditation, obedience to the conversion of our will to His.

When I was a youth, I thought that once I finally and completely gave my life to Christ, then I would be on easy street. Let me explain. I had this notion that if I truly turned to Christ, then He would take over. It would be a life on autopilot. I wouldn’t have to worry about temptations, or what to say, or courage, etc. etc. I was very disappointed when I found no matter how hard I tried this method – O.K. God, you take over – it did not work. God’s grace is always with us, always has been. But I still have the reins in my hands. No autopilot. I think this urge for somebody else in charge is why so many seek religions that will tell them what to think and do in every circumstance – then I don’t have to worry about it! But as I understand what God has done through Christ in my life, I understand that it is the gift of a living relationship, not a rigid set of rules and dogma. That makes it a bit messy at times, as we come down to different ideas. But our life of faith is all about our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and consequently our relationships with one another. It is a life journey with Christ, always asking for directions, but knowing that I will always have more to learn. Above all, it is about how we love Christ, and how we love one another on this life’s journey.

**Accepting Christ and that relationship that God offers, we can do nothing but accept what Jesus did for us**.

I have been talking about our saying yes to Christ, but have you ever thought about the fact that God has said yes to us? That started with the creation of Adam and Eve. It came with a loud exclamation point at the Cross as the Apostle Paul points out in Romans 5:6-11, “*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us*.”

It is in response to God’s yes to us in Christ that we can say yes to the relationship God offers in Jesus.

(**CHRIST IS THE INVITATION, FAITH IS OUR RESPONSE**)

As I said earlier, God continues to expect us to take responsibility for our lives. And part of the responsibility is a daily saying of yes to Jesus as we respond in faith. And God addresses us in a multitude of ways.

God addresses our intellect. We are not asked to put our minds on the shelf when it comes to matters of faith. We are to discern the will of God. Paul writes in Romans 12: 1-2, *”I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.   
Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

I might add that the discernment process is greatly helped by our corporate study and worship. In other words, it is really important to know that we are not called to faith in a vacuum – by ourselves. An important part of the discernment process comes as we study the Scripture together, as we worship, and as we engage in discussion over the issues that face us day by day. My life has been greatly enriched by Bible studies across denominational lines in the communities I have been privileged to serve.

Even as God addresses our intellect, God also appeals to our will. By Grace we are free to choose. That invitation from Christ is heard in the Book of Revelation 3:20, *“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”*

Jesus does not knock the door down. He does not come in uninvited. We can learn humility from our Lord as we share the Good News with others. Accepting the invitation offered is an act of our will. It means that even though we may have reservations, we can decide to act and invite the Lord in. Faith is an act of trust and self-denial. Remember how Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-26 , *“, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* *For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”*

Be aware that your decision to say yes to Jesus Christ does not come without a cost. What that may be will be varied. In some countries, it can cost you your life.

(**Justifying Grace is God’s love in Action**)

God addresses our intellect, God appeals to our will, and God also touches our hearts. We are invited to respond with love and enthusiasm. Love is a verb. Christian love is an act of will. If you depend upon feelings or emotions, Christian love will not prevail. Disciples of Jesus reach out in love and concern to one another by choice, not feelings. God’s saving grace in our lives is the foundation of our good works.

John 14:15-17 points out that it is not good works that will save us. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.**This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”*

Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit, does not put us on autopilot, but it does give us the courage and hope to follow in the steps of the Disciples of Jesus Christ. Those early disciples experienced God’s grace, and they invite us to do the same in Acts 3:1-8. Peter approached the lame man begging for alms and told him he had not silver or gold, but “what I have I give you”, and he commanded him in the name of Jesus to stand and walk. And he did.

Peter acted on the authority given him by Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We may not have the healing power of Peter, but what we have, we are asked to give. We are asked to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the love of God shown to all the world. And as we do, it is a contagious thing, others will come to know and accept Christ into their lives.

So remember Justified Grace is

**Justified= Just-as-if-I’d never sinned**

God who loves you so much as to give His only Son will wipe the slate clean, you can start anew.

**Agape Love = God’s love**.

Remember, God first loved you, and invited you to this weekend through people who likewise love you. Sometimes you may not be all that lovable! But agape love is unconditional love, which is always a gift, not merited. I pray that you realize the Agape love you are surrounded with as you sit here this weekend. It is not only present in this room, but in the prayers, the meals, the agape love gifts, the crews who work behind the scenes every hour. All of this agape is given to let you know the justifying grace of God who through Christ invites you to accept His invitation to be in relationship with him. Come Lord Jesus, be in us this day.

One way God moves in our lives to bring us to the point of accepting the invitation to be in Relationship with Him is through others gifts to us. This AGAPE, God’s Love, is an unconditional gift, a gift of grace.

During this weekend, Christians will express unconditional love to you in sacrificial ways by praying, serving, and performing other acts of agape – so that you will know more clearly how much God loves you.

Emmaus communities from across this nation, and around the world have sent letters and other forms of communication of let you know about this agape love. .

Here are some samples . . . . . .

**DeColores!**