Means of Grace

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Prayer to the Holy Spirit ~ p. 48

This weekend you have been hearing a lot about Grace. Yesterday morning, ***Greg Inboden*** told us about God’s grace that is pursuing us and seeking a relationship with us. In the afternoon, ***Eva Marie Wolfe*** shared with us how we can accept God’s offer of love and receive new life. GRACE.

I am ***Mark Chow*** and this morning I am going to talk with you about the ***Means of Grace.***

[Title slide]

What is grace? Quite simply, grace is God’s gift of love to each of us …through Jesus Christ… whether we deserve it or not. A gift. A free gift. With no strings attached.

I think you are starting to understand that Grace is God’s gift of love to us.

[slide: Means of Grace defined]

1. So, What are the Means of Grace? **The Means of grace are …**

* **sacramental moments when we celebrate God’s love and presence;**
* **sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present or real to us**;
* ways **in which we can experience God’s presence and power in our lives.**
* Symbols of God’s great work in our lives and which remind us of the covenantal relationship we have in Jesus Christ.
  + 1. The word ***sacrament*** comes from the Latin words ***sacer*** and ***mentum***. When put together, they mean ***sacred moment.*** In some denominations, a sacrament is defined as ***“an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”*** meaning that the actual sacrament is something people can observe from the outside, but which carries much deeper meaning within a person’s heart. Sacraments are sacred moments that Jesus gave us by clear instruction and example in the scriptures.
    2. ***Let’s take a look at the*** History of the Sacraments *in the church.* ~ The number of sacraments celebrated within the church varies according to the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination.

1. [slide: Baptism and Communion] Most Christians recognize two sacraments: ***Baptism*** and the ***Lord’s Supper*** or ***Holy Communion.***
2. Matt 28:19 ~ Jesus said “go… make disciples… baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
3. Luke 22:19 ~ Jesus said to His disciples, “this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (and again, Matt. 26:27) ~ “Then He took a cup and after giving thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.”
4. Summary: For about 12 or 13 centuries, Baptism and Holy Communion were the only two sacraments recognized by most Churches. We’ll talk more about both of these in a little bit. Before going there, let us look at what other churches consider sacraments.
5. Some churches consider other rites or practices to be sacraments as well. [slide: Roman Catholic Church]

* 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 (forgiveness), marriage, holy orders (ordination), confirmation, and healing (extreme unction or last rites)***.
* Some churches recognize ***Footwashing*** as a sacrament.

C. However many sacraments may be recognized, Christians must have an attitude of love and humility toward the different practices of various traditions. It was John Wesley (Founder of Methodism) who said, “***We may not all believe alike, but we can all love alike.***” We may disagree on important matters like Christian baptism. However, we can still find the foundation for our fellowship with one another and treat one another with genuine respect—as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-14:40).

### Purpose and intent~

Growing up as a preacher’s kid, I had the opportunity to experience the sacraments in many different ways and settings. One particular way we celebrated Holy Communion was by using these thin wafers and tiny cups of grape juice. I can well remember how these flimsy, tasteless objects stuck to the roof of my mouth. (kind of like M & M’s~ they “melt in your mouth, not in your hands!”) and there wasn’t enough juice to wash them down.

I remember asking my father:

***Why*** ***did we use these tasteless, sticky wafers when we could use something that at least tasted better?***?

As an inquisitive young child, I had no idea what the real meaning of the sacraments was.

What I didn’t understand was that the Sacraments are intended to remind us of Christ’s very real presence with us.

[slide: Sacraments: Outward Sign]

*“Outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”*

Another aspect of the Sacraments that I didn’t understand was that the ***church represents Christ in the World***. Therefore, we participate in the sacraments in order to be a part of Christ, Whose ministry is reconciliation with the world. So, whenever we participate in the sacraments, we are part of Christ; and as we become present to the World, Christ becomes present through us.

# In what Ways Do we experience God’s Grace? I mentioned earlier that Grace is Gift of God’s love to us. There is nothing we can do to earn it. It’s simply a gift. A free gift. Inside this box are symbols of God’s Sacred Moments. God’s *Means of Grace*. (The two sacraments observed by most Christians)

1. **SHELL** [take out water bottle or pitcher or shell]**~** reminds us of the purification of the waters of **Baptism** ~ an *outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual work of grace*. Greek word ß∂π†izo- paints a picture of a ship ***stuck in the mud.*** *entrenched. Baptized. Baptize.*

Baptism…[slide: Baptism explained]

1. marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)
2. emphasized by John the baptizer, ***“I baptize… with water; but one … more powerful than I … will baptize … with the Holy Spirit”*** (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:26,33)
3. entrusted by Jesus to his disciples (Matt 28:19-20). At Pentecost, the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire gave birth to the church. The promise of baptism *“is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him”* (Acts 2:38-39).
4. marks our new identity in Christ.
5. as members of the body of Christ.
6. supported by the congregation on our spiritual journey.
7. experienced in different modes and at different ages, depending on the denominational understanding.

**+ The modes of baptism include:**

[slide: Modes of Baptism]

1. ***Immersion*** (put under the water) – symbolizes being buried with Christ and raised with Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)
2. ***Pouring*** (using pitcher or shell)-another form of anointing; see Exodus 29:7 and Psalm 133:2.
3. ***Sprinkling*** (washing by using drops of water) – *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean…”* (Ezek. 36:25). *“You were washed…”* (1 Cor 6:11)

+ The age for baptism varies among Christian traditions:

1. In **Adult/Believer baptism** ~ we celebrate both ***God’s love*** and ***justifying grace*** together in one act. God’s offer of a relationship is accepted; the person is cleansed and incorporated into Christ’s body.
2. In **Infant baptism** ~ congregation celebrates ***God’s unconditional love and promise*** for the children’s lives.
3. **Jesus** said, *“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it”* (Mark 10:14,15).
4. **Parents/guardians** and **congregation** make a ***commitment*** to ***God, each other*** and the ***child*** to make God’s love and presence real, and the action begun in the baptism of children comes to completion in confirmation.

† Story~ Congregational commitment in baptism

† Personal story ~ baptized > re-baptism > reaffirmation

Have You been cleansed by the Waters of Baptism?

#### B. **Chalice/Plate** [take out chalice and bread] ~symbolize for us the sacred moment of Holy Communion

READ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26  (MSG)~ hear these words of the Apostle Paul:

**“**Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘***This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me.***’ After supper, he did the same thing with the cup: ‘***This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you***. *Each time you drink this cup, remember me*.’ What you must solemnly realize is that ***every time you eat this bread*** and ***every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words*** and ***actions the death of the Master***. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt.” 1 Cor 11:23-26  (MSG)

[slide: Different Names for Communion]

1. known by Different names:
   * ***Holy Communion*** (communing together; sharing and celebrating the presence of God);
   * ***the Lord’s Table,*** (celebrating our oneness in Christ);
   * ***the Lord’s Supper*** (last meal Jesus shared with His disciples before His suffering, death and resurrection);
   * the ***Eucharis†*** (from Greek word which means ***“Thanksgiving”*** or ***“to give thanks”;*** giving thanks for all that God has done through Christ),
   * the ***Divine Liturgy*** (Eastern Orthodox), or
   * the ***Mass*** (Roman Catholic and some Lutherans)

[slide: Holy Communion explained]

1. instituted by Jesus during his last supper with his disciples, and continued in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19-20).
2. shared 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).
3. celebrated since the time of the earliest Christians, who 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; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:23-26).
4. experienced as the Lord’s Table where:

[slide: The Lord’s Table]

1. the inward and spiritual grace are conveyed to us through these outward and visible elements of bread and juice/wine.
2. all are welcome and all are fed.
3. we can see what God intends for the world to be - i.e., all of God’s children sharing the ***bread of life*** and the ***cup of salvation*** together in a spirit of gratitude and love for God and for one another.

[slide: Blue Screen]

† Do you need to Give Thanks and Remember?

Announce Break

[slide: Seventh Inning Stretch]

[break]

[slide: Means, Part Two]

Means of Grace are ways that God meets our deepest human needs. While every sacrament is a sacred moment, we cannot call every sacred moment a sacrament.

1. In addition to the sacraments**, there are many other means of grace we can describe as sacred moments.**

[slide: Sacred Moments]

* + **Some sacred moments come as a** *surprise*. God may come to us in a variety of ways, such as: the *birth of a child*, the *death of loved one,* the *beauty of a sunset*, *something you read, a song on the radio,* or a *timely visit from a Christian friend*. Each means of grace connects us to the living God and provides the grace we need.
* **Other sacred moments can come by** *divine appointment*. God has given the church special ways to remember and experience Jesus Christ. These sacred moments within the life of the church are called *rites, ordinances*, and *ceremonies* – for example, *worship, morning and evening prayer, giving money to the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned.*

Let’s look in the gift box once again and see some other Sacred Moments. [slide: Sacred Moments: Gift Box]

1. **Confirmation book** [take out Bible/Confirmation book] ~ reminder of the covenant between God and us through **Confirmation**, which marks the confirmand’s *decision to accept the relationship offered by God* – begun in baptism and affirmed now in a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ – *the commitment to take responsibility for living as a disciple*. In short, it is saying “YES” to God.
2. Whereas 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 this family of faith*.”

1. 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).
2. Viewed differently by various Christian traditions.
3. For those that practice infant baptism (United Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics), Confirmation - when young person accepts for him/herself the gift of salvation.
4. For those who practice adult/believer’s baptism, (Baptists, the Church of Christ, the Anabaptist tradition), the individual’s profession of faith, confirmation and baptism happen at approximately the same time.

##### **Baptism/Membership Certificate** [display certificate]~ reminds us that we are all called to a life of ministry. Baptism, Call, Membership and Ordination

1. In the PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS talk, you learned that *in baptism, every Christian is called to a life of ministry*.
2. Every Christian is gifted for ministry. (Eph 4:11-13)
3. And Every gift is needed *for* the health and well being of the ***body of Christ***. (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
4. *Every Christian is called to be a disciple* and a *member* of the *body of Christ*, the church.
5. *Not every Christian,* however, *is called to ordination*… But some are.
6. 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
7. **Robe/Stole**~ [put on robe/stole]~ signifies those set apart to devote themselves solely to the work of the Lord. 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; Josh 24:15; Rom 12:1-2 and Acts 6:1-6)

The stole worn by ordained persons symbolizes the *yoke of Christ*.

1. Ordination affirms and challenges those called by God to ***use*** their ***gifts*** to ***equip others for ministry*** (Acts 13:1-3).
2. 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; and caring for the *order* and nurture of the church., equipping the laity for ministry and *service*

† Personal story~ call to ministry~ not lightning bolt experience, but a process or journey; ordination: awesome feeling of responsibility; being entrusted as servant or shepherd of souls

† What has God called YOU to be or do?

1. **Wedding RING** –[put on wedding ring]~ symbolizes two becoming one in the presence of God through Marriage, which is: *giving oneself to another 100% in representing Christ; mini-representation of the body of Christ; a gateway through which grace can enter; parallels relationship between Christ and His Church; NOT greater than* Singleness – Whether we are **Single** or **Married**, the grace of God empowers us to live a *loving and productive life***.**
2. Just as Every Christian is called to a life of ministry, so too, *every Christian is called to meaningful and loving relationships*.
3. *Persons called to singleness* can experience abundant grace and joy… in ***covenant relationship to God and to other Christians***.
4. *Persons called to marriage* can also experience abundant grace and joy… by ***being*** the *means of grace* to each other, children, families, community and world.

* 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.”* (Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer and Contemplation*, Garden City, NY, Image Books, 1979, p. 46)

# Some Sacred moments are *divine appointments* with God that we *practice* *every day*.

1. These **daily practices** help connect us to God.
2. **telephone** [pick up telephone/bluetooth]~ reminds us of the two-way communication we have with God through Prayer~ search for authentic relationship with God; *dialogue with God; NOT* Christmas Wish List to satisfy our “on demand” mentality; listening to God, seeking God’s guidance, wisdom, healing; practicing the presence of God. Prayer~
3. *Modeled by Jesus*, Who spent time daily with God in prayer, (Luke 6:12; 9:18; 11:1; Mark 1:35; 6:46).
4. Means *living with our hearts open* to God.
5. Our mission and *ministry for others* (Eph 3:14-19; Phil 4:6-7).

† Are you Connected to God?

1. **Bible** [pull out Bible] reminds us of the importance of Searching the scripture – spending time each day reading the Bible, hearing it explained, meditating on it, and applying its truths to daily life. (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps 119:103-105; Matt 4:1-11; John 8:31-32).
2. **Songbook** [display songbook] reminder to spend time in Worship~ praising God; loving God; *connecting with God*. (Deut 5:6-14; Heb 10:19-25)
3. “True Friend” **Mug** ~ symbolizes the value of true Spiritual friends and the importance of actively *participating* in the *body of Christ* (John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-47;Heb 10:25)
4. Wendy’s **Gift Card** ~ reminder to NOT eat so much or so fast, but instead, to spend time **Fasting** as a way to connect w/ God. This discipline can be understood as **fasting from the things of earth** to allow time for **feasting on the things of the Spirit.** (Isa 58:5-7; Matt 4:2-11; 6:16-18)
5. **Million Dollar** Bill ~ symbol of our need for **Generosity:** the gift of giving, serving, helping others. (Phil 2:5-11; John 13:1-20). Truly, the way one spends one’s money reveals one’s heart (Luke 12:32-34;Matt 25:14-29).
6. Some sacred moments occur in shared experiences that *restore us* to *physical and spiritual health*, true freedom, and *Christian community***.**
7. **Cross** [pull out Cross]**~** reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, dying for our sins and forgiving us. It is a symbol of our need for **Confession,** and God’s gift of **Forgiveness.** *Confession* and *forgiveness* clearly relate to *spiritual healing* within the body of Christ. *“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed”* (James 5:16).
8. **Oil** [pick up flask of oil]**~**reminds us of our many hurts and our desperate need for **healing and reconciliation.** The Greek word sozo meaning *healing* is the same word used for **salvation**.(Luke 7:50; 9:24). All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: *spiritual, physical, emotional, mental or relational*. God wants to make us whole (Luke 7:18-23; Matt 12:15-21). *Reconciliation* - the restoration of a relationship; this is the will of God and the mission of God in the world (2 Cor 5:18-19)

† a story about healing; types of healing: natural, supernatural, medical, final… *God wants to make us whole*

# Friends, God’s grace comes to us in a variety of ways.

* There are many more sacred moments~ moments when you can feel the presence and power of the living God.
* Be open to all the means of grace in your life, and let your life be a life of love and grace.

# Conclusion

1. Now we will move to the sanctuary for a special service of Holy Communion~ to share in this sacramental meal where the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be re-presented to us.
2. Just like the first disciples, we go to the Lord’s table with all our human weakness and brokenness.
3. Please go in silence and sit with your table group.