MEANS OF GRACE

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Gentlemen would you please pray with the prayer to the Holy Spirit found on page 48 of your purple worship book. Come Holy Spirit-

**Introduction to talk**- long, we will take a break, even have lunch and come back from lunch to finish. You may want to get a new tablet and a fresh pen. You will even have an opportunity to ask questions, there will be cards placed on your table that you can write a question down and we will try to answer them after lunch. This is not the time to stump the pastor, but if you have a question that you are looking for an answer I will make every attempt to answer it for you. So if you are ready let’s get started.

So far this weekend you have been hearing a lot about Grace. Yesterday morning, \_\_Dave Warner\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ told us about God’s Prevenient Grace that is pursuing us and seeking a relationship with us. In the afternoon \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Fred Kinne\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ shared with us how we can accept God’s offer of love and receive a new life through Justifying Grace.

The title of this talk is Means of Grace and my name is Keith Taylor.

What is Grace? Grace is simply God’s gift of love to each of us, through Jesus Christ, whether we deserve it or not. It’s a gift and it’s free. The price has already been paid and there are no strings attached.

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So what are the Means of Grace? They are:

1. sacramental moments when we celebrate God’s love and presence;
2. sacred moments where Christ is re-presented , or becomes present or real to us;
3. ways in which we can experience God’s presence and power in our lives.
4. Symbols of God’s great work in our lives and which remind us of the covenantal relationship we have in Jesus Christ.

And the most popular way to experience the Means of grace are through Sacraments. 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. Sacraments involve our physical senses through outward and visible signs; in addition, they involve our spiritual senses through an inward and spiritual work of grace. The number of sacraments celebrated by the church varies according to the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination.

Slide- Baptism & Communion

However most Christians recognize two sacraments- Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion

Matthew 28:19, Jesus said “go… make disciples… baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 22:19, Jesus said to his disciples, “this is my body, which is given to for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Then he took a cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to them saying Drink from it, all of you.”

For 12 or 13 centuries, most churches only observed the two sacraments. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church has celebrated seven sacraments. In addition to Baptism & Communion, these include:

Slide- penance (reconciliation), marriage, holy orders (ordination), confirmation, & healing (extreme unction or last rites).

Even though other churches may recognize different sacraments, Christians must have an attitude of love and humility toward these different practices of various traditions. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, 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)

Now that we have looked at the definition of a sacrament, and have given some examples of different sacraments practiced today, which are ways we experience God’s grace, let’s spend some time talking about two of them more specifically.

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**BAPTISM**- An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual work of grace.- symbol of bowl & pitcher

1. Baptism marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (Matt. 3:3-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)
2. John the baptizer made it clear, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming…He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:26&33)
3. Jesus entrusted the ministry of baptism to his disciples (Matt 28:19-20) At Pentecost, the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire gave birth to the church (Acts 2). 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. Christian baptism marks our new identity in Christ
   1. Baptism marks each person as a member of the body of Christ
   2. The congregation echoes God’s acceptance by promising its support for the newly baptized person on his/her spiritual journey.
5. Baptism is experienced by different modes (ways) and at different ages

Slide: Modes

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 (where large bodies of water were not available)-another form of anointing. See Exodus 29:7 and Psalm 133:2
3. Sprinkling (washing by sprinkling water)- Ezek. 36:25 “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. 1 Cor 6:11 “You are washed”

\*\*Joke about man looking for Jesus in River

Age of baptism varies among Christian traditions:

1. 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. Infant baptism- congregation celebrates God’s unconditional love and promise for the children’s lives. 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) 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.

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Personal Baptismal Reflection- Infant touching water

Member renewing baptism in pool

Pouring Water in Bowl- pee

**COMMUNION-** Chalice & Plate- symbolize for us the sacred moment of Holy Communion.

Hear these words from 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. Holy Communion (communing together; sharing and celebrating the presence of God)
    2. The Lord’s Table, (celebrating our oneness in Christ)
    3. The Lord’s Supper (last meal Jesus shared with His disciples before His suffering, death & resurrection)
    4. The Eucharist (from Greek word which means “Thanksgiving” or “to give thanks”; giving thanks for all that God has done through Christ)
    5. The Divine Liturgy (Eastern Orthodox) or
    6. The Mass (Roman Catholic and some Lutherans)

No matter what you may refer communion as, the points to remember are:

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1. known as different names
2. instituted by Jesus during his last supper with his disciples and continued in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19-20)
3. 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)
4. 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: 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
5. When we come to the Lord’s Table, we come to the banquet table of God

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* 1. We experience the inward and spiritual grace conveyed to us through these outward and visible elements of bread and juice/wine
  2. At this table all are welcome and all are fed.
  3. 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 life and the cup of salvation together in a spirit of gratitude and love for God and for one another.

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Ways of Communion

Bread, Cubes, Wafers, small cups, common cup

Intinction

Personal Communion Story

Home Church- garlic potato chips & kool aid

Member with personal hygene- intinction- finally comes around

Juice running down over cup and hands

Caleb- I want a piece of Jesus also.

\* Remind them about cards on tables for questions.

Break

Part 2

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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.

In addition to the sacraments (however your congregation defines sacraments), there are many other means of grace we can describe as sacred moments.

* Some sacred moments come as a surprise. God may come to us in an infinite variety of ways, such as through the birth of a child, the beauty of a sunset, or a timely visit from a Christian friend. Each means of grace connects us 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.

Slide- gift box

Let’s now take some time to describe some other sacred moments keeping in mind that all of them are a free gift from God, to experience and draw us closer to Christ.

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1. Confirmation- the church celebrates the spiritual growth and conscious choice of the confirmed. Confirmation marks the confirmer’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.
   * 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 confirmed says, “You are my God, I love you, and I want to live my life in relationship with you and this family of faith.”
   * 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)
   * Various Christian traditions view confirmation differently
     + In traditions that practice infant baptism (United Methodist, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, & Roman Catholics), confirmation is understood as the time when the young person accepts for him/herself the gift of salvation.
     + For Baptists, the Church of Christ, and others within the Anabaptist tradition, the individual’s profession of faith, confirmation & baptism happen approximately the same time.
2. Membership & Ordination

* 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/her for ministry. (Eph 4:11-13)
  + Every Christian has a calling and a ministry that are essential to the health and well being of the body of Christ.
  + Every Christian has a spiritual gift, and every gift is needed. (1 Cor. 12:12-27)
  + 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 ordination.
* 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.
  + The stole worn by ordained persons symbolizes the yoke of Christ.
  + Ordination affirms and challenges those called by God to use their unique gift(s) to equip others for ministry. (Acts 13:1-3)
  + Ordination confirms those called to b e 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.

Personal reflection of my call to ministry (if time)

1. Marriage- a 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

* Just as every Christian is called to a life of ministry, so too, every Christian is called to meaningful and loving relationships.
* Persons called to singleness can experience abundant grace and joy…in covenant relationship to God and to other Christians.
* 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.”

Other sacred moments are divine appointments with God and can be found in our daily practices the help us connect to God.

1. Prayer
   * Jesus invested time daily with God in prayer, providing an important spiritual model for us (Luke 6:12)
   * Prayer means living each moment with our hearts open to God
   * Like Paul, we are called to pray for others (Eph 3:14-19)
2. Searching the Scripture

* Spending time each day reading the Bible, hearing it expounded, meditating on it, and applying its truths to daily life. (Matthew 4:1-11)

1. Worship

* In worship we find ourselves in the presence of the living God.
* We open ourselves to feel the living God, and to renew ourselves for the life He wants us to lead
* If we do not center our lives in the worship of God, we will begin to worship false gods.

1. Spiritual friends

* Jesus invested time with his disciples. Mutual accountability in a small group is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship (John 13:34-35 & Acts 2:42-47)
* Regular participation in the Christian community is an essential means of grace. It provides spiritual nurture and support.

1. Fasting

* Gives us time to connect to God
* This discipline can be understood as fasting from the things of earth to allow time for fasting on the things of the Spirit.
* Fasting can include refraining from activities that hinder our relationship with God. We can fast from television, from complaining or from any activity that keeps us from God.

1. 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.
   * Before He gave himself for us on the cross, Christ took the most humble role of a servant to teach his disciples the importance of serving others with humility and grace (John 13:1-20)
   * Jesus had much to say about giving money. The way a person spends his/her money reveals his/her heart. (Luke 12:32-34)

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

* The Cross-reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice, 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)
* 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) All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental or relational. God wants to make us whole. 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)

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Friends, God’s grace comes to us in a variety of ways. And there are many more sacred moments than we have mentioned. Be open to all the means of grace in your life, and let our life be a life of love and grace.

We are all called to open ourselves to God’s amazing grace. In human relationships: in situations like the birth of a child, the return of a loved one, the surprise of a random act of kindness. In nature: 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, the playfulness of a newborn colt. We must make room for a new life in Christ so we can enjoy all of these means of grace.

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

Gentlemen it is now time to make that room. We will now move

to the sanctuary for a very special Communion Service- to share in the sacramental meal where the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be re-presented to us. Please go in silence, sit with your table group, and bring your purple worship book.

DeColores