**Clergy Talk: Sanctifying Grace**

Please open your purple worship books and join me in the prayer to the Holy Spirit... *Come, Holy Spirit, 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.*

*Oh 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.*

Please be seated.

Do any of you remember when you first started a new sport, or attempted a project like wallpapering for the first time? If you are like me, don’t you wish you could start out like a Jack Nicklaus at golf, or remodel a home like Norm Abram or Tom Silva on This Old House? I remember the first time I seriously thought about being a Christian, after a Youth Retreat when I invited Christ into my life. I thought that if I only got right with God, everything would be on easy street. Immediately. I would know all the right things to say, I would do all the right things – sort of like being on autopilot. It should just come naturally – right?

I struggled with this question for several years – not a quick learner! In the midst of this struggle, I was wrestling with the recurring call I felt to become a minister of the Gospel. I initially reject this call because of my friend David. David said you couldn’t be fully a Christian unless you were a minister – in other words, full time. I knew this to be a ridiculous statement, yet when I felt the continuing nudge to say yes to being a minister, I said no because of that old argument.

One evening, I finally decided to pray once again about this call. As I knelt to pray, I knew I had to say yes. And when I did, there was a sense of peace and joy the likes of which I had never known.

Through many storms and trials since, that peace has never departed. It is God’s gift.

Am I perfect now??? Just ask my wife and children!

This title of this talk is \***Sanctifying Grace**, and my name is \***Bill Koppert**.

You have had a several talks on God’s Grace. Each one highlighted a different way in which the Grace of God impacts our lives. But the reality in midst of these talks is that \***ALL GRACE IS GOD’S GRACE.** Grace is experienced in a variety of ways as we continue on our spiritual journey.

On Friday you heard Rev. Dave Warner talk about \***Prevenient Grace**. That is God at work in our lives before ever we knew it. Even now, God is in your life in ways that you may not realize until a later time. Just know, God has always loved you, and been working in your life since the beginning.

On Friday you also heard about \***Justifying Grace** from Rev. Cindee Johnson. She shared with you how God brings us to the point where we can accept for ourselves the relationship God offers us through Christ. As I shared, in my life, when I was in doubt, God was at work in my life empowering me to say yes to the challenge God had placed before me. It was God’s Grace that brought me to say yes.

On Saturday our Spiritual Director, Rev. Stacy Evans, spent some time with us explaining the \***Means of Grace** by which we are brought anew into Christ’s presence through Baptism and Communion. The means of grace helps us to celebrate and strengthen our relationship with God.

On Saturday Rev. Cheryl Evans shared with us some of the \***Obstacles to Grace.** Obstacles can be attitudes and actions that hinder our relationship with God and our neighbor. But, thanks be to God, through the cross, Jesus Christ has overcome every obstacle.

And now we come to yet another aspect of God’s Grace, and that is \***Sanctifying Grace.**

Sanctifying Grace is God at work in us to produce both \***the desire and the power t**o give God our undivided attention – our whole heart – and our entire life. It enables us to mature as son/daughters of God and to be Christ-in-the-world. It is a growth process. As we move to authentic discipleship, our focus shifts from being self-directed to being led by the Spirit of God. It is the \***power of the Holy Spirit that equips us** for every good work and act of obedience.

Sanctifying Grace is the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. God’s Sanctifying Grace is divine energy transforming our heart and life. \*It makes us **RIPE** for maturing in our faith.

First of all Sanctifying Grace is \***restoring** our relationship with God and others. How do we restore a relationship? We cannot earn a relationship with anyone. Relationship is a gift. And we change our ways because God first loves us and gives us the grace to make a fresh start, day by day, hour by hour.

Romans 8:15-17 states that we receive God’s spirit “bearing witness with our spirit” that we are beloved children of God. It is this identity as children of God that forms the foundation for all other relationships.

My son, Andy, was about seven years old when we were riding in the car together. As usual, I tend to be a bit impatient with other drivers on the road. On this occasion, someone was very slow to start up and move out of my way! I had a few choice words (no cussing) for the individual. Andy then said, “maybe they are just having a bad day”. All of a sudden, that individual was no longer just an inconvenience in my way, he was a person!!! And I was immediately forced to look at the situation through very different eyes. That image is still a help to me to this day – for I still tend to get a bit impatient. But, then, Andy’s words of wisdom come to help me focus on a person, not an obstacle in my path. From the mouths of children . . .

The Holy Spirit \***imparts** new life, new light, new strength, and a new heart. Justifying grace is the moment when the righteousness of Christ in imputed to us. This means we are declared “not guilty” because of all that Christ did for us on the cross – we experience a change of status.

Sanctifying Grace is the process by which the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us – it becomes a part of us, and we experience a change of heart. Ephesians 3:14-19 states that day by day we become more like Christ in our attitudes and actions.

I knew when riding in the car with my son what my attitude should be – I was raised in a Christian home. But it took my son to impart that teaching by etching into my memory who I was – a child of God.

The Holy Spirit is \***Perfecting** us in the image of God and the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Conversion is a process. It happens once, but not all at once. It is a lifelong process of dying to what is evil and rising to what is good and true (Christ in us)

The gifts of the Spirit are given to help us grow and to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12-14)

As a Christian matures, his life displays certain qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22)

Perfecting involves pruning (John 15:2) the Bible tells us that every vine and fruit tree requires pruning, and so do we. A life in grace is a life in process, and some of this process is painful.

Christian perfection is both instantaneous and progressive. The Greek work for perfect can also be translated as “mature or complete”. Just as a person can be mature or complete as a five-year-old, the same person years later can be quite different and still be a mature or complete fifteen-year-old, or a mature twenty-five year-old, etc. To be perfected in love is both God’s call, and God’s promise – in Christ you can be perfect, mature, and complete today, and continue to grow in grace and be more like Christ next month.

Sanctifying grace is the doctrine of “the more.” God has more love, more power, more peace, and more joy in store for us.

The means of grace are means of growth. Sanctifying grace is our deepest joy and our greatest good in all our relationships.

I have had the privilege of serving a number of very different churches. And in each church I have found “saints” who by their living lifted me up. I learned so much from the laity of each church. One lady was active all her life in the church. She had been the Sunday School Superintendent for 25 years, and then she had been the church treasurer. She was the most humble and joyful person I had ever met. She was up in years, and she became ill with a number of problems, so she moved herself into a Retirement Center in town. She had a room of her own, but was only in it briefly, and had to be admitted to their care center. While in there, she had to depend upon the aids for all her needs. She was a strong person all her life and took care of others. Now, she was the one who needed care. She said to me she did not know why she was still here on earth – she was ready and willing to join her Maker. But she always prayed that God would use her – and she wondered what God wanted her to do while flat on her back in bed. A few days later I was visiting with her and she said she had the answer to her prayer – she needed to learn humility! Charles, a lay member of the congregation and a rough and tough truck driver was with me. We looked at each other, and Charles said, “If she needs to learn humility, we are in deep trouble” She laughed and said, no, she needed to learn to be thankful for all that those who were caring for her were doing.

Needless to say, the staff took great delight in caring for her. She told me a week later, that she thought she had learned some humility, and she was indeed thankful for the care she was receiving – and let it be known. She died several weeks later, with a peace that was complete.

The Holy **Spirit** \***EQUIPS** us to do the work of Christ in the world – to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Sanctifying Grace is the work of the Holy Spirit empowering us to see and serve Christ in the least and lost of our city, state, and world. Matthew 25:31-40 tells of feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and the prisoner – these are all essential activities of a Christian.

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry. Every person is gifted, and every gift is needed if the whole will of God is to be accomplished. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

The Holy Spirit equips us to obey the Great commandment and the Great Commission.

This is the Great Commandment: “Love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your5 would, and with all your mind . . . love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37,39)

This is the Great Commission: “God . . . and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19)

\***How do we grow in Sanctifying Grace**?

\*Growth in grace is a natural process that occurs when we are connected to the living God – as a branch connected to a healthy vine (John 15:1-2)

We abide in Christ through \***PRAYER** and worship as we open ourselves to God; we are rooted and grounded in love and intimately connected to Christ.

Christ’s word abides in us through \***STUDY** as we give our minds to God and grow in the mind of Christ. (John 15:7, 10 Philippians 2:5-8)

We bear much fruit for God glory through \***ACTION**. In Christian action we give our hands to God and participate in the work of Christ (John 15:8) these works include works of mercy, and works of justice.

\***We open our hearts to receive grace as a gift**

Romans 5:5 says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” We do not earn it or deserve God’s love; we simply open our hearts to receive it.

We share grace in the body of Christ (community) Through participation in the gathered community and small groups, we receive strength and nurture – just as a branch does from the vine (John 15:5). We come alive in Christ, learn the mind of Christ, and help one another remain rooted and grounded in God’s love. (Eph 2:5, Phil 2:1-12, Eph. 3:14-19)

We respond by full participation in the mission of Christ in the world.

For three days we have prayed for the Holy Spirit to come and fill us with the fire of love. We have learned that:

1. God wants a relationship with us even more than we want a relationship with God.

2. God’s role in sanctifying grace is to fill us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Our role is to open our hearts and walk in the Spirit with Christ day by day.

3. Small groups are an important means of sanctifying grace for disciples – from the time Jesus called the first disciples to this very day, small groups are an essential means of grace.

\*De Colores!