**MEANS OF GRACE**

Lead the Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

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. Please be seated.

Introduction

In 2008 my wife and I were blessed with the opportunity to travel to the holy lands for two weeks of travel and study. As you might guess it was a life changing experience, there were many sacred moments. One of those moments happened on the shore of the sea of Galilee *[show slide]*. Our group gathered at day's end and shared in Holy Communion. There was no doubt in any of our minds that we were in a sacred place, during a sacred moment, and Christ was present. Even though I had experienced communion many times before, I felt connected to God in a new way that day.

The title of this talk is MEANS OF GRACE and my name is Pastor Shawn.

EXPLAIN QUESTION AND ANSWER

**The means of grace are sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present to us anew.** **Sacraments are sacred moments that Jesus gave us by clear instruction and example in the scripture.** They 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 within the church varies according to the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination. Most Christians recognize two sacraments: **baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.**

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said "Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And in Luke 22:19-20, "He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.” After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."

**Some churches consider other rites or practices to be sacraments as well**. Since the Council of Trent (1545-63), 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 (also known as extreme unction, the last rites, or anointing of the sick or dying).**

Christians must 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." (repeat)** 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.

**The two sacraments observed by most Christians**

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

Baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Matt. 3:13-17).

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).

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).

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 person on his/her spiritual journey.

In the history of the Christian church, baptism has been experienced in different modes and at different ages, depending on the denominational understanding.

The modes of baptism include:

Immersion (put under the water)-symbolizes 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)-another form of anointing; see Exodus 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). "You were washed . . ." (1 Cor. 6:11).

The age for baptism varies among Christian traditions:

When adults are baptized, 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.

In the baptism of infants and children, congregations celebrate God's unconditional love and promise for 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).

Through the 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.

Holy Communion

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

**23**For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread **24**and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+11%3A23-26&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28585a)] Do this to remember me.” **25**In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.” **26**For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.

Various Christian traditions refer to this sacrament by different names, including: Holy Communion, the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist (which means "grateful"), the Divine Liturgy (Eastern Orthodox), or the Mass (Roman Catholic and some Lutherans).

Jesus 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).

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/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 life and the cup of salvation together in a spirit of gratitude and love for God and for one another

TAKE THE BREAK NOW.

Before the break we considered the two sacraments that most Christians agree are means of grace, in other words, 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 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 that are celebrated 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~~. Sacred moments can come by divine appointment as we engage in our daily devotional practices; you heard about these in the Life of Piety talk given last night by Pam [Miller]. Finally, sacred moments can come by divine appointment through shared experiences within the community of faith. We are going to take some time now to look at these ways of experiencing sacred moments by divine appointment.

First are the sacred moments that are celebrations within the life of the church. These include things such as the sacraments, worship, morning and evening prayer, giving money to the poor, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. We have already discussed the sacraments; there are three more that we will discuss in more detail.

Confirmation -

In the sacred moment of confirmation, the church celebrates the spiritual growth and conscious choice of the confirmand. Confirmation 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-and the commitment to take responsibility for living as a disciple.

In infant baptism, God and the Christian community said, "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."

Confirmation signals a transition to a new level of personal responsibility for one's own faith. Just as a bar mitzvah for Jews marks the transition from child­ hood to young adulthood, confirmation marks the transition from spiritual child­ hood 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 Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and 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, and baptism happen at approximately the same time.

Call to Ministry & 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 or 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.~~

Every Christian is called to ministry, and ~~T~~the church can celebrate and confirm (affirm? consecrate?) a person's call to ministry in a variety of ways.

Anointing with oil

Services of installation

Laying on of hands and blessing

Consecration

As I said, every Christian is called to ministry; 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

Ordination confirms (affirms? consecrates?) 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 worship, order, and nurture of the church.

Singleness & Marriage -

Just as every Christian is called to a life of ministry, and every Christian is called to meaningful and loving relationships.

The grace of God empowers us to live a loving and productive life, both in our singleness and, for some, in marriage.

We are all members of the body of Christ.

We all find our true selves as we share our lives with one another in the Christian community.

Persons called to singleness can experience abundant grace and joy.

The single person can find in Christ all that is needed for complete holiness and happiness.

Every Christian is called to live his/her life in covenant relationship to God and to other Christians.

Persons called to marriage can also experience abundant grace and joy.

Christian marriage joins two lives in the presence of God (Matt. 19:4-6).

Christian marriage is characterized by mutuality, love, and the intimate knowledge that comes from a shared life (Eph. 5:21-31).

God intends for marriage to be a means of grace for the children, the extended families, and the whole society. Each spouse is to re-present 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 to God's love." *(repeat quote and give them plenty of time to write)***

**Sacred moments occurring by divine appointment** can be found in the **daily devotional practices** that help connect us to God.

**Prayer**

Jesus invested time daily with God in prayer, providing an important spiritual model for us (Luke 6:12; 9:18; 11:1).

Prayer means living each moment with our hearts open to God.

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 Worshipbook for additional help with prayer and meditation.]

**Searching the scripture**

Spending time each day reading the Bible, hearing it expounded, meditating on it, and applying its truths to daily life. (Ps. 119:103-105)

**103**How sweet your words taste to me;  
    they are sweeter than honey.  
**104**Your commandments give me understanding;  
    no wonder I hate every false way of life.

**105**Your word is a lamp to guide my feet  
    and a light for my path.

**Worship**

If we do not center our lives in the worship of God (Deut. 5:6-14; Heb. 10:19-25), we will begin to worship false gods.

**Finding spiritual friends and participating actively in the body of Christ**

Jesus invested time with his disciples. Mutual accountability in a small group is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship (John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-4 7).

Regular participation in the Christian community is an essential means of grace. It provides spiritual nurture and support

**Fasting**

Fasting is a means of grace that connects us to God.

Both the Old and New Testaments teach fasting (Isa. 58:5-7; Matt. 4:2-11; 6:16-18). This discipline can be understood as fasting from the things of earth to allow time for feasting on the things of the Spirit.

The spiritual practice of fasting should be learned from a pastor or spiritual director.

Fasting can include ref raining from activities that hinder our relationship with God. We can fast from television, from complaining, or from any activity that keeps us from God.

**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

Finally, **sacred moments by divine appointment sometimes occur in our shared experiences** of healing, confession & forgiveness, and reconciliation. These means of grace restore us to physical and spiritual health, true freedom, and Christian community.

The Greek word for **healing** in the Gospels is the same word used for salvation: sozo

All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, or relational. God wants to make us whole. Healing played an essential role in the ministry of Jesus and the disciples

**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).

The ministry of healing belongs to the church and should not be left to just a few people who make it a show of their own power and glory rather than allowing healing to serve as an expression of God's love, power, and glory

In every authentic healing ministry, Jesus Christ is clearly present and acknowledged as the healer. In fact, Christ re-presented is the only authentic and authoritative means of grace for the forgiveness of sin, physical healing, or inner spiritual healing and human wholeness

**Reconciliation** is the restoration of a relationship; this is the will of God and the mission of God in the world (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

TAKE THE SECOND BREAK HERE.

We are called to open ourselves to God's amazing grace in an infinite variety of ways.

By surprise:

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.

By divine appointment – through the sacraments, the celebrations and ceremonies of the church, our daily devotional practices, and our shared experiences that build and strengthen the community of faith…[recap all means of grace …]

Conclusion

We meet God in the Sacraments and in the Sacred Moments. Sometimes the come together such as for My wife and I on the core of the Sea of Galilee. At other times it happens through community or spiritual disciplines. One thing is certain however…

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

John 15:1-2 makes clear that God prunes away the dead branches and the unproductive parts of our life in order make us more fruitful and productive. “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. **2**He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

Now we will move to the chapel/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.

Just like the first disciples, we go to the Lord's Table with all our human weakness and brokenness.

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

I. Henri Nouwen, Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation (Garden

City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979), 46.