MEANS OF GRACE October 24, 2015

Please turn in your worship book to page 48 and pray 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 every enjoy your consolations.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

I will always remember my own Walk to Emmaus that happened many years ago. During that time I experienced for the first time someone giving me the bread and the wine of Holy Communion and using my first name as they did so. Many years before that I had an assignment from a professor in seminary to look back on my baptism: when I did so I found that my life had changed profoundly. There really was a “before” and an “after.” I realized that before baptism my life was OK but it did not have a sense of clear purpose. After my baptism I experienced the protection of God and was able to see my feet standing on solid ground. I was very impressed that what we call “sacraments” had had such an effect upon my own life.

\*The name of this talk is Means of Grace (3); my name is \*Stacy Evans (3a).

# \*The means of grace are sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present to us anew (4).

\***Sacraments (5)** are sacred moments that Jesus gave us clear instruction and example in the scripture. Sacraments \***involve our physical senses through outward and visible signs** (5a); in addition, they \***involve our spiritual senses through an inward and spiritual work of grace** (5b). 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 (6) and the \*Lord’s Supper (6a) or Holy Communion.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said “Go…and make disciples…baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Remember what Jesus said to his disciples, “This [bread] is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). “Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you.’” (Matt. 26:27).

Some churches consider other rites or ceremonies to be sacraments as well. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the \***Roman Catholic Church** has celebrated **seven sacraments** (7). In addition to the \***baptism** and **the Lord’s Supper** (7a), these include: \***penance** (7b)(making amends for sins), \***marriage** (7c), \***holy orders** (7d)(ordination of priests), \***confirmation** (7e), and \***healing** (7f)(which is 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 the various Christian traditions. John Wesley said,

\*“We may not all believe alike, but we can all love alike.” (8) 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 we are all members of the body of Christ. (I Cor. 12:1-14:40).

# The two sacraments observed by most Christians

\***Baptism** (9)is **an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual work of God’s grace**. Baptism \*marked the beginnings of Jesus’ public ministry (9a) (Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). \*John the Baptizer made it clear (9b), “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful that I is coming…He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:26,33). Also, Jesus \*entrusted the ministry of baptism to his disciples (9c) (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 calls to him” (Acts 2:38-39).

\***Christian baptism marks our new identity in Christ** (9d). Baptism marks each person as member of the body of Christ. In the rite of baptism, 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** (10)include:

1. \***Immersion** (10a), which means to “put under the water”—this symbolizes being buried with Christ and raised with Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).
2. \***Pouring** (10b)(where large bodies of water are not available)—this is another form of anointing (see Exodus 29:7; Psalm133:2). As early as the third century Christian art shows John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus.
3. \***Sprinkling** (10c)(washing by sprinkling water)—God says in Ezekiel 36:25, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean…” I Cor. 6:11 says, “You were washed.”

The \*age for baptism (11) varies among Christian traditions:

* 1. When \***adults** (11a)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.
  2. In the baptism of \***infants and children** (11b), 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 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 (12)

One of the scriptural bases for this sacrament is I Corinthians 11:23-26, which I will now read. READ scripture passage from the Bible.

\*This sacrament is referred to **in different Christian traditions** by **many names** (12a)including: **Holy Communion**, **the Lord’s Table**, **the Lord’s Supper**, **the Sacrament of the Altar**, **the Eucharist** (which means “thanksgiving”), **the Divine Liturgy** (Eastern Orthodox), or **the Mass** (Roman Catholics and some Episcopalians and Lutherans).

Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion during his last supper with his disciples before he was put on trial and crucified. He commanded the disciples to continue sharing the bread and the cup of the new covenant in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19-10). In the first supper after the Resurrection, Jesus shared a meal with the travelers on the road to Emmaus. When he said the blessing and 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, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who come to receive him in faith (Acts 2:42; I Cor. 10:16, 11:23-26).

\*When we come to the Lord’s Table (13) we come to **the banquet table of God**. Here \*we experience (13a):

# The inward and spiritual grace conveyed to us through the outward and visible elements of bread and wine/grape juice.

* \***All are welcome and all are fed** (13b)**.**
* \***A glimpse of the way God intends for the world to be** (13c)**—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.**

\***We will now take a 10-minute break** (14)**.** (ALD to give directions to the pilgrims)

# \*(15) In addition to the sacraments (however your church defines sacraments; some churches refer to this as ordinances), there are many other means of grace we can describe as \*sacred moments (16).

\***Some sacred moments come as a surprise** (16a)**.** 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 another Christian friend. Each means of grace connects us to the living God and provides the grace that we need.

\***Other sacred moments can come through Christian rituals** (16b)**.** 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, or ceremonies** (16c)—for example, worship, morning and evening prayer, giving money to the poor, visiting the sick and the imprisoned.

\***Confirmation** (17)is one of the rituals of the church which **celebrates the spiritual growth and conscious choice of the confirmand (the person being confirmed).**

Confirmation is a sacred moment when the confirmand (a person who has gone through a systematic course about the origins and beliefs of the church) decides to accept the relationship that is offered by God—begun in baptism and now affirmed in a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ—and the commitment to take responsibility for living as a Christian disciple.

The whole **process is begun with infant or child baptism when God and the Christian community say, “You are marked as a beloved child of God.** You belong to God’s family and the congregation’s family, and you are loved. **Following baptism and during confirmation the confirmand says, “You are my God. I love you, and I want to live my life in relationship with you and the family of faith.”** Confirmation signals a transition to a new level of personal responsibility for one’s own faith.

Just as *bar mitzvah* for Jews marks the transition from childhood to young adulthood, 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—Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Methodists and Roman Catholics—confirmation is understood as the time when the young person accepts for her/himself the gift of salvation. For Baptists, the churches of Christ, and others with the Anabaptists tradition (such as Mennonites), the individual’s profession of faith, baptism and confirmation happen at approximately the same time.

# \*Baptism (17a)

In the Priesthood of All Believers talk, you learned that in baptism, every Christian is called to a life of ministry. Every Christian has a spiritual gift, and every gift is needed by the body of Christ. Every Christian has a calling and a ministry that are essential to the health and well-being of the body of Christ. Every Christian is called to be a disciple and a member of the body of Christ, the church.

# \*Ordination (17b)

However, not every Christian is called to ordination. The church can celebrate and confirm a person’s call to ministry in a variety of ways. These include services of a) Anointing with oil; b) installing the person in the pastoral office; c) laying on of hands and blessing; or d) consecration. 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. (See Luke 2:41-52; Matt. 4:18-22, 28:19; John 6:66-68; Josh. 24:15; Rom. 12:1-2; Acts

6:1-6)

The stole worn by the ordained person symbolizes the yoke of Christ. Ordination affirms and challenges those called by God to use their unique gifts to equip others for ministry (Acts 13:1-3). Ordination confirms those called to be set apart for the specialized ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God; administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; and caring for the worship, order, and nurture of the church.

# \*Marriage and singlesness (17c)

The grace of God empowers us to live a loving and productive life in adult singleness or in marriage.

Every Christian is called to a life of ministry, and every Christian is called to meaningful and loving relationships. We are all members of the body of Christ where we can find our true

selves as we share our lives with one another in the Christian community.

**People 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. This is a gift from Christ. All those called to singleness can live her/his life within a covenant relationship to God and with other Christians.

**People 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 share life (Eph. 5:21-31). God intends for marriage to be a means of grace for the children, the extended families, and the whole of society. Each spouse is to re-present Christ to his or her mate, family, and community. Christian writer Henri Nouwen puts it this way: “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.” (*Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation*, Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979, page 46)

# Sacred Moments are appointments with God

\*Sacred moments can be found in the daily practices (18) that help connect us with God. This is the practice of making time for God throughout your life. Many of these have already been mentioned in the previous two talks. Let me review them briefly and two more.

# \*Prayer (18a)

Jesus invested time daily with God in prayer, providing an important spiritual model for us (Luke 6:12, 9:18, 11:1; Mark 1:35. 6:46). Prayer means living each moment with our hearts open to God. Like the Apostle Paul we are called to pray for others (Eph. 3:14-19; Philippians 4:6-7). There are people praying for you around the clock. You can see from this chart how members of the Emmaus community are remembering you in prayer during this weekend. And there are many aids for daily prayer in your worship book. (Point out several pages of prayer helps)

# \*Searching the scriptures (18b)

This means spending time each day reading the Bible, hearing it expounded, meditating on it, and applying its truths to daily life. (See 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Psalm 119:103-105; Matt. 4:1-11; John 8:31-32) The process of searching the scriptures can be educational, rewarding, and life changing as we pay close attention to its content and apply biblical truth to daily living.

# \*Worship (18c)

Psalm 122:1, says, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’” We are to center our lives on the worship of the one true God so that we will not begin to worship false gods. (Deut. 5:6-14; Heb. 10:19-25) One of the main things about public worship is being in the company of other believers. There is strength in Christian community gathered together.

# \*Finding spiritual friends and participating actively in the body of Christ (18d)

Jesus gave quality time to being with his disciples. After discovering spiritual friends, it is essential that you have mutual accountability in a small group—just as Jesus did with the Twelve (John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-47). Regular participation in the body of Christ that is your church is an essential means of grace. Being part of the church provides spiritual nurture and support (Heb. 10:25).

# \*Fasting (18e)

Both Old and New Testaments teach fasting as a spiritual discipline (Is. 58:5-7; Matt.

4:2-11, 6:16-18). This discipline can be understood as **fasting from the things of earth** in order for us to engage in **feasting on the things of the Spirit**. This particular spiritual discipline should be learned from a spiritual leader such as your pastor or a spiritual director. Fasting is not only refraining from eating food but can include refraining from any activities that hinder our relationship with God. We can fast from television, from complaining, or from any other activity that keeps us from God.

# \*Generosity (18f)

Jesus used his time and energy in serving and helping others. He willingly sacrificed all power and position in heaven in order to take the lowliest position of service (Philippians 2:5- 11). 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 human grace. (John 13:1-20). Jesus said much about giving money to the poor and to God’s work on earth. He told

everyone that the way a person spends her/his time and money reveals that person’s heart (Luke 12:32-34; Matt. 25:14-29).

# \*Confession, Forgiveness, Healing, and Reconciliation (19)

All of these are means of grace that restore us to physical and spiritual health and give us true freedom and an ongoing place in the Christian community.

The word for \***healing** (19a)in the gospels is the same word used for **salvation**: *sozo*. (Luke 7:50, 9:14) So healing is a matter of being made whole as a total person. All of us need healing and wholeness of some kind, whether spiritual or physical or emotional or mental or relational. God wants to make us whole (Luke 7:18-23; Matt. 12:15-21). Healing played an essential role in the ministry of Jesus and his early disciples (Matt. 9:13-34; Luke 9:1-6; Acts 4:9).

\***Confession** and **forgiveness** (19b)are also means of spiritual healing within the body of Christ. “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed,” says James 5:16. The ministry of healing belongs to the whole church and should not be left to just a few people who try to 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 (James 5:13-15). 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 (Matt. 9:2-8).

\***Reconciliation** (19c)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). Reconciliation may be the mending of a relationship with someone from whom you have been estranged. Reconciliation also occurs when we confess our sins to God and we receive divine forgiveness. In both cases reconciliation helps us to reclaim who we really are as God’s beloved children.

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

We see God’s grace in so many of life’s ordinary situations like the birth of a child, the return of a loved one to the family, the surprise of a random act of kindness. God’s grace is always all around us if we are discerning and ask the Holy Spirit’s help to see it. Another place where we see God’s grace is through nature—the beauty of a flower or a gorgeous sunset, the

grandeur of a mountain peak or the mystery of a flowing stream. We see God’s grace at work in the animal kingdom when we behold the birth of a puppy or a kitten or the playfulness of a newborn colt. God’s grace keeps the world turning so that new life is always possible.

We always have to make room for the new life in Christ, so something old has to die. John 15:1-2 makes clear that God prunes away the dead branches and the unproductive parts of our lives in order to make us more fruitful and productive. \*Now we will move to the sanctuary (20) 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 will go to the Lord’s Table with all our human weakness and brokenness, asking God to make us whole.

# Please go in silence and sit with your table group. The ALDs will direct us. \*De Colores!