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Means of Grace – William Koppert

Face to Face Encounter #4

*[Prayer to the Holy Spirit – page 48 of the purple worship books]*

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. 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.

As you know, we can go to a wall switch and flip it on, but we cannot provide the electricity. We can go to our sink and turn on the faucet, but we cannot make the water flow. There will be no light, and no water, without someone else providing it.

And so it is, to some extent, for the Christian with the ongoing grace of God. God’s grace is vital for our spiritual lives, but we do not control the supply. We cannot make the grace flow, but God has given us circuits to connect and pipes to open in order for us to experience God’s grace.

What are these circuits, and what are these pipes that God has given to us so that we can experience grace? One of the stories in the life of Jesus that points us to one of these circuits and pipes is the story of the Emmaus walk. You know that story: two people on the road to Emmaus meet a stranger who speaks to them about the Messiah, and why he came to this world. They invite him to stay the night, and during the meal he takes bread and breaks it, and it is at that moment that their eyes are open and they know that this stranger is none other than the Lord. Through that experience, that circuit, that connection, the hearts of these two were warmed and transformed. God has given to us many ways through which our hearts become strangely warmed and our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. We call these moments, these holy moments, these grace filled moments: Means of Grace.

**This talk is titled** **[^] MEANS OF GRACE and my name is** **[^] Bill Koppert**

The scripture references and key points are listed on your talk outline and will appear on the screen. I invite you to add your own notes to aid your discussion later.

It is in these moments that **[^]** Christ is represented or becomes present to us anew. It is in these times when we have a **[^]** spiritual encounter with the risen Christ. It is in these moments that God provides the electricity and provides the water of God’s presence. And these sacred moments, through which we receive God’s grace, are called **[^]** sacraments. They involve our physical senses through the outward and visible signs, but they also involve our spiritual senses, as god’s grace, through the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts.

There are many sacraments, sacred moments, that are shared in the life of the church that are based upon particular expressions of that denominational tradition. Within Christianity most churches affirm and recognize two sacraments. These two sacraments are central to the life of all expressions of the Christian faith. The reason why the two are recognized as central to the life of the church is that Jesus instituted them.

In the Gospel of **Matthew, Chapter 28, verse 19**, that’s Matthew 28:19, Jesus says to His disciples, “Go . . . make disciples **[^]** baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” And in the Gospel of **Luke, Chapter 22, verse 19**, that’s Luke 22:19, during the Passover meal, Jesus said during the meal, **[^]** “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Then He took the cup and blessed it and gave it to His disciples saying, this is the blood of the new covenant in my blood that shall be spilled out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink it, do it in remembrance of me.”

Because not all within Christianity celebrate all the sacraments in the same say, we must practice love within the Body of Christ. We may not agree on these matters concerning God’s grace and how they are expressed through the sacraments, but as John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said, “We may not all believe alike, but we can all love alike.” In other words, we may disagree on these matters concerning the sacraments, but we must do so in the Spirit of Christ. For Christ’s body is not divided, and the sacraments, which are to be His means of expressing God’s grace, are not meant to divide us, but instead to unite us.

Most of the time that I want to spend with you will focus on the two sacraments that most followers of Christ consider to be the two essential ones for the Church. But, again, that does not mean that God does not show us God’s grace through other means or by other ways. I am so glad that God uses tangible things, the physical world, to reveal spiritual truths, but more importantly, God’s very presence.

**[^] BAPTISM:**

**Baptism is an [^] outward act and visible sign using water expressing something of spiritual significance.** Baptism is a symbol that reminds us of the work of God’s grace in the heart of a person. Why is baptism so significant? Well, as you probably remember, **Jesus’ own baptism** **[^] marks the beginning of His public ministry.** When John was baptizing along the Jordan River, Jesus came and offered himself for baptism, not because of any sin in His life, but in order to fulfill all righteousness. We find this incident recorded in three Gospels, **Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22.** John told the people, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The importance of baptism is seen in the fact that **Jesus [^] entrusted the ministry of baptism with His own disciples.** We find this in the Great Commission that is recorded in the Gospel of **Mathew, Chapter 28, verses 19-20.** In the book of **Acts, Chapter 2**, we read that at Pentecost, the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire gave birth to the church which is still very much alive today. The significance of baptism is that it **[^]** marks us as disciples of Jesus Christ**. It is the beginning of our spiritual journey with Him**.

One of the areas that we tend to put a lot of focus on this sacrament is the way, or the **[^]** mode, in which we baptize, and the age at which we baptize. It should not be a point of disagreement for those within the Body of Christ, but it often is. It is essential that we try to understand how others in the Body of Christ view this sacrament and respect their understanding of this expression of God’s grace. And that is essential, because we need to remember that the sacrament of baptism is a gift from God, and is not something that we have created. **Baptism is God’s act and action that we participate in as the recipient of God’s grace.**

**The [^] modes of baptism that often are used includes: [^] Immersion**, or put under the water. This way, or mode, of baptizing and individual symbolizes being buried with Christ and raised with Him in order to walk in newness of life. The reference to this is found in **Romans, Chapter 6, verses 3-4**.A second way or mode of baptizing an individual was by way of **[^] Pouring.** This is offered where large bodies of water were not available. This perhaps was the way that Jesus was baptized.

The third way or mode of baptizing an individual was by **[^] Sprinkling**. Again, this way is offered when there are not large bodies of water available. In **Ezekiel 36:25**, we read, “I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean**.” Our focus should not be upon the amount of water, but upon the grace of God.** For it is the grace of God that brings that individual to their baptism, and it is God’s grace that will bring about the transformation in the person’s life.

The **[^]** age at which a person is baptized also varies among the many Christian traditions. **When [^] adults are baptized, we are celebrating both God’s love and Justifying grace together in one act.** When an adult is baptized, it shows that God’s offer of a relationship is accepted and the person is cleansed from their sin and incorporated in Christ’s Body. I have been privileged to have the wonderful experience over many years of conducting baptisms of babies, young people, and adults. It is indeed a grace filled event. In the baptism, it is very evident that something transformational takes place. Watching the individual, or the family, seeing their response to the words, and to the baptism, is a humbling experience. You realize that the baptism has really nothing to do with you as a pastor, but it is totally God, through the Holy Spirit, that is doing a transformational work in the individual and their families.

**When an [^] infant is baptized, the congregation or church is celebrating God’s unconditional love and promise for the child’s life.** In infant baptism, the traditions that hold to this are simply acknowledging that it is only by God’s grace that a person will come to Christ. Left to ourselves, we would not seek God. It is God who has sought us. Thus, by baptizing a child, this is an act of acknowledging God’s grace that is at work in the child’s life. Listen to what Jesus says concerning children and His Kingdom, “Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them; for it 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.” **Luke 10:14-15**

It will be through the commitment of the parents and the congregation that God’s love is made real for that child, and the action begun in baptism comes to completion in confirmation. When I have met with a couple who is having their child baptized, I shared with them the reality that baptism is the expression of God’s grace. I also shared with them that it would be by their example and the church’s example that this child will be given the opportunity to accept for themselves the gift of salvation that is offered to them through Jesus Christ.

In baptizing a child/infant, I have always sensed God’s grace working in the life of the parent(s) as well as in the life of those that are witnessing this special act of God. It is a moving experience to take an infant or child and place the water on their head saying … I baptize you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The walk down the aisle with an infant into the midst of the congregation is not for show, it is an acceptance of that child as a child of God, and the acceptance by the congregation of their responsibility to provide this child and his/her parents with the support, love, and prayers necessary to continue the revelation of God’s love in the midst of their lives as they grow. It is a Holy Experience for all.

**[^] HOLY COMMUNION:**

The second sacrament that is held by the vast majority of Christians is the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is interesting to note that the various Christian traditions refer to this sacrament by **[^]** different names. In addition to Holy Communion, it is also called the **[^] Lord’s Supper, the [^] Lord’s Table, [^] Eucharist, [^] Divine Liturgy, and the [^] Mass.** Jesus himself, **[^]** instituted this sacrament, sacred moment, during the last Passover Meal that He shared with His disciples. He then commanded them to continue to share the bread the cup of the new covenant in remembrance of Him. This is accounted for **in Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 22, verses 19-20.** Jesus **[^]** shares a meal with the travelers on the road to Emmaus. And when He broke the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. Since that time the Disciples/Followers of Jesus Christ have shared in this sacramental meal that represents the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who come to receive it in faith. So what does it mean when we come to the **[^]** Lord’s Table? What does it do for us?

**Most importantly, we experience the [^] inward and spiritual grace conveyed to us through the visible elements of bread and juice**. At this table, **We are [^] all welcomed and fed. And at this table,** **[^] we can catch a glimpse of the way God intends the world to be** – that is, all of us sharing the bread of life and the cup of salvation together in a spirit of gratitude and love for God and for one another. For me personally, the sacrament of Holy Communion reminds me of the sin that is in my life, but at the same time it reminds me of the sacrifice that Jesus made in order to pay for the penalty of my sin. Holy Communion reminds me that I was once lost, and now I am found. It reminds me that I was once dead, but now because of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, I am alive. It reminds me that I am forgiven. It reminds me that I need to forgive just as God has forgiven me through Jesus Christ.

Thus far, I have shared with you two ways in which we experience the grace of God. These means of grace are ways that God meets our deepest human need. **And** **[^] while every sacrament is a sacred moment, we cannot call every sacred moment a sacrament.** These two sacraments that I have shared with you in this talk are meant to be shared within the community of faith. They were meant to be carried out within the Body of Christ.

As a pastor I am always humbled and moved as I have the privilege of sharing in Holy Communion. I know I am in the presence of God as I consecrate the bread and the cup, and it is a moving experience. As I share the words of the sacrament, “on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, take, eat, for this is my body which is broken for you. Likewise, when the supper was over, He took the cup, gave thanks to His Heavenly Father, and gave it to His disciples, saying, take and drink of this, for this is my blood that is poured out for you and for many for the remission of sin; as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.” As I share these words I look at each person as they come to share, and I can see that for most, it is truly a holy, sacred, moment. The presence of God is known and felt. It is always a humbling experience.

There are many other means of grace that we can describe as **[^]** sacred moments. **Some of the sacred moments [^] come as a surprise to us.** God may come to us at the birth of a child, especially our own, when we get to witness the miracle of birth. God may come to us as we experience the majesty of a sunset or a sunrise. God comes to us in those moments when we witness God’s presence in His creation when we see His handiwork on a clear night and the universe literally lays before us in the splendor of the night sky. God’s presence can be sense in a timely visit from a friend who comes to encourage us or give us direction. Each of these moments of grace is a means by which we are connected to the living God. The grace that touches us in these sacred moments often transforms us, makes us new.

**There are other sacred moments that [^] come to us by divine appointment.** In these times 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. For example, they might include worship services, devotional time with prayer, giving to the poor, visiting the sick or those imprisoned. At these times we can experience God’s grace.

Sacred moments are also **[^]** divine appointments with God. There are a number of daily practices that enable us to experience God’s presence and to be connected to our Creator. I want to share six of these with you. They are familiar to many of you, and I am sure that you already practice some of these on an ongoing fashion.

**Number One: [^] Prayer**

Prayer for me is a conversation with God that is comprised of both listening and speaking. Unfortunately, we have the tendency to spend more of our time in prayer focusing upon the speaking part of the conversation. We also do that in our day to day conversations with our friends and family.

How important is prayer? Well, as you probably already know, Jesus spent a great d3eal of time in prayer. At critical times in his life, Jesus prayed. When He chose the twelve disciple, he prayed. When He was tempted in the wilderness, I’m sure that He prayed. The night of His betrayal, He prayed. Some of the Scriptural references for these moments in His life are:

**Luke 6:12,**. **9:18, and Mark 1:35, and 6:46**

Lk.6 Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God

Mk.1 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

Mk 6. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

Prayer is that time when we listen to God speak to us. It is when we open our hearts to God’s presence. The scriptures tell us to be still, and know that He is God. We are also called upon to pray for others as revealed to us in **Ephesians 3:14-19, and Philippians 4:6-7.**

**Number Two: [^] Reading the Scriptures:**

One of the most important ways that God speaks to us is through God’s Word. There are many voices out there that are clamoring for our attention. And there are many, even within the Christian community that offers us guidance through the interpretation of the scriptures. However, there is nothing more important than to simply sit down and allow God to speak to you directly through His Word.

**Number Three: [^] Worship**

Worship is another way through which we can experience the presence of God. Yes, we can worship by ourselves, and it is important for us to do so. But we must also worship corporately. We must be together. It is important that we share in worship together. It is through worship that we focus upon God. We acknowledge God’s presence, submit to God’s will, and place God at the center of all that we do in life as individuals, but also together.

**Number Four: [^] Christian fellowship and friendship**

It is through this means of grace that we so often experience God’s grace. God uses others to touch our hearts and challenge our faith, and help us to grow in our relationship with Christ. There is a reason why Jesus chose twelve to follow Him. Yes, in part it was to mirror the original twelve tribes of Israel. He knew the value of being a part of a group to support, encourage, and hold each other accountable in order that the kingdom might expand into the world. Several scriptural passages that speak of the importance of being a part of a fellowship of fellow believers are found in: John 13:34-35, Acts 2:42-47, and Hebrews 10:25, which says that we should not forsake the gather together of ourselves.

**Number Five: [^] Fasting**

One of the areas that many in the household of faith have attributed to experiencing God’s grace is through fasting. If it is done in the right spirit, and for the right motive, it can be a powerful way that we can experience the presence and grace of God. In both the Old and the New Testaments, the practice of fasting was taught. **Isaiah 58:5-7, and Matthew 4:1-2, & 16-18** are two of these references where fasting is mentioned. The focus of fasting is the abstaining from things of this world and to replace them with the things of the Holy Spirit. Its purpose is to control the appetites of our flesh and to then strengthen our spiritual life and connection with God.

I have found that fasting as a commitment by a group is most helpful. Several fasts I remember occurred from Maundy Thursday evening through Good Friday. The Fast was then broken with a breakfast on Saturday morning by the group. We share the experience of fasting and reading Scriptures with one another as we shared the Saturday breakfast. They were very meaningful experiences for Lent.

Besides food, there are other things that you can give up. But the point in giving something up is to use it as a reminder to be in prayer and Bible reading. The point is not to pat ourselves on the back because of any sacrifices we make. The point is to do that which will draw us closer to God. My 6 year old grandson announced he is giving up Brussel sprouts for Lent. When it was pointed out that he doesn’t even like Brussel sprouts, he said, “Well, someday I might like them”.

Whatever you decide, may our actions bring God honor and bring us into a closer relationship with Christ.

**Number Six: [^] Generosity or Giving**

Jesus is our supreme example of One who invested time and energy in giving of Himself. He willingly sacrificed all power and position in Heaven in order to take the lowest position of being a servant. While on earth, He led the life of a servant, not demanding His own way, but doing the will of His Father. Christ Himself said, I have come to serve, not to be served.” In the area of material things, in particular, money, Jesus had a great deal to say about the subject. In the **Gospel of Luke, Chapter 12, verses 32-34, and the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 14-29**, Jesus says the way a person spends his/her money reveals much about that person’s heart.

Sacred moments, the experience of God’s grace, or the means by which we experience God’s grace, also occurs in several other ways that are a **[^]** part of the tradition of the Church. These too find their roots deep within the Biblical story and have been incorporated in the life of the Church.

They are: **[^] Confession, [^] Forgiveness, [^] Healing, and [^] Reconciliation.**

Through these means by which God reveals grace we are restored both in the physical and spiritual parts of our lives. Due to the fall of the human race and because we are all born into a sinful nature, we are not whole persons. However, it is God’s desire that we become whole persons. That is why God sent the Son, Jesus Christ. God offers each of us the means by which we can experience God’s grace and become whole persons. As you read the Gospels, you will notice that often Jesus would heal a person physically in order to bring healing to their soul as well. One of the areas that is essential to help us become whole person is found in the experience of confession. In order for us to experience the justifying grace of God in our lives, it is necessary for us to confess to God that we are sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness and grace. In the book of **James, Chapter 5, verse 16**, it says that we are to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so that we may be healed. In this case, confession and healing have a direct tie with one another. Healing comes when we confess by opening up to God’s truth that is convicting us, and then are honest and open with God about those thoughts that we hide deep within our souls.

**[^] We are called to open ourselves to God’s amazing grace in an infinite variety of ways.**

Some of these ways that God reveals His grace to us are found in our human relationships – at the birth of a child, the return of a loved one, a random act of kindness, and even in the time of loss in our lives. Other ways that reveal God’s grace can be seen in the beauty of a flower, the thunder of the surf on the beach, a sunset or sunrise, the grandeur of the mountains, the open sky at night when you mind takes you on a journey into eternity. These, and many, many more are those places that God, through Creation, helps us to see and experience God’s grace.

**[^ blank screen]** I have shared with you a few ways that God reaches us, touches us, and changes us by His grace through our physical senses as well as our spiritual senses. In order for us to fully experience God’s grace, and to experience this new life in Christ, we need to make room, we need to let go, we need to let something that is a part of who we are from our old nature to die.

In **John’s Gospel, Chapter 15, verses 1-2**, Jesus makes it clear that God is in the business of pruning away the dead branches, and those unproductive parts of our lives in order to make room for new growth. You have probably been taught that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. Well, that is simply not true! Especially if the trainer is Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter how long we have lived, and how much we have experienced God’s grace, there is always something in our lives that can be changed and made whole.

Because we know that God loves us and wants the very best for us, there are those things in our lives that can keep us from experiencing the fullness of grace. It is God’s desire that we become fruitful and reveal Jesus’ nature to those around us. We will now move to the sanctuary for a special service of Holy Communion. This sacred meal is where the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be represented to us. And just like those disciples on the Road to Emmaus that had their eyes opened, and their hearts burning with them, may this time we spent together be a heartwarming and eye opening experience for us as well. Please go in silence and sit with your tables.

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**Scriptures for the Means of Grace Talk**

Matthew 28: 19

Luke 22: 19

Matthew 3: 13-17

Mark 1: 9-11

Luke 3: 21-22

Matthew 28: 19-20

Acts 2

Romans 6: 3-4

Ezekiel 36: 25

Luke 10: 14-15

Luke 22: 19-20

Luke 24: 13-35

Luke 6: 12

Luke 9: 18

Mark 1: 35

Mark 6: 46

Ephesians 3: 14-19

Philippians 4: 6-7

John 13: 34-35

Acts 2: 42-47

Hebrews 10: 25

Isaiah 58: 5-7

Matthew 4: 1-2

Matthew 6: 16-18

Luke 12: 32-34

Matthew 25: 14-29

James 5: 16

John 15: 1-2