**Means of Grace**

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WW #48

Please pray with me the prayer to the Holy Spirit found on page 48 in your purple worship book.

This weekend you have been hearing a lot about Grace. Yesterday morning, Pastor Barb Salyers told us about God’s grace that is pursuing us and seeking a relationship with us. In the afternoon, Pastor Mike Denman shared with us how we can accept God’s offer in love and receive new life. GRACE.

When I was doing my C.P.E. (Chaplain Program of Education) studies at University of Kentucky Hospital, I was on call one night a week. One night I was sleeping when about 2 o’clock in the morning my beeper went off. I got up, dressed and went to the hospital. Upon arriving and checking about the call I found the call was for a pre-mature newborn who was not going to make it and the parents wanted her baptized. As I went into the Neo-natal Care Unit I located the couple with their baby. (Share about conversation) After talking with them awhile I baptized the baby. She was connected to a bunch of wires so I couldn’t hold her, as is my custom, as a matter-of-fact two fingers was the most I could place on her little head.

By the means of Grace through baptism we would eventually be delivered from this storm of life. I’ll share more details later.

The title of this talk is *Means of Grace* and my name is Gerri Lampton

How many of you like to receive gifts? (pause) Of course, we all like to receive gifts. So, today I would like for us to consider one of the most important gifts, in fact the most important gift we will ever be given – the gift of God’s grace. But, then, you might ask, “What is Grace?” It is not a blue eyed blonde. Quite simply, Grace is God’s gift of love to each of us … through Jesus Christ … whether we deserve it or not. A gift. A free gift. With no strings attached.

Are you starting to understand – Grace is God’s gift of love to us. Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8 (repeat) says, “For by grace are you saved through faith; and not of yourselves; it is a gift of God.”

Now that still may be unclear, so, let me put it this way. (That reminds me, there are 3 x 5 cards on your tables that you can write down any questions that may come to mind as I am speaking. This is not to be “Stump the Pastor” but questions about the various Means of Grace.) Means of Grace are the vessels that God uses to pour His love out on us. There are no limits to the vessels God uses. Let’s look at some symbols/vessels we use of God’s love that touches our lives from the cradle to the grave and everything in between and beyond.

I. The means of grace are sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present

to us in new ways.

1. The word sacrament comes from the Latin words *sacer and mentum.*  When put together they mean **sacred moments.** 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.
2. The number of sacraments celebrated with the church varies according to the teaching of the particular tradition or denomination.

Lets look at the History of Sacraments in the church:

1. Most Christians recognize two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.
2. Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, “go …make disciples … baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”
3. Luke 22:10, Jesus said to His disciples, “this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me”. And in Matthew 26:27, “Then He took a cup and after giving thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you.”
4. For about 12 or 13 centuries, Baptism and Holy Communion were the only two sacraments recognized by most Churches. I’ll talk more about both of these in a little bit. Before going here, let’s look at what other churches consider sacraments.
5. Some churches consider other rites or practices to be sacraments as well.
6. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church has celebrated seven (7) sacraments. In addition to Baptism and the Holy Communion they include: penance (forgiveness), marriage, holy orders (ordination), confirmation, and healing (extreme unction or last rites).
7. Some churches recognize *footwashing* as a sacrament.

However many sacraments may be recognized, Christians must have an attitude of love and humility toward the different practices of various traditions. It was John Wesley (founder of Methodism) who said, and I quote, “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 found-ation for our fellowship with one another and treat one another with genuine respect – as members of the body of Christ.

I remember growing up in the Church, being taken to Church and dropped off. I had wonder-ful teachers, but, somehow I hadn’t caught the intent of Holy Communion. We celebrated Com- munion many different ways – passed in the pews (very impersonal), at the altar (but still the little pieces of bread and little cups), and then by intinction (tearing a piece of bread off and dipping it into the cup). What I hadn’t understood was that the Sacraments are intended to remind us of Christ’s very real presence with us. SACRAMENTS: OUTWARD SIGN “Outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”.

II. In what ways do we experience God’s Grace? I mentioned earlier that Grace is a Gift of

God’s love to us. There is nothing we can do to earn it. It’s simply a gift. A free gift.

Inside this box are symbols of God’s Sacred Moments. God’s *Means of Grace.*

Can you remember when you were baptized? Some may. Some may never have been bap-tized and that’s OK too. Many of us who were baptized cannot remember the event because we were just infants.

Our parents probably took us before the baptismal font of the church and spoke vows of faith in the Grace of God, as well as, vows of commitment to rear us in a Christian home, bring us faithfully to the Christian Church and seek to lead us to an acceptance of Jesus Christ and become full members of Christ’s Holy Church.

(Tell about my dedication and then my baptism.)

Remember the baby I told about at the opening. Her parents were expressing their faith in the Grace of God. They couldn’t repeat vows of commitment to rear their little girl because she wasn’t going to live. After baptizing her we sat or stood at the end of her little crib until there were extremely long pauses between heart beats. She died, baptized.

By baptism, we are accepted into God’s family. God’s family accepts us and promises to sur- round us with the love that will enable us along life’s journey of faith and faithfulness. In no way do I intend to say that to be accepted we must be baptized.

1. **Take out the SHELL** (explain that I use this for baptism). It reminds us of the purification of the waters of BAPTISM. I’m going to share several Scripture references, you will get a copy of these at the end of the weekend. BAPTISM:
2. Marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (Jesus’ baptism) Matthew 3:13 – 17, Mark 1:9 – 11, Luke 3:21 & 22
3. Emphasized by John the baptizer, “I baptize … with water; but one … more powerful than I … will baptize … with the Holy Spirit” Mark 1:8, Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, John 1:26 & 33
4. Entrusted by Jesus to his disciples, Matthew 28:19 – 20. At Pentecost, the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire gave birth to the church. Acts 2:38 & 39 says, 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.”
5. Marks our new identity in Christ
6. As member of the body of Christ
7. Supported by the congregation on our spiritual journey.
8. Experienced in different modes and at different ages, depending on the denomi- national understanding. The different modes of baptism include:
9. Immersion (put under water) – symbolizes being buried with Christ and raised with Christ to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3 & 4)
10. Pouring (using a pitcher or shell) – another form of anointing (Exodus 29:7 & Psalm 133:2)
11. Sprinkling (Washing by using drops of water) – “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean …” (Ezekiel 36:25)

The age for 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 – congregations celebrates God’s unconditional love and promise for the children’s lives. 1. 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. 2. Parents/guardians and congregations make a commitment to God, each other and the child to make God’s love and presence real. The action begun in the baptism of children, comes to completion in confirmation. (Tell my personal story of my baptism, well, dedication as an infant, baptized at confirmation and then reaffirmation as a young adult.)
3. **Chalice/Plate** (place them on the table) – these symbolize for us the sacred moment of Holy Communion. Hear these words of 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. Haven 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.” I Corinthians 11:23 – 26

1. There are different names for Communion. It is also known as:
2. Holy Communion (communing together; sharing and celebrating the presence of God)
3. The Lord’s Table (celebrating our oneness in Christ)
4. The Lord’s Supper (last meal Jesus shared with His disciples before His suffering, death and resurrection)
5. The Eucharist (from the Greek word which means “Thanksgiving or to give thanks”; giving thanks for all that God has done through Christ
6. The Divine Liturgy (comes from the Eastern Orthodox)
7. The Mass (Roman Catholic and some Lutheran
8. Instituted by Jesus during his last supper with his disciples, and continued in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19 – 20)
9. Shared 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)
10. Celebrated since the time of earliest Christians, who 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 & I Corinthians 10:16, 11:23 – 26)
11. Experienced as the Lord’s Table where:
12. The inward and spiritual grace are conveyed to us through these outward and visible elements of bread and juice/wine
13. All are welcome and all are fed
14. We can see what God intends for the world to be – for example, 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

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.

III. In addition to the two 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 a variety of ways, such as: the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, the beauty of a sunrise or sunset, something you read, a song on the radio, 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 within the life of the church are called rites, ordinances and ceremonies – for example: worship, morning & evening prayer, giving money to the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned.

Let’s look in the gift box once again and see some other Sacred Moments (Gift Box slide)

**Confirmation book** – reminder of the covenant between God and us through Confirmation, which marks the confirmands 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 of take responsibility for living as a disciple. In short, it is saying YES to God.

In confirmation the confirmand say, “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 (Ephesians 4:1 – 16).

**Baptism/Membership Certificate** – reminds us that we are all called to a life of ministry

1. In the Priesthood of All Believers talk, you learned that in baptism, every Christian is called to a life of ministry.
2. Every Christian is gifted for ministry (Ephesians 4:11 – 13)
3. Every gift is needed for the health and well being of the body of Christ
4. Every Christian is called to be a disciple and a member of the body of Christ, the Church.
5. Not every Christian, however, is called to ordination. But some are.
6. The church can celebrate and confirm a person’s call to ministry in a variety of ways – anointing with oil, services of installation, laying on of hands and blessing

**Robe/Stole** – signifies those set apart to devote themselves solely to the work of the Lord. 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.

1. Ordination affirms and challenges those called by God to use their gifts to equip others for ministry.
2. Ordination confirms 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 order and nurture of the church, equipping the laity for ministry and service.

(Tell a little about my call to ministry) At the end ask: What has God called YOU to be or do?

**Wedding ring** – symbolizes two becoming one in the presence of God through marriage, which is giving oneself to another 100% in representing Christ. This may be painful for some of us to hear but please bear with me. The ritual of the wedding ceremony is steeped in the scriptures from Genesis through Revelation.

“In the beginning God created … male and female he created them … to become one flesh … what God has joined together let no one put asunder.”

“I take thee to be my wedded \_\_\_\_, to have and to hold from this time forth, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death us do part.”

The most wonderful gift in human experience is a vital Christian marriage. The Wedding Feast at Cana where Jesus transformed water into wine. What a beautiful story. Mary the mother of Jesus was the hostess. The groom may have been the disciple John. The best man may have been Jesus. In the midst of the traditional three day Jewish celebration, the wine supply was depleted – a social disgrace. Mary must have been embarrassed. “Jesus, can you help me?” Jesus directed the servants to fill jugs with water. When the water was drawn out, it was reported to be the best wine yet served. The touch of the Master’s hand on our marriages is the difference between water and wine. He offers exciting sparkle, beautiful color and rich taste to our marriage relationship.

There is also a special means of God’s Grace to those who find themselves living the single life. Some of us find ourselves living the single life by choice – never having married. I was single for 43 years. The apostle Paul encouraged and blessed such singleness, so the single one could devote full time to the Lord. Some of us find ourselves living the single life by happenstance – perhaps as the result of the tragic death of a spouse, or desertion by a spouse, or even by divorce.

IV. Some Sacred moments are divine appointments with God that we practice every day.

These daily practices help connect us to God

**Telephone (Bluetooth)** – Reminds us of the two-ay communication we have with God through Prayer. Prayer – search for authentic relationship with God, dialogue with God, NOT Christmas wish list to satisfy our “on demand” mentality, listening to God. Seeking God’s guidance, wisdom, healing, practicing the presence of God.

1. Prayer – modeled by Jesus, who spent time daily with God in prayer (Luke 6:12, 9:18; 11:1, Mark 1:35 & 6:46).
2. Means living with our hearts open to God
3. Our mission and ministry for others (Ephesians 3:14 – 19 & Philippians 4:6 & 7)

Are you connected to God?

**Bible** – reminds us of the importance of Searching the scripture – spending time each day reading the Bible, hearing it explained, meditating on it, and applying its truths to daily life

(II Timothy 3:16 & 17, Psalm 119:103 – 105, Matthew 4:1 – 11 & John 8:31 & 32).

This Bible is special. Not because anyone gave it to me. I bought it for myself when I began my study for the ministry. My Mom made this cover because the cover was beginning to fall apart due to the use it was getting. This happens to be the K.J.V. but there are more modern translations – R.S.V., New International, New K.J.V., The Message – whatever translation of the Scriptures you use all of them contain God’s love letters to us. In John 3:16, John wrote, “For God so loved the world ….” And in John 14, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except by means of me.”

**Songbook** – reminder to spend time in Worship – praising God, loving God, connection with God. (Deuteronomy 5:6 – 14 & Hebrews 10:19 – 25).

**True Friend (Mug)** – symbolizes the value of true Spiritual friends and the importance of actively participating in the body of Christ (John 13:34 – 36, Acts 2:42 – 47 & Hebrews 10:25).

**Gift Card** – reminder to not eat so much or so fast, but instead, to spend time *fasting* as a way to connect with God. This discipline can be understood as fasting from the things of earth to allow time for feasting on the things of the Spirit. (Isaiah 58:5 – 7, Matthew 4:2 – 11 & 6:16 – 18).

**$10.00 bill** – symbol of our need for Generosity, the gift of giving, serving, helping others, (Philippians 2:5 – 11 & John 13:1 – 20). Truly, the way one spends one’s money reveals one’s heart (Luke 12:32 – 34 & Matthew 25:14 – 29).

V. Some sacred moments occur in shared experiences that restore us to physical and spiritual

health, true freedom, and Christian community.

**Cross** – reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, 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. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”

**Oil** – reminds us of our many hurts and our desperate need for healing and reconciliation. It is symbolized by the anointing oil of the olive tree. This oil I brought back from the Holy Land.

Jesus was and is and ever shall be the Great Physician. He touched and healed counted and countless individuals during His earthly ministry. We are commanded in James 5:14 to call on the elders of the church. It reads like this: “Is any sick among you? Let them call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.” Jesus has continued to touch and heal countless individuals down through these 2000 + years and to this very day through His Spirit working through His Church.

All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental or relational. God wants to make us whole.

(Tell the story of Ben and Lisa)

Ladies, God’s grace comes to us in a variety of ways.

There are many more sacred moments – moments when you can feel the presence and power of the living God. Be open to all the means of grace in your life, and let your life be a life of love and grace.

Introduce a short break (10 minutes) “seventh inning stretch”. A part of this time may be used to write those questions on the 3 x 5 cards.

**Conclusion**– Ladies, we come now to the conclusion. God’s Grace is a gift offered to us. It has come in this beautifully wrapped gift box – a heavenly gift. I must say that there is nothing magical about these various symbols. They are merely outward signs that help us to visualize God’s Means of Grace. All we have to do is accept and use them. We may have to reorder our priorities in order to set aside the time to enjoy all these gifts of His Grace. We will have to die to all self-centeredness in order to come alive in a new relationship with God. A life centered in God. We can only be resurrected to a new life in Christ after we have been willing to die to the old life in self.

We are now going to the Sanctuary to share in one of the means of Grace – Holy Communion – in a very special way. A once in a life time way.

Go in silence. Sit by tables. “Let us now go to the Sanctuary in silence.”

In the afternoon Matt and I will answer the questions on the cards. At that time I will share that we may not get to all the questions but there is no rhyme or reason for the questions answered. Know that we are available to talk to on breaks, meals and other times. We do not say “I don’t want to deal with that question, let’s not answer it.” Some questions we can combine so we do.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES IN THIS TALK – See next page

Acts 2:38, 39, 42-47

Deuteronomy 5:6-14

Ephesians 2:8; 3:14-19

Ephesians 4:1-16, 11-13

Exodus 29:7

Ezekiel 36:25

Hebrews 10:19 – 25

I Corinthians 10:16

I Corinthians 11:23-26

II Timothy 3:16, 17

Isaiah 58:5-7

James 5:14, 16

John 1:26, 33; 8:31, 32

John 13:1-20, 34-36; 14

Luke 3:16, 21, 22; 6:12

Luke 9:18; 11:1

Luke 12:32-34; 22:10

Luke 22:19-20; 24:13-35

Mark 1:8, 9-11, 35

Mark 6:46; 10:14, 15

Matthew 3:11, 13-17

Matthew 4:1-11; 6:16-18

Matthew 25:14-29

Matthew 26:27

Matthew 28:19-20

Philippians 2:5-11; 4:6, 7

Psalm 119:103-105

Psalm 133:2

Romans 6:3, 4