

## Union United Methodist Church

### Sermon Outline: **Spiritual Growth Part 3: Grace & The Means of Grace**

September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Acts 2:36-47, Isaiah 40:20-41**

#### 1. **Grace, the nature of Grace**

- **Definitions of Divine Grace**

- **"unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification"** - Miriam Webster dictionary

Regeneration = spiritual rebirth or being born again

Sanctification = holiness or to be set apart for God and separate from evil.

To sanctify is to make holy.

When we become born again, "in that very moment *sanctification* begins."<sup>1</sup>

- **"the power of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] enabling us to believe and love and serve God."**<sup>2</sup>
- "the love that God shows towards the human race"  
Oxford Learners' Dictionary

- **"Grace upon grace"**

**"The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."** John 1:14,16

There are different ways in which God's grace is shown to us, including these listed by John Wesley<sup>3</sup>:

- **Prevenient or Preventing Grace**

This is God's grace which upholds and sustains all creation. It is grace which also draws us to God and help us to understand the gospel of Christ and to believe it.

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation"

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley, *Instructions for Children*, p.10

<sup>3</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace"

**1**You were dead through the trespasses and sins **2**in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. **3**All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. **4**But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5**even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ –by grace you have been saved  
Ephesians 2:1-4 NRSV

As Wesley puts it, it is  
"all the 'drawings' of 'the Father', the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more,"<sup>4</sup> and, "all the convictions which his Spirit from time to time works in every child of man," helping us to hear and respond to the gospel and salvation in Christ.

- **Justifying Grace**

It is the grace that saves us as we believe in Christ. Through our faith in Christ, we become justified with God and our sins are no longer held against us.

**"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God– not the result of works, so that no one may boast."** Ephesians 2:8-9 NRSV

**"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2**through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand;** and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" Romans 5:1-2 NRSV

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<sup>4</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation"

- **Sanctifying Grace**

This grace that helps us along the Christian journey, helping us to live holy lives that please God, separate from wrongdoing and evil, and transforming us into the image of Christ. **With this grace, God “enables his children to give him their whole heart.”<sup>5</sup> We move towards “perfection” or full maturity in Christ, attaining “perfect love ... love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.”<sup>6</sup>**

The work of sanctifying grace is gradual, a lifetime of experiencing “grace upon grace”. As we focus on Christ, wait on the Lord daily, and walk with the Lord we are transformed into the image of Christ.

**“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 NRSV**

- **Spiritual Growth is growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ**

- We are instructed to:

**“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

2 Peter 3:18 NRSV

- **Divine Power for Life and Godliness, and God’s Promises**

**“His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us** by his own glory and goodness.

**Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.” 2 Peter 1:3-4 NRSV**

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<sup>5</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge”

<sup>6</sup> Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,”

## 2. Necessity of Waiting on The Lord for Grace

Isaiah 40:28-31 NKJV

28 Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the Lord,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the weak,

And to those who have no might

He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint

## 3. The Means of Grace

Waiting on the Lord is critical to receiving grace, and growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ. We must live our lives in a posture of waiting on the Lord.

John Wesley explained that,

**“ all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained”<sup>7</sup>**

**“By “means of grace” I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace”

Wesley lists the three "chief" means or channels of grace from God as

- Prayer
- The Scriptures  
Includes hearing (sermons etc.), reading, and meditating.
- Holy Communion

"all who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord's Supper"<sup>9</sup>

**Partaking in the Lord's support is communion (*communication*, as Wesley emphasizes).**

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Corinthians 10:16 NKJV

**"Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread and drink of that cup."**<sup>10</sup>

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? "

In addition to these "chief" means, Wesley adds

- Fellowship

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<sup>9</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace"

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

We see all these means of grace at work in the early Church in Jerusalem:

**42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. **And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

Acts 2:42-47 NRSV

As we emulate the first Church, we shall also grow individually and as a church.