

Grace Happens: Sanctifying Grace **May 17, 2020**

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Book of Acts:

Acts is the second letter of a two-letter series written by Luke. The first letter is the Gospel of Luke. Luke was a physician who traveled with the apostle Paul. The date of the writing is believed to be around 62 A.D. when Paul was under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar. Many scholars assume Acts was written then because it does not record Paul's defense, release, and further gospel preaching. The themes in Acts center on the Holy Spirit empowering the believers to declare the Good News of Jesus the Christ to both the Jews and the Gentiles. As they declared the Good News, people started to believe resulting in the Christian church being established. Luke's purpose for writing his Gospel (see Luke 1:3-4) applies to Acts as well: to give an "orderly" account of the early church after Christ's resurrection. Dedicating the two-volume work to Theophilus, Luke wanted him to have "certainty" about what he had been taught. Basically, Acts is the story of how the church was established and how it grew through the power of God's Holy Spirit, with the story of Christ Jesus, and service of the disciples.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Acts 2:42-47 (NRSV) Sermon Scripture

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; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all

the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Galatians 2:19-20 (NRSV)

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Colossians 3:1 (NRSV)

³ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Questions to ponder about the passages:

What jumps out at you from these passages?

So, bottom line, what do you get out of these passages?

What were the 4 activities in which they devoted themselves?

How often were they practicing the activities?

What do you think was the most important aspect of these activities?

In a pre-Christian culture of abuse towards Christians, what do you think the group activity did for the Christian community?

How do you think the activities helped grow the individuals toward God?

What was the result of their spiritual activities?

From the scriptures identified, what does “sanctifying grace” mean?

Commentary:

For another week, we continue on our journey to learn about grace. For United Methodists and John Wesley, “Grace” and its forms are the hallmark of our theology. John Wesley outlined three aspects of grace in his sermon on “The Way of Salvation.” The Book of Discipline 2016, Part III Doctrinal Standards, paragraph 102. Section 1, highlights the three aspects of grace in the salvation process. For the next several weeks, we will be focusing on these three aspects of grace: Prevenient, Justifying, and Sanctifying.

Two weeks ago, we focused on God’s prevenient grace. The meaning of prevenient in Bing’s online dictionary is “preceding in time or order; antecedent.” The term prevenient comes from a Latin word that meant “to come before, to anticipate.”

Consequently, prevenient before the word “grace” means, a grace that comes before. You may ask, before what? Well, it is the grace of God, or the work of God, that acts in every person’s life before a person even understands and accepts the reality of God’s power working on their behalf.

Both of our scriptures from last week highlighted the idea that God was at work before we even knew it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was described as one who was part of the Godhead from the beginning as the “Word.” Christ did not just come into existence upon his earthly birth, but was from the beginning. God was already working in creation to the culmination of Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection for the salvation of the world. The Gospel of John also describes Christ Jesus as a light. Jesus was the light that would enlighten all mankind to God’s love, grace, and redemption.

In Ephesians, we find that we all were dead in our transgressions, or sin, before knowing God in Christ. The great thing is that God already started to work on our behalf, even though we were dead in our transgressions, to bring about a way that would lead us to salvation and into a relationship with the creator God. God’s work in our lives that leads us to the door of salvation, before we understand it and accept it, is prevenient grace. Our transgressions separated us from God, but by accepting the work of God in Christ, we have forgiveness of our transgressions and a new relationship with God. The work of prevenient grace is stage one.

John Wesley used the image of the house of God to illustrate grace in the process of salvation. Before anyone can enter the house of God through the door to make residence, one must step on the porch, which is the place of God’s prevenient grace. It is the place where God is at work before a person understands it. A place in which God is working to lead a person to the door of salvation, or committed relationship. It is the place where the light of Christ shines as a way to light the path to salvation. The light shines into the darkness of life as a beacon of God’s love and grace.

Last week, we focused on God’s Justifying Grace.

Continuing with our house of God illustration, God’s grace works on people standing on the porch before they even know it, while having been attracted by the porch light of Christ shining in the darkness of mankind’s self-centeredness, or sin. It is on the porch, while facing the door, that God’s convicting grace works on the heart of the individual to want to change their self-centeredness, or sinful ways. It is at the door that the convicted person realizes the distance between God and him/herself cannot be crossed by personal performance, or adherence to a particular law. The person’s relationship to God can only be made right, or repaired by accepting the gift of God’s grace through Christ’s death, and resurrection. What does that mean? Well, like Christ, we all must die to, or put away, the self-centeredness, or sin, that has led us away from God. In the act of

Christ's death on the cross, he took all sin upon himself, so that sin would not reign over us any longer. In the power of the resurrection of Christ, a person is raised up into the newness of life with God in right relationship. Through the act of repentance, sin is forgiven, and relationship is restored as the person lives in the faith founded in what Christ did and will do. When one accepts what Christ has done and lives into it, that is the act of turning the knob on the door to walk into the house of God. The opening of the door to enter the house of God symbolizes God's Justifying Grace, or Pardoning Grace.

As you heard Pastor Tom say in the sermon:

"Convicting Grace opens our eyes to our selfishness and we then repent."

"That change of heart (repentance) can lead us to the door of grace in the house of salvation... Wesley called this Justifying Grace (or Pardoning Grace). In which we access the door through the faithfulness and forgiveness of Christ and stand inside the peace-filled house by his grace."

This week, we will focus on God's Sanctifying Grace.

Continuing with our house of God illustration, God's grace works on people as they enter into the house of God and take residence, through the rest of life, as a Christian. Living in the house of God and committing to regular spiritual activities helps people to draw closer to God and grow in God's righteousness. You are not to grow in self-righteousness, which is ego-centric and performed out one's own strength, but in God's righteousness that comes through our regular spiritual activities founded in God's Spirit in each of us. As a Christian, we spend a lifetime growing in grace as we love God and other people, while practicing the ways of Christ Jesus. Sanctifying, or Sanctification, in the New Testament is the Greek word, *hagiosmos*, which means to "set apart" as in sacredness to God service. It also can be described as "set apart" for holiness. So, when you walked through that door of justification, having experienced salvation in Christ, you then started a pilgrimage into growing in holiness for the rest of your life. Sanctification is the everyday process of maturing in the faith, or some say, moving toward perfection. However you want to say it, simply put, you and the Holy Spirit are the drivers in living more like Christ under the sanctifying grace of God's activity in developing maturity of faith.

The final question for us all is, "How are you going to willingly participate with the Holy Spirit to develop your maturity in the faith and practice as you live the rest of your life in the metaphoric house of God as a Christian?"

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

In these passages, what is the main practical lesson you get from it?

How can we describe God's grace in these scriptures?

What does it feel like to be active in the community of God?

What spiritual practices help you develop your relationship with God and encourage you in the community we call church?

Now that you are justified before God through Christ, how do you grow in God's sanctifying grace throughout life?

How would you describe sanctifying grace?

What do you need to focus on to grow in God's grace through the next year?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
Romans 12:2 (NRSV)
"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."
3. Think about and act on a spiritual practice that can help you grow in your spiritual walk with God this week.