

## **Grace Happens: Multiplying Grace** **May 31, 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 2:1-12 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Acts 2:36-41 (NRSV)

<sup>36</sup> Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." <sup>40</sup> And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

### **Questions to ponder about the passages:**

What jumps out at you from these passages?

What is happening in these scriptures?

How was the coming of the Holy Spirit described?

What do you think it actually looked like, real time?

What do you think God was up to at this point?

What was the result of the Holy Spirit coming?

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

### **Commentary:**

This is the final week to teach about the journey of 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: Preventive, Justifying, and Sanctifying.

Four weeks ago, we focused on **God's Preventive Grace**. The meaning of preventive 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.

Three weeks ago, 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."

Two weeks ago, we focused 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 righteous. 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?"

Last week, we focused on **God's Ultimate Grace**.

Grace is a powerful thing in the lives of people who have faltered before God and others. Grace, and the forgiveness that comes through Christ in reconciling one's relationship to God and others, allows the release of guilt and the start of a new

beginning. Grace, practiced in love and hope, changes lives for God in the midst of a counter-culture that can seek to damage, break, batter, and destroy the self-image and spirit of an individual. By attending to the spiritual practices found in scripture, for our purposes today 1 Thessalonians, you can be helping people accept and live into the Ultimate Grace of God's dynamic work that spiritually saves the life of another person. John Wesley, encouraged his followers to Do No Harm, Do Good, and Practice the Ordinances. The ordinances would be praying, fasting, attending worship, and others. Practicing the ordinances helps you stay connected to God, but also helps foster the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within you. That power, that I spoke of last week, gives you the strength to develop in God's righteousness. The ego is minimized, while God's power is maximized in you. So, when John Wesley encouraged people to Do No Harm, Do Good, and Practice the ordinances, he was encouraging Christ followers to tap into the ultimate grace of God's power through the holy spirit in order to be able to practice what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5. By doing this, as Paul wrote in verses 23-24, God will sanctify you entirely, you will be sound and blameless, and live in the grace of the God who is faithful to do as said.

**This week, we finish with God's Multiplying Grace.**

Our scripture focus is on Acts 2, which shows the movement of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of the Holy Spirit in this context was the sound like a violent wind and divided tongues, as like fire, by which every person in the room heard the Good News of Christ Jesus in their own language. It is in this power that Peter spoke the message of Christ's death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit's job at that point was to encourage the spread of the Good News of Christ Jesus to all the world. Thus, the church was established and growth occurred. God's grace through that activity was multiplied out into the world and the boldness of the message of Christ Jesus proclaimed.

Just so you remember, before Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He spoke of a helper that would be given to those who believe. The Greek word for the helper was "Paracletos" which means "advocate." It holds a meaning of one who comes alongside to give aid. So, the Holy Spirit comes alongside the believer to give aid through life's journey. The Holy Spirit comes from the Father of creation to teach and remind us of what Jesus has said, convict the world of sin and righteousness, and guide the believer in all truth. A living power that resides with us! (John 14:26, John 16:7-16)

A stage was set and now was being executed through the new covenant founded in the activity of Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God would live in the hearts of those following Jesus.

In Acts 2, I see four significant events happening giving evidence of God's Multiplying Grace:

1. The visible manifestation of God's power and work through the Holy Spirit's arrival.
2. The writing of God's law on the hearts of the followers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
3. The bold proclamation of the Good News of salvation through Christ Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit.
4. The sending out of the disciples under the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim to **ALL** the Good News of salvation that comes through Christ Jesus.

**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 is the work of the Holy Spirit?

What is the heart of the message given in Acts 2?

How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life, in those around you, and the church?

How do you need to respond to the move of the Holy Spirit in your life?

**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:  
Acts 2:36 (NRSV) Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."
3. In regards to the scripture you have been asked to ponder, how can let the people you influence know that Christ Jesus is your Lord and Messiah without hitting them in the head with a Bible?