

Call to Worship

Lord, we have come again to worship you through word and song. Throughout history you have sent great leaders to guide us. In 1761, John Wesley wrote for us "Directions for Singing", may they inspire our song:

Number 5: Sing modestly. Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.

Prayer of Invocation

Lord God, people everywhere are hungry for the reality of a personal touch from you, and we as Christians can do something about that. The wonderful gift of the love of Christ, which was given to us when we trusted in Him, was never intended to be kept to ourselves.

May these words, attributed to John Wesley, lead us in that direction: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, to everyone you can, as long as you ever can." Amen.

The Word

John 15:1-12

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit.

You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

"As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. **I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you.**

Living the Word

The Wesley boys, John and Charles grew up in a small community north of London. Their father was a pastor as their Grandfather had been. They aspired to be the same. They attended Oxford University, studying their books even while walking the 150 miles when they went home. They began a small group study named the Holy Club, later the nickname of "Methodists" stuck as they always used an order at their meetings.

They left Oxford without pastoral posts and decided to visit 'the new world' to convert the Indians to Christianity. They found Georgia to be rough and unpleasant. After numerous failed attempts to reach the Native Americans; along with stubborn colonials – who had come to the Colonies to avoid being told by the church what to do; and for John a broken marriage engagement, which included him not allowing his former girl friend to take Holy Communion, and his being chased out of town; they were encouraged to leave.

Frustrated and confused they went back to England, Charles a few months before John. John spoke to an older colleague in ministry, Peter Bohler, saying that he wasn't sure if he even had faith. The friend said this to him "Preach faith until you have it and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." Then May 24,

1738, John wrote this in his Journal: (page 103)

Charles conversion story happened only three days before John. For each of us there are many different ways to learn of God's grace, or know the means of God's grace for us. The 'Means of Grace' are sacred moments where Christ is re-presented, or becomes present to us anew. Ways for us to know God's love for us.

Sacraments are sacred moments that Jesus gave us by clear instruction and example in the scripture. They involve our physical senses through an inward and spiritual work of grace. Most Christians recognize two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion, as Jesus spoke directly of them in the Scriptures: Some other denominations consider other rites or practices to be sacraments as well: marriage, holy orders (ordination), confirmation and several more.

As Christians we must all have an attitude of love and humility toward the different practices of various traditions. John Wesley said, "We may not all believe alike, but we can all love alike." (Repeat) We may disagree on important matters like Christian baptism. However, we can still find the foundation for our fellowship with one another and treat one another with genuine respect as members of the body of Christ.

In addition to the 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 an infinite variety of ways, such as a moment with a child, a timely visit from a Christian friend, or the beauty of a sunset. 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 for example, worship, and prayer, giving money to the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Sacred moments also occur in the shared experiences of confession, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. These means of grace restore us to physical and spiritual health, true freedom, and Christian community. All of us need healing and wholeness of some sort: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental or relational. God wants to make us whole.

Reconciliation is the restoration of a relationship; this is the will of God and the mission of God in the world. We are called to open ourselves to God's amazing grace in an infinite variety of ways: In human relationships – in situations like the birth of a child, the return of a loved one, the surprise of a random act of kindness; In nature – the beauty of a flower or a sunset, the grandeur of a mountain peak or the mystery of a valley stream, the birth of a kitten, the playfulness of a newborn colt.

Even so, the Christian Life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of temptation, poor choices, and sin. Obstacles to grace are common. Things that get in the way of God's love for me/you/and gentlemen in red pick-up trucks...

The date: May 19, 2005, I was driving my new PT Cruiser from Wausau to Hayward. It was my dream vehicle...as I came around a big bend in the road to find myself on the main street of a little village, I saw a big red Pick-up truck, being driven by a man in a neck brace, so I stopped. He backed out onto the street in front of me and began to move forward, and so did I. Another pick-up truck was coming from the other direction, and he stopped, and so did I. He then put his big red truck in reverse, backing right into my new PT Cruiser.

The front of my new car was stuck under his fender and when pulled apart it was well smashed. There was a small scratch on the truck, and he was yelling at me that it was my fault because he couldn't look behind...he had a neck brace on. When the county sheriff came his story was the same. I gave my statement and we checked to see if my car would run enough to get me home. My anger grew as I limped my car the 20 miles home. Poor Bob, I railed about men and too large trucks and especially Red Necks in the Red trucks. The insurance fixed my car, but my bitterness grew over time.

In January when I copied all of the birthdays over on the new calendar, when I came to May 19, there in big red bold letters were the words 'Red Neck in a Red Truck.' I actually still felt enough bitterness to consider for 20 seconds writing it on the new calendar, and then I began to laugh. The accident wasn't the problem, it was my attitude toward the accident – cars can be fixed, but so can attitudes...

We all experience obstacles to grace. An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship and joy of life that God offers us in Christ. Sin is alienation. The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as alienation from God, from others, and even from ourselves at times.

Through Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace. Jesus is always there, trust his friendship, practice the presence of God. The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God, in Christ we: Remember our baptism; recover our identity as children of God; receive the power to walk in the Spirit; and resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one *The Devil*

The horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and with our neighbors. In Christ we: Come to know and love our true selves; therefore, we are reconciled to ourselves; become reconciled to our neighbors - therefore, we can love one another, live in peace and seek justice together; and feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love our enemies *and that includes gentlemen that drive red pick-up trucks...now when I think of that day, I pray for him and laugh at my stubbornness to give it up to God...*

The Christian life is a daily decision to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ. It is a life lived in the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention given to our relationship with God and our relationship with others. There is always more grace in God than there is sin in us (Good thing!). and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In Christ we can overcome every obstacle to grace.

Sanctifying grace is the gift of God providing the desire and the power to grow in our relationship with God – forever. It is the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the heart and life of every believer. Grace is God's active love – toward me; Grace is God's love in action – toward others and toward the world God created; Our response to grace involves both love and action.

Sanctifying grace is the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. It is divine energy transforming our hearts and life, restoring our relationship with God and others. We cannot earn God's love by changing our ways. Rather, we change our ways because God loves us and gives us the grace to make a fresh start, day by day, hour by hour.

It is the grace that is perfecting us in the image of God and the likeness of Jesus Christ. Conversion is a perfecting process. It happens once, but not all at once. It is a lifelong process of dying to what is evil and rising to what is good and true - Christ in us. The gifts of the spirit are given to help us grow and to build up the body of Christ.

Sanctifying grace equips us to do the work of Christ in the world – to be the hands and the feet of Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit empowering us to see and serve Christ in the least, last and lost of our City, State, and world. Let me read to you from John's Journal, what his days looked like: (page 193).

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry. Every person is gifted, and every gift is needed if the whole will of God is to be accomplished. We are equipped to obey the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, love your neighbor as yourself" and the Great Commission "Go...and make disciples of all nations".

The Holy Spirit helps us in loving un-loveable people and doing impossible tasks. John Wesley was ridiculed, beaten on occasion, turned away many a time, but he continued to live the life God called him to. When told that he was not welcome to preach in his home church by the new pastor there, he went out behind the church and stood on his father's grave, which he stated 'This the family owns' and he preached, much to the

local vicars frustration. Listen as I read one last example from his journal: Thursday, Oct 20, 1743: (page 436-437).

How do we grow in Sanctifying grace? Growth in grace is a natural process. Jesus told us that a life in grace is as natural as the life of a branch connected to a healthy vine. We abide in Christ. Through prayer and worship as we open ourselves to God, we are rooted and grounded in love and intimately connected to Christ. Christ's word abides in us. In study we give our minds to God and grow in the mind of Christ.

We bear much fruit for God's glory. In Christian action we give our hands to God and participate in the work of Christ. These works include: works of mercy (providing food, water, and clothing) and works of justice (release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed). We open our hearts to receive grace as a gift. Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." We do not earn it or deserve God's love; we simply open our hearts to receive it.

We share grace in the body of Christ. Through participation in the gathered community and small groups, we receive strength and nurture – just as a branch does from the vine. We come alive in Christ, learn the mind of Christ, and help one another remain rooted and grounded in God's love. We respond by full participation in the mission of Christ in the world.

There is much more to know about the Wesley Boys, most importantly as John said

"We are all moving on to perfection..."

I once had a bumper sticker that said

"I'll be perfect just as soon as I get the Walking on Water thing down."