

PATHWAYS OF GRACE

Acts 2:37-42

The scripture I have chosen comes from Acts 2:37-42

This scripture comes at the end of Peter's sermon preached on the day of Pentecost after the Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples.

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?" 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. 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." And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

This is the word of God for us the people of God. Thanks be to God.

In this scripture we get a picture of what the church looked like then and what the church looks like today.

We see what it looks like to be a grace-filled people.

I want to say a couple of things about this grace that forms the church, the people of God.

My definition of *grace* is the amazing and unmerited love of God to ALL people.

The three "Ps" of grace are . . .

Grace is PERVASIVE

It is everywhere and for everyone.

A sower went out to sow and threw seed everywhere.

This is the way God pours out his grace

It is present in all times of our lives . . . when we know it and don't know it.

This is what John Wesley called prevenient grace.

Grace is PERSISTENT

God's amazing and unmerited love never gives up on us.

Grace is PERISHABLE

What I mean by this is that grace is NOT irresistible.

God is indiscriminate when God pours out God's love upon us, BUT it is up to us what we do about it.

"Although God's grace to create, forgive, reconcile and transform are universally and persistently present, we can resist God's gracious presence and work in us and the world.

Wesley affirmed that we can lose our responsiveness to grace and thereby "backslide" or shut ourselves off from God's grace.

Still, God's grace remains steadfast, ever blessing, sustaining and beckoning us toward wholeness and salvation" [Kenneth Carder, "A Wesleyan Understanding of Grace," in *The Interpreter*, November-December 2016.]

Because this is so, God has provided us means, channels, pathways in which we encounter and nourish grace God pours upon us.

John Wesley, our father in faith, was very broad in his understanding of the means of grace.

He allowed that they could be almost anything that awakened and fed our awareness of the presence of God – grace – in our lives.

Elaine Heath, Dean of Duke Divinity School, tells about a friend who ironed every day because while ironing she felt closer to God.

She said, "As I press the fabric, the steam rises, all fragrant and clean. All the wrinkles go away. . . . Something about the steam, the wrinkles, and the regular movement of the iron across the board brings peace to me. I feel at home and at ease. Things that were troubling me don't seem so overwhelming. I even feel closer to God.

Dean Heath says, ". . . ironing is a pathway for her to encounter the healing, peaceful, loving presence of God" [Elaine A. Heath, *Five Means*

of Grace: Experience God's Love the Wesleyan Way, Leaders Guide, p 39.]

It isn't ironing for me, it is running.

But, Wesley also believed that there were so "ordinary means of grace."

Things spoken of in scripture as pathways of God's love.

Wesley identified five of these means of grace.

- Prayer
- Reading and searching the scriptures
- Meeting together for worship and fellowship
- Fasting
- Holy Communion

Pastor Claude is going to preach on each of these means of grace in the months to come, but, today on World Communion Sunday and at the end of our series on grace, I'm going to say a word about Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is . . .

Presence

Emmaus Road . . . the risen Christ was made known in the breaking of the bread

Nourishment

The bit of bread and the sip of juice nourishes our souls.

It is at the Lord's Table that we discover the strength – the grace – to go forward into God's service in the world.

Union

In Holy Communion we are not only united with God in Christ Jesus . . .

We are also united with each other.

"Grace cannot be received privately; cut off from others it is perverted into greed" [Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*].