



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665  
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com



April 2, 2014

## Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology The Theology of God's Grace

### *Sanctifying Grace*

<sup>17</sup> *Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17 NRSV*

<sup>40</sup> *And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Matt 25:40 NRSV*

Did you ever have a project that just never seemed to be done? When I was growing up my Dad would work each year on a small cottage that we owned and used in the summer months. The cottage was perfectly serviceable as it was, but he was always working at it, trying to make it better. I've seen people do that with an automobile. Not necessarily a classic automobile, but one that is used every day. Adding a new stereo, maybe rims on the wheels, new upholstery. And no matter how well it seems to run they keep working to improve it. We've all known situations like that.

The project that never ends is a pretty good metaphor for the work of God's grace in our lives. No matter how well we think we might be doing, God is always at work in our lives trying to make us a little better.

We are talking about God's Grace; God's unconditional love that transforms our lives. We've talked about *Prevenient Grace*, the Grace of God that seeks us out where we are. No matter how hard we may try to flee and hide from it, God's prevenient grace seeks us out. God's prevenient grace always seeks to draw us into relationship with God; to show us of our need for God.

Then there is the *Justifying Grace of God*. The grace granted humankind through Jesus Christ that frees us from our sin and allows us to start life anew in Christ.

In some traditions, the story of God's grace stops with justifying grace. They tell people it never gets any better than that. They say if you have received justifying grace you are good to go. Set for life. They preach a "once saved, always saved" theology. Sort of like having your ticket punched to gain admission. Once you're in, you're in. But does a once saved, always saved theology fit with your experience of the world?

Have you ever know someone who apparently has fallen away from God; away from life as a Christian? Is God really done with us at the rebirth, the born again experience, or does God continue to raise us in the faith?

Yes. God's grace never stops working in our lives. Just as the prevenient grace of God always surrounds us, just as the justifying grace of God is always available to us, so God's *Sanctifying Grace* is always at work in our lives. We are God's unfinished weekend projects; except that God doesn't stop when the weekend is over. God's grace never stops working in our lives, seeking to make us more faithful servants of Christ.

The poet Maya Angelou was once confronted by a woman who proudly proclaimed that she was a Christian. The poet responded, "My. Already?" Being Christian is an on-going process involving you, God and the rest of the world.

God works in our lives as we live out our faith in the world. If you are going to follow Christ you don't get to **just** sit in Church and sing a few songs. If you are going to follow Christ you don't get to **just** sit in your room by yourself, or with a few close friends and study the bible and pray. Those things are all well and good and are in themselves a source of God's grace in our lives. But there is more. Following Christ means living and ministering in the world. And as we minister in the world, we receive God's grace. As we reach out to bring God's Grace to others we receive God's Grace ourselves.

The most glaring failing of the Church today is the emphasis in many congregations on preparing for our deaths or for the end of the world. Look at the bible! There is next to nothing in scripture about what happens when we die or what will happen at the end of time. But, there is page after page that talks about how we worship God by living righteously in God's world. Consider this passage from Isaiah, for instance. God is responding to the people's complaint that, despite their faithful worship in the temple, their feasts and days of fasting, days of wearing sack cloth to humble themselves, God is not blessing their lives. God responds with these words:

*<sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*<sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. Isaiah 58:6-10 NRSV*

God, through Isaiah, tells the people that God wants their very lives to be worship by how they live in the world.

And, in one of the few passages where Jesus does speak of the end of time and a final judgment, these images from Isaiah are the ones he invokes. Look at Matthew 25:31-46, the Judgment of the Nations. The questions Christ asks are those of Isaiah. Did you feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty? Did you clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit with those sick and in prison? "What you did for the least of these you did for me." God calls us to serve God by loving and caring for others. Could it get any plainer than that? We

worship God with our whole lives, by everything we do each and every day. Our worship on Sunday morning is a celebration of our daily lives of worship. Our prayer lives are a reflection on our faith lives.

The writer of James has the same message. How can you say to someone who has no food and no home, “Jesus loves you. Go in peace and be warm and happy?”

<sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?*  
<sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,* <sup>16</sup> *and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?* <sup>17</sup> *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:14-17 NRSV*

What we do with our lives is not a way to earn salvation. But what we do with our lives reflects what we really believe about the nature of God. It speaks about the nature of our faith. And it also transforms our lives.

Elsewhere in James, the writer says that every generous act of giving is from God.

<sup>17</sup> *Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* <sup>18</sup> *In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. James 1:17-18 NRSV*

Think about that. When we give of ourselves to others, we are conveying God’s grace to others. We are the channel through which God’s grace flows. Just like water flowing through a channel we are a channel for God’s grace. And just like water flowing through a channel can cut the channel deeper, so being channels of God’s grace can cut deeper channels for that grace into our lives.

It’s been written that, above all things, Francis of Assisi feared nothing as much as leprosy. If he encountered a leper he would give him alms through another. He encountered a leper early in his life as a new Christian. Although he at first drew away, he realized that his commitment to Christ called for more. Francis answered his plea for money with money and a kiss. Francis of Assisi was channeling God’s grace. At the same time, God was cutting a deeper channel for Grace into Francis of Assisi’s life.

The sanctifying grace of God continues the work of God in our lives. God’s grace comes to us in many ways. We receive God’s grace as we worship. We receive God’s grace as we study the bible and as we share with one another those things that we hear in scripture. And we receive God’s grace as we come together for the Eucharist. But one of the most powerful instruments of God’s sanctifying grace is ministry in the world. As we live out our faith by being instruments of God’s grace, we receive that grace as well. As we come face to face with the need in the world, as we minister to the hurt and grieving, God works in our lives as well cutting a deeper channel, uncovering the image of God buried deep within all of us.

We are constantly surrounded by the grace of God, and that Grace is always at work in our lives. God’s grace reaches out to us when we have lost our way. God’s grace gives us a new birth in Jesus Christ. We have been born again; given a new life in Christ. But the story does not end there. God is not done with us. God’s grace forms us into the Body of Christ and places us back into the world to serve the world. As we live out our lives as the Body of Christ, God’s grace is constantly at work in our lives to draw us closer to God and to one another. As John Newton so aptly noted two centuries ago, God’s Grace is amazing.

## The Poverty and Justice Bible

*The Poverty & Justice Bible* is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

<sup>5</sup> *God gave his Law  
to Jacob's descendants,  
the people of Israel.  
And he told our ancestors  
to teach their children,  
<sup>6</sup> so that each new generation  
would know his Law  
and tell it to the next.  
<sup>7</sup> Then they would trust God  
and obey his teachings,  
without forgetting anything  
God had done. <sup>8</sup> They would be different  
from their ancestors,  
who were stubborn, rebellious,  
and unfaithful to God.  
Psalm 78:5-8 CEV*

Christians and Jews hold the belief that there is a God given law worked into the fabric of creation. A law that demands, among other things, that we care for one another. Care for one another, and especially care for those who, for whatever reason, are unable to care for themselves is not optional. Care for one another is a mandate of God's Law. Ignoring that mandate is being unfaithful to God.

<sup>27</sup> *But the rich man said, "Abraham, then please send Lazarus to my father's home. 28 Let him warn my five brothers, so they won't come to this horrible place."*

<sup>29</sup> *Abraham answered, "Your brothers can read what Moses and the prophets wrote. They should pay attention to that."*

<sup>30</sup> *Then the rich man said, "No, that's not enough! If only someone from the dead would go to them, they would listen and turn to God."*

<sup>31</sup> *So Abraham said, "If they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even to someone who comes back from the dead." Luke 16:27-31 CEV*

Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) drives home the point that God's Law requires us to be involved in the lives of others. Nothing in the parable describes the Rich Man as evil. His one failing is to ignore the poor man Lazarus who literally sits at the gate to his home. Lazarus is not described as virtuous or as a victim of unforeseen tragedy. He might be the author of his misfortune or even an out of work

criminal. The reader is left to speculate. The Rich Man's failing was to ignore the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets concerning care for those in need. Luke leaves us with this sentence hanging over our heads: <sup>31</sup> *So Abraham said, "If they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even to someone who comes back from the dead."* Strictly speaking, we are expected to listen to someone who came back from the dead.

## **Bible Study**

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

## **Disciple Bible Study Opportunity**

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

I have been approached by two people who would be interested in a Disciple Bible Study that met from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursday evenings. I would like to get at least five more people to participate in this study. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful opportunity. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact me.

## **Prayer Ministry**

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

|                 |               |                  |                 |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Elva Beard      | Sarah Jordan  | Kenneth Stevens  | Judy Richardson |
| Larry Eastwood  | Mac McAfee    | Patricia Stevens | Charles Wilson  |
| Leslie Eastwood | Rachel Newman | Sam Richardson   |                 |

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;

- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

### Up-Coming Sermons

**April 6<sup>th</sup>: The Journey to Easter: *God Opens New Roads.*** Our Discipleship Journey can take us to new places, on roads we never thought we would walk. God is a God of New Beginnings. My texts are Ezekiel 37:1–14 and John 11:1–45.

**April 13<sup>th</sup> : Palm Sunday: Lessons and Hymns.** Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Passion Week. On Palm Sunday we will recall the events of the last week in the life of Christ beginning with his entry into Jerusalem and ending with his crucifixion.

### Worship Leaders Schedule

#### April 6

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Jason & Lindsey Aldred, **Ushers**

#### April 13

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Marty Bauguess & Sam Richardson, **Ushers**

### Announcements

Order forms for **Easter Lilies** are located on the shelves inside the side door. The lilies are \$8.00 each and can be given in memory of or to honor a loved one, a friend or family member. Brooks is coordinating this process.

### Easter Egg Hunt

**WHEN:** Saturday, April 19, 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

**WHERE:** Trinity UMC

### Volunteers Needed!

To Prepare for 50 children up to age 12 and their accompanying adults.

We will need some help before the event in the form of egg stuffing (we have 600 eggs), food prep, advance publicity poster placement, and set up. In addition, we're looking for people during the event to supervise the bag decorating table, bounce house, duck pond, games, and prizes. We would like to find some folks to be in charge of face painting, family photos, and music & PA system. **A signup sheet is posted on the bulletin board or you can let Julia or Jeanne know what you'd like to do.** Also, need some "fishing poles" appropriate for the duck pond. Thanks in advance to all!

**On April 22nd at 6:00 p.m.**, the ladies of our church will be hosting the annual **Columbia District United Methodist Women's Partners in Mission Dinner/Event at our church.**

This year the focus mission is **BRIDGES of Williamson County, a local Shelter and Domestic Violence Program.** Our guest speaker is **Linda Crockett Jackson, the founder of BRIDGES.** BRIDGES offers the standard core components of shelter, court advocacy, child advocacy, support groups, clinic services and outreach. We look forward to learning more about this mission and Ms. Jackson's work.

If you would like to help BRIDGES, there will be boxes placed around the church marked BRIDGES for donations that we want to begin collecting from now until April 22nd. Please see the list below.

Kroger gift cards in SMALL denominations, given to clients to purchase gas, prescriptions and food. Please give these to our Treasurer, Nanette.

Additional items needed by the clients of BRIDGES:

kitchen and lawn size garbage bags  
laundry detergent  
60W light bulbs  
copy paper  
cleaning products - no Lysol or bleach products please  
body wash  
shampoo/creme rinse

**Please see Dana for more information.**

The dates for serving at **61<sup>st</sup> United Methodist Church** are **April 19, May 24, August 16, November 15.** These occasions are all Saturdays. Be aware that April 19 is the Saturday before Easter. Food will be purchased and taken to the 61<sup>st</sup> Street church that day but we will not be serving the food.

There are sign-up lists on the Bulletin Board for volunteers who will prepare communion as well as hosting the First Sunday meal. Please sign up!

### **April Birthdays**

**Betty Whitefield, Mary Coleman, Jo Oliphant, Jason Aldred, Houston Hartsock**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**