

“Restored: Finding Redemption in Our Mess---Address This Mess”

Psalm 84:5 (NIV), Matthew 23:37-40 (NIV)

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When people ask me what I do, I often hesitate. I don't exactly know how to answer them. For clergy, pastors---it's hard to explain what we do---especially since we only work on Sundays. Since I believe in a heaven and hell, I've often thought of answering the question “What do you do?” with the answer...I sell ‘fire’ insurance.

I found a video clip sometime ago by J. John and international evangelist from England. He has been on many Christian TV shows and has spoken at such places as Hillsong Churches and Joyce Meyer Conferences. Take a listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6TGxKvSqH8>

Woo-hoo!!! We are part of a global enterprise with intergalactic connections dealing with behavioral alteration. Friends we are about transformation. We are about redemption. We are about restoration. We deal with addressing the mess! All of this is made possible through the Grace of Jesus.

We are on a journey, a pilgrimage. Spiritually we are not running a sprint but we are in a marathon.

Psalm 84:5 New International Version (NIV) ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

Our strength is in God. Blessed are you. We cannot make it on our own. Our hearts must be set on a pilgrimage---making the journey.

In New Members Class I sometimes over simplify Methodist theology to one word=Grace. And yet it is not over simplified is a profound truth of scripture major emphasis of United Methodism.

As we have been addressing this mess in our lives, this mess called sin, we have been talking about the transforming power of God's grace.

PREVENIENT GRACE

Grace at work in our lives before we are even aware of it.

JUSTIFYING GRACE

“Saving Grace”

Grace that shows us who we are and where we fall short

Sanctifying Grace

Grace that works to restore the image of God in us.

God is at work before you are in Preventive Grace. In Justifying grace, the mess is addressed as a whole and in Sanctifying Grace the mess is addressed with the specifics.

Every United Methodist pastor since 1773 has answered nineteen historic questions as a way of agreeing to how we will live into this ministry life as an Ordained Clergy. Let me share the first 4 questions with you. We stand before the Bishop and other clergy and are asked these questions.

1. Have you faith in Christ? (expected answer of course is yes)
2. Are you going on to perfection? (yep and expected answer of yes)

Now friends...you already know that you do not have a perfect pastor. If you are mistaken about that just ask Sarah. We are going to be talking about this perfection part more at length, and what is meant by “going on to perfection.”

Matthew 5:48 New International Version (NIV) ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

C. S. Lewis wrote, “The command ‘Be ye perfect’ is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. [God] is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. ... He meant what he said. Those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect — perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality.”

We are going to see today what it means to be perfect in love.

3. Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? (again, the answer is yes)
Methodists believe sanctifying grace is the pilgrimage of authentic discipleship. The question is not whether we have reached it or even if we can. The question is, are our lives pointed in that direction? Sanctification is costly; it is, simply put, a call to die to self. But this question is also an invitation to freedom — freedom from mediocrity and the tyranny of tolerable. It is an invitation into the good life in its most vivid and faithful form.

4. Are you earnestly striving after it? (the answer for those getting ready to be ordained better be a “YES!”)

Retired Bishop Will Willimon said, “By ‘perfection,’ Wesley did not mean moral flawlessness or sinlessness. He meant perfection in the sense of maturity.”

Sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit restoring us to continually being conformed to the mind of Christ.

Our United Methodist Website says: Wesley believed we could become perfect in love in this life. If Jesus invites us to seek perfection, perfect love is possible. He didn’t mean we would be free from mistakes, temptation or failure.

For Wesley, growing as a Christian is all about being filled with love, which happens by the grace of God. We may not be there yet; but by God's grace, as United Methodists we say, "we're going on to perfection!"

A Catechism for the use of the people called Methodists teaches

Through the Holy Spirit God has given us His love so that we may love Him in return with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. This is a gift offered to all Christians, and by responding we affirm that there is no limit to what the grace of God is able to do in a human life. By giving us the Holy Spirit, God assures us of His love for us and enables us to love as He, in Christ loves us. When God's love is perfected in us, we so represent Christ to our neighbours that they see Him in us without hindrance from us. Perfect love, as Christian perfect is often called, is the result of, and can only be maintained by, complete dependence on Jesus Christ.

John Meunier writes: "...John Wesley repeated the two great commandments frequently. For him — as for many, many other Christians — these are the marks of a true Christian. Wesley went further than many, however, in that he believed that since Jesus had commanded us to do these things, he also provided a means by which we could do them. In Wesley's words, every command of Christ is both law and gospel. It is law in that it tells us what to do. It is gospel in that it promises the power to do it.

The very definition of "going on to perfection" is becoming the person, by the grace of God, who fulfills the two great commandments. Methodism believes and affirms that you and I can be the people who really do love God with all we are and love our neighbors as purely as we love ourselves.

I am not there yet. But God in his word tells me that I should expect to reach that place by grace. Jesus does not deny us the power to do what he commands."

Matthew 22:37-39 New International Version (NIV) ³⁷ Jesus replied: "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Perfect in our love of God. Perfect in our love of neighbor. We can't do it by ourselves. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we are going on to perfection in love. Wesley called it: "purity of intention," "dedicating all the life to God," "loving God with all our heart," "renewal of the heart in the whole image of God."

Oh, to have that perfect love in every situation.

**HOLEY
WHOLLY
HOLY**

HOLEY in that just as a cup with holes in it makes a mess---so our life is full of holes and makes a mess. We are not complete. WHOLLY---complete, all. Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, and mind. Love Him wholly. And to be HOLY, that is set apart and striving for that perfect love of God and neighbor.

1 Peter 1:14-16 New International Version (NIV) ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

But in our mess, we may not feel holy. I don't know about you, but I am good at beating myself up, “over guilting myself,” and being harder on myself than I am on others. Life is hard. I need to be reminded of His grace.

I found the following that spoke to me. I have modified and adapted it for the sermon this morning. I pray it speaks to you.

Church is hard.

Church is hard for the person walking through the doors, afraid of judgement.

Church is hard for the prodigal soul returning home, broken and battered by the world.

Church is hard for the youth who looks like they have it all together, but don't.

Church is hard for the couple who fought the entire ride to service.

Church is hard for the single mom, surrounded by couples holding hands, and seemingly perfect families.

Church is hard for the widow and widower with no invitation to lunch after service.

Church is hard for the church leader with an estranged child.

Church is hard for the person singing worship songs, overwhelmed by the weight of the lyrics.

Church is hard for the spouse who longs for their spouse to also be a follower of Jesus.

Church is hard for the single woman and single man, praying God brings them a mate.

Church is hard for the youth ashamed of their mistakes.

Church is hard for the sinners.

It's hard because on the outside it all looks shiny and perfect. Sunday church. The best in behavior.

However, underneath those layers, we find a body of imperfect people, people living in the world with selfish motives.

But here is the beauty of church—as J. John said, this global enterprise deals with behavioral alteration.

You see, Church isn't a building, mentality, or expectation.

Church is a body.

Church is a group of sinners, saved by grace, living by grace in fellowship as those whose hearts are set on a pilgrimage to be more like Jesus.

Church is a body of believers bound as brothers and sisters by an eternal love.

Church is a holy ground where sinners stand as equals before the Throne of Grace.

Church is a refuge for broken hearts and a training ground for mighty warriors.

Church is a converging of confrontation and invitation. Where sin is confronted and hearts are invited to seek restoration.

Church is a lesson in faith and trust.

Church is a bearer of burdens and a giver of hope.

Church is a family. A family coming together, setting aside differences, forgiving past mistakes, rejoicing in the smallest of victories.

Church, the body, and the circle of sinners-turned-saints, is where He resides, and if we ask, He is faithful to come.

So even on the hard days at church—

The days when you are at odds with a friend, when you've walked in bearing burdens heavier than you're your heart can handle, yet masking the pain with a smile on your face. When you've fought tears as the lyrics of a song were sung. When you've walked back in, afraid and broken, after walking away.

Remember His grace and love for you is always here.

Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace. Sanctifying Grace. Grace Grace Grace

Jesus will never fail to meet you here.

Church is a body, a family, a place to love God and love others through our struggles!

Church a place of restoration and redemption in our mess.

Written by the Apostle Paul in the book of 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 13:14 New International Version (NIV) ¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.