

Dear Methodist Saints,

“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (John 3:5)

I believe that every human being is a child of God and is surrounded by the presence of the Holy Spirit. That presence serves to lead us closer to God. For some, exposure to this grace is dramatic and for others it is more subtle. The presence of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of our lives and the free unmerited gift of God’s love for us are parts of what we refer to as prevenient grace. Understanding this will result in a response to the leadings of the Holy Spirit and recognition that this is God’s gift that opens us to a new beginning.

Being open to a new beginning leads to what some refer to as being born again. It is at this point that we become assured of the reality of God and of God’s love for us. We begin to understand our purpose. We feel that we are justified. The assurance which occurs often impels us to love and to serve. Life takes on new meaning for those who have experienced justifying grace. Whereas prevenient grace may cause us to wonder and to explore, justifying grace leads to an understanding of purpose.

Justification leads us to the realization that we are on a journey toward sanctification. Sanctifying grace is that grace which leads us ever closer to perfection. For United Methodists, sanctification is a process and it is possible for those who have proclaimed the name of Jesus to fall away, to stray off the path to righteousness. Our understanding of God’s mercy, however, helps us to realize that those who have strayed can return to the way to salvation because God’s love and acceptance is never ending. It is possible for someone to be entirely sanctified upon being justified, however, for many persons it is an ongoing process. We understand that steadfastness is assured by our love for one another in a community of believers.

In remaining steadfast, Christians come to recognize their reconciliation with God through Christ’s atonement for our sins. The point at which the gift of salvation and life eternal and the return to wholeness is recognized provides Christians with a marker for their journey of faith. In sharing this, strength of commitment among Christian communities can occur.

As United Methodists we believe that we are moving on to perfection and that it is possible to achieve perfection in this life. Perfection refers to our ability to give ourselves completely to God and to love others in the way Jesus Christ showed God’s love to us. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that enables us to do God’s will and surrender to the reality of the gift of salvation that is given to us. Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3 ring true for all of us. We must open ourselves to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that we will be able to begin life anew. Surrendering to the reality that is the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit creates within us joyful exuberance for the work needed to restore all of humankind to a willing response to God’s loving embrace.

Grace and Peace

Pastor Dennis