

Unison Opening Words ~ *Common Prayer: Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

Lord, train us to hear your voice. When it is time to grieve, help us to grieve. When it is time to rejoice, help us to rejoice. When we grow weary, be the strength in our weakness. And may your most beautiful and perfect will, not ours, be done. Amen.

Traditional Service Liturgy Following Opening Hymn **and** Contemporary Service Liturgy Following The Lord's Prayer before the Scripture Reading: This We Believe Document 'Article XVI'

Article XVI – Of the Sacraments

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord...

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul saith.

- Matthew 7:21-27.
- It is not enough for Christians to call Jesus by name.
 - It is not enough for Jesus to know us and recognize that it is us calling him, "Lord, Lord."
 - It is not enough for us to do religious works or to do them in his name – prophesying, casting out demons, deeds of power are not enough.
 - Jesus does not criticize these activities; Jesus does not tell them to stop.
 - He says these actors will 'go away' rather than 'enter into the Kingdom of God.'
 - Perhaps because that is who they are. Actors. People who act.
 - And acting – even saying Jesus' name even in Jesus' name – is not enough.
 - Jesus is not interested in actors and acting.
 - Jesus is interested in genuine relationship born from and through his transformative life-saving power rooting in our hearts.
 - Jesus requests of us – expects of us – a (1) both/and response:
 - We are to **both** recognize and glorify him as Lord
 - **And** we are to offer acts of mercy and justice through personal and social holiness in his name.
 - This both/and response brings our will into accord with so that we can fulfill God's will.¹
- Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount with the parable of the Two Foundations, a parable that resists easy allegorizing.
 - Notice, friends, that in each scene the houses are built.

¹ *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew Vol I* 178.

- In each scene the ‘religious act’ is taking place.
- In each scene a degree of relationship with Christ is present.
 - The foundations set the houses apart – one on rock; the other on sand.
 - “It is the (2) joining of the relationship and the actions that results in being *founded on rock*. The same actions, if they do not arise from that [genuine relationship born from and through Jesus’ transformative life-saving power] rest on *sand*, and will ultimately fall.”²
- Friends, we – as individuals – cannot exist solely to praise God.
 - Neither can we exist solely to function as another social service agency in the community, even if we do so publicly and emphatically in the name of Jesus.
 - Likewise, the Church cannot exist solely to praise God.
 - Neither can the Church exist solely to function as another social service agency in the community, even if we do so publicly and emphatically in the name of Jesus.
 - If we discern, desire, and decide to be a Church evidencing our movement towards the Kingdom of heaven, then our decision is to **visibly** live out Christ’s both/and response.
 - Our decision is to be **visibly evidenced** by our “gathering of people who seek to deepen their relationship with Christ and who, transformed by that relationship, engage others both within the church and beyond it in the world in ways that make real God’s just will for all.”³
 - *This is Christian witness.*
- Making visible our Christian witness is our denominational heritage.
 - The people called Methodist are an industrious breed.
 - Methodists first gathered as The Holy Club in Oxford with the Brothers Wesley as their leader.
 - They met for rigorous study of Scripture, sharing of the Sacraments, and service, all bathed in deeply spirited prayer.
 - Charles composed hymns, numbering in the thousands.
 - John wrote and preached sermons, numbering in the tens of thousands.
 - It is believed that John Wesley converted an estimated 140,000 persons in his lifetime.⁴
 - American Methodists founded hundreds of schools, hospitals, colleges and universities in addition to communities of faith.
 - Methodists have been and continue to be leaders across the globe in eradicating illness, accelerating disaster response, and making disciples of Jesus Christ.⁵
 - We remain committed to nourishing the hearts, minds, souls, and strengths – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – of people worldwide.
 - Why? Because we feel deeply the call of Christian witness.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 178-180.

⁴ Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 108.

⁵ Ibid., 109.

- Because (3) “an active God evokes active lovers of God.”⁶
- Remaining active physically, spiritually, and emotionally requires nourishment.
 - I often ask Joshua if he wants to be strong like Andrew – and his eyes get big and his smile widens as he nods excitedly.
 - And so we tell him he has to eat!
 - Physical nourishment.
 - My Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. McCullough, taught her students Day One:
 - To make a friend you have to be a friend!
 - Emotional nourishment.
 - Jesus nourished himself spiritually by taking time to pray, by participating in a small group study and life together, by generous service.
 - Wesley identified these practices in Scripture as the *means of grace*.
 - These practices 1) “constantly feed our desire to do good in return for the good that God is doing among us” and 2) “strengthen our ability to actually do some good.”⁷
 - When we engage the means of grace, we are not seeking to earn or gain grace; grace is freely given.
 - Rather, when we engage the means of grace, God’s grace engages us – God’s grace sustains, shapes, and sanctifies.
 - Through God’s grace-filled means, we become holy and grow in holiness.
- We work out our salvation – a characteristically Wesleyan phrase! – as we gather with “people who seek to deepen their relationship with Christ and who, [because of that transformational relationship] engage others both within the church and beyond it in the world in ways that make real God’s just will for all.”⁸
 - As we attend to this witness, Wesley prescribes our strengthening (4) through prayer, including fasting; searching the Scriptures; and receiving the Lord’s Supper as our standard nourishment.
 - These “outward signs, words or actions,” Wesley said, “[are] ordained by God to be the *ordinary* channels whereby [God] might convey to [another] preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.”⁹
 - That prayer, searching the Scriptures, and receiving the Lord’s Supper are the *ordinary* means of grace leaves room for God to surprise us.
 - For God to speak to, engage with, and share grace with us in *extraordinary* ways.
 - I am not only expecting God to do this; I am counting on it!
- John Wesley wrote in his journal, upon hearing read Luther’s *Introduction to Romans*, that his heart was *strangely warmed* as he felt assurance of his faith that “Christ died for me yes, even me.”¹⁰
 - Bishop Will Willimon says (5) “The religion of the warmed heart produces religion of the active hands.”¹¹
 - Because God acts, we are able to act.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁸ *Feasting*, 178-180.

⁹ “The Means of Grace,” *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, II.1.

¹⁰ Robert Outler, *John Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc., 1966), 66.

¹¹ Willimon., 127.

- Because Jesus' transformative life-saving power is rooting in our hearts, we are capable of **both** genuinely glorifying him as Lord **and** offering acts of mercy and justice through personal and social holiness in his name.
 - It is *only* because God acts that are our Christian work and witness is capable of being truly good.
 - And with God's help, our Christian work and witness is capable of accomplishing more than we could ever imagine...and certainly more than we could ever accomplish on our own.
 - This we believe.

1 – **Both** recognize and glorify Jesus as Lord **And** offer acts of mercy and justice through personal and social holiness in his name.

2 – Joining of the genuine relationship with Christ with the actions for Christ

3 – An active God evokes active lovers of God

4 – Ordinary *Means of Grace*:

Prayer, including fasting

Searching the Scriptures

Receiving the Lord's Supper

5 – "The religion of the warmed heart produces religion of the active hands."