

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

God, make us bold enough to question tyranny, impassioned enough to submit ourselves to good teachers, and discerning enough to know when it is our turn to lead. 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 II, III, and XX'

Article II – Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

Article III – Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

Article XX – Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished upon the Cross

The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone...

- Romans 5:1-11.
- Today's core United Methodist belief is the Doctrine of the Atonement.
 - This doctrine focuses on the Second Person of the Trinity's operation – it focuses on Jesus' ultimate act of redemption – his death on the cross.
 - (1) There are six primary atonement theories:
 - Five of them posit Jesus' death on the cross as the defining act of atonement – our 'being made one with God again through the removal, cleansing, paying the penalty of or conquering humanity's sin.'
 - The sixth theory holds Jesus' entire life, ministry, and death as evidence of his gracious atoning act, and those that follow him should live likewise.
 - As we live more like Jesus – become more Christ-like – we reveal his reign, which is marked by and abounding in grace.
 - While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 - *This* is grace. Unmerited and undeserved.
 - The wages – the cost – of sin is death.
 - Jesus triumphed over death – and all that causes it – for us.

- This does not mean that we will not experience temptation or negative consequences from sin.
- This does not mean that we will not endure suffering.
 - It does mean that temptation, sin, and suffering do not have the final word.
 - It does mean that because we know *life* is Jesus' final word through grace we can (2) make decisions and choose relationships and invest stewardship in those people and entities that are life-giving, that are redemptive, that enable us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to become holy.¹
 - "God's grace works in us not only to convince us that the problem between us and God, due to our sin, has been solved by God in Christ, but also to restore our capacity to love God and neighbor."²
 - This is what makes grace so amazing.
- In earlier chapters in Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses the concern of boasting.
 - Boasting was the preferred means of 'puffing oneself up' through personal acknowledgement and congratulation on being justified by works.
 - Paul admonished this behavior because we have no need for justification by works – also known as 'works righteousness.'
 - We are saved by grace through faith.
 - So if we boast, Paul says – in full swagger of his rhetoric skills – let us boast in Jesus Christ.
 - Let us boast in his death and resurrection.
 - (3) Let us boast in "God's goodness toward those who do not deserve it. This boasting is appropriate...because it calls attention to what God has done. When boasting brings attention to the grace God lavishly gives to believers through Jesus Christ, it brings glory to God, for in Christ the favor of God toward us is demonstrated. This favor is granted, not because of our goodness, but because of God's goodness."³
 - Last week we learned a chief aim of the Trinity is to relieve suffering.
 - Paul suggests in Romans 5 that a way we can join the Triune God in the work of relieving suffering is by boasting in our suffering.
 - Rather than a competition of 'who has it worse' –
 - Of 'one-upping' our neighbor's hurt with one of our own –
 - I sat in many a children's Sunday School class and during prayer request time witnessed an innocent prayer request for my dog's hurt toe escalate into my dog's hurt leg into my dog's lost leg into my dog's lost life! –
 - Rather than *that* Paul suggests boasting in our suffering not because we seek it, but because we know it.

¹ Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 37.

² Ibid., 30.

³ *Feasting On The Word: Year A Vol III* 136.

- And because we are in relationship with the Second Person of the Trinity, we know that we will overcome our present suffering because Jesus overcame all suffering!
- There is a spiritual in our hymnal that has roots both in Appalachian and African American contexts that sings of facing sufferings head-on:

(4) Jesus walked this lonesome valley
He had to walk it by himself
Oh nobody else could walk it for him
He had to walk it by himself.⁴

- The second verse sings “we must walk this lonesome valley.”
- And the third “we must stand our trial” – nobody else can walk it or stand it for us.
 - The question is – as we walk these valleys and stand these trials, will we do so in tenderness and hope because of our experience of Jesus’ grace and residency in God’s beloved Kingdom?
 - Or will we heap hurt upon hurt thereby increasing and exacerbating trauma, which does not reflect life or residency in God’s Kingdom as it should be?
- That we endured suffering past means we can sustain in the present.
 - That sustaining produces a ‘tested character,’ which is a more accurate translation of verse 4.
 - This is the character resultant of what the Prophet Isaiah describes, (5) “When you pass through the waters, I [God] will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa 43:2-3a).
 - This tested character produces hope for the future that inspires us to act as people of faith in the present.
 - Acting as people of faith now does not earn our way into Jesus’ reign later.
 - Acting as people of faith testifies that we are residents of Jesus’ reign now even as we await its fullness in glory.
 - Revelation 21 describes the full glory of Jesus’ reign as the place where God will dwell with God’s peoples, establishing a permanent home because sin will no longer separate us; where God will wipe every tear from their eyes; where death will be no more; where mourning and crying and pain will be no more (vv. 3-4).
 - Faith in this future glory “is not to be used as an anesthesia or opiate to make us passively accept pain. Rather, the love of God is so powerful that

⁴ “Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley,” *The Faith We Sing* 2112.

is sustains us through suffering and empowers us to act according to our faith.”⁵

- Our God won victory through suffering and sacrificial love.
 - Through grace our God weaves into God’s purposes even the worst of human sin, bringing hope, peace, and the joy of salvation.⁶
 - When we live in response to Jesus’ grace, we live in the midst of Jesus’ reign.
 - This we believe.

1 – Collage with *Atonement Theories* in the center and then the following scattered around it:

Moral Influence

Ransom

Christus Victor

Substitutionary

Cleansing

Reconciliation

2 – Make Decisions – Choose Relationships – Invest Stewardship

3 – *Let us boast in God’s goodness toward those who do not deserve it.*

4 – (center justified) Jesus walked this lonesome valley

He had to walk it by himself

Oh nobody else could walk it for him

He had to walk it by himself.

5 – “When you pass through the waters, I [God] will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa 43:2-3a).

⁵ *Feasting*, 138.

⁶ Willimon, 42.