

First Lutheran Church of Venice
Foundations Class – Fall 2013
Session 7 – Our Receptive Life: The Means of Grace I

Means of Grace

1. The central truth: We are brought into a saving, life-giving relationship with God by grace, through faith for the sake of Jesus Christ as a gift!

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-10)*

*For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a **gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom. 3:22b-25a).*

2. Today: **How will the gift be delivered?**
 - a. Through the *means of grace* – tangible ways God works to deliver His grace us, create and sustain faith
 - b. Means of grace: Word (specifically, the Gospel), Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
 - i. Note: These means are where we can be *certain* that God is working for our benefit because we have that promise from the Scriptures. God is not limited by the means of grace.
 - ii. God could choose to operate without means, but if he were to do so, his will would be forced upon us. No creature could endure the direct, unmediated presence of God (see, e.g., Ex. 33:17-23, Is. 6:1-6). Instead, because God is a God of grace, he comes to us more gently, through *means* He has appointed – means that are *resistible*.
 - c. These means – human speech, water, bread and wine might seem to “common” or unimpressive for God to use to accomplish such great things. But that’s our God!
 - i. Read 2 Kings 5:1-14.
 - ii. Think of Jesus! - He was God’s *physical*, incarnate means of bringing the kingdom of God near – restoring creation, delivering from sin, death and devil
 - iii. Jesus Himself worked through means: See, e.g., Mark 7:32-35
 - iv. He commissioned his apostles to bring God’s salvation through means:
 - v. *baptizing and teaching* (Matt. 28:19-20); *proclaiming* repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations (Lk. 24:47-48, Jn. 20:23)

3. The Means of Grace: The Gospel

- a. In a way, there is only one means of grace, but it comes to us in different ways
- b. What is the Gospel?
 - i. “All that God did and does in and through Jesus Christ to save sinful humanity and renew creation. It is the work and offer of God alone. The Gospel is most clearly seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, even in the Old Testament, one can see clearly the Gospel as the promise of the Christ who was to come.” (Mueller, 68)
 - ii. We hear the Gospel proclaimed or read it
- c. The Gospel Word has POWER to create FAITH

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16)

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18)

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:14-17)

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you (1 Pet. 1:23-25)

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 Thess. 2:13)

4. Other means of grace (sometimes called “Sacraments”)

- a. We might call them “physical applications” of the Gospel, or the “visible Gospel”
- b. Sacrament: a sacred act instituted by God which has the promise of delivering God’s grace or forgiveness and is joined to a visible element

Baptism

Three major questions divide Christians regarding Baptism

- **Who ACTS in Holy Baptism?**
- **WHO is to be baptized?**
- **HOW is baptism to be administered?**

5. Read Luther's Catechism – First Part

a. What does the word baptize mean?

Baptize means to apply water by immersing, washing, pouring, and the like.

Mark 7:4 When they [the Pharisees] come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing [baptizing] of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.

b. Who instituted Holy Baptism?

God Himself instituted Baptism, for our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His church to baptize all nations.

Matt. 28:19–20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

c. Who is to baptize?

Normally the called ministers of Christ are to baptize, but in cases of emergency and when no pastor is available, any Christian should baptize.

d. Who is to be baptized?

“All nations” are to be baptized, that is, all people, young and old.

e. What distinction is to be made in baptizing?

- A. Those who can receive instruction are to be baptized after they have been instructed in the main teachings of the Christian faith.
 - a. E.g., The Ethiopian was instructed before he was baptized (Acts 8:26–39). The jailer was instructed before he was baptized (Acts 16:25–33).

- B. Little children should be baptized when they are brought to Baptism by those who have authority over them.

Mark 10:13–15 And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to Me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Acts 2:38-39 Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children.

f. Why are babies to be baptized?

Babies are to be baptized because

- i. They are included in the words “all nations”
- ii. Jesus especially invites little children to come to Him; 840
- iii. As sinners, babies need what Baptism offers (Ps. 51)

John 3:5–6 Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Eph. 2:3 [We] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

- iv. Babies also are able to have faith. Certainly, babies cannot give a verbal profession of faith. But this does not mean they are incapable of believing (just as infants know and love their mother even though they cannot verbalize it). However, baptism is also not “hocus pocus” or a “spiritual inoculation” that gives immunity from sin and unbelief. A child who is baptized should be raised in the faith, instructed in God’s truth, and nurtured in that faith. This is the promise that parents (and sponsors) make at baptism. Baptizing and teaching go together (Mt. 28). This is also why we don’t get in a helicopter and dump water on the city of Los Angeles.

Matt. 18:6 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (Luke 1:15), and even before birth (1:41–44).

6. Read Luther's Catechism – 2nd and 3rd parts

a. What great and precious things are given in Baptism?

Acts 2:38 Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Acts 22:16 Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins.

Rom. 6:3, 5 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ... If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.

Gal. 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Col. 1:13–14 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Compare Col. 2:11–12.)

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

1 Peter 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this [waters of Noah's flood], now saves you ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

b. Why are we not to seek a “baptism with the Holy Spirit” in addition to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism?

Eph. 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

John 3:5 Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 860

c. How does baptismal water work forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation?

God's words of institution put these great blessings into Baptism. Faith, which trusts this word of God in the water, takes the blessings out and makes them our own.

Eph. 5:25b–26 Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

Gal. 3:26–27 You are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

7. Read Luther's Catechism – 4th part.

a. What is the Old Adam?

The Old Adam is the corrupt and evil nature that we inherit because of Adam's fall into sin.

Eph. 4:22 Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.

b. How is this Old Adam to be drowned in us?

The Old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we resist and overcome evil desires.

Luke 9:23 If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

c. What is the new man?

The new man is the new spiritual life and nature, created in us by the washing of rebirth.

2 Cor. 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

d. How is this new man to emerge and arise?

The new man emerges and arises as we daily live and grow before God in true faith and good works.

Eph. 4:24 Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Rom. 6:3–4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

e. With which words do we regularly remember our Baptism?

The words “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” come from the baptismal command (Matt. 28:19) and are known as the Trinitarian Invocation. By repeating these words, in church or by ourselves, we recall, claim, and confess before heaven, earth, and hell all that God the Holy Trinity has given us in our Baptism.

Note: The Trinitarian Invocation may be accompanied by the sign of the cross, made at our Baptism upon our foreheads and hearts to mark us as “redeemed by Christ the crucified.”