

Lesson 1: Means of Grace

“Nothing is so effectual against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it. Psalm 1 calls those blessed who ‘meditate on God’s law day and night.’”

—Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: Preface

Thesis:

God uses the Means of Grace to impute grace to us.

Key question:

How does God show His grace in our lives?

Catechism:

Sverdrup’s Questions – none with this lesson

Accompanying Bible Story:

Luke 5:17-26 – Jesus Heals the Paralytic

My questions:

The crowd at the house where Jesus was teaching was very large. So many people had come to hear Jesus that even the entrance to the house was blocked. This large crowd of people presented a problem for a particular man and his friends. The man was paralyzed and could not walk on his own. His friends, believing that Jesus could heal him, had brought him to Jesus, bed and all. Their problem was how to get the man on his bed through the crowd to where Jesus was.

In those days, houses in Israel had flat roofs that acted like a patio or outdoor living space. The men managed to get their friend up on the roof. They then opened a hole in the roof big enough through which to lower the man on his bed.

Jesus understood that what the friends did was an act of faith. They believed and acted on that belief. Seeing this faith, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness. Wait! What? That’s odd. The men did not bring their friend to be forgiven. They brought the man to be healed of his paralysis. But Jesus, seeing deeper into the man’s needs, spoke words that gave the man the healing he really needed.

There were some religious leaders in the crowd who thought Jesus was a threat to their authority. Immediately, they protested Jesus’ words. They accused Jesus of blasphemy, which is a very serious crime against God. “If Jesus thinks He can forgive sins,” they thought, “He must think He is God since only God can forgive sins.”

The irony in the story is that Jesus, in addition to being able to forgive sins, was able to hear their thoughts. So He asked them a pointed question. “What’s easier? To say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Get up and walk’?” Then to show He had the power to forgive sins, He said to the man, “I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.”

Jesus was speaking to the crowd at the house. Jesus spoke forgiveness to the paralytic. Jesus used words to challenge the beliefs of the religious leaders. Jesus also spoke physical healing to the paralyzed man. Jesus’ words were Law and Gospel. The word of Law condemned the pride of those who heard. The word of Gospel declared God’s grace and forgiveness of sin to them.

We, like the paralyzed man, are sinners in need of forgiveness. God is gracious and wants us to know the benefits of His grace. We experience God’s grace through what we call the Means of Grace: His Word and the Sacraments.

* What do the following verses teach us about grace?

Romans 11:5, 6

Ephesians 1:7, 8a

Titus 2:11

* Read Ephesians 2:8-9. What do these verses teach us about salvation?

* Read Romans 10:17. Where does faith come from?

Because God gives us the gift of faith when we hear His Word, we call God's Word a "means of grace." It is somewhat like the pipes through which water gets into your house. The pipes are the "means" for transporting water. The Bible, God's Word, is the "means" through which God shows us His grace and gives us faith and salvation.

* Read Romans 6:3, 4. What happens to us in baptism?

* Read Matthew 26:26-28. Why did Jesus pour out His blood?

Baptism and Holy Communion are two special events we regularly do in the Church. God's Word, the primary means of grace, tells us that God forgives our sins in these acts. Because these are holy acts, we call them Sacraments (if you like big words, you can look up the etymology, but it has to do with being "holy" or "sacred"). Because God lavishes His grace on us through these two holy acts, we also call them "means of grace." So, we say we have two Means of Grace: God's Word and the Sacraments. We will be spending the next eleven weeks studying the Sacraments, learning to better appreciate how God has been and continues to be gracious to us through these holy acts.

What did I learn in this lesson (three or four sentences)?