

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Way of Salvation

Psalm

Psalm 23 (KJV)

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Gospel Lesson

John 10:1-10 (NRSV)

¹“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Sermon Focus

This week’s sermon focused on the grace of God as the source of our salvation. Wesleyan theology emphasizes salvation as a process or a journey that is empowered by God’s grace. The “way of salvation” begins before you are even aware of God’s grace and continues, moment by moment, throughout your entire life. As such, salvation has an immediate impact in the here and now. What we do as the church is our way of cooperating with God’s grace to bring salvation to the world. The Wesleyan Methodist theology of salvation can re-awaken the 21st century church by centering on the grace of God and bringing new meaning to the things we do.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your own history with the Methodist church? Were you raised Methodist? Did you become Methodist?
2. Reflect on the following quote from John Wesley: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power." Do you think the church has been "going through the motions," "having the form of religion without the power?" How so?
3. John Wesley and George Whitefield were very different people, but very good friends. They were both in the holy club as followers of Christ when they were at Oxford. When have you made a friend in Christ that was vastly different than you?
4. "The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness... It is not a blessing which lies on the other side [of] death... It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing; a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of... the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory." In this quote John Wesley describes salvation as something experienced in the present, in the here-and-now and not just post-mortem. In what ways do you agree or disagree? Have you experienced salvation how Wesley is describing it?
5. Pastor Andy said that when different Christians talk about salvation they do so in different ways. When asked the question "When were you saved?" some other traditions may focus on a specific date and time, one particularly powerful and meaningful experience. For some Methodists the best answer to the question "When were you saved?" is "I'm still working on it." How are you "still working on it?"

Methodist Focus

One of the most distinctive qualities of Wesleyan (Methodist) theology is our understanding of grace. Our Wesleyan beliefs around grace, include multiple stages/kinds of grace. These are prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, as well as Christian perfection.

Prevenient Grace is the grace that "comes before." The word prevenient is an old-timely word that we don't really use anymore. *Prevenient* or *preventing* just means something that comes before something else ("pre-" + "event"). God's prevenient grace is always available. It is there before we know we need it. It is there before we are born and it will always remain. It is there even if a person is not experiencing it. Grace is all around us, in all things and through all things all the time, whether or not we acknowledge it. We would describe that kind of grace as prevenient grace.

Justifying grace is the grace a person recognizes. To experience God's justifying grace is to experience a radical sense of forgiveness and assurance inside of yourself. It's an assurance that you have indeed received grace from God. That you are loved and forgiven exactly as you are. Often when people talk about conversion experiences they are talking about the experiences of justifying grace. The song "Amazing Grace" is a great example of the experience of justifying grace.

Sanctifying grace is the grace that makes us better. With God's grace, we can learn to sin less, and to love more. Sanctifying grace is cooperative; we join with the grace of God to "work out our salvation" as followers of Jesus. We become more in tune with what God is doing in the world and how to respond to it. We recognize that grace coming from God and not from our own selves.

Christian perfection is probably the most debated aspect of Wesleyan grace in the Christian world. Wesley taught that to be "perfected in love" is the goal of sanctification. To reach Christian perfection means that all of our motivations are one motivation, love. Christian perfection means that we are made "perfect" through God's grace.

In prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, as well as Christian perfection, we see a lifelong growing process, where God is in process with us to make us more and more in-tune with God's ultimate aim for creation. Read the following quote from John Wesley's sermon, *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*.

"All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as 'a grain of mustard-seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds,' but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed, from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we 'grow up in all things into him that is our Head;' till we attain 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'"

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Andy compared the Methodist concept of grace to the story of the Good Shepherd. Did some of that resonate with you?
2. Describe in your own words the definitions of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, as well as Christian perfection.
3. Do you have a "justifying grace" story, a moment you recognized God's grace for the first time?
4. How do you cooperate with the sanctifying grace of God, as you "work out your salvation?"

Prayer

God of Grace, we thank you for your presence among us, that works on us, that moves us, that assures us we are not alone and that we always have you. We thank you for that deep assurance and pray that we may respond to your grace better each day. Thank you for your church, Lord, your Spirit that guides us as individuals and collectively toward the ultimate love that you will for us. Open our hearts more and more each day to the awareness of your grace in the world. Amen.

*"The sum of Christian perfection... is all comprised in that one word,
Love."*

-John Wesley