

## **Appendix C - Every follower a Sacrament...**

It was right before Christmas and, after a long conversation on the phone, I walked into a hospital room...surrounded by a loving family was the small bundle of a baby. What should have been a room filled with smiles and joy was rather immersed in contemplation and watchful sadness. It was not a tense situation, don't get me wrong. The room had the air of hope but also had been saturated with a life-altering reality - the baby was stillborn. Instead of anticipating days and moments of life, the mom and dad and their extended family were embracing the wrap of swaddling clothes that encapsulated a lifeless, their lifeless, child. I looked at little Olivia and I didn't see those newborn's eyes that are searching, trying to make sense of their new world...I didn't hear the groans, coos, and squeaks that normally accompany such joy-filled seconds of new life. What I beheld was that of a lifeless body...that "look" that is unmistakable - death.

As I walked into the room, I thought to myself, "why am I here?" What possibly could I bring to this situation and to this grieving couple and family? What words of hope? What action of love? What presence is needed? As you might imagine, it is at moments like these that a follower of Jesus depends on only one thing - the love and grace of God. It dawned on me as I crossed the threshold of the room that I was going to have the honor, the humility soaked, spiritually called and privileged honor, of being a "means of grace" to this couple and to these moments of their lives. Yes, it occurred to me as it has escaped my consciousness and awareness before that I was bringing something into that room that was definitely of God's heart - His presence, His mercy, His love, and the potentiality of transformation and hope. No, it wasn't about me...it was about what God wanted to do through me...to tell you the truth, I didn't even know how and what the Spirit was going to do...all I knew is that I had the awesome responsibility and call to be His means of grace and hope in those moments.

That brings me to the "bigger picture" that is the subject of this article. Ok - so here's some things I've been thinking about...I've been teaching a bit on the sacraments while I've been helping families prepare their children for the receiving of communion in the worship experiences of Peace (by the way, that is the foundation of how decisions are being made in our faith community regarding communion readiness...they are being made by parents in consultation with me). Yeah, for some of you, you have no idea what I'm talking about...but that's OK. Let me school you for a moment:

A classic definition of a Sacrament is this (straight out of [Martin Luther's Catechism](#), mind you):

*A Sacrament is a sacred act - instituted by God Himself; containing certain visible means connected with His Word; by which God offers, gives and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins...essentially a sacrament is a means of grace"*

Also, another quote on the means of grace (these from the [Book of Concord](#) - yeah, look that up too if you need to, the BOC is a collection of confessional documents that provided and provide the doctrinal framework the historical Lutheran expression of Christianity) *"a means of grace is a way God creates faith, bring about conversion, justification and sanctification."*

Again, from a historical perspective, there have been debates denominationally on how many sacraments there are and what specific acts are defined as sacramental (or if sacramental theology even is relevant because in some denominations, it is not). Even so, I've come to the conclusion, after having a plethora of conversations and debates over the years, that I am not only one who proactively embraces this whole notion and deep theology of how God reveals Himself sacramentally to the world through and in the acts of ekklesia (that being the gathered faith community, i.e. baptism, communion and the Word of God) but also that those who follow Jesus, in other words, the WE of the Body of Christ are sacraments.

Oh, I know that there may be a few naysayers out there...so hear me out. Look again at the definition of sacrament - realize that God created you and me...that not only has God created us but God is always the initial "mover" in terms of a relationship with us. In other words, the only reason we can know and love God is that God is the one who made the first move...He INITIATED and INSTITUED our relationship. Ephesians reminds us that we are "chosen" and called by God...established in a new identity because of new life in Jesus. In fact, the whole Body of Christ idea...the whole discipleship thing...the whole mission and purpose of living our lives in and through His Spirit? God's idea! So, we are instituted by God...secondly we, as people who love and follow Jesus, are a visible means that God uses to communicate the truth of His Word. In other words, when you think of "visible means", you think of the word, "incarnation." Jesus Himself was the incarnation of God's love, will, purpose and heart for His world. Jesus was God with skin in the "game" of the world...He was God made flesh and He who "moved into the neighborhood." Now, through the Holy Spirit, who is the contemporary "incarnation" of the presence of the

Lord? You guessed it...we are! God is alive in and through us...we are the "temple of the Lord"...we are the hands and feet of Jesus today. WE are the Body of Christ in the world...that isn't just some mysterious, mystical definition but His Word made truth and made real in our lives. So, second sacramental issue spoken to...how about the third? Have you ever read about us being "God's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5)?" I bet you have...we are agents of reconciliation...we offer the love that Jesus gave to us to others...we love because He first loved us. We love "one another as I (Jesus) have loved." We forgive each other...extend God's healing hand through prayer...oh, the list goes on and on.

Just to underscore...read about the sacraments sometime - they are "outward signs which have God's command and promise" - isn't that what our identity is to be all about as followers and lovers and children of God? "The chief thing about sacraments is God's Word" - isn't it true, that this Kingdom deal isn't about you and me but really all about Jesus, the Living Word? "Sign of the covenant of grace" - aren't we called as followers of Jesus to embody God's covenant? Light and salt to the world...a city set on a hill...go and do likewise...those are words of Jesus given to challenge and encourage you and me to bear His Word and will into our world. I don't know...I don't want to make TOO BIG of a deal of this, but it is making more sense to me as I go along. I don't think God uses only a handful of means to communicate and reveal His grace to the world...He uses a multitude of expressions of Himself and His love through people who are part of His Body...you and me. I underscore, this doesn't mean that WE do the actual work...we just bear the presence of the ONE whose work has been, is being and is going to be done in our lives. Jesus is the one who saves, justifies, and sanctifies...His work alone.

So, I've been coming to this conclusion...we are a means of grace. In fact, the more you think about, the more sense it makes. The classic definition of a sacrament actually helps you and me (if we are followers of Jesus) to embrace our God given purpose and call...we are "sent" to the world to "go and make disciples." We are a means of God's grace in and through our mission...in that way, every follower is a sacrament...every person who loves Jesus that which is poured out, broken, bringing the washing of new life that only comes through Jesus into the presence of the relationships in which we have been blessed.

How's that for clarifying who we are in Jesus? We (as the gathered community of faith) not only handle the means of grace, we ARE a means of grace! Every follower a "sacrament"...I don't know, it seems to work for me.