**DIDACHE:**

**Session 7**

**The Means of Grace:**

**How God Dispenses His Grace, Gifts, and Blessing**

**To and Through the Church**

**Summary of Session 6**

**\*From the beginning, God’s design for human life was a design rich in**

**fellowship. God did not create us to live in isolation from other**

**human beings. We are designed for mutual companionship.**

**This is a basic, foundational truth for life together on earth. Life**

**is a society.**

**\*The Holy Spirit—the Third Person of the Triune God—brings the people**

**He calls through the Gospel to faith into a very special society, a**

**community called the Christian Church. We confess the Church is**

**“a mystical body,” that is a divine work of God and so somewhat**

**invisible and hidden to human reason and perception. It is also**

**by faith that we believe in “the Church.”**

**\*The Church was created and instituted by Jesus Christ Himself, and it is**

**made up of all true believers, that is, the people whom the Holy Spirit**

**has gathered to Christ.**

**--Christ is the Head of His Church, and this is why we call it the**

**Christian Church**

**--The Church is one because Christ Himself unites all people who**

**are members in it; a very clear and central teaching in the**

**Bible is that there is only one Lord (ruler, Head, i.e. Jesus,**

**one saving faith (way of salvation), one truth (a specific**

**body of doctrine), and one Baptism.**

**--The Church is holy because its Head, Christ, is holy, and He gives**

**to the people of the Church, as a free gift, this holiness or**

**righteousness of His through the forgiveness of sins.**

**--The Church is catholic (universal, global) because in every**

**generation, in every geographic place on earth, in every**

**human language, all the people who believe and confess that**

**Jesus is Lord and Savior, are in this Christian Church. (This**

**roster of all true believers is known only to God, who alone**

**can see into human minds, hearts, and souls.)**

**--The Church is apostolic (founded on the body of teaching—the**

**doctrine—that Jesus gave to His twelve apostles, whose witness**

**to His teaching, preaching, work, death, resurrection, and**

**ascension is preserved in the Holy Scriptures).**

**\*In His Church God, through Jesus Christ, freely gives His people the gift**

**that human beings need the most—forgiveness of sins.**

**\*In theology we call this great work of forgiveness justification. It is a legal,**

**forensic term from the very courts of divine justice in heaven. The**

**just punishment and the fitting sentence for sin is death, both physical**

**and eternal. But God, in His love and mercy for sinners, that is the**

**whole of His created human race, sent His Son to become human in**

**order to set Him up as a substitute defendant who, though completely**

**innocent of sin, willingly took our penalty and punishment and**

**exchanged his perfection and holiness for our sin and guilt. And He to and upon Himself our just and due punishment and death, and gave us eternal life and immortality. That’s one unimaginable curse for Him, and one blessed exchange for us. We were justified by grace (solely because of God’s love; that’s the entire motive and impetus in**

**this heavenly trial) through the gift of faith (a divine gift that enables us to receive and believe this amazing gift and exchange).**

**\*This work of the Son of God is good news for humanity, thus it is called the**

**Gospel. The Gospel is all that God has done for us to save us, to**

**reconcile us to Himself, through Christ. The Gospel is a message that**

**can only be received and believed by faith.**

**\*By God’s own design He distributes the forgiveness of sins (the Gospel)**

**through means He has also instituted for all time in and through His**

**Church. These means of grace are His Word (preserved in the Bible**

**and proclaimed and taught) and His Sacraments—Holy Baptism and**

**Holy Communion. These means of grace are the marks of the**

**Church, so called because they identify for us the places where God**

**Himself in His Word has promised to always be present with us.**

**OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION**

**Introduction**

**Two basic approaches in Christianity today in understanding the presence of the almighty, invisible, all-present God among us, both answering the question “where is God to be found?, yet in a different way:**

**\*the MEANS OF GRACE**

**He is hidden from the world**

**He reveals Himself clearly and as fully as He has determined in His Word,**

**and is present in a close communion with His people of faith, in that Word**

**and in His Sacraments (Acts 2:42) Roman Catholic, Orthodox,**

**Lutheran, Anglican approach (though these churches teach various**

**Things**

**\*THE EXISTENTIAL AND EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH**

**Denies that God works through means, channels, vehicles (16th century**

**quote from reformer Ulrich Zwingli and the Radical Reformers)**

**Denied the miraculous, mystical, sacramental power of Baptism (did not**

**baptize infants; believers’ Baptism, and considered it a mere**

**symbolic action. . .also denied the miracle of the real presence of**

**Jesus’ Body and Blood in Holy Communion**

**In these denials, they were forced to deny 1500 years of Christian history**

**and practice and to revise it**

**Contend that God works directly without means and the Holy Spirit**

**operates through the mind and heart of the individual. Discarding**

**Baptism and Holy Communion (though strangely redefining in**

**theology and transforming in practice both of them, retaining the**

**Biblical names, and exterminating liturgy and ritual, Biblical**

**fruits of faith—good works in the Christian life—were elevated**

**to, in a sense, replace the sacraments. Prayer became a place**

**where a Christian might experience direct guidance from God for**

**particular situations. Emotionalism, and also within the context**

**of worship, was viewed as a sign of God’s presence. . .Experiences**

**are not only signs of God’s presence, but often measures of faith**

**This is a quick summary of a very complex theological reality and a large**

**organizational situation in the world and in particular the United States**

**(over 800 Christian denominations and groups!); but these two approaches**

**still are a major division in Christianity. The experiential approach warns**

**than a means of grace approach results in institutionalism, ceremony, ritual,**

**and is hardly capable of producing genuine conversion or obedient, devoted**

**disciples (who talk the talk and walk the walk). The means of grace**

**approach warns that not only does the experiential approach forfeit the**

**growth in spiritual maturity and growth of sacramental divine power God**

**designed and commands and invites for the Church to use, but that the very**

**definitions of justification, conversion, and sanctification are not faithful to**

**the Bible and do not give all glory to Christ.**

**I. Sacraments: Definition**

**The term "sacrament" does not appear in the Bible anywhere. “Sacraments” are**

**defined and applied in different ways even in the different churches who insist they**

**are means of grace; churches who believe Baptism and Holy Communion are not**

**miracles, but only symbolic rituals do not use the term sacrament.**

**The word “sacrament” is derived from *Sacramentum*, a Latin word originally used**

**in the Roman Empire as a military oath of commitment to the Emperor, excluding**

**any other primary allegiance or loyalty. The early Christian Church borrowed this**

**word to describe Holy Baptism, especially to that part of the baptism liturgy that**

**renounced the devil and all idolatry and pledged sole allegiance to the Triune God.**

**Shortly thereafter the term was also used to describe Holy Communion. (The**

**church father Tertullian calls both "sacramentums" @A.D.200). The Latin word**

**had three meanings: something to be kept sacred; a secret; and a mystery. When**

**the church leader named Jerome, who translated the Greek New Testament into**

**Latin, used this world “sacramentum” for Baptism and Communion, he was**

**translating the Greek word *mysterion.* Church historians have long noted how**

**Jerome understood the word *mysterion* (“sacramentum”) in two senses: in the**

**wider sense--all the saving truths of the Gospel, and in the narrower sense, Baptism**

**and Lord's Supper.**

**From the time of Martin Luther, Lutheran Christians have admitted there are**

**various beliefs and practices relating to the doctrine of the sacraments. Because the**

**word "sacrament" is not an actual Biblical word, various groups have defined**

**various doctrines concerning sacraments. But in one of the Lutheran writings, the**

**Apology to the Augsburg Confession, it is stated that "no intelligent person will**

**quibble about the number of sacraments and the terminology, so long as those**

**things are kept which have God's command and promise!"**

**While the authority of tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism**

**mandates the sacraments in definition, number, and practice, the Lutheran**

**Confession focuses on the concept of God working through visible, tangible,**

**physical means to offer and convey His undeserved love to fallen human beings,**

**as a Biblical Truth at the very heart of the mystery of the Gospel. The God who**

**became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ now places His love within reach of**

**our very senses in the water of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine of the**

**Holy Supper. By such a focus, Lutherans established three requirements for their use of the word "sacrament." First, Lutherans distinguished very simply, but very sharply in their practice an "act" from a "sacred act." An act would be something the human believer did; the sacred act is something God does. On this basis a**

**Sacrament was defined as a "sacred act":**

**\*instituted by God Himself;**

**\*in which God has joined His Word of promise to a visible element; and**

**\*by which He offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ**

**With this definition in place Lutheran Christians can then speak of the other rites or rituals in the Church that lack one or more of the above stipulations, and yet retain what might well serve the Church as a “human-invention” that does not contradict the Word of God and serves a useful purpose in the practice of the Christian faith. Thus, Confirmation, Marriage, and A Service of Commendation for the Dying were retained as practices in the Church, but were not given the status of a sacrament. Those practices such as penance and the orders of celibate monks and nuns were rejected as contradicting Scripture. Lutherans speak of two sacraments, while retaining private confession and absolution (without paying of penances and indulgences). Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians (the two largest Christian denominations in the world in numbers) still hold to seven sacraments.**

**II. Holy Baptism**

**A) Chief Scriptural teaching and data**

\***Matthew 28:18-20 \*Acts 2:38-41 \*Acts 8:26-39**

**\*Acts 16:25-33 \*Acts 22:16 \*Romans 6:3-5**

**\*Galatians 3:27 \*Ephesians 5:26 \*1 Peter 3:21**

**\*Titus 3:5-7**

**B) Issues**

**\*The Issues of Infant/child Baptism**

**“How do you know Jesus wants babies/children to be baptized?”**

***Thoughts:* Luke 18:15-17, although included in the Baptism**

**liturgy, is not a proof passage that we should baptize children.**

**Jesus is blessing the children, laying on His hands, not**

**baptizing. But this passage does show Jesus’ compassion for**

**children, both male and female. And here in the Greek, the**

**word used for “children” refers to “nursing children” (Greek)**

**“Show me a single Scripture that specifically says, “baptize a child,**

**an infant, or a newborn!”**

***Answer:*  There isn’t one. But neither is there one that says baptize any segment of the human population to the exclusion of others. Let’s look at them: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-41, Acts 16:25-33. . .I don’t see the word “infant” or “baby” or “child” and neither do I see the word “man” or “woman” or**

**“adult over twelve years old,” or ‘bald-headed lefthander,” or**

**“pious person,” etc.**

**If baptism is for sinners, are not babies born in sin? The Bible**

**teaches us that we are all *conceived and born in sin* (Psalm**

**51:5, John 3:5-6, and Romans 5:12); therefore do we not need**

**salvation from minute one! How can a baby be saved from sin**

**the devil, and death? Show me, in Scripture, where God says**

**babies and children have such an amnesty**

**In fact, the Bible says babies can have faith and believe, even**

**before they can cognitively know and understand it (Matthew 18:6!)**

**And finally, one more question for you: are we Christians not**

**taking a serious risk (if one or more of these things are true), if**

**we do not baptize our infants and children? Show me a**

**Scripture that says, “Don’t baptize a baby; that is a false**

**hope and would be a purely meaningless ritual.”**

**\*The Issue of the Necessity of Baptism for Salvation--is it possible for**

**a person who was never baptized to be saved and go to heaven?**

***Answer:* Yes. In the Bible the only thing that now condemns the**

**human being is unbelief. Sin itself cannot do it anymore; Christ**

**paid for all sin. Those are lost who are found to be without the gift of**

**faith. It is possible for one to be given faith and believe the Gospel**

**and die before being baptized; such a person is a Christian and is**

**saved. However one who has become or has been a Christian will not**

**deny or despise what Christ has promised in His Word about**

**Baptism; such an unbaptized believer should not delay in getting**

**baptized. To summarize with an old adage: baptism is**

**necessary, but not absolutely necessary for salvation.**

**Conclusion**

**In His Church Christ has also instituted another Sacrament known by a variety of names: The Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, The Holy Meal, Holy Communion, etc.**

**We will discuss this in detail in the next session. He has also instituted for the benefit of His New Testament Church *the office of the holy ministry* (the pastoral office) for the purposes of good order, efficiency, and servant leadership in the Church. In the Bible requirements for the men who serve in this office are clearly laid out. The office is what is divine; the men who are called by the Holy Spirit through the congregations and churches are fellow sinners with their people, who also hold an equally important collective calling, called in Scripture *the royal priesthood of all believers*. Pastorsand people of the Church work together to carry out the ministry and mission of Christ, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, works through them to proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness.**

**Again, because we live in a fallen, sinful world culture; because the devil is still at**

**work in this fallen world; and because all people are sinners with a sinful nature, and even we Christians also remain sinners with a sinful nature within us. . .the members of Christ’s Church bring their sins into the fellowship of the Church, two deadly sins in particular: such as false teaching (the ancient word *heresy*) and division (the ancient word *schism*). This is why the Church on earth does not appear at some times and in some places to be either united, holy, global, or apostolic.**

**If you have questions or seek further discussion with Pastor Marler, please contact him at:**

[**wmarler@trinitylutheranspfd.org**](mailto:wmarler@trinitylutheranspfd.org)