

# Grace

*divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.*

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This great mystery of faith is complete with the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup of salvation. It is what John Wesley referred to as the means of grace. Grace is this divine means of help or strength given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. It is a free unmerited gift that is available to all persons at all times. It is what God does at that moment when we approach the table and humble ourselves. It is one of the messiest of sacraments because as we meet Christ in this meal, we acknowledge:

1. Our mortality and sin
2. Our need for Jesus
3. Our need to be in ministry to all the world.

Holy Communion is a call to respond to the grace of God given in Christ. It is an opportunity for us to experience God in a tangible way that cannot be duplicated by human hands.

For the past couple of years, I have been meeting with two of my parishioners in my office every Wednesday morning for Holy

Communion and prayer. My coffee table becomes a makeshift altar. The bread is still warm from coming out of Harold's oven, and Howard reminds me, "I am doing pretty good for an old guy." We laugh, talk, solve the world's problems, and then pray. We ask God's blessing in this time and space and share in the words of the institution. We break bread together and depart in the grace of God. I have been doing this every Wednesday for the past five years. The impact that it has had on the three of us cannot be explained. All of us have changed spiritually, and we have become closer than I ever thought possible. It is the means of grace and thanksgiving that God has given at that moment that make all the difference.

Bishop Al Wesley Goodwin said, "We are not human beings having a supernatural experience. We are supernatural beings having a human experience." That human experience of bread and cup is just what the church needs on a regular basis to stay in connection with Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.



*"Christ is present here, and Christ's presence really changes us."  
Read more on page 2.*

## What's inside

- 2 | What to know about communion in The UMC
- 3 | Grace through coming to the Lord's table

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# Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church

*Excerpts from UMC.org*

## ***Do United Methodists believe the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ?***

In the Great Thanksgiving, we ask the Holy Spirit to be poured on us and on the gifts of bread and wine we offer.

We ask for the Spirit's outpouring to make the bread and wine be for us the body and blood of Christ so we, who receive them, may be for the world, the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. We believe God answers this prayer "Yes," and the Spirit does all these things. Christ is present here, and Christ's presence really changes us.

## ***Why do many United Methodists use grape juice instead of wine?***

Predecessor bodies of The United Methodist Church were deeply involved in the Temperance Movement. Grape juice was originally invented by Thomas Welch, a Methodist, so Methodists and others would not need to use wine for communion. Today, United Methodists still commend, but do not require abstinence, and may continue to use grape juice in communion out of pastoral concern for people who may have problems with alcohol.

## ***When should the bread be broken?***

As we note in the ritual in our hymnal, the bread is broken after the conclusion of the Great Thanksgiving, typically right after the Lord's Prayer.

## ***Who May Receive?***

As we say in our Invitation to the Table, "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to be at peace with one another." If you can say you do or have done these three things, you are welcome to receive.

Additionally, all baptized Christians, of any age (including infants) and any Christian denomination are welcome to the Lord's table. It is Christ's table. He welcomes all who are baptized in his name, and so do we.

We affirm the historic Christian precedent that people are normally baptized prior to receiving communion. Yet, as our invitation notes, baptism is not required. If you come and are not yet baptized, we will encourage you toward baptism at your earliest convenience.

# The means of grace through coming to the Lord's table

By Daniel Bradley,  
*Pastor, Faith Journey UMC*

It's inborn in our humanity—the need to connect with people, places, and things. We have the desire to be more than we are as human beings. This can be a good thing or bad, depending on your perspective.



Pastor Bradley

Bishop Al Wesley Goodwin said, "We are not human beings having a supernatural experience. We are supernatural beings having a human experience."

Let that sink in for a moment. The divine God, as we understand God created us for connection. However, it was not for connection one to another but to God. We are created in the strange vastness of the *imago Dei*. We were created and placed perfectly in this world as divine image bearers of God. That means that with all our shortcomings and imperfections, we bear God's image. Look in the mirror: "What do you see? Do you notice your beauty, or do you notice your imperfections?" Mirrors reflect our physical presence but cannot reflect our intellect or spiritual essence. They give us an incomplete picture of the 'whole' of ourselves. Only God can see the full picture of who we are and our potential in this world.

During the Passover feast, Jesus gave the disciples bread which he referred to as his body, and wine, which he referred to as his blood. In this meal, Jesus gave of himself to his disciples for the journey ahead. The

journey would be hard and painful and end in Jesus's death. If that were the end of the story, we wouldn't be here to tell it. Jesus's death was the beginning of God tearing open the heavens and restoring humanity in connection to God and one another. Three days

later, the event that would change the universe happened. The stone was rolled away, the grave clothes were folded, and the first witnesses were women who carried the message to the disciples who dismissed them as 'mad.'

## **Death is the culmination of faith's perfection in Jesus Christ.**

Death then becomes the beginning of new life in Jesus Christ. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "Death works backward." Life begets life, and the story continues with us as participants in a new story of faith.

Coming to the Lord's communion table to receive the body and blood of Christ binds us in faith to billions who have gone before us singing the great mystery of faith:

**"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna is the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest."**

*Continued on page 4.*