



LOVE HAS GIVEN US THE GIFT OF GRACE TO CARRY US THROUGH THE DARK

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LOVE HAS GIVEN US THE GIFT OF GRACE TO CARRY US THROUGH THE DARK
Metaphysical application ideas for the Christian Science Bible Lesson on

“Sacrament”
ending July 10, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Sacrament is one of several sacred rituals today in many Christian churches. The two “biggest” sacred rituals are: baptism, and the sharing of the Eucharist, or bread and wine, representing Jesus’ body and blood from the Last Supper. This lesson focuses more on the Eucharist, and since that ceremonial sharing closely preceded Jesus’ crucifixion, it is associated with the idea of atonement, or sacrifice. “The atonement is a hard problem in theology...” says Mary Baker Eddy on page 23 of *Science and Health*.

It is especially hard to imagine the terrible anguish that Jesus must have suffered in overcoming the fear and dread in Gethsemane, knowing as he did, what was to come. However, contemplating his struggle, we begin to realize that we cannot skip our own challenges, any more than the Savior did, and this Bible lesson explains the way that we can meet our own “dark nights” with the gift of divine favor, or grace from divine Love. Her sentence above finishes “The atonement is a hard problem in theology, but its scientific explanation is, that suffering is an error of sinful sense which Truth destroys, and that eventually both sin and suffering will fall at the feet of everlasting Love.”

It is everlasting Love that triumphs in the crucifixion story. This might be hard to glimpse in the midst of a painful challenge, but Love’s gift of grace is abundantly bestowed on each of us at all times. We are never alone, any more than Jesus was alone with his sleeping disciples in the Garden. We are surrounded by Love which breaks through the darkness of sin, the pain of disease, and any despair or fear that we might meet.

We cannot run from the challenges that come, eventually they chase us down and it becomes a terribly unfulfilling “game” of tag in which we exhaust ourselves trying to avoid the healing that we are meant to have. Each struggle comes with an answer of grace. Know that in advance, and we can sooner feel at peace with taking up the task. “Prayer, watching, and working, combined with self-immolation, are God’s gracious means for accomplishing whatever has been successfully done for the Christianization and health of mankind.” (p.1:6/citation S19 in this week’s lesson) There is no greater story of grace than Jesus’ resurrection from death. This story is ours in a thousand ways throughout our lives as we no

longer resist the need to grow up and out of matter and into our true stature as God's expression.

Our **Golden Text** is a statement of Paul's: "I do not set aside the grace of God;". This may be a rebuke to the other Jewish Christians following Peter, to stop separating themselves from Gentiles, or non-Jews, during meals (mixing with Gentiles during meals was forbidden under Jewish law). Eventually, we know that Peter also had this grace revealed to him in a dream and he dropped these distinctions. But I have been enjoying thinking of this statement as a command to be alert to and recognize the presence of Love's grace in my day. I certainly don't want to be found "setting aside" such grace, or not recognizing its presence!

Ultimately, Sacrament is a way to remember Jesus' sacrifice and victory. So, our **Responsive Reading** from Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11 and Ephesians 4:1-7 comes from Paul sharing his joy in the good news or "gospel" of Christ, *reminding* his churches to live according to this gospel in *unity*—finally affirming that "...unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

SECTION 1: "OUR EUCHARIST IS SPIRITUAL COMMUNION WITH THE ONE GOD." (cit. S4/35:25-26)

I've thought a lot about the difference between communion and silent prayer. The dictionary definition of communion is "The sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level." Prayer and communion can certainly overlap. But when we go to church on Communion Sunday in a Christian Science church, we are invited at the end of the service to "kneel in silent communion" rather than "join in silent prayer". These periods feel more like times when I have been in natural settings in a very quiet or still moment. It is more as if any mental or material barriers that I have put up, quietly fall away, and the Divine permeates being more freely.

I love thinking of Moses, who first experiences God in the desert while minding his sheep. It is a natural wonder that attracts his attention and opens the door in his consciousness to hear God speak to him. He does not readily take up the task that God gives him. He is anxious about his ability to do this great thing. I suspect many of us have felt this way from time to time. But God tells him "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." What a gift of grace to give to someone about to lead an entire people out of slavery.

Most mainstream Christians believe that grace is actually conferred through the ritual of sacrament, so we could say that spiritually, this statement of Love's presence to Moses was a personal "Eucharist". This is born out in statements such as citation S2/333:19-26 where Mary Baker Eddy tells us "Throughout all generations both before and after the Christian era, the Christ, as the spiritual idea,— the reflection of God,— has come with some measure of power and grace to all prepared to receive Christ, Truth."

Moses modeled the prayer of humble communion. He needed to know that he was not the one responsible. He took up the challenge presented, but not with personal power, always with humility. He was a model of the kind of prayer that Mary Baker Eddy speaks of in citation S3 where she tells us that "What we most need is the prayer of fervent desire for growth in grace, expressed in patience, meekness, love, and good deeds." (SH 4:3-5, 17-22)

SECTION 2: SACRAMENT IS ABOUT FEELING GOD'S/LOVE'S GRACE.

The Samaritan woman by the well in John chapter 4/citation S6 is rightfully astonished that Jesus asks her for water. In that time, it was inappropriate for an unaccompanied woman to be

spoken to by a man, and doubly inappropriate since she was a Samaritan, a people that were despised by the Jews (even though they were also of Jewish descent). Jesus demonstrates the impartial and universal nature of divine Love (cit. S5/12:31) by not only speaking to her, but explaining that the lifegiving “waters” or grace of the Christ was available to all. This woman, who had had five husbands, certainly was receptive to his message of “all-absorbing spiritual love.” (cit. S9/264:24) We all need these moments by a deep well of refreshment.

We can pause in our hurry and scurry to feel the presence of grace. The pace in our lives can be daunting, but there is only one purpose, and we can remind ourselves in moments throughout our days that this purpose is one of peace and love. Just last weekend in the midst of such scurry I received two successive calls for support. In one call a camper had gotten a key chain ring stuck on her finger and the nurse had been gently working on it with soap and baby oil to no avail (there was certainly prayer involved as well!). The finger was quite swollen at this point. The next call came that a horse was struggling to get up and that this is usually a difficult process for her. After briefly speaking to the camper I went into another room and just looked out the window through trees to the lake beyond. Such a sense of peace and the government of harmony was present in that moment surely through the combined prayer of all of us at camp. Within fewer than five minutes the camper came into the room all smiles showing me her freed finger and giving me a big hug. While hugging her, the radio call came in saying that the horse was up and that was the quickest, easiest time they had experienced helping her in this process. This healing power is Love’s ever presence acknowledged, not personal in any way. The true Sacrament of Communion comes in moments of this kind of grace.

SECTION 3: WHAT DOES TRUE CONSECRATION LOOK LIKE?

Love’s abundant grace is certainly poured down on all. But we do need to slow down enough to feel it! I have a soft spot in my heart for Martha in the story of Mary and Martha in Luke chapter 10/citation B9. Martha is busy with serving while the Master is preaching. Her sister, Mary is just sitting and absorbing his words, leaving Martha alone to serve. Not fair! But Jesus points out that the real need is not for food and drink, or other service. These tasks will always be there. But the message of the Christ, from Jesus’ own mouth, is a lasting gift of grace.

It may be easy to think that we would choose Jesus’ message in such an instance, but do we take time for stillness and prayer each day? Or do the daily tasks, the seeming “fires” of the day, end-up taking precedence over that which is truly the most important element? Because our consecration to Love, to the expression of Love, is paramount, we will find with this consecration, that tasks become less onerous, often are accomplished more quickly through inspiration that might not otherwise occur, and certainly feel less tiring.

In citation S12 Mary Baker Eddy tells us that “The way through which immortality and life are learned is not ecclesiastical but Christian, not human but divine, not physical , but metaphysical, not material but scientifically spiritual.” This is an amazingly complete statement when you dissect it for each element. We do not find our spiritual, eternal nature through “ecclesiastical, human, physical, or material means”! There is not enough hard work in the world that will get you closer to God or to the grace of Love. It’s not that hard work won’t be required, but it is not so often the kind of humanly hard work that Martha was complaining of. Gaining a truer sense of spiritual living is what will bring peace, joy, abundance, not human or physical effort.

SECTION 4: OKAY, NOT HUMAN EFFORT, BUT IT DOES TAKE WORK.

If we want lasting joy, peace, and satisfaction, it takes work. I know that sounds like a contradiction of what I just wrote in the last section, but the work of our “jobs” or home or

career is not the kind of work that I'm talking about here. Communion with Truth can sometimes bring to the surface many uncomfortable things that need to be dealt with and lifted-up for purification and healing. Sometimes such times of communion cause us to wrestle with human will, as is illustrated in the story in this section where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mark 14/cit. B11)

As our human will yields to the Divine, the end of that resistance to what is happening or needs to happen, brings an outpouring of grace. Our storehouse of strength to meet the challenge at hand is filled, and we can proceed with greater peace, even if it is uncomfortable. When it is a physical challenge we can yield to the need to love God first rather than the need to rid ourselves of the pain. A shift of this kind is challenging, "hard work" if you will. Ego, self-righteousness, self-pity, and fear, all can make a showing as we commune deeply with Truth, but the healing comes through the avenue of "all-absorbing spiritual love", love for God and man.

SECTION 5: WE NEED THE "TRIALS AND SELF-DENIALS", AS WELL AS THE "JOYS AND VICTORIES".

In order to have a victory, we have to have a trial, race, match, whatever. These are things we usually put some practice and effort into if we care about them. It is no less true in our pursuit of spiritual growth. The challenges or trials that we face bring us joy and victory as we pray through them and find healing. Jesus certainly found that victory as he submitted to the crucifixion. Even while hanging on the cross his thought was so filled with love that he reached out to John, his disciple, to ask that John take care of his mother, Mary. This is grace in the midst of the worst kind of fire. He was meek in the presence of ridicule and hatred. He didn't waste his time on the error around him, but focused on Love. In this way he was able to triumph over evil, hatred, and the grave.

God does "Give us grace for today;" as Mary Baker Eddy spiritually translates the line in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." The questions we might need to ask are: "Do I rejoice in the trial at hand, or just want the discomfort to stop?", and "Am I willing to accept the grace that is given or am I expecting it to take a specific form?" Maybe "rejoice" is a hard one sometimes, but we could try for being gratefully cheerful to meekly and willingly face a challenge. We do have to overcome each obstacle in our path to deep spiritual understanding. We cannot skip over any of the trials that come up. There is no easy path, but there are simpler ones that involve humility and obedience.

SECTION 6: SOMETIMES WE JUST NEED TO SEE "THE FRUITLESSNESS OF OUR TOIL IN THE DARK".

It seems like many times, maybe most, we need to learn our lessons in life through experience. Taking someone's word for it just doesn't allow that deep knowing to settle on us. We certainly don't need to learn *everything* through experience, but our bigger trials and victories come through our communion between just us and God. In this section the disciples have headed back out to fish. They have struggled through the night and not caught a single fish. When they are heading to shore Jesus calls to them and tells them to "cast [their] net on the right side". This is an elegant symbol for what is required of us.

If we are gathering our good from material industriousness, craft, intellect—"the left side" in this case—we will get nothing, or at least nothing of lasting substance with which to feed our soul. If we instead cast our net on the right side, or gather our information from Spirit, we suddenly witness the outpouring of spiritual abundance that is ours. The disciples had seen Jesus heal multitudes, and yet went back to their nets, regarding Christ's mission as "failed". We too may have at times felt that the Christ has failed us in our time of need. But we can,

with the disciples, discern "...Christ, Truth, anew on the shore of time..." (cit. S24/34:24-14) We can gain a fresh sense of the presence of Christ to heal. When human means have failed us, we may then be ready to turn whole-heartedly to Love to understand our abundant supply of good.

When I first moved to Alaska with my husband I was young, right out of college. It was a hard transition for me. I was used to the regular evaluation of my "worth" that school had always given me, and that was notably absent in my work in a restaurant. We were living a pretty spartan life with no running water and no electricity. I was delighted when a couple of friends from school decided to come for a semester to live in our town. I looked forward to their arrival and to doing things with them. But they were really there for their own reasons, not to help me get through this challenging time in my experience. I quickly found myself hurt and disappointed that I couldn't count on them for companionship, or relief of the hunger I was experiencing for something familiar and "fun" to take me away from the mental and physical tasks I faced. It was not until I realized that my need was for something deeper than a casual friendship that I was able to give up this willful desire to have these friends be something that they never intended to be for me.

I needed to give up my fruitless desire to "count on" human support and friendship in that way. I saw that I was resisting the tasks at hand that seemed difficult, unfamiliar, and challenging to me. Looking back on this time, I have many happy memories of sharing a quilting class with them, as well as some meals and jam-making. I found my place in that town by willingly embracing the tasks at hand rather than wishing that they looked more like ones I had succeeded at in the past. Not long after this period, my very best friend from growing up moved nearby, all the way from Massachusetts! She was followed by her sister, and they were both married to good friends of ours in the community. Pretty soon, we had a burgeoning church community as well as deep friendships that nurtured me in the best ways. Sometimes we just need to let our "fruitless efforts in the dark" go, in order to make room for the overflowing nets of Love's grace.

SECTION 7: GRACE IS GOD'S GIFT TO EACH OF US.

This section is a benediction. Sacrament in Christian Science is an acceptance and demonstration of Love's overflowing grace to mankind. Jesus, of course, demonstrated this best for us, but each of us can experience this deep grace as we take-up the trials that cross our path with poise, humility, and confidence in the fact that the great heart of Love bestows healing and grace on each of us without measure.

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