

LESSON 5

Sacred Stuff: The Sacraments

Next on our agenda is to learn about the sacraments. Most likely, you've heard the word "sacrament" in church, but you may not know what it means. And you may not know what the sacraments are in the Methodist Church. Have no fear, though! By the end of this lesson, you'll know a lot more about them and how they are important in your life as a Christian.

You can probably guess that a sacrament is something *sacred*, but beyond that, it is pretty mysterious. The word sacrament comes from "sacramentum," which means the combination of two different things. As a Christian, you can think of this as a covenant, or really important bond, between God and people. When we participate in the sacraments, we are uniting with God in a covenant relationship.

The sacraments, by nature, are mysterious because *God* is mysterious. In fact, they are so mysterious and sacred that only ordained ministers can give and bless the sacraments in the Methodist Church. Ordained ministers have been trained to honor and respect the sacredness of the sacraments. God is so huge, and we are so small... how can some ritual we perform in church suddenly put us in a relationship with Him? It's impossible to totally grasp how it works because sacraments are beyond human understanding. Still, even though we cannot fully understand why or how, we do know that we participate in the sacraments in order to be united with God and celebrate His great love for us.

What are the sacraments in the Methodist Church?

- Baptism
- Communion

Sacrament #1: Baptism

As this book has already mentioned, baptism involves water and symbolizes God's love for us. It is a sign of God's grace poured out into our lives (and onto our heads!) because of Christ's death on the cross. As sinful as we are, even at birth (Psalm 51:5), God cleanses us and makes us new through baptism!

Baptism tells us a lot about God and humanity. We can be baptized as a baby or later in life. Infant baptism shows us that God gives us love even before we can accept it. It tells us that God gives us grace, not because we're super cool or cute or because we've done anything special, but because we *need* it (Ex: Think about how a mother bird cares for her baby birds. She provides a nest because they need shelter, but the baby birds don't necessarily *know* they need shelter since they're so young.). Believers' baptism (ex: an adult professing faith in Christ and asking to be baptized and join the church) shows God's work in a slightly different way. What unites different understandings of baptism is the belief that God is the most important part of the sacrament. 1 Peter 2:10 says that "*Once you were no people, but now you are God's people.*" Basically, without Christ, we're all "lacking" and full of sin. Because of Christ though, we are made complete because God saved us and

set us apart for God's purposes. Baptism symbolizes this "shift." The water of baptism cleanses us, gives us new life, and brings us into God's holy Church!

Baptism also tells us a lot about the home and the Church. When a child is baptized, not only is God working in his or her life, but God is working in the parents' lives and the congregation too! The parents are giving their child to the care of the congregation. They take serious vows and are considered responsible for raising their child in Christian love. Likewise, the congregation is considered responsible for nurturing the child in Christian love. During baptism, God calls both the parents and the congregation to be shepherds over the child and raise him or her to know all about God and His love for the world in Christ.

The three ways we can be baptized:

- 1.) Sprinkling – a little bit of water sprinkled on the head
- 2.) Pouring – a little bit of water poured on the head
- 3.) Immersion – full-on dunk!!

**In every Christian baptism, the minister says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."*

Why use water?

- Water is a symbol of God's love and forgiveness (Matthew 3:11).
- The Holy Spirit moved over water at the beginning of Creation and brought forth life (Genesis 1:2).
- In the Old Testament, God led the Israelites out of slavery through water to freedom (Exodus 13,14).
- Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in water (Mark 1:9-10).

FYI:

Methodists only baptize a person once. The Methodist church (and some other Protestant denominations) believes that baptism is a "one-time deal" because God does it, and what God does never needs to be "re-done." Every once in a while, though, a person might want to be "re-baptized" because he or she did not remember their infant baptism or for other reasons. In this case, the person is not "re-baptized" by the Methodist church, but instead, he or she "remembers" their baptism by having water sprinkled on their head again.

Sacrament #2: Communion

Communion is also known as the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist (which means thanksgiving), and mass (in the Roman Catholic Church). It is the second sacrament in the United Methodist Church. Communion is important for several reasons.

It is our way of remembering.

On the night Jesus was arrested before his crucifixion, he had the Last Supper with his disciples. Back then, the Jews celebrated a time called "Passover" together by eating a meal and worshipping God together. They did this every year to remember how God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom (long story... read the book of Exodus!).

Jesus wanted to eat with his disciples one last time because he wanted them to remember him. He gave them bread, which symbolized his broken body, and wine, which symbolized his shed blood. Jesus wanted his disciples to remember his life and ministry on earth and his death that would save them. As we take communion today, we too are called to remember. We must remember that had Jesus not died on the cross for us, we would not be able to live in eternity with God.

It is our way of celebrating.

Thankfully, Jesus' story did not end at his death! Easter is a happy day because we remember that God raised Christ from the dead. Because of the resurrection, we can experience joy and hope today, as well as look forward to eternal life with God! Communion is a meal we eat to celebrate God's amazing love and mercy.

It is our way to be in community or fellowship.

We've already mentioned that mealtime is hugely important in the Christian life. Communion is a special meal we eat with our Christian brothers and sisters. It's like eating turkey on Thanksgiving with our moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, dogs, etc. We gather together and enjoy the bond of Christ. As many of us as there may be, we eat the same bread and drink the same wine (well, actually, we Methodists drink grape juice!) and are one in Christ!

It is our way to be in God's presence.

The Bible tells us that God freely gives His spirit to all believers in Christ (John 14:15-17, 25-27). We experience the presence of the Holy Spirit during communion. The Holy Spirit gives us peace in the midst of our crazy lives, and it empowers us to continue living for God. Communion can be our "gas station." When we're feeling empty, God's sacred meal can fill us and remind us of our place and purpose in God's world.

What else do I need to know about communion?

Not every church does it the same. At First Methodist McKinney, we take communion by *intinction*, which means we all receive a piece of bread and dip it in the same cup of grape juice. In other churches, people eat small wafers or pieces of bread from a basket and drink grape juice from individual little cups. In the Roman Catholic Church, the people receive the bread, and the drink from the same cup. Some denominations serve wine instead of grape juice. It all depends on the traditions of the particular church. However the church serves it, though, communion is a sacred meal. It should be taken seriously and reverently because Jesus' death was serious and reverent.

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Find out how many sacraments are in the Catholic Church and name them in the space below.
