

M e a n s  
o f  
G r a c e



Week 3

L e n t  
2 0 2 0

## What are “Means of Grace?”

John Wesley taught that God's grace is unearned and that we are not to be idle waiting to experience grace but we are to engage in the means of grace. The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening, and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples. As we look at the means of grace today, they can be divided into works of piety and the works of mercy.

### Works of Piety

Individual Practices – reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others

Communal Practices – regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another), and Bible study

### Works of Mercy

Individual Practices - doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others

Communal Practices – seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of the poor You are invited to engage in many of these means of grace during this season of Lent! Each Sunday, be sure to pick up this weekly devotional as we seek to grow more fully in God's transformational love!



## Discover more ways to engage in Lent online!



Weekly reflection videos: [www.facebook.com/cranfordumcnj](https://www.facebook.com/cranfordumcnj)



Lent Photo-A-Day: @cranfordumc on Instagram



Website: [www.cranfordumc.com](http://www.cranfordumc.com)

**And, of course, Sundays at 10AM!**

### Monday: Scripture

**Scripture:** Psalm 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

**Reflection:** We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Fear is essential to survival in situations where we are under immediate threat, giving us the surge of energy and the strength to run to safety or confront danger directly. Or in our current situation, to be able to break out of our routines to protect those most vulnerable to viral infection.

When fear turns into anxiety or chronic worry, it does the opposite of what it is intended for. It drains our energy, dulls our vision, and saps our will to face the actual or imagined dangers.

There are many scary things in the world, COVID-19 notwithstanding. In the times when we are able to be aware of God as the epicenter of our lives, however, we can let go of our anxieties and let fear be what it is – a survival mechanism, not a constant. Our greatest protection is the knowledge that are created through the power of God who loves us, shapes us, and gives us a vision of how the world can be when we live within that love and let that love move through us. To live in love, even in the midst of disaster or fear, is a choice and love casts out fear.

Tuesday: Music

*“Great is Thy faithfulness  
O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not  
Thy compassions they fail not  
As Thou hast been  
Thou forever will be”*

These lyrics, penned in 1923 by Thomas O. Chisholm, echo last Sunday's scripture reading from Lamentations. It has been a frequent flier in hymnals for almost a century because it beautifully expresses a timeless sentiment that is a couple of millennia old; God is still faithful. If we find ourselves on the mountain top of life's joy – God is still God. If we find ourselves laid low in the valley of the shadow of death and pain – God is still God.

The character of God does not waiver and change based on our individual circumstances or situations. God still cares deeply and intimately about us and our experiences, but regardless of the quality of our own participation in life, God's compassions for us are new each and every morning. God remains faithful in being present.

*“Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!”*

The same God who saw the Israelites through the wilderness, through times of exile, through seasons of famine and plague, will see us through this time of trial as well.

Sunday: Worship

It is important to note that Wesley separates the “means of grace” into a few categories, which includes individual practices and communal practices. This echoes the truth that our faith lives are inherently intimate but also shared as part of community. God calls us to both. This is why church is so important!

If local cases of COVID-19 are reported, we will likely cancel physical congregational worship. At the time of this writing, however, we are still planning on being together on Sunday mornings. It is important that if you find yourself in an at risk population, that you give prayerful consideration to staying home. We want you to be safe.

Though it's not quite the same as being physically together, we will have videos of services available on the church website on Sunday afternoons so that we can continue to engage with one another as a community!

This Week's sermon is entitled: “Hello Future: Future Foundations”

## Saturday: Prayer

### PRAYER FOR A PANDEMIC

May we who are merely inconvenienced.

Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors.

Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home.

Remember those who must choose between preserving their health and making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close.

Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips.

Remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of our economic market.

Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home.

Remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country.

Let us choose Love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other.

Let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen.

## Wednesday: Fasting

In week 1 of Lent, we tried fasting from technology. In Week 2, we tried fasting from food. I encourage you to make both of these types of fasting part of your regular practice of spirituality. This week, I think we need to focus on conquering the inward space even more than the outward space. I'm referring, of course, to our hearts and minds and emotions.

I'm asking us to give up panic for this week. Now that is easily said, isn't it? A little harder to practice. This will manifest differently for each of us. For instance, as cancellations have become rampant at the time of writing this devotion (3/13), I have had to abstain from social media entirely in order to maintain focus and clarity. Information is readily available from the CDC website and from more trusted sources of news. For some, turning off the cable news channels may be a way to help ease some of the tension. When at the store, try not to be selfish in stockpiling, but remember that your neighbors have needs as well.

Fasting is known as a practice of abstaining from something, but we are encouraged to replace the abstention with something positive. If you are working from home or have the kids home from school, this is a unique opportunity for quality time. Play together, cook a meal that you haven't had time for in a while, rest. Check in with folks that you haven't talked to recently on the phone. Take this moment of darkness to look up and see what stars God has scattered throughout our night sky.

Above all, love well. Check in on our vulnerable church family members to see if there are needs that we can meet together as the body of Christ. Putting panic aside, we can find deep meaning in this difficult season. Let us teach our children resilience in the storm, not panic.

#### Thursday: Healthy Living

Intersecting our spiritual Lenten journey with the present reality of COVID-19, let's put Wesley's beliefs about hygiene into practice this week! The CDC advises that the most effective way to prevent the spread of disease is to frequently and thoroughly wash our hands. In fact, they recommend singing "Happy Birthday" to ensure that you are doing enough scrubbing. Here, we can add a bit of spiritual edification. Try singing a verse or two of your favorite hymn instead! There will be no denying your faith when you're belting out "Amazing Grace" in the restroom while washing your hands.

Seriously though, just as communion is a practice of making a simple and common action Holy and special, we have the ability to mark something as necessary as hand washing as an act of discipleship. At the very least, it is watching out for the health of others and especially protects those vulnerable to disease. Not a singer or can't think of that many lyrics off the top of your head? Try saying the Lord's Prayer instead. There are many ways that we can live into the saying that "cleanliness is next to Godliness!"

Our health also includes the practice of social distancing this week, which is hard for Christians sometimes! Remember that these guidelines are not made out of fear, but out of love to protect those who are most vulnerable.

#### Friday: Sharing Faith

Well, there's not going to be a lot of opportunities to share your faith in person with others this week. I would say, however, that behaving in such a way as we've discussed in the other means of grace this week is a strong witness to the faith that we carry in our hearts. Even, perhaps especially in times of crisis our faith rises to the surface. In a time when the human condition leads folks to fight over toilet paper at the grocery store, let us think of our neighbors who have less than we do. In a world where fear grips so many, let us be vigilant but courageous in our commitment to loving others.

As the quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi says, "Preach the Gospel at all times, but only when necessary, use words." This is a time for our actions to speak.