What is the Meaning & Significance of the Sacraments?

And Why This Question is About More Than Just Some Water and Food

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In the myriad of things to be examined in candidates for ministry...

…..why worry about sacraments?
Why worry about the sacraments at all?

- We only need to be concerned about the meaning and significance of the sacraments if Jesus having an actual human body, both by his birth and by his resurrection, is important.
- And if Jesus was also fully divine while also having a human body.
- And if Jesus continues to be both fully divine and fully human.
Article II, The (historic) Articles of Religion of Methodism

- The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided.

- Answering the significance of that “joining together in one person, never to be divided” is the key to answering the meaning and significance of the sacraments.
What’s the Meaning & Significance of the Sacraments?

- To provide us humans access to and participation in the tactile, tangible, and sensible dimensions of the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate, Resurrected Savior and Son of God.
Jesus’ Body: Was It Important?

- Charles Wesley thought so in Hymn 39, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, 1745

  Sinner with awe draw near,
  And find thy Saviour here,
  In his ordinances still,
  Touch his sacramental clothes,
  Present in his power to heal,
  Virtue from his body flows.
A Useful Question

Is spiritual the opposite of physical?
A Potential Problem

- What do we do now since the Ascension?
- Has the Ascension created a problem if we want to encounter the divine through Jesus’ body? Do we have any hope of encountering Jesus Christ in his tangibility?
A Handy Statement of Hope for Us

• Leo I, 5\textsuperscript{th} Century:
  • Preaching an Ascension Day sermon
  • “What was conspicuous in the Redeemer has passed over into the sacraments.”

• Body of Christ
  • Tactile, tangible, and sensible dimensions of who the church is in its union with Jesus Christ
What is the Meaning & Significance of the Sacraments?

- To provide us humans access to and participation in the tactile, tangible, and sensible dimensions of the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate, Resurrected Savior and Son of God.
- To provide the church the means and opportunity to express itself as the Body of Christ.
How Many Sacraments Are There?

- 7?
- 2?
- 0?
Basic Classic Definitions

- Outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace
- A sacrament is a sensible sign to which has been added the grace of God (sacrament = sign + grace)
- Article XVI: Not only human professions but “certain signs of grace and God’s good will toward us, by which he does work invisibly in us, and does not only quicken, but also strengthens and confirms our faith in him”
- A means of grace (Wesley: “ordinary channel by which God conveys grace to people”)
- Sacraments are a cause of grace through the act of signifying
A Note on Grace in These Definitions

- Grace is not an object or a commodity
- Grace is God graciously giving himself in unmerited love through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit
Classic, Biblical Meanings

- Baptism, the sign signifies the following aspects of grace:
  - Birth
  - Washing
  - Union with Christ
  - Reception of the Holy Spirit
  - Incorporation into the Church
  - Flood
  - Passage (Red Sea or Jordan River)
Article XVII

- Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.
Classic, Biblical Meanings

- The Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, Communion, the sign signifies the following aspects of grace:
  - The meals of Jesus or of the OT/divine presence and provision/nourishment and feeding
  - Thanksgiving
  - Communion/Fellowship
  - Sharing of the Spirit
Article XVIII

- The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

- Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

- The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith.

- The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshiped.
Specific Considerations: Baptism

- Who?
  - To receive it? Why?
  - To administer and participate in it?
- How? (How much water and why?)
Specific Considerations: The Lord’s Supper

- Who?
  - To receive it? Why?
  - To administer and participate in it?
- How? (What kind of food?)
Learning from the Rites: Baptism Covenant

- Basic actions:
  - Proclaim
  - Present
  - Renounce
  - Adhere
  - Commit
  - Confess
  - Thank
- Get physical: water, hands, oil, clothing, light
- Fulfill in the Lord’s Supper
Learning from the Rites: The Lord’s Supper

- Basic actions:
  - Take (offer)
  - Bless
    - Thank God the Father by remembering
    - Praise, Heavenly & Global
    - Thank God the Father by remembering Jesus
    - Offering ourselves in union with Christ
    - Petitioning for the Holy Spirit
    - Praising the Trinity
  - Break
  - Share
Sacraments and Worship

- Sacraments are focused, condensed, and tangible aspects of what Christian worship is generally.

- Worship as human access to and participation in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate, Resurrected Savior and Son of God
  - Ministry to the world
  - Ministry to God the Father in heaven

- Worship as the “ongoing song and dance of Jesus Christ.”
“Yes, we praise Jesus the Son with everything within us— but we also join with Jesus in worship as He glorifies His Father. As the Holy Spirit reveals the Lordship of Jesus to the depths of our heart, He also takes us into the Son’s relationship with the Father. Wow!”

_Facedown_, p. 52
“Christian worship is, therefore, our participation through the Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to our Father for all that he has done for us in Christ. It is our self-offering in body, mind, and spirit, in response to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude (eucharistia) to God’s grace (charis), our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ.”

*Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, p. 15.
Good Worship Questions

- WWJS?
- WWJP?