

Bishop: Hello friends, and welcome to this episode of Grace For The Future, a monthly video blog and podcast that explores the different aspects of the means of grace that informs our lives together. Today, we are continuing our journey of exploring the means of grace, and the sacrament of Holy Communion. And today we are grateful to be sharing, and a part of that service, that talks about the peace and the offering. Our guests for today are two laypeople, Dr. Melba McCallum and Pam Moran. I'm going to get them to just share a little bit about themselves, as they prepare to share with us, as we get going with our time together today. And Sister Pam, I'll begin with you. Just share a little bit about who you are, and where you're from, and be grateful for that.

Pam Moran: Thank you, Bishop. And it's such a pleasure to be with both of you today, thank you for this honor and opportunity. Again, my name is Pam Moran. I'm born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky, and I've lived in Henderson, Kentucky now, longer than I lived in Lexington. So, I think I have two hometowns. Attended First Church since the 1980s, in downtown Henderson, an old church, one of the first of the churches that was built in this area, in Henderson. I'm a new grandmother, believe it or not. I was a little late to the game of being a parent. So, I'm the same on being a grandmother and I'm just having such a wonderful time with that. I serve on the board of ordained ministries. And before that I was the Conference Of CFMA Chair, and I just enjoyed the many opportunities, the good people, the Methodist conference, that I've worked with.

Bishop: Wonderful, thank you. And Dr. McCallum, share a little bit about yourself, happy you're here with us today.

Melba McCallum: Okay, good afternoon. And thank you for inviting me to be with you this afternoon. As you mentioned, I'm Melba McCallum, a deaconess in the North Carolina conference, the Gateway district, and I currently service the executive director of Partners In Ministry.

Bishop: And thank you. And now in both these ladies, I've had the privilege to work with, and to share ministry together. Course, our Dr. McCallum is a part of a ministry called, Partners In Ministry, that extends God's grace to the least, and the last, and the lost. And it's just a beautiful ministry that goes on there. And Pam, we're so happy to have you on the podcast, as well. As you said, I've had an opportunity to serve with you on CFA and all the many ways that you helped guide our conference. And using it's resources, and it's stewardship to show God's grace. Today, I'll share two questions with you, and I'll start with you, I'll start again with Pam. And the first question is this, how does this section, particularly about peace, passing the peace, and the offering? How does this section of this sacrament inform our decisions, our conversations, and our discernment about the future.

Pam Moran: Thank you for the chance to think through this part of the liturgy. I've changed my thoughts on this several times, in this preparation. I think initially, at First Church, and I think throughout the Kentucky conference, we suspended the passing of the peace in an effort to provide safety to our members of the

congregation, in the spread of COVID 19. Which has been serious throughout our nation, and especially serious in Kentucky, and still is. For me, this has always been a time of fellowship and expression of love.

And for some members, I think about, Bishop, when we return to, let's say, a full church. COVID has been restrained and infection is not an issue. I suspect that we will spend an extended period of time, maybe over several Sundays, passing the peace. This is something that is so important to certain members of the congregation and they miss it terribly, they speak about this. But something I think that's come up, or that, at least that we've begun to realize, is for some people they're very uncomfortable with this part of the service. And they're not comfortable with passing of the peace. So, I truly believe that we're going to spend some time in the future being more sensitive to this, and to what we can do to make this a good and holy part of the service.

But as I've talked through some of the things that I think about with this, this is not to me... And I would love to hear from you and Dr. McCallum about this. It's not reconciliation, for me, it is more about fellowship and love. And how can we perhaps strengthen this area of how we deal with this in the liturgy, and maybe in these periods of time. I think that's it for me.

Bishop:

And so, as you were talking, I appreciate the fact about how we've missed it, and how there are oftentimes we don't recognize the beauty of that until we've missed it. Until we've missed that ability to touch, which is something that Jesus did throughout his ministry, is when he healed people, he touched them. And just something about the touch, even though people are uncomfortable with it. But like you said, I think that when we go back, people are going to want to be able to share that gift with each other. And so, I appreciate your bringing to our... Recalling to our memories. What touch does, and how even touch, appropriate touch, can be a means of grace for somebody who's gone through something serious. It's a grace, it is a grace. And so Dr. McCallum, same question, what do you see the passing of the peace, and how it informs our conversations, our decisions, and our lives together, as a means of grace.

Melba McCallum:

Yes, I've also looked at this question a lot, and I've changed it several times, because I'm a person that's outside of the walls of the church. And so, yes, in the church and how we do those things, but we've been out of church now for a while. And we still have to understand how do we do that means of grace, how do we still inform and make decisions or conversations? Somewhat, I wanted to move from that stance to look at how are we doing it now. Now that we're not... Because I think during this time that we are in, we have to do things differently.

And so, we have to understand what that means of grace is? What does that mean, of grace? What does that mean? So, I approached it from that standpoint, what the means of grace is. It's a gift from God that guides us in our decisions, our conversations, and our discernment, and this gift allows us the free will, as we are outside of our churches, to forgive, to care for others, to

reconcile differences, and to transform into the likeness of Christ, as we grow in love with God and our neighbors.

And in response to God's grace, as we pass along, the folks that we meet daily, we offer ourselves and our gifts to God. This is what God's grace is. We're offering ourselves, freely, in a life of service, of loving our neighbor, while we are out there. Sharing in the struggles together, becoming active participants in showing God's love in our ever-changing world, through mission and ministry. God's grace moves us to offer our time, and our talent, and our insight, and concerns for others, intangible acts of love and service by sharing.

Sharing with any brother or sister, who has a need. Bearing one another's burden is listening to one another, praying for one another, touching, and hugging, and embracing, and encouraging one another. Whether we're inside the walls of the church, or outside of the walls of the church, still in ministry. So, God's grace, and our love for Christ, helps us to inform our decisions, our conversations, and our discernment, during difficult, trying times. Or even in the best of times, it helps us to make those decisions. So, it challenges us to move beyond ourselves, our interests, and our concern to fulfill God's purpose for our future.

Bishop:

Yeah, and I like the way both of you have sort of crafted your answers around this thing about peace. As Pam was talking, we're not together anymore. We've not been together in passing the peace, we don't do, because we do value the sacredness of life. And we want every person, we've lost too many people, too many good people, one too many to this disease. But Dr. McCallum, as you were talking, it brought back to my mind, is the table of the Lord in that invitation? And in that liturgy, do we practice passing the peace, in order to share that peace when we are away from the table? And how have we discovered new ways to pass that peace, in the help of other people in sharing the blessings? Is there other ways that you can pass that peace, even though we've not been to the table? Of course, when you're at the table of the Lord, and you hear that wonderful invitation, and you do your confession, your next step is to say I'm at peace.

And to be able to say that to a brother or sister, peace be with you, Jesus did it over and over again. When he met people, he said, "Peace be with you." And so, how do we practice that? So, practicing at the table gives us the encouragement. And I hope the example of how to pass that peace when we're out in the world. So just, I like that, I never thought about peace like that, outside of this literature. So, you've helped me a great deal in understanding that peace, not just at the table, but you practiced a peace at the table, to do it when you're out. So, I thank both of you for giving us more insight in that. The second question is this one, as you think about this peace, where have you seen it? And Dr. McCallum, you've given us beautiful examples, but where have you seen it lived out, in your work, or in your life? Where have you seen that peace work? And this time I'll start, Dr. McCallum, with you and then down to Sister Pam. So, where have you seen it?

Melba McCallum: Well Bishop, first of all, these are incredible challenging times but we have incredible opportunities to live into our call of love, justice, and service. I see signs of grace through selfless acts of others, as we understand, how interconnected we are as people. So, I see communities coming together to support the greater good of all, advocating for the most vulnerable, caring for our neighbors, and supporting and serving our community. But I've been blessed, not only to have an opportunity to see how, and where, the means of grace has lived out. But I've also had an opportunity to be in a position to respond to God's grace through this season, from transition and uncertainty, and anxiety, at Partners In Ministry. I see the means of grace lived out in the love and compassion, when our staff offer themselves and their gifts, to serve God, and to be of service.

That's through the critical home repairs that we do, to ensure the safest possible living conditions for our families. Also, providing food and essential needs for the most vulnerable, as we partner with our communities, our churches, to ensure that the community's basic needs are met. And engaging and challenging our youth and young adults to find hope, during these times of challenging situations that they are seeing themselves in. I see God's grace abound when those we serve become servants of God. As they become volunteers, to join in the ministry with us, especially during these uncertain times. It has really been amazing to see how God's grace, and his provision, has equal partners in ministry. To adapt, to becoming a nurturing ministry, a servant ministry. And lastly, I find peace in God's amazing grace, and trust that God is with us, during this season. And this season has not caught God by surprise. We can have peace in knowing that God is in total control of all the circumstances that are going on right now.

Bishop: Great, thank you. All right, Pam, where have you seen, Pam, this piece lived out, in your life, or in areas of work that you've done. What do you see it?

Pam Moran: Bishop, Dr. McCallum, I knew I was going to be inspired by both of you just being a part of this. And I want to thank you both for what you're doing for me. Very early in the pandemic, and I really think it was April 2020, the pastor and associate pastor, reached out to members of our ministry teams. And we divided up all of the members of the congregation and put them on lists of 10, with their phone numbers, with their contacts, and then divided them up among members of those teams, evangelism, spiritual formation, fellowship. And the individual assigned to someone on the list would call, and simply ask, "How are you? Is there anything that you need? Is there anything that, we at the church, could provide?" And then they would be in prayer. And then, periodically, and to me, this was that passing of the peace, virtually if you will, or by phone or text.

And so, periodically, the pastors would say, "All right, we're going to call our teams again, call our individuals." And it has continued for some individuals, they never stopped calling their lists. They would call the people on their list weekly, just continue that relationship, and that support, and that love. And so

even in these months of isolation, I've witnessed, I've felt, that support within the congregation. But again, to me, that part of confession, and repentance, and reconciliation. Initially, when I was putting my notes together, I thought, "Well, we've been in some isolation, perhaps that reconciliation is not the issue, and His means of grace are being delivered in other ways." But then, I know that's wrong, I know that we're... People are having very difficult times.

There are breaks in relationships of family, and friends, and we've become somewhat polarized on so many issues, including the pandemic. That again, I reach out, and I believe, and I'm listening to you all, and we're going to discuss it more at church. Are there things that we can, and should be doing, even in isolation? Is there an opportunity to be more in love with our neighbors? Is there something that we can remember about this part of the liturgy, whether it's virtual or not, and pass that level of peace on.

Bishop: And you mentioned about the calls, and I know Partners In Ministry does a lot of these things, even, you've not slowed down, even though we're in a pandemic. If anything, you've found ways to speed up, because it's been needed. But Pam, as you were talking about the calls, I was intrigued by that. Because sometimes when a person has been in isolation, or sometimes when a person has been hurt, or feel like they've been harmed, sometimes the beginning step is to hear another human voice, even on the other end of the phone. And that could be the beginning of what you just shared with us. How do we do this, in this season that we're in? Sometimes a phone call brings a tremendous amount of peace, to a person who's been struggling. And so, I'm grateful for this conversation because what we are trying to figure out, is these are our means of grace.

This is a sacrament that Jesus calls us to do, but in the season we're living in, how do you live? How do you still live, into what Christ calls us to do in these sacraments? And how could they still be a means of grace for us? The other piece of our question today had to do around the offering, and we've had to discover different ways to do that, but what about the offering? Is there any means of grace in us bringing offerings to God? Or, to Dr. McCallum, saying offering different services to God, can those be seen as means as grace for the future, as well? Do we stop giving because we're in a pandemic or do we find different ways? And so Dr. McCallum, does it mean we stop, or do we keep going, and how does that affect how we see grace?

Melba McCallum: Yeah. It is so important that we continue to give, so that God's work can continue to go on. That is, we need it more than ever, now. We need the offering more than... We need to give ourselves our first fruits, that still must happen. That is that blessing, that we cannot move away from God, blesses us to bless others. And we're going to need those blessings. We're going to continue to need that more than ever now, because we have to do ministry in so many different ways.

So, we're going to still need to be able to bring back that offering to the storehouse. We're going to have to continue to do those kinds of things, so that

God's work can move wide. Not just inside the walls of the church, but now we're going to have to move out. So, we're needing those dollars, even more so than ever, we have to continue to do the ministry. We have to do it in different ways, but that we also going to need to have a support, all to bring, and continue to bring those offerings, so that God's work can continue to be done.

Bishop: And so, as Pam has reminded us too, we're not only in a season of COVID 19, but there's a lot of division, lot of polarization. And so, as I hear you talk, you're saying that none of that precludes us, continue to bring our offering to God. And I appreciate you helping me to get that picture in my mind, as well. We can't stop. We, regardless of what's going on in the world, or in institutions, we have to keep offering because Christ offers himself to us, in the beginning of the liturgy itself. So Pam, same question. What do you see us bringing our gifts to God, in this season? How would it help form who we are and what we do?

Pam Moran: I don't see Henderson First different from any other churches that I've talked to. And it's comforting to know, that no pandemic is going to keep us from worship and communion. And for all those times that we didn't think that we had the funds, if you will, to be technologically sound. We can now have worship on YouTube and we'll have worship adapted on a DVD for someone to take home with them. And we'll meet in parking lots, and we'll meet in large venues, but we will come together. And I found that we found the money, to be more technologically savvy than we were before. And I think that's going to be a comfort forever, to people who are ill, or who are in the hospital, they can still participate in worship, and at peace with that. For us, the offering plate is, kind of, left now at the beginning, or the exit of the sanctuary.

And you can leave anything in there, when we are meeting within the sanctuary. But we've also strengthened our online giving, and given that opportunity to people, to give in a way that we probably should have done before. We were a little behind in allowing individuals to give in that way. We've changed how we reference it. Bishop, you know we had Jason Moore, at the annual conference, and he helped us, kind of, look at ourselves in a new way.

And so, we talk about it being a blessing, and a gift of that blessing, and investment in that blessing. And I think that's been good for us. Early on, and I'm talking about early in 2020, for both the conference and for our church, we were concerned that people might not be able to give, that they weren't going to have the funds to give, and we were wrong. Such abundance, such generosity, even in these difficult times, I think has been across the board. We're seeing it everywhere. We're seeing it in small businesses, we're seeing it in churches, we're seeing it in conference giving. And that to me has... I was so glad to see we were wrong, that, this grace, this sharing of resources, and caring for one another, has been strong.

Bishop: Yeah, and then you reminded me of something when you mentioned that we were wrong. I've learned in this period, to always tell myself I could be self-righteously wrong. So he reminded me of that, once again, but the beauty of

this conversation that we've had together, and I'll say this to our audience, because I have worked with both of you. And you have shared with us beautifully, Pam, you within context of the local church. And it comes across, that's where your heart is, in that, both these pieces, the peace and the offering, are important to how we live in the midst of our local churches. And Dr. McCallum, you brought us a very deep concept of, how do we do this? How does this grace extend to something like a Partners In Ministry? That's not like a worshiping community, but in a way it is, because you're worshiping the Lord when you give, and you support, and you take care of the last, the lost and the least.

So, hearing this conversation in those two contexts has been amazing and beautiful. It's teaching me that God's grace cannot be restricted or limited, that God's grace covers everything. And so, I thank the both of you for being with us today and sharing that. In this means of grace, there is hope, there is healing, and we are wonderfully surprised that we don't serve a God of scarcity, but a God of abundance. And that is, a deep grace that will always be sufficient for all that we might ever need. So, thank you both for sharing with us today, know and go in peace, know my blessings. And our prayers go with you, and keep doing what God has called you to do, and be. Blessings on both of you.

Melba McCallum: Thank you.

Pam Moran: Thank you so much.

Bishop: And again, friends, we thank you for joining us for this episode of Grace For The Future. It is my hope and my prayer that you will be with us next time, as we continue to explore together, the wonders of God's grace. Peace and blessings to you, my brothers and sisters. Thank you for joining us. We look forward to seeing you next time.