



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology New Birth

*“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.
⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ John 3:5-7*

One of the most pernicious heresies of the twentieth century is embodied in the term “Born Again Christian.” A heresy is a false teaching that leads us away from the Gospel. And the way this term has been used and understood by many Christians places it in the category of heresy.

To begin with, if one is a Christian they have, by definition, been born again. As the term is commonly used by news outlets and too many Christian traditions it implies that there are two categories of Christians: general run of the mill Christians and an elite group of Christians who have been “born again.” That is the heresy and it is harmful to the body of Christ. This harmful teaching about the New Birth is often accompanied by a teaching that, if you have been “born again,” you can name the day, hour and minute of the experience. Some falsely teach that, if you cannot identify the moment of new birth, you have not really experienced salvation. This teaching can be especially devastating to youth who are made to feel unworthy because they have not shared an experience that their peers claim to have experienced.

However, it is not possible to channel all spiritual experience into one mold. That particular heresy was one that Paul was addressing in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul tells the Christians of Corinth that the Spirit of God works in different ways in different people but is still just one spirit:

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

To claim to have discerned the one and only way that the Spirit of God can manifest in the heart of a believer is presumption that almost defies comprehension. Who are we to proclaim that God can only work in another's life according to rules we lay down? Wesley knew some people who did appear to have experiences of the Spirit that seemed to strike like a lightning bolt. Wesley himself had a memorable spiritual experience that provided him assurance of salvation. However, Wesley also observed that others experienced a more gradual form of conversion.

In Wesleyan theology the new birth is viewed as part of a larger experience that Wesley called *Regeneration*. Regeneration begins when the prevenient grace of God brings about an *Awakening*; an awareness of our need for salvation. Such awakening can be triggered in many ways. A personal tragedy, a traumatic experience, a single conversation or many conversations with a close friend, even a sermon might start to awaken a person to their need for a saving relationship with God. Or it might be a combination of some or all of these experiences. This process might be very sudden and therefore memorable or it might be a gradual process taking place over a period of months or even years. If one is raised in the church, attending Sunday School and church all their life, the process probably will be a more gradual one.

As a result of the awakening, the person comes to acknowledge the sin in their life and the need for *Repentance*. Repent is a term borrowed from Judaism and means literally "to turn." Repentance in Judaism and Christianity means to turn your life back to God. Repentance involves acknowledging the sin in our lives and acknowledging that we are dependent upon the Grace of God for life. Repentance means to acknowledge that, without the help and grace of God, we cannot live lives of righteousness; that is live in "right relationship" with God. Moreover, it includes the acknowledgment that God enables righteous living through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This right relationship with God through Christ is what we mean when we speak of salvation. It includes not only forgiveness of our past sins but the gracious assistance of God to live lives in right relationship to God. It is also the power that binds us together as the Body of Christ.

With repentance and acceptance of Christ comes the *New Birth*. The Justifying Grace of God places us in right relationship with God; brings us salvation. As discussed in previous articles, the prevenient and sanctifying grace of God also continues to work in our lives calling us back when we stray and working to perfect us in love; to help us claim the image of God which we all share.

If you have accepted Christ in your life you have been born again. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. And, if you feel the need to reaffirm that acceptance of Christ, the United Methodist Church offers a liturgy for that purpose. It is not rebaptism (which is not practiced in the United Methodist Church) but an opportunity to renew the vows made when you were baptized or confirmed. If you wish to reaffirm your faith, reaffirm your baptismal vows, let me know and I will schedule it for a Sunday of your choosing if at all possible.

Holy Week

What a glorious week! Thanks to everyone who worked on the Holy Thursday and Good Friday services. Thanks especially for your hard work on the Easter Egg Hunt. We had around 35 children who were old enough to hunt for the eggs on their own and another half dozen toddlers. Some of these were children and grandchildren of our members. Others were invited by members. And a significant number came because they saw the sign out front, the announcement in the newspaper, or the notices on Facebook and the web site. Finally, we had a wonderful Easter morning service, thanks especially to Lynn, Marilyn, Ensley and the choir.

Easter Sermon Series Christian Essentials

On Easter Sunday I started a new sermon series called “Christian essentials.” This series will continue through the next five Sundays in Easter (The time between Easter Sunday and Pentecost is Easter). The purpose of the series is to address some of the questions common to new Christians and old alike. The sermon Titles are:

How Can I Believe in the Resurrection? (Easter Sunday)

Doubt is Good

It's all About Christ

We Worship God, Not the Bible

God Will Not Leave You Behind

We Are the Body of Christ

Any time is a good time to invite someone you know to share in our worship. But, the sermon series in particular provides an opportunity to open such a discussion and make an invitation. Always remember, most new people come to a church because someone they know invites them.

Sermon Topics

It has been a while since I reminded everyone that I would like to hear from you regarding sermon topics. Not all topics lend themselves to a sermon format, even as part of a series. But, if there is a topic you would like addressed I'd be glad to do so. If, in my judgment, we cannot fit the topic into a sermon format, we can schedule a class to study the question from a Christian and biblical perspective.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

⁸ *When the people of Zion
and of the towns of Judah
hear that God brings justice,
they will celebrate. Psalm 97:8 CEV*

When the people hear that God brings justice, they will celebrate. Is that our experience? Too often, I'm afraid, we don't really desire justice and fairness unless there is some benefit in it for us. In Ken Burn's series on the Civil War, Shelby Foote tells a story about a young trooper brought up on charges before General

Lee. The trooper was literally shaking in his boots before the General. Lee, perceiving the man's fright, sought to comfort him. He told him, "Don't be afraid young man, you'll only receive justice here." To which the man replied, "That's why I'm shaking, General." If we perceive ourselves to be in the right, we want to be treated with justice and fairness. But, if we have benefitted from what is unjust or unfair, we are probably not in a hurry to see the situation corrected. .

About this same time Jesus was told that Pilate had given orders for some people from Galilee to be killed while they were offering sacrifices. ² Jesus replied:

Do you think that these people were worse sinners than everyone else in Galilee just because of what happened to them? ³ Not at all! But you can be sure that if you don't turn back to God, every one of you will also be killed. ⁴ What about those eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were worse than everyone else in Jerusalem? ⁵ Not at all! But you can be sure that if you don't turn back to God, every one of you will also die. Luke 13:1-5 CEV

The people around Jesus want assurance that they are not as bad as these people who have suffered tragic and unexpected deaths. They seem to assume that God has brought about these deaths as punishment; that those who died received the justice of God. They fear receiving God's justice. Jesus both assures them and warns them. God is not dropping buildings on peoples' heads nor causing maniacs like Pilate to kill indiscriminately. Jesus tells them that living unrighteous lives, lives outside of relationship with God, is as sure a death as any these people suffered. As painful as we may find it, we are called to live lives of fairness and justice.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We have just begun a study of the Book of Numbers. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Disciple Bible Study Opportunity

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

I have been approached by two people who would be interested in a Disciple Bible Study to meet from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursday evenings. I would like to get at least five more people to participate in this study. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful opportunity. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact me.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

April 27th: Christian Essentials: *Doubt is Good.* Some Christians believe that having doubts is a sign of a lack of faith. Indeed, that having doubts about Christian teaching is a sin. Yet, doubt is often found as the driving engine behind the most profound faith. My texts are John 20:19-29 and Mark 9:14-24.

May 4th: Christian Essentials: *It's All About Christ.* We are called Christian for a reason. Our faith is based upon the act of God in becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. Yet it seems to me that, at times, we make our faith more about ourselves than about Christ. My texts are Philippians 2:5-8 and John 1:1-5, 14.

Worship Leaders Schedule

April 27

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Ushers**

May 4

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

Announcements

The dates for serving at **61st United Methodist Church** are **May 24, August 16, November 15**. These occasions are all Saturdays.

There are sign-up lists on the Bulletin Board for volunteers who will prepare communion as well as hosting the First Sunday meal. Please sign up!

April Birthdays

Betty Whitefield, Mary Coleman, Jo Oliphant, Jason Aldred, Houston Hartsock

Happy Birthday to each of you!