



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Christian Perfection

⁴⁸ *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

When one is to be ordained in the United Methodist Church they are asked several questions that have been asked of all Methodist pastors for over two-hundred and fifty years:

Have you Faith in Christ?

The Answer: Yes

Are you going on to Perfection?

The Answer: Yes

Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?

The Answer: Yes, through the Grace of God.

All candidates for ordination know that these questions are coming and the expected answers. There is a story in the Tennessee Conference, supposedly from the 40s or 50s, that when the Bishop asked a group of potential Elders these questions they stumbled over the question, “Are you going on to Perfection?” Not getting a prompt answer, the Bishop then inquired, “If you are not going on to perfection, where are you going?”

One of the most debated aspects of Wesleyan Theology, and possibly the most misunderstood, is the concept of Christian Perfection. The basis for this doctrine is found in the scriptures quoted above along with some scriptures from the Old Testament that speak of the perfection of God’s Law (see e.g. Psalm 19:7-9). Wesley believed that the scripture was not intended to mock us and that Jesus’ teachings in particular were not intended to mock us. If Jesus commanded his followers to seek perfection then perfection was possible. If Paul told the Churches that it was possible to discern what conduct was perfect in the eyes of God, then it was indeed possible. But, it is important to understand what Wesley meant by Christian Perfection.

Christian Perfection does not mean that it is impossible for one to make mistakes. As indicated in the third of the Historic Questions, the goal was to be made **perfect in love**. Wesley believed that, through the power of God's Sanctifying Grace (see last week's newsletter), it was possible for one to share the heart and mind of Christ; to see and respond to the world as Christ would see and respond to the world. Wesley also spoke of this as uncovering the God given image of God that is the legacy of all humanity. Christian perfection, then, is having the heart and mind of Christ.

Christian Perfection should not be confused with salvation. Wesley taught that salvation comes through faith in the sacrifice of Christ; the Justifying Grace of God. However, Wesley believed that the Justifying Grace of God did not bring out our full potential as Christian Disciples. We enter our lives of discipleship as children in the faith and we are expected to grow in our faith through the power of God's Sanctifying Grace. If perfection was not reached in this life, Wesley believed that God granted it as a gift at death.

To further muddle the waters, Wesley believed that even those who had reached Christian Perfection could still grow in discipleship. There can never be a time when we are on parity with God. Moreover, as Methodists, Wesley taught that it was possible to lose the status of perfection. In the English Methodist Societies it was accepted that disciples might become "backsliders." That, having received the justifying grace of God, or even after attaining Christian Perfection, a person might fall away from the faith. This is something that everyone could witness happening from time to time and was the reason Wesley rejected the concept of "once saved, always saved." The Good News, the Gospel, was that God's Prevenient Grace was constantly calling those people back and that God's Justifying Grace was always available for those who truly accepted it.

Did Wesley believe that he had attained Christian Perfection before his death? No. He did, however, believe that he had met some people who seemed to have attained perfection.

The significance of these doctrines of Grace and Perfection is found in the history of the Methodist movement. At a time when British society was heavily stratified and poverty was universal, the Methodist societies sought to reach out to the world around them. This was part of the *methodical* manner in which they celebrated their faith. They established orphanages, schools, food kitchens and clinics. They may have been the first Westerners to utilize the concept of micro-loans to enable people to buy tools with which to work and establish small business that could support their families. They knitted people together in small groups, called classes, that emphasized living lives of Discipleship and responsibility. When they gathered they might listen with interest to someone's ecstatic experience of the spirit, but the core question addressed in the group was: "How goes it with your soul?" In short, they demonstrated what it looks like when people take seriously the concept that they are the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Some historians credit Wesley and the Methodist Societies with saving England from the peasant revolts of the type that raged in France, Germany and other European nations. The Methodist Societies shared a Gospel of love, concern and hope with the people of England.

It is these doctrines that have also driven much of the ministry of the United Methodist Church through the decades. John Wesley proclaimed that the world was his parish. We continue to believe in, and proclaim, the importance of sharing God's Grace with the world around us. Through sharing God's grace, we receive God's grace. As we share God's grace, God's grace works in our lives moving us onward toward perfection in our love for the world and God's people.

Holy Week

This Sunday begins the last week in the season of Lent. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week. It begins as we commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem when the crowds greeted him by laying palm branches in his path. Our **Palm Sunday** service will be a service of lessons and hymns. We will recall not only the entry into Jerusalem but also the Last Supper, the agony in the Garden, the arrest and trial of Jesus, his crucifixion and his burial. We do this because not everyone can attend services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We cannot fully appreciate Easter Sunday unless we also recall the Passion of Christ.

On Thursday we will have a combined **Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae service**. Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin phrase *mandatum novum* meaning New Commandment. Jesus gave his Disciples a new commandment on that night as recorded in John 13:34-35:

³⁴ *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

The Tenebrae Service is sometimes called a Service of Shadows. It is a meditation on the passion of Christ. Just before the service begins the church will be "stripped." The symbols of the faith will be removed (the Cross on the altar, the altar cloth, etc). The sanctuary will be lit by candles and the passion story will then be read as the candles are extinguished.

On **Good Friday** at noon we will hold a short service recalling the crucifixion. Scripture tells us that the crucifixion took place between noon and 3 o'clock. The Scripture will be read from the lectern instead of the pulpit. The pulpit represents the proclaimed Word of God and Good Friday is the day that we sought to remove the Word of God from the world. The church will remain open until 3:00 PM for those who wish to stop, meditate and pray.

Easter Sermon Series Christian Essentials

I'll be starting a new sermon series on Easter Sunday and continuing for 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?

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

If you have been considering inviting a friend or neighbor to share our worship, Easter Sunday would be a good time to start. If they are new to Christianity, these sermons will be a way of opening discussion about the Church.

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.

¹ *When all of the other gods
have come together,
the Lord God judges them
and says:*

² *“How long will you
keep judging unfairly
and favoring evil people?”*

³ *Be fair to the poor
and to orphans.*

*Defend the helpless
and everyone in need.*

⁴ *Rescue the weak and homeless
from the powerful hands
of heartless people. Ps 82:1-4 CEV*

Psalm 82 has an unusual opening with its reference to other gods. Some commentators consider it a transitional Psalm from a time when Israel was moving from a polytheistic worldview to a monotheistic world view. (Compare Psalm 115:3-8 that begins *Our God is in the heavens, doing as he chooses.* ⁴ *The idols of the nations are made of silver and gold.*) These other “gods” represent a Divine Council of sorts that is nonetheless answerable to the one true God. The message, however, is a familiar one by now. These other gods and their human followers are using their authority to oppress the poor, the weak, the homeless, the helpless and “everyone in need.” In God’s eyes, “being heartless,” failing to show mercy and compassion to those who are helpless, is a crime. God sits in judgment on their conduct and, at the end of the Psalm, condemns them to a mortal death “*just like everyone else.*” Psalm 82:7 CEV

One day a king decided to call in his officials and ask them to give an account of what they owed him. ²⁴ *As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him fifty million silver coins.* ²⁵ *But he didn't have*

any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt.

²⁶ The official got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!" ²⁷ The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he did not have to pay back the money.

²⁸ As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him a hundred silver coins. So he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, "Pay me what you owe!"

²⁹ The man got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you back." ³⁰ But the first official refused to have pity. Instead, he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.

³¹ When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. ³² The king called the first official back in and said, "You're an evil man! When you begged for mercy, I said you did not have to pay back a cent. ³³ Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?" ³⁴ The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. ³⁵ That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart. Matthew 18:23-35 CEV

The theme of Psalm 82 is the driving force behind the story of the unforgiving official. The King showed mercy in his dealings with the official, not only by relenting from punishment but forgiving a gigantic debt. But, the official refuses to show the same mercy to someone who owed him a miniscule debt in comparison to the one forgiven. Jesus tells the people that God expects judgments among ourselves to be tempered with mercy and compassion, especially when dealing with those who have very little. Being "heartless" is conduct to be condemned.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Psalms. 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 that met 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 13th : Palm Sunday: Lessons and Hymns. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Passion Week. On Palm Sunday we will recall the events of the last week in the life of Christ beginning with his entry into Jerusalem and ending with his crucifixion. This is a service of lessons and hymns. There is no sermon.

April 20th: Christian Essentials: *How Can I Believe in the Resurrection?* The resurrection is a stumbling block to many modern people. In fact it was a stumbling block to the early Christians as well. Being crucified by the Romans was not a sign that one had the favor of God, and people in the first century were as skeptical about resurrection as are modern people. Yet, belief in the resurrection is essential to our faith. My texts are 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 and Luke 24:13-35.

Worship Leaders Schedule

April 13

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Marty Bauguess & Sam Richardson, **Ushers**

April 20

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**

Julia & Tom Moore, **Ushers**

Announcements

Order forms for **Easter Lilies** are located on the shelves inside the side door. The lilies are \$8.00 each and can be given in memory of or to honor a loved one, a friend or family member. Brooks is coordinating this process.

Easter Egg Hunt

WHEN: Saturday, April 19, 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

WHERE: Trinity UMC

Volunteers Needed!

To prepare for 50 children up to age 12 and their accompanying adults.

We will need some help before the event in the form of egg stuffing (we have 600 eggs), food prep, advance publicity poster placement, and set up. In addition, we're looking for people during the event to supervise the bag decorating table, bounce house, duck pond, games, and prizes. We would like to find some folks to be in charge of face painting, family photos, and music & PA system. **A signup sheet is posted on the bulletin board or you can let Julia or Jeanne know what you'd like to do.** Also, need some "fishing poles" appropriate for the duck pond. Thanks in advance to all!

Ladies, please plan to attend the **UMW meeting Tuesday, April 15 at 6:00 PM.** The discussion will include the Mission event at our church April 22. Thank you for your support of this ministry.

On April 22nd at 6:00 p.m., the ladies of our church will be hosting the annual **Columbia District United Methodist Women's Partners in Mission Dinner/Event at our church.**

This year the focus mission is **BRIDGES of Williamson County, a local Shelter and Domestic Violence Program.** Our guest speaker is **Linda Crockett Jackson, the founder of BRIDGES.** BRIDGES offers the standard core components of shelter, court advocacy, child advocacy, support groups, clinic services and outreach. We look forward to learning more about this mission and Ms. Jackson's work.

If you would like to help BRIDGES, there will be boxes placed around the church marked BRIDGES for donations that we want to begin collecting from now until April 22nd. Please see the list below.

Kroger gift cards in **SMALL** denominations, given to clients to purchase gas, prescriptions and food. Please give these to our Treasurer, Nanette.

Additional items needed by the clients of BRIDGES:

kitchen and lawn size garbage bags

laundry detergent

60W light bulbs

copy paper

cleaning products - no Lysol or bleach products please

body wash

shampoo/creme rinse

Please see Dana for more information.

The dates for serving at **61st United Methodist Church** are **April 19, May 24, August 16, November 15**. These occasions are all Saturdays. Be aware that April 19 is the Saturday before Easter. Food will be purchased and taken to the 61st Street church that day but we will not be serving the food.

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!