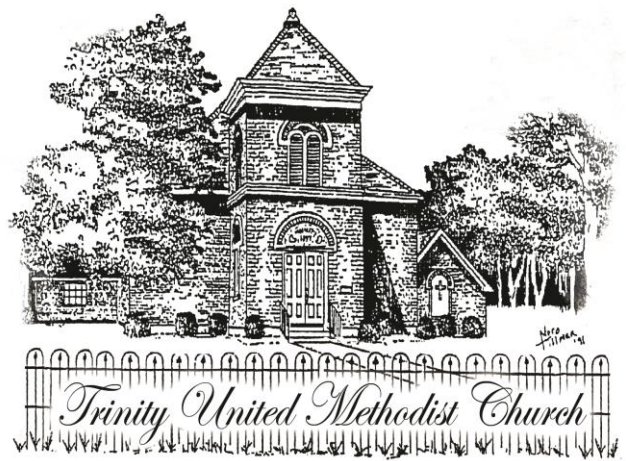




# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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June 18, 2014

## Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Our Theological Task (Part 2)

<sup>28</sup> *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* <sup>29</sup> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.* <sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:28-30*

<sup>4</sup> *just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.*  
<sup>5</sup> *He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,*  
<sup>6</sup> *to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:4-6*

In the last article we established that we, as Christians, have an on-going responsibility to engage our faith. We are to ask what our faith means in our lives, the lives of those around us and what our faith means for the world. This is our “Theological Task” as Christians. Our Theological Task is based, in part, upon the teachings of the Church of England (The Anglican Church). Wesley, an Anglican Priest, applied what was called the *via media* or “Middle Way” to aid him in translating his faith into the realities of his world.

The Anglican Middle Way acknowledged that our faith was a living faith capable of addressing concerns never imagined by the writers of scripture. Anglicans were called upon to engage in theological thinking to discern how their faith called them to live in the contemporary world. The Middle Way was meant to avoid the dangers of religious fundamentalism and radicalism that had disrupted Great Britain during the reigns of Henry the VIII, Edward VI and Mary, first daughter of Henry. Recall that Henry had clashed with the Roman Catholic Church over his divorces as he searched for a Queen to give him an heir. Henry, in response to the Roman Catholic’s Church refusal to recognize his multiple marriages, had established the Church of England that was, never the less, very “Catholic” in nature and theology. At this time the protestant Reformation was well underway and there were many in England who desired to form the Church of England along the lines of the emerging Protestant traditions. Edward, Henry’s son, had lead the Church in a peculiarly protestant, anti-Catholic reformation. Henry’s daughter Mary, also known as “Bloody Mary,” led a persecution of the protestants when she came to power. For decades England was wracked by religious upheaval and rebellion. Queen Elizabeth I, the sister of Mary, pushed the Anglican Church toward the “Middle Way” developed under the leadership of an Anglican Priest named Richard Hooker.

Hooker proposed that our faith was to be shaped by reference to three sources: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Scripture is the primary source for our religious understanding. Scripture contains all the teachings necessary for our salvation and no condition for salvation can be proposed that is not contained in scripture. As used in the Middle Way, “scripture” meant all of scripture. No particular passage of scripture could be interpreted standing alone but must be seen in light of all other scripture. This limitation not only provided for a firmer understanding of scripture as a whole but avoided the dangers brought about through “proof texting”; i.e. focusing upon a narrow passage of scripture that supported a proposition while ignoring contrary scriptures.

Hooker also proposed that theologians view scripture in light of Christian Tradition. Each generation of Christians struggles with the call of scripture and the problems of following our faith in a changing world. When approaching theological questions we ought to take into account how prior generations have answered these or similar questions. We are not the first Christians to read scripture or struggle with our faith. By looking at the Tradition of the Church we can find guidance from the understanding of those who have gone before us.

Finally, Hooker proposed that religion must be “reasonable.” Reason is a God given gift and our theology must therefore be subject to logical evaluation. Wesley once noted that he would as soon give up his soul as to abandon his reason. The Anglican Middle way then was to approach theological reflection with the focus on Scripture as the primary source, illuminated and guided by tradition and reason.

Wesley added a fourth element to the Middle Way. He believed that God, through the Holy Spirit, enabled humankind to Experience God’s presence and work in the world. He taught that this experience of the Holy Spirit was an important element in our spiritual formation. Thus, when Wesley engaged in theological reflection, he used Scripture as the primary source of understanding, illuminated by Tradition, Reason and Experience of the Holy Spirit. Although Wesley never used the term quadrilateral, later theologians described Wesley’s approach as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

An example of how this process works can be seen in Wesley’s theological reflection upon the two scripture passages at the front of this article. These passages were instrumental in the Presbyterian understanding of election to salvation. The Presbyterians believed that God had elected, or predestined, some people for salvation and some for damnation. They looked in part at these passages that speak of God “predestining” some for salvation. Wesley looked at these same passages and applied the process of examining all of scripture, considering tradition or how these passages had been viewed in the past, applying reason and considering his own experience of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley found the concept of election contrary to the absolute love of God as conveyed in such passages as these:

*<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16*

If God loved the whole world such that he would send his son for its salvation, why would he elect to damn a large percentage of its population?

<sup>19</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup> *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*<sup>1</sup>

There would be no reason to make Disciples in all of the world if God had already selected those who would be saved.

<sup>31</sup> *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.* <sup>32</sup> *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,* <sup>33</sup> *and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left... Matthew 25:31-46*

There are many passages in scripture that speak of God’s judgment. Why would these passages speak of judgment if all questions of salvation had been made? There are many more scriptures that speak against the concept of election.

Looking to Christian Tradition Wesley noted that the Church had always taken seriously the commandment of Jesus to go into the world and make disciples. Paul preached to everyone he met, including Kings. From the beginning of the Church to the present time, the Church had always considered God’s salvation available to all. It was only a small number of traditions that promoted the concept of election.

Looking to Reason, Wesley did not find it reasonable to believe that God had damned people before they were born despite their faith in God and Christ and despite how they chose to live their lives. Indeed, the concept of election cheapened the sacrifice of Christ since it carried the conclusion that Christ’s atoning sacrifice was not for all humankind but only for the elect.

Finally, Wesley’s experience of the Holy Spirit found the concept of election abhorrent. Wesley’s experience of God was of a God of Love and Justice and the concept of election was opposed to God acting in a loving and just manner.

How did Wesley understand these passages that speak of predestination and election? Here is what he said in an essay titled “Predestination Calmly Considered”:

*I believe election means... a divine appointment of some men [those who accept Christ in faith] to eternal happiness. But I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation opposite thereto [i.e. damnation]. I believe the eternal decree concerning both is expressed in those words: “He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” And this decree, without doubt, God will not change, and man cannot resist. According to this, all true believers are in Scripture termed elect, as all who continue in unbelief are so long properly reprobates, that is, unapproved of God, and without discernment touching the things of the Spirit.*

Wesley believed that God had elected all people to salvation if they would accept Christ. In later years, consistent with his belief in the inherent Love and Justice of God, Wesley speculated that God, in his infinite Wisdom and Love, even made provision for those who had never heard of the Gospel to come to salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.* (1989). (Mt 28:19–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

As United Methodists we are called to theological reflection. Also, as United **Methodists** we have a method for that reflection; the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. If you wish to see another example of the application of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral I have included here an analysis of the sometimes thorny question of women in ministry that I used in a sermon not too long after I came to Trinity.

This article is the last of my articles on Wesleyan Theology. I've tried to go over some of the principal elements of the Wesleyan tradition so that we can better understand our roots. If you have any questions on any of the articles that I have posted, or any other theological question, I'd be glad to talk with you about them.

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*How do we analyze this issue [of women in ministry]? Well, we are United Methodists. We come out of the Wesleyan, the Methodist, tradition. Do you all know why we are called Methodists? It was a name of derision. Those early Methodists were methodical in the way they practiced their faith. One of the ways our methodology shows through is in what is sometimes called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral; a four part way of thinking through theological issues. When seeking the Gospel, God's word, the Good News, we consider four things:*

*Scripture  
Christian Tradition  
Reason  
Experience of the Holy Spirit*

*That's what I want to do this morning. Have a somewhat rushed bible study. ...*

*We look first to scripture. But, when I say we look to scripture, I do not mean that we proof text. Proof Texting is focusing on one or two scriptures to the exclusion of the rest of scripture. When I say we look first to scripture, I mean we look to what **all** scripture has to say on the subject.*

*Some Christian Traditions, including Catholic, Southern Baptist and Church of Christ look primarily at two scripture verses in deciding that women should not be pastors: The 1 Timothy text read earlier and a similar statement in 1 Corinthians (1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36). Those are so explicit in their exclusion of women that some traditions look no further. But scripture actually says quite a bit more about women in ministry and there is reason to doubt that these statements are the final word on the matter.*

*For instance, 1 Corinthians does contain this statement.*

women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.<sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 1 Cor 14:34-36

*Pretty explicit. Why should there be confusion about that verse? Actually, there is a lot of reason to doubt that Paul ever said anything of the kind; reason to doubt that these are Paul words. The first part of Chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians is devoted to discussing how women should dress and style their hair when they prophesy and lead prayers in church. Prophesying in this context means preaching. Why would Paul devote space to setting out a dress code for women preachers if women are supposed to be silent? Many scholars consider verses 14:34-36 to be something added in later centuries when the text was being copied. It does not appear in all manuscripts. Most modern translations put this passage in brackets indicating that it was probably not part of Paul's original letter.*

Also, in the passage I read from Romans (Romans 16:1-16), Paul identifies many women leaders in the church. There are:

*Prisca and Aquila, a husband and wife evangelistic team who work with Paul*

*Mary who works among the Corinth Church*

*Andronicus and Junia, people Paul identifies as apostles; i.e. on a level with Paul himself.*

*Tryphaena and Tryphosa, likely two sisters who are workers in the Lord.*

*Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, likewise workers in the church.*

Clearly, Paul knew many women who were leaders of the Church and whom he respected and wanted others to respect.

In Galatians, Paul also said that in Christ we are neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, **male or female**. We are one in Christ.

One last thing. In Looking at the 1 Timothy text, you need to read the verses that follow:

<sup>12</sup> I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. 1 Timothy 2:12-15

Ask yourself if Paul would have ever said that salvation for women comes through childbirth. Paul is the one who proclaimed that salvation comes through faith in Christ Alone! (Romans 10:1-13)

We take scripture seriously, but we take it together as a whole and seek the word of God within the scripture. We do not worship the words on the page. We do not worship the bible. We worship the God revealed to us in the Bible.

IV.

*Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. We've looked at scripture and found some apparently conflicting passages. But, we are not the first ones who have had to interpret scripture. We have 2000 years of Christians in front of us. What do they say?*

*Again, it's a mixed bag. On the one hand, the church has not been very friendly to women through the centuries. On the other hand, some of our greatest spiritual leaders have been women. In our own United Methodist tradition, John Wesley was asked to forbid women from preaching. So, John went to his mother and talked to her about it. His Mama said, "Let's go listen to some of these women as they preach." John Wesley's ultimate conclusion was that these women had been called by God to preach the Gospel. He allowed them to continue preaching.*

*Even in the Roman Catholic tradition, some of our most inspirational and influential teachers are women. Although a lot of Christian tradition opposes women in ministry, there is much in Christian tradition to support women in ministry.*

V.

*Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience.*

*Reason. Wesley once said that he'd as soon lose his soul as his reason. He believed that reason is a God given gift and we should use that gift as we seek to understand scripture and hear the gospel.*

*What does your reason tell you folks? Is there some inherent inadequacy in women that would prevent them from being capable pastors? Some deficiency in reasoning power, intellect, spiritual depth? Perhaps, as Paul said, in Christ there is no male or female. If we look to reason, there does not appear to be justification for excluding women.*

VI.

*Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience.*

*Experience. Your experience of the Holy Spirit. Think about the churches you have attended and the women leaders you have encountered. In your experience, can women be leaders in the church? Anyone here ever been a part of a church run solely by men with no involvement by women?*

*This church had a woman pastor for five years. Did you hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ being preached from this pulpit by Paula Hoos? Many of you have told me that you did. Did you experience God's presence in her ministry with you? Again, many of you have told me you did. I went to Divinity School with Paula. I never doubted her call to ministry.*

*In my own experience, I've known many women who were pastors and leaders in the church. One of those, at my request, came here and preached a couple of weeks ago. There are women layspeakers in this congregation. Rachel Newman was one of the writers of the musical This Man. Would those of you who heard that music choose to silence her because she is a woman or did you maybe hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ being proclaimed in the lyrics and music of that production?*

*Our experience of the Holy Spirit is much like that of John Wesley. We have experienced a sense that the Holy Spirit is working in the Church through women; we have encountered women we believe called by God to be pastors.*

*Conclusion:*

*The United Methodist Church has looked methodically at the theological question of whether women can be pastors and leaders in the church. As a church, as part of the Body of Christ, we have determined, based on scripture, tradition, reason and experience that women have been, are now, and will be in the future pastors and leaders in the church. That God calls women into the ministry just as God calls men into the ministry. As Paul proclaimed, in Christ there is no male or female. All are called to be the people of God. Amen.*

## **Interested in Working in Vacation Bible School?**

*[Note: thanks for all who have volunteered to be a part of this effort. The response has been great. If you are still on the fence, please prayerfully considering participating in this ministry.]* We are reviewing the feasibility of doing a VBS program this summer. One of the critical factors in that determination is having enough committed volunteers to staff such an endeavor. We can foresee that it will take a lot of folks. If you

would be willing to assist, please let Julia Moore or Jeanne Rybolt know. Alternatively you can contact Pastor Meaker. We will need people to lead crafts, music, games, and skits to name a few. **To assist in your deliberations, please keep in mind that the programs we are considering would likely take place in late July over a weekend (rather than a full week) - Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday.**

## **Pilgrimage to the Holy Land**

Jeanne and I would like you to join us this February on a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We will leave on February 16 for nine days of Biblical discovery, returning on February 25th. We will be part of a larger group of primarily United Methodists from all over Middle and West Tennessee. This is a special tour organized by Bishop William McAlilly, the Bishop for the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

I first visited the Holy Land in 2000. Jeanne and I went back in 2005 and again in 2012. Before I went the first time I was somewhat cynical about the upcoming experience. I didn't think that it would have much of an effect on me. But, when you stand on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or travel to the Synagogue at Capernaum, you suddenly realize that you are likely walking ground that Christ walked. When you pray among the Olive trees in Gethsemane, stand in the prison cell contained in the House of Caiaphas, or see the name of Pilate inscribed on a monument in Caesarea, the events surrounding the imprisonment, trial and passion of Christ take on new meaning; a new reality.

Brochures for the trip, including exact costs and travel itineraries, are available in my office. I'll also schedule a time this summer to share photographs taken on my previous trips to Israel and answer questions about the trip. I hope you will prayerfully consider participating in this faith building experience.

## **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](http://www.Justicebible.org).

<sup>2</sup> *Proverbs will teach you  
wisdom and self-control  
and how to understand  
sayings with deep meanings.*  
<sup>3</sup> *You will learn what is right  
and honest and fair. Proverbs 1:2-3 CEV*

Proverbs is referred to as part of the "wisdom" literature in the bible. It contains practical guidance on how we are to live our lives in accordance with God's will. It has much to say about the issues of poverty and justice, beginning with this passage from the first chapter. Here again the basic understanding is that God's way involves being both fair and honest in everything we do.

<sup>4</sup>*Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or* <sup>5</sup> *rude.  
Love isn't selfish or quick tempered.  
It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do.*  
<sup>6</sup>*Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil.*  
<sup>7</sup>*Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting.*  
<sup>8</sup>*Love never fails! 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 CEV*

Paul's guidance to the church at Corinth is offered from the same understanding. Our treatment of one another must be based in kindness and in truth. Paul also focuses on those human traits that can be particularly destructive in our dealings with those who are poor: pride, arrogance, anger, rudeness and selfishness.

## **Bible Study**

For almost three years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Ruth. 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

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> Sermon: *Mistakes Happen*:** One of the most contentious issues in our society is the use of Capital punishment. In recent months, the Tennessee legislature has taken steps meant to ease the way to beginning executions again here in Tennessee. I invite you to consider the ramifications of the death penalty from a Christian perspective. My texts are Genesis 9:1-7 and Mark 15:25-39.

**June 29<sup>th</sup> Sermon: *Abraham and Isaac*:** Once or twice every decade some mentally unbalanced person murders their children on the basis that God told them to do it. Most often they are using the story of Abraham and Isaac as their starting point. I want to look at this difficult text and seek to hear the Gospel message that it contains. My texts are Matthew 10:40-42 and Genesis 22:1-14.

### Worship Leaders Schedule

#### June 22

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Cherry Klein & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Herb Haynes & Sam Richardson, **Ushers**

#### June 29

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Ushers**

## **Announcements**

Please consider being a volunteer in the nursery. There is an opportunity each Sunday for you to be blessed by spending time with the youngest among us. Both men and women are welcome to be a part of this ministry.

**There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board for volunteers to sign up to assist in the nursery or Sunday School. Please sign up for one or more Sunday's.**

**Thank you for being a part of this vital ministry of our church.**

**Sunday, June 15** - "**Enough-Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity**," a five part Sunday School series, will begin. **Please join us in the middle Sunday School classroom, gathering at 9:45 am and class at 10:00 am.**

"Enough" is an invitation to rediscover the Bible's wisdom on prudent financial practices. Find the keys to experience contentment, overcoming fear, and discovering joy through simplicity and generosity.

Please join the Companions in Christ class for this series!

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!

### **June Birthdays**

**Lynn McGill, Jo Cotton, Nancy Conway, Richard Stevens, Larry Eastwood, Kenneth Stevens,**

**June Pollard**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**