



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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June 4, 2014

Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Our Theological Task (Part 1)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,*

'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

⁷ *Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* "

⁸ *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

'Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.' "

¹¹ *Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV*

You have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Now what? What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st Century? On the one hand we have doctrines that have been developed over 2000 years of theological reflection. On the other hand we have a rapidly changing world that no one seems to fully understand; a world that, from time to time, can become very threatening and frightening.

I began this series on Wesleyan theology fourteen weeks ago. As I've noted from time to time throughout this series, Wesley was a very pragmatic theologian. He was intensely interested in how our beliefs shaped our lives and the world. He believed that accepting Christ should change our lives for, if it did not, how could accepting Christ ever change the world? This pragmatic theological focus is reflected in the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. All United Methodists are called upon to consider the meaning of their faith in the world around them; to apply their understanding of the will of God to their lives and our world. That process is referred to in the Discipline as *Our Theological Task*.

“But,” some will object, “I’m not a theologian.” However, the word ‘theology’ means ‘God words’ or ‘God talk.’ Each of us is engaging in theology whenever we speak about God or express our beliefs about God. Even an atheist is engaging in theology when he states that there is no God. Every Christian is a theologian and is required to remain a theologian as they struggle to express their beliefs about the nature of God in their everyday lives.

Although I could paraphrase the Discipline in this regard, I believe that the Discipline’s statement of the nature of our theological task is succinct and readily understandable. Here is what the Discipline has to say about our theological task.

Our theological task is both critical and constructive. It is *critical* in that we test various expressions of faith by asking: Are they true? Appropriate? Clear? Cogent? Credible? Are they based on love? Do they provide the Church and its members with a witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage and that is authentic and convincing in the light of human experience and the present state of human knowledge?

Our theological task is *constructive* in that every generation must appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom, justice, moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns. Our summons is to understand and receive the gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times.

Our theological task is both individual and communal. It is a feature in the ministry of *individual* Christians. It requires the participation of all who are in our Church, lay and ordained, because the mission of the Church is to be carried out by everyone who is called to discipleship. To be persons of faith is to hunger to understand the truth given to us in Jesus Christ. Theological inquiry is by no means a casual undertaking. It requires sustained disciplines of study, reflection, and prayer. Yet the discernment of “plain truth for plain people” is not limited to theological specialists. Scholars have their role to play in assisting the people of God to fulfill this calling, but all Christians are called to theological reflection.

Our theological task is *communal*. It unfolds in conversations open to the experiences, insights, and traditions of all constituencies that make up United Methodism. This dialogue belongs to the life of every congregation. It is fostered by laity and clergy, by the bishops, by the boards, agencies, and theological schools of the Church. Conferences speak and act for United Methodists in their official decisions at appropriate levels. Our conciliar and representative forms of decision-making do not release United Methodists as individuals from the responsibility to develop sound theological judgment.

Our theological task is contextual and incarnational. It is grounded upon God’s supreme mode of self-revelation—the incarnation in Jesus Christ. God’s eternal Word comes to us in flesh and blood in a given time and place, and in full identification with humanity. Therefore, theological reflection is energized by our incarnational involvement in the daily life of the Church and the world, as we participate in God’s liberating and saving action.

Our theological task is essentially practical. It informs the individual’s daily decisions and serves the Church’s life and work. While highly theoretical constructions of Christian thought make important contributions to theological understanding, we finally measure the truth of such statements in relation to their practical significance. Our interest is to incorporate the promises and demands of the gospel into our daily lives. Theological inquiry can clarify our thinking about what we are to say and do. It presses us to pay attention to the world around us. Realities of intense human suffering, threats to the survival of life, and challenges to

human dignity confront us afresh with fundamental theological issues: the nature and purposes of God, the relations of human beings to one another, the nature of human freedom and responsibility, and the care and proper use of all creation.

No Author (2009-05-01). The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008 (p. 75-76). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Still, the Wesleyan tradition does provide some guidelines for undertaking our theological task. The last article in this series will discuss what has come to be known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

The Tennessee Conference Will Meet June 8th thru 11th

Very early in the Methodist movement in England, Wesley found it helpful to gather his pastors together to conference with one another every year. The purpose of these conferences was to discuss what should be taught and preached in the Methodist Societies. In Baltimore beginning on December 24, 1784, Methodist pastors in the United States met to form the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. In Methodist history, this is referred to as the Christmas Conference. The newly formed church adopted articles of religion as proposed by John Wesley and accept the leadership of Thomas Coke and Frances Asbury as general superintendents or Bishops. Circuits were established and pastors appointed.

In the decades that followed, new conferences were established as the Methodist Church moved West with the pioneers. Along with the Baptists, Methodists were at the forefront of the settlement of the United States. By the early 19th century the North Carolina/Tennessee conference was established and then the Tennessee Conference. The current bounds of the Tennessee Conference were set in 1968 when the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to become the United Methodist Church (the Evangelical United Brethren church was formed by German Christians following a Wesleyan theology.)

Throughout the four days of the conference clergy and lay representatives of over six hundred Tennessee United Methodist churches in Middle Tennessee will meet to consider the business of the Conference and the historic questions of what we will teach and preach. In addition to such matters as the budget for the Conference, new pastors will be licensed, commissioned or ordained and the laity will select its Conference leaders for the coming year. There will be a worship service each night of the conference. Pat Moran is Trinity UMC's delegate to the conference and Brooks Crowell has been appointed a delegate at Large from the Columbia District.

If you have any questions about the conference, or would like to attend some of its sessions, please contact Reverend Meaker.

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, will be available in my office within the next week or two. 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.

⁷ *[The LORD] gives justice to the poor
and food to the hungry.*

*The LORD sets prisoners free
⁸ and heals blind eyes.*

*He gives a helping hand
to everyone who falls.*

*The LORD loves good people
⁹ and looks after strangers.*

*He defends the rights
of orphans and widows,
but destroys the wicked. Ps 146:7-9 CEV*

A recurring theme in scripture is the admonition to welcome the stranger. In the Old Testament this admonition is often accompanied by the reminder that, at one time, the people of Israel were strangers in a strange land and that God heard their cries. Accordingly, said Israel's law, God will hear the cries of the strangers you oppress. The people of every nation have a tendency to resent the stranger, the new comers, the interlopers whose language and culture are strange. This has even been true in this nation where almost all of us are descended from people who came to the land as strangers. Yet, much like a bell that is rung again and again, scripture reminds us that we are to welcome the stranger.

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Luke 10:25-29 NRSV

"And who is my neighbor?" asks the Lawyer. So begins the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus then tells a story where the 'stranger', and the Israelite's worst enemy, is a neighbor to the wounded Israelite who has been left bleeding and dying beside the road by his countrymen. As we contemplate pushing the Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern or other immigrant out of communities and hearts, Jesus invites us to visualize that person coming to our aid in time of need. He then closes his teaching with this:

³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:36-37.

Bible Study

For the last two 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 8th *There Was No Spirit:* Was there ever a time when the Spirit of God was absent from the world? My texts are Acts 2:1–21 and John 7:37–39.

June 15th *Whose Gospel?* Christ directed us to go into all the world to spread the Gospel. But sometimes I suspect that we forget whose Gospel we are spreading. My texts are 2 Corinthians 13:11–13 and Matthew 28:16–20.

Worship Leaders Schedule

June 8

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardson & Marty Bauguess, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

June 15Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**Jeanne Rybolt & Linda Robinson, **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!