



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology The Trinity (Part 1)

⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 1 John 5:7 KJV

John Wesley was an accomplished Greek and Hebrew scholar and conversant with the scholarship of generations of Christian theologians. However, he focused most of his writing on what many call “practical theology.” While some theologians would strive to settle the ultimate mysteries of religion, Wesley focused his attention on how Christianity was to shape our day to day lives. Nevertheless, there were fundamentals of Christian tradition that he believed that all must accept. Among these was the concept of the Trinity. That there existed Father, Son and Holy spirit that were, despite having distinct existence, all one in God. For Wesley, belief in the Trinity was a fundamental belief of Christianity as settled by the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. and as settled in the text from 1 John. (Note: as Wesley’s sermon discusses, the various manuscripts are not consistent with regard to this passage. The modern view, as reflected in the NRSV and other modern translations, is that the original text read as follows: ⁷ *There are three that testify:* ⁸ *the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.* In Wesley’s day, the accepted text was the one printed in the KJV).

In 1775 John Wesley wrote his sermon, “*On the Trinity.*” This sermon is not a deep discussion of the theology behind the Trinity. Although he mentions the theological dispute that caused Emperor Constantine to call for the Council of Nicaea, he spends very little time on the dispute itself. Instead he focuses on the objection that he most often heard in regard to the Trinity: “Regardless of the words of scripture, how can I believe in something I don’t understand?”

But it is objected: “Whatever becomes of the text, we cannot believe what we cannot comprehend. When, therefore, you require us to believe mysteries, we pray you to have us excused.”

*Here is a two-fold mistake: (1.) We do not require you to believe any mystery in this; whereas you suppose the contrary. But, (2.) **You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.**¹*

¹ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley: Sermon LV On the Trinity* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, pp. 201–202). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

Wesley then begins a fascinating exposition of all the things that people “believe in” despite the fact that they do not understand them. As you progress through the sermon you discover that Wesley did not spend all his time reading the bible or the writings of the Christian fathers. You soon discover that Wesley was very well read in the scientific works of his day in areas as diverse as astronomy, physics, medicine and philosophy. This sermon is worth reading solely for the opportunity to look through a window on Wesley’s world and to see that world as he saw it.

Wesley begins his argument by pointing out that people “believe-in” the sun although they know scarcely anything about it:

7. To begin with the latter: You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend. For you believe there is a sun over your head. But whether he stands still in the midst of his system, or not only revolves on his own axis, but “rejoiceth as a giant to run his course;” you cannot comprehend either one or the other: How he moves, or how he rests. By what power, what natural, mechanical power, is he upheld in the fluid ether? You cannot deny the fact: Yet you cannot account for it, so as to satisfy any rational inquirer. You may indeed give us the hypothesis of Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, Copernicus, and twenty more. I have read them over and over: I am sick of them; I care not three straws for them all.

*Each new solution but once more affords
New change of terms, and scaffolding of words:
In other garb my question I receive,
And take my doubt the very same I gave.*

Still I insist, the fact you believe, you cannot deny; but the manner you cannot comprehend.²

Wesley then turns to the question of light; both sunlight and the nature of light itself. In this sermon he mentions one of the early efforts to measure the speed of light based upon observations of the moons of Jupiter by the Danish astronomer, Ole Rømer.

8. You believe there is such a thing as light, whether flowing from the sun, or any other luminous body; but you cannot comprehend either its nature, or the manner wherein it flows. How does it move from Jupiter to the earth in eight minutes; two hundred thousand miles in a moment? How do the rays of the candle, brought into the room, instantly disperse into every corner? Again: Here are three candles, yet there is but one light. Explain this, and I will explain the Three-One God.³

He next discusses what is not known about the air we breathe, even though we certainly “believe” in it. Note also the speculation about “electric fire” affecting the “particles” of air:

*9. You believe there is such a thing as air. It both covers you as a garment, and, Wide interfused,
embraces round this florid earth.*

But can you comprehend how? Can you give me a satisfactory account of its nature, or the cause of its properties? Think only of one, its elasticity: Can you account for this? It may be owing to electric fire attached

² Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, p. 202). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

³ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, p. 202). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

*to each particle of it; it may not; and neither you nor I can tell. But if we will not breathe it till we can comprehend it, our life is very near its period.*⁴

Wesley then turns to the earth itself, mocking the explanation of both Christian and Hindu theologians:

*10. You believe there is such a thing as earth. Here you fix your foot upon it: You are supported by it. But do you comprehend what it is that supports the earth? "O, an elephant," says a Malabarian philosopher; "and a bull supports him." But what supports the bull? The Indian and the Briton are equally at a loss for an answer. We know it is God that "spreadeth the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." This is the fact. But how? Who can account for this? Perhaps angelic but not human creatures.*⁵

The next portion of the sermon deals with the thoughts about the soul and its relation to life and to the body, including speculation about whether animals have souls. Wesley's comment on the later topic is typically pragmatic:

*I will not quarrel with any that think they [animals] have [souls]; nay, I wish he could prove it: And surely I would rather allow them souls, than I would give up my own.*⁶

Finally, Wesley concludes with the field of medicine and the mystery of mind and body.

*13. I bring but one instance more: At the command of your soul, your hand is lifted up. But who is able to account for this? For the connexion between the act of the mind, and the outward actions? Nay, who can account for muscular motion at all; in any instance of it whatever? When one of the most ingenious Physicians in England had finished his lecture upon that head, he added, "Now, gentlemen, I have told you all the discoveries of our enlightened age; and now, if you understand one jot of the matter, you understand more than I do."*⁷

Wesley concluded his sermon by drawing a comparison between believing in the fact of something even though one did not understand the manner or mystery of the matter. We believe in the sun, light, air, earth and body even though we cannot understand the mystery of them. Wesley called for belief in the "fact" of the Trinity, as confessed in scripture, even though we could not understand the manner or mystery of the Trinity.

If you would like to read Wesley's sermon "*On the Trinity*," it can be found here: <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-55-On-the-Trinity> . In part two of this article I'll offer a pragmatic explanation of the concept of the Trinity.

⁴ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, p. 202). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

⁵ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, pp. 202–203). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

⁶ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, p. 203). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

⁷ Wesley, J. (1872). *The Works of John Wesley* (Third Edition., Vol. 6, pp. 203–204). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

Interested in Working in Vacation Bible School?

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.**

Scholarships to Cedar Crest Camp

Bishop William McAlilly has issued a call to United Methodists throughout the TN Annual Conference to contribute to the 99+1 Fund for scholarships for children to participate in our camping ministry at the Cedar Crest Camp. Remembering Jesus's parable about the shepherd seeking after the lost sheep, our goal this year is to find 100 (99+1) scholarships given to allow TNUMC kids to experience the love of Christ through camping. There are two ways that Bishop McAlilly and the Camping and Retreat Ministries team are asking for participation:

1. To recruit at least one child from your church to participate in a faith forming camp experience at Cedar Crest Camp this summer.
2. To raise funds to provide one \$300 scholarship for a child who could otherwise not attend camp.

Please send all scholarship funds to:
The Bishop's Cedar Crest Scholarship Fund
C/O The Rev. Dickie Hinton
P.O. Box 414
Monterey, TN 38574

More information on this important program can be found at <http://cedarcrestcamp.org/> or by emailing camp director Russell Casteel at russell.casteel@tnumc.com.

Easter Sermon Series Christian Essentials

On Easter Sunday I started a new sermon series called "Christian essentials." I'll conclude the series this Sunday with the sermon, "*We Are the Body of Christ.*" 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 (2nd Sunday in Easter)
It's all About Christ (3rd Sunday in Easter)
We Worship God, Not the Bible (5th Sunday in Easter)
God Will Not Leave You Behind (6th Sunday in Easter)

We Are the Body of Christ (7th Sunday in Easter)

Any time is a good time to invite someone you know to share in our worship. But a 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.

⁷ *God lifts the poor and needy
from dust and ashes,
⁸ and he lets them take part
in ruling his people.
Ps 113:7-8 CEV*

Simply because one is poor doesn't mean that they should not have a say in how they are ruled. According to scripture, all people should share in the burdens and benefits of society.

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ² he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴ for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." Luke 21:1-4

In the story of the Widow's Offering Jesus points out that the contribution of the poor should not be measured against what the rich can offer from their abundance, but what the poor can offer from their scarcity. In many ways, the poor have a greater stake in how the nation is run than the rich. But we generally fail to value them when it comes to making decisions affecting how we will be governed. In this day when politicians are debating the extent rich individuals and corporations should be able to support particular politicians, these scriptures should give us pause.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Joshua. 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

May 25th Christian essentials: *We Are the Body of Christ.* Too many Christians think of their faith solely in terms of having a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ. Yet, the core of our theology is that God has made all of us, together, into the Body of Christ, the Presence of Christ on earth. My texts are Matthew 22:34-39 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

June 1st *Life Eternal:* Life Eternal is not something that begins after death. It is the reality in which we live as Christians. Join us this day as two of our youth confirm their faith and take their place as members of this congregation of the United Methodist Church. My texts are Deuteronomy 11:8-21 and Acts 8:26-39.

Worship Leaders Schedule

May 25

Liturgist

Linda Robinson & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Donnie & Renita Hartsock, **Ushers**

June 1

Donnie Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**

Charles Wilson & Herb Haynes, **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.

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

The dates for serving at **61st United Methodist Church** are **August 16, November 15.** These occasions are all Saturdays. Volunteers are needed on these occasions. You will be blessed as you serve.

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!

May Birthdays

Tommy Cotton, Sam Richardson, Jim Winton

Happy Birthday to each of you!