



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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February 10, 2016

## Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Christian Perfection

<sup>48</sup> *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. <sup>2</sup> 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, which 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 last two and a half centuries. 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.

## Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have concluded our study of Mark and Matthew and have begun a study of Luke.

### Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

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

**February 14<sup>th</sup>: Satan Has a Bad Day:** Sometimes scriptures become so familiar to us that we stop thinking about them. Consider the story of the Temptation of Christ from the perspective of Satan. My texts are Romans 10:8b-13 and Luke 4:1-13.

**February 21<sup>st</sup>: Our Citizenship is in Heaven:** There is a difference between citizenship and residence. My texts are Psalm 27:1-4 and Philippians 3:17-4:1.

## Worship Leader's Schedule

### February 14

Houston Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Ken & Jan Strait, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

### February 21

Hal Newman, **Liturgist**

Stacy & Jan Bell, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

## Announcements

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is studying, **“Jesus: Understanding His Death and Resurrection.”** This is a study of Mark 14-16 which we will continue for six weeks. This study was created by Kay and David Arthur who are well known for founding “Precept Ministries.” Please consider being a part of this inspiring and interesting study. We enjoy fellowship as well as our Study. All are welcome to join us in Sunday School. Our fellowship begins at 9:45. The study begins at 10:00 AM.

### **Birthdays in February**

Donnie Hartsock, Joyce Edwards, Bert Winton, Maurice Edwards, Jeanne Rybolt, Patricia Stevens, Rodger Klein, Eric Crowell

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**