



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com

June 8, 2016

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

²⁸ *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *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*

⁴ *just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.*
⁵ *He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,*
⁶ *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 led the Church in a peculiarly protestant, anti-Catholic reformation. After Edward’s death Henry’s daughter Mary, also known as “Bloody Mary,” led a persecution of the Protestants when she came to power. Many Protestants were burned at the stake as heretics. For decades, England was wracked by religious upheaval and rebellion. Queen Elizabeth I, the half-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 referencing 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:

¹⁶ *“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?

¹⁹ *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,* ²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*¹

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

³¹ *“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.* ³² *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,* ³³ *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 decisions regarding 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.

¹ *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.

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.

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. ³⁵ 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

*That is 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. Many 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:

¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ 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.

Preacher, What Does the Bible Say about ...?

From the time I came to Trinity I have stated on numerous occasions that I am willing to consider a sermon, or sermon series, on any subject that is of concern. I want to reaffirm that offer since it's been a while since I have stated it. If there is a subject upon which you would like me to preach I will consider it. If I do not think it appropriate for a sermon I will explain why. It might also be appropriate to address some issues as part of a Newsletter article or series or as part of the Sunday School curriculum. But, if at all possible, I will seek to

Speak to these issues that are of interest on Sunday morning. One purpose of worship is to contemplate our relationship with God and if something is bothering you it is likely bothering others as well.

New Disciple Bible Study

Disciple Bible Study is a powerful experience that can open the bible up for the participants. I would be willing to begin a new class this September if at least seven people desired to undertake the 34 week study. I could do this study on Monday or Tuesday nights between 7 and 9. If participants would prefer to meet on a week day that could also be arranged. In years past I have also taught Disciple Bible Study between 7 and 9 AM Sunday mornings. If you are interested please contact me at the Church. If you desire additional information for yourself or to give to a friend I have some explanatory booklets available.

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 completed our study of the Gospels, including the Book of Acts and are beginning a study of Paul's Epistles. We have just begun a study of Ephesians.

Prayer Ministry

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

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

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 12th: Sermon: I Want It. My nominee for the most dangerous phrase in the English language. My texts are Luke 7:36–50 and 1 Kings 21:1–21a.

June 19th: Sermon: Demon Fear. What are we 21st century people to do with stories of demons? Most of us have a hard time making anything about the talk of demons in scripture. Yet, there is one demon that I am convinced is alive and well. My texts are 1 Kings 19:1–15a and Luke 8:26–39.

Worship Leader's Schedule

June 12

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Mike and Renee Fetting, **Greeters**

Maurice and Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

June 19

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Tommy and Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Marty and Dana Bauguess, **Ushers**

Announcements

UMW: (Trinity Ladies)

We will be meeting **Tuesday, June 14 at 6:00 PM**. We will meet at church for a time of conducting our business, enjoying Blue Coast Burrito dinner and enjoying the fellowship. Please make Dana aware if you plan to attend. (dbsquare@aol.com).

Erin McKibben is hosting a weekly devotional meeting at her home, "**Meditations on Tuesdays.**" The first occasion was Tuesday, June 7. **This weekly meeting will take place each week through July.** Time of meetings is **6:00 AM – 7:30 AM**. Her address: 8358 Carriage Hills Drive which is off of Wilson Pike across from Ravenwood High School.

Parent's Night Out:

"The Parents Night Out team is looking for volunteers to help launch this family ministry! We need **6 volunteers for each of the following dates/times**. The launch party will be held [on Sunday July 10th from 12:30-3:30](#) after the service. The initial two PNO evenings will be [July 15th](#) and [July 29th from 5:30-9](#) and we need **volunteers to serve from 5-9:30**. Volunteers will serve by staffing the various stations for the children attending and by serving a pizza dinner to the children. No experience necessary- just a heart to serve! All are welcome and we need many hands in order to ensure the success of this ministry. We are asking that volunteers complete a background check prior to [July 10th](#) and the PNO ministry will support with the cost and directions on how to do this. Once you sign up, a member of the PNO team will contact you with details. Please sign up to share your gifts!"

Volunteers are needed to help with this year's VBS. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board by the side door. If you have questions, please contact Dawn Stevens at (615)-638-8827 or dawnstevens1961@gmail.com. A meeting will be scheduled soon to discuss the theme and all the activity details. VBS is an exciting, fun time for all, come join in!

Hosts and Hostesses for First Sunday Lunch: Please see the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Please add your name to host this occasion for the coming months.

Trinity UMC Directory: We are updating our directory. If you are not listed in the current directory, if you have changed address, phone numbers, email address, we would like to make these changes in the directory. **Please see the document on the table at the back door. Please make your changes on this document.**

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is both learning and enjoying a series of videos, narrated by Ray Vanderlann. The videos as well as the narration take place in ancient lands described in the Old Testament. We enjoy discussion about what we are learning and the application of the lessons to our lives.

We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in June

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

Happy Birthday to each of you!