



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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## John Wesley on the Relationship Between Justice, Wealth and Hunger Part Two

<sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Matthew 25:42-43 NRSV

<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? James 2:15-16 NRSV.

This article was inspired by the words of a Tennessee Congressman implying that helping the poor was somehow contrary to Christian teaching. In the first part of the article I discussed the misuse of scripture involved in the Congressman's pronouncement and then went on to examine the biblical concept of Justice. In scripture, Justice and Righteousness are described as attributes of the nature of God and are concepts that are central to living a life focused on God. Indeed, the biblical prophecies that Christians focus upon that foretold the birth of Christ speak of Christ bringing forth a Kingdom founded upon God's Justice and Righteousness. Moreover, Justice and Righteousness as described in scripture includes care for the poor and those who are oppressed. The prophet Isaiah goes so far as declaring that the worship God desires is care for one another:

<sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Isaiah 58:6-7 NRSV

Wesley understood hunger and poverty in ways that many of his fellow churchmen didn't. He took seriously the admonition in Matthew 25:31-46 to seek out and help the poor, the sick and those in jail. This was as much to convert the person offering help as to help the poor. Wesley firmly believed that God used these encounters to reshape our souls. For Wesley and the early Methodists, acts of love and justice, including helping to feed and clothe the poor, were a means of receiving God's grace.

Wesley also viewed poverty as a condition that drew, or tempted, people away from God. Wesley was intimately familiar with the conditions of those living in poverty. In his Sermon **Heaviness through Manifold Temptation** (a reference to 1 Peter 1:6 KJV) Wesley spoke of the effect poverty has on a person's faith. He began by quoting the words of a Roman poet: ... *the worst thing about poverty was that it caused others to ridicule you, to laugh at you.* He then went on to say this about the reality of experiencing poverty and the hunger that always accompanied it:

*Has poverty nothing worse in it than this, that it makes men liable to be laughed at? It is a sign this idle poet talked by rote of the things **which he knew not.** Is not want of food something worse than this? God pronounced it as a curse upon man, that he should earn it "by the sweat of his brow." **But how many are there in this Christian country, that toil, and labour, and sweat, and have it [food] not at last, but struggle with weariness and hunger together?** Is it not worse for one, after a hard day's labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength? **You that live at ease in the earth, that want nothing but eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand how well God hath dealt with you, — is it not worse to seek bread day by day, and find none? perhaps to find the comfort also of five or six children crying for what he has not to give!** Were it not that he is restrained by an unseen hand, would he not soon "curse God and die?" O want of bread! want of bread! Who can tell what this means, unless he hath felt it himself? I am astonished it occasions no more than heaviness even in them that believe!*

Meeting the needs of the poor was an issue of justice for Wesley. But he was also concerned about what had caused this situation where thousands were going hungry. Wesley wrote an essay about the causes of hunger in 1773. The essay was titled ***Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions.*** At this time thousands were starving throughout England. In the essay Wesley gives examples of women scavenging dung hills for food for their children, or collecting bones the dogs have finished with. One woman told Wesley the family dog went into the streets and brought back a good bone from which she made a meal.

Wesley then examined what was happening and provided this analysis:

1. **People are out of work.** Wesley says that employers have laid off workers because no one is spending the little money they have on goods. It is all going for food.
2. **Why is food so expensive?** Grain and corn are going to distilleries. Wesley objected to drinking distilled spirits on the basis that it destroyed families through alcoholism **and** because it drove up the price of grain and corn making bread prohibitively expensive. But grain and corn going to distilleries was not the only problem. Wesley noted that:
  - Oats and Bartley are going to feed expensive horses that draw the carriages of the rich. The rich are keeping more horses than ever before because it had become the fashion on the continent of Europe to have large teams of horses pulling private carriages. Having a large team of horses pulling your carriage was a symbol of your wealth and status.
  - For the same reason, fewer people were raising cows and sheep. Horses were a better investment. They could be sold for livery or exported, primarily to France.
  - Pork, poultry and eggs were expensive because of the sudden creation of large farms. Estates that used to be home for 20 tenant farmers, each of which would raise a few pigs and chickens and sell

the produce, had been consolidated. They now had only one or two farmers and were devoted to raising grain for distilling or for raising horses.

- The food that was available was wasted by the rich. With the rich fighting over the supply of food, the price of food again went up well out of reach of the poor.
- 3. **Land is expensive.** Because of the money that could be raised by selling grain and horses, the price of land had skyrocketed along with the level of rent for the land.
- 4. **Taxes are high:** Taxes had been steadily increasing, something that was to become a factor in sparking the American Revolution. High rents were also needed to pay the taxes.
- 5. **Taxes are so high because of the National Debt.** The King had been waging wars for some years and also supporting a large standing army, including the troops garrisoned in the Americas. This had run up the national debt pushing up taxes.

To sum up the whole, in Wesley's estimation thousands of people throughout the land were perishing for want of food. This was owing to various causes but, above all, to the loss of grain to distilling and supporting a lavish lifestyle for the rich. For Wesley this was a justice issue that could not be solved by simply raising money to buy food for the poor. There needed to be a fundamental change in society.

To some extent the Methodist Societies brought about a change in English society by "redistributing the wealth." It came about this way.

1. **Come and See:** Methodist Societies focused on spreading the Gospel. When people expressed an interest in becoming Christian they were not simply invited to accept Christ as Lord and savior, but to "Come and See" how the Methodists lived out their faith. Methodists lived out their faith through the work of the "classes."
2. **Small Groups:** Each Methodist society was organized into "classes" of 12 with a Class Leader. In addition to regular meetings for prayer and study, the Class Leader would be responsible for visiting the other class members and helping make sure they received help if they were in need. Also, each Class member was expected to donate a penny a week to support the ministries of the Methodist societies. If a family was too poor to make the contribution, the Class Leader, always one of the wealthier members of the society, made up the difference. To those who had been richly blessed, much was expected.
3. **Ministry with those in need.** The money thus raised was used by the Methodist Societies to open food kitchens that could bake bread for the poor, to establish schools for the poor, to establish orphanages and to establish clinics. In effect, the Methodist societies became a social safety net for England. Some historians credit the work of the Methodist societies for saving England from the type of revolution that engulfed France later that century.
4. **Fishing poles instead of fish:** Because of the support offered by the Methodist societies, and the mutual support of Christians in ministry together, many of the early Methodists worked their way out of poverty. Indeed, one of Wesley's greatest concerns for the Church was that its members would become wealthy and indifferent to the Gospel's call to be in ministry to the poor and one another.

In conclusion, it is not as easy as some suggest to separate out the work of the church with the work of Government. Simply because the church is called to be in ministry to the poor does not mean that there isn't a need for changes in the way we govern ourselves or a need to provide governmental assistance to those in need. As Christians we live in the world and do not leave our Christianity outside the polling booth or outside the doors of the legislature. Above all, those who would suggest there isn't a call in scripture to reach out to those in need are simply ignoring whole portions of scripture. Although we might find the concept uncomfortable, care for those who are poor is a matter of God's Justice and Righteousness that concerns every Christian.

### **The Poverty and Justice Bible**

For Christmas this past year I asked for, and received, a copy of *The Poverty & Justice Bible*. This is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of justice and poverty. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty, 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 these issues. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on amazon or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; **I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,** <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Exodus 3:7-8

There are a number of passages in scripture that testify to the fact that God hears the cry of those we oppress. Indeed, this concept is later incorporated into the Law of Moses and the people are reminded that God will hear the cries of those who they oppress just as God heard the cries of those who oppressed them. In sum, God cares about how we treat one another.

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup> Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3:7-10

In accordance with the Exodus passage is this passage from Matthew. John the Baptist does not mince words. We cannot hide our actions from God nor rely upon our professions of faith if our lives do not reflect our acceptance of Christ. Our salvation is an act of grace based upon our faith. But, do we have faith if we do not live in accordance with God's Justice and righteousness?

### **Companions in Christ Class Meeting Sunday Mornings**

**Sunday's at 10:00: "Companions in Christ"** - The Small Group Sunday School Class will be talking about how to be better companions to our fellow Christians, discover what our spiritual gifts are, and dig deeper into what we believe and why. Please come and enjoy this time with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. We will meet in the Youth Sunday School room. All are welcome! *Nanette Noffsinger*.

## Graceworks' Fuel Bag Program

As I have mentioned a number of times from the pulpit, around 250,000 children go to bed hungry in Tennessee some part of every week. That figure has grown over the years. Their families are what is called "food insecure." There is rarely enough nourishing food in the home to be certain of providing for the needs of the children. Some of those children live right here in Williamson County.

Graceworks ministry has a program to provide food for children in need to take home over the weekends. These "Fuel Bags" provide nutritious food that the child can eat without preparation or with minimal preparation. The Children's Sunday school class is organizing Trinity UMC's support of this program. We need the following contributions:

### Graceworks Fuel Bags

Please pick up a few items when you are at the grocery store to include in the fuel bags:

Boxed Milk  
Raisins/Fruit Snacks  
Peanut  
Butter Crackers  
Cheese Crackers  
Cereal Cups  
Pudding Cups  
Microwaveable Meat Meals  
Easy Mac  
Tuna & Crackers

Thanks for your support of this ministry.

## Still Looking for Worship Leaders

The Worship Ministry is central to any church because it involves the majority of the members every week. Central to the Worship Ministry is the leadership of the laity. Judy Richardson and I are trying to organize the worship leadership schedule so that it is easier for people to plan in advance when they will be serving as **Greeters, Liturgists, Ushers and Counters**.

I would very much like to see greater participation in worship leadership from the laity. If you would like to make worship leadership part of your ministry in the church, please contact either Judy Richardson or Rev. Meaker.

## Bishop McAlilly Promotes a 40 Day Period of Prayer Leading Up to Annual Conference

### 40 Day Walk



**Daily devotionals of The 40 Day Walk With God will post each morning on the Bishop's Blog during our season of intentional prayer. If you would like to Follow the Bishop's Blog during this time, posts will be delivered to your INBOX daily – enjoy them each morning on the device of your choice!**

**To download a copy to your computer for reading or printing, please follow the instructions below:**

1. [CLICK HERE](#) to download .PDF file (you may “right click” and “save as” to your desktop or destination of choice)

**1a. NEW:** If you're here to download the Children's prayer guide, [CLICK HERE](#) to download (.PDF)

2. The cover image below also provides a link for download

3. NOTE: The .PDF prayer guide is 84 pages, please allow ample time for downloading depending on your connection speed

### **The Problem of Personal Information**

At one time it was not unusual to distribute lists of birthdays and other personal information within the Church. Such lists can still be created today if people wish to add their names to them. However, despite many requests to the contrary, I have chosen not to put information about birth dates, other than birth month, or other personal information, in the newsletter. Once this information has been posted in an online newsletter it is available to everyone. Our birth dates are an important piece of personal information that can be used as part of an effort to steal someone's identity. For much the same reason we do not post addresses and telephone numbers of members and we do not publish information about who is in the hospital. If a thief knew that someone was in the hospital they might take the opportunity to target that person's home for a break-in. The potential misuse of online information is something that we all need to be careful about.

### **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 9, 2013: Who Are You To Preach the Gospel?** This is not a question directed solely to the clergy. We are all ministers of the Gospel. What are your credentials for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ? My texts are Psalm 146 and Galatians 1:11-24.

**June 16, 2013: I Want It.** Three simple words that are at the root of so much pain and suffering. My texts are Luke 7:36-50 and 1 Kings 21:1-21a.

### **Worship Leaders Schedule**

#### **June 9**

Liturgist: **Charles Wilson**

Greeters: **Mike & Elaine Rohrig**

Ushers: **Rodger & Cherry Klein**

#### **June 16**

Liturgist: **Rachel Newman**

Greeters: **Herb & Betty Haynes**

Ushers: **Maurice & Joyce Edwards**

### **Announcements**

**Sunday School Adult Classes:** There are two adult Sunday School classes to choose from. One meets at 9:45 in the Fellowship hall and the other meets in the classroom next to the Nursery at 10:00. Faith development is part of our discipleship commitment.

**Wednesday, June 5 @ 7:00pm** Choir Rehearsal

Our Annual **Fish Fry and Bake Sale is scheduled for Saturday,**

**June 22.** This is an important event for our church and we will appreciate your donations of baked items, donations of time and work in supporting this event.

Please begin to pray for the success of this event

The dates for our church to prepare and serve dinner at **61<sup>st</sup> Street** are as follows: **August 17, and November 16.** We will also be participating at the Christmas Toy Store, dates TBD.

### June Birthdays

Tom Holt, Jo Cotton, Nancy Conway, Kenneth Stevens, Larry Eastwood, June Pollard.