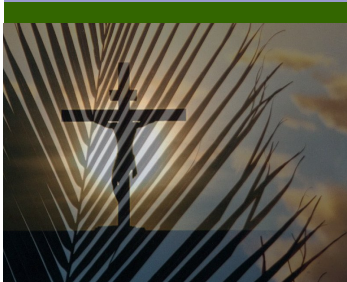


March 2010

Selections from "Deep and Wide" by Dr. Nick Campbell are quoted in this newsletter



# Journey to the Cross



The Methodist Societies had "three simple rules" – do no harm, do good, attend to the ordinances of God. These rules then became the General Rules of the Methodist Church. The context for the rules was the expectation "of all

who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation." Methodists are expected to "work out their salvation" (Philippians 2:12). Because the first rule is stated in the negative, there is the temptation

to think it can be kept by avoiding an evil, or by doing nothing. Choosing to do nothing, however, is often a way to do harm. This newsletter will look at what it means to actively keep the first rule to "do no harm."

## First, Do No Harm from Dr. Nick's reflection's on the Three Simple Rules

Before one of his evening prayers each week, John Wesley would ask "Have I interested myself any farther in the affairs of others than love requires? Have I mentioned the failing or fault of anyone when it was not necessary for their good, or the good of another? Have I unnecessarily grieved any one by word or deed?" If we took just those three questions seriously, as they apply to "doing no harm," we would eliminate paparazzi, gossips, and most politicians -- all of whom defend their doing harm under the "greater good" of "free speech." Many preachers and laity would also be hard pressed to continue what they consider their "Christian duty" to judge and condemn others for their sinfulness.

What's the harm being done? We harm others when we judge them by anything other than who they are before God. Yes, we are all sinners -- and we are all sinners that Jesus came to redeem. We harm others when we insist on only seeing how they have fallen short, instead of looking for how God is working through them to reveal God's image in them. We harm others by sharing our assessments, either by justifying the evil we have named or by dividing the community that Jesus came to redeem.

Bishop Robert Schnase writes about the 5 Vital Practices of Fruitful Congregations -- radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity. We harm ourselves and the faith community when our practice as Christians lacks these signs of our dependence on God, our conformity to Christ, and our confidence in the Holy Spirit.

By not engaging in an active hospitality to a visitor at worship, we harm the visitor whose experience is now evidence that being "Christian" means being cold and aloof. By not being fully present in worship, we harm others who see in us that being in the presence of God is not humbling, not affirming, not life-changing. By not being intentional about learning our faith, our scriptures, and our traditions, we harm others who see that our faith is less important to us than the box scores of the sports section or the stock reports of the business page, or whatever else it is that we obsess about and give ultimate interest and meaning. By being more concerned with our personal care and safety than the needs of those we are called to love as Christ loved us, we lack the vulnerability that true love requires. By worrying more about our treasures on earth, we become bankrupt in heaven -- and that poverty of spirit is evident to those God sends to us to love.

We confuse "do no harm" with "do nothing that could harm me." As we go through Lent, look for the times we do nothing, and consider it prudent, when upon reflection we come to know that this was a time that our doing nothing caused harm to someone else.

FAIRVIEW UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# The Link

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## “Do no harm” & Radical Hospitality

Jesus said welcoming a little child was like welcoming him, and welcoming God (Mark 9). He said welcoming a stranger was like welcoming him, and welcoming God (Matthew 25). It would seem that welcoming others is important to the religion of the heart. But how important is it?

In the Sermon on the Mount, we read, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and*

*sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:43-48) There is a building contrast between those we normally welcome, and those we shun and avoid. Even Gentiles and tax collectors meet the standard of reciprocity. Our hospitality, if it is to reflect the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ, welcomes the enemy, the persecutor, and the unrighteous, greeting them as brothers and sisters as part of what it means to be perfect. This is how “deep and wide” the compassion of God through Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners (see I Timothy 1:15) through his “full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world” (Sunday morning prayer). Hospitality is about God’s willingness to welcome all into the kingdom!

Karen Mains writing on the distinction between entertaining and hospitality writes, “Entertaining says, ‘I want to impress you with my home, my clever decorating, my cooking.’ Hospitality, seeking to minister, says, ‘This home is a gift from my Master. I use it as he desires.’ Hospitality aims to serve. Entertaining puts things before people. ‘As soon as I get the house finished, the living room decorated, my house cleaning done--then I will start inviting people.’ Hospitality puts people first. ‘No furniture--we’ll eat on the floor! The decorating may never get done--you come anyway. The house is a mess--but you are friends--come home with us.’ Entertaining subtly declares, ‘This home is mine, an expression of my personality. Look, please, and admire.’ Hospitality whispers, ‘What is mine is yours.’”

## “Do no harm” & Passionate Worship

While justifying grace is an unmerited gift of God through Jesus Christ, we have been given “means of grace” to help us become conformed to Christ, so that we may continue a justified relationship with God. John Wesley taught that Christ ordained the means of grace; that is, Jesus himself said that we should do these things that help us to “*work out our own salvation*” (Philippians 2:12). These things include prayer, searching the scripture, and receiving the Lord’s Supper -- all elements of our worship. The purpose of these means of grace is not the outward works but the renewed heart

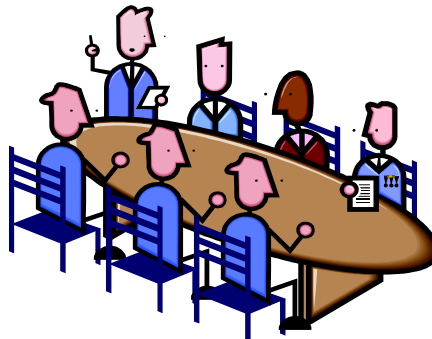
through which flows the love and grace of God. Wesley taught that in our “going on to perfection” the means of grace are not the end of our faith. The fulfillment of our salvation is our love for God and love for our neighbors. The means are outward and visible signs that God has chosen for conveying God’s grace to us. God is free to offer grace in many other ways, and is not limited to these particular means, but it is clear that God has given us these means.

That is why it is important to come *expectantly* to worship. To come expecting

anything less than the powerful and gracious presence of God is an attempt to save ourselves, which we cannot do. Ever the analyst, Wesley concluded that if we do not experience in worship the presence and power of God, it is because we either think we are Christians when we are not, and therefore have not repented of our sin; or because we are attempting to make our worship something that earns us favor with God, which is not possible since the means of grace cannot atone for even one sin, for that is the work of the blood of Christ alone.

## Church Council & Trustees Meetings

The Church Council (officers of the council, as well as the chairs of all church teams and committees) will meet in the Church Office Tuesday, March 9, 7 PM. The agenda includes final planning for Holy Week and Easter, a pictorial directory for the membership, and planning to participate in “Change the World” weekend April 24-25 (a United Methodist program to invite others to participate in missions.)



The Trustees will meet at the church Monday, April 15, 7 PM. Their agenda includes the maintenance of the church and parsonage. Upcoming projects include the replacement of some lighting fixtures, upgrading the appearance of the Fellowship Hall entrance, and a schedule for maintaining the tile floors in the church. If you notice something at the church in need of repair or attention, send an email to the church office.

## “Do no harm” & Intentional Faith Development

In his sermon “Salvation by Faith,” Wesley declared that Christian faith is not intellectual assent that there is a God (a heathen’s faith); it is not an intellectual assent that God is powerful and just, and the Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world (a demon’s faith); it is not leaving all behind to follow Jesus, working miracles, doing good, and having all authority over evil (the disciples’ faith before the crucifixion and resurrection.) True saving faith “acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection. It acknowledges his death as the only, sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and his resurrection as the restoration of us all to life and immortality; inasmuch as He was delivered for our sins, and rose again for our justification.”

This understanding is reflected in his

notes on the Bible. For Matthew 5:48, he wrote: “*Therefore ye shall be perfect; as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.* So the original runs, referring to all that holiness which is described in the foregoing verses, which our Lord in the beginning of the chapter recommends as happiness, and in the close of it as perfection. And how wise and gracious is this, to sum up, and, as it were, seal all his commandments with a promise! Even the proper promise of the Gospel! That he put those laws in our minds, and writes them in our hearts! He well knew how ready our unbelief would be to cry out, this is impossible! And therefore upon it all the power, truth, and faithfulness of him to whom all things are possible.”

James 1:2-4 reads “*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you*

*know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.*”

Wesley’s comment was “My brethren, count it all joy, which is the highest degree of patience and contains all the rest. When ye fall into diverse temptations, that is, trials. Let patience have its perfect work. Give it full scope, under whatever trials befall you, that ye may be perfect and entire, adorned with every Christian grace. And wanting nothing – which God requires in you.” In these comments, we see his understanding of conformity to Christ, as well as confidence in the Holy Spirit working for good in the disciple.

## “Do no harm” & Extravagant Generosity

Tithing is the standard for the righteousness of the Pharisees. Those who are going on to perfection in love are called to exceed this level of righteousness (Sermon 20). The amount we are to give for the ministries of the church, and for other charitable needs, is not to be determined by a “dotted line” 10% (as if God is indifferent to how we use the other 90%), but by conformity to Christ, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.”

This method for giving is consistent with the rest of John Wesley’s understanding of *going on to perfection*, for in this he “was able to avoid the antinomianism of those who held to grace without human participation, as well as avoid the works righteousness which relied so heavily on human participation that there was little or no need for atonement through Christ.” It helped him to avoid the sins of omission that can only be addressed by being conformed to the compassion of Christ.

It helped him “take up his cross,” which he addressed in Sermon 42.

Wesley’s petition in his Thursday morning prayer: *O Lord Jesus, I give you my body, my soul, my substance, my fame, my friends, my liberty, my life. Use me, and all that is mine, as it seems best to you.*

## Special Worship Services

Maundy Thursday, April 1, 7 PM, the Festival Choir will present the perennial favorite by Hal Hopson, *Tenebrae*. The Festival Choir is under the direction of Rev. Kathy Rollings, accompanied by Sandy Selby, and includes additional singers from the congregation who participate in the choir during the holiday performances. Choir practices are every Wednesday, 6:30 PM, with the Festival Choir practice beginning around 7:15 PM.



Good Friday, April 2, 7 PM, Dr. Nick Campbell will lead us into the experience of the betrayal of the disciples during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

On Resurrection Sunday, April 4, we will have a “Sonrise” service at 7:00 AM, which will be a brief service of lighting candles and singing praise. At the Morning Worship services, the Festival Choir will sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s oratorio, *The Messiah*.



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## “Do no harm” & Risk-taking Mission and Service

Seeking Christ in the least of these through service and mission is an extension of the hospitality that welcomes everyone as someone that Christ died to redeem. John Wesley included this in his prayer for Monday morning:

*Do not let me exclude even one, O Lord, from your love for all are to receive your works of mercy. Let me treat all my neighbors with that tender love that is due to your servants and your children. This is the love you have commanded me to do! For if I fail to love even one of my neighbors, it exposes to your sight my ingratitude, and I forfeit your loving kindness in my life, which I need more than life itself!*

We can think of the results of what we do in service and mission by the dollars and hours spent, and quickly become discouraged. The world makes it clear that we do not have enough money or resources on our own to fix all the problems that dehumanize and divide all the children of God. The world may see our efforts as

tiny and insignificant; yet, Jesus calls us to see our Spirit-enabled work as mustard seeds and yeast. There are countless stories in our faith tradition of simple ideas of compassion and service becoming something much greater than any one else could have imagined. Blankets for babies may have been the seed that became a major hospital. An after-school program for children may have been the yeast for a comprehensive program of therapy, education, and life skills for troubled teenagers. A kind word and a helping hand may not seem like much in the moment, and it may not even be thankfully received, yet it may be the seed that will later grow and make that person or community receptive to the working of the Holy Spirit in changing their lives.

Our service and mission to others is the incarnation of Christ, for without this discipline we only have evidence of the *forms* of godliness in our lives, but we do not have evidence of the *power* of godliness. Sermon 19 reminds us that there is

an appropriate time to let our light shine before others, remembering that we are not to take any credit for the good that is being done. We can do no good at all, except that God does the good through us.

Jesus, as the unjust steward (Luke 16:5-9), has changed the terms concerning what we owe God. The Good News of Jesus Christ has changed our debt, and we have entered into a new obligation – to love God and our neighbor with the perfect love of Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit enables us. And like the people of the parable who had their debts changed, we can praise the goodness of the Master. It is then that we will embrace what is known as John Wesley’s Rule:

*Do all the good you can,  
by all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.*