

November 23, 2014

## WE MUST GROW UP IN EVERY WAY

Ephesians 4:14-16

After a brief exhortation to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Timothy 6:12), John Wesley concludes his sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* with the following words:

Labor, then, brothers and sisters, for that which endureth to everlasting life. (John 6:27). Go on, in virtue of the grace of God, preventing, accompanying, and following you, steadfast and immovable, “*always abounding in the work of the Lord.*” (1 Corinthians 15:58) And “*the God of peace who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of His sheep (Jesus), make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever!*” (Hebrews 13:20-21)

In The Book of Discipline (1992), we are able to read in the section on the **Distinctive Wesley Emphases**, under the heading, *Mission and Service*, (p.46), “We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.”

United Methodists strongly believe that Scriptural holiness includes more than personal piety. Love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice, and renewal in the life of the world. Piety is good. But unless it includes being grounded in a social conscience, we can never pray with integrity for God’s will to be done *on earth* nor can we pray with sincerity for God’s Kingdom to come. (Matthew 6:10)

Integrity for a Christian comes when faith is put into action. For John Wesley, there is no religion but social religion, and no holiness but social holiness. And so, United Methodists not only emphasize mission and service, but also the ministry and mission of the Church. We believe that the personal experience of faith is nourished by, in, and through the worshiping community where gifts are given “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry.*” (Ephesians 4:12) Every individual who has faith is to be directed to this common purpose. The outreach of the Church springs from the working of the spirit. We must always pray with St. Francis of Assisi to become *instruments of God’s peace*.

John Wesley expressed his expectations for the people called Methodists by proclaiming that Christians should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, first, “by doing no harm and by avoiding evil of every kind;” second, “by doing good of every sort, and, as far as possible to all.” And third, “by attending upon all the ordinances of God.” The Three Simple Rules

And so having shared several messages about the distinctive Wesleyan emphases, every one of us can claim in our lives the principles and purposes proclaimed by our founder: Prevenient Grace, Justification and Assurance, Sanctification and Perfection, Faith and Good Works, Mission and Service, and the Nurture and Ministry of the Church.

And yet, with Wesley, we know that we must not duly rely on disciplinary rules, for discipline is not Church law. With John Wesley, we must proclaim: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things charity!”

Let us never forget that love is greater, even, than faith! (1 Corinthians 13:13) May love be our purpose, as we work together for the glory of God!