

## **Disciples Take Their Faith Public**

November 17, 2019

Theme: Faith impacts both the personal realm and the public realm.

Scripture: Isaiah 65: 17-25

*<sup>17</sup> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD — and their descendants as well. <sup>24</sup> Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent — its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.*



Today we continue our “What Disciples Do” sermon series. Last week we heard the story of one of the giants of the faith – Job. As Coleen shared last week,

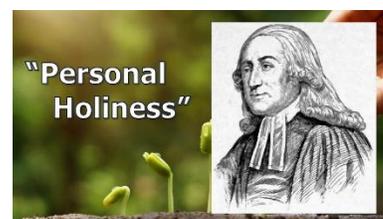
he was a man of great faith that was richly blessed by God. Then Satan went to

work in Job's life, first taking all his livestock and then his children. Job kept the faith, recognizing that God both giveth and taketh away. Job then blessed the name of the Lord. When the trials and sufferings increased, Job still held his faith. Job declared that through it all he knew that his redeemer lived and would one day walk upon the earth. As Coleen said, in his greatest moments of despair, Job's faith was the strongest. She also shared her struggle, which I appreciated very much. In the end, she came to understand what Job came to understand: God has a plan and we must trust in that plan. Coleen acknowledged that, yes, sometimes the timing is not our timing. Like Job, we were also reminded that God the redeemer will take care of us. Thanks be to God. Let us pray...

Today we will look at our call to take our faith public. This was what Job did when his wife and then friends questioned his faith. This was what Coleen's friend did when she shared her trust in God's plan and in the promise that there is nothing that God will not do for us. This was what Coleen did as she stood up here and shared how God has been and is at work in her life. This is an area of faith that we are sometimes reluctant to pursue, to put effort towards.

When considering our faith, we prefer to think of it on a personal level. We like to think of faith as that thing that affects our beliefs, values, relationships, ethics, and the way we spend our time and money. John Wesley, founding father of the Methodist movement, called this "personal holiness".

For Wesley, personal holiness was developed and matured through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

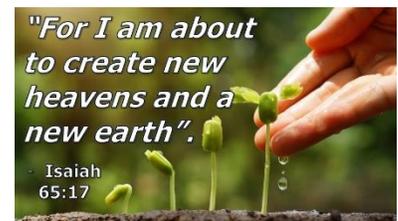


These disciplines would be: study and meditation upon God's word, time spent in prayer and fasting; and worship. The time we spend in drawing closer to God deepens our relationship with God. For Wesley, this was a lifelong process. He called it a "journey to perfection". The journey begins when we profess Christ as Lord and ends when we stand before him in heaven, finally being made perfect.



This idea of things being made new is the focus of our passage from Isaiah 65. If you are not turned to this chapter in your Bible, I invite you to turn there now, to

Isaiah 65. In verse seventeen, God says, *"For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth"*. In our passage we read that in this new heaven and earth there will be much joy; there God will delight in his children. In short, life will be really good. We will live to old age; infant mortality will be no more. We will have homes and will have food to eat. Our children and grandchildren will be blessed by the Lord. We will live in close communion with God. So close, in fact, as we read in verse 24, *"Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear"*. Before a word is on our lips, God will know what we are saying. Before we finish the request, God will have heard our plea. Yes, life will be really good.



When one looks at our larger world today, we seem to be far from this vision of a new heaven and a new earth – one where the *"wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox"*. The idea of a world living in peace and in harmony with one another seems far from our current reality. On a personal level, we may indeed feel that same closeness to God as is described in Isaiah 65. Many of us feel that God is as close as our next breath. In Wesleyan terms, our personal holiness is doing just fine. In terms of having homes and food, good health, and a generally blessed life, I think we would all fall into the terms described in God's vision.



But another reality exists. There are many people in our community and nation and world do not feel that life is really good, that life is blessed. Many feel how Job felt last week – powerless, in pain, covered in sores, abandoned by friends and maybe even by God - questioning God at the very least. Many who are struggling to find adequate and affordable housing and enough food for the table would read about homes to live in and plenty of food to eat and ask, "Where"? Many that cannot find a job that provides a living wage would read about enjoying the labor of their hands and would ask, "When"? Many who have experienced injustice and prejudice would read about the lion and lamb feeding together and ask, "How"? Many who have lived with an untreated medical or emotional problem year after year would read about no more weeping and crying and ask what they need to do to experience this kind of a wonderful life.

For many, the distance is great between Isaiah's vision and their daily reality. While most of us who are here this morning can connect the vision to our daily life, there are many who cannot even begin to see that vision as a possibility for their lives or for the lives of their children. Those families that must decide between buying propane and paying the electric bill cannot envision a life blessed by God. The single mothers that must decide between food for their children and gas for the car so that they can go to work simply cannot read Isaiah 65 and see the hope for the future that God lays out. If our world is to become what is laid out in this passage from Isaiah 65, then issues such as poverty and homelessness, and access to basic health care, adequate food and shelter, a good education, a living wage, and so on are God's kingdom issues.

To bring this idea home, hear these words written by a Winner resident. I read this post on Facebook Thursday morning and want to share it with you now to help make real the struggles that people right here in our community face. Hear these words as the reality for a person in our community. This woman writes,

*Okay, let's set the scene. You're a single parent with a child. You work full time for \$14 (an hour). You bring home roughly \$800 per paycheck. Your bills: \$1000 rent, \$150 electrical, \$250 car payment, \$150 car insurance. So, let's do the math. You bring home about \$1600 a month and your bills average about \$1550, give or take. You're making it, but barely. (This doesn't even include groceries, internet, cable, cell phone, etc; nor does it include child tax credit or child support)*

*Now, it's a really cold December and you get a power bill for \$600. How do you pay that? To put it simply, you don't. Because you can't. So your power gets shut off. But you know what your lease says? It says you get evicted if your utilities are terminated. So now you're in court, crying to a judge who doesn't care, and you have 10 days to get out.*

*Well, you're in luck! Because you found somewhere with 3 days to spare and it's only \$650 a month! But to get in, you have to pass a background & credit check. Which you can't, because you just got evicted. You've never been a criminal, but even if you could pass it, you're looking at \$1300 to move in, after paying the deposit and first month's rent.*

*Time's up! Landlord shows up at 7 am with the police and changed your locks. So now you're living in your car with your 7-year-old son and everything you need to get by. You tried to get a storage unit, but you don't have a billing address so they won't sell one to you, so you could only take what would fit in your backseat. You pay to shower at local truck stops and eat whatever can be cooked in a gas station microwave. Someone sees you and your son living like this and calls CPS; guess what happens next. They remove your child from your care. As if this isn't devastating enough, you lose your job too, because "an employee losing their child reflects poorly on this company."*

*So now, you apply for an apartment with the region, where the waiting list is 3-7 years. Then you go into Wal-Mart to put in an application. When you get back to your car, you see that your back window has been smashed and someone helped themselves to your belongings. Remember that it is December, and really cold, and now you have damage to your only shelter.*

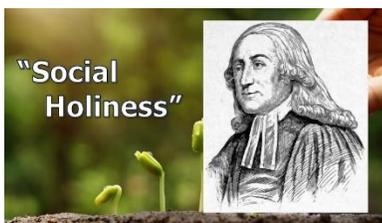
*You call your car insurance, who says your deductible is \$1,000 AND they're going to increase your monthly rate since you're now "high risk." You call the homeless shelter as a last resort... and all their beds are full.*

*I'll stop here, because I think you get the point. The people we work with every day are these people. WE ARE THESE PEOPLE. We are all so close to homelessness and don't even realize it. All it takes is one unexpected bill, one fender bender, one lay-off, one house fire, etc.*

*Instead of talking trash about people who are poor or homeless or need assistance, why don't you try being thankful that you're not in their shoes... yet.*

*This is about staying humble and being kind. BE THANKFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE.*

I would argue that because these issues matter to God, they should matter to us as well. This is where we get into John Wesley's second form of holiness –



“social holiness”. Wesley believed that our personal holiness must inform and guide our social holiness. As a young college student, John was part of a small group that studied Jesus' call to care for the orphan and

widow, to tend to the sick, to visit the prisoner. His study led him to do just these things – visiting the orphan and widow and sick and imprisoned. As

Wesley lived out the gospel more and more, he began to address other needs.

Wesley began what was called “open air” preaching so that the word of God could come to those who were unwelcome in the churches.

The poverty he saw in these places led him to begin Sunday schools so that poor children could learn how to read, providing a possible path to a better life. The ailments that were caused by poor living conditions and a poor diet led him to write "Primitive Physic" – a wildly popular book that detailed inexpensive and practical cures for many ailments of the day. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was a great champion of the poor and the needy, of the lonely and the outcast. He allowed his personal holiness - his relationship with Jesus Christ – to influence, to impact, to guide all areas of his life – his social holiness. If we as individuals and as a local church are to live into our Methodist heritage and into our missional traditions, then we too must seek to address the issues that are preventing the advancement of the kingdom of God as detailed in Isaiah 65's vision of a new kingdom on earth. To address these issues, we must each be the hands and feet of Jesus, ministering to a world in need.

Living out our social holiness also involves telling others about the good news of Jesus Christ. Back in mid-September we talked about taking our faith out into all the areas of our lives and about being evangelistic – inviting others to know the Jesus that makes all the difference in our lives. For those struggling with life, for those who cannot even begin to envision the new heaven and earth that Isaiah writes of, we must first begin by addressing social justice issues like poverty. Only after making a positive difference in their lives and only after developing a relationship can we begin to explain why we are doing these things. Only then have we earned the right to speak of the things of faith. Only then do we gain the holy privilege of sharing the story of our faith. First by action and then by word, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are charged to take our faith public.

Fritz Kreisler was a world-famous violinist who lived during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions. He generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he was not able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase the beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay, it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. But the collector refused to sell it. He said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it at any price. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. He asked the collector, "Could I play the instrument just once more before it is consigned to silence?"

Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep that to myself", he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

Take it into the world, and let people hear it. The good news is beautiful news to the ears of the lost and broken. The good news is truly good news. We have no right to keep it to ourselves. As Christians, we all have beautiful news to share - the good news that is in our personal possession. And there is a world of dying people waiting to hear it. If we will not share the gospel so that all people may hear the good news of God, how will they ever hear it? Through both our actions and our words, may we take the gospel to the world so that all may hear the hope that we each have found in Jesus Christ. May we take our faith public, seeking to build the kingdom of God here in this place. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve:**

- 1) Grow. How are you growing in matters of personal holiness - Bible study, prayer, worship, praise, fasting?
- 2) Pray. Who do you know that is lacking in basic needs - food, shelter, warmth...? Pray for your faith to be in action to help meet these needs.
- 3) Serve. How is your personal holiness leading you out into a life of service to the poor and broken, to the lost and the least?