

“Three Simple Rules”
James 3: 13-4:3, 7-8a
Sunday ~~October~~ 23, 2018
Sept.

A man, for some reason unbeknownst to himself, began to exhibit a habit of grumbling at the food his wife placed before him at family meals. Each evening it was his job to ask the blessing over the food. One day after his usual combination complaint-prayer, his little girl asked, “Daddy, does God hear us when we pray?”

“Why, of course,” he replied. “He hears us every time we pray.”

She paused on this a moment, and asked, “Does He hear everything we say the rest of the time?”

“Yes, dear, every word,” he replied, encouraged that he had inspired his daughter to be curious about spiritual matters. However, his pride was quickly turned to humility at his daughter’s next question.

“Then, which does God believe?”

Let us prayer?

Do you know who our spiritual heroes are?

Every church that you and I have attended in our life has spiritual heroes. The Lutheran’s have Martin Luther who founded the Lutheran church in about 1520. The Presbyterians have John Knox who founded the church in 1592 in Scotland. The Southern Baptist Church was founded by John Smyth in Amsterdam, Holland in 1609 and 1612 by Thomas Helwys and John Murton in America. A little side note...my husband and my first argument were about the founding of the

Southern Baptist Church. He was taught at his Baptist Church that the Baptist Church was founded by John the Baptist. My reaction to what he had been taught was less than charitable.

The Methodists were founded by John Wesley in England. It was intended to be a reform movement within the Church of England. Life in England in the 1730's was a difficult life unless you were not in the top 2% of the population. You see, the top 2% of the population had 98% of the wealth in the country.

There was great poverty, no system for those who could no longer work due to age, who could find no work, or were too ill to work. Poor houses had been developed in which those who had no money could live. They were almost like mass prisons that locked people in at night and opened in the morning for people to work.

Conditions were wretched in there. People were beaten, raped, murdered, stolen from, and acted so inhuman to each other. On top of that many people were moving from the farms to the city to work. Men and woman went to work in the factories that were emerging. Children ran the streets because there was no childcare that anyone could afford.

If you were not wealthy, then you were poor. Those who went to Church were those who were wealthy. It was felt if you didn't have the right clothes to wear to church, then you couldn't go to church. There many people who worked day in and day out in the mines, in the factories, and on the farms not to be mention as servants in the homes of wealthy. They did not work 5 days a week and have two off. They might have one day off on Sundays. Then there were those who just made enough to get by outside the factories. They had an occupation. Yet, they were not wealthy either.

Many people coped with these harsh conditions through large amounts of alcohol consumption, gambling, sex outside of marriage, fighting, quarreling, returning evil for evil, and so much more.

John Wesley was a Church of England priest who had not had much success in pastoral duties as he had hoped to. His spiritual searching lead him to an experience, in which, he sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit one particular day as he and other friends were studying the Bible together.

It is a spark that changed his life. He was not assigned to a church at that time. As he shared with others about his experience, people came to see him. They too wanted to experienced forgiveness of their sins and flee the wrath of God that was to come on judgment day. Each week they met on a Thursday night. More and more people came to this Bible Study expressing their desire to know that their sins were forgiven and that they could flee the wrath that was to come on judgment day.

God had picked a man who was an organizer. John Wesley began to organize people into small groups of about 12. To be a part of these groups you had to want to flee that wrath that was to come on judgment day.

Wesley not only organized the group, but he required that those who wanted to come to these groups would abide by three rules. It is these three rules that Wesley expected the members of the small group to abide by that are evident in our passage today and throughout the New Testament.

Wesley's three rules were these: Do no harm by avoiding every kind of evil; Doing good of every sort as much as it is possible; and Stay in love with God-Attend upon the ordinances of God.

Look at James for a moment: James 3: 14 and 16 talks against bitter envy, selfish ambition, boastfulness, lying, disorder, and every kind of wickedness. James was talking to those who were Christians in which the habits of their former lives were gradually being replaced. Their souls were being transformed yet, their conversations and actions needed some work.

It reminds me of the divide between Christians even in the United Methodist Church. We don't all see the issues of homosexuality, the interpretation of the Bible, and who to vote for, the same. We view things differently. Sometimes there are vehement arguments about these things to the point that people stop listening to each other and even to the point where we may view "the other side" as not going to heaven.

John Wesley named a few of the evils of his day that he wanted those in these small groups to not participate in: Not taking the Lord's name in vain, not spirituous liquors to buy or sell, no drunkenness, no slaveholding, no fighting, brawling, no taking your brother to court, no returning evil for evil, and even not doing things that you know you do not honor God.

The second rule was to do all the good you can. James put it this way. He wanted those young Christians to seek what was wise in God's eyes to do. This wisdom from God would demonstrate itself in the good things that you do to those around.

John Wesley, put it this way: As you are able for the bodies of others food for the hungry, clothing for the naked, and visiting those who are sick or in prison. For the souls of others, teach them what about how to live out this faith in Jesus Christ. Deny yourself and take up your cross daily. Help each other by going to their stores and buy things, help

them in their stores with what they need, display the love of Christ in your business dealings.

We have a mission in our Annual Conference called McCurdy Mission. It was established in 1912 in the Espanola Valley here in New Mexico when there was no school there. The missionary who started this ministry was the school teacher, the nurse, the pastor of the church she founded there. Her name was Millie Perkins. She had four students.

The school changed the world around her and many more missionaries would come to carry on the work. The school not only educated children in reading, writing, and arithmetic it also educated them in the Christian faith. Lives changed. I want to tell you a story that blessed my heart. There was a child who started kindergarten at the school. Some time in his early years his parents, aunts, uncles, and some grandparents could not care for this little boy except for grandfather. All the other relatives' family of this little boy were on drugs, alcoholics, or in prison.

This grandfather loved this little boy as did the teachers and staff at McCurdy. This boy continued in the school all the way through high school. It was his senior year and just a few weeks from graduation and his grandfather died. The day after the funeral, he was back at school. His teachers were surprised to see him. He answered them this way: where else would I go? You are my family.

He did graduate and went into the military. He is proudly serving his country, is married, and has two children. Many changes have happened in the way that McCurdy approaches its mission ministry in education and outreach to the community.

The third rule was to aid the process of staying in love with God. Wesley did not want the small group to take the place of some

important means of God's grace. These activities aided each believer in staying in that love relationship with God.

In the book of James 3: 8, he tells believers to draw near to God and God will draw near to them. Wesley took that to mean that people needed to attend public worship, that they needed to read the Bible aloud and think about what it meant at home. He told them that they needed to not avoid taking communion. People were afraid to take communion the wrong way because of some words the apostle Paul said in Corinthians 1. Many people avoided taking it all together. God's grace is in these holy moments. He also included reading and praying at home and what today we might call a devotional time. We might use the Upper Room Devotional Guide and our Bibles to read the passages and story that goes with that reading. He also recommended abstinence and fasting.

These are all ways that we could grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Both John Wesley and James, as well as others in the Bible talk about the demonstration of the love of God that is spread across our hearts. It will show itself in our lives. The demonstration of that love is a growing thing.

Many of you know of my son Peter who is autistic. He wanted to grow some flowers. I wasn't sure about these flowers he wanted to grow and if he would follow through with wanting them and whatever else he needed to do. Would they even live?

Finally, I gave in and we went together to get the planter, the soil, miracle grow, and the seeds he so disparately wanted to grow. In Peter's enthusiasm, the soil went in, the seeds went in, and water went in. He read carefully the directions, the first morning he got up and nudging he went out and watered the planter. The second morning the

same thing happened, the third, the fourth, and on and on. Never did I have to remind him to water his seeds. Then one day those seeds begin to sprout. Each day Peter watered after he got up in the morning. Finally, these beautiful flowers bloomed.