

“Social Holiness” - Luke 10: 25-37 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

We learn Social Holiness from Scripture. Some of the materials we will use in this sermon series comes from the work of a colleague the Rev. Ron Dunn. The words and witness of the prophet Amos assailed the religious establishment of his day for their focus on rituals and feasts, while ignoring the plight of the poor and the marginalized. He cried out, *But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* (Amos 5:24 CEB) This was not a trickle-down theory, but a spring rain type gushing down –rolling down - practice.

Jesus offered the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate what it means to be a neighbor. Once again, the religious establishment is exposed in this parable for its failure to truly care about the needs of others. Both a priest and a Levite cross over to the other side of the road rather than help the man who has been robbed and beaten. It is only the Samaritan, living by a different principle, who illustrates for us what it means to be a neighbor by binding up the man’s wounds and paying for his recovery. A true neighbor, says Jesus, is the one who does likewise—one who offers compassion and care to those who have need.

We learn Social Holiness from John Wesley We have inherited a long and rich legacy that has attempted, over the centuries, to tie together one’s experience of God’s love with one’s witness to that love. Or as it is written in the letter of James, *As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.* (James 2.26 CEB) John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was quite clear that while personal piety—that is, one’s personal relationship with God—was important, it was, in and of itself, not enough to provide a life of vital and meaningful faith. A vital faith, Wesley said, was one not only of the heart, but of the hands as well; a faith that was focused not only upon one’s personal salvation, but upon the salvation—that is to say, the healing, wholeness, rights and dignity of others as well. John Wesley believed that a vital personal faith had social implications and social responsibilities.

We learn Social Holiness from the Social Principles from the Methodist movement In 1908, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a **Social Creed** which became the foundation document upon which the **Social Principles** would be built as a result of General Conference action in 1972. In the most recent 2020/2024 edition of the Book of Discipline the Social Principles take up 40 pages to cover the six broad areas of: **Natural World, Nurturing Community, Social Community, Economic Community, Political Community and World Community.** For those of you wishing to take the time to read the principles you can find them here: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124> The purpose of these principles is not to “lay down the law” prescribing just how United Methodists should think or act, but to provide guidelines that would assist us in our efforts to discern just what it meant to live as faithful people. Webster’s dictionary defines a principle as: *a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption.* In the Good Samaritan story the priest and Levite held the principle of: “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” so they could not go near or help the injured man by the side of the road. They were living in a world of social

distancing to prevent them from being defiled or “getting their hands dirty.” BTW the Samaritan seemed to live by a different principle – a biblical principle: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers* (Hebrews 13.2a NRSV) And this week in the devotions I used the Golden Rule - *Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you.* (Luke 6.31CEV)

For me it is helpful to think of our social principles as a “guidebook” that we can use to chart our course in these uncertain times. While some choose to interpret their faith through the lens that tends to view controversial issues in either/or, black or white terms, that is not our tradition as a people of faith. The Social Principles are not intended to end the debate and narrowly define the Christian response. Instead, they are intended to ground us in the witness of scripture, tradition, experience and reason as we go about the process of making up our own minds and then, acting upon our decisions. Please realize that good, well-meaning and well-versed United Methodists often find themselves in disagreement over these principles as they are stated. I certainly do not agree with every statement made within these guidelines. But I am grateful that we can agree to disagree and that we have these Social Principles as a means of lifting up and discussing the important questions of how we, as followers of Jesus, should live our faith in this time of challenge and change. And it is my hope that this brief sermon series on the Social Principles will invite and encourage you to do what Jesus told the legal expert, “*Go and do likewise.*” Alleluia and Amen.

Who Is My Neighbor (Luke 10)

Jeffrey B. Childs 1/19/22

Who is my neighbor?
A scholar asked Jesus.
Don't you mean the nearest?
Those who look like us.

Then the stranger took him,
To recover at an inn,
And paid the bill in full,
To the innkeeper within.

But Jesus told a story,
Of a man who nearly died,
And how two holy men,
Passed on the other side.

Jesus asks, “Which was the neighbor?”
And when the scholar replies,
Jesus says to all who'll hear,
To, “Go and do likewise!”

But there was another,
Someone different Jesus said,
Who came to the man's rescue,
And offered him first aid.