

Lesson: The Wesleyan Quadrilateral - God's toolbox

The Methodist Theological Journey or the way Methodists speak about God.

CONFIRMATION CLASS

Today's Scripture Readings:

- a. 2 Timothy 3:10-17 (Page 1318 of Confirmation Bible)
- b. Acts 2:41-47 (Page 1184 of Confirmation Bible)
- c. Luke 4: 14-24 (Page 1110 of Confirmation Bible)

Take away: God reveals truth in different ways.

Part of our faith journey as Methodists is to reflect on what we call “*our theological task.*” *Theology* is our effort to consider God’s gracious action in our lives. *Theology* is how we talk about and think about the mystery of God’s presence, peace, and power in the world. One of the unique ways Methodists undertake this task comes to us from both John Wesley and a twentieth-century Methodist scholar named Albert Outler. It was Albert Outler who studied the teachings, writings, and sermons of John Wesley and he was the one who pinned the phrase: *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*. In another words, it is important to note that John Wesley never used the term *Wesleyan Quadrilateral* in any of his writings. When Albert Outler began studying the writings and works of John Wesley he then realized that John Wesley commonly used four resources to arrive at reliable conclusions regarding issues of faith. Those four resources were *Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience*. These four resources gave John Wesley the tools to navigate, discern, and apply the truth and wisdom of the Bible. John Wesley believed the Bible to be the primary source of God’s revelation. He also recognized that Tradition, Experience, and Reason helped to reveal God to us in other ways and

these resources are meant to show us different ways of applying what the Bible teaches. John Wesley always emphasized that the Bible is our ultimate authority. Think about Apostle Paul's charge to young Timothy as found in 2 Timothy 3:14-15 on page 1318 of our Confirmation Bible: *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."* Read this scripture again but remember that the Apostle Paul knew he was about to be executed when he wrote this second letter to Timothy. It was the last letter ever to be written by Paul, so he emphasized the things he thought were important to encourage and guide his young friend Timothy. Give thought to the fact that the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is not primarily about making decisions but rather about helping you to draw closer to God. You can draw closer to God by seeking God's will and wisdom. These last words written by the Apostle Paul can also help you keep on the right path too as you grow older and as you solve problems and learn about new things.

What is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral - God's toolbox?

"God revealing His truth in different ways"

Confirmation is a time to figure out what you want for your spiritual future.

*The **adults in your life have made the decision** and got you up to this point. Now it is time for you to learn and grow and decide what you want for your future.

*At the **end of the year you will have the choice to make the commitment** to join the church and to be baptized if you haven't already.

*To **help you on this journey** we are going to take the time to go through the **Old and New Testaments**. We are also going to specifically talk about **Methodism** and its founder John Wesley. Hopefully by the time you decide to make this commitment we will have given you a better understanding of Christianity and Methodist beliefs to help you make your decision.

***Scripture can seem confusing** at times as to what we should do. When we read through the bible it will seem to contradict itself at times. (Larry talking about at retreat) It will seem harsh, it will seem loving, it will seem unlike anything we experience today.

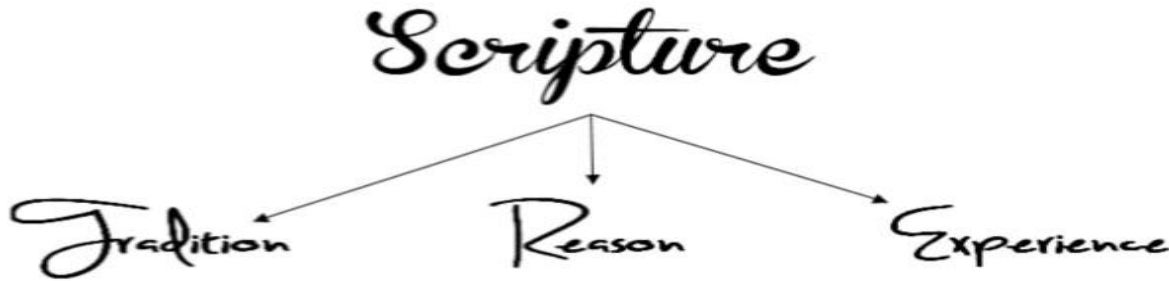
*Not just scripture - What about life situations - Bullying, gossiping everyday situations that we have **decisions to make**.

***We need some "tools" to help us in our understanding of religion and scripture.**

We need **tools for everything**:

Jobs - education, clothing, briefcase
 School - supplies, teachers, textbooks, backpacks
 Friendships/Family - Love , support and understanding
 Church - Preacher, hymnals, congregation our spiritual gifts etc.

***Video:** John Wesley, through Albert Outler put together a “method” or a “toolbox” to help us.



*Wesley (Methodists) believed that **nothing trumps Scripture!** However, we need to remember that Jesus is God, Scripture is not.

Scripture **helps us** to meet the living word of God (Jesus) and the relationship with his people (Holy Spirit).

***So, if you don't understand what scripture is saying or need help with a decision.** We can use our toolbox, or we will now call it the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” of Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. Let’s look at those four items in our Wesleyan Quadrilateral:

Scripture:

- *How is it the same and different that **other verses in the bible.**
- *What was the **original context**
- *God’s written Word serves as the *primary* source for theological reflection.

Example: *Creation: **Did you know that there are two creation stories** in the Bible? First is found in Genesis 1:1-31 on page 5 of our Confirmation Bible and Genesis 2:4-25 on page 6 of our Confirmation Bible. The first recounts God creating the universe in six steps. The second version makes no mention of days, nor any other unit of time, for that matter.*

Tradition:

- ***What traditions** is it speaking to Jewish, Pagan, Philosophical law etc.
- *Does it affirm or conflict traditions in your church or family tradition
- *Using the teachings of those who came before us (beliefs of your parents or grandparents)

Example is Creation: The majority of Christians hold that creation occurred over six literal, 24-hour days. This stems from the traditional Christian beliefs in Biblical literalism and inerrancy.

The writer of Deuteronomy named Tradition in this manner: “When your children ask you in time to come, what is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord your God has commanded you? Then you shall say to your children, We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” The writer was penning these six hundred years after the exodus, six hundred years after the Hebrews had escaped from Egypt, but the writer still used the word “we” and “us”. Even though it was six centuries later, the writer knew that this information held the power of Tradition and was more than just a story about ‘way-back-then’ but rather it was a story about ‘our’ Tradition and listening to Tradition allows ‘us’ to have a conversation with those who came before ‘us’.

Experience:

*What was the passage **mean to the 1st readers**

*Is it for a **specific audience or for all readers**

*How is it different / same from your experience with God? a

***Personal experiences are useful** for clarifying the answers we learn from these other sources. God has put us in a physical world, and it is through experiencing this world that we can seek to understand the world beyond.

Example: Creation: By studying science throughout my education, I’ve realized how incredibly complex our universe is. Because I have a background in science, I’m even more in awe of God’s creation. With that said, we shouldn’t be making science the enemy. Instead, we should be open to using it as a tool for complementing—not undermining—Scripture.

Reason:

Reason describes how God is at work in what God has created.

Reason does not operate in a vacuum.

Reason does not produce independent information but allows you to process data from a variety of sources.

John Wesley wrote: “Some say you are for reason; some say I am for faith; I am for both; I am for faith to perfect my reason, that, by the Spirit of God not putting out the eyes of my understanding but enlightening them more and more. I may be ready to give a clear, scriptural answer to every man that asketh me a reason of the hope that is in me.”

*As you read Scripture then ask, ‘What was the writer thinking’?

*How does this logic inform your own way of thinking?

*Without reason, we cannot understand the essential truths of Scripture. God created us as intelligent beings—the use of reason is a gift from Him. But since reason is not a human invention, it needs assistance from the Holy Spirit. Faith and reason are meant to work *together*.

Example is Creation: The Bible’s creation narratives seem more concerned with revealing God’s role as creator than presenting certain facts. For the original writer or writers of Genesis, separating creation into days may have simply been an orderly way to organize a story meant to highlight God’s creative role. Because Genesis’ original audience wasn’t focused on scientific accuracy like we are today, the timeframe probably didn’t matter much to them.

John Wesley taught that Methodists need to come to understand that the “honest and full message” of the Bible is most likely to be revealed to those who draw on reason, tradition, and experience. Such an approach to Bible study tends to protect Methodists from “bibliolatry”, which is a kind of worship of the Bible instead of worship of the God of the Bible. John Wesley taught that the Bible is the final authority, and persons in the Wesleyan or Methodists approach will use reason, tradition, and experience as the lenses through which to look at Scripture.

Think of it like this: I wear glasses and unless I have them on, even though I want very much to see the words on my computer screen, the text blurs. Even though God has revealed plain truth in the Bible, we sometimes need the help of experience, tradition, and reason to bring the meaning of the text into focus.

Other Examples:

- John 8:1-8 - Stoning a woman for adultery - those without sin – “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” (page 1158 of our Confirmation Bible).
- 'Women in church - Paul's letters to a specific audience or all - yet look at all the leaders Ruth, Phoebe and Priscilla
- 'Galatians 3:25 women silent in church but was specific to that church, have to take culture into play (page 1277 of our Confirmation Bible).
- 'Slavery- Ephesians 6:5 slaves obey masters (cultural tradition at the time written) - Philemon owned a slave that was in prison with Paul and later Paul rejected slavery and to set him free (page 1288 of our Confirmation Bible).

Need to see yourself in these stories. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said we choose friends who are useful to us, friends whose company we enjoy, friends whose qualities we admire and who admire us in return. As you see yourself in the stories mentioned above, also ask yourself: How do I choose my friends?

Look at the lessons and scripture thru ideas and the cultural settings of the day. Read the bible as a whole. Discuss scripture with your friends and parents. Remember that in Romans 15:7 we are told that Jesus chose you to be his friend: “*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*” (page 1240 of our Confirmation Bible). Maybe it is more important to be a friend than to have one. How can you be a friend? Proverbs gives these guidelines: (1) **Love unconditionally** as found in Proverbs 17:17 on page 688 of our Confirmation Bible and (2) **Be available for advice** as found in Proverbs 27:9 on page 698 of our Confirmation Bible; and (3) **Speak the truth** as found in Proverbs 27:5-6 on page 698 of our Confirmation Bible; and (4) **Be Loyal** as found in Proverbs 17:17 on page 688 of our Confirmation Bible.

Confirmation Student Questions:

- (i) Do you think that John Wesley was aware of the social cost of making mistakes as he lived during the first thirty years of his life? When it came to John Wesley's faith, do you think that he worried that making a mistake or not believing 'correctly' would somehow put him on the wrong side of God? Do you think that as John Wesley's life changed after some of his earlier disastrous experiences that was reminded of things like 'redemption' and 'resurrection' and that through God's grace there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God? (Re-read Romans 8:38-39 on page 1234 of our Confirmation Bible).
- (ii) What are the characteristics of a 'wise' person as discussed in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes?
- (iii) What does Paul mean by the 'thorn in my side keeps me humble'? (Re-read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 on page 1272 of our Confirmation Bible).
- (iv) How can seeing your weaknesses then help you see God more clearly? (Re-read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 on page 1272 of Confirmation Bible).
- (v) Why do you think as a society we are so concerned about perfections and achievements? What's something you would do differently if you didn't care about being perfect? (Look at Isaiah 26:2-4 on page 748 of our Confirmation Bible)
- (vi) What comfort do you find when you are experiencing something difficult or when something bad happens to you? During these times do you remember that you live under the grace and love of God. During these times do you remember that you are in a relationship with a God who is greater than anything you can comprehend. During these times do you remember that Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 on page 222 of our Confirmation Bible).
- (vii) Do you think John Wesley's 3 simple rules of Do No Harm; Do Good; & Stay in Love With God are helpful?
- (viii) Think about helping the poor and needy; (Read Amos 5:4-17 on page 976 of our Confirmation Bible) Why does God put so much emphasis on the way we treat the poor and needy? Have you ever thought about how you treat the celebrities or the rich or those of equal economic standing, and how your actions reflect what you hope to get from them?

- (ix) Have you ever thought that simply because the poor and needy cannot give you anything of financial value that you treat them differently? Do you give without thought of gain? Please remember that you should treat the poor and needy as you would like God to treat you.
- (x) Continue to reflect on the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. who said: **“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”** When you realize that someone is being bullied, or persecuted, or threatened, or made-fun-of because the way they look or act, how do you feel and how do you react? (Read Amos 5:24 on page 976 of our Confirmation Bible).

Have a great week. Pray and talk to God every day. And remember.....

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.

Blessings to all from Lori and Rocky