

CLERGY *Connection*

HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
www.holston.org

THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN *A United Methodist Perspective*

In light of the recent war in Iraq, I write this brief article to highlight the several chaplains who serve from Holston Conference. This article is not focused on either justifying or questioning clergy serving as military chaplains. The role of chaplain in a secular institution is indispensably linked to ordination and the chaplain serves as a pastor to the setting where assigned.

The process for becoming a military chaplain begins with being endorsed by a faith group. For us this is the Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The requirement for endorsement helps to maintain the chaplain's accountability. The chaplain remains accountable to both the denomination and the military branch where one is serving.

Military chaplains serve in a pluralistic setting. It is not unusual to serve along side Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, Church of God, or Roman Catholic chaplains. There is a spirit of collegial, collaborative ministry where the Spirit of God empowers their team effort.

The military offers extensive training to its chaplains at various points in their service. The basic course lasts for six to ten weeks and

covers the foundation teachings for initial service. Basic includes field training and classroom instruction in relevant combat ministries such as pastoral care on the battlefield, ministry to the wounded, care for the dead, preparing service members and their families for separation and dealing with other specific war-related issues. Chaplains get a brief taste of family separation and will most likely serve six months to a year away from the family in the first three years of chaplaincy. In a time of war, family separation is all too frequent among military families.

In the recent Iraq/Afghanistan conflict and its continuing aftermath, a ministry of presence sets the stage for effective pastoral care. The fact that chaplains have volunteered and serve with the unit from the beginning gives chaplains an empathy and credibility for subsequent ministry. A soldier or marine feels comfortable to express concerns of fear, missing family and friends, or wondering what would happen next in battle with the knowledge that the chaplain is also away from family and equally unsure of the future.

Chaplains are creative in providing worship and support for young adults in their care. Chaplains reflect on what is really important and what matters as they speak from the heart



The Clergy Connection

is a communication produced and written by the clergy of Holston Conference for the purposes of deepening relationships, encouraging spiritual growth, increasing awareness of challenging opportunities, imparting useful information, stimulating theological exploration, providing a forum for honest expression and sharing the joys of creative ministries.

Contents

- The Military Chaplain*1
- Matthew 5:9*2
- Clergy Marriages*3
- Bishop's Column*4
- Growth in Ministry*5
- How Many Sermons*6
- Pride & Joy*7
- Book Review: A Perfect Love* .7
- A Text for Today*8

The Clergy Connection exists to call clergy into deeper covenant with God through Christ and to call clergy to live in covenant with each other.

Military Chaplain, continued on page 2

Matthew 5:9 Applied to the Real World

Holston United Methodists along with all Christians should be engaged in efforts for peace in the Holy Land, particularly Israel/Palestine. The lands of the Bible have been desecrated with seeming endless cycles of violence and oppression. Bethlehem is scared, desolate and overshadowed with sadness. The Church of the Nativity is often empty except for a few priests tending their duties. Jerusalem is tense, and the temple mount is the focal point of conflict between Jews and Muslims. Jesus still weeps over Jerusalem and must be saying again to the holy city, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hid from your eyes." (Lk. 19:42)

Since this crisis is so long standing, and so many peace initiatives have failed, there is a temptation to despair and be overcome with a sense of futility. If only the crisis would resolve

itself! But we cannot abdicate our responsibility to be peacemakers; nor resign to the secular powers the sole responsibility for this task. As Christian citizens of the most powerful nation in the world, whose foreign policies are the most significant external influence in the Holy Land, we have the responsibility to understand how our nation engages with the people of this conflicted land and to inform our leaders of our concern.

But what can we do? It is still possible for Christians to go to Israel/Palestine and talk with the different groups engaged in the conflict and its resolution, yet most of us must rely on secondhand information. Rather than allowing the secular media to shape our understanding of the conflict, we should seek to find out for ourselves. Each one of us has our favorite news sources and political ide-



ologies, but if we feed only our preconceptions we may not see the truth. Where does one gain the best Christian perspective of the conflict in the Holy Land?

We need to be informed by Christians, Jews and Muslims within Israel/Palestine who are working for peace and understanding. There are many of them. They are eager to hear from us and to share what is happening in their land and to help us understand what might be done to make for peace. Some of the most eloquent spokespersons for peace are contemporary Palestinian Christians like Elias Chacour and Naim Ateek; there are also Israeli young adults, women's groups and rabbis who work hand in hand with Palestinian peace advocates.

There is also a need for sound bib-

Matthew 5:9 continued to page 6

Military Chaplain

continued from page 1

about spiritual issues to a spiritually eclectic group. Arranging for a priest to say mass or setting aside a private space with access to water for ablutions for Muslim troops in required prayers, are all part of today's chaplains' responsibilities.

Modern warfare gives chaplains a chance to offer ministry to those suffering from battle fatigue, a profound emotional/physical and spiritual depletion brought on by the shock of war, especially in situations where a large number of ill-trained enemy soldiers have been killed close at hand. Again, a ministry of presence opens doors for future ministry. Sensitive and caring chaplains are able to give wise counsel and allow the service member to express anger, grief, and guilt and the emotional support to be human in a time of war.

As I write this, a quiet hero, Pat

Tillman, is being mourned. Pat walked away from millions on the football field to become an elite Army Ranger following the 9-11 terrorist attacks and was killed April 22nd while on patrol in Afghanistan. To honor the dead in combat settings is more than a brief, perfunctory memorial service. The reverent handling of remains is a major issue of morale and rightness to those in combat. Chaplains are involved in ministering to those who see death and offer the important closure of a memorial service for the fallen.

Chaplains serving in proximity to deceased family members often are the official bearers of death notices. Each notification is different but equally difficult.

Those new to the military chaplaincy learn very early that their assigned unit is constantly training

for real world situations. Chaplains train for chemical or biological assault, for ministry in night combat situations, and how to keep pace with the unit when covering long distances in brief time spans. Chaplains as team players who are spiritually and physically motivated and prepared build relationships with the young service members with whom they undergo the training.

My friend, Howard Hinds, writing at his retirement in 2003, said, "ministry may be summed up in one word, chaplain." I am humbled and honored to have been an Army Chaplain for twenty years.



Don Allison
retired clergy
Chattanooga, TN

Clergy Marriages

A Model of Grace

Four decades of ministry have affirmed for us the blessings and benefits of a happy marriage. In retirement, we have reflected on the unique position of clergy marriage to bear witness that marriage is one of God's good gifts. From the moment we said our vows, our marriage was surrounded by wonderful support from the Christian community. Viewing the marriage bond as a "holy covenant" provided a solid foundation for our relationship.

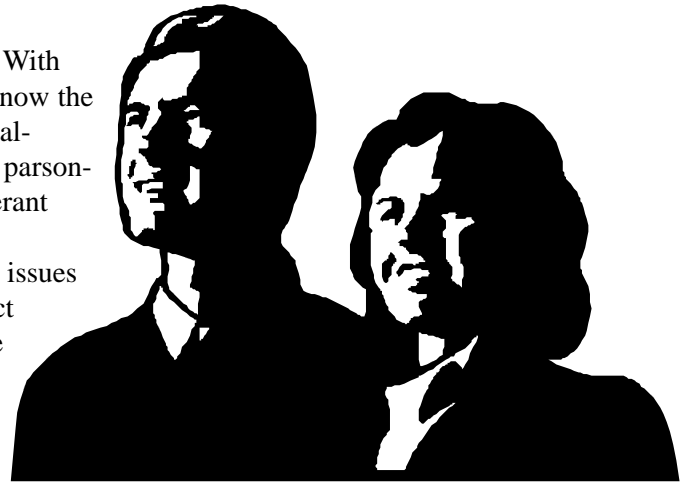
We are keenly aware that serving in Methodism's itinerant system creates many stresses for clergy marriages. Urgent congregational needs are always vying for attention. For the minister's spouse to ask for more time and attention may seem like competing with God.

Ginny: After we married, I taught piano lessons to provide "extras." Part-time work, homemaking duties, and trying to meet expectations of church members filled my days. When the children were school age, I went to graduate school, subsequently teaching in a community college. The stresses multiplied. Still, we tried to give our relationship some prime time. Without making marriage a priority, I don't think we could have kept our family life and our church responsibilities balanced.

Pete: Looking back, I wish I'd been careful to take my "day off" regularly. I responded to the church's needs seven days a week for much of my ministry. I realized that I needed a loving spouse in whom to confide and on whom to depend for encour-

agement and support. With two-career marriages now the norm, even greater challenges exist for every parsonage family in the itinerant system.

So you see, many issues that continue to impact clergy marriages were present for us. Fortunately we received training in marriage enrichment models. By leading events for couples, we were repeatedly in settings where we confronted our own issues. This helped us to grow individually and as a couple.



As we continue to see potential for growth in our own marriage, we are convinced

that every marriage can be better. Our experience has also taught us that couples need support in developing highly functional and deeply satisfying marriage relationships. Our dream is that other clergy couples will have similar opportunities to have their marriages strengthened.

Clergy marriages are a powerful example, in either a positive or a negative way. Clergy divorces are personal tragedies that also cause trauma for the church. Churches can help clergy by encouraging couples to take time off to be together and to participate in marriage enriching events. Training is available for couples who wish to develop leadership skills in marriage and family ministry.

The Holston Conference Task Force on Marriage and Family Ministries is in the process of identi-

fying means whereby churches can provide more effective marriage and family ministries. Let us not assume that healthy marriages result as an automatic by-product of church participation. Much more can be done to nurture strong marriages and to foster stable, happy families. We believe that growing, healthy clergy marriages can provide a model that will inspire other couples who are influenced by their example.



Pete and Ginny Rowlett,
Pete is retired clergy
Knoxville, TN

CLERGY Connection

is a joint publication of the Office of Clergy Concerns and the Office of Communications of the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church

Jim Green, Editor
P.O. Box 32939
Knoxville, TN 37930



Staffing for Ministry

Holston Conference, just like local churches, struggles with resourcing its various ministries with the best personnel possible.

Over the past several years a couple of significant principles have guided staff-related decisions:

1. Provide staff to fulfill our conference vision for ministry.
2. Develop a culture of flexibility – shifting personnel to meet emerging needs.
3. Enlarge the circle of decision makers in deciding staff needs/priorities.
4. Stay within the same percentage for staff support of the Fair Share over the years.
5. Include as conference staff Wesley Foundation Directors and Camp Directors for the enhancement of our connectionalism and ensuring their value, viability and financial support.
6. Identify the best persons for the various roles/tasks.

The implications of these guiding principles are:

1. Intentional staffing means the Discipleship Team, Personnel Committee, Cabinet and other groups identify missional needs and then, when necessary, staff to meet those needs. An example of this was the need to improve our Older Adult Ministries and so Bob Bostick, though very part time, is able to focus and lead the conference in this ministry.
2. Portfolios for staff persons shift to meet changing needs. Examples of this are increased responsibility for Annual Conference planning shifted from the Conference Secretary to the Director of Connectional Ministries and certain orientation events from Steward of Clergy Concerns to Director of

Wesley Institute.

3. Positions are filled after consultation with various groups. An example of this is the position of Print Media Specialist which had the input of staff, Personnel Committee and Communications Team.
4. Budget restrictions have pushed

Holston Conference, just like local churches, struggles with resourcing its various ministries with the best personnel possible.

us toward creative staffing solutions. To maintain the same percentage level in the Conference Fair Share budget (after discounting for adding Wesley Foundation Directors and Camp Directors to payroll by shifting funds from program to personnel) led the Personnel Committee to use more part-time persons. An example of this is that the one full-time missions staff person was replaced with four part time persons for the same amount of funding.

5. Wesley Foundation Directors and Camp Directors are now paid with personnel budget dollars rather than program budget dollars. Thus there is no impact on the total Fair Share askings. Some reasons for this shift were more efficient payroll, insurance and pensions procedures; protecting conference employees with personnel policies; and bringing these valued persons into the loop with other conference staff and to avoid the loneliness of isolation.
6. Through the Cabinet/Personnel Committee and input from various other groups we have consistently uncovered excellent talent.

Examples of this are our new Pastoral Counselor, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, outstanding Wesley Foundation Directors and a very capable Conference Treasurer.

One of the primary responsibilities of a conference is to provide spiritually formed, emotionally healthy and theologically trained clergy. Clergy in turn provide leadership to over 925 congregations. A focused effort has been given to developing our Clergy Ministry Team, which is hard at work to address the needs of our clergy.

These include the:

Director of Clergy Services, who is responsible for records, credentialing matters and support and guidance to district committees on ministry and the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, etc.

Director of Wesley Institute, though part-time, the director is responsible for developing opportunities for continuing education; mandated sexual ethics and diversity training; pastoral transition seminars; first-time appointees orientation, etc.

Pastoral Counselor provides free and readily available counseling to all Holston Conference clergy and their families as well as conference staff.

Steward of Clergy Concerns offers support to the Orders and Fellowships and gives special attention to paragraphs 311, 312, and 345 of the **2000 Book of Discipline** that address what it means for clergy to be in covenant relationship with each other.

I also serve on this Clergy Ministry Team. Together we ask ourselves how we can better support our clergy. Holston Conference has become a model for other conferences because of our intentional and focused concern for our clergy. Have





Growth in Ministry is No Accident

The source of all ministry is Jesus Christ. Ministry itself is an incarnational act. Our skills, pastoral arts, and personalities are useful only when they flow from a heart of faith that is formed through a strong relationship with the loving God. To aim at becoming Christ-like is to begin the journey toward pastoral effectiveness.

One of the strongest tools for growing deeper in our relationship with God is

For some, using Covenant Discipleship will mean revising the way we think about relating to other clergy.

Covenant Discipleship. Many clergy already participate in voluntary groups (lectionary study groups, golfing teams, etc.). This is laudable. But to focus with other clergy upon the spiritual dimension of our lives is to enter into a personal, spiritual, and holy place where few will go willingly. Covenant Discipleship assists any who utilize it in reaching that place in the safety of Christian community.

An effective covenant will touch upon the four components of the General Rule of Discipleship, which states that members are to “witness to Jesus Christ in the world and follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” This combines private acts (compassion and devotion) with more public acts (justice and worship).

The act of making a covenant can take several meetings. Much thought and prayer need to go into this document, as it will guide the group in future meetings, and shape discipleship. A key part of the covenant discipleship process is the intentionality of all participants sharing his or her experience in living into the covenant. This takes discipline and commitment. Indeed, turning the pastoral babble of most of our conversation into holy conferencing will take time, but as it becomes transformed, a new bond develops and members grow to appre-

ciate each one's gifts and learn from one another. Such sensitivity to life in the spirit changes every aspect of participants' lives and helps pastors grow in their ministry.

Covenant Discipleship groups can be used by anyone at any level in the life of the church. I have personally benefited from groups with a variety

of persons, including people from all clergy classifications, genders, ages,

nationalities, and theological preferences (even ecumenically diverse). It is remarkable to see God turn such a group into a life-giving means of grace. Lives shaped by grace bless others.

The poet William Stafford titled a book on writing *You Must Revise Your Life*. For some, using Covenant Discipleship will mean revising the way we think about relating to other clergy. It calls for deeper communion, holding one another accountable, living up to a covenant. It means taking God seriously and owning up to that as an intentional act. It calls for reflecting the presence of Jesus Christ and embodying the Holy Spirit within our clergy community. It demands our authenticity. God will bless that.

Anyone looking into Covenant Discipleship needs to take a close look at Gayle Turner Watson's *Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups*, Grace Bradford's *Guide for Class Leaders: A Model for Christian Formation*, and David Lowes Watson's *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*, all three available through Discipleship Resources.

we fulfilled our vision of all clergy being spiritually formed, emotionally healthy, theologically trained – nurtured and nourished? No, but we are on the right track with the Clergy Ministry Team.

Every staff member is a part of a functioning, intentional team to provide assistance to what only a conference can do: provide for clergy, colleges, retirement centers, and centers for children. Hold large events like Divine Rhythm, Jubilation, and Resurrection. Support Change for Children, new church development, global ministries, Wesley Foundations, camps for children – the list is long.

We have been blessed with the gifts of leadership from some who have retired early from the pastorate to serve the conference with very modest financial support. Without their generous contribution of gifts of time we would be faced with increased costs for staff like most other conferences.

We have wonderful people doing ministry in our name and in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.
Grace and peace.



Ray W. Chamberlain, Jr.
is bishop of
Holston Conference



Brad Scott
is pastor of
Jonesborough UMC
Jonesborough, TN

How Many Sermons Do We Really Have?

Preachers on the final Sunday of their pastoral appointment can face the last and sometimes greatest temptation of their sermonizing, namely, make this one say everything they ever wanted to say to the congregation but didn't because they wanted to keep their job.

So, now that you're leaving, lock and load the last sermon and let it fly. A wise elder told me, when I admitted such a temptation, that the last sermon would not make things any better or any worse in the parish than they have been.

While I have resisted the temptation thus far, by grace, I believe most pastors have only one sermon they preach week in and week out. Its usually wrapped around a theme or passion of ours birthed by life experiences and the life-lens through which we read and exegete scripture. It might be summed up in a word or a phrase. For some their one sermon may be about social action or piety,

repentance or peace, morality or eternity just to name a few. We preach the theme a thousand different ways and run it through the lectionary cycle like laundry through the washing machine hoping it comes out fresh and looking like new each week.

My husband mostly preaches on Biblical ethics. He can tweak an ethical perspective out of most pericopes. Yet Sunday after Sunday his sermons hardly sound repetitive.

When I contemplate the one sermon I preach nine Sundays out of ten I would say it boils down to one word. The other Sunday I confessed it from the pulpit. I said that for the past two-plus decades my sermons were

and are bottom line about love. With more self-disclosure than I am want to give from the pulpit, I said I had come to look at love from both sides now, conditional and unconditional. I said I hated it when people don't get the love they need and when they don't know how loved they are.

When I look at Scripture I see a lot about love. Jesus talked about it a thousand different ways. Sometimes it was tender, sometimes it was tough. It was pervasive and persuasive in his speech and action. As far as I can tell, love was in the driver's seat up to that last visit to Jerusalem and his short stay in the tomb. God's love shown through Jesus looks life-giving to me and I have wanted it most of my life. Since I know some things about its gift and power, is it any wonder I apprehend a text and pen a sermon through the lens of love? Am I preaching some kind of gospel according to me? I pray not. Maybe the inspiration part comes when God

When I contemplate the one sermon I preach nine Sundays out of ten I would say it boils down to one word.

says, "I want my word about love put before the people and Jane is just one among many of my preachers who can do that. If she harps

on it, so be it. I've got other preachers covering my others words and besides United Methodists move their preachers around enough that several of my words can be heard over a generation in any one of their congregations."

So, let's see, the text for this Sunday is about the Ascension ... mmm, love is in the air and therefore everywhere ... yah, that's it, love is everywhere - that'll preach!

Jane Ayers is pastor of Damascus UMC Damascus, VA



Matthew 5:9

continued from page 2

lical scholarship to combat the increasingly popular misuse of scripture to justify violence and oppression. Just as some Muslims misuse the Koran, some Jews and Christians misuse the Bible. Unfortunately, a primary source of support for the continuing strife comes from church groups that regard this conflict as an opportunity to hasten the final battle between good and evil.

Just as we must "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" as mandated in Psalm 122, we must become informed, speak out, and let our political leaders know what the Holy Spirit is revealing to us.

We must have the courage to question our foreign policies when they seem to be in conflict with the teaching of Jesus and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. We are better citizens of our nation and in our communities when our first allegiance is to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Two inexpensive books by contemporary Palestinian Christians leaders are: **Blood Brothers** by Elias Chacour and **Justice on Justice** by Maim Ate. Here are a few samples of Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates that are easily accessible by a web search: SABEEL INSTITUTE, a Palestinian Christian Theology Center; B'TSLEM, an Israeli Human Rights Center; and CHRISTIAN PEACE-MAKERS TEAM, an almost daily account of peace efforts in the area of Hebron.

The Society for Biblical Studies, affiliated with Holston Conference's Wesley Institute, conducts frequent, inexpensive small group fact-finding pilgrimages to Israel/Palestine and Jordan. Interested persons may apply.

Charles Lippse retired clergy Chattanooga, TN



Pride and Joy: Tears and Teaching

The books were right, you know. They told us this would happen.

It happened on a Monday night in March. Noah was about three weeks old. Tracy was at handbell practice at the church, enjoying some much-deserved break from her maternal responsibilities. So it was just Noah and me at home. I had been looking forward to some good quality father-son time. That was when what

the parenting books said would happen happened.

Noah started crying.

And crying. And he kept on crying. And it kept on getting louder and longer. And he wouldn't stop crying.

I went through my little checklist. Tracy had just fed him, so he wasn't hungry. I had just burped him, so he wasn't gassy. I had just changed him, so his diaper wasn't dirty. I had been holding him the whole time, talking to him and walking with him, so he wasn't lonely. I tried everything I knew to comfort and console him, and I just couldn't figure out what was wrong, and I certainly couldn't seem to do anything right.

Noah was having a meltdown, and I wasn't far behind him.

Now the books said this would happen. That it was completely nor-

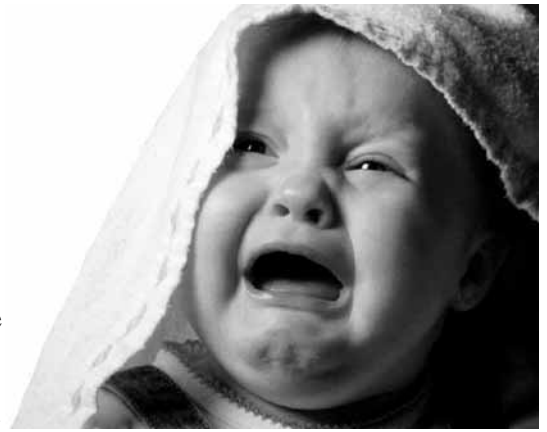
mal. That it was to be expected. That it was just one of the ways babies broadcast to the world, "Here I am! Hear me roar!"

But what the books didn't tell me, what they didn't quite prepare me for, was how what they said would happen would make me feel. For the first time in my foray into fatherhood (and I dare not say the last), I felt like a complete and

For the first time in my foray into fatherhood (and I dare not say the last), I felt like a complete and unutterably miserable failure.

unutterably miserable failure. I felt absolutely helpless. And I was beginning to feel pretty hopeless. There wasn't a single solitary thing I could do to console my crying son.

So what did I find myself doing when there was nothing more I could do? I did about the only thing I could do: I started crying myself, right there along with Noah. It wasn't like it was a competition; he was still out-crying me by far, for his were tears of protest, whereas mine were more the tears of quiet resignation to the fact of feeling like a failure. But after a while (before Tracy came home, thank God), his crying began to calm and the tears on both our faces began to subside. And so it was while holding him there in the arc of my arms that Noah and his family – his father, at least – once more were saved from



the flood.

We chose the name Noah because one of our book of babies' names said it comes from a Hebrew word that can mean peacemaker. If ever our world – if ever our church – has been in need of peacemakers, surely it is now.

If I were to mine a theological gem from all this (after all, this is a clergy journal), it would be this: Sometimes the way God moves to make peace in our lives and in our families, in our church and in our world, is less through those times when we feel like we're standing on top of the world (though those times do come and thank God for them), and more through those times when we feel absolutely helpless, when we feel like a miserable failure.

But, of course, we knew this already. After all, the Book said this would happen. And the Book is right, you know.

David Graybeal
is associate pastor of
Keith Memorial UMC
Athens, TN



A PERFECT LOVE

Understanding John Wesley's

"A Plain Account of Christian Perfection"

By Steven W Manskar, Diana L. Hynson,
and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki

A Perfect Love is the full text of Wesley's book. What makes this version unique is that the author has edited Wesley's text and updated his language for the contemporary reader. Christian perfection is the doctrine that distinguish-

es Methodism from other Protestant denominations. People who read and study this book will come away with a greater appreciation for this important doctrine.

A Perfect Love includes definitions and notes that explain names and terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader. It also includes hymns by Charles Wesley that describe the work of grace in human lives that leads to perfection in love.

Christian perfection, as Wesley used and understood it, may be translated as "Christian maturity." It is the process of "growing up" in the love of God and neighbor. It is "holiness of heart and life." It is "having the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Christian perfection is the goal of salvation; it is the outcome of a life lived with and for God in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Text for Today:

Amazing Grace in John 4

Jesus is tired. It is hot and he has been walking through Judea to Galilee through Samaria. Near Sychar he stops to rest by Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water, and Jesus asks her for a drink. The drama begins.

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" In that question rests centuries of prejudice. It is a question answered by Paul in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The woman's question is one with which we continue to struggle as if Galatians had never been inspired.

Back to Jacob's well. Men had little to do with women in casual settings. Jews had virtually nothing to do with those with Gentile blood in their veins, the Samaritans. And the woman had trouble with metaphor. What could "living water" be except some substance at the bottom of a well. She probably could neither read nor write but she thought that scripture and words about scripture could only be taken in a literal sense. She is much like Nicodemus in John 3 who asked if the second birth was re-entering the womb.

Enter amazing grace. Jesus entered into conversation with the woman. By this act he said two very important things: First, it is o.k. to be a woman. The culture and all of the attendant prejudices about women notwithstanding, Jesus elevated women. He did not elevate women by preachments but by relationships. Jesus took the Samaritan woman seriously. The second thing he said is that it is o.k. to be a Samaritan. Racial, gender, and cultural differences were reinterpreted by Jesus. Whoever one is by birth is surely accepted by God.

Persons who are taken seriously are usually good listeners. Jesus had some theology to teach and he did it by dealing with the woman's life. "Go, call your husband and come here." She rightly said that she had no husband. Jesus agreed but said, "You are right but you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband." When the woman reported this conversation to her friends she said that Jesus had told her everything she ever did. Clearly this means that it was an extended pastoral conversation filled with both grace and judgment.

When we are in conversation with Jesus, it becomes clear that we are taken seriously, accepted, and for-

givenness is offered. Such grace helps us accept ourselves with all that we have inherited. Pretense and posturing become less important and we are empowered to hold hands around the scandalous cross with all for whom Christ has died. Our Gospel is inclusive. When the Gospel is interpreted as exclusive it ceases to be the good news of God and becomes the bad news of a tragically divided world.

The text tells us that many of Sychar came to believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. After Jesus had spent two days with them they said that it was no longer because of the woman's witness that they believed "for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

There is an ecology in grace and forgiveness. Jesus is open to us. We become open to ourselves. Those on the outside are welcomed. The grand message of the text is that grace is both acceptance of who we are and the power to change who we are not called to be.

James Green
steward of clergy concerns
for Holston Conference



CLERGY Connection

Holston Conference
of the united methodist church
P.O. Box 32939
Knoxville, TN 37930-2939

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 309
Knoxville, TN