



John Wesley and Charles Wesley

Greetings!

John Wesley wrote a sermon based on the text from 2 Kings 10:15 titled ***Catholic Spirit*** [1]. Click [here](#) to read it.

Catholic Spirit is known as one of Wesley's classics on unity in the church. A few short days ago our staff worked on a statement of encouragement to the district and my previous devotional attempted to do the same. My thanks to their tireless work for justice and peace.

- Together we offer encouragement to be community.
- Together we offer encouragement to be justice seekers.
- Together, we offer encouragement to not be people of hate, division and retribution.
- Together, we speak out against White Supremacy.

In their ministry the Wesleys were working on healing divisions in their culture, theological differences with other reformers, fighting for the decriminalization of gin addiction, the end of the abomination of the slave trade, health care for all and other hot button issues that were shredding society. The Wesleys offered ways to encourage justice and community and sought to stand in opposition of hate, division and retribution of those who spoke out. Their methodology was developing the spiritual disciplines known as the ***Means of Grace: Works of Mercy and Works of Piety*** [2]. In that vein John Wesley's brother, Charles, wrote a hymn entitled [Catholic Love](#) to accompany the sermon *Catholic Spirit*. In 1974 Fred Kaan penned the hymn [Help Us Accept Each Other](#), #560 in our UMH. It was set to a tune written by Columbus, Ohio native and musician John Ness Beck.

In our generation, sharp contrasts of religion and culture exist and fall on political and theological tenants that are more divisive than most of us can remember. The question is, Who is the Jesus you follow? Will it be a Prince of Peace or a

Conqueror? Both images exist in the history of Christianity, but both do not exist in the Bible. The dividing lines of our time are quite clear with entrenched positions. In a clear Op-Ed regarding these matters, David French, a conservative commentator wrote a piece about this division and how the Christian Atl-Right has enabled lies about the faith. He labels what happened at the Capitol as a Christian insurrection[3]. It is a challenge for the church to once again attend to the spiritual needs of serving people, along with the call of Christian leaders to “confront conspiracies and condemn violence.”[4]

The invasion of the US Capitol building is just the latest version of runaway theology. Unfortunately, the church has been here before. The church has promoted systematic killing and genocide in its history because it lived out of fear. And this history is repeated when politics and religion run on top of each other. Health, between religion and politics, is co-equal accountability hedging against each other’s abuse of power. We are reminded in scripture that perfect love casts out fear. [5] The writer of this Epistle wrote this message of hope to an infant church in a time where there was much uncertainty.

The early church promoted an alternative Savior of the World, a vision given by God through the ancient Israelites in prophetic literature. That literature offers a Suffering Servant, a blameless Child of God, a Prince of Peace. The moments of violence perpetrated by the church, in history, are not remembered in glory because the Prince of Peace does not need an army or purges to be Lord. The wisdom of Jesus and the power of the cross is the non-violent witness for justice and obedience to a creative God. When the church lives out of fear, it gives rise for the abuse of power, white supremacy and empire building through a reverence of nationalism which cannot be supported by the sweep of holy scripture.

The prophet Micah in an earlier time asked ***What does the Lord Require of You? Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with God.*** [6] Even when God tells us what is good, we have trouble living into God’s vision.

So, in good Wesleyan tradition we have help. Help comes in learning how to discipline ourselves, seeking after God first and not false promises of humanity. Perhaps these questions might be a helpful template as these passages and hymn texts wash over you and help all of us consider our spiritual life and the condition of our souls.

Questions for reflection:

- How is it with our soul today?
- Are you living in fear? If so, is fear causing you to believe in things that are unholy?
- Who is your Lord – Jesus or people?
- Are you leading a disciplined spiritual life, practicing the Three Simple Rules: ***Do no Harm, Do Good, Stay in Love with God!?***
- Do you feel that unity, not uniformity, is possible in our spiritual life together?
- In what ways do you hear and feel grace in community? How can you build muscle memory around grace in community?
- In what specific ways will you help to cast out fear by speaking the truth in

love?

[1] <http://www.umaffirm.org/cornet/catholic.html>

[2] <https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>

[3] <https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/only-the-church-can-truly-defeat>

[4] Ibid.

[5] 1 John 4:18

[6] Micah 6:6-8, *paraphrase*

Peace,



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