



Portrait of John Wesley by George Romney 1734 – 1802, The John Howard McFadden Collection, The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Greetings!

Some have asked if “we” talk about sin in the UMC. I don’t understand. I think we talk about sin a great deal. If you are not convinced, I wonder what type of sin it is that you really want to talk about?

In over 30 years of ministry, I have served in multiple local church settings in three different states. When this question comes up, my experience reminds me that often what is happening is the person wants to talk about somebody’s else’s sin and not their own. This is the human condition.

Recently I attended a seminar where we were challenged to think about how much time we spend trying to look good in front of other people. It is the sin of hiding our true selves from one another, or worse, perhaps ourselves. It is the human condition.

In ancient days the great philosopher, Socrates, is reported to have said at his trial that the “unexamined life is not worth living.” Self-examination is an important part of our tradition as United Methodist Christians. Reflection and confession are ready partners and are very much included in Wesley’s admonitions on the Means of Grace. Wesley even knew that after conversion Christians would continue to struggle with personal and corporate sin. In a sermon titled, [*The Scripture Way of Salvation*](#), Mr. Wesley wrote:

How naturally do those who experience such a change imagine that all sin is gone; that it is utterly rooted out of their heart, and has no more any place therein!... But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended, not

destroyed. Temptations return, and sin revives; showing it was but stunned before, not dead.¹

For Wesley, the remedy for personal and corporate sin was reflection and confession. Then through the Means of Grace (our action) and the Grace of Jesus (divine action) we are forgiven. Reflection/Confession is an important element in searching yourself and your motives. I believe that a personal search of such is devotional in nature. But let's face it, this is sometimes hard work and can be very challenging.

Over the course of several months, our devotions have considered many sins, both personal and corporate. We've touched on racism, sexism, class, cultural competency, greed, the distribution of the vaccine among wealthy nations, equality and equity, the marginalization of people, and many more. For some these devotional examinations have been hard, but we must have the courage to examine ourselves individually and corporately. The beauty of the Christian life is that it is both individual and corporate; embrace this and you will thrive spiritually!

As I mentioned before, you and I spend a great deal of time making sure that we always look good in front of others. But the call to discipleship is not about looking good, but in being faithful. Too many of us would rather marginalize another than to look in the mirror. Too many of us see an opportunity to score points and use another for our glory. Too many have faith in the Pharisaical than in the Grace of Jesus. Obsession with others and the desire to name call and play the blame game signals the need for some personal work. If I can be blind to my sin because I will not examine my motives, beliefs, behaviors and actions, then I can impose almost anything on anyone at any time. The refusal of self-examination negates responsibility.

Discipleship is about the responsibility of picking up your cross daily and following Jesus. Wesley almost always talked about sin in the context of the Grace of Jesus Christ. He knew that sin without grace is only half of the conversation. Recently I talked about the [Means of Grace](#) and its two major components – Works of Piety and Works of Mercy. I hope you might familiarize yourself with them.

Take a moment to listen to this hymn by Joseph Hart. ² It brings home these thoughts: [Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy](#).

¹ [Before God and one another: United Methodists and confession](#) by Joe Iovino

² Joseph Hart (1711/12 – 24 May 1768) was a Calvinist minister in London. His works include *Hart's Hymns*, a much-loved hymn book amongst evangelical Christians throughout its lifetime of over 200 years, which includes the well-known hymn, "Come ye sinners, poor and needy". One of Hart's early publications was a tract denouncing Christianity (prior to his conversion) called *The Unreasonableness of Religion, Being Remarks and Animadversions on the Rev. John Wesley's Sermon on Romans 8:32*. Clearly Mr. Wesley had an impact on Hart. Eventually, he came around and accepted Jesus and the notion of the Means of Grace even though he did not

become a Wesleyan.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Todd".

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