

**Monday, October 17 – Read Matthew 5:13-16.** John Wesley, following the teaching of Jesus, said, “Christianity is essentially a social religion.” Jesus did not retreat and live on an isolated island, and he does not call Christians to vacate their cultures for an exclusively Christian environment. God’s followers are to be “salt and light” in the world. God empowers us to “preserve” what is good and live lives that shine light into the darkness of our world. Lamps light up the darkness. It would be pointless to light a lamp and cover it up. Jesus compared his followers to a lamp in a dark room, or a city on a hill at night, seen for miles around. God still calls us to be his light, to help people lost in the darkness find their way to the light, and ultimately dispel the darkness. What choices do you make in your attitudes and actions to ensure that those around you see Jesus’ light more clearly as they spend time with you? In Jesus’ day, there was no electricity or refrigerators. People preserved food with salt. In today’s passage, Jesus said he means his followers to be “the salt of the earth,” living in such a way that they “preserve” what is good in the world. He said bluntly that if people have lost their “saltiness,” they are “good for nothing.” In what ways are you living out your faith in such a way as to preserve the good in the world? What would be the point of following Jesus if not to join in his mission to be salt and light in the world?

**Tuesday, October 18 – Read Ephesians 2:4-10.** Paul, as passionate a preacher of God’s saving grace as ever lived, wrote that when we accept that grace, we live as people “created in Christ Jesus to do good things.” To people who argued that grace made Christian actions unnecessary, Wesley said, “Surely there are works of mercy ... which are real means of grace. They are more especially such to those that perform them with a single eye. And those that neglect them, do not receive the grace which otherwise they might.” The Second General Rule of the Methodist Church is John Wesley’s way of applying the idea that we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good things”: “By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men.” In what ways does the phrase “doing good of every possible sort” spark your imagination? What are one or two “sorts” of goodness you didn’t use to practice, but now do as a follower of Christ? What is your life’s purpose? Spend some quiet time today reflecting on your life’s purpose in the light of what Ephesians 2:10 says about God’s intention for your life.

**Wednesday, October 19 – Read 1 John 3:14-18.** The apostle John said no one filled with God’s love could see a brother or sister in need and not try to help. John Wesley wrote of a time when he lived this out: “At Hannam, four miles from Bristol ... I made a collection in our congregation for the relief of the poor, [outside] Lawford’s gate; who, having no work ... and no assistance from the parish wherein they lived, were reduced to the last extremity. I made another collection on Thursday and a third on Sunday, by which we were enabled to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty, a day, of those whom we found to need it most.” John used strong words about those who saw their brothers and sisters in need, and didn’t care. He said such people hated their brothers and sisters, which made them murderers (verse 15)! Can apathy and inaction have results as murderous as active malice? What ways have you found to help yourself avoid “compassion fatigue,” and remain sensitive when God nudges you to help someone in need?

**Thursday, October 20 – Read Isaiah 1:11-18, 42:1-7.** The prophet Isaiah pointed out, on God’s behalf, the injustices rampant in ancient Israel. Then, three times in four verses, Isaiah 42 said God’s servant would bring justice. John Wesley visited one “poor prisoner,” falsely charged with a large offense instead of the petty crime he’d committed. He wrote indignantly, “2) Where is the justice of swelling four pounds into five hundred and seventy-seven? 3) Where is the common sense of taking up fourteen sheets to tell a story that may be told in ten lines? 4) Where is the mercy of thus grinding the face of the poor? thus sucking the blood of a poor, beggared prisoner?” Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 and 58 to define his mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Do you think those were just symbolic words about spiritual captivity, or did Jesus, like Wesley, want to help actual “poor, beggared prisoners”? What are some practical ways you can live out God’s concern for justice today?

**Friday, October 21 – Read James 2:14-26.** Wesley had learned firsthand the folly of trying to earn God’s favor through good works. But he found, as James had, that some other Christians thought “salvation by faith” meant good works are optional. In his sermon “The Mystery of Iniquity,” he said, “When St. James wrote his Epistle ... that grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works, was spread far and wide; filling the Church with a ‘wisdom from beneath,’ which was ‘earthly, sensual, devilish.’” Like James, Wesley knew that true faith produces actions that honor God and bless others. James vividly pointed out the flaw in thinking that genuine faith could ever be limited to intellectual knowledge, to “the head”: “It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear” (verse 19). Whose example most powerfully drew you to a faith that includes your heart and your hands as well as your head? Notice that James didn’t talk about a good “balance” between faith and works, as though we need a 50-50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both, and our works need to grow out of our faith, as a grateful response to God’s gracious acceptance of us. What are some of the actions, the works, which you have seen grow in your life as you have responded to God’s grace?

**Saturday, October 22. Read Matthew 25:31-46.** Looking back, it’s easy to see that John Wesley and his followers made a big impact for good, first in Britain and then in America. Studying Wesley’s life reminds us that it didn’t happen with one big sermon or campaign. Many, many (often small) acts of grace and caring in the end changed the world. In his sermon “The Reward of the Righteous,” Wesley urged his hearers, “While you are promoting this comprehensive charity, which contains feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger; indeed, all good works in one; let those animating words be written on your hearts, and sounding in your ears: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto ME.’” The English word “charity” came from the Greek word *charis*, which meant “grace.” In Wesley’s day, it had not taken on the negative sense of dependence or humiliation we sometimes give it. His phrase “comprehensive charity which contains ... all good works in one” strikingly pictures the kind of life Jesus calls his followers to live. What are the main ways you are involved in honoring God by serving others? Consider making your service more “comprehensive” by serving in a way you never have before.