

Sermon Title: A Methodist Loves Others

Primary Text(s): I John 4:7-12, 19-21 (used by pastor with sermon)

Other Texts: Matthew 22:34-40 (reading by worship leader)

By: Rev. Terry Carty

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Place: Kingston Springs UMC

Season: 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Series: The Distinguishing Marks of a Methodist

Main Point: Wesley, like Jesus, knew that without this last mark, loving others, we might become stuck in our life of faith.

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I John 4:7-12, 19-21

**7**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8**The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9**By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. **10**In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12**No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

**19**We love, because He first loved us. **20**If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21**And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

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Founding father of the Methodists, John Wesley, like Jesus, knew that without this last mark, loving others, we might become stuck in our life of faith.

The first four marks of a Methodist (they love God – receive God's love in their heart, rejoice in God, are thankful in all things, and pray continually) **have a tendency to be more about us** as individuals and our personal relationship with God. They are things that **fill up our spiritual tank** with life and happiness and gratitude, which are all good things, and yet, however, left on our own, **we might get stuck in the rut of constantly seeking our happiness.**

I guess **we come by this rut naturally because** we learn at an early age that if we cry out, someone will come and give us comfort. It is with greater maturity that we **move on to caring for others. Our culture encourages self-centered immaturity.** We are bombarded with messages that encourage a "**whats in it for me**" attitude. And culture presses us toward always looking for ways to justify the way we spend our money, our time, and our love.

John Wesley wanted the people called "Methodists" to become mature in their faith. **He wanted all to "become mature adults - to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ"** (Eph. 4:13). He wanted to connect us to the **full circle of God's love**: God pours love into us, then we pour love into others, and then God keeps us filled to overflowing all over again so that we can serve the world. **That is the way God's love works.**

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Sociologist **Rodney Stark** wrote a book on the rise of the early Christian movement. His research question was: **How did the Christian movement go from 120 believers in an upper room on the day of Pentecost to 54% of the people in the Roman Empire by the year 313?**

We would expect the preaching of the gospel to be primary in this growth of Christianity. Preaching and doctrine certainly were **catalysts**, but the **reason** for the growth was the **Christians' character**.

- Christians provided a caring community in a Roman culture where families were often broken, children abandoned, and divorce was common.
- Christian communities consisted of the very wealthy and the very poor, of freedmen and slaves, for all were considered equal. This was radically different than the stratified Roman culture that separated those different from each other.
- When waves of plagues hit the Roman world., Christians risked their own lives to care for the sick. Many Christian caregivers died while tending strangers whom they didn't know.
- Christianity elevated the role of women, allowing women to serve in leadership. Women were drawn to Christianity and brought their husbands and families with them.
- Thousands of Christians went to their deaths in the waves of persecutions in those early centuries. Yet the church grew as the fortitude of the martyrs impressed many the pagans. Christians went to death without returning violence because that's what Jesus taught. Eventually the empire stopped killing Christians because even that strategy didn't deter them.

These are just a few examples of how the early church grew because of their love for others, even strangers and enemies. **Christianity gained a hearing because of the love demonstrated by Jesus' followers**, not because of their great theology. That came later.

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**Wesley sought to bring Christian believers back to the character of the early Christians.** His marks of a Methodist continue today to call us back full circle to that Christian characteristic of loving others because God loves us. It presses us to **move away from our self-indulgent culture** and shed God's love abroad.

A little book by Steve Harper, *Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith*, tells of the morning prayer of **Frank C. Laubach**, an early 20th century missionary. He prayed, "**Lord, what are You doing in the world today that I can help You with?**"

The prayer reminded him that God is at work in the world. **God doesn't wait for us to act, but rather invites us to join in on what God is already doing.** The prayer also reminded him that there are **some things God is doing that we are not expected to do. Each disciple is given an assignment - a measurable and achievable amount of the will of God.**

Laubach's prayer helps us understand our assignment: "Lord, what are You doing in the world today that I can help You with?" **This is just one way in which we might discern how God is calling us to live out the commandment to love others.**

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Loving others day by day may be the best way to mature in faith. **Being a disciple is not a course in religion that you pass** – it is an **offering up of the lives we live routinely**. In Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase (*The Message*) of Romans 12:1 he says “So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.”

When Jesus first called the disciples, he told them he was going to make them “fishers of men” = fish for people (Mark 1:17). He was talking to fishermen! This was his way of saying, **“take what you normally do and naturally do, and do it for me.”**

Wesley calls us,  
     Jesus calls us,  
         the Holy Spirit calls us,  
             God is calling us  
 to receive the love of God poured abroad in our hearts  
     and to allow our hearts to pour love abroad into in the world.

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#### **DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING**

Go forth to love God and your neighbor in all that you do.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore.

**Amen.**