

Sermon: *Methodist DNA: Do Good!*
Text: *Matthew 25:13ff*
Date: *June 21, 2009 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

In the spring of 1729, Charles Wesley was a student at Oxford in England and his brother, John, was serving as his father's associate at Epworth. And Charles wrote to John, telling him about a new group. At Oxford, a handful of men were getting together on a regular basis for prayer and study and to take the sacrament and Charles thought that John could help.

Now, it just so happened that a few months later, John received a letter from one of the professors, reminding him that as a fellow at Oxford, he was required to live near campus and engage with the students. So, that was all the excuse John needed. He packed his things and left Epworth and went back to Oxford. And there, John began meeting with Charles' group. They dedicated themselves to living out their faith in two ways: first, by engaging in acts of piety like prayer, fasting, Bible study, and constant communion; and second, by engaging in acts of mercy, like visiting the sick and the imprisoned and caring for the orphans and the widows.

Well, outsiders took notice of this group and their crazy way of living out their faith together. And they called them "*Bible Moths*" and "*The Godly Club*" and "*The Holy Club*," but one name seemed to stick: "*The Methodists*." And soon, there were Methodist Societies springing up all over England. Now, there was only one requirement for those who wanted to join the Methodist Society: a desire to flee from the wrath to come. But those who wanted to remain in

the Societies had to dedicate themselves to living by *The General Rules*: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Attain upon the Ordinances of God.

Now, we've already looked at the first of these rules, Do No Harm, and how we tend to harm others with the words we say and the things that we do. And the world would be a better place if we all dedicated ourselves to doing no harm. But that's not enough; it's not enough that we should just do no harm, for the Bible teaches us to do good. Those, who love God and who desire to live a spirit-filled, spirit-led life, must be like Jesus, who "went about doing good."

In our text this morning, Jesus tells a story; it's the story we call: *The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*. It's the end of the world and all of humanity has been called to assemble before the Lord. And these people have been divided into two groups: the sheep, who are positioned on His right, and the goats, who are placed on His left. And the Lord turns to those on His right, the sheep, and says: "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and in prison and you visited me." And then, He turns to those on His left, the goats, and says: "Depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you didn't feed me; I was thirsty and you didn't give me drink; I was a stranger and you turned me away; I was naked and you didn't clothe me; I was sick and in prison and you didn't

visit me.” And of course, the basis of their separation, the basis of their eternal reward or eternal punishment is: “Whenever you did it to the least of these, you did it unto me.”

Now, brothers and sisters, if anything else this is a story about doing good. It’s not a story about being saved by works; it’s a story about how our works demonstrate the validity what we believe. Christianity is a faith of good works, of doing good. So, how do we “do good”?

First, we can do a lot of good with our words. John Wesley said: “*It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by doing good ... to their souls by instructing, reproofing or exhorting all we have any intercourse with.*” Just as the words we say have tremendous destructive power, they can be a great force for good too!

And so, we must be encouraging! This is what sets us apart as followers of Christ, for we live in a culture where words are used to hurt and destroy and tear down. But look, most people really respond to encouragement.

Maybe you’ve heard about the man who was on his way to pick up his newspaper, but when he opened the door, he was shocked to see a neighbor’s dog standing on the front porch with the paper in his mouth. Well, the man was grateful for the new delivery service and he gave the dog a treat and patted it on the head and closed the door behind him. Well, imagine his shock with he woke up the next

morning and opened the front door to go out and get the paper and found the neighbor's dog sitting there surrounded by 8 copies of the morning paper.

Ephesians 4:29 says: "*Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.*"

We must also be complementary! There's some good in everybody; find it and praise it! One day the Sunday School teacher asked her class to share something good about their fathers. One said: "My daddy is a good fisherman." Another said: "My daddy is a good yard man." And then, everybody looked at Johnny, but Johnny was quiet. He couldn't think of anything to say. And finally, he said: "My daddy cooks the best ... well, the best he can anyway."

I wonder what kind of church we'd have if we replaced criticism with encouragement and complaints with complements. I don't really know, but I do believe we could do a lot of good with our mouths.

Second, we can do a lot of good by our actions. Wesley said: "It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by doing good ... to their bodies by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick and in prison."

That almost sounds Biblical, doesn't it? One of the first things those early Methodists did was visit the prisons to serve Holy Communion to the prisoners. The first orphanage in the United States was started

in Savannah, by a Methodist named George Whitefield. John Wesley walked down the street at the age of 88 years old in order to collect money for poor children. Methodists have always had clothing closets and food pantries and prison ministries, because we believe in doing good with our actions. And when the church stopped caring for the poor and addicts of England, some Methodists left and started The Salvation Army. And when the church in America stopped caring about the needs of the poor and the needy, some Methodists left and formed The Church of the Nazarene.

You see, in the mind of a Methodist, you can't separate what you believe from how you act. That's why we take meals to our shut-ins! That's why we serve meals at Tabitha's Place. That's why we meet people's needs through the Altar Fund. That's why we volunteer at the Good Samaritan Center. We can do a lot of good by our actions.

Now, our words and our actions are the primary ways that you and I are called to do good, but ***we can do a lot of good through our generosity.*** When we give our tithes and offerings, we make a difference in the lives of other people. You see, you might not ever work in an orphanage, but because you give the boys and girls at the Methodist Children's Home have a roof over their head and food in their stomach and loving arms to care for them. You might not ever work in a Nursing Home, but because you give the elderly residents of Magnolia Manor are cared for and ministered to. You might not ever work with the

mentally challenged, but because you give the residents of Wesley Glen are loved and cared for. You might not ever preach the gospel in Africa or Asia or the utter most parts of the earth, but because you give United Methodist missionaries are serving around the world today.

And because we're a connectional church, we can do more than we could if we were just one church sitting in the middle of Jesus, Georgia doing what we think is right. Just like the churches throughout the Roman Empire who pooled their money to care for the poor Christian community in Jerusalem, Methodists have decided we can do more together and we do a lot of good through our generous giving.

One day, James was cutting his grass when the lawn mower broke down. Well, he worked on it for a few minutes but it wouldn't start. And just about the time he was ready to give up, the next door neighbor came over with a box full of tools. He worked on the mower for about 20 minutes and got it running again. And as he was about to leave, James said: "*Thanks, man. Hey, can you tell me something? What do you make with those fine tools?*" And the man said: "*Well, mostly friends.*"

Friends, John Wesley challenges us to make more friends by doing "*all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.*" Let us go and do likewise!