

How many of you here ever worry? I find it amazing how many different things we can worry about: big things and little things. We can be good at worrying. I came across a delightful story about worrying.

There was once a 94-year-old church member in a nursing home. The pastor visited her and asked, "How are you feeling this week?"

"Pastor," she replied, "I'm sorry to admit it, but I'm getting a little worried."

"I'm so sorry to hear that," the pastor said as he tried to comfort her, "but you look terrific today. Are you in pain? Are they taking good care of you?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

"Well," he continued, "What are you worried about?"

"Pastor," she answered, "it's like this. Everyone in my Senior Adult Sunday school class died years ago. I'm worried that they're all up in heaven now talking about me, and they're wondering where I went."

Isn't that delightful? It is true; we can worry about the darndest things. Do you?

We worry about our children. We worry about our parents. We worry about making it to the end of the month. We worry if God will accept us? Will I be good enough? We can be good at worrying.

When worrying gets the best of us, what can we do? I think our scripture for today, gives us a clue on how to replace worrying with a different focus.

Let me share with you where we have been. We are in the midst of a sermon series called *Beginning Again: Basics in Faith - Wesleyan Style*. In this sermon series we have talked about how the problem of sin gets in the way of our connecting with God. We have talked about how God begins to act in our life, even before we are

aware of that action, and once we become aware of it and invite Jesus into the center of our life, we actually have a shot at life. Last week we talked about how God is willing to sustain in faith. Sustaining grace can grow as we commit to living the Means of Grace. Today, I want to talk with you about what John Wesley, the founder of United Methodism meant when he talked about Christian perfection.

Usually, when we hear the word, Perfection, we begin to worry and say, "I am so far from perfect. I will never make it." But perfection, as Wesley talks about it is not an end product. It is to be understood as more of a process. In fact, when any United Methodist Pastor is Ordained, the Bishop asks each one of us, "Are you going on to Perfection?" The answer is yes. It means we are in process.

Just what are we in process for? We are in process to do what Jesus talks about in our scripture for today, when a religious leader comes to trap Jesus. He asks him, "What is the greatest commandment of all?" Jesus' response is, "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence." Or love the Lord your God with all that you are. Don't cut corners. And, Love your neighbor as yourself."

For Jesus and for Wesley, the point of life was to place God at the center of who we are. That way, if we could learn to love God with everything that makes us up, and if we could put that love into action by how we love others, then we learn to live for more than ourselves. These two things, loving God and loving neighbor, can give us a sense of purpose.

Here's how this works. If we are committed to loving God each day, and expressing that love to others, then we can become more aware of what is going on in the world. That awareness allows us to get involved and see the problems of this world in a way that challenges us to act.

Right now, our US House of Representatives has passed a law on immigration that says that everyone who enters this country is

committing a felony. It also says that anyone who aids a person who has entered this country as an illegal alien is committing a felony.

If this law passes the Senate and the President signs it that means that everyone who is a member of this church will be guilty of committing a felony, because our church is committed to helping the least and the last of our society. We are helping illegal alien's, by providing basic necessities such as food and shelter as they are working the crops in the area. As a church, and as members of the body of Jesus Christ, we are faced with a dilemma. Will we follow the laws of this land? Or will we be committed to loving God with all of our heart, and putting that love into action by helping out the most vulnerable in our world?

Loving our neighbor is the way we express loving God. It helps us focus and overcome the type of self-centered life-is-all-about-me, mentality of our world. It is how we grow in Christian perfection. What about you? Do you find yourself living more self-centered than you would prefer? Do you find something missing? What would it mean for you to choose to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength and mind today? What would it mean for you to love your neighbor as yourself, today?

To be sure, it might even mean that God calls us beyond our comfort zones. But that is because God wants us to lean on God more than on ourselves or our abilities. What is God calling you to right now? What is it that would move you beyond your comfort zone, so you are utterly dependent upon God? Loving God and loving neighbor is all about letting ourselves lean on God for our very lives.

A few weeks before Christmas 1917, Europe was going through a terrible war. The trenches on one side held the Germans and on the other side the trenches were filled with Americans. The exchange of gunfire was intense.

Separating the trenches was a very narrow strip of no-man's land. A young German soldier attempting to cross that no-man's land had been shot and had become entangled in the barbed wire. He

cried out in anguish, then in pain. Eventually his cries of anguish diminished to a whimper.

Between the shells all the Americans in that sector heard him scream. When one American soldier could not stand it any longer, he crawled out of the trenches and on his stomach crawled to that German soldier.

When the Americans realized what he was doing they stopped firing. When a German officer realized what the young American was doing and he ordered his men to cease firing. Now there was an eerie silence across the no-man's land.

On his stomach, the American made his way to that German soldier and disentangled him. He stood up with the German in his arms; he walked straight to the German trenches and placed him in the waiting arms of his comrades. Having done so, he turned and started back to the American trenches.

Suddenly there was a hand on his shoulder that spun him around. There stood a German officer who had won the Iron Cross, the highest German honor for bravery. He took it from his own uniform and placed it on the American. Then they parted ways.

This young man acted out of a sense of calling and compassion. His calling led him out of a comfort zone. It had a powerful impact on many people.

But that is how God works. God calls you and me, just ordinary, average, every-day people. When we place love of God and love of others at the heart of who we are it gives us a sense of purpose and meaning. It helps us strive for what John Wesley called for, the type of Christian Perfection that allows God to live through us.

What is God calling you too? What do you need to trust God with today? May God help us live faithfully.

Amen