Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today on [my Facebook ministry page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

This is the last in this series on John Wesley and Methodism. Today, we reflect on the commitment of Methodists to the connection among all disciples, for we all tell one story and are part of one body.

***Genesis 1:1 (NRSV)***

**In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . .**

***Genesis 12:1-3 (NRSV)***

**Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

***Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)***

**You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.**

***John 3:16 (NRSV)***

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**

***1 Corinthians 12:12 (NRSV)***

**For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.**

John Wesley had a missionary’s heart. He devoted the better portion of his life to preaching the Good News among the masses and to righting the injustices of his own country. Wesley embraced open-air preaching after overcoming his misgiving about its appropriateness. He went to the people -- he had a story they needed to hear. He probably felt more like a town crier than an Anglican priest, but he went. John, with his hymn-writing brother Charles, went to Georgia as a missionary in his early thirties. It didn’t go too well; Charles returned home after six months and John followed about a year later. Nonetheless, he went.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is a proclamation meant for the whole world. I often read and hear commentators who say they are ok with religious faith of any stripe, so long as we keep it to ourselves; in other words, they are saying that religion has no place in the public square. But John Wesley would certainly strive to help them see that not only would the banishment of religion from the public square be bad for our country, the Christian story is a *public* story.

*We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations*

We Christians have a story to tell, a story that we believe to be true, a public story. Even the angels who arrived to announce the birth of Jesus carried a message intended for all the world. Of course, when I say we have a story to tell, I perhaps need to spell it out it a bit. The Scripture passages I selected for this week highlight key themes of this story. Bishop N.T. Wright, staying away from Christian “jargon,” tells it the story thusly:

"The story is about a creator and his creation, about humans made in this creator's image and given tasks to perform, about the rebellion of humans and the dissonance of creation at every level, and particularly about the creator's acting, through Israel and climactically through Jesus, to rescue his creation from its ensuing plight. The story continues with the creator acting by his own spirit within the world to bring it towards the restoration which is his intended goal for it."

Wright holds that these sorts of over-arching stories seek to answer four questions: Who are we? Where are we? What is the problem? What is the solution? Christians, he writes, propose the following answers to these questions:

"(1) Who are we? We are humans made in the image of the creator. We have responsibilities that come with this status. We are not fundamentally determined by race, gender, social class, geographical location; nor are we simply pawns in a deterministic game.

(2) Where are we? We are in a good and beautiful, though transient, world, the creation of the god in whose image we are made. We are not in an alien world, as the Gnostic imagines; nor in a cosmos to which we owe allegiance as to a god, as the pantheist would suggest.

(3) What is wrong? Humanity has rebelled against the creator. This rebellion reflects a cosmic dislocation between the creator and the creation, and the world is consequently out of tune with its created intention.

(4) What is the solution? The creator has acted, is acting, and will act within his creation to deal with the weight of evil set up by human rebellion, and to bring his world to the end for which it was made, namely that it should resonate with his own presence and glory. This action, of course, is focused upon Jesus and the spirit of the creator."

This is the story that God has given us to tell. It is a public story, meant for the ears of those who will listen. It is much more than a matter of private belief. And yes, it contradicts other stories told by other religions and by atheists, whose story is devoid of any god. Nonetheless, we hold that it is true that there is a creator God who revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ and who, out of love, gave his Son so that the world may be reconciled to God.

*“The Connection”*

As United Methodists, we know that to live out our stated mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, we must not only proclaim this Good News to the world in all that we say and do, but we must also *be* good news. Our way of being this good news, of being the church, is to embrace our common fellowship, our connection to one another, one church to another.

We believe that even with all the problems of “organized religion,” there is great power in our churches’ connection to one another, working together for common goals. For example, the United Methodist Commission on Relief (UMCOR) responds to natural disasters all over the world. Because they are able to use the UMC’s existing organization structure 100% of the money that local churches donate to UMCOR go directly to relief and not to overhead.

Here’s other examples. Because all the UMC churches contribute money to a “common pot,” the UMC is able to help sustain churches in small communities and poorer neighborhoods. We support a worldwide system of missionaries, who help us to sustain a global vision of our part in the building of God’s kingdom. Indeed, the fastest growing conferences in the UMC are in Africa and Asia. Of the roughly 13 million United Methodists, less than seven million reside in the U.S.

Still following John Wesley’s vision of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we United Methodists remain committed to taking our place in the public square, as God’s people proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott