

John 18:33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

I just learned something a few days ago, but Johnny Cash actually had a special song from before 1970 called “What is Truth?” It is a great song, and he actually performed it at the White House for President Nixon. It sure asks a giant question: *What is Truth?* I would follow this question by adding this question: *How do we know?*

Last Sunday we started a journey together that will take us into Lent. Each Sunday will point us in the same direction, which is, **WE ARE WHAT WE BELIEVE**. We will keep building these ideas in coming weeks, and we’ll take some important steps today that hopefully will be helpful. In fact, I hope they might be helpful in the face of what our country experienced this last week as well.

I have a suggestion for all of you who are watching at home. Take a piece of paper and just keep it handy with your pencil. I will ask you to make a little list. It won’t be that long, but we could fill things in over the next weeks. With that all clear now, let’s go ahead and fill in #1. These first few go back to last Sunday. In number 1, I’d like you to write “Age of Confusion.” Why those words? Because, as we went over last week, people are bombarded

with almost too many different things to believe. So many different churches, many claiming that they alone have the truth. Besides all the different religious voices, we have the world around us. In reality, it might have been easier to believe in God 200 years ago than it is today. It used to be that people believed that God controlled everything, that everything that happened was simply the will of God, whether it be a storm or a war, people believed that all was under control. It just might be harder for us today to really trust that the world makes sense, and that things are the way they are supposed to be. Because of all those things, we live in a world of confusion.

As we heard last Sunday, we all do believe something, and we all live and act certain ways ultimately because of what we believe. Just like the song says, *They will know we are Christians by our Love*, it should in fact work out that way. It matters what we believe, what we think, and other people should be able to see something about what we believe by the way we live our lives, the way that we treat people, on and on. So, already we are ready for line #2. In it you may write something like “Our actions flow from our beliefs.” Because of this, it matters what we believe, and if our beliefs actually do influence our actions and behaviors, then we’d better check out what we believe and how those beliefs got there.

Having said this, we are all ready for Line #3, and this opens up our work for today: I invite you to write in line 3 “Our beliefs must be explored and tested.” To use a fancy philosophy term, we need to be concerned with Epistemology,” which basically means

“How do we know what we know, and how can we test our beliefs about truth and what is good and what is right?” Now, this might all sound very strange. But since we live in a culture of *everyone has their own beliefs*, and they are all true because people are allowed to believe whatever they want, we need to realize that we have to do better than that! We might not have the words for it, but if we are not careful about testing out what is right and wrong and good and bad, we can end up with a ridiculous culture of ethical relativism, which means “*Something is right if I think it is right.*” Have you heard people say that? It is popular today. What if someone else says “*I believe I have the right to go through your house and take your stuff?*” How do you argue against that? Well, we might hold up the Golden Rule here. If you think it’s right to go steal from someone else, is that something that you would want them to do to you? Most people are going to say NO.

Let me clarify this so we can move on: Someone might say “I believe what I believe, and I’m allowed to believe whatever I want,” well, we need to know that that IS ridiculous. There are ways we can figure out what is right and wrong. I would also suggest that we should be able to test our religious beliefs as well, to see if they can stand up to some checking. This is for our benefit.

Let me highlight our lesson from the Gospel of John for just a quick moment: Jesus is just before being crucified, and he is with Pilate, and they have this odd discussion. Jesus says to Pilate that he has come into the world to testify to the truth. Pilate then asks back “What is truth?” Well, there has to be a way. Well, we have

good news. We have a method to use within our Wesleyan Methodist background. John Wesley in England had to wrestle with beliefs just like everyone else, and he had to try to figure out what was true, and he had to be able to defend what he believed to be true, so that his position and his teachings were in fact rationally defensible. And so he did something that later on came to be known by a fancy big name. Have any of you heard of the **Wesleyan Quadrilateral**? They never ask about this before joining a church!

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is simply 4 methods of seeking religious truth that developed from the work of John Wesley. For your little list on the bulletin, please put down

4) The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Bible, Tradition, Experience, Reason.

Some people might say “But isn’t the Bible all we need for everything?” John Wesley would never agree to that, and for good reason: He would say that the Bible is the most important one of the 4 parts, but the Bible is actually not some kind of mechanical rule book that will allow us to look up every problem that comes along in life. It just doesn’t behave that way. First of all, the Bible is filled with very different things. It might look the same because of how it is printed on a page. But the Bible is a library of many books. There are stories, poems, direct teachings, and parables that require some wisdom. Our word Bible comes from a Greek word, *ta biblia* which means the *library*. I know that this will go against what many preachers say in our society today, but we have

done things to the Bible, trying to make it do things that it might not have been designed to do.

We need to carefully and prayerfully spend time, even years and years, with the Bible. The stories will shape our hearts and our eyes. But Wesley would say that we also need to be informed by the Tradition of the Church, and that means the beliefs of the Church going back to the beginning. If we are going to insist that some matter of faith is true, we should go back and try to see what others have said about this same thing. Chances are good that many people have weighed in on a particular question. For centuries other Christians have weighed in on tough beliefs, they have wrestled to try to understand, what is *truth*? What is right and good? So we have behind us the Tradition of the Church.

But Mr. Wesley would allow two other methods into the mix: Experience and Reason. These certainly do not carry the weight of Scripture and Tradition, but they are factors. Wesley would have us also examine the experience of our own lives to try to understand what is true and good. Let me give an example of how this would be factored in:

In 3 of the 4 Gospels, Jesus says “*Divorce is wrong...do not get divorced...if you do divorce and remarry you are an adulterer, and that is wrong.*” He says that, plain as day. Now, does this mean we kick out half the people in our church? Do we kick out a percentage of our pastors? Is that how it should be? Our experience tells us that divorce is usually a painful, terrible event. Marriage is difficult, and sometimes a marriage does not survive.

There is nothing to be celebrated in that. But does that also mean that people are forever banished from the house of God, from the community of faith? In many divorces, one person does not want it. Our experience tells us that a lot of good people go through the pain of divorce, and that they should not be banished for life from the Church. That is one of those places where our Experience and our Reason must play a role.

Another place where this comes in is the role of Women in the modern Church. We have a tiny portion in 1 Corinthians where Paul says that women need to sit down, shut up, keep their heads covered, and never be any kind of leader in anything but changing babies and washing dishes. Women are never to be leaders in the Church. Our experience and our reason tell us that God has given special gifts and abilities to women, and that these are used in service to God. We have many women in ministry in the United Methodist Church, we have female Bishops, and that would seem to go against that one spot from Paul. This is something to spend time with in a Sunday School Class! If any of you would like to tackle it, I have some helpful materials!

I need to wrap this up for today. Next Sunday, I'd like to talk about our beliefs regarding who and what we are as human beings. But for now, let's just try to digest this idea of Wesley's about how we use these 4 methods to try to find the truth for our Faith. I hope that in days to come to we actually put these methods to work for us. We have a great trail to walk, and there needs to be a lot of

talking and sharing on that trail. May God bless and keep us as we walk and try to learn what is good and right and true. **AMEN.**