

Love 'n the 'hoods

Service Elements

February 16, 1998

By

F. Bruce Simmons III ©

Message: Luther's doctrine declares it is no longer necessary to receive priestly intervention in order for a Christian to communicate with God. Wesley's doctrine of perfect love directs us to reach beyond our boundaries and love our neighbors more than ourselves.

Message conduits:

Songs: (Select 2-3 hymns to be used throughout the service between elements that illuminate communion directly with God and service to our fellow human beings)

Play: Love 'n the 'hoods featuring Luther and Wesley

Sermon: Love 'n the 'hoods (attached)

Take home: Love 'n the 'hoods bibliography

Total service time: 30 minutes

**LOVE 'N THE 'HOODS
5 MINUTE
ILLUMINATION PLAY**

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ACT I

STAGE SETUP/costuming needs:

Door with sign that says "GOD"

"Priest" hat

Priest to dress formally

Key on long neck chain (the bigger the key the better)

"L" to attach to the front of Luther's shirt

All others, including Luther, to dress as "commoners"

CHARACATERS:

PRIEST: Wears Priest hat and key around neck

BELIEVERS: 2-3 people dressed as commoners

LUTHER: Dressed as commoner but with "L" on shirt

GOD: Voice off-stage

WESLEY Dressed as commoner but with "W" on shirt

ACTION:

Priest stands before the commoners and Luther on stage and addresses them saying:

"You must use me to reach God and I have the Key" (he holds up the key and points to the door that says God).

The priest continues lecturing the commoners:

"I am your witness as God has chosen me, and not you. I will read you the scriptures as God can only talk to you through me. I will express the faith. You must go through me. I am the conduit to God to salve your world's sickness and suffering. If you are to have a finer life, YOU MUST GO THROUGH ME....it is WRITTEN!"

All the commoners now kneel before the priest expressing their whispered gratitude....EXCEPT Luther.

Luther turns from the Priest and the commoners and faces the audience directly. He looks at them quizzically and says:

"This does not seem right. My God is a loving God and an approachable God. I wonder...."

Note: if lights are available, have all lights gone dark with exception on one spotlight on Luther. The other actors quietly exit when stage is dark.

Luther then kneels next to the stand with an open Bible and prays:
“God, please illuminate me. Coming to you only through a Priest does not seem right to me. Please guide me....”

Then God’s voice comes from back stage saying:

“ALL THE BAPTIZED MEMBERS IN MY COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS HAVE CERTAIN RIGHTS! They may:

- ***Pray directly to my son, the Holy Spirit, and me through Christ. You do not need mediation by others for the benefit of fellow human beings.***
- ***You may live your own life as witness to others of our own faith.***
- ***You may read the scriptures yourself, not just for us, but also for others.***
- ***You must express your faith in acts of love and mercy.***
- ***You must share in the world’s need for food and shelter and the misery of natural forces...you must help.***
- ***You may engage in social action to attempt to correct the world’s social injustice.***

God stops talking and Luther stands. If house lights are available, stage goes dark, if not, Luther turns and walks off stage.

ACT II

STAGE SETUP/costumes:

Door with sign “God”
Many keys on a table
Actors dressed as commoners
“L” on Luther who is still dressed as a commoner

CHARACTERS:

LUTHER: Dressed as a commoner with an “L” on his shirt
BELIEVERS: Now 5-6 believers dressed as commoners

ACTION:

Luther is standing in front of 5-6 believers and says:

“God has illuminated me! Through His written word He has declared that YOU, each of YOU is worthy of meeting Him and communing with Him personally! No longer must you go through a priest to express your needs,

desires and love of God. You may go to see Him yourself! Take these keys and go to Him NOW!"

Luther then hands the keys, one at a time, to each commoner who then takes it and enters the door marked "God".

ACT III

STAGE SETUP/costuming needs:

Sign that says: "250 years later in the rectory of Wesley"

Door with sign that says "God"

"W" to attach to Wesley's suit

Desk with chair, with quill pen and candle for light.

Bible and books to illustrate the writings of Luther

CHARACTERS:

WESLEY: Wears a suit of the time with a "W" on it

GOD: Voice off stage (same voice as earlier)

ACTION:

Wesley is seated at his desk facing the audience. His bible and the writings of Luther are open on his desk. The house is dark except for the single spotlight on Wesley.

Wesley looks solemn as he prays:

"Dearest God, It is through your illumination of Luther that we all now understand we can come directly to you. For this honor I am so very humbled and grateful. It is also through this means that I seek understanding.

In Matthew 5:48 you say that we "therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect".

How, God? Even with our ability to seek you directly, the world is still a cruel place. Country still fights country. City still fights city.

Neighbor still fights neighbor. There must be a way to end the madness!

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, I seek guidance!"

Wesley's head heavily drops onto the desk.

As God speaks to Wesley, Wesley's head begins to rise, his hands fold in prayer, and then he picks up a pen to record the words. God says...

"Wesley, you are a good and humble man. You see the needs and illness of your fellow man. That is why I have chosen you to take this

message to all those who will listen. Like those of historic Biblical times, many believe that to be close to me they must have a religious vocation but know this....contributing to society and thus serving one's neighbor, is as fulfilling to Me as any specifically religious vocation! ANYONE can serve Me. They must SIMPLY serve their fellow man!

Scriptural holiness is the inward love of God but the OUTWARD LOVE OF GOD IS LOVE OF YOUR NEIGHBOR! Each one who loves Me must give of themselves, reach beyond their human boundaries and their neighbor. You must reach out to the poor among you and aid them. You must contribute to society. You must love your neighbor. Through this you will have perfect love.

Wesley, you must take the message of love to your congregations!"

CLOSE:

Wesley then stands and faces the audience and says...

"AND THIS is what I tell you now. God is close to each of us! We need no human intervention or religious vocation to be near Him or show our love of Him. EACH of us is called to show our love of God in a simple, but effective way. Love our neighbors. This, and only this, is a reflection of our love of God. Won't you begin today?"

Stage goes dark, or if there are no stage lights, Wesley drops his head, holds his arms out to each side and silently awaits applause.

THE END

LOVE 'N THE 'HOODS

By

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One of the distinctive items in the United Methodist Church is the usage of the two doctrines of the priesthood and sainthood of all believers. All baptized, practicing Christians are called to be priests and to be saints. In the body of Christ, or community of believers, each member is a priest for the rest of us.

Luther's doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers destroys the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacerdotal priesthood. No longer will it be a necessary precondition for hierarchical priestly intervention in order for a Christian to communicate with God. The lay Christian is no longer barred from direct communication with God. The issue is no longer who controls access to heaven, but how does a member of the community of believers get in step with what God wants humans to do.

The foundational text for Luther's concept about the priesthood of all believers is as follows.

1 Peter 2:5 "... like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices [Rom 12:1, Heb 13:15-16, includes worship and social ethics] acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (i.e. the Christian community is not passive, however, as a building is; its members are to be active in their Christian life, serving God, as did the priests of old).

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

All baptized members in the community of believers are entitled to:

- Pray directly to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit without mediation by others for the benefit of fellow human beings
- Live own life as witness to others of our own faith
- Read the scriptures, not for ourselves, but for others
- Express our faith in acts of love and mercy
- Share in the temporal world's need for food and shelter and the misery of natural forces
- Engage in social action to attempt to correct the world's social injustice.

Accompanying the doctrine of the priesthood of believers, is the Wesleyan doctrine of the sainthood of believers. Perfect love or sainthood of all believers dictates that in our loving God one must reach out beyond the ordinary bounds of

religious observance. Should one not reach out beyond, one falls short of one's spiritual capacity. A saint is one who is openly and freely dependent through Christ and the Holy Spirit on the grace of God for pardon and forgiveness, whose love for God causes one to reach beyond the boundaries, and who loves one's neighbors more than one's altruism or self interest. People with flaws can be saints. Within this doctrine of perfection, in order to depart this earth as a saint all one must do is love others out of their response to God's love for them and to live, in practice, that love. There are no limits on our loving God and our neighbor.

The foundational text for Wesley's concept about the sainthood of all believers is as follows.

Matthew 5:48 "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect."

The Wesleyan approach tied together the perfectionism of the pietists, the moralism of the puritans, and the devotionalism of the mystics; all within the structures and doctrines of the Church of England. The two doctrines that represent the dual thrust of the Wesleyan message were justification and sanctification. Scriptural holiness is the inward love of God and the outward love of neighbor. One's love of one's neighbors is but a reflection of one's love of God. Sainthood, or outward holiness, is a direct consequence from one's love, faith, and trust in God. As one who is called Methodist, we are directed to love God's other children in every place, in any real need or distress where one can relieve or reduce it. Wesley's law of love directs one to give away one's luxuries and conveniences to our neighbor's necessities and to give away one's necessities when one's neighbor is in extremities.

The Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification stressed the believer's empowerment by God for holy living and action. The themes of perfection, love, the Holy Spirit, and the recognition of growth occurred throughout the treatment of this doctrine. Following justification, or what God does for us (i.e. the forgiveness of sin), sanctification described the Christian life. Thus, the doctrine of sanctification was not a doctrine that competed with, or replaced, the importance of one's initial trust in God's forgiveness. The experience of sanctification developed from one's being right with God through God's forgiveness. The need for sanctification had arisen because justification dealt with guilt from sin but not the ongoing Christian life of forgiveness. The transformation of life followed justification.

The Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, or what God does in us, involved three stages. Initial sanctification consisted of the work of the Holy Spirit establishing the love of God and neighbor and in moving the individual who believes that God forgives to a more complete involvement in God's life and purpose. Perfect love, or entire sanctification, is the level where the believer experienced further spiritual growth and brought a level of realization of a new level of fellowship with

God and of conscious commitment to this loving God. Glorification moved beyond forgiveness for and deliverance from sin to the removal from the presence of sin. This crucial doctrine of sanctification encompassed the maturation from forgiveness of sin, to the deliverance from the power of sin, and to the removal from the presence of sin in the Christian experience.

The result of sanctification in the life of the believer is a life of perfect love. Instead of acting out of self-interest and doing one's own thing, life becomes motivated by the desire to do God's love. As a restoration of the image of God in the believer, perfection can be thought of as participation in God. Sanctification involves the human response to divine grace. Rather than a routine membership in a corporate national church, personal saving faith is a lifetime of development through repeated responses to God's grace.

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ACT II

STAGE SETUP/costumes:

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Many keys on a table

Actors dressed as commoners

“L” on Luther who is still dressed as a commoner

CHARACTERS:

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