

By a show of hands how many of y'all grew up with a brother or sister at home? (pause) Did y'all ever argue with your brothers or sisters? (pause) I know I did. With my Mom's recent passing I have been thinking a lot about the things Mom used to say to my brother and I. I remember when I was a kid Mom would say, "Do not stoop to their level," or, "Do not sink to their level." I usually heard this when I would get into a fight with my brother. Sometimes Mom would say this when my little brother was trying to see how far he could push me before a fist fight broke out. Sometimes, Mom would say it to me when I would try to get a rise out of him. And sometimes Mom would say those words when I would get picked on at school. "Do not sink to their level."

I want y'all to think about this for a minute. Jesus was dying on the cross. (pause) Jesus had been arrested, spat upon, made fun of, and beaten. They threw Jesus in a dark hole for hours before dragging him out again to be falsely tried, charged, and convicted of being exactly who Jesus is – the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus was then handed over to the Romans who caned, scourged, spat upon and made fun of Jesus all over again. Then they nailed Jesus to a cross and crucified Him. (pause) Think for a minute about Jesus, nailed to the cross, beaten, bloodied, and stripped naked in front of his Momma. (pause) They had deliberately drug Jesus about as low as humanly possible. (pause) Gotta say, if it's me; I am probably gonna lash out. I am probably gonna say some mean and hurtful things. I am probably gonna make some threats. I am probably gonna come down off of that cross and bring some Old Testament judgment along with me. (pause) right? (pause) Do ya know what I mean? (pause) Can you see where I am coming from? (pause) But I am not Jesus. Thank God. Thank God I am not Jesus. Do not look to me. Look to Jesus. What does Jesus do? (pause) Here. Y'all look it up. Does Jesus lash out? (pause for answers) Does Jesus make threats? (pause for answers) Does Jesus come down off of the cross? (pause for answers) What does Jesus do? (pause for answers) Jesus prays. Jesus prays for those who have hurt Him, and for those who are hurting Him. Church, what does Jesus pray, "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**" (v.34).

When the Methodist Societies first started they were not for committed disciples of Jesus Christ. The Methodist societies were not for committed Christians. The Methodist societies were for those people who were convinced Hell is real. They were convinced Hell is real and they had a dread fear of the wrath to come. In fact they wanted to flee the wrath to come. (pause) Now, y'all pay close attention to this. Wanting to flee the wrath to come is not the same as being a Christian. (repeat 2x) John Wesley observed this to be true. Giving our lives to Christ cannot just be a pie crust promise – easily made and easily broken. Giving our lives to Christ is a commitment made with our whole heart, body, mind and soul. Making this commitment is a little like learning to grieve. I am not sure anyone can really tell you how to grieve, or how to accept Jesus Christ. It is something we have to do for ourselves. However, I believe, and Wesley believed that while salvation may be something we have to accept **for** ourselves in Christ it is not something we are meant to **figure out by** ourselves. The purpose of the Methodist societies and class meetings was to provide a place and structure for people to give their lives fully to God. I believe that is why the Societies only had three rules.

Do No Harm

Do Good

Attend to the Ordinances of God.

From the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (v. 34).

Members of the Methodist societies were expected – EXPECTED to look at their lives for the harm they were doing. Each week the group would meet and they were expected to find one way they were doing harm and

to stop doing it. They were to ask the other members of their small group to help hold them accountable for this task. The group would also help them to discover where their blind spots were so they might discover the areas they are doing harm without meaning to.

The members of the societies were expected to do good. Now, the Jewish rulers and Pharisees thought they were doing good when they pushed the Romans to crucify Jesus. But Jesus prayed for them, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (v. 34). The Jewish leaders and Pharisees did not recognize the good they intended to do was actually causing a lot more harm. I think if we are really honest with ourselves there are times when we have been guilty of the same thing. (pause) Can you think of a time when you have tried to help out and to do good, but you only wound up making things worse? (pause) That's what the Pharisees and Jewish ruling officials had done. The question is **how are we to tell the difference?** How are we to know? (pause) The best way to figure this out is to be part of a small group who regularly helps us to ask the question, "Where am I doing good, and are the things I am doing actually good?" In the Methodist Societies the class meetings were small groups where people could ask those questions with people whom they could trust.

Now I know for a fact there are four Sunday school classes at this church; two for adults, one for kids, and one for youth. Those classes are pretty full which leaves me wondering how many people sitting in the pews this morning are not in a Sunday school class, or participating in Disciple Bible study. I am not going to ask for a show of hands, but how many of y'all **are not** in a small group that holds you accountable? It leads me to wonder, "**What are we trying to do?**" (pause) What are we trying to do? Do we even know?

In the wake of the recent gun violence I saw a video of Trevor Noah from the Daily Show on Comedy Central. I don't often watch the Daily Show any more. I don't really have the time and I kinda prefer the other host, but this video's commentary caught my attention. Trevor Noah described America as a country that tries. He was talking about gun control, but he used this example that I really appreciate. Trevor Noah said, Cars today are a lot safer than they used to be. They are safer because we have tried to make them safer. Compared to fifty years ago cars have better brakes, better seatbelts, better windshields and windows. Cars crumple upon impact now because scientists discovered a car that crumples is less likely to kill a person when they are in an accident. We have airbags in cars now. Cars are safer because we have tried to make them safer. America is a nation that tries and works to make life better and safer. As the Church, what are we trying to do? (pause) What are we trying to do better? (pause) What are we trying to make better?

I am convinced if we are not actively trying to grow in our relationship with God we will sink to the same level as the rest of the world who does not love God with all of their heart; mind; soul; and strength. We will put ourselves first. We will not stand up for the oppressed. We will not hear the cry of the needy. Without God we will sink to their level. We won't know or care about the harm we cause – even when we are trying to do good. (pause) Sisters and brothers that is no kinda way to be. (pause) That is a world that is not worth living in, and as my Mother was fond of saying, "If you don't do the work to change it, you don't have a right to complain about how it is going." Do we know what we are trying to do? Are we really trying to grow closer to God or are we just **talking** about growing closer to God? Are we looking for ways to be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit, or are we just talking about it? My brothers and sisters in Christ are we too comfortable doing church the way we have always done it, or are we ready to stretch and grow so we might be moved closer to God?

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen