



HOLLYWOOD
United Methodist Church
the **heart** of hollywood

**TOUGH QUESTIONS:
DO UNITED METHODISTS HAVE
OPEN HEARTS, MINDS & DOORS?**

Sunday, May 4, 2008

Sermon by Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma & Rev. Dave Stambaugh

Scripture: Luke 24:44-53

We have open hearts. Our hearts have been "strangely warmed" by the Holy Spirit just like John Wesley's heart was warmed one night in 1738. He heard a sermon preached on Aldersgate Street and became convicted of the power of God to work change in his heart and the hearts of others through faith in Jesus Christ. We claim that same power of the Spirit today – the spirit that Jesus talked about when he ascended into heaven as we read in Luke's Gospel this morning.

The next year, Wesley defined three general rules for Methodist "societies" so that their members would live according to the Spirit. They are:

**Do no harm.
Do good.
Stay in love with God.**

Do all United Methodists follow these general rules and have open hearts? Not all United Methodists; not all the time.

But there were strong evidences of open hearts in the General Conference sessions:

- passing legislation strengthening our opposition to war;
- our opposition to torture in any form;
- our opposition to the death penalty generally and specifically in Texas (where over 400 people have been executed in the past 25 years);
- proclaiming justice for migrants and immigrants in circumstances worldwide;
- speaking with one voice to tell SMU to reject plans for the G.W. Bush Presidential Library;
- passing legislation that would provide study materials for every church to raise awareness of and combat homophobia;
- to raising \$18 million for *Nothing but Nets*, providing bednets for children in Africa so to prevent the spread of malaria. (<http://nothingbutnets.net/>)

What about Wesley's quadrilateral? Doesn't that mean we automatically have open minds?

The reality is that some parts of the quadrilateral are given more emphasis by some than by others. Some rely more on tradition than reason or experience, while all rely on Scripture.

But we saw evidences of open minds at General Conference. The Judicial Council elections were a great example. We elected five fair-minded people to serve on the Council for the next four years -- a good indication that the Judicial Council will adjudicate, not seek to impose, legislation in the next quadrennium (see last week's post).

We saw the church decide to study how we can and should be a worldwide church with regional differences. We can talk more about this in the "green room discussion" after church tomorrow; but we are hopeful about how the church can accommodate regional differences and agree to not be of one mind on all issues, even while being a united church.

And we saw the church overwhelmingly reject any petitions that said that gender identity is a barrier to serving as clergy. That is good news.

We saw evidences of where the spirit is still tugging on minds to open. The most painful processes at GC: the retention of prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline which does not allow for same gender blessings by clergy nor in church remains, by the narrowest of margins. So does the prohibition against gay and lesbian clergy. Again, by the narrowest of margins -- less than 100 votes.

(following that vote, there was a demonstration on the floor of GC. Stoles – it seemed from the video that more people were standing than were seated)

I believe the way in which we prepare to open hearts -- and minds -- is to continue to grow our church and tell our story of God's amazing spirit here at HUMC. The more our congregation can serve as a model of God's inclusive, radical love for all people -- the more the church can lean on reason and experience over and against tradition. HUMC -- our congregation was lifted up as a model of open hearts, open minds and open doors in the Ministry and Higher Education legislative section by our former District Superintendent Grant Hagiya. Hollywood – will be hurt by restrictions—growing by leaps and bounds.

I sobbed from my seat in the gallery.

So do we have open doors? By the grace of God, the answer is yes.

Efforts to restrict membership, or make it the sole discretion of the pastor or of the congregation, were rejected. And one of the most important developments was the GC

approval of a constitutional amendment that says, very simply, all means all. Two-thirds of annual conferences have to approve it; but simply it puts into our church constitution that all persons are welcome. Before it said all persons regardless of race, gender, age and a litany of other qualifiers. Rather than add sexual orientation or gender identity or other missing adjectives...we just asked for all to mean all. Amen!

What do we do now?

--We continue to model open hearts, minds, doors.

--HUMC was chosen as a leadership center by Conference.

--We are on the progressive cutting edge. As Rev. Dave reminded me, change doesn't come from the center; it comes from the cutting edge. We must continue to be that church.

So that we indeed have a future with hope.

Amen.

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