

**Sunday, August 6, 2017**

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

**Message:** "Heart Perfection"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

**Message Series:** The Holy Spirit in Daily Life

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:12-16 (CEB)

**Text:** Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**Blurb:** Jesus said, "out of the mouth the heart speaks" (Matt. 15:18). It is our heart, our spiritual heart, that is the center of our being. Christians invite Jesus to live in our hearts. Yet our problem is that our hearts are divided. This Sunday, as we again encounter the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, we will place our hearts before Jesus asking Him to make them perfect. Yes, perfect. That is God's intention for us! God takes our divided hearts and makes them perfect. This is for you!

**Gathering Song:** *Everlasting God*

**Welcome:** -Pastor David

-Holy Communion for everyone. Kids come back in.

**Worship Set:** Sanctify

*There Is Joy in the Lord*

*Have It All*

*Beautiful Things*

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Kids invited to Kids' Church

**Sermon Bumper**

**Message:** "Heart Perfection"

**PP#1:** Heart Perfection

Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." -Matthew 5:48

The Holy Spirit in Daily Life. Heart Perfection. Matthew 5:48, Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**PP#2:** *Picture of us in England.*

Twenty four years ago tomorrow, Reese and I were married! Happy anniversary, my love! We turn 48 this year. That means that now we've been married half of our lives! Wow! I still do, Reese!

Oh, and by the way, I didn't buy you anything, so I hope this public acknowledgment is enough to keep you from being mad at me!

Anyway, during our first year of marriage, we went to England, where I served as a pastor for a year as an internship through my seminary. And there were all sorts of cultural differences we had to learn, even our shared language!

<b>PP#3:</b>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>England</u>
<i>Image of cookie:</i>	Cookie	Biscuit
<i>Image of bread biscuit</i>	Biscuit	Muffin
<i>Image of a muffin</i>	Muffin	American Muffin

For example, french fries to them are chips (like, fish and chips), and chips to them are crisps. A cookie to them is a biscuit, and a biscuit is a muffin (like, English muffin). There were some more embarrassing differences, like one time I complimented a lady on her *pants*. She gave me a horrified look, for, I found out, pants in England mean *underpants*! I should have said "trousers."

I had another language mistake. You see, as I went from house to house meeting all the church people, they would ask me if I wanted more tea, or biscuits, or whatever. Evidently, my usual "no" response was, "No, I'm perfect, thanks."

Well, finally, one of the ladies took my wife aside and asked her, "Does your husband think he's perfect? He keeps saying he is!" Now, even though we were only in our first year of marriage, my wife had no newlywed delusions. "Let me assure you, he's not. It's an American phrase, meaning, "No thank you. I'm *perfectly* content without anything further."

**PP#4:** *Image for "Nobody's perfect,"* <http://www.lovetispic.com/image/25251/nobodys-perfect>

Saying I was perfect got me into trouble. And it still does, even now. For as a United Methodist, I talk about perfection as part of salvation. It gets me into trouble. But it's in the Bible! Jesus even commanded it. He said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Now, most Christians defer this to heaven. When we die, we will become perfect. We will get perfect bodies, and then we will be perfect. After all, "To err is human," right? Nobody's perfect. We're all sinners, and we all continue to sin until we die.

Well, that may be what our culture has done with what Christians have taught from the Bible, but that's not actually what the Bible teaches. Yes, the Bible teaches us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And 1 John 1:7 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves." But be careful. The Bible says this in reference to people *without Jesus*. This is the natural state we people are in *before* we are saved. We all sin, yes.

But the Bible says that when we are saved, we are saved *from sin*. Now again, most people take this biblical teaching to mean that Jesus takes away our *past* sins. Well, that's true, they are washed away.

But God doesn't stop there. God came in Jesus to earn forgiveness for the sins we have, and will, commit. True. We are justified, made "just as if I'd never sinned." All past sin-records wiped clean.

But—and here we push into our message series of walking daily with the Holy Spirit—in addition we hear the Bible saying that God also came in the Holy Spirit, to come into us, to work a change from within, breaking the power of sin in our lives, and MAKING US ABLE NOT TO SIN.

*I know!* We don't hear this from the culture's teaching of Christianity. That's why we can't get our teaching anywhere but from the Bible! It doesn't say what most people think it ought. It speaks truth. We need to dig into it to live fully.

**PP#5:** 1 Peter 2:24

“‘He Himself bore our sins’ in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”

1 Peter 2:24 says, “Jesus ‘Himself bore our sins’ in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by His wounds you have been healed.’” Jesus died on the cross to take our past sins away, but also to crucify our old selves—that love to sin—and take that away, too. We don't have to sin! He died so that we might live righteously. We are *healed*. That means the brokenness in us that craves sin and desires to act sinfully, is itself broken. WE DON'T HAVE TO SIN!

*I know!* This seems like crazy talk, doesn't it? Crazy to our culture, but not crazy to our Bibles.

**PP#6:** 1 John 1:7-9

7 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Let's go back to 1 John 1. Verse 7, “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, His Son, *purifies us from all sin*. [The meaning here is forgiveness of past sins committed, *and* enabled to resist our sinful nature.] 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [But, watch what this means in the context.] 9 If [however] we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our [past] sins and [here it is, notice,] purify us from all unrighteousness.” That means we are made pure in heart, so we do not have to commit sins *going forward!*

**PP#7: Salvation: Put right with God.**

Justification: Past sins forgiven (Work of Jesus on the cross)

Regeneration: Made new and different, don't have to sin (Work of the Holy Spirit within us)

Sanctification: Made more like Jesus, ungodliness removed (Work of the Holy Spirit within us)

Perfection: Made perfect in love in the heart (Work of the Holy Spirit within us)

OK, a quick biblical outline of salvation. Salvation is not just our conversion. It's not just being forgiven for past sins. Salvation is a relationship. It's being in right relationship with God, as God intended, and what God made us for.

So, the Bible describes salvation in four acts of grace. (Grace is what God does for us.) First act of grace, Jesus died on the cross to earn our forgiveness. We receive it when we give our hearts to Jesus. But when we give our hearts to Jesus, Jesus also lives in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit. So, when we take Jesus, Jesus also takes us. And that's the second act of grace. He sends the Holy Spirit to live within us. The Holy Spirit takes up residence, and transforms us from the inside out. He makes us new...the Bible also calls it “being born again.” And then, the Holy Spirit works on us, day

in and day out, to purify all that is in us, giving us victory over our selfishness and pride, piece by piece, part by part. This is called sanctification. We grow in holiness. This is the third act of grace. We are being perfected. We improve. When we let Jesus be Lord, and we let the Holy Spirit reign within, we get better in holiness.

My wife has grown in holiness. She's improved over the last 24 years. She is a more grace-filled woman than she was when I first married her.

Now, we don't *have* to improve. We can be stubborn and resist the working the Holy Spirit within us. Some of us do. But when we are open to the Holy Spirit, when we walk daily with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit *lives* in us, and *works* in us.

Well, so far most Christians are on board. We usually stop there. But the Bible doesn't. It goes on to talk about perfecting grace, where the Holy Spirit pushes us to strive for perfection. In fact, the Bible expects us to be perfect *in this life*. Jesus says, "be perfect." Not "someday, when you die." The context for this command is Jesus telling us to love our enemies. *Love* them. In your heart. Be perfect. Right now.

Now we may, as we falter and slip up, still sin. But that should be getting less and less.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, claimed that God raised up the Methodists as a movement for the expressed purpose of reminding the Church about Christian perfection.

It's in the Bible, he argued. Just because people don't find it easy, doesn't mean it's not true. So many people, even many Christians, hide behind the excuse that nobody is perfect. But it's a worldly loophole, and we use it to justify our spiritual laziness. It's easier not to go on to perfection. It's easier to justify our continual anger, or foul mouth, or financial tightness, or lack of forgiving someone, or bitterness. We make a loophole for sin.

But when we surrender ourselves to Jesus as our Lord, and walk daily with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit pushes us to perfection. Practice makes perfect - it's true! Each day we have more opportunities to practice living God's way, in holiness, and we should be improving at it.

One of our key jobs as United Methodists is to point to the biblical teaching of holiness, to the Church, and to the whole world. We do that by our biblical teaching, and by how we live out our lives every day with the Holy Spirit!

Did you know, when United Methodist pastors are ordained, the Bishop asks us, "Are you going on to perfection?" "Yes." "Do you expect to be made perfect in love this life?" We must answer "yes" to be ordained!

#### **PP#8: Heart Perfection**

1. Not sinning: doing the right thing

OK, we need to unpack three different pieces of perfection here. One is not *having* to sin. We have the power of the Holy Spirit in us, so that we don't have to commit sin. Now, by sin, we mean a known, willful act against God. So, this doesn't mean things you don't know. It's things you know. And you understand this. You can resist stealing, right? You can count to ten before you mouth off. You can turn and walk away. You can choose to forgive someone. It's a matter of choosing what the Holy Spirit is leading you to do. It's really not that complicated. One group simply puts it this way, it's living by the motto: "In this moment, right now, do the right thing." Our reality is that we always can, but we just don't always WANT to. Sometimes we just give in to what is easier.

#### **PP#9: Heart Perfection**

1. Not sinning: We can do the right thing
2. Broken sinful nature: We are able not to follow it

So, sin is also a desire within us, a selfishness in our hearts. But, we have the Holy Spirit in our lives that breaks that sinful nature within us. It is still there, but it is not so powerful that we are helpless to resist it. We can call upon the Holy Spirit to give us victory. It requires, however, a continual dying to self, a choosing not to do whatever we feel. Now, I'm not talking about pathological problems, here. And addictions have a chemical component, too. But even then, with a deep dying to self, that sinful trap can be broken.

We may sin, but we don't have to. And we can start again and be successful next time!

I want you to hear the good news here. The world's teaching that *no one is perfect* is a death sentence. It's a miserable burden. You are stuck! You are trapped in your problems. It's hopeless.

But the Bible teaches us good news! You are NOT slaves to your sin. You have the Holy Spirit within you to make you able to resist. So, give it a try! You can do it! If you falter; get up, and try again, for next time you can have victory. We have Good News! We walk daily with the Holy Spirit. We teach hope. We proclaim a different future!

#### **PP#10: Heart Perfection**

1. Not sinning: We can do the right thing
2. Broken sinful nature: We don't have to follow it.
3. Heart filled with love: God's love fills up our hearts.

But what about our thoughts that we can't turn off, the meanness in our hearts that's just there? Jesus said, "He who lusts in his heart commits adultery" (Matt. 5:28).

Here's the key teaching on perfection. Perfection is not acting perfectly. As humans we can only do what our physical bodies and minds allow. We will make mistakes, even with good intentions. Perfection is not that. Above all, perfection is a *heart* that loves God so much, that everything ungodly is pushed out. Perfection is God's love perfectly filling up our hearts.

And this is possible, too. Have you ever noticed those saints that give annoying people the benefit of the doubt? Or who don't seem to get offended so fast? Or who see people like God does? Who care and love others—even very broken people—in amazing ways? Who don't seem to get unraveled when they are mistreated? They walk around splashing love and grace on everyone near them. They speak words of kindness, grace, sometimes correction, but in love; words that help.

The Bible says, "out of the mouth the heart speaks." These people have a heart very full of love. It can happen. It does happen. People's hearts can become so filled with love of God that there just isn't room for malice, or envy, or greed, or bitterness, or selfishness.

This is what we are striving for. Not perfect actions or behaviors by some human standard. But a heart so filled with love that it changes us from the inside out.

#### **PP#11: 1 John 4:7-18**

"7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ... 12 If we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit. ... 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus."

1 John 4, the passage that tells us that God is love. Verse 7, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. [It’s God’s love in us.] Everyone who loves has been born of God [born again from the inside out] and knows God. ... If we love one another, *God lives in us and His love is made complete in us*. [There it is, His love *complete* in us.] This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit. [This is all the work of the Holy Spirit in us.] ... And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. [God’s love in us is what makes us able to love. We rely on His love in us, not our selfish nature.] God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete [perfect] among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.” The love inside affects our daily walk. We are not slaves to sin. We can behave differently. We can live in holiness, living like Jesus. Do the right thing right now.

**PP#12: Heart Perfection**

Believers “purify their hearts by faith” [Acts 15:90] from:

1. Pride
2. Self-will (or self-desire)
3. Anger leading to sin

-John Wesley, “Christian Perfection,” Sermon #40 (1740) II.26

John Wesley, in his many sermons on Christian Perfection, identified three areas that Christians need to consistently give up to God in order to make progress in going on to perfection. Three key areas of sin in the heart are: pride, or thinking too highly of oneself so that we don’t need Jesus, having ourselves in the center of our hearts and lives; self-will, or as we might say, selfishness, a wanting what we want rather than what God wants; and anger that leads to sin. Anger in itself is not bad. It’s just that it flairs our emotions and we let it act out in ungodly ways. These three the Christian must continually fight in order to go on to perfection.

Search your hearts. Are you fighting them today? Call on the Holy Spirit inside to help you. Which of these three is your biggest struggle right now? You have the Spirit’s power inside you to resist.

I close with our Scripture passage today. Paul talks to the Christians at Philippi about what it means to live going on to perfection. Perhaps you can identify.

**PP#13: Philippians 3:12-16 (CEB)**

12 It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. 13 Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. 14 The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. 15 So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her. 16 Only let’s live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached.

Philippians 3, starting with verse 12. “It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, *but I pursue it*, so that I *may* grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me *for just this purpose*. [To be perfect.] Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it [yet!], but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me [past sins are forgiven] and reach out for the things ahead of me. [Holiness.] The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in

Christ Jesus. [That upward call is God's intention for us: to live in perfect love with Him.] So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, [see, growing in holiness] and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her. Only let's live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached [so far]." We strive upwards, and we do that by living out what we can right now, not in our own strength alone, but by accessing the Holy Spirit within us.

Some day we expect, in this life, to be able to say to sin and our selfish desires, "No thanks. I'm perfect."

Amen.

### **Song for Holy Communion Bread - Andrew**

Kids bring in the bread for Holy Communion

### **Prayers**

#### **PP#14: Heart Perfection**

Believers "purify their hearts by faith" [Acts 15:90] from:

1. Pride
2. Self-will (or self-desire)
3. Anger leading to sin

-John Wesley, "Christian Perfection," Sermon #40 (1740) II.26

### **Holy Communion**

Great Thanksgiving

Prayer for the Holy Spirit

Lord's Prayer

Receiving the Elements

Offering: "O for a Heart to Praise My God" #417

**Closing Song:** *We Are the Free* -Sanctify

**Benediction:** Pastor David