

## Refreshing Our Prospective

"Why, a four-year-old child could understand this report. Run out and find me a four-year-old child. I can't make head or tail of it." - *Duck Soup, spoken by Groucho Marx*

"Here's looking at you, kid."      "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse."  
*The Godfather, spoken by Al Pacino*      *Casablanca, spoken by Humphrey Bogart*

"May the force be with you."      "Go ahead, make my day."  
*Star Wars*      *Sudden Impact, spoken by Clint Eastwood*

"My momma always said life was like a box of chocolates...you never know what you're gonna get."  
*Forrest Gump, spoken by Tom Hanks*      "You had me at hello."      *Jerry Mcquire*

Those famous one liners – they seem to have the ability to convey just the right message, to wrap it all up, neatly and even with a bow. We often connect to and identify with others based on the one-liners we hold in common. One-liners also have power to bring to mind a much greater story or truth in just a moment. In their place, community-understood one-liners serve, a great purpose.

Yet, life is not as easily wrapped up as a movie; and though a one-liner may work in its time and place, it does not take long until it simply is not enough.

"God is good"      "Christ is Risen"      "This is a day"      "Amazing Grace"

One-liners have their place and importance in the community of faith also. We can feel at home, even when in a strange place of worship, in the sharing of common phrases, praises and prayers. The one-liners in the language of Christianity do serve the purposes of identifying and uniting us. Like the chorus of a song, they evoke the memory of words far beyond what is spoken. In their place community of faith one-liners play an important role.

"A man of one book"      "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can"      "moving on to perfection"      "Scripture, reason, tradition and experience"      "Heart and hand"

As a United Methodist congregation and a part of the greater Wesleyan tradition, we too have and need our one-liners. They bind and remind us, they facilitate our teaching and help claim an understanding of the ways in which we grasp and seek God. In their place, these one-liners help us to grow and to share our faith.

Yet, there is danger when we allow one-liners, in any aspect of life, to become more than what they are. We can harm ourselves and others when we speak, share or come to accept one-liners as complete truth or full answers. When any one-liner is taken out of its context only to have that context, that story, forgotten over time, the truth it contained becomes distorted.

It can be irritating in life when too many one-liners are shared in response to our attempts to share of ourselves or our thoughts. It can be growth stunting and heart numbing when we rely and share too frequently the one-liners in our faith lives. Faith is not about learning and reciting certain facts, though there is a place for learning and reciting. Staying at the one-liner

level closes ourselves off from God and others. When grasped only at the one-liner level, we put God in a box, we limit God to our understandings and often to our cravings.

When Paul speaks of being of one heart and mind, it can sound like we are to be almost robotic in our thoughts and words, relying on one-liners to convey and shape our faith. However, faith requires so much more. Faith requires us to engage, consider and contemplate, then to choose to believe and trust in that which is beyond, that which is God.

John Wesley is known to have claimed to be a man of one book (The Bible) and to encourage others sharing in the Methodist way to share this way of naming the importance of Scripture. John also provided a list of required reading for his circuit riders, a list which not only included a number of writings on theology and doctrine, but also general information which would help them help others in the communities they visited. This list included medical advice and folk lore treatments as often the circuit riders engaged with communities well before medical practitioners came into these communities. His claim and call to be of "one book" named the primary role of Scripture in understanding God and the Christian faith. No other book could take the place of The Bible in seeking to know and share God's will and way. Yet other books have their place and purpose and should not be ignored or shunned.

After John's death the term Wesley Quadrilateral, came into being to describe the ways that Scripture, reason, tradition and experience, each in their place and all in conjunction with each other, to define and live out our faith. This "one-liner" naming four aspects of how God is revealed does not mean that the four have equal standing, or that any one can be chosen to the preferred source of knowing God. Scripture, The Bible, was primary to Wesley, who likened reason and tradition to "servants" to our ability to grasp the "master", God's revelation in the Scriptures.

The word "tradition" has become somewhat of a one-word one-liner. When Wesley spoke of tradition he did so in the light of the decades and centuries of faithfulness. Wesley's call to use tradition as a tool for understanding God has been used by one generation to impress their mode and model of faith and life onto others. This is a far cry from looking to the ancient understandings and writing, then searching for those which have withstood the test of time and history.

"You had me at hello" worked for the fictional Jerry McQuire in the movie, yet as we seek to grow into those who can be of one heart and mind, reliance and adherence to a "one-liner" understanding of faith, life and most of all God does not. There is a place to embrace our one-liners, a place where they are understood to be reminders of something much greater and more complex. One-liners need to be shared in a place where they are named as that which unites us, in spite of our differences.

May we be deliberate in keeping one-liners in their place and striving to experience and share a faith which is far deeper, for we, and the world, need something much larger than a "one-liner God." We need God who is who God is, something greater than any of us and great enough for all.