

Cross-Cultural Hospitality and the Wesleyan Way of Salvation

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What comes up for you when you hear the phrase “Cross-Cultural Hospitality”?

The different ideas about what this means, the different actions it involves, and the different feelings that arise will depend on who you are.

For the purposes of this reflection, I am inviting United Methodist followers of Jesus to consider what cross-cultural hospitality means, what actions it involves, and what feelings arise in the process. I’m suggesting here that practicing the habits of cross-cultural hospitality is an essential way to experience God’s saving work through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

While United Methodists have some common cultural roots and theological grounding in how we read and interpret Scripture through the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience, we also have a great diversity of interpretation—since *whose* tradition, reason, and experience we draw upon makes a difference in our understanding.

This reality both complicates our life together and makes it more beautiful.

It complicates things because when more than one way of seeing and interpreting Scripture arises, we have a choice to make: whether to make space for culturally non-dominant voices to be recognized, understood, appreciated, and included—or to require their assimilation.

It makes things beautiful because, for United Methodists, salvation has always been about more than making a one-time decision to get to heaven when we die. Salvation is more than a trajectory for religious supremacy culture (or any other version of supremacy culture) to thrive.

Salvation has been God’s gracious, persistent invitation to belong (prevenient grace); God’s gracious celebration of our awakening to our own and others’ inclusion at the table of the Lord (justifying grace); and God’s gracious, ongoing freeing and healing work in us, between us, and among all creation (sanctifying grace).

These are the movements of God’s saving grace that John Wesley proclaimed in his sermon *The Scripture Way of Salvation*. In Wesley’s theology, salvation refers to more than simply justification by faith. Salvation includes holiness by definition, as a restoration of the *Imago Dei* (image of God) of holiness in us.

That “*Imago Dei* of holiness in us” is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. In our baptism, we receive the gift of being claimed as a beloved child of God, *and* we find ourselves connected interdependently to everyone else God loves too.

My friend Derrick Scott III (lay leader in the Florida Conference UMC) has invited me to think about the forgiveness of sin that Jesus offers as “closing the distance” —the distance in us, between us, and between us and God. Derrick points out that effects of sin (of all the “-isms”)

are distance, fracture, and “better-than/less-than” dynamics that lead to death. Jesus came to forgive sin—to close the distance.

As we come to know Jesus and his gift of salvation, we learn that we are forgiven, *and* we keep on forgiving. That is, we hold the tension that the reality of heaven—in which all distance is closed—is *already here* and also *yet to come*.

The vision of cross-cultural hospitality is already here with Jesus, *and* it requires our ongoing work. Perhaps this is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the church at Philippi: “Beloved... work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2:12

Practicing cross-cultural hospitality is the work of salvation because it reflects the heart of God to forgive sin—to close the distance that all the “-isms” cause within and among us.

This is not easy work, but rest assured: Jesus has already moved into these broken places in our lives—these “neighborhoods”—with the truth, grace, and power to heal.

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. —John 1:14 (The Message)

Remember that *sozo* is the Greek word for salvation, and it carries the idea of being physically healed of diseases, being made whole, restored, and delivered from one’s enemies.

Just think of all the ways Jesus addressed and changed “-isms” that kept people at a distance from their true selves and from belonging in an interdependent community where they both received and gave good gifts:

- Mary, a young, poor, unmarried pregnant woman.
- Peter, James, and John—fishermen whose industry was controlled by Rome.
- Zacchaeus and Matthew—tax collectors surviving and taking advantage of others.
- People isolated from community by feared skin diseases.
- A Samaritan woman trying to survive.
- A man living in isolation in a cemetery.

These are just a few examples of Jesus practicing cross-cultural hospitality that led to the closing of distance, restoration to community, wholeness, and deliverance from enemies.

The way of salvation that United Methodists get to experience and offer others is the good news that Jesus is already present, persisting with an invitation to deeper belonging—even before our conscious awareness (prevenient grace).

So, if you ever feel a little overwhelmed by what you *don't know* in the work of cross-cultural hospitality, then great! Lean into that *not knowing* with all the cultural humility you can muster, because Jesus is with you—especially in the midst of your child-like openness to learning new things.

The experience of “ah-ha!” is bound to come. That is the good news of Jesus’ awakening grace (justifying grace)—often feeling like seeing something for the first time (when it had been there the whole time!). This can be a little scary, overwhelming, or even isolating—as much as it is joyful and powerful. Not everyone will want to hear about your “ah-ha!” So, find a supportive group to celebrate these insights and victories, and keep on keeping on.

The journey of cross-cultural hospitality never ends. The ongoing growth of God’s sanctifying grace continues as you practice the tools and strategies for recognizing, understanding, appreciating, and utilizing cultural differences as a strength for God’s mission in the world.

As you do this good work—and as it is done *in* you—remember that you are always part of a big and beautiful story that began before you, will continue after you, and is destined for success. It is the way of God’s salvation!