



Investing or Wasting

Adapted from “Get into the Game” series by Wayne Murray.

You are probably familiar with Welch’s Grape Juice, but you may not know it has ties to the history of The United Methodist Church.

In the 1800s, churches faced a dilemma. To combat the epidemic of alcoholism, the temperance movement advocated total abstinence from alcohol. In celebration of the Lord’s Supper though, the church filled the communion chalice with wine.

Substituting grape juice seems an obvious solution. “For us today it is such common practice. We don’t know any different,” explains Adrienne Possenti, church historian at First United Methodist Church of Vineland, New Jersey.

In the 1800s, however, that was no easy task. Raw grape juice stored at room temperature—home refrigerators were not available until 1913—naturally ferments into wine. This caused a problem for congregations not wanting to use anything containing alcohol.

One solution was to squeeze grapes during the week and serve the juice before it fermented, but grapes were not readily available to every church. “Lots of churches just didn’t have communion when grapes were out of season,” reports Roger Scull, also a church historian at First United Methodist Church of Vineland.

Some creative communion stewards chose to make their own unfermented sacramental wine. One recipe called for adding a pound of hand-squashed raisin pulp—dried grapes—to a quart of boiling water. Later in the process, the “winemaker” was to add an egg white. Doesn’t that sound delicious?

Some churches substituted water for wine. Many in the temperance movement declared water the *only* proper drink. Jesus’ miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12) seemed to give the practice a biblical justification.

Most churches, however, simply continued to use wine. Not only did it solve the storage problem, it resolved another issue. Many believed the biblical mandate called for the use of wine, and viewed the sacrament as an exception to temperance.

Others claimed the wine used at the Last Supper must have been unfermented—not a widely-held understanding today—and insisted on receiving the same.

The sometimes-heated debate continued for decades. In 1864, the General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church entered the conversation when they approved a report from the Temperance Committee that recommended “the pure juice of the grape be used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.”

Four years later, Dr. Thomas B. Welch, a dentist, became a communion steward at Vineland (New Jersey) Methodist Episcopal Church—now First United Methodist Church of Vineland—and vowed to provide his congregation with an unfermented sacramental wine.

“He was so staunch in advocating not having anything to do with alcohol,” Possenti states, “it was reported that he didn’t want to even place his hands on it.”

Before moving to Vineland, Welch had served as a Wesleyan Methodist preacher. Throat problems that sometimes made it difficult for him to speak curtailed that ministry. In this newly established community, advertised as having a “healthful climate,” he opened a dental practice.

Always interested in science, Welch wondered if Louis Pasteur’s breakthrough techniques could be applied grape juice. He experimented to find a way to keep juice from fermenting.

In 1869, he perfected a juice pasteurization process in his kitchen and began selling “Dr. Welch’s Unfermented Wine” to churches preferring an alcohol-free substitute for Communion.

Unfortunately, the idea didn’t take off. After four years, Welch gave up this side business.

Two years later, his son Charles convinced him to produce unfermented wine again. Charles offered free samples of the sacramental wine substitute to churches. He later published temperance magazines that advocated alcohol-free Communion. He also advertised the product with lines like, “If your druggist hasn’t the kind that was used in Galilee containing not one particle of alcohol, write us for prices” (Pinney 389).

At about the same time, the temperance movement and their concern over using fermented wine for communion, was gaining momentum. By 1876, members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were refusing to receive the sacrament in churches using wine. The WCTU, organized in 1873, consisted largely of women from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Well-known Methodist Frances Willard served as their first secretary and second president.

Then, the 1880 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church approved two changes to the *Book of Discipline* that may have been influenced by the work of the WCTU and the growing popularity of Welch’s Grape Juice.

The first change provided an option. Churches were “to see that the Stewards provide unfermented wine for use in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.” Alcohol-free Communion was to be available in every church.

The second change, however, made it effectively mandatory, “Let none but the pure, unfermented juice of the grape be used in administering the Lord’s Supper, whenever practicable.”

Charles Welch summed up his dad and his life’s work in his will: Unfermented grape juice was born in 1869 out of a passion to serve God by helping His Church to give its Communion “the fruit of the vine,” instead of the “cup of devils.”

Today, Welch’s is a multinational corporation offering several grape and other fruit products. It all started, however, with a communion steward in a Methodist Episcopal church who wanted a suitable, unfermented wine for Communion.¹

Many things can be accomplished for the Kingdom of God if we will just invest our lives into God’s Kingdom. God desires us to invest the talents He has given to us.

¹ Joe Iovino, “Methodist history: Controversy, Communion, and Welch’s Grape Juice.” UMC.org, June 28,2016

COURAGE

C1: Most people seem to look for a church based on how well the church meets their needs or helps their family. Read the following verses and then answer the questions.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT) God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

- What do these verses mean to you regarding what a church should be?
- How can you best serve your church?
- How can you best serve the Kingdom of God?

C2: Everyone has a gift to offer the kingdom of God. Read the following passages of scripture and then answer the questions.

Exodus 31:1–6 (NLT) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft! "And I have personally appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make."

Romans 12:6–8 (NLT) In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving,

give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

1 Corinthians 12:8–11 (NLT) To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

- What do each of these passages teach you about God’s use of gifts in different people?

- List three gifts, talents, abilities and/or skills God has given to you:

C3: The Kingdom of God requires the believer to use their abilities from the posture of servanthood. Scripture has much to teach about the idea of a serving with a servant mindset in everyday jobs and activity. Read the following verses and then answer the questions.

Luke 10:40 (NLT) But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.”

Acts 11:29 (NLT) So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could.

2 Corinthians 8:4 (NLT) They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem.

- What do these verses speak to you regarding serving in an everyday capacity?

- When you hear the word “servant” what comes to your mind? Does your understanding of a servant lean towards a negative understanding or a more accepting one?

- The idea of a servant seems to go against our inner desire. Have you discovered that serving is difficult or fulfilling? Why?

STRENGTH

S1: If you want to be used by God, you need to be willing to allow your schedule and your to-do list to be interrupted. John Wesley once said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, by all the ways you can, in all the places and at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.”

- What is your understanding of John Wesley’s statement? Write your understanding in your own words.
- Why should you make yourself available to serve?
- Have you made room in your schedule and your to-do list to allow for interruptions? How can you free some of your time for interruptions?

S2: The needs of people will always be pressing our schedules. If not careful, we become unavailable to the very people we are called to serve. Read the following scriptures and answer the questions.

Philippians 2:4 (NLT)

Ecclesiastes 11:4 (NLT)

Luke 16:13 (NLT)

- What do these scriptures speak to you about serving?
- According to these scriptures, what are three things that keep a person from serving?

S3: Serving is not only an act of service but an attitude of the heart. Not only does Scripture admonish the believer to serve, but to do so with the right attitude and heart. Read these two verses and answer the following questions.

Psalm 135:1-2 (NLT)

Matthew 15:36 (NLT)

- What do these verses speak to you about what our attitude should be as we serve in the Kingdom of God?
- On a scale of 1-8 with 1 being the least and 8 the best, how well do you serve the Lord with gratitude and gladness? What plan can you put into practice to improve in this area over the next 30-days? Who will hold you accountable?

ENDURANCE

E1: If we are going to serve in God's Kingdom, we must serve with a grateful heart. It has been said, "You will know if you have a servant's heart by how you react when you are treated like a servant." Read the following verses and answer the questions.

Romans 14:4 (NLT)

Matthew 6:1 (NLT)

- What do these verses speak to you about serving with a poor attitude rather than with gratefulness and gratitude?
- Examine your heart and answer honestly. Do you tend to serve so others will admire you or do you serve because that is the requirement for you as a servant? How can you improve your servant attitude?

E2: To be a servant, another requirement is to serve out of faithfulness while you are alive. You may retire from your job, but you never get to retire from serving. God does not seem to put stake on our abilities but on our faithfulness. Read the following scripture and then answer the following.

John 17:4 (NLT)

1 Corinthians 4:2 (NLT)

Hebrews 6:10 (NLT)

- What does the word "faithful" mean to you?
- What do these verses speak to you about being a faithful servant?

- On a scale of 1-8, 1 being the least and 8 the best, how would you rate yourself as a faithful servant? What is your plan to improve your faithfulness over the next 30-days? Who will hold you accountable?

E3: Sometimes servants get tired of serving, because they feel as if what they do does not matter. People like to feel appreciated and encouraged. It is true, anonymous does not mean unnecessary. Take the following quiz and then answer the questions.

A Little Quiz

1. Do you know the name of the person who **greeted you** at the church door today?
 2. Do you know the name of the teacher who is **teaching your children** right now?
 3. Do you know the names of the **musicians** who were on stage this week?
 4. Do you know the name of the people who worked to **clean the kitchen and the rooms** so you can have a clean place to eat and store things?
 5. What can your group do to send encouragement to those who are faithful in their tasks?
- Develop a yearly encouragement plan for the persons in your organization and begin to implement it. Discuss your plan with two of your friends. What were their thoughts? How did you feel as you began to develop your plan?