

M. MADELINE SOUTHARD, 1877 – 1967: DOING ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN DO

By Jerry L. Wallace

Preaching at one of her revivals, the Reverend M. Madeline Southard, a holiness Methodist who promoted piety and social justice, admonished her listeners to abandon “living in the shallows of life” with its “shallow thinking, shallow feeling, shallow doing.” “God lives in the Deeps of life,” she proclaimed. “Move out where God is. He made you for deep living.”

As her life story reveals, Rev. Southard lived her life in the deeps with her God. For her, this meant an active life fully engaged as an agent of change. From her early years, she felt God’s call to proclaim the Good News, and in doing so, she very much involved herself not only in religious matters, but also in the principal social and political issues of her time and place. She would do this in a variety of roles during her lifetime, primarily, as an evangelist, a sometimes pastor, and a missionary; and secondarily as a lecturer, journalist, editor, author, teacher, and as an advocacy group organizer, leader, and spokesperson. Through it all, her close personal relationship with her God, maintained through frequent prayer, was the guiding force behind her varied endeavors.

Madeline championed women’s ecclesiastical rights within America’s Protestant churches, and this is the cause for which she is honored and remembered today. Having herself faced a male-dominated clergy, she well understood the anguish women felt as they sought to answer God’s call to preach. This led her to found the International Association of Women Ministers, an advocacy organization for women church service workers, and to undertake her successful crusade to open to women the doors into the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church (today, the United Methodist Church). She also had other concerns, most notably her life-long fight to ban the use of intoxicating beverages at home and abroad. On a lesser scale, in relationships between a man and woman, she sought to replace the old double standard of conduct, which held the woman to a higher standard of morals than the man, with a uniform standard for both.

As a devout Christian, her aim in life was to make this world a better place for all God’s children—or simply doing “all the good you can,” as John Wesley urged. And Rev. Southard faithfully sought to do this over the nine decades that God gave her on His green earth.

Early Years.

Mable Madeline Southard entered this world on the 29th day of July, 1877. She later dropped the Mable from her name, becoming Madeline to those around her, but the