

**“ReNew: Methodism”**

Matthew 22:34-38

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This morning, I invite us all to explore the Methodist movement. The key word in Methodism is “renewal”. The renewal doesn’t mean to throw away the original. Rather it is a strong desire to reach back to the root of our original faith and restore the foundation essence where this faith journey began in Christ Jesus. In the early 1700s the Church of England offered worship that was beautiful but low-spirited, speaking more to the intellectual than to the heart. The Anglican Church lost spiritual vitality and passion. John Wesley and his brother Charles, both Anglican priests, began to seek more from their faith. In 1738 both Wesley brothers had profound experiences in which they came to have an assurance of their salvation. They had known a faith of the intellect, but now they knew a faith of warm hearts as well. As a result, they incorporated their experience of God into their beliefs and need for the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives. Methodist movement began as a renewal movement within the Anglican Church. John Wesley did not intend to start a new denomination but rather to reform the Church of England in his day. As an Anglican priest, John Wesley committed himself to renew the Anglican Church. We hope to learn the passion and renewal spirit from early Methodists and apply them to our church and our individual spiritual practice.

Our Methodist Church shares Anglican Church tradition. We are different but still we are one body in Christ. When I visited one of my friends house last week, I saw a multi-fruit tree in their front yard. Have you ever heard about a “Fruit Cocktail Tree”? It is a single tree but several different fruits grow on the tree, for example, peaches, nectarines, plums and apricots on one tree! This “multi-fruit” image may help us understand different Christian denominations. As we explored last Sunday, the Presbyterian Church shares their roots with Martin Luther’s reform. In the same way, the early Baptists came out of the Church of England, but they thought that the Anglican Church had not gone far enough from Catholicism. Ironically, the Anglicans believed that Luther and Calvin had gone a bit too far and sought to navigate a middle path between Catholics and Protestants. In our tree, our Methodist Church came out of the Anglican Church tradition, but unlike the Baptist Church, we wanted to remain in the Anglican Church. We wanted to renew and restore a right and new spirit within the Church of England. In a sense, we are different fruits like peaches, nectarines or apricots on one “fruit cocktail tree”. In Wesley’s time, what was

the renewal spirit in the Anglican Church?

Let's briefly explore the Anglican Church first. Historically speaking, the Anglican Church became an independent Church from the Catholic Church due to King Henry VIII's marriage issue with Katherine. The Anglican Church aimed to draw from both Catholic and Protestant traditions, never returning to Catholicism. But the Anglican Church never fully embraced Lutheranism or Calvinism either. They took the middle road between the Catholic Church and Protestant Church. The Anglican Church was not a confessional church, but the church emphasized three important spiritual disciplines: scripture, tradition, and reason. But they didn't put a great emphasis on personal holiness, passion and experience either.

John Wesley demonstrated a new passion and religious zeal to the Anglican Church renewal movement following his personal experience in the Holy Spirit. Methodists fully accept the Anglican Church's three ways to know God: scripture, tradition and reason. John Wesley embraced "experience". In Wesley and our Methodism, reason and experience are equally important. The combination of the intellectual pursuit of God with spiritual passion is part of the basic foundation of Methodism. The early Methodists were called "reasonable enthusiasts."

Many people do not know that the roots of Pentecostalism also reach back to John Wesley and the Methodist Church. In nineteenth-century America, the Methodist movement was divided between those who emphasized the heart (Christian experience, personal holiness, and the evangelist gospel) and those who emphasized reason, intellect and the social gospel. During the nineteenth century, a number of groups broke away from the Methodist movement to form their own churches, emphasizing holiness. They included the Nazarenes, the Church of God, the Adventists, the Salvation Army, the Wesleyan Church, and others. Pentecostalism was born out of this holiness movement in 1901.

One more important thing in our Methodism is our free will. We really value our choice. Wesley and the Methodists stood against Calvin's teaching on predestination. Wesley vigorously argued that God has not predestined some to everlasting life and others to hell, insisting that God's grace is available to and working in all of us and that we are free to accept it or reject it. Today, our United Methodists continue to place a strong emphasis on free will and reject the idea of predestination. John Wesley and Methodists believed Jesus called his followers to be involved in the transformation of society. He organized a school for children, raised funds for the poor, spoke out against slavery and other social

ills of his time.

Our Methodism emphasizes the balanced stance between our experience and reason. We know God by our minds, accept Jesus Christ by our hearts and do serve and transform our world by our hands and feet. What John Wesley emphasized to his followers of Christ was holiness and grace. This is the essential Methodist spirit! The essential Methodist spirit places major emphasis on two seemingly contradictory ideas: grace and holiness. We recognize that it is only by God's grace that we have life and salvation. Our salvation is purely a gift from God. At the same time, we are saved from sin in order to do good works. Wesley emphasized the doctrine of sanctification or holiness (sometimes we call it Christian perfection). Holiness has two dimensions: personal holiness and social holiness. Rooted in the ground of grace and holiness, the early Methodists were required to follow three simple rules. Now we call these "General Rules" 1. Avoid doing what you know is wrong. 2. Do all good you can to everyone that you can. 3. Pursue the spiritual disciplines, including prayer, worship, Scripture readings, and fasting, among others. Especially, three spiritual practices made a significant contribution to the Methodist movement: Preaching by lay people, creating small groups called "societies" and singing. Music captured Methodist theology and practices.

In wrapping up my sermon, I want to challenge us all with this question. Just imagine that John Wesley was here with us as our Fair Oaks pastor, what would he suggest to us or challenge us to do for the renewal of our church? I believe that he would want us to rekindle our passion in Christ, to carry on the value of Methodism holiness and grace and to serve our community through ministry and mission opportunities. I hope that we remember John Wesley's spiritual advice. He said, *"I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."* The power meaning passion. Let's continue to be proud that we are Methodists. Amen.

Thanks to Adam Hamilton's book "Christianity's Family Tree" for framing this sermon.