A Prayer of John Wesley

Eternal God our sovereign Lord, we acknowledge that all we are, all we have, is yours. O give us such a sense of your infinite goodness, that we may return to you all possible love and obedience. O may we always delight to praise your holy Name, and, above all your benefits, love you, our great Benefactor. Amen

Why study Wesley?

"tradition" as a noun, adjective, etc.

"traditio "to tradition"

"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in tern had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.” (I Cor 15.1-11)

Why study Wesley?

“Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living, but tradition is the living faith of the dead.”

Jaroslav Pelikan, Yale University

English Society portrayed by Hogarth

Religious fanaticism and Morality laxity
The Early Methodist Movement

- “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the People Called Methodist?
- A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”
  - “Large” Minutes

Difficulties of Contemporary Language

- Where are we?... And how did we get here?
- A bifurcation...
- Etymological threads

Reclaiming Language

- Greek root—euangelion
- Old Testament usage
  “to proclaim good tidings”
  angelos “messenger”
  angelo “to announce”
  Announcement of God’s salvific activity (Isaiah)

Reclaiming Language

- New Testament/Post-Easter usage
  to proclaim the message of salvation in word and deed (Klaiber)

With Intentional Practices...

Evangelism is that set of loving, intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God

(Scott Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor, 18)

Who practices evangelism?

- ...all Christians
- We are commissioned to evangelistic ministry by our baptisms
- “…to proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Jesus Christ.”
  (See the UM Hymnal pages 35 and 40)
Mission of the UMC

- “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ”—for the transformation of the world


Discussion….

- What opportunities and obstacles to practicing ministry and evangelism do you and your congregation perceive in your context?

Obstacles Then and Now

- Lack of capacity and/or confidence to understand and live our beliefs
- Preoccupation with rapid numerical growth
- Disinterest in sustained Christian practices
- Reluctance to share wealth
- Lack of capacity to move beyond relief efforts to facilitate sustainability

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

**Obstacle**

Lack of capacity and/or confidence to understand and live our beliefs

**Resource**

The Wesley’s encouraged a deep simple faith that shaped Christian living

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

**Obstacle**

Preoccupation with rapid numerical growth

**Resource**

‘Growth’: steady intense growth in numbers, but also in grace

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

**Obstacle**

Disinterest in sustained Christian practices

**Resource**

Practices and organization emerged from doctrine for intentional growth
Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Obstacle
Reluctance to share wealth

Resource
Wealth-sharing and outreach are significant components of personal and communal faith

A Prayer of John Wesley

Teach us, Ruler of the universe, to see people by the light of the faith we profess, that we may check in ourselves all ungenerous judgments, all presumptuous claims, that, recognizing the needs and rightful claims of others we may remove old hatreds and rivalries and hasten new understandings, that we may bring our tributes of excellence to the treasury of our common humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Obstacle
Beyond Relief

Resource
Long term practices such as education, medical care, and no/low interest loans facilitate sustainability

Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Living Faith

A steady decline in theological aptitude has occurred in the last two centuries among those practicing ministry.

John Wesley (with Jonathan Edwards) is among the last serious scholars and Christian practitioners.

See William Abraham, Logic of Evangelism

Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Living Faith

A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, to preach and “to convince those who would hear what true Christianity was and to persuade them to embrace it.”

Wesley named the following as important resources for the early Methodists: “following only common sense and Scripture, though they generally found in looking back, something in Christian antiquity.”
Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Living Faith

- In his *The Character of a Methodist*, John answered the questions, “who is a Methodist?” and “what is the mark?” with this response:
  - “A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in [one’s] heart.

Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Doctrine

In his sermon, *Causes of the Inefficacies of Christianity*, Wesley outlined three aspects that Christians often lacked:
1. a sufficient understanding of doctrine,
2. adequate discipline, and/or
3. self-denial.

Living Faith: Charles’ Hymnody and Christian Formation

- Hymns more than anything else formed early Methodists
- Yet, did not receive doctrinal status with the *Sermons and Notes on the NT* in the 1784 Deed of Declaration

Doctrine: Charles’ Hymnody and Christian Formation

- “These hymns lead one back to basic themes and emotions of the formative faith: the soteriological center, the emphasis on God’s grace and human appropriation, the challenge for growth and missional responsibility.”
  
  Thomas Langford

John Wesley’s Theology

- “Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765)
- Most often preached sermon, and
- Most mature representation of Wesley’s theology
- Sanctification as event and process

John Wesley’s Theology: ‘Via Salutis’

- Original righteousness and sin
  - “One thing needful” – the renewal of the image of God
- Preventive grace
  - Precedes human action
  - Analogous to conscience
  - Given to all
- Repentance
- Justification
- Sanctification
- Assurance
- Regeneration
### John Wesley’s Theology: ‘Via Salutis’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Sanctification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pardon</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
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<td>God does for us</td>
<td>God does in us</td>
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<td>Work of Christ</td>
<td>Work of Holy Spirit</td>
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<td>Accounted as righteous</td>
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<td>Imputation</td>
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<td>Saved from guilt of sin</td>
<td>Saved from power of sin</td>
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### John Wesley's Theology: ‘Via Salutis’

- Christian perfection (entire sanctification)
  - Perfect love (purity of heart)
  - Is not absolute perfection, but freedom from sin (a conscious, voluntary breaking of a known law of God)
  - "Having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked"

- The root or remains of sin still not destroyed
  - Backsliding still possible
  - A process or instant? gradual or instantaneous?

### John Wesley's Theology: ‘Via Salutis’

- Possible Problems with Perfection...
  - Antinomianism—being above the law
  - Perfectionism—being without error
  - "Sinless perfection"—a problem term
  - Claims of perfection—Bell and Maxfield
  - "Second Blessing"—Fletcher’s terminology (Checks against Antinomianism)
  - A roadblock for participation of many Anglican clergy in the Methodist movement

### John Wesley

- Theological Integration
  - Knowledge and vital piety
  - Sacramentalism and evangelism
  - Faith and good works
  - Justification and sanctification
  - Sola fide and sola gratia
  - Piety and mercy
  - Personal holiness and social holiness

Not a new theology—Synthesis

From Richard Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*

### Living Faith

**Wesley and the Moravians**

Peter Bohler presses him on "sola fide"

"Preach faith til you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."

Bohler forms Fetter Lane Society

May 1, 1738, at Hutton's house

**John Wesley’s experience of assurance**

May 24, 1738

"He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me…"
Discussion….

- How do you and your congregation understand Christian faith?
- What direct and indirect practices contribute to formation in faith in your congregation?
- What would you like your congregation to learn from the Wesley’s?

A prayer of John Wesley

All-sufficient God of heaven and earth, who art above all, and through all, and in all; from whom, by whom, and in whom are all things; in whom we live, move, and have our being; may our wills be as entirely and continually derived from yours, as our being and happiness are. Help us with your grace, that whatever we do or suffer this day may tend to your glory.

Amen

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Growth

While much of contemporary ‘evangelism’ is quantified by the rapid increase of local church attendance, the early Methodist movement acknowledged a relatively slow, but steady, intense process of Christian formation resulting in changed lives.

Counting Conversions

Growth:

(1) Numerical, and

(2) Growth in Grace

Numerical Growth

- Bristol, 1739
- The revival begins with field preaching and ‘society’ meetings
- 1745 experiment

Early Methodist Strategies

- Beginnings of field preaching
  - A "new period" in Wesley’s life
  - Following George Whitefield’s example
  - Started in Bristol at the brickyard (Kingswood)
- Preaching outside church buildings not illegal but highly irregular

- George Whitefield
Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Organization and Practices

"I was so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." JW

Early Methodist Strategies

- Formation of the "United Societies"
  Starts in Bristol, combined Nicholas Street and Baldwin Street societies
- Acquisition of "preaching houses"
  Building of the New Room, Bristol
  Leasing of the Old Foundery, London

Numerical Growth

- By 1750,
- London societies’ membership 2000
  100 circuits total, served by 3 dozen preachers

- By 1760,
- Societies’ membership 20,000
  Growth rate: approximately 1000 members per year

- By 1770,
- Methodism growing steadily in America
  Growth rate in England: approximately 1600 members per year
  1775 Leeds membership 2000
  London, still 2500 after twenty years
Numerical Growth
- In 1781, 178 preachers, one for every 250 members, a constant ratio since 1767
- 63 circuits in England
- Only a dozen with 1000 members

Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Organization and Practices
- The movement spread North and West, initially mostly among youth and women of modest background, eventually forming a triangle—London, Bristol, Newcastle

Discussion….
- What is lost when growth in numbers are prioritized above grace? Or numbers and growth are dis-integrated (separated)?
- Where do you see the integrated growth of numbers and grace in the United Methodist Church?

Discussion….
- How can we develop measures of growth—or what measures of growth are faithful assessments of ministry?
- Discuss goals, evidence/artifacts, direct/indirect measurers.

A prayer of John Wesley
O God who dwells in the Light which no one can approach, in whose presence there is no night, in the light of whose countenance there is perpetual day; we your servants, whom you have preserved by your power this day, bless and glorify you and humbly pray that this, and all our days, may be wholly devoted to your service. Send your Holy Spirit to be the guide of all our ways and the sanctifier of our souls and bodies.
Amen
Spreading Scriptural Holiness

**Practices**
The intentionality of the early Methodist movement's organization and practices (e.g., field preaching, lay preachers, classes and bands) emerged directly from doctrinal frames facilitating intentional and meaningful growth.

John consistently urged that authentic spiritual formation could not take place “without society, without living and conversing with [others].”

“New Period” -- Bristol

“Society structure: divided into small groups
Classes: 10-12 by geography (subdivision)
Captain Foy’s suggestion
First used to pay debt at New Room
Leader responsible for full amount
Everyone assigned to a class
Later developed into meetings

**Bands:** 6-8 people, by age, sex, marital status
Voluntary, homogenous, nurturing
Not everyone belonged to a band
Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Organization and Practices

- Lay leadership positions in society
  - Helper—preacher
  - Class and band leaders
  - Trustees—oversee property
  - Steward—manage funds
  - Visitors of the Sick
- Circuits formed of societies in a region located primarily in rural areas led by Assistants—head preacher on circuit

- Discipline in the societies
  - Class tickets—examined, renewed quarterly
  - Required for attendance at some meetings
- General Rules—
  - One requirement to join
  - Three conditions in order to continue:
    - do good,
    - avoid evil,
    - attend to the ordinances of God

Means of Grace

- Piety: [Instituted] prayer, searching Scripture, Lord’s Supper, fasting, conferencing
- Mercy: [Prudential] feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting sick, imprisoned or variously afflicted, almsgiving, awakening the sinner...

Early Methodist Organization

- Strategies:
- Field Preaching
- Lay People
- Small Groups
- Organization:
- Classes/Bands
- Tickets, General Rules
- Conference
- Itineracy/Circuits
- Examination
- Doctrinal Standards
Oxford Methodism

Wesley’s reading

- Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*
- Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
- William Beveridge, *Private Thoughts upon Religion*
- Robert Nelson, *The Practice of True Devotion*

Christ Church, Oxford

Wesley’s Diaries

Bocardo Gaol
Ingham and Wesley Diaries

Oxford Methodism

- Wesley’s diaries
  Care of time (see Taylor’s Holy Living)
  Family tradition (see Susanna, Samuel)
  Private account (compare with Journal)
  Written in code/cipher for secrecy, economy of space and time
  Record of details: reading, traveling, writing, conversations, prayer, resolutions, self-examination, etc.

General Questions

- Have I prayed with fervor, by myself and at Chapel?
- Have I used the Collects at 9, 12, and 3? Grace?
- Have I after every pleasure immediately given thanks?
- Did I in the morning plan the business of the day?
- Have I been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?
- Has good will been and appeared the spring of all my actions toward others?

Discussion….

- At what point do practices and organizational structures become ‘works righteousness’ or as Parker Palmer describes, ‘functional atheism’?
- How can we anchor ourselves in faithful practices that provide a foundation for Christian belief and practice, particularly justification and sanctification?

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

- Wealth-sharing
  Consideration of economics and its implications for personal and communal faith, specifically wealth-sharing among and by participants, was a significant discipline required of early Methodists contributing significantly to changed lives.

A prayer of John Wesley

Eternal God, we give you humble thanks for all the blessing spiritual and temporal which in the riches of your mercy you have poured down upon us. O thou Saviour of all who trust in you, do with us what seems best in your own eyes. Pour into us the whole spirit of humility, and make it the constant, ruling habit of our minds, that all our other tempers may arise from it.

Amen
John Wesley

Wesley’s Social Context
- Not a preferential option for the poor, rather a commitment to living into the image of Christ
- 18th Cent. Tremendous Social Transition: Capitalism & Enlightenment
- Vast majority of Methodists, like the majority of society, were poor

John Wesley’s Economic Ethic
1. The source of all things is God and so all things belong to God
2. Earthly wealth has been placed in human hands to be stewarded on God’s behalf
3. God expects that we use what we are given to provide for our own necessities and then for the necessities of others
4. To spend our God-given resources on luxuries while others are in need of necessities is to misuse what God has given us

Biblical Foundations
The Bible Offers:
- 500 verses on prayer
- Less than 500 on faith
- Over 2,000 on money and possessions
- 10% of the gospels (288 verses) focus on the use of money
- 16 of Jesus’ 38 parables are about the use of money

Old Testament Themes
1. Wealth as Occasion for Idolatry
2. Wealth as Fruit of Injustice
3. Wealth as the Blessing on the Faithful
4. Wealth as the Reward of Labor

New Testament Themes
1. Wealth as a Competing Object of Devotion
2. Wealth as a Stumbling Block
3. Wealth as a Symptom of Injustice
4. Wealth as a Resource for Human Needs

Church History
Teaching from Early Church
- Didache, Apostolic Constitutions, Barnabas, Hermas, Justine Martyr

Justin Martyr: “The wealthy among us help the needy... Those who are prosperous and willing, give what each thinks fit. And what is collected is deposited with the president, who gives aid to the orphans and widows.”

Church Fathers
- Tertullian: “Whatever we acquired from unrighteousness when we were unbelievers, we proved righteous when we have become believers, by applying it to the Lord’s advantage.”

Church Fathers
Cyprian: “Life is redeemed from Dangers by almsgiving. Souls are delivered from death by almsgiving.”

“Make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom.”

“’You are wealthy and rich. Do you think that you can celebrate the Lord’s Supper, not at all considering the offering? Can you come to the Lord’s supper without sacrifice and yet take part of the sacrifice that the poor man has offered?”
Spreading Scriptural Holiness

- “Gain all you can, without hurting either yourself or your neighbor…
- Save all you can, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire…
- Give all you can, or in other words give all you have to God.”

John Wesley's Letter to Miss March

“Visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless in their affliction, and this, although they should have nothing to recommend them but that they are bought with the blood of Christ. It is true that this is not pleasing to flesh and blood. There are a thousand circumstances usually attending it which shock the delicacy of our nature, or rather of our education. But yet the blessing which follows this labour of love will more than balance the cross” (JWL, 6:208-9)

Miss March

“Yet I find time to visit the sick and the poor; and I must do it, if I believe the Bible, if I believe these are the marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know and judge His sheep at the great day. . . . I am concerned for you; I am sorry you should be content with lower degrees of usefulness and holiness than you are called to.” (Letter to Miss March, 10 Dec. 1777)

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

“But first supplying thy own reasonable wants [necessities], together with those of thy family; then restoring the remainder to me [God], through the poor, whom I had appointed to receive it…leaving the right of being supplied first, and the blessedness of giving rather than receiving?”

Charles Wesley

“How many collections think you has my brother made between Thursday evening and Sunday? No fewer than seven. Five this one day from the same poor exhausted people. He has no mercy on them, on the GIVING poor I mean; as if he was in haste to reduce them to the number of the RECEIVING poor.”

XIII.2 Works, 9:277
From Wesley to My Church:

Ronsvalle Study: 29 Protestant Denominations in the US from 1968-1995

- As American wealth has increased, giving as a percentage of total income has declined
- Decline of 35% in benevolence giving (if "Congregational finance" is separated from "benevolences"

Contemporary Situation

- "Many pastors loathe stewardship sermons, since they feel an inherent conflict between their sincere personal ministry to parishioners and the necessity to ask the same people for Money" (Dean Hoge, *Money Matter*)
- 83% of pastors feel their congregants do not want the pastor to know how much they give (John & Sylvia Ronsvalle, *Rediscovering Accountability*)
- Many church members view money given to the congregation as paying for a service, like dues paid to a social organization

Contemporary Situation

- Seeker Church Movement: Postponement of Ethical Awareness (from mid-80s)
- Highly individualistic and consumeristic—self-sacrifice and community responsibility unpopular; need for community eroded
- In this culture all self-sacrifice—especially that involving personal wealth—is highly unpopular

The Spirituality of Fund-Raising

by Henri Nouwen

- "As a form of ministry, fund-raising is as spiritual as giving a sermon, entering a time of prayer, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry."
- "Asking people for money is giving them the opportunity to put their resources at the disposal of the Kingdom. Whether they have much or little is not as important as the possibility of making their money available to God."
- "When fund-raising as ministry calls people together in communion with God and with one another, it must hold out the real possibility of friendship and community."

For Discussion

Where, in your congregation, do you anticipate points of tension when speaking of wealth sharing?

What are the reasons behind the anticipated tensions? What can you do to resolve these?

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Obstacle

Beyond Relief

Resource

- Long term practices such as education, medical care, and no/low interest loans facilitate sustainability
Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Wesley sought to treat symptoms and systems of poverty to empower numerous Methodists not merely to survive but to live sustainably and flourish.

London

- Class meetings & Bands
- Class Leaders
- Connectional Collection
- Individual Solicitation
- Lending Program
- Soup Kitchen
- Orphanage (Newcastle)
- Dispensary
- School (Kingswood)
- Preaching Houses

Beyond Relief

- A number of experiments including:
  - A lending stock
  - Medical dispensary
  - Poor houses
  - As well as schools and care for vulnerable and abandoned children

Beyond Relief: Lending Stock

- Wesley had hoped the Methodist movement would eventually “have all things in common”
- However, that became difficult as the movement grew.
- In 1746 Wesley experimented with a micro-loan program funded by collections among Wesley’s more affluent friends in London.
- 20 shillings paid in 3 months

Beyond Relief: Medicine

- Wesley published Primitive Physick, 1747
- He was skeptical of physicians, but also moved by those too poor to seek medical care.
- In 1746 he engaged a surgeon and apothecary at the Foundery to dispense medicine and offer advice each Friday
- 100 visitors monthly at a cost of 120 pounds

Women in Early Methodism

- John Wesley is among the earliest to encourage women’s participation and leadership
- Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (1739-1815)
- Most likely wrote first defense of women’s preaching in Methodism
Women in Early Methodism

- “Can I do more for the souls or bodies of those about me?”
- Mary Bosanquet Fletcher

Obstacles Then and Now

- Lack of capacity and/or confidence to live our beliefs
- Preoccupation with rapid numerical growth
- Disinterest in sustained Christian practices
- Reluctance to share wealth
- Lack of capacity to move beyond relief efforts to facilitate sustainability

Spreading Scriptural Holiness

Obstacle

Lack of capacity and/or confidence to understand and live our beliefs

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The Wesley’s encouraged a deep simple faith that shaped Christian living

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‘Growth’: steady intense growth in numbers, but also in grace
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Obstacle
Disinterest in sustained Christian practices

Resource
Practices and organization emerged from doctrine for intentional growth

Obstacle
Reluctance to share wealth

Resource
Wealth-sharing and outreach brings implications for personal and communal faith

Obstacle
Beyond Relief

Resource
Long term practices such as education, medical care, and no/low interest loans facilitate sustainability

Next Steps

- Where is the Holy Spirit calling you? Your congregation(s)?

Next Steps

- What are the next steps?
- What do you need to take those steps?
- Prayer

Luke 13. 10-17

- What binds us as individuals?
Luke 13. 10-17

- What binds us as the body of Christ?

- What transforms us as individuals?

John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing…

Let us pray as communities:

We freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art ours, and we are thine. So be it. And the covenant which we have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

In Closing…

Goodness is stronger than evil;
Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness;
Life is stronger than death;
Victory is ours through Him who loved us.

Desmond Tutu, South Africa
(John 1.5)