

May 20, 2012 - 7th Sunday of Easter - Aldersgate Sunday

My Heart Was Strangely Warmed: A Tale of Two Brothers

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

2723 N 50th St. Lincoln 68504 402 466 1906

*A Conversation between **Pastor Larry (L.A.) Moffet** and **Rev. Chuck (C.W.) Leypoldt***

L.A.: Today's sermon answers the burning question: "Exactly what do preachers talk about when they get together for a cup of coffee?" I love talking to Chuck because his experiences are so different from mine - he eased out of pastoral ministry when he was 31 - to become a banker - he went back into pastoring and was our Conference Treasurer and now serves churches by working for Church Mutual Insurance. You probably know Chuck and Chris. Some remember their son Seth who was an intern here at First Church in the 90's.

So what do pastors talk about when we sit down for a minute to get caught up with each other's lives?

Why, of course, we talk about John and Charles Wesley. At least Chuck and I do.

Those Wesley brothers took people from the edges and made the Christian Faith vital, full of energy, and changed lives.

I really like John Wesley -- and Chuck has a very good reason for identifying with Charles Wesley.

C.W.: Almost 65 years ago my parents gifted me with the names "Charles" and "Wesley." It's too bad they didn't endow me with some musical ability as well. Mom told me once that she just liked the name Charles and Wesley seemed kind of natural because "double-us" run in our family. I have a great nephew named Charles Walter Woodrow Dorr! I think I became aware of Charles Wesley when I was in the first or second grade. I was easily bored with the preaching so I began thumbing through the hymnal and I found that name "Charles Wesley." Sunday after Sunday I made it a quest to count the hymns ascribed to him.

L.A.: One thing Chuck and I have in common is we are preacher's kids. PKs are unique.

C.W.: Seth never knew his grandfather Woodrow but he got even for him for the times I ignored his preaching. Seth used to time my sermons, down to

the second, write the information on a calendar and report it to me periodically.

L.A.: Today let's explore our DNA as followers of Jesus Christ who are part of the Methodist movement.

We are going to try to let John and Charles Wesley come to life a little bit. Here's why: this week Methodists all over the world celebrate Aldersgate Day. Before that Day, John Wesley was just a headstrong, inside-his-own-head pastor. He knew he needed assurance that he was accepted and loved by God. He was struggling to accept God's love, even though he was preaching about God's love.

C.W.: The Wesley brothers grew up in poverty. Their father, an Anglican priest, even spent time in a debtor's prison. Their mother had 19 children, with only half living to adulthood. John and Charles were brilliant scholars, received good educations, and were both ordained as priests. But were restless. They went to America as missionaries, but failed miserably, returning to England... continuing to search for meaning as we all do.

L.A.: John Wesley's Aldersgate experience is a true gift for any of us who struggle with faith. John was hard on himself because he didn't feel like he had "the right experience" to prove that his faith really was from God...

What happened is a little quaint to our modern ears. In fact, we United Methodists have been a bit embarrassed by parts of this story...

He went Unwillingly...

The part that's easy for me to understand is John writes he went unwillingly to meet with his covenant group at a home on Aldersgate Street. I sure have gone unwillingly to some church meetings over the years.

It got worse. Someone was reading from a book by Martin Luther. I've read that book. It is not riveting. Then something riveting happened. A warm feeling flooded John Wesley, and he says it best: "**My heart was strangely warmed.**"

From that time on the Methodist movement became people with warm-hearts who were on a mission to make a difference in individual lives and in the whole world. The Wesley brothers organized all kinds of groups across England and around the world. The METHOD of the Methodist way is to study together, to worship together, and to work together for the good of all people-doing everything with a warm heart.

All that we call "Methodist" really came together in that experience John Wesley had on Aldersgate Street, May 24, 1738. He linked his assurance of his personal salvation with a PASSION to work with God so that all people everywhere could live in God's love...so that things will be on earth as in heaven.

What an experience John had!

C.W.: Wait a minute. Something happened to Charles that same week, as well. It's been reported that Charles was popular and outgoing but also suffered from periods of doubt and melancholy. It was the week before Pentecost and he was especially discouraged about his life. In his hymn "Depth of Mercy" Charles asks: "Depth of mercy, can there be mercy still reserved for me? Can my God his wrath forbear, me, the chief of sinners, spare?" Imagine the agony he was feeling. But he had friends and his Bible and that Sunday evening he experienced a "strange palpitation of the heart" and he "found himself at peace with and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ." The hymn continues, "God is love! I know, I feel, Jesus weeps and loves me still!" He told his friends and family, including older brother John, about his feelings of acceptance. This was three days before Aldersgate.

L.A. Is this sibling rivalry? Or were they just learning to collaborate?

C.W. As time went on John seemed to be a workaholic, spending day after day preaching and organizing his growing flock. Charles married a girl nineteen years his junior, had a family, and was more content to write poetry. He wrote as many as

6,000 hymns. He took the words of theology and put them into verse. He took the experiences of poverty and cruelty and created inspiring poems that helped people understand God want them to have better lives. He spent time at public events, listened to political speeches, and drinking songs.

One day he penned these words: "Work for the weak, and sick and poor. Raiment and food for them procure, and mindful of God's Word, enjoy the blessedness to give, lay out your gettings, to relieve the members of your Lord."

Charles put ideas in songs people could sing

L.A. God bless Charles. He took John's mystical ideas and put them into the heart language of the people. You might say that John Wesley's head was in the clouds, and Charles Wesley took his great ideas and put them in every-day language people could sing.

C.W. We can't forget that these two brothers did struggle with each other. John had a problem with the doctrine of new birth. He felt that everyone had to have an experience like his to be considered a true Christian. Charles disagreed and talked about people who were unable to understand the faith completely as "almost Christians."

3 Kinds of Grace: PREVENIENT Grace

L.A. So the idea of prevenient grace was a late-breaking idea for the people followed John and Charles!

C.W. What is prevenient grace? Lots of volumes have been written to help us understand the concept. I believe it has to do with the idea that God is active in our lives before we consciously understand God. For instance, God is very much a part of Baptism, but our children understand this later as they grow in faith.

L.A. When the Wesleys were at work, most people didn't go to Church. Church was for the upper class.

It breaks my heart that even today many people aren't comfortable coming into our churches. First UMC had also been a peoples church. However some folks stay away because they think we are too good for them. Pastor Jamie and I meet people all over town who claim to be Methodist...

C.W. Another conflict between the Wesley brothers was that John found some of Charles' hymns to be "mushy," too filled with personal experiences. He even left the great hymn "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" out of the first collection published. Perhaps John was the intellectual and Charles was more emotional.

3 Kinds of Grace: JUSTIFYING Grace

L.A. Let's talk for a moment about Justifying Grace. Charles on May 21 and John on May 24 had justifying grace moments. Justifying grace means... knowing you are forgiven by God. "Being put right."

Once they had this "I am loved by God moments" on May 21 and May 24, 1734, that was when the Wesley Brothers began to understand that God is busy in our lives long before we are ready to respond.

That is when they started preaching about prevenient grace. That is when people starting coming to hear them preach and sing Charles' songs.

C.W. John was very effective in getting his message across to the people. Sometimes people would respond in hysterical ways, shouting with excitement, passing out, even passing out. Charles didn't like this at all and made fun of his brother for allowing it to continue. Even though his heart was set free, he didn't go for this kind of "enthusiasm."

Charles also was suspicious of lay preachers being ordained without proper seminary training and disagreed with John's decision to ordain as Bishops Coke and Asbury when they went to America. After all John had no authority to do so. He was not a Bishop. You and I are part of this great movement because John Wesley made difficult decisions that led to Methodists separating from the Church of England.

L.A. The Wesley brothers kept on growing and supporting each other as Methodism grew.

3 Kinds of Grace: SANCTIFYING Grace

One idea they agreed upon was that grace is not just for us to feel good about ourselves, but it energizes us to get out there and roll up our sleeves and work where God is working in every part of human life.

Look at UMH 438 "Forth in thy Name O Lord, I Go"

Every part of human endeavor is a part of God's grace.

C.W. Another part of God's grace is Sanctifying Grace...sometimes called Perfecting Grace.

L.A. I love the idea of Sanctifying Grace. We live it a lot more than we talk about it.

Turn to Hymn 384 "Love Divine"

We become united with God-part of God's energy. perfection is not "I am going to do everything right."

It is being full a channel of God's Grace. Love Divine-"[we, as we are sanctified, will be] "lost in wonder, love, and praise...what an awesome goal!"

C.W. We always need to ask: What shall we do with all this? How does learning about the Wesley brothers help us today?

UMH 438 It is good to be lost in wonder love and praise for God, but what about the world of hurt we find when leave this sanctuary?

L.A. We leave here aware that in everything we do we are a part of God's Saving Action. We are one with God, not in the Essance of God but at-one (atoned) with God by being One with God's Energy.

The Scriptures for last Sunday and today make that point.

We are united with God: No longer strangers and aliens, we are Fellow Citizens of God's own Household.

In the words of Scripture from Ephesians today – we allow Christ to fill us. – Christ is our all in all!

Sanctifying Grace unites us with God...

In the words of Jesus' Prayer in John, Chapter 17, We are part of the unity between Christ and God...

In all the mundane details of our lives, in all the ways we make a difference around us, we are part of God's saving love.

We are not just recipients of God's salvation, We become PART of God's Saving Love.

Atonement means God's GRACE, God's energy, claims us, and clears out our sin, and makes room for us to be at-one with God...

Do all the GOOD you can...

You probably have heard John Wesley's phrase: "Do all the good you can" is not just a work assignment: it is an invitation to participate fully with God in God's work!

C.W. In 1995 one of my Geneva parishioners decided to move to Denver to be close to her daughter. She decided to sell most of her belongings at an auction and most of her church family were at the sale. I looked around before the auctioneer began and found a framed picture which contained what is called "John Wesley's Rule." I decided right away this was something I should buy.

After a couple of hours my item was up for sale and I started the bidding a two and a half. It shot up from there until just two of us were nodding back to Mr. Underwood.

My competitor was Sue Shaw, faithful church worker and friend. When we passed the \$20 threshold, doubts set in, and Sue bought my treasure for maybe \$25. No harm done.

A few months later Bishop Martinez asked me to apply for the Nebraska Conference Treasurer position and we left Geneva with a few parting gifts. One of these was a nicely wrapped package from Sue Shaw. She had enjoyed Mr. Wesley's rules for a time and passed them on to me.

**"Do all the good you can...
by all the means you can...
in all the ways you can...
in all the places you can...
at all the times you can...
to all the people you can...
as long as ever you can."**

Photos of Wesley brothers windows at the United Methodist Church at Columbus, Nebraska taken by Rev. Charles Wesley (Chuck) Leypoldt.

