

Call to Worship

Though we long for light and pray for grace, we cannot make it happen or win it for ourselves.

We are dependent on God's mercy in our desire to 'know it all,' and to understand it all.

We think that we can grasp by our intellect that which is not intellect, but spiritual.

In our worshipping together, let us be open to receive a glimpse of the radiance of Jesus, and to hear God's word for us this day.

Prayer of Invocation

Holy God, come before us this day in ways that challenge the limits of our mind. Show us a greater hope, a greater courage, and a grander vision than we have yet seen. Come, Jesus, come. This we pray in expectation. Amen

The Word

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone.

He was transformed in front of them, and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white.

Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus.

Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, "Rabbi, it's good that we're here. Let's make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He said this because he didn't know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One had risen from the dead.

Living the Word

Jesus took three of his closest disciples on a hike up the mountain with him. They never knew what was coming next with him. One minute he was talking openly about loving and helping your neighbors and the next he was healing a blind person. One minute he was playing with the children as if life was simple and the next he was teaching how difficult it can be to follow God's ways. The disciples were just trying to keep up, take it all in and trying to understand it all.

Jesus often went away to be alone, but this time he was very specific to ask these three to come along; to the top of a high mountain. On the long journey to the top they must be thinking, 'now what is he going to do?' *"Once there, he is transformed in front of them, clothes amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white. Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus."*

They are seeing and hearing the unbelievable – an unexpected light show, on Jesus' clothing and a visit from two Hebrew leaders who have been dead for centuries. Peter was always the disciple that spoke and acted first. He once again dives right in with a human response to build monuments to the three mysteries before them.

Then God arrives as a voice from a cloud –here scripture says: 'which overshadows them.' When you were little did you ever get lost in your own thoughts and have someone tall, stand over you and say "pay attention, this is important?" The disciples surely didn't understand what was going on, they just wanted to please Jesus, whom they loved and to serve him.

So we move forward 1700 years to Rev. John Wesley. He came from a family of preachers: grandfathers, father and even his mother, though, of course, they couldn't officially call a woman a preacher. All he knew was church life and living in a parsonage. He planned early on to follow in his grandfather and father's footsteps and be a preacher, too.

He went to Oxford University, to study religion just as his father had. He taught there for a time, including while his brother Charles was attending as a student. But he always was seeking more, trying to understand. As a scholar he wanted to get it all figured out – what it meant to be a Christian. He worked in jail ministry, with the poor, the orphans and the widows. But he couldn't figure out how to be 'good enough' for his God.

The work that the 'Holy Club' of John, brother Charles and several others, did became more extreme, to the point that they went across to the new world, John as a missionary to the Indians, to one of the newly establishing colonies of America. Wesley wrote this to a friend before he left: *"My chief motive, is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen... I then hope to know what it is to love my neighbor as myself, and to feel the powers of that second motive to visit the heathen, even the desire to impart to them what I have received-- a saving knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; but this I dare not think on yet.*

It is not for me, who have been a grievous sinner from my youth up, . . . to expect God should work so great things by my hands; but I am assured, if I be once converted myself, he will then employ me both to strengthen my brethren and to preach his name to the Gentiles." John was feeling unsure about his own faith and understandings. Even as a teacher and frequent preacher, he wasn't sure of himself.

The voyage across the Atlantic Sea took eight week. This gave time, on the ship, for the Methodists to plan their days as carefully as they had at Oxford. From four to five every morning was spent in private prayer; then for two hours they read the Bible together...Breakfast and public prayers filled two hours more. From nine to twelve Charles Wesley wrote sermons, John studied German, Delamotte read Greek, and Ingham taught the emigrants' children; and the remainder of the day was as carefully mapped out, all uniting with the German Moravians in their evening service.

One event of the eight weeks' voyage made a deep impression on John Wesley. On several occasions there were storms, and he felt restless, and afraid to die. He had made friends with the Moravians and was charmed by their sweet spirit and excellent discipline. He now found that they were brave as well as gentle. One evening a storm burst just as the Germans began to sing a psalm, and the sea broke, split the mainsail in shreds, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep were swallowing them up. The English began to scream with terror, but the Germans calmly sang on. Wesley asked one of them afterward:

"Were you not afraid "

"I thank God, no," was the reply.

"But were not your women and children afraid "

"No," he replied mildly, "our women and children are not afraid to die."

At the close of the day's Journal Wesley writes, "This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen."

On February 6, 1736, they landed in Georgia. One of Wesley's first acquaintances was Spankenberg, a Moravian pastor, whose advice he sought. The German said: "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions: Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" Wesley knew not what to answer. The preacher, seeing his hesitation, asked:

"Do you know Jesus Christ"

"I know," said Wesley, "he is the Savior of the world."

"True," replied he, "but do you know he has saved you "

Wesley answered, " I hope he has died to save me."

Spangenberg only added, "Do you know yourself "

"I do," was the reply; but in his Journal he wrote, "I fear they were vain words." Such a spiritual probing Wesley had never before received. That conversation was worth the journey across the ocean.

Having no success with the Indians, Hon went to Savannah. He established day schools, teaching one himself and placing Delamotte in the other. Some of Delamotte's boys who wore shoes and stockings thought themselves superior to the boys who went barefoot. To cure their pride Wesley changed schools with his friend and went to teach without shoes and stockings. The boys stared, but Wesley kept them to their work, and before the end of the week he had cured the lads of their vanity.

All might have gone on well if he could have taken the advice of Dr. Burton, to consider his parishioners as babes in their progress, and to feed them with milk. But "he drenched them with the demands of an intolerant discipline." He refused the Lord's Supper to all who had not been baptized by someone of the Bishop's Authority from the Church of England; he re-baptized the children of Dissenters, and he refused to bury all who had not received Anglican baptism.

Charles Wesley, who had gone to Frederica, a new settlement, one hundred miles to the southward, had no better success in winning the sympathy of those to whom he preached. His faithful preaching at the sins of his parishioners gained him enemies, who lied about him, and even attempted his life, until at a funeral service he said that he "envied the corpse in his quiet grave." In 1736 he was sent home to England with dispatches from the governor, and saw no more of Georgia.

The incident which terminated John Wesley's usefulness as a missionary has a somewhat romantic interest. He fell deeply in love with Miss Sophia Hopkey, the attractive niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah. On the advice of his Moravian friends he suddenly decided not to marry her, and she soon married another. The attachment must have been very strong, for in his old age he wrote of the disappointment: "I was pierced through as with a sword."

But the matter did not end here. Later Wesley felt it his duty to rebuke the lady for inconsistency of life and to refuse her the Communion. He was prosecuted' by her husband for so doing, but, as a High Churchman, refused to recognize the authority of a civil court. Then the storm burst. The colonists found many grievances against their rigid clergyman, and to end the matter, on the advice of his friends, he decided to leave Georgia before the trial was settled.

January 1738, two years after he had arrived in Georgia, on his voyage home, John Wesley poured out his soul in his journal: "I went to America to convert the Indians, but, O! who shall convert me? who is he that will deliver me from this evil 'heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion; I can talk well, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, to die is gain . . . I show my faith by my works, by staking my all upon it. I would do so again and again a thousand

times, if the choice were still to make. Whoever sees me sees I would be a Christian But in a storm I think, What if the Gospel be not true... O who will deliver me from this fear of death . . . Where shall I fly from it"

John Wesley had most of his faith in his head, in his intellect, but it hadn't yet reached his heart. Upon returning, Wesley spent time traveling around England to catch up with family and friends, landing again at Oxford, where he renewed his acquaintance with Peter Bohler, who was still at Oxford, "By him," he says, "(in the hand of the great God), I was, on Sunday, the 5th" (March, 1738), "clearly convinced of [my] unbelief [and] of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved." Wesley immediately concluded that he was unfit to preach. He consulted Bohler, who urged him to go on. "But what can I preach" said Wesley. And his friend said, "Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." This sound advice Wesley followed.

Wesley remained unsure until London, Wednesday, May 24th, 1738, only a few months after arriving back in England. At five that morning he opened his Testament on the words, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." In the afternoon Wesley remained unsure. Then someone asked him to go to St. Paul's Cathedral. The anthem was, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord... O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy."

That evening he went very unwillingly to a Society meeting at Aldersgate Street where someone was reading Luther's introduction to the book of Romans. His journal reads this way: "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley at once began to pray earnestly for his enemies, and publicly testified to all present what he now felt. He was much tempted when he returned home, but when he prayed, the temptations fled. He soon found how different they were from his former struggles, when he was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now he was always the conqueror.

Now you know of John's fear of dying, his scandal in Georgia and how God used all of these experiences along with the night meeting at Aldersgate Street, to bring all of that 'head knowledge' that he had, to his heart. Like Wesley, we need to listen to those who seem to have the faith we seek and know that faith is a life-long learning. We know that we have not got this all figured out – head or heart, but we also know that if we stay connected to God, through prayer, scripture, worship and connected to others who touch our life, we will grow in our faith all of our life.