A Call to Holy Living

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13 Therefore prepare your minds for action: discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16)

1. My Trip to England

Last Thursday, I came back from London, England. During my trip, we visited the cities of Epworth, Bristol, Salisbury, and London. These places are where John and Charles Wesley were born, studied, preached, and served. I am so thankful that I was part of Wesley Pilgrimage because my trip was an opportunity to renew my faith and wake me up to the need for learning more about Methodism.

Even though I've been a UMC pastor for some time, my lack of knowledge during the trip about John Wesley and the Methodist movement embarrassed me. I feel like if I knew more about John and Charles Wesley, I may have been a much better Christian and a pastor. I learned that Charles Wesley began to meet with two friends in Christ Church, a residential college in Oxford University in 1729. While in Christ Church, John Wesley read Thomas A Kempis' book "The Imitation of Christ" and pondered what a Christian should look like, along with the tension between his reality and a devoted life.

I learned that John and Charles Wesly and two friends met to study the Greek New Testament every evening. They woke early in the morning to pray, fasting until 3 pm on Wednesdays and Fridays, and visited prisoners and the sick. They received Holy Communion once a week and brought all their lives under strict review. Since John and Charles Wesley were so earnest in their desire for holiness, they often were ridiculed by other people. But they were convinced that holiness was what it meant to be Christian according to the Bible. The group was called "The Holy Club" in mockery of their emphasis on devotions.

2. Be Holy

In today's scripture, 1 Peter 1:15 & 16 say, "***As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy***." The writer of the first Peter tells the early Christians to be holy. Why does he say this? It is because this is what the Bible tells us to be. Leviticus 11:44 and 45 say, "***For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. … For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy***." Through Moses, God told the Israelites that there were clean and unclean food. The Israelites were forbidden

eating the unclean food. By following the rule, God wanted the Israelites not to forget their identity.

When the author of Leviticus says, "***You shall be holy, for I am holy***," what does the term "holy" mean? "Holy" in Hebrew is "*kadosh."* It means "set-apart, separate, sacred, and other." In the New Testament, the word for holy is "*hagios*" and means "set apart, reverend, and sacred." This word applies to God because God is totally other, separate, sacred, and set apart from every created being. "Holy" for us means "to be set apart for a special purpose." God's people are "holy*"* because they are separated from the other people as servants of the Lord. We are called to live a distinctly, different life. Like the Jewish people, the first Methodists pursued an intentional and methodical plan for becoming more like Jesus. That's why John and Charles Wesley and their friends were called "Methodist." It was not John and Charles Wesley, but other students who began to use the term to make fun of them.

3. What is a Methodist?

We get together at Swift Memorial UMC on Sundays to worship the Lord. Why do we belong to a United Methodist Church? What would we say if someone asks us what a Methodist is? Would you say that we are not that different from other denominations? Or would you say that Methodists are believers who are very active in mission? Some might say that Methodists are Christians whose mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Steve Manskar, one of the leaders in Wesley Pilgrimage says "A Methodist is a Christian who is *in training* to love God with all his or her heart, soul, and mind and to love his or her neighbor as himself or herself." He believes "Methodism is a system for training people in the practice of loving God." Do you think we train people? If we do, how? John Wesley believed that people could be trained by being in a small group community.

We cannot live as if we are alone on an island and be a Christian. It is so sad that Christianity has been privatized, individualistic, and emphasizing a lack of personal accountability. Participating in intimate groups, where people share their lives and faith, is important for our fellowship and spiritual growth. As a new born baby needs to grow physically, socially, and spiritually, every believer needs to grow so that we can understand better about God's love and his calling. John Wesley believed that there is "no personal holiness without social holiness." Wesley's system of mutual accountability was divided into three formative aspects: societies, classes, and bands.

4. Societies, Classes, and Bands

When some of the earliest members of the Holy Club in Oxford University graduated, they formed societies similar to the Holy Club wherever they went. John Wesley experienced his heart becoming "strangely warmed" after participating in a Moravian society meeting. Soon after his heart-warming experience, George Whitefield, a former Holy Club member invited him to come to Bristol to do a ministry

of field preaching. After John Wesley preached, the society grew quickly. The growth was so quick that just a few months later, the Methodists in Bristol began building a meetinghouse called the New Room. From the pulpit in the chapel of the New Room, John Wesley and others preached during the Society Meetings. The New Room was also used to feed the poor, to teach children, and to distribute remedies to those who were not able to see a doctor, and to serve their community in other ways.

The original purpose of forming classes was to collect a penny a week from members to support the building of the New Room. To facilitate the collection, John Wesley divided the Methodist Society into "Classes" of twelve and appointed Class Leaders who agreed to visit and collect the money. While visiting Class members, Class Leaders noticed that some members were struggling in their pursuit of holiness. Soon the class leaders' responsibilities expanded to serving as spiritual coaches for the class members. Weekly class meeting soon replaced the one-on-one visits. In addition to the Society and Class meetings, Bands of about five people of the same gender and marital status met to have more intimate relationship. The purpose of all this activity was to grow people into discipleship leaders who lived out their love of God and neighbor, just as the Holy Club had done years before.

5. General Rules of Discipleship

To keep members focused on their pursuit of holiness, John Wesley developed the General Rules of the Methodist Societies. "First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind…; Secondly: By .. doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all…; Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God" (2016 Book of Discipline #102). Today, the General Rules have been adapted into the General Rule of Discipleship, "To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (2016 Book of Discipline #1117.2. a). I am so delighted that today's General Rule of Discipleship emphasizes witnessing to Jesus Christ in the world and following his teachings under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What do you think our mission is as followers of Jesus Christ? In Acts 1:8, Jesus says to his disciples and us, "***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***." Our mission is to be Jesus' witnesses in all around the world. John Wesley did a very good job as a witness to Jesus Christ not by his power but by the power of the Holy Spirit. He died on March 2, 1791 at 87. Today there are 8 million United Methodists in the United States and 40 million Methodists in the world. John and his brother Charles Wesley are still witnessing to Jesus Christ.

6. Conclusion

John Wesley made and is still making a big impact on many people in the world. However, throughout his life time John Wesley experienced constant conflict, opposition, and controversy. Violent opposition became a part of his life from an

early age. When he was 5 years old, Epworth Rectory caught on fire. John was rescued from his second story room. The fire was likely started by opponents of John's father Samuel Wesley, who disagreed with his support for the Church of England. Later in life, mobs quite often targeted John Wesley as he travelled from town to town. Even in Oxford, Wesley's colleagues and students ostracized him because of his religious zeal. The Church of England banned him from preaching, forcing him to preach in obscure venues and even outdoors. Yet this pushed him to reach a wider unchurched audience than John Wesley otherwise would have reached.

As John Wesley suffered, many first-century Christians were suffering and persecuted for believing in Jesus. From Jerusalem to the rest of the world, wherever Christians gathered, there was persecution. The writer of the first Peter knew persecution. He had seen Christians die and the church scattered. But nothing could shake his confidence in Jesus. Peter writes to the church scattered and suffering for the faith, giving comfort and hope, and urged them to continue in their loyalty to Jesus. Peter encourages his readers to live a holy life. Their life style was to reflect not their former ignorance, but the holy nature of their heavenly father who called them to be his own. As God asked the Israelites to be holy, setting apart them to be God's chosen people, Peter reminds the early Christians of the fact that they are called to be God's servants.

7. Application

John Wesley was a priest in the Church of England and had no intention to make a new denomination. He simply sought to renew the Church of England by having Christians seriously following after the lives we are called to live. Although John and Charles Wesley are not among us today, we can still learn from them and renew our commitment to Christ. Living a holy life means to love others as our Lord loves us. During my trip to England I saw the genuine love from the British Christians.

Before my trip, I heard that the church in England is declining. However, I noticed that the Methodist Church in England is thriving. I was challenged when I learned about street pastors. These are lay people who are trained volunteers from local churches. They are usually on patrol from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. on a Friday or Saturday night to care for, listen to and help people who are out on the streets. Christians in England share Jesus' love with those who are in need of His love.

One sentence that I can't forget from my Wesley Pilgrimage is "Remember who you are." We need to remember that we are descendants of John Wesley in faith. God used John Wesley as a role model for us. We need to pass on the wonderful tradition that John Wesley showed throughout his lifetime. I've heard many times from the first-time visitors that our church is a warm congregation. I pray that everyone who visits us can experience genuine love of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to give thanks to God for using John Wesley and all of us so that people in the world can have hope even in suffering by seeing our holy living. Amen.