***Singing Our Faith: Happy Birthday, John!***

Scripture: Lamentations 3:41

June 14, 2015

**SERMON SUMMARY**

John Wesley’s 312th birthday is this week. Wesley founded the Methodist Movement, and he and brother Charles worked as a team, preaching and leading people to faith, using music as a powerful teaching and preaching tool. John wrote only a handful of hymns, but he translated many hymns, especially translating works from the German and those that came from the Moravians whom Wesley judged to be people of deep faith and spirituality.

**A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation**

**A Prayer for Every Day:** O Almighty God, Maker of all people, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, who makes the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice, let me now come humbly before your divine majesty, with all reverence and godly fear. It is my desire to adore you. This is your day! O Lord, enable me to rejoice and be glad in it! Open my understanding to receive your truth in your love. Set it so powerfully upon my heart, and root it so deep in my soul, that its fruit may be seen in my life, to your glory and praise. May I always hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest your word, that it may be a savor of life to my soul. Amen. ~John Wesley[[1]](#footnote-1)

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**MONDAY**

Read scripture, Lamentations 3:41

*41* Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven.

1 We lift our hearts to Thee,

O Day-star from on high!

The sun itself is but Thy shade,

Yet cheers both earth and sky.

2 Oh, let Thy rising beams

The night of sin disperse,

The mists of error and of vice

Which shade the universe.

3 How beauteous nature now!

How dark and sad before!

With joy we view the pleasing change,

And nature’s God adore.

4 Oh, may no gloomy crime

Pollute the rising day;

May Jesus’ blood, like morning dew,

Wash all our stains away.

5 To God, the Father, Son,

And Spirit, One in Three,

Be glory, as it was, is now,

And shall for ever be.

John Julian was right when he said that John Wesley knew the power of music in our faith. Yet, John only wrote a couple of hymns himself.  *We Lift Our Hearts to Thee* is one of the few credited to John. The text is a poem comparing the glory of God/Christ to the beauty of creation. This hymn addresses the ***Daystar***, one of the names used for Jesus in verse 1. Notice the 3rd line in the first verse, “the sun itself is but Thy shade,” a line is borrowed from Plato, describing the radiance of Christ’s glory as so brilliant that the sun’s radiance, the brightest in our world, is far overshadowed.

In the 2nd verse, Wesley prays (and maybe proclaims) that Christ’s radiance overpower the things which “shade the universe.” Verse 3 shows how Jesus’ life, death and resurrection have made the world – even nature itself – dazzling – far more so than before Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, came to earth.

Today, play a word game. Write a list of as many “bright” names as you can think of that describe Christ.

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**TUESDAY**

Read this article from The Center for Church Music and the words of *And Can It Be that I Should Gain*:

Charles Wesley, founder of the movement known as Methodism with his brother, John, was ordained as a priest in the Church of England in 1735. However, three years later, the evening of May 21, 1738, reportedly after prolonged Bible reading he wrote:

"At midnight I gave myself to Christ, assured that I was safe, whether sleeping or waking. I had the continual experience of His power to overcome all temptation, and I confessed with joy and surprise that He was able to do exceedingly abundantly for me above what I can ask or think."

Another writer states that he recorded in his journal:

"I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. I saw that by faith I stood."

Two days later, his journal reported that he had begun writing a hymn. This hymn was likely "And Can It Be" because of the vivid testimony of stanza four. This hymn and "Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin" were the first of the 6000 plus hymns that he wrote. [[2]](#footnote-2)

1. And can it be that I should gain

an interest in the Savior's blood!

Died he for me? who caused his pain!

For me? who him to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be

that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

2. 'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies!

Who can explore his strange design?

In vain the firstborn seraph tries

to sound the depths of love divine.

'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;

let angel minds inquire no more.

3. He left his Father's throne above

(so free, so infinite his grace!),

emptied himself of all but love,

and bled for Adam's helpless race.

'Tis mercy all, immense and free,

for O my God, it found out me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay,

fast bound in sin and nature's night;

thine eye diffused a quickening ray;

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

my chains fell off, my heart was free,

I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5. No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in him, is mine;

alive in him, my living Head,

and clothed in righteousness divine,

bold I approach th' eternal throne,

and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Where are some places that you deeply identify with this hymn?

**WEDNESDAY**

Read Hebrews 11:1-3

*1* Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. *2* Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. *3* By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Read the words of this hymn *Author of Faith, Eternal Word,* by Charles Wesley:

1. Author of faith, eternal Word,

Whose Spirit breathes the active flame;

Faith like its finisher and Lord,

Today as yesterday the same.

2. To Thee our humble hearts aspire,

And ask the gift unspeakable;

Increase in us the kindled fire,

In us the work of faith fulfill.

3. By faith we know Thee strong to save;

Save us, a present Savior Thou!

Whate’er we hope, by faith we have

Future and past subsisting now.

4. To him that in Thy name believes

Eternal life with Thee is given;

Into Himself He all receives,

Pardon and holiness, and Heaven.

5. The things unknown to feeble sense,

Unseen by reason’s glimmering ray,

With strong commanding evidence

Their heavenly origin display.

6. Faith lends its realizing light,

The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;

Th’invisible appears in sight,

And God is seen by mortal eye.

What does this hymn say to you about faith? How do the scripture and this hymn compare?

**THURSDAY**

Though known as the “Wesley Table Grace,” this hymn was penned by John Cennick, a follower of the Wesleys and George Whitefield. Use this table grace this week, either sung or spoken, as you begin your meals:

Be present at our table, Lord;

be here and everywhere adorned;

thy creatures bless, and grant that we

may feast in paradise with thee.

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**FRIDAY**

*Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown* is another hymn that I consider related to conversion of the heart. In the *Minutes of Conference, 1788,* John Wesley wrote that Isaac Watts said "that single poem, Wrestling Jacob, was worth all the verses he himself had written."

Powerful poetry, based on Genesis 32:24-32, this hymn describes a disciple coming to terms with who the Savior truly is.

1 Come, O thou Traveller unknown,

Whom still I hold but cannot see,

My company before is gone,

And I am left alone with thee,

With thee all night I mean to stay,

And wrestle till the break of day.

2 I need not tell thee who I am,

My sin and misery declare;

Thy self hast called me by my name:

Look on thy hands, and read it there!

But who, I ask thee, who art thou!

Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

3 Yield to me now, for I am weak,

but confident in self despair!

Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,

be conquered by my instant prayer.

Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,

and tell me if they name is Love.

4 ‘Tis Love! ‘tis Love! Thou diedst for me,

I hear thy whisper in my heart.

The morning breaks, the shadows flee, pure, Universal Love thou art.

To me, to all, thy mercies move;

thy nature and thy name is Love.

Meditate on the words of this text. What insights come to you? If you still have some time, paraphrase one or more verses into your own poetry or prose.

~ Rev. Vivian McCarthy, Pastor

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June 14, 2015

1. Opening Prayer is from John Wesley’s Prayers for Children, Youth and the Childlike, Prepared for Today by Nick Campbell and found at https://goo.gl/peIe7s [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/and-can-it-be [↑](#footnote-ref-2)