

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

*Give Me Your Hand*

## Gospel Lesson

John 14:15-21 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup> “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

## Sermon Focus

This week’s sermon focused on truth. Wesleyan Methodism has always emphasized reason, our human ability to process information and to learn. Predictably, the gift of reason guides different people to interpret the Bible in different ways. In Methodism, a rigorous exchange of different opinions is good, as long as we manage to do so with grace and love. Each of us sees only a limited glimpse of a larger truth.

## Discussion Questions

1. Are you a person who remembers your dreams? Describe a vivid dream you’ve had recently.
2. What would you say are the essential truths of the Bible?
3. In our text from John’s Gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth.” What is truth?
4. People of faith can read the same scripture and come to different conclusions about what it means. What does it mean that each person’s different truth matters? What does it mean to have a true heart?
5. Reflect on one (or both) of these two quotes from John Wesley.
  - *“But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection. Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.”*
  - *“For God’s sake, if it be possible to avoid it, let us not provoke one another to wrath. Let us not kindle in each other this fire of hell; much less blow it up into a flame. If we could discern truth by that dreadful light, would it not be loss, rather than gain? For, how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love! We may die without the knowledge of many truths, and yet be carried into Abraham’s bosom. But, if we die without love, what will knowledge avail? Just as much as it avails the devil and his angels!”*

6. How is love more important than truth?
7. As the church is re-awakening in this season of reform, what if some of those divisions were bad dreams? What will it look like for the church to wake up from the nightmare of divisiveness?

## Methodist Focus

The early Methodist movement was part of a time period known as the “Great Awakening.” This “Great Awakening” came as a kind of pendulum-swing response to the “Enlightenment” or the “age of reason.”

The age of reason was just that. It was a time of new ideas that were really important to scientific advancement and different forms of philosophy. The creation of the scientific method, philosophers confronting the violence of their European world, and many more factors, birthed the Enlightenment.

During the Enlightenment there were theologians who thought that the Bible and even God could be analyzed and known in a reasonable, logical manner. Many believed scientific reasoning, and philosophical reasoning were tools that could also be used to study God and scripture—allowing us to come to some “real” conclusions about them. It was a time when we began to research more about when and where the Bible was written and brought about new ideas we had never considered, rich with new insights for people of faith.

What also came from the Enlightenment was deep questioning of the very nature of God, sometimes even questioning not just *how* God was real, but *if* God was real. What is God’s actual function in the universe? How much does God influence the universe, if at all? This was the world that the John and Charles Wesley were raised in. This was the world that Susanna Wesley was raising her children in.

Oxford was crawling with these thinkers, many of whom, by their brilliance, have brought us innovations in thinking. But Wesley and others knew that something was missing—something he and his friends named a “religion of the heart.” It’s not that seeking God in a reasonable fashion was wrong, it was just not the whole picture. This “religion of the heart” that Wesley wrote about, was something that you could physically feel. To a very honest degree, Methodism is a charismatic faith—we believe that a person can have a physical experience in their flesh. John Wesley experienced a “warming of his heart” at a church on Aldersgate Street that transformed his ministry forever. And this is one of many spaces where Wesley bumped up against the Enlightenment to help move us into the next era.

Around Oxford, Wesley and his friends were accused of being “enthusiasts.” Enthusiasm as a movement has been around since the Greco-Roman era. Enthusiasts believed that they had a special knowledge of God’s will accessible only to them, that they received through dreams and charismatic experiences. It does not lean on logic or reason at all—only these experiences.

But those of the Great Awakening saw their faith not as an enthusiastic one, but as a “religion of the heart.” They did not feel they were ignoring reason. Wesley believed deeply in reason. But he also witnessed to a God who was stepping beyond just reason and into an emotional space. A space of love and feeling. A God who we can reach in our reason and also feel in our flesh. For Wesley and his friends, it was a both/and.

Wesley wrote extensively on reason and even described “reason” as having three parts: apprehension, judgement, and discourse. Apprehension is conceiving something in your mind. Judgement is comparing that concept to previous concepts. And discourse is progressing from one comparison to another (aka “learning”). Reason, is deeply important to Methodists. Wesley believed that reason makes it possible to “understand the essential truths contained” in the Bible AND ALSO that with a text as big, as complex, as meaningful as Holy Scripture, we should not be surprised that, as we use reason to figure it out, different people arrive at different understandings.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is problematic about a person believing that they have a special knowledge of God’s will, accessible to only them?
2. If there really is a grand objective “Truth” somewhere out there, how is claiming to know it fully at best audacious and arrogant, and at worst maybe blasphemous?
3. With a text as big, as complex, as meaningful as Holy Scripture, we should not be surprised that, as we use reason to figure it out, different people arrive at different understandings. Why is it important to read and study scripture in community, in the body of Christ together?
4. Where do you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with others on scriptural interpretations of the Bible? Can you have those conversations without getting mad? Have you been able to enjoy them? How is loving others first, difficult for you sometimes?

## Prayer

God of Love. We thank you for our curiosity. We thank you for yet another chance to think of your activity throughout the ages. We thank you for your inspiration that nudged us humans to seek the stars and ask big questions about the beautiful creation you have made in us and around us. We thank you for the science and the medical professionals who are right now working to save and heal your people. We thank you for the thinkers and dreamers that have expanded how we can think and talk about you—a creative and loving endeavor that you have gifted to us. We thank you for a community of faith with which to reason and discern together, lest we be arrogant to believe that we not need each other, or you. And we thank you God, for the power of the Holy Spirit which we can feel in our bodies as a witness to your work in this world. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

*As the church is re-awakening in this season of reform, what if some of those divisions were bad dreams? What if, as we wake up, the divisiveness, the “I’m right / You’re wrong,” the “us versus them,” what if it all just fades away like parts of a barely remembered nightmare?*