

## Introduction

## Aldersgate

Check-in & Introductions

**Note to leaders:** *This week there are no questions under the Methodist Focus section. There is a video you can “share” on your screen for participants, and then reflect on. The “Methodist Focus” article, video link, and prayer were all produced by the United Methodist Church, and the work it cited.*

## Gospel Lesson

Acts 1:6-14 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

## Sermon Focus

Sunday’s sermon was about “Aldersgate moments,” the moments of our lives in which we are especially aware of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley went to an Aldersgate prayer meeting “unwillingly,” feeling like he had failed in his ministry - and the Spirit warmed his heart and empowered him to launch the Methodist movement. Even in our seasons of deepest struggle or despair, the Holy Spirit still empowers us, calling us to witness to who God wants us to be.

## Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Andy shared a personal story that it was at the age of 6 or 7 that he realized the story of the crucifixion. Do you remember the first time you felt the weight of the crucifixion?
2. Do you remember the first time you felt the weight of the resurrection?
3. Was faith something you came to quickly or over a long time?
4. The night Wesley went to the church on Aldersgate Street he says he went “very unwillingly.” Share a story about when you have found yourself going to church “very unwillingly” only to have your heart strangely warmed?
5. Wesley, the weeks before his Aldersgate experience, journaled that he felt he was failing as a preacher and had “continual sorrow” in his heart. How do you relate to Wesley’s overwhelming sense of failure? Has God done anything with that?
6. Wesley’s calling into ministry came years before his largest and most familiar conversion experience. How do you relate to John Wesley’s experience?

7. This experience did not take away Wesley's problems; he had just reached a deeper relationship with Christ. Initially, his relationship was based on knowledge of the mind, now it was based on knowledge of the heart. How have your struggles changed as your faith has matured?
8. Before the ascension, Jesus explains to his disciples that their calling will go beyond Jerusalem, and beyond Rome, to the entire world. How would you have responded to this call, or better, how do you respond to this call?
9. Jesus promises that the disciples will be equipped to live out this call. How has God equipped you to live into your call?

## Methodist Focus

### What is Aldersgate Day?

"Aldersgate Day is celebrated on May 24 (or the Sunday closest) to commemorate the day in 1738 when John Wesley experienced assurance of his salvation. Wesley reluctantly attended a group meeting that evening on Aldersgate Street in London. As he heard a reading from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he felt his "heart strangely warmed." Wesley wrote in his journal that at about 8:45 p.m. "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."

Charles Wesley only a few days before had also had a conversion experience in a building that still stands on an adjacent block (John Bray's house on Little Britain). We do not know whether the building where John Wesley's experience took place still exists, nor exactly in which building on Aldersgate Street it may have been if it still stands. A monument at the London Museum on Aldersgate Street marks where some believe the building may have been.

Over time, Aldersgate Street has been shortened by common Methodist usage to simply Aldersgate. The word has come to represent both the place and John Wesley's experience."

*This content was produced by Ask The UMC, a ministry of United Methodist Communications.*

Here is a 3-minute video about Aldersgate moments for your group to reflect on together:

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/how-aldersgate-changed-john-wesley>

## Prayer

Almighty God, in a time of great need you raised up your servants John and Charles Wesley, and by your Spirit inspired them to kindle a flame of sacred love which leaped and ran, an inextinguishable blaze. Grant that all those whose hearts have been warmed at these altar fires, being continually refreshed by your grace, may be so devoted to the increase of scriptural holiness throughout the land that in this our time of great need, your will may fully and effectively be done on earth as it is in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (FRED D. GEALY, U.S.A., 20TH CENT., ALT.)

*The ascension moment is not the beginning of their relationship with Jesus, nor it is the end of the story. It is one moment along the way. An encounter where everything clicked. A call. In the middle of their lives, a call.*