

Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.
Sunday May 17th 2026. Aldersgate Sunday.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship.

Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him – his name is the Lord. Psalm 68:4

Today is known as Wesley Day, the Sunday closest to the day that marks John Wesley's conversion. His Brother Charles had a similar experience at the same time and he became a prolific hymn writer. He wrote over 6000 hymns. Our first hymn appeared in John Wesley's first hymn book in 1780 and has been included in every Methodist hymn book since. However not with the original eighteen verses!

STF 364

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.

Jesus - the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;

his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.

He speaks; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

See all your sins on Jesus laid:
the Lamb of God was slain;
his soul was once an offering made
that all may heaven gain.

In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,
shall feel, your sins forgiven,
anticipate your heaven below,
and own that love is heaven.

Prayers of adoration and confession . A Collect for Aldersgate Sunday:

God of immeasurable grace Your Spirit has from age to age, confirmed your work of salvation in the hearts of those who love you. Grant to your people a true spirit of worship, That renewed in their calling They might achieve the vision you have given to them. May we become your people, United and equipped to proclaim the good news of Salvation for all, By faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit One God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Heavenly Father, we confess that we don't always hear your word. Sometimes we don't want to listen Sometimes we don't want to do what you ask of us. Sometimes we don't trust that you know what you are doing. Forgive us our lack of vision. Forgive us for the things we should have done – but didn't. Forgive us for the things we shouldn't have done – but did. Forgive us for the challenges that we have not taken up. Forgive us that we try to do things in our own strength instead of relying on you. Lord God, help us to listen, to feel your presence, to hear your word in our hearts and to follow where you lead. **Amen**

Bible reading. John 17:1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Reflection

I had an interesting conversation with someone recently who told me about his journey through several church denominations and finally decided he would belong to an independent church. I tried to find out what he meant especially as he travels to different countries as a church missionary. Sadly it came down to his disillusionment with the established churches and he has set up on his own. He doesn't seem to belong to any congregation in his own country and sees himself as a truly itinerant missionary affiliated to no one but Jesus Christ and himself.

I warmed to his commitment to evangelism and I know of many people who for all sorts of reasons have chosen to change denominations or the church they attended. Either through personal circumstances, moving to a different area perhaps or through marriage, or a falling out with the church they attended.

It is interesting in this portion of Jesus' high priestly prayer as it's known, Jesus prays not for the disciples health and wellbeing, or strength for them to carry on His ministry. He prays that they may be One.

We like to think of the church being of one heart and one mind but unfortunately Jesus' prayer still needs to be prayed and acted upon. Throughout the church's history this has always been the case. Divided for too many reasons and years and yet with a common purpose, to make Christ known.

Today we commemorate Wesley day, the Sunday nearest to the date of John Wesley's conversion. On Wednesday May 24th 1738 Wesley wrote in his journal how he went very unwillingly to a Moravian society meeting and it was there while someone was reading Luther's preface to Romans. He felt his heart strangely warmed and that he did believe in Christ for salvation. He felt that his sins had been forgiven and a deep assurance that they had been taken away. He seemed to be a person who dedicated his life to God and came from a Godly family, so what brought this about?

When we look at his journal we see that for the preceding months he had been in a very low mood following a failed mission to Georgia, America. John was brought up in a Christian household. At an early age, the rectory in Epworth, the family home suffered a fire. Young John was spotted at a bedroom window and plucked from the fire to safety. His mother named him 'a brand plucked from the fire'. A child marked by the experience to do great things for God. He and his brother Charles studied theology at Oxford. John was ordained in the Anglican Church and for a time assisted his Father in Parish ministry. When his father's health was failing he wanted John to succeed him as Rector. This was in 1734 but John declined writing this to his Father, "The question is not whether I could do more good to others there or here, but whether I could do more good to myself; seeing wherever I can be most holy myself, there, I am assured, I can most promote holiness in others. But I am equally assured there is no place under heaven so fit for my improvement as Oxford." So it appears that John returned to Oxford and was involved in leading groups of students in what we know as, 'the Holy club'. There strict regime was an attempt to renew their faith and the faith of others to be more inline with the early church. He also felt he needed to suffer on his faith journey as the disciples had. It was the Holy club and it's methodical ways that earned them the title, 'Methodists'.

It was also around this time that John was contacted about the possibility of ministry amongst the native Indians in Georgia. His interest was further strengthened when General Oglethorpe, the *de facto* governor of Georgia, brought the Yamacraw chief, Tomochichi, to England to meet with King George, Wesley became even more fascinated with the idea of evangelising Native Americans. This opportunity aligned with his vision of self sacrifice and recovering the spirituality of the early church in Jerusalem, who shared all things in common. While Europeans, he thought, had been corrupted, Wesley held the belief that Native Americans were pure and closer to Primitive Christianity, embodying a communitarian lifestyle. It was after his Father's death in April 1735 that the following December, John and his brother Charles with two members of the holy club set sail for Georgia. It was whilst onboard the ship that John wrote about his motivation for going to America. His words seem very self centred and showed a great sense of disillusionment with the church in England. "My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, 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 heathens...But you will perhaps ask, Can't you save your own soul in England as well as in Georgia? I answer, No, neither can I hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there, neither, if I stay here knowing this, can I reasonably hope to attain any degree of holiness at all." In other words, Wesley's motivation for going to preach to Native Americans was intimately tied to his own spiritual journey toward holiness.

It was during the early days of his time in Georgia that one of two Anglican missionary societies approved his status, without any consultation. Saying that he was now part of their society and offered him a salary of £50 per annum. John refused as he saw himself as a volunteer missionary, there to evangelise the Native Americans, not to be answerable to the society that would insist on reports of his progress. However Wesley's mission failed on many counts and he was forced to leave. His strict religious discipline alienated him. Especially when he refused to give communion to various parishioners, including one lady Sophia, who he had been romantically involved with. After Wesley denied Sophia communion, her uncle (a chief magistrate) accused him of violating ecclesiastical laws leading to a warrant for his arrest. His goal to convert the native Americans was unmet and his strict moral reforms were not accepted by the English settlers. Wesley was left feeling his faith was insufficient, famously writing, "I went to America to convert the Indians, but, O! who shall convert me". On his return to London we can understand the quandary that he found himself in. The reason why perhaps on a Wednesday, he should be found going not once but twice to two different churches. His story is quite remarkable in how through all his disillusionment and confusion, God

broke through in such a way that he felt he had found Salvation full and free. Freed, forgiven and his sins removed completely.

John Wesley's story is just one story from a plethora of misguided attempts to make religion known but by our standards and not God's. Frederick Faber penned these words in his hymn, 'there's a wideness in God's mercy', But we make His love too narrow, By false limits of our own; And we magnify His strictness, With a zeal He will not own'. Faber was born in 1814 and converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in 1845. The Roman Catholic Church at that time did not include hymn singing in its worship. Faber introduced the practice and wrote about 150 hymns. He was greatly influenced by the new approaches to worship and in no small measure by Wesleyan ways.

Through out the history of all our church denominations there have been schism's over doctrine, how a church should order its policy, practices and even how it should worship.

So as we glory on this Aldersgate Sunday about the foundation of Wesley's faith and the subsequent growth and development of the Methodist Church we can see that there were serious concerns. Jesus' prayer was and is still very pertinent, "that they may all be one."

Wesley never wanted to form a separate movement but rather to reform the Church of England from the inside. The Methodist Church grew after his death and divided itself in numerous ways, the Bible Christians, the Primitives and the Wesleyans to name just a few of the various divisions that formed and amalgamated over the years.

There was a time when there was so many different chapels from the different denominations and their different stances in each town and village. Then often for pragmatic reasons they came together. Though not without some difficulty in finding their unity and letting go of their past identities. We can look back at our own experiences in the church and the circuit and see how we have changed and transformed into our present circuit. We need to keep the prayer of Jesus as our constant agenda, that we might be One.

It's interesting looking At John Wesley's initial motivation to evangelise. He was really trying to work out his own personal salvation by going to convert those who he considered to be 'heathens'. His journey out to those so called heathens must have been part of his road to enlightenment as he observed the spiritual and practical aspects of another religious group from the Europe that he had written off. He wrote in his journal: 'At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour. Of their humility they had given a continual proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the Spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no."

Wow! Which camp would you have been in if you had been on that ship, just starting your early morning service and experienced the full force of nature? Screaming or singing on? Wesley we know from his journal entries was very moved by the faith of this group of Moravians.

How is Christ's prayer and Wesley's commitment an inspiration for us today? Ashley Brilliant, a British cartoonist who moved to America and was known for his 'pot shots', (I have included two at the end of this service that are quite pertinent to today's theme). There one which shows two people climbing a mountain in knee deep snow. The caption reads: "Keep Climbing Upwards! You may never reach the top, but it's in that direction." The secret is not giving up. Unity isn't easy. Most of us have never learned how to disagree in love. Christian unity is not determined by whether we agree with each other about every interpretation of scripture or doctrine or form of church government but whether we love one another, and whether we reflect the love of God. We have to work to break down the racial and denominational barriers that divide us. We're called to demonstrate our unity in Christ through love. Christ's prayer and Christ's command is still that we be One.

Wesley in a sermon on Christian Unity acknowledged that we have different ways, beliefs and practices and I include just three short excerpts from that sermon that encourage us still to act on Jesus' prayer. 'I dare not presume to impose my mode of worship on any other.'.... 'Are you of my Church? Of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of church government, and allow the same church officers with me? Do you join in the same form of prayer wherein I worship God? I inquire not,'..... 'Let all opinions alone on one side and on the other. Only give me thy hand.'

On this Aldersgate Sunday let us be of one heart and one mind, to be as one and taking the hand of those who with us seek to continue to follow the ways of Christ.

STF 345

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?

2. What mystery here! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the highest angel tries
to sound the depths of love divine!
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Father's throne above-
so free, so infinite his grace-
humbled himself in all his love
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!

Prayers of Intercession

We give thanks to God for the richness and renewal which comes to us through the ecumenical movement, so that today the rich heritage of one tradition can be freely enjoyed as a blessing to all.

We give thanks to God for the love and commitment of pioneers and trail blazers, which set fresh examples and establish new norms in the life of the churches. On this day we particularly give thanks for the life of John Wesley, whose burning compassion for the poor was matched with his evangelical fervour.

God of all ages, you have accompanied your people with the courtesy and knowledge of true friendship. We thank you for the memory of Jesus referring to his disciples as his friends. Deepen friendship between Christians who appear to have little in common, remind us all again and again that love is the point of all we do in our work and in our worship.

Open our eyes to insights of faith which are unfamiliar to us and to ways of witnessing which challenge us, so that the love of Christ may shine in our lives. May we, as followers of Jesus, be known by our love and be bold to affirm that we are 'friends of all and enemies of none'. **We say the Lord's Prayer.**

STF 691

What shall our greeting be:
sign of our unity?
Jesus is Lord!
May we no more defend
barriers he died to end:
give me your hand, my friend -
one Church, one Lord!

What is our mission here?
He makes his purpose clear:

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night:
then shone your glorious gospel ray;
I woke! The dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!

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 the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ my own;
bold I approach the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

one world, one Lord!
Spirit of truth, descend;
all our confusions end:
give me your hand, my friend -
Jesus is Lord!

He comes to save us now:
to serve him is to know
life's true reward.
May he our lives amend,
all our betrayals end:
give me your hand, my friend -
Jesus is Lord!

The Blessing

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage our hearts and strengthen us in every good deed and word.

Amen.

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