

Sermon Title: A Methodist Rejoices in God
 Primary Text(s): Matthew 5:1-12 (CEB translation)
 By: Rev. Terry Carty
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 Place: KSUMC
 Season: 7th Sunday after Pentecost
 Series: The Distinguishing Marks of a Methodist

Main Point: Reconciliation with God and with others is the source of our joy.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 5:1-12 Common English Bible (CEB)

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying:

“Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

“Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

“Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

“Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

“Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

“Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

“Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

“Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

“Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

Sermon

Reading from Zach Clayton’s little book:

You Might be a United Methodist if ... you consider a potluck dinner to be a sacrament.

 For the past couple of weeks I have focused our attention on John Wesley’s paper that he prepared to guide a growing movement of people called “Methodist.” He wrote *The Character of a Methodist* in 1742. His intention in writing it was to give the proper meaning of the term “Methodist.” And it was to demonstrate that Methodism is simply genuine Christianity, nothing more.

Methodists who have lived in three centuries how found identity in this work. I believe that we, in this century, can find that Wesley’s work gives us the direction we need for the challenges we face as Christians in the world today.

Last Sunday I told you about the first mark: A Methodist Loves God. As we become more and more aware of God’s love for us individually, we find ourselves becoming filled to overflowing with that love. As God’s love overflows in us, we love as God loves.

Today I want to talk to you about a second mark: **A Methodist Rejoices in God!** I could have just as easily said **“A Methodist is Happy in God.”** Mr. Wesley always **co-mingled his references to joy and rejoicing with references to our happiness and our blessings that come from God.**

This morning I was very specific with my request that our reading of the Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount would be read from the Bible translation known as the Common English Bible. Unlike most English translations of the Greek New Testament, the CEB uses the word “Happy” rather than the word “Blessed” to express the content of Jesus’s teaching.

This is not some kind of “feel good,” “hippie” translation. It is a real, scholarly translation. The Common English translation is not the first to use ‘Happy’ in translating the Beatitudes.

John Wesley was much more than the founder of Methodism. He was a very accomplished scholar who created a study Bible to help his preachers and leaders communicate Biblical truth to the common, less educated people of his time. Unlike to King James Version of the Bible in his day, Wesley used the word “Happy” in his translation of the Greek word (Maka’rios) because it communicated the Greek meaning better than the high-church King James “Blessed.” It better communicates the deep joyous satisfaction that comes to one who knows the indwelling Love of God. [The adjective ‘bless-ed’ means more than a noun – blessing – or a verb – to be blessed. The Greek that is translated ‘blessed’ or ‘happy’ in the Beatitudes and other places refers to a state of being.]

When I first discovered this different way of translating this one word, I worked for hours trying to unravel the woven connection between **happy** and **rejoicing** so I could present this concept as part of a brief meditation. But I discovered this: **a disciple cannot separate a sense of everyday happiness from an awareness of having God’s love poured into one’s heart.**

In my reading the Beatitudes in “*Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament,*” I also found a footnote on the passage just prior, Matt 4:23 “*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching **the gospel of the kingdom**...*” His footnote read: “*The gospel of the kingdom, that is, the joyous message, is the proper name of our religion; as will be amply verified in all who earnestly and perseveringly embrace it.*” This verifies that Mr Wesley was not trying to create a new religion. No, he was trying to bring out the joy and happiness that should come from the Good News of God’s life-giving love.

We Christians should not expect to find our identity, our ‘mark,’ in a cross, nor in a steeple, nor in a denominational logo. Our mark is an enduring, everyday happiness that comes with the joyous assurance that God is constantly working in each of our lives.

Invitation to Holy Communion

This morning we celebrate Holy Communion. Mr. Wesley considered this sacrament to be one of the primary “Means of Grace.” That is, this is one of the most obvious ways, alongside baptism, that God communicates with us and we with God.

Wesley himself communed several times a week. He believed that it was commanded by Christ, and that the benefits (forgiveness, grace, assurance) of receiving communion should motivate one to commune frequently. According to his journal and other writings, every time he participated in Holy Communion, God filled him and strengthened him to constantly commune with God in his heart.

If we are seeking to experience the outpouring of God's love, this is the place to come and be filled or refilled. If we are seeking assurance that Christ died for us while we were still lost in sin, this is the place. If we are seeking to be restored in our belief that God loves you and me individually and is saving us day by day, hour by hour, we can find ourselves restored at this table.

Today, almost three centuries after Wesley's first Methodists, we still believe that someone who is "earnestly seeking" may come to the table and find the grace they need. As you celebrate the sacrament today, may God so fill you that you will find joy and happiness to take with you into your week of faith.

Hear now this historic invitation to Christ's Table:

"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
And are in love and charity with your neighbors,
And intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God,
And walking from henceforth in his holy ways:
Draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort,"