

Holy Christmas – Day 11 Monday before Epiphany January 4, 2021 “Methodist Heritage”

In the closing days of Christmas I find myself reflecting on my heritage as a United Methodist ordained Elder and Deacon, a retired member of the West Virginia Annual Conference. This new year of 2021 brings many concerns about what The United Methodist Church will look like going forward. This will be a critical year for people called Methodists. These are challenging days to be the Church in midst of world-wide pandemic.

Every United Methodist clergyperson and lay leadership uses (and should have in their library) the books – The Holy Scriptures, UM Book of Worship, The UM Hymnal, Book of Discipline, Book of Resolutions and the Conference Journal. Each of these represents the various aspects of engaging in ministry through the teachings of The United Methodist Church. They guide, inform, govern, challenge and inspire as we carry out the mission of The United Methodist Church – “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

During the season of Christmas we United Methodist people reflect and remember the beginnings of Methodism in America out of our Wesleyan heritage in The Church of England. The “Christmas Conference of 1784” was the beginning of the Church. I like the summary notes of the meeting as shared by Dr. Bertrand M. Tipple, Methodist preacher, writer & lecturer:

“On Friday morning, December 24 the party . . .traveled to Baltimore, and the first session of the Christmas Conference began at ten o’clock in Lovely Lane Meeting House. Thomas Coke presided as John Wesley’s representative and presented the plan. John Dickins offered a resolution, the unanimous adoption of which created the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. Francis Asbury was unanimously elected as superintendent (bishop), as was Coke. On Christmas Day, the second day of the conference Asbury was ordained deacon by Coke. . .the following day he was ordained elder; and on Monday, December 27, he was consecrated superintendent. William Philip Otterbein, a German minister. . .assisted in the consecration. Nearly sixty preachers were present. . .”

Bishop Francis Asbury wrote in his Journal –

“We spent the whole week in conference, debating freely, and determining all things by a majority of votes. The Doctor (Coke) preached every day at noon, and some one of the other preachers morning and evening. We were in great haste, and did much business in a little time.”
(Journal of Asbury, Epworth Press/Abingdon Press, 1958)

On January 3, 1785 Asbury wrote in his journal –

“The conference is risen and I have now a little time for rest. In the evening I preached on Ephesians 3:8, being the first sermon after my ordination: my mind was unsettled, and I was but low in my own testimony. (You may want to read the entire passage of Ephesians 3:7-13.)

His journal records his travels from January 4th to 7th in the cold moving southward into Virginia.

I am thankful for this Methodist heritage. May we be reminded of the passage from Ephesians – “Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of (God’s) power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring. . .the news of the boundless riches of Christ. . .” (Ephesians 3:7-8)

The Word of God for the people of God, in such a time as this. . .

William H. Wilson (Bill)+