

He was struggling at this point in his life, when it was far from certain that the beginnings of a religious revival would take hold and flourish. John Wesley's experience at the Aldersgate meeting transformed his belief and preaching, ultimately leading to the formation of the Methodist Church. Without Aldersgate, Methodism as we know it today may not have happened.



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But Aldersgate is not just about the past, or just about John Wesley. His experience, so memorably and vividly expressed in his journal, demonstrates the difference it makes knowing God for ourselves. When one least expects it, even when things haven't turned out the way we hoped or when we feel we've heard it all before, there can be change. Change happens when we share the story. Wesley experienced this when someone else read to him Martin Luther's Preface to Romans. Just as John Wesley felt his heart 'strangely warmed', we too can be refreshed and inspired by sharing our faith stories with each other. What story can you tell?

What story can you tell?

The **Methodist Church**
Living generously

"God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."
Sunday 24th May 2020 Easter 7 / Aldersgate Sunday - Revd Tony Morling

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use as you are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer & Lighting of a Candle

As I come before you God help me to praise your name. Focus my mind on your presence with me and remind me that I am joined together with people around the world worshipping at home. May your name be glorified in our worship. **Amen.**

*Sing to God,
sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him
who rides upon the clouds—
his name is the LORD—
be exultant before him. (Psalm 68)*

Hymn: 10,000 Reasons

Matt Redman (1974-)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2M58JuV-FU>

*Bless the Lord, O my soul
O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before,
O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name*

The sun comes up,
it's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass, and
whatever lies before me
Let me be singing
when the evening comes
Chorus

You're rich in love,
and You're slow to anger
Your name is great,
and Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
for my heart to find
Chorus

And on that day
when my strength is failing
The end draws near
and my time has come
Still my soul will sing
Your praise unending
Ten thousand years
and then forevermore
Chorus x2

*Jesus, I'll worship Your holy name
Lord, I'll worship Your holy name*

*Sing like never before,
O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name
Jesus, I'll worship Your holy name
I'll worship Your holy name.*

Let us pray together

Everyday God,

We praise you that you are with us in every part of our lives and you never stop loving us.

We praise you for the world you created and the beautiful things we see around us.

We praise you that you came to earth in Jesus to show us in person how much you care about us and the world we live in.

We thank you that when you ascended you did not leave us alone but sent your Spirit so that we can always know you are with us.

You invite us to join in your work of loving people and the planet and we pray that you will show us how we can share in your mission of love. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**



A Collect for Aldersgate Sunday

God of overwhelming grace, you ignited the spark of your grace in John and Charles Wesley and a passion for holiness, justice and sharing your great love with others.

Warm our hearts that we may trust in you.

Renew our conviction and inspire us to embrace new opportunities even in difficulty.

Pour out your spirit on your people that we may be united in your love and ready to share hope with the world through Jesus who is one with you. **Amen**

Aldersgate Sunday:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwrOTIPCs_k

Today's Reading from the New Testament: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

FEAST OF FAITH: BACKGROUND

Why 'Aldersgate' Sunday?

Methodists traditionally commemorate Aldersgate Sunday on 24 May or the Sunday nearest to it, which was a day of significant change for John Wesley. Throughout his life, John Wesley captured his experiences in his journal:

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, 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."



"Faith is a work of God in us, which ... makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers..."

(Extract from Martin Luther's Preface to the Letter of St Paul to the Romans (1552), translated by Bro Andrew Thornton © 1983 St Anselm Abbey)

It was 24 May 1738. Wesley was almost 35 years old and had been ordained for nearly 10 years. The 'society' he attended was a Moravian meeting in London. Wesley has first encountered the Moravian Church during a difficult two-year mission to Georgia in North America, from which he had returned just six months earlier. During the journey, their ship had been struck by a severe storm, and shipwreck and death seemed inevitable to most aboard. What Wesley noticed was the calm assurance of the Moravians: confident in God's love and their salvation, they did not appear to fear death. Wesley did not have that assurance.

We pray for the people we miss.
Our friends and families and
those we long to see face to
face. We pray for safety and
protection for our loved ones.

We pray for those who have lost
someone they love and haven't
been able to say goodbye. We
pray that they will know the
comfort of your loving presence
and that you will show us how to
reach out in love and friendship.

We pray for ourselves in these
difficult days shared by so many
people but also lived in isolation.
Help us to know your protecting
love and to live in the power of
your Spirit.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: O Thou Who Camest From Above

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMRSFGHCbPQ>

1. O thou who camest from above
The fire celestial to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!
2. There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent
praise.
3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for
thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up the gift in me.
4. Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat;
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

A prayer of blessing

Holy God, be with me
as we leave this time of worship.
May we know your presence in
our every day and live your
message of love and hope.
Amen

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Time to Reflect:

*"God's love has been poured out
into our hearts through the Holy
Spirit, who has been given to
us". Romans 5:5*

*When St Paul described New Life
in Christ (Romans 5-8) little
could he know what influence his
words would have upon the life
of John Wesley & Charles Wesley.
Nor yet imagine that 80 million
Methodist world-wide today
would cherish the verse, "God's
love has been poured out into
our hearts through the Holy
Spirit, who has been given to
us". Romans 5:5. But such is
God's timing and providence.*

*When the queen viewed the life-
size statue of John Wesley at
Westminster Central Hall she
quipped, 'It's nice to view a
statue about the same size as
me'. In his riding breeches he
stood just 5 feet 6 inches and
weighed around 120 pounds, and
subsequently often had to perch
on a chair, platform or horse, to
preach his 40,000 sermons. He
travelled the length and breadth
of the country—altogether more
than 250,000 miles, when crowds
were often hostile, and once a
bull was let loose in a
congregation he was addressing!*

*He could be awkward, autocratic
and overbearing and in his days
at Oxford, terribly earnest. He*

*was part of the 'Holy Club',
visiting prisoners, praying and
reading the bible with such
ordered methodology- hence the
name. A term of derision that
stuck. As a young Anglican priest
he embarked upon a disastrous
missionary journey to America
lamenting, 'I went to America,
to convert the Indians; but oh!
who shall convert me?'*

*His mother Susanna bore 19
children- and she was one of 25!
She educated her brood of
children including the girls, as
soon as they turned five years
old and were expected to gain
proficiency in Latin and Greek
and to learn major portions of
the New Testament by heart. It
all seems a little head-based a
little dry- like eating five cream
crackers without butter or
cheese. Then, on May 24th,
something happened. Here are
his words,*

*I went very unwillingly to a
Society in Aldersgate where one
was reading Luther's preface to
the Epistle to the Romans. I felt
my heart strangely warmed:
About a quarter before nine,
while he was describing the
change that 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*

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mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Did you notice that he went ‘unwillingly’, just as a lad might return to school with a heavy satchel after the summer holidays? But he did go, and he felt his heart strangely warmed’. It would have been so easy for John Wesley to not bother, to not accept that invitation to attend, to offer his excuses, to stay at home watching tv. But he went.

And have you ever wondered who it was that read Luther’s preface? Would he or she ever know what they helped ignite? Unknown, lost to history, but their simple act of faithful witness changed Wesley and moulds us. They probably never knew the difference they made- but what a difference! And neither do we always know what happens to our small acts of faithfulness. So be encouraged, they are woven into God’s providence. With Him we too make a difference.

‘Conversion, spiritual renewal, being baptised in the Spirit’- call it what you, but it seems to match the words of St Paul “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”. A spark ignited, just as it

did for Charles three days before and thus they began to sing

O Thou who camest from above, the pure celestial fire to impart kindle a flame of sacred love upon the mean altar of my heart.

After May 1738 they learnt that faith is to experience a synergy of mind and heart, and to live in Christ is not to strive for what you can earn, but to receive the free gift of love in Christ. That was John Wesley’s text in Jersey when on Thursday 23 August 1787 he records:

I rode to St Mary’s, five or six miles from St Helier’s, through shady, pleasant lanes. None at the house could speak English, but I had interpreters enough. In the evening our large room was thoroughly filled: I preached on ‘By grace are saved, through faith’. Mr Brackenbury interpreted sentence by sentence; and God owned His word.

For John, over the years sometimes the flame lit brighter and sometimes dimmer. Unlike Charles, he struggled with melancholy; he continued to be obdurate and contradictory, claiming to be a true Anglican and then taking it upon himself to ordain new ministers. When challenged about stepping on ecclesiastical parishes and toes,

he claimed with some immodesty, that the world was his parish.

We, who are the inheritors of this curious narrative, do well not to venerate him to sainthood: he was far too much like you and me for that. Rather, can we acknowledge the godly distinctive emphasises that we have inherited that will guide us well in the future: covenant, all are loved, all can be saved, social righteousness, scriptural holiness, everyone has a ministry, global church, connected, plain speaking practical faith, community and a love of singing. These are things we can share with confidence - while also realising there is much beyond our tradition that can enrich us. Church history did not begin at the Epworth vicarage!

So:

Be encouraged- just like the unnamed person who read in Aldersgate Street we too can make a difference and be woven into God’s providential plan.

Be challenged- Wesley went unwillingly and his heart was warmed. Do challenge our unwilling moments when we say, ‘I do it tomorrow, can’t be bothered, nobody will miss me’. There’s always an excuse. Seize the day.

Be open to God who wants nothing more than to pour love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”.

Come Holy Spirit and strangely warm our hearts, kindle our spirits, join our minds and emotions. Come and pour love into our hearts.

Take a time to sit quietly.

A Time of Prayer

God our protector,
We come before you in prayer for your world, your children and ourselves.

We pray for the world that you have made. We thank you for the renewal of creation springing up as human activity has been restricted. We pray that we will learn to value these gifts and to live more gently in the future.

We pray for the leaders of nations making impossible decisions on our behalf. We pray that they will speak and act with integrity and protect those who are most vulnerable.

We pray for our church communities. We bring you our sadness at not being able to meet together and we thank you for the people finding it easier to explore faith at this time. We pray that we will find new ways to reach out to the world.