

CUT FOR TIME

EXCERPTS REMOVED FROM TODAY'S SERMON

If Methodism was supposed to be a renewal movement of the Church of England, why did it end up forming its own church? The American Revolutionary War is the reason for this. Leading up to the War on Independence, the Anglican Church in the States drove itself into extinction because King George III was the Head of the Church. Anglicans in America eventually broke away and formed their own denomination known as . . . The Episcopal Church. (Episcopalians.) This took place in 1783. A year later, in 1784, seven years before John Wesley's death, his Methodists also needed to sever ties with England. And John Wesley agreed – his Methodists would never survive in the new USA if they clung too tightly to England, and especially to himself, who remained loyal to the King until his death. So it was out of necessity that he ordained two ministers to be sent to America, thus, allowing the Methodists to break away from England entirely, and to be their own American denomination.

(Methodists in Britain also broke away from the Church of England just shortly after John Wesley's death. British Methodism remains their own denomination, separate from The United Methodist Church.)

Why didn't the Methodists and Episcopalians merge, since they came from the same England Church and were now freed from the King? Because the upper-class Anglican-attitude toward the lowly, wayward, peasantry of Methodists still lived on. Not only that, but a point of pride for Anglicans & Episcopalians is that they are part of the Apostolic Succession – the belief their bishops maintain a direct, unbroken line of authority from the Apostles. Methodists, on the other hand, had our succession broken when Wesley, without authority, ordained our first American leaders. For Methodists, Apostolic Succession is not important at all; we believe God calls who God wants to call.

Nevertheless, from our beginnings, there have been real attempts at uniting our two Churches. Most recently, our General Conference approved Full Communion relationship with the Episcopalians in 2024. This was a historical moment. If and when the Episcopal Church ratifies this agreement in 2027, it means we become “best buds” for the first time. This is not a “merge” but one of the closest relationships possible while remaining separate.

So why was our first American denomination called the Methodist Episcopal Church if we weren't Episcopalian? Because it referred to our *episcopal* polity.

It meant, “*Hey, we come join us – we have bishops, too!*” Our bishops are our *episcopal* leaders and the office they hold is the *episcopacy*.

LOSING VILE-TALITY:

Here are two ways that later Methodists began to lose their “vile” Wesleyan roots:

Colonialism: Methodism’s involvement in colonialist practices is evident in its missionary efforts, especially among Indigenous peoples in North America. Missionaries sought to bring Christianity to Native Americans, but they did so within the context of white American expansionism and exceptionalism, often bound up with the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Methodist missionaries often aligned themselves with federal policies that sought to (oftentimes forcefully) assimilate Native peoples, eradicate their cultures, and steal their land. One egregious example of this was Methodist involvement in the cultural genocide through the Indian boarding school system. Another example was the involvement in, and coordination of, the Sand Creek Massacre. In 1864, a Methodist minister and district superintendent led a brutal attack on a peaceful encampment of Cheyenne and Arapaho people in Colorado. The massacre resulted in the deaths of over 230 Native Americans, most of whom were women, children, and elderly. Their distorted sense of “Christian duty” caused a permanent stain on Methodist history.

Nuclear Family & Heterosexism: One of the ways The Methodist Church of the 1950s sought to “focus on the family” was by naming the month of May as “Family Month.” The National Methodist Committee on Family Life began an annual competition to name one family, nominated by their local congregations, as the Methodist Family of the Year. It doesn’t take a genius to guess what that family usually looked like: white, middle class, and suburban with a mother staying home, a father working, and multiple children—all active in their church and all following their assumed gender roles. This family was put forward each May as an ideal for all Methodists to try to live up to. It played directly into the increasing consumer mindset of the 1950s, equating success with spending power. And it solidified the WASP-ism & heterosexism of Methodism for decades to come.

MAINTAINING VILE-TALITY:

Here are some ways that Methodists kept our vile-tality alive:

Many Methodists were actively engaged in dismantling the social injustices of the early twentieth century, particularly ones related to alcohol abuse and labor practices. PTSD spiked in the aftermath of the Civil War and alcohol consumption increased with it. Alcohol consumption tended to be male-centered, and Methodist women began to argue that it was the root cause of poverty and domestic abuse. The temperance movement became *the* sphere where Methodist women began to step outside of their “proper place” within the home and dare to ask for not only a public voice but a voice at the ballot box! And much of this strategy should be credited to Frances Willard.

Frances’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) brought women of all ilk together to reform the nation through the regulation of liquor. Under her leadership, the WCTU became the largest women’s organization in the U.S., centering around the idea that alcohol abuse and the liquor trade directly threatened the stability of the American home and family.

In May 1880, Frances attempted to address the General Conference of the MEC in order to bring greetings as the president of the WCTU. However, women were not allowed to address the General Conference (a male-only event at the time). She wrote *Woman in the Pulpit* which unapologetically argued that women had an equal standing with men and should be allowed not only a voice in the denomination but full ordination rights. In 1887, she was elected as a lay delegate to the 1888 General Conference, one of five women elected that year. However, when they arrived, the male delegates refused to seat them. She did not shy away in defeat but again turned to education and advocacy. Her efforts continued until, finally, women were allowed to be seated as delegates in 1904.

Also at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Second Industrial Revolution in the U.S. saw an explosion of assembly lines and factories. This had rather severe effects on the working and living conditions in the rapidly growing and overcrowded cities, including a growing disparity between the haves and have-nots. Children as young as four worked in the factories, people were paid pennies an hour, and the idea of a weekend simply did not exist yet. Methodists saw the overworked, underaged, underpaid, and overexposed workers and felt a need to step up and out.

By 1907, the Methodist League for Social Service was created. In their first year, they drafted the world’s first Social Creed, focusing on labor rights. This

creed was adopted at the 1908 General Conference, followed by the National Council of Churches, and a few years later was being quoted by President Teddy Roosevelt. Quotations of this Methodist Creed can be found in his New Deal.

The heart of Methodism began when John Wesley, on April 2nd, 1739, wrote, *“I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.”* Wesley’s vile “method” would ultimately be replicated and multiplied the world over, forming life-giving communities that liberated and empowered the marginalized while forming vital faith and reforming the Church. His “method” can still be repeated and implemented today, with some cultural updates, to meet people where they are and to form robust faith in Christ while moving them outward to share God’s love with others.