



October 11, 2026 | *More Than the Name on the Sign* | Pastor Eddie Eddy

Romans 5:1–5 *5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through 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. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And 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.*

L: This is the word of God for the people of God. P: Thanks be to God:

More Than the Name on the Sign

I want to begin this morning with what sounds like a pretty simple question. In fact, some of you may think it is so simple that you already know the answer. But I want you to think about it for a minute before you answer it.

Why are you a Methodist?

If somebody walked up to you after church this morning and asked, “Why are you a Methodist?” what would you tell them?

Some of us might say, “Well, I've always been Methodist.” Maybe your parents were Methodists. Maybe your grandparents were Methodists. Maybe your family has been sitting in the same general area of the same sanctuary for so many years that everybody knows those are your pews.

Maybe you are Methodist because this was the church closest to your house. Maybe somebody invited you here years ago and you just kept coming back. Maybe you came because there was a good children's program. Maybe your kids had friends here. Maybe you liked the music. Maybe you liked the people. Maybe you married a Methodist and decided it was easier to come to church with your spouse than argue about where you were going every Sunday morning.

And hopefully somewhere on that list somebody says, “I really like the pastor.” I'm not saying it has to be number one...but it would be nice if it made the list.

There isn't necessarily anything wrong with any of those answers. Those things may explain **how you got here**. They may explain why you attend this particular congregation. But they don't really answer the question I am asking.

Why are you a Methodist?

Why Methodist instead of Baptist? Why Methodist instead of Lutheran? Why Methodist instead of Presbyterian, Catholic, Pentecostal, or one of the many churches today that simply call themselves non-denominational?

What makes us different?

And maybe an even more important question is this: **Does it really matter?**

Because...I think it does.

That's why over the next few weeks I want us to spend some time talking about something we probably don't talk about nearly enough. I want us to understand not only that we attend a Methodist church...but **why we are Methodists**. I want us to understand where this Wesleyan movement came from, what we believe, how those beliefs shape the way we live, and finally what any of that has to do with being part of Back Roads Church and the Global Methodist Church today.

Because I don't want “Methodist” to simply be a word on the sign outside the building. I want us to understand what that word means.

PAUSE

Now, before we start talking about what makes Methodists different, I think we need to be clear about something. We don't have a different Jesus.

We are part of the larger Christian family. We share the historic Christian faith with millions of other Christians around the world. We believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We believe He died for our sins and rose from the dead. We believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ. We believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe in the Church. We believe in resurrection and eternal life.

So...this series isn't about saying, "We're Methodists because we're right and everybody else is wrong."

That's not the point at all.

Maybe a better way of saying it is this: **Methodism isn't a different Gospel. It is a particular way of understanding how the Gospel changes us.**

And to understand where that came from, we have to go back a few hundred years and meet a guy named John Wesley.

John Wesley was born in England in 1703. His father, Samuel, was an Anglican priest, and his mother, Susanna, was a remarkable woman of faith who had a tremendous influence on John and the rest of the Wesley children. So John Wesley grew up in the church. He knew the Bible. He knew the prayers. He knew the traditions. He knew what Christians were supposed to believe.

And all of that eventually led Wesley to become an Anglican priest himself.

And that's important... because sometimes we imagine Wesley as some guy wandering around England who suddenly discovered Jesus and decided to start a new church.

That's not what happened...at all.

John Wesley was already a minister.

He studied Scripture. He prayed. He preached. He received Communion. He fasted. He served people. At Oxford, John, his brother Charles, and several others became incredibly **disciplined** about their faith. They developed a very intentional pattern for Christian living. They prayed together. They studied Scripture together. They received Communion regularly. They fasted. They cared for the poor. They visited prisoners.

And here's the thing...they were so methodical about practicing their faith that other students began making fun of them. They called them **Methodists**. And...in their day...it wasn't meant to be a compliment.

But here is what I would like us to think about...what was underneath that name? These men believed that if you were going to follow Jesus, following Jesus ought to affect the way you actually lived your life.

Christianity wasn't supposed to be something you did for an hour on Sunday morning. It was supposed to shape your life. And there's our first little glimpse of what would eventually become the Wesleyan way.

But here's where Wesley's story gets interesting. Because Wesley was doing all the right things. He was going to church. He was reading his Bible. He was praying. He was taking Communion. He was helping people. He was preaching sermons. He was even an ordained minister. And yet something was missing.

In spite of all of his religious practices...Wesley struggled deeply with assurance. He knew a lot **about** God, but deep inside...he wasn't convinced that he truly trusted God.

And I think that's something we need to hear today, because it's possible to be around Christianity for a long time without ever really asking ourselves whether we have personally placed our trust in Jesus Christ.

You can grow up in church. You can know the hymns or praise songs. You can know when to stand up and when to sit down. You can know the Lord's Prayer without the words on the screen in front of you. You can serve on committees. You can put money in the offering plate. You can even know your Bible pretty well.

But there is still a difference between knowing **about Jesus** and trusting **in Jesus**. There is a huge impact when we shift from Head knowledge to heart knowledge.

And eventually...John Wesley had to wrestle with that difference.

In 1735, Wesley sailed to the American colony of Georgia as a missionary. And during the voyage, the ship encountered a terrible storm. The storm was violent enough that Wesley feared for his life.

And while he fretted through this storm...there was another group of Christians aboard that ship called Moravians. And Wesley noticed something about them. While he was afraid, they were worshiping. They were singing. They had a peace that Wesley realized he didn't have.

And it bothered him.

Here he was...an ordained priest traveling across the ocean to be a missionary to somebody else, and suddenly he was wondering whether these people had something in their relationship with Christ that he didn't.

Friends...sometimes God works like that.

Sometimes we don't recognize what is missing in our own faith until we encounter somebody whose faith has become real in a way that challenges us.

And maybe the question isn't what our faith looks like when everything is going well.

Maybe the real question is: **What happens to our faith when the storm hits?** When the diagnosis comes. When somebody we love dies. When the marriage struggles. When one of our children is hurting. When the job disappears. When the bank account isn't big enough. When the plans we had for our lives suddenly fall apart.

It's easy to say, "I trust God," when the water is calm. But what happens when the boat starts rocking?

Is Christianity simply something I believe...or is Jesus someone I trust? That's part of what Wesley was wrestling with.

And that brings us to Paul's words in Romans 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.**"

Listen to those words.

Faith. Peace. Grace. Hope. Love. Paul isn't describing everything we have to do to get God to love us. He's describing what **God has already done for us**.

That's going to become incredibly important as we move through this series, because if there is one word you need to understand if you're going to understand Wesleyan theology, that word is **grace**.

Christianity doesn't begin with us trying to find our way to God. It begins with a God who comes looking for us. And on a boat ride to bring the gospel to the Indians...Wesley was...for the first time... beginning to understand that.

And guess what...his missionary experience in Georgia didn't go as planned. He returned to England discouraged, defeated, a little ashamed...and...still wrestling with his own personal faith.

And then came May 24, 1738.

Wesley attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. He didn't particularly want to go that evening, but he went anyway. It's funny how the Spirit will move us when we need to move.

Someone was reading from Martin Luther's preface to the book of Romans, describing the change God works in the human heart through faith in Christ.

Wesley documented what happened next. Probably one of his most famous quotes: He said that he felt his heart “**strangely warmed.**” That's probably one of the most recognized phrases in all of Methodist history.

But we don't want to miss what came after it. Wesley said he felt that he **did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation**, and that he had received an **assurance** that Christ had taken away his sins.

That's the important part. Wesley knew about Jesus before Aldersgate. He had preached about Jesus. He had studied Jesus. He had served Jesus. He had crossed an ocean trying to tell other people about Jesus. But something changed when the Gospel moved from something Wesley understood in his **head** to something he trusted in his **heart**.

And Church, that's where this Methodist story really starts getting interesting.

Because at the heart of Wesleyan Christianity is this conviction that following Jesus is supposed to be more than simply **knowing** the right information.

God's grace changes the human heart.

Now, that doesn't mean Methodists believe Christianity is all about feelings. Wesley didn't build a theology around getting goosebumps during worship. A strangely warmed heart doesn't mean you have to have some dramatic emotional experience to know Jesus.

The point is **assurance**. I know whom I have trusted. I know salvation is not something I have earned. I know Christ has done for me what I could never do for myself. I know I belong to Him. And because I belong to Him, something begins to change inside of me.

That's why Jesus' words in Mark 12 are so important to the Wesleyan understanding of Christianity. When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest, He said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” And then: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

For Wesley, holiness wasn't primarily about becoming better at following religious rules. Holiness was about becoming more like Jesus. And becoming more like Jesus means learning to love God more completely and learning to love the people around us more faithfully.

That is where Methodist Christianity begins.

Grace changes the heart...and a changed heart produces a changed life.

That's important because sometimes we have reduced Christianity to a destination. We ask, “Are you saved?”

And what we really mean is, “Are you going to heaven when you die?”

Now don't misunderstand me. Eternal life matters. Salvation matters. Heaven matters. But Wesley believed Jesus didn't come simply to change our destination after we die.

Jesus came to change who we are...while we live. The grace of God doesn't simply forgive us. The grace of God begins transforming us.

We'll talk a lot more about that next week, because Wesley had a beautiful understanding of grace. He believed God's grace is working in our lives before we even recognize it. God's grace brings us into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And God's grace continues working in us afterward, shaping us and transforming us and making us more like Christ.

But for today, I want us to come back to the question we started with.

Why are you a Methodist?

Maybe your parents were Methodist. That's how you got here. Maybe your grandparents were Methodist. That's part of your story.

Maybe somebody invited you to this church. Thank God they did. Maybe you came because your children liked the programs.

Wonderful. Maybe you came because this church is five minutes from your house. That's fine too.

But those things don't really explain why we are Methodist.

We are part of this Wesleyan tradition because we believe **Christianity is about more than getting people into church. Christianity is about God's grace getting into people.**

And when God's grace gets hold of us, things begin to change.

Our priorities change.

Our relationships change.

The way we treat people changes.

The way we use our money changes.

The way we respond to people who are hurting changes.

The way we deal with people who disagree with us changes.

The way we see the poor changes.

The way we see our enemies changes.

The way we see ourselves changes.

Because grace isn't simply something God gives us so we can be forgiven.

Grace is the power of God working within us to make us more like Jesus.

And that brings this sermon down from John Wesley in eighteenth-century England to you and me sitting here today.

Because eventually inherited faith has to become **personal faith**.

You can inherit a church building, a family Bible, traditions, the pew your grandparents sat in. You can even inherit the name "Methodist."

But you can't inherit somebody else's relationship with Jesus.

While your grandmother's faith can inspire you...Your father's faith can teach you...Your mother's prayers can surround you...Your church can nurture you...eventually there is a question that every one of us has to answer for ourselves:

Do I trust Jesus Christ?

Not simply, "Do I believe God exists?" Not, "Do I attend church?"

Not, "Was I baptized?" Not even, "Am I a Methodist?"

But:

Do I trust Jesus...and...is my relationship with Jesus changing me?

Because that's where Wesley's story stops simply being Methodist history and starts becoming **our** story. Wesley's strangely warmed heart wasn't the end of his story. It was really the beginning.

Because once Wesley began understanding grace differently, he began understanding salvation differently. He began understanding holiness differently. He began understanding discipleship differently. He began understanding the Church differently. And eventually he began understanding our responsibility to the world...differently.

And over the next few weeks, we're going to walk through that Wesleyan way together.

But before we get there, we have to start here.

Somewhere outside this building is a sign that tells people who we are. And somewhere on that sign are the words **Global Methodist Church**. I don't want "Methodist" simply to be a word on our sign. I don't want it simply to describe the church our grandparents attended. I don't want it to be something we check on a box when somebody asks our religious affiliation.

I want us to understand what it means.

Because long before there was a Global Methodist Church, long before there was a United Methodist Church, and long before Methodism became an institution, there was a movement of Christians who believed something incredibly powerful:

The grace of Jesus Christ can change the human heart...and a changed heart can produce a changed life.

That's where our story begins.

So I'm going to leave you this morning with the same question I asked when we started:

Why are you a Methodist?

Maybe after today our answer might begin to sound a little different. I'm a Methodist because I believe God's grace doesn't simply call me to believe something **about** Jesus.

God's grace invites me to **know Jesus...trust Jesus...love Jesus...and through the power of the Holy Spirit, become more like Jesus.**

And Church...that says a whole lot more than a name on a sign.

To God be the Glory. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

John Wesley understood that when God's grace gets hold of our hearts, it eventually gets hold of every part of our lives. It changes the way we treat people, the way we serve, the way we use our time, and yes...the way we use our money. We don't give today because we are trying to earn God's favor. We give because God's favor has already been freely poured out upon us through Jesus Christ. Our offering is simply one more way that a changed heart produces a changed life. So, with gratitude for the grace we have received, let us return a portion of what God has entrusted to us so that others might come to know, trust, and follow Jesus too.