

Celebrating our Heritage

[1 John 3:1-7](#), [Luke 24:36b-48](#)

Today is considered Heritage Sunday in the church calendar. Each of us brings our own heritage as part of our family history through our professions, our ancestors, our beliefs and values. As a congregation, we bring our heritage as a deep-seated body of Christ with a longstanding history in this area. As a denomination, we bring our heritage handed down from our founders. As followers of Christ, we bring our heritage following a charismatic group of empowered people who took on the roles of ministers – sharing the message and ministry of the resurrected Christ.

Our scripture lesson from Luke gives us a glimpse of our heritage as the body of Christ. Jesus appears to his disciples, and the scripture notes that Jesus opened their minds so they were finally able to fully understand the events that had

unfolded before them. The disciples must have been on an emotional roller coaster throughout their time with Jesus. They were on emotional highs through witnessing Jesus feeding the multitudes, comforting the outcasts of society, healing the sick, and welcoming the children. The disciples must have hit their pinnacle with the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Then they find their emotions plummet into despair as they watch Jesus placed on trial, tortured, and brutally killed. They are still in stunned disbelief when they are told Jesus had risen from the dead. When Jesus appears to them in this scripture, he even goes so far as to ask for something to eat so they can see he is not a ghost but living flesh and blood. The disciples are then charged as witnesses to these events – to go out and share the good news of the resurrected Christ.

Our Wesleyan heritage is an interesting one as well.

Churches over time had become more and more institutionalized. In many ways church leaders were more concerned with how to do church than to witness to the outcasts of society. John and Charles Wesley were well educated in religion, yet felt called to share the healing message of Christ to the poor and downtrodden. Hence, they went outside the church walls to take the message to the street, feeding the hungry, providing care for the sick, and bringing an inclusive message of hope to the many outcasts of their society. The rough terrain and difficult living conditions of America enticed them to send ministers to the frontier land. Names like Frances Asbury, Thomas Coke, and Robert Strawbridge (first Methodist class was established in 1762 in New Windsor, MD) are part of our joint heritage as United Methodists. These men were true pioneers, keeping with the philosophy of bringing the message

of Christ to where the people were. House churches were prevalent. The average size of a church at this time was the same as in Jesus' time – between 25-40 people on average. Circuit riders were common – ministers who would travel on horseback throughout a specific region administering the sacraments, performing baptisms and weddings, and providing pastoral care. When the preacher wasn't available, lay leaders would take charge of services and Bible studies.

I wanted to talk a little about Suzanna Wesley, mother of Charles and John Wesley, and 17 other children. Yes that is correct, 19 children. It has been said that the Methodist denomination was born on the lap of a mother, Suzanne Wesley.

SUZANNA WESLEY'S RULES FOR RAISING CHILDREN
(Author Unknown)

She spent one hour each day in prayer. That's seven hours each

week! She spent one hour per week with each child individually imparting spiritual life and wisdom. That's nineteen hours!

Suzanna Wesley over two hundred years ago formulated sixteen rules for raising children. They are still pretty good rules!

1. Eating between meals is not allowed.
2. As children, they are to be in bed by 8 pm.
3. They are required to take medicine without complaining.
4. They are to subdue their self-will so that they might be open to God's salvation.
5. Teach a child to pray as soon as he can speak.
6. Require all to be still during Family Worship.
7. Give them nothing they cry for, and only that which they ask for politely.
8. To prevent lying, punish no fault which is first confessed and repented.
9. Never allow a sinful act to go unpunished.
10. Never punish a child twice for a single offense.
11. Commend and reward good behavior.

12. Any attempt to please, even if poorly performed should be commended.

13. Preserve property rights, even in smallest matters.

14. Strictly observe all promises.

15. Require no daughter to work before she can read well.

16. Teach children to reverence God.

I think we can still see her wisdom in these rules. Our heritage is clearly based on placing God first in our lives and first in our households.

The congregation of Mount Tabor also has a rich heritage.

Some of you may be familiar with what I am about to read, but

I find it fascinating and hopefully worth hearing again. [History]

That is our heritage – from Christ and his followers, to the Methodist invasion of America to the establishment of our congregation here at Mount Tabor. I believe it is important to celebrate our heritage. Only when we know where we have

come from can we look toward our future. Faith in Christ has carried this congregation for over 125 years. Our faith has been tried and tested over the years. Yet we continue to exist as a welcoming body of Christ, our eyes fixed on God and our hands outstretched to our neighbors. [Vivian's poem]

I would like to close with one of Suzanna Wesley's prayers, which gives a glimpse of her faith:

“Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church, or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Your presence... May all things instruct me and afford me an opportunity of exercising some goodness and daily learning and growing toward Your likeness.”