

**I Believe!**  
**Romans 8: 14-17**  
**May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007**  
**Pentecost Sunday**  
**Rev. Steve McCoy**  
**First United Methodist Church**  
**Marquette, MI**

Today we conclude our series on Wesley and grace. And today we talk about the central tenant of our faith. Being Sanctified or moving on to perfection. This past Thursday was Aldersgate day, when Wesley had the experience of his heart “Strangely Warmed.” Where he felt the first time that God had saved him and he needed to stop trying but knew that God was there in the midst. Now strangely warmed was almost the title of this sermon, but instead it is I Believe, which is what he shouted in the street following the Bible study.

But today is also Pentecost Sunday. We heard in Acts about the birth of the church and the tongues of fire. I am reminded of my friend Robert who is a Baptist, and said that is the problem with you Methodists, I want people on fire for God, what is this strangely warmed stuff, that sounds like someone spilled coffee on his pants! Well we also have to remember he was English. But the important thing to remember is that no matter if we have felt strangely warmed, or on fire for God, or felt the movement of the Spirit etc. he felt that, and said I believe.

What clicked for Wesley, while he was studying Luther's commentary on Romans, was that he didn't have to keep trying so hard. For many of us, that can be the problem in our own lives. The guilt, the fear, the doubt. We have been lead to believe that to be an authentic Christian, one must have no doubts, and no fears, and that our lives will be perfect from then on, but Paul tells us that is not the case. If you are led by the Spirit of God, then you are a child of God. It is not what we do but instead God has adopted us because God in fact wants too. That's it. There is no way we can earn that Grace. What we tend to do and Wesley was guilty of that as well was to turn God's grace into a commodity. We also believe that it something that can be taken back. But in fact grace is always there, what is taken back is how we respond to it.

Paul says it clearly, here that we do not live in fear, we are reconciled in Christ. We on the other hand are the ones that separate ourselves when we do the things we should not. That is what it means to move on toward perfection. Ultimately that is what Wesley came to understand, is that this walk with God is a daily one and we will have High points like Aldersgate Street, we will have low points as he recalled after his failure in Georgia,

and most of the time we will have days in between. What we need to do is to continue to understand and walk in faith.

Erasmus, the famous Renaissance scholar, once told a classis story which was designed to emphasize how important it is that we take up the torch of Christ's ministry with great commitment. In the story, Jesus returns to heaven after His time on earth. The angels gather around Him to learn what all happened during His days on earth. Jesus tells them of the miracles, His teachings, His death on the cross, and His resurrection.

When He finishes his story, Michael the Archangel asks Jesus, But what happens now? Jesus answers, I have left behind eleven faithful disciples and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me. They will declare My message and express My love. These faithful people will build My church. But, responds Michael, What if these people fail? What then is Your other plan? And Jesus answers, I have no other plan!

Jesus is counting on you and you and you and me. But the good news is, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is here to melt us, mold us, fill us, and use us. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Moore, Sermon: What do You Do With Such a Gift?

As I watched the survivor finale a few weeks ago, one of the contestants questioned a finalist about his tactics in the game. He said he was asking him “as a Christian...” Not satisfied with the response, he said “I believe you are an immature Christian and I hope you will work on it.” I thought to myself at least he didn’t say he wasn’t a Christian. Ultimately though we are all immature Christians. We never stop trying to understand what God is doing in us and through us. There are many people on different stages of that journey of faith. That is what it means also to be moving on toward perfection. We may not get there in this life, that is the goal. But we must be earnestly striving after it.

Today is the day of Pentecost. On this day we mark the birth of the church. But on this day we also mark the rebirth of the church which happens again and again as we the people of God, adopted by God’s grace, are renewed and remade because we need that grace. We need that reminder that God is with us. So when we gather at this table today, and we remember and we take the bread and we drink the wine, we are reminded that we don’t need to try. We don’t nor cannot earn the grace that God gives us. Instead we accept that it is already there, we can choose to walk with Jesus knowing that we having nothing to fear for we are heirs with Christ. We can

always learn more, we can always do better, and because of God's grace when the world says no you can't God says, yes you can, because you believe.