

Good Friends

A WESLEYAN WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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Friends

There's a meme going around that says, "Nobody talks about Jesus' miracle of having 12 close friends in his 30's."

It's funny because it's true.

Friendship is rare commodity these days. The demands of life, the mobility and transiency of the modern era, the deepening divides along political, racial and socio-economic lines all make friendship difficult, to say the least.

As a society, we seem almost nostalgic about friendship, as if it is something we once knew but have somehow forgotten. Perhaps this is why *The Golden Girls* and *Friends* are some of the most streamed shows today. These stories about unlikely (and un-alike) friends staying together, being there for each other no matter what seem almost impossibly romantic to our modern ears.

At the same time, loneliness is being reported in record numbers. It seems that as our world gets bigger and bigger (numerically and in global access to information, news, relationships and resources) we are dividing ourselves into smaller and smaller groups (conservatives and liberals and democrats and republicans and rich and poor). As the walls between the groups climb higher and higher, we begin to feel more and more isolated in an ever expanding world.

These divisions, which at first may be survival instincts responding to a rapidly expanding world, actually turn out to be the very things that make us feel so alone.

Such is the liturgy of modernity. As soon as someone says something we don't like, we unfriend them. When we hurt someone else, we double down in our reason for hurting them rather than drawing near and saying, "I'm sorry."

We whittle our friendships down until our worlds get smaller and smaller, and we find ourselves more and more isolated...less and less friendly...with fewer and fewer friends.

Before long we have ultra conservatives and ultra liberals and ultra rich and ultra poor and, in the end, the only people we have room to be friends with is ourselves.

We are a society of lonely people watching shows about friends because we have this sneaking suspicion that friendship is something we have lost along the way.

This is particularly troublesome for those of us who follow Jesus.

Jesus makes friendship the theatre of salvation.

That is, friendship is how God has chosen to save the world.

We can't hear "friends" without hearing Jesus telling the disciples in John's Gospel, "I no longer call you servants, I now call you friends."

When God takes flesh in Jesus and calls us friends, God proclaims that it is not through hero worship, or political legislation or even through right rituals that God will save us.

This is nothing new, of course. The church mothers and fathers often called God "The Holy Friends." Looking at the life of Trinity, friendship began to seem divine, as though God's very self is comprised of an eternal friendship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the mystery of the incarnation is that in the person of Jesus, God has incorporated humanity into God's holy friendship.

Early on, Christians began to see themselves as people who had been befriended by God. By extension, they began to see friendship as the theatre of salvation. It was in our friendships that we found ourselves being saved. Holy friendships, like the divine friendship of the Trinity, became the most basic way of life among those who followed Jesus. They practiced friendships that were holy – that made them whole – and their friendships, like Trinity, always made room for the “other.”

Before long, Christians began to practice friendship in very particular ways with all sorts of people. According to Acts 2, they ate together, prayed together and learned together. Friendship was the only program we had; befriending others was our evangelism, our discipleship, and our worship. We ascribed worth to the way of Jesus by making friends with neighbors, strangers and even enemies and breaking bread with them.

In a very real way, friendship became a matter of life and death for those who were seeking to follow Christ.

It still is.

The church remembering how to practice friendship in a way that saves us has never been more critical than it is today. The church’s main mission in a world that has forgotten how to be friends is to be an embodied reminder of the friendship that we were made *from* (Trinity) and *for* (communion).

We are the ones who understand God to have befriended us in Jesus, not because we were perfect, not because we think like God or act like God, but because friendship is the very nature of God.

What follows is a model for practicing holy friendship. It is loosely based on John Wesley’s early Class Meeting practices, and in that sense this is the most Methodist thing we can do.

Remembering how to practice friendship methodically, religiously, as if our life depends on it is our call today.

May you practice friendship with people who think like you and people who don't.

May you practice friendship with people who live like you and people who don't.

May you practice friendship with people who look like you and people who don't.

May you practice friendship with people who vote like you and people who don't.

May you practice friendship with your neighbors and even with those people who try to make you their enemies.

May you practice Holy Friendship until all heaven breaks out.

What is a Common Table?

A Common Table is a group of 5-15 people who gather together weekly or every two weeks to share life and faith together, deepening their friendship with God, each other, and the world.

Why Common Tables?

Tov: Exactly As It Should Be

We were created from and for communion.

The opening chapters of Genesis say as much. There, in the beginning of our beginnings, language seems to strain in order to proclaim the truth of our genesis. "Then God (singular) said, 'Let us (plural) make humanity (singular) in our (plural) image (singular) to resemble us (plural) so that they (plural)..." and on it goes.

The complex truth that is held together by that dance between the singular and the plural is this: we were made for and from community. All of us. And each of us. We were made from and for communion.

And God's pronouncement over God's creation was that it was good. The Hebrew word is *tov*, which could be translated, "as it should be."

There, in the beginning, was God (singular and plural) who created us (singular and plural) in God's image, and in that communion, we were exactly as we should be.

Ordered Relationships

It doesn't take much research to find out that things are not *tov*. We are not connected to God, to one another, or to creation in ways that we should be.

This is not a new problem (see chapter 3 of Genesis) nor is it unique to modernity.

Wesley saw the disordered nature of Industrializing England, and began to form groups of people who would "watch over each other in love." This was based on the notion that we could not be made whole again without each other.

Wesley created methods for people to live in communion with each other through bands, classes, and societies. Wesley, reading the story of Jesus and the early church, began to order his relationships to look like those of Jesus. He created bands (3 people) classes (12 people) societies (70 people) and parish (crowds). These relationships each had disciplines which worked together to celebrate that communion which we pray for at the communion table when we ask Christ to make us "One with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to all the world."

These ordered relationships were the primary means through which the people called Methodist practiced friendship together. This is how they sought to be made whole, and to spread holiness (wholeness) throughout the world.

This is the genesis of our family story as the people called Methodist.

Sold

Like any family, part of our story is painful.

There are the humorous things that we can look back on now and smile at (like John's being kicked out of Georgia). But there are more painful parts, like our division over slavery, women's ordination, and civil rights, to name a few. Each division brings pain and a chance for reconciliation, which we have experienced as well.

This is not about those parts of our story.

The hunger pains that we feel can be traced back to about the turn of the last century.

Toward the end of the 19th and into the early 20th century, Methodism was thriving. Our liturgy was taught and kept, our cell groups were central to who we were, and mission ran throughout all we did. To be Methodist was to share in this common experience of worship, discipleship, and mission.

It was thriving, but it wasn't easy.

Accountable discipleship was hard (it always is). Cell groups were a struggle, both to equip and encourage cell group leaders and to engage participants. Getting people to come to cell groups to practice holy friendship and helping them grow in grace took a huge effort on everyone's part.

Even scheduling was difficult. This was during the Industrial Revolution, so time was quickly becoming money. As industry made more and more demands on the lives of our great-great-grandparents, getting them to come to another church event during the week was becoming onerous.

Meanwhile, Sunday School had begun as a social justice movement in industrial England. People like the evangelical Anglican (Methodist?) Robert Raikes and Anne and Hannah Ball noticed that children were working in factories all week and were not in school learning how to read and write and do basic math. The only time they were

not at work was, of course, Sunday morning. So, they devised a plan to teach the children their school work on Sunday. What would they read? Well, they had all of these Bibles laying around, so why not start there? Thus, Sunday School was born.

And then someone had an idea...a wonderfully awful idea.

Since class meetings were so hard, and accountable discipleship seemed to be keeping so many people away from the Methodist Church, why not just let them come to Sunday School and learn the basics there? Then, if they want to know more, of course, they can always join a cell group later.

The problem is that children learning essential life skills in order to find a way out of crushing poverty was the goal of Sunday School, not discipleship. Curriculum-based discipleship is never how people learn to follow Jesus. It's by living with Jesus together, learning how to pray together, listening to each other, asking for forgiveness from each other that we watch over one another in love. It was in cell groups that we learned how to ask and answer the fundamental question, "How is it with your soul?" We did accountable discipleship through laity trained in a method of teaching others how to follow Jesus. This is our family story. This is our DNA. This is our brier patch. It was in cell groups – not Sunday School – that our family came into being.

But somewhere along the way, we traded accountable discipleship, as embodied in holy friendship, for Sunday School.

Looking back, it seems like we traded our birthright for a cup of stew. And some 150 years later, we are starving. Sunday School wasn't all we sold out for...

Around this same time, Methodists were still big into field preaching, especially in America. We loved revivals and camp meetings, where we would sing our best music and hear some of our best sermons. These camp meetings were designed to help people find their way into faith, into church, into covenant and communion.

And people seemed to love it, too. Huge crowds gathered to hear the likes of Harry Hosier and Francis Asbury preach. Their ability to proclaim God's grace and invite people to receive that grace was exciting and relevant and garnered a huge response.

Meanwhile, our Sunday liturgy seemed a little out of touch. It was basically the Anglican liturgy for worship (as Wesley insisted on maintaining the historic liturgy of the church) and, of course, included communion when an authorized person was there to preside.

And then someone had an idea...another wonderfully awful idea.

Since people loved the excitement of revival, and teaching people what the liturgy of the church meant was so hard, why not drop the Sunday liturgy and just bring the revival to Sunday morning?

And just like that, the fullness of our liturgy, which shaped discipleship and mission and helped us grow in grace in communion with all the saints, was gone. Communion as a regular means of grace was de-emphasized. Our tables were cleared of bread. Our chalices were put back in the cupboard.

We traded the feast of liturgy for the fast food of revivalism.

Hungry

We are the great-great-great grandchildren of the Wesleyan movement, and we are hungry.

As grafted-in heirs of the promise given through the Prophet Isaiah, we are hungry for a richer feast than that which has been laid before us.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are hungry for the promise of living bread.

As pastors, we lead people who are hungry for more than fast food spirituality and superficial relationships.

As laity, we are hungry for a living experience of grace instead of another explanation of how salvation works.

As heirs of the Wesleyan movement, we are hungry for the feast of liturgy, discipleship, and mission.

Common Tables begins with this deep hunger.

It is an attempt to engage in the prophetic work of remembering who we are through the gift of our familial story.

What follows is the attempt of some Methodists seeking to remember what it means to do accountable liturgical discipleship.

I pray, by God's grace, that we will find our memories jogged, that this moment of ecclesial amnesia in which we find ourselves, will be overcome by divine anamnesis (Greek for "remember"), and that we, like our ancestors, will discover that best of all, God is with us.

Reflection Questions

What relationships in your life are closest to being *tov*?

What relationships in your life need to be created or recreated for you to be *tov*?

Who taught you to follow Jesus?

What was the context/venue of that relationship(s)?

What is the content of that relationship(s)?

Who are you teaching to follow Jesus?

What is the context/venue of that relationship(s)?

What is the content of that relationship(s)?

Response Prompts

Reach out to someone who helped you grow into a Christian to check in and say thank you.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving for that person/people.

The Four Legs of the Table

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to the prayers.” Acts 2:42

It is telling that immediately following the event at Pentecost, the disciples go home.

One would have expected a different schedule of the day. The Holy Spirit was just poured out on all flesh, the confusion of Babel was undone with the understanding of parousia, Jesus was back from the dead, and all of Cæsar and the Temple’s power was being undone.

What’s next? Do we storm the palace? Sit in at the Temple?

According to Acts, we went home.

The Gospel became performed and celebrated around our dining room tables as we grew in our communion with God, each other and the world.

Ultimately, this is what made the early church grow so quickly while still underground in Cæsar’s empire. This practice is what allowed the fabric of society to hold together when Cæsar’s empire crumbled. When the tables of empire fall apart, communion tables prove to be built on solid rock.

What makes life around these tables common is that we all share specific practices. While each Common Table attends to these practices in their own way, it is understood that every Common Table will attend to these practices in some way.

Since the very first day of the church, Christians gathered together around the table to celebrate what God was doing in their lives, encourage each other in the faith and share what they had received from God together. As we read in Acts 2:42, the first Christians devoted themselves to 1) The Apostles' Teachings, 2) The Community, 3) Their Shared Meals and 4) Their Prayers.

These four basic practices are the legs on which Common Tables stand.

1. The Apostles' Teaching

Each Common Table is a place where the Lectionary texts for the week are read and discussed.

The standard pattern for daily prayer, which all people from the Table share is:

Monday and Tuesday: Old Testament Reading

Wednesday and Thursday: New Testament Reading

Friday and Saturday: Gospel Reading

2. Community

Being present is a big part of life around The Common Table. Devoting ourselves to showing up is one of the most basic, yet most profound aspects of table life. Being devoted to being present with one another is an irreplaceable practice of the table.

3. Shared Meals

Eating for Christians is a theological act. It is a sharing in how God has provided for us. It is an offering and reception of hospitality. It is opening our homes and ourselves up for others to come and share in life with us. The best practices section of this document can help guide how your table shares meals together.

4. Prayers

Sharing together in deeper communion with God is the heart of Common Tables. This is the place to encourage each other in the practice of prayer (paying attention to what God is doing in us and around us), engage in the discipline of prayer (using our shared daily liturgy, www.commonprayer.net), and hold one another accountable to being faithful to what we are hearing God say as we grow in our shared life of prayer.

Further, praying through the lectionary texts daily and then discussing them weekly deeply enriches the worshipful life of the broader community.

Reflection Questions

Which leg of the table comes most naturally to you?

Which leg of the table is most difficult for you?

How do you choose what scripture to pray daily?

What does your daily prayer practice look like?

Response Prompts

Write a brief teaching piece for someone, sharing with them how you pray.

The Four Circles of the Common Table

Ordered and open relationships allow us to have particularity of friendship, which is really the only kind of friendship there is. That is to say that specificity of people is critical in order for relationships to be authentic. In the same way that marriage demands that you specifically be in relationship with a particular person (you can't be

vaguely married to no one in particular) covenantal relationship for the purpose of discipleship demands specificity and particularity.

This is the beginning of having our relationships ordered like Trinity. The particularities of who we are in communion with is critical.

And yet, we also are called to have our relationships set up openly so that we have room to invite others in. This is at the heart of Rublev's famous 15th-century icon of the Holy Friends seen here.

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg/1024px-Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg>

INSERT IMAGE OF RUBLEV'S TRINITY ICON HERE

Notice how their relationship with each other is honored in the way they bow to one another. And there is an open space where the viewer is looking in that clearly is intended to allow room for someone new to join the table.

Trinity's relationship is ordered and open.

Holy friendships are, too.

Unholy friendships are disordered and cliquish.

When we are *toiv*, our relationships are ordered and open as God's relationship eternally embodies.

This is a model for our relationships. As people created in God's image, we seek to relate to one another as God relates to Godself and to us.

Bands, Classes, Societies, and Parish

Our Wesleyan communion is a participation in the life of Trinity.

As such, we seek to order our relationships like God's, and specifically to follow the way of Jesus as he restores the image of God among us by establishing ordered and open relationships.

Wesley, in reading the life of Christ, replicated the circles of relationship of Jesus in his own life.

Those closest to Jesus (Peter, James, and John) are with him at both his lowest and his best moments. This inner circle of three becomes what Wesley calls Bands.

The next circle of friendship in Jesus' life are the slightly larger group of twelve disciples. They are devoted to sharing life with each other while following Jesus. They are some of Jesus' closest friends, but they are not quite as close as the inner three. This circle becomes what Wesley calls Classes.

The third circle in Jesus' life are the seventy. These followers are in Jesus' social circle and have committed to joining Jesus in mission and ministry. These are the ones who are sent out to share in and extend his ministry in the world (Luke 10). They are walking with Jesus, but are not as close as his twelve disciples or the three in his inner circle. Wesley calls a group of about seventy a Society.

The final circle in Jesus' life is the crowd. They are sometimes hungry (Matthew 14) sometimes amazed (Luke 9) sometimes joyful (Matthew 21) and sometimes angry (Mark 15). You never know what you are going to get with a crowd. Wesley would call this circle a Parish.

As Wesley looked at his life, he noticed that his energy and time was not ordered like Jesus'. Jesus spent most of his time with the three in his inner circle and the twelve disciples; he seemed to give the crowds as little energy and attention as possible. Wesley realized that in contrast, he was spending almost all of his time and energy on a faceless crowd of people, while neglecting to nurture friendships of depth and worth with an inner circle or group of twelve.

In an attempt to be more like Jesus, Wesley began to meet with people who would watch over each other's soul with love. This eventually became the method of Methodism.

To be a Methodist was to seek to order your relationships in this method: having a three, a twelve, a seventy, and a parish, all for the purpose of personal and social holiness.

This was so much a part of who we were, in fact, that in order to receive communion as a Methodist, you had to bring your ticket from your class meeting, proving that you were participating in relationships with others in this way. Everyone was welcome at the communion table, but to accept our open invitation, you had to be open to creating and cultivating relationships of depth and worth in the way of Jesus.

You had to want holy friendships.

The Four P's of Invitation: How is a Common Table Formed?

Invitations to the table are always christological. That is, we seek to invite like the one who invites us.

Before inviting others into this practice of friendship, we would do well to notice how Jesus invites us into friendship and be formed by his way. There are four key components to Jesus' invitation. For us to be able to extend the invitation of friendship of Jesus, we must ensure that are invitations are:

Prayerful

It is not accidental that Jesus goes away to pray and fast before he calls his disciples. Before we invite anyone into our lives, it should be covered in prayer, contemplation, and fasting.

Spend some time in prayer and fasting (either from food or electronics) and ask God to bring to your attention people in your life with whom you are called to cultivate a holy friendship.

Personal

It is a pattern within the call stories in scripture that God uses the name of the called-on person twice. When God invites, it is specific and personal, not broad and impersonal.

After praying and fasting for God to reveal who you are called to deepen your friendships with, talk to them personally about what you are seeking to create with them. These invitations must be personal and rooted in prayer, not impersonally offered as a new program of the church (i.e. printed in the bulletin, "New Group Starting: email yourname@email.com for more information).

Purposeful

Further, Jesus does not make the invitation to join him in communion ambiguous or clouded with uncertainty. When he calls us, it is always with the clear purpose of joining him at the table in the mission of God.

The invitation is never a "bait and switch" (i.e. "I think we should have dinner, and oh, by the way, I'm going to read scripture.") Be honest with those you are inviting with your desire to deepen your friendship with God, them and creation and how you are hoping to do that.

Persistent

Finally, God's call is persistent. When God begins to call someone, that call does not stop until either the person answers or they wind up in a deep dark place (like Jonah). Even there, in the belly of the whale, the call chases us. When we invite in the name of Christ, we will need to prepare to be as persistent as the One whom St. Augustine calls "the Hound of Heaven."

If someone defers or declines your invitation, do not be dismayed or discouraged. The call of God is often delayed or denied. Simply continue to pray about who God would have you invite into this pattern of living, and repeat the steps above.

Reflection Questions

Who are your 3, 12, 70 and Crowds?

Who does God bring to mind for you to invite into these spaces in your life?

Response Prompts

Schedule a time to fast and pray about who you are called to invite to share in communion with you.

The Four Seasons of the Table: The Life Cycle and Rhythm of Common Tables

The liturgy of the church is based on the rhythm of the creative life of God. In the major creation stories of the Bible, we see God creating life according to the same rhythm. God gathers things together, God proclaims new life, creation responds to

God's call, God feeds creation, and then God sends the new creation to bear fruit in the world.

This is the rhythm of the life of God.

This is the rhythm of a life of a disciple of Jesus who is seeking to be made whole. We seek to be people who gather, listen, respond, receive and share, and lives on purpose with God.

This is the rhythm of the liturgy of the church, and this is the rhythm of Common Tables. Each Common Table seeks to be aware of the season they are in, and align themselves with what God does in that season in order to be in rhythm with the creative work of God.

1. The Season of Gathering (Months 1-2)

Calendaring

During your first or second meeting, have everyone bring their family and work calendars to the table. Decide on a time that works best for everyone present to gather on a regular (every week, or every other week) basis. (Note, sharing our calendars with each other is one of the most vulnerable and counter-cultural things you will do together. It allows everyone to see how busy, or not busy, everyone else is, and re-orders our time toward each other. Many tables say that this is the hardest part of their work together!)

Covenant

The group writes a covenant to attend to the four legs of the Table. Make it plain. When will you meet? What will you do when you meet? How long will the group seek

to be together? Answering these questions early greatly helps the group function as it moves through the four seasons together.

Sharing Stories

The bulk of this season is spent sharing our stories with each other. Each person should have one gathering where their story is the only business on the table. Each person should share their story, as the group listens with one ear to the one sharing their story, and the other ear turned toward God.

2. The Season of Proclamation and Response (Months 3-6)

Daily Prayer

Prayer is paying attention. The shared discipline of prayer is practicing paying attention in a common direction and in a common way. One way to begin to be devoted to prayer together is by having each person attend to a common practice, such as a morning routine of prayer, using a common resource, such as, Common Prayer (www.commonprayer.net)

Listening

Journaling is a shared discipline which many participants engage in order to more actively listen for what God is calling them to do as they pray. Many Tables bring their journals with them to their gatherings as a way of sharing with others what they are hearing. For more information on the practice of journaling, please see:

Responding

The goal of prayer is to help the community share the practices of listening to what God is saying and encourage each other to be responsive to what they are hearing.

During the season of Proclamation and Response, the table encourages each other and holds each other accountable to actively responding to what they are hearing God call them to do.

The Season of Great Thanksgiving (Months 7-8)

Gratitude

During this season, we intentionally give thanks for the gifts we have received from each other. Much like the season of Gathering, each time we gather, one or two people offer thanks for something they have received from each person at the table.

Seeing

If you want to see Jesus, you might want to start by looking around the table.

According to the Gospel writers, that's where they saw Jesus most of the time. He was so well known for hanging around tables that when we were looking for charges to level against him, the best we could come up with was that he was a drunkard and a glutton (Luke 7:34). In the resurrection, they almost didn't recognize him. That is, until he showed up at the table and their eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35).

The Gospels are also clear that the table is not just a place for seeing Jesus.

The table is also the place for seeing *like* Jesus.

Who has enough? Who doesn't? Who has a place? Who is excluded? Who was invited but refused to come? Who snuck into the feast because they were so hungry for food and community that they would even eat the crumbs if they were allowed?

If you ever want to see like Jesus, you might want to start by looking around the table. Begin to pray for Jesus to help you see who is missing from your table life, and begin to pray for them by name as you prepare to invite them to the table.

Sharing

Based on who you have seen together in the previous season, each table begins to invite new people into the communion they share. During this season the table grows, and sometimes doubles in size. As members of the table see and invite others to join them in this practice, soon the gatherings feel too big. This is how you know it is time to enter the final season of the table.

The Season of Sending Forth (Months 9-10)

Blessing

For the last time, each person hosts the Table as the group gathers. This time, it is to name gifts they see in each other and to pray for those gifts to be shared with others. As each person hosts, take time to offer written blessings for them and their household.

Sending Forth

Finally, each Table bands together (groups of two or three households) and sends each other out to start new Tables with those you have seen and invited to the feast.

Asking For A Friend

"If you go out looking for friends, you're going to find they are very scarce. If you go out to be a friend, you'll find them everywhere." — Zig Ziglar

At its most basic level, church is about becoming better friends.

It is about becoming better friends with God.

It is about becoming better friends with our neighbors.

It is about becoming better friends with creation.

God help us, we often forget this. In the busyness of trying to teach Sunday School and preach sermons and practice anthems and meet budgets, church can become quite unfriendly. Sometimes, we can even fall into the trap of trying to grow our churches for the sole purpose of filling our Sunday School rooms, our pews and our choir lofts. The goal is to grow, at all costs, and to do that, we work ourselves into a frenzy trying to get other people interested in our programs so that they can come and help us continue our programs.

Sometimes, our growing at all costs becomes the church's agenda.

But here's the thing: the only agenda of friendship is love.

And friendship is how God is smuggling love into the world.

I write this not because I am an expert in friendship. Ask anyone who has ever tried to be friends with me, and they will quickly tell you I am far from the perfect friend.

I am writing this because this is what I need from the church. I am asking the church to remind me how to be a friend. I am asking you, the church, to show me what it means to embody the kind of friendship that Jesus is always talking about when we get together to read and pray and sing and preach. I am asking the church to teach me how to be a friend of God's, of my neighbor, of creation.

I am asking the Body of Christ to lead me in the work of being perfected in friendship.

Perhaps the best blessing we ever offer in the church is the one we offer at the end of weddings. After watching a couple declare that they will befriend each other day in and day out for the rest of their lives, the pastor looks at the congregation and says, "Bear witness to the love of God in this world, so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends."

May that blessing take flesh in the people called Methodist. May the world find in us generous friends.