

**Text:** [James 2:1-7, 14-17 \(CEB\)](#)  
**Date:** April 21, 2024  
**Title:** “Genuine Faith”  
**Theme:** Genuine faith is faith put into action.

# 1

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is supposed to have said:

“The church changes the world not by making converts, but by making disciples”

Now, I’m not 100% sure this is a real Wesley quote – I don’t think it is

But it DOES capture something important about his understanding of faith

The world is not changed when people believe what Jesus said

The world is changed when people do what Jesus did

We’ve had a lot of new folks coming to Church, joining us online lately – which is very exciting

And some of you grew up in traditions other than Methodism

So I know this question is on a lot of your hearts: “what’s different about this tradition than, say, being Catholic, or Lutheran?”

I often say that the difference between branches of the Church is less about what we believe and more about what we choose to emphasize

I think if you want to know what we emphasize, this would be a good place to start: Methodism is about commitment to faith AND action

We're starting a new series this week called "Living Faith" that's about understanding faith from a United Methodist perspective

Using scriptures from the book of James, which is about the most practical book of the Bible there is

## 2

I particularly wanted to preach these messages during this season

As our denomination prepares for and experiences our General Conference

Which is a gathering of elected delegates from all across the world

Who will vote on matters affecting the future of our Church  
Next weekend, I'll be away as Kate and I attend the conference

– not as delegates but as observers

Because this is a big deal

We've not had this meeting since 2019

The 2020 session was postponed multiple times due to the pandemic as well as travel and visa issues for delegates outside the US

And today, in the US our denomination is about 25% smaller – both in terms of membership and the number of congregations – than it was in 2019

Many traditionalist congregations have departed, sensing a likely shift in the Church's official position on same-sex weddings and LGBTQ+ clergy

Though we as a congregation have voted to align with the Reconciling Ministries Network, which advocates for full inclusion, it's important to note that the UMC has not yet changed its policy

But whether we'll actually see that shift at this General Conference is unclear

A lot is still up in the air

Regardless of the outcome, I want to assure you that my position as a pastor and our commitment as a congregation remains consistent:

We want to welcome and bless all people

Because faith AND action – that's what's needed

### **3**

In the early days of the Methodist movement, back in the 1700s

John Wesley and his brother Charles brought together a few friends

Who were studying for the priesthood at Oxford

On some level, what they did was nothing new  
It was an age-old formula that the Church needs to re-  
discover every now and again  
A small group began to pray and study scripture together  
They'd meet a three or four days a week (remember they  
were students, so they had time) and they'd check in  
on how the others were doing spiritually

In time, they began not only to pray together, but serve  
together

Faith AND action

They would pool their money to give to the poor

Visit people who were in jail

They cared first FOR EACH OTHER, and in doing that  
found the strength to go and care FOR OTHERS

There's a great line in one of Wesley's sermons – and this  
IS a real quote – where he says:

“Whatever religion can be concealed is not Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

## 4

This is the perspective of James 2

Imagine a hungry person shows up to church

And you say, “You haven't eaten today? I'm sorry to hear  
that.”

“God bless you, have a good week –

and be sure to come back next Sunday for another  
amazing message!”

What good is that?

I remember one time, many years ago  
It was church conference season, and I was serving a  
church in North Jersey  
We gathered with our District Superintendent for the  
conference on some random Tuesday night  
And part of the meeting was worship  
I remember we had some props for the service that night –  
items we had set up on the altar

The theme was all about abundance, and so we had fruits  
and vegetables, and all kinds of food on the altar  
And wouldn't you know it, a guy I had never met before  
showed up at the church  
He saw the lights on and so he wandered in  
He sat through the service and the meeting, too – which I  
thought was strange – so afterward I went up to him  
I introduced myself and asked, “So, what brings you here  
tonight?”

He said, “Well, I was wondering if you could help me...I  
thought maybe you might have a food pantry or  
something like that.  
I saw folks were here, and I know this church cares about  
helping people, so I thought I'd take a chance.”  
I said, “We don't normally have too many pantry items  
laying around, but tonight we just happened to have  
this food we set up for the worship service.  
You're absolutely welcome to all of it.”  
So we bagged everything up, and he left – super  
appreciative

I never saw him again – it was just this random meeting  
But I just could not help but think, that's more than a  
coincidence  
God brought him here for a reason

## 5

In the words of the scripture:  
“Faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.”  
We don't BELIEVE our way into life-change and into  
world-change  
We have to ACT on it  
Christians are called to DO the things Jesus did

What did Jesus do?  
Well, he loved  
He taught  
He fed  
He healed  
He gave  
And he for-gave

He built a community of people committed to ministry  
And he practiced peace  
He took peacemaking so far, in fact,  
that rather than take up arms against his enemies  
He willingly gave up his life  
So that we might find peace with God

Faith is not meant to be a thing we put into a box  
And get out on Sunday mornings when we walk into the  
door of the church

Genuine faith, life-changing and world-changing faith  
Requires something from us everyday  
Believing is great, but it's not enough  
The world isn't changed by converts, but by disciples  
The people who put what Jesus taught into action

“Whatever religion can be concealed is not Christianity.”

## 6

I want to leave you with a couple questions to consider  
this week:

First, what if folks in Medford came to know this Church  
not just for what we believe

– which we advertise very plainly –

What if instead people knew us for what we do?

What would YOU want us to be known for?

I want to hear from you about that

Then, I want you to take that same question and apply it to  
yourself:

Can people look at me and see a reflection of Jesus' life?

In other words, if someone watched you this week, would  
anyone catch you doing some of the same things he  
did?

Would they see you:

Loving

Teaching

Feeding

Healing

Giving

For-giving

Would they see you building a community and investing in relationships?

Would they see you working to bring peace in your workplace, in your school, in your family?

“Faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity.”

The world doesn’t change because we believe what Jesus said

The world changes when we do what Jesus did

That’s genuine faith

Amen.

**By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-24-upon-our-lords-sermon-on-the-mount-4>