

Abducted by God

The other day I met a pastor who is leading an animated congregation that is reaching out to its community to invite and to serve. He is energetic, intelligent, impassioned, and profoundly committed to bearing witness to God's grace and the joy of living as Jesus' disciples. Above all else he wants people to know that God loves them and is a reliable presence in all of creation now and forever.

While he gratefully affirms the church that nurtured him, he fervently believes that people need new experiences as entryways to receive and respond to God's love, and to worship and to grow in faith and service. When others in the church as an institution are reluctant or unable to understand and embrace his unconventional methods, he is not angry but saddened, not condemning but descriptive, not immobilized but emphatically determined to pursue an alternate course.

I ask him how he came to have such conviction and to embrace with such freedom alternative ways to nurture people in their relationship with God. He answers: "I was abducted by God!"

Here is a passionate, educated, and traditioned servant leader with a warmed heart and a passion for bidding all people to come to know God and live holy lives. His intensity, his humble but zealous confidence, his unrelenting determination, his willingness to see and fill "new wineskins," and the expansiveness of his aspirations, make him not very easy to talk with—nor, I suspect, to live and work with!

And that brings us to our interest in, and affection for, Mr. Wesley. After we work through the competing and blurred perceptions of the man, we are nevertheless confronted with a most complex and compelling personality. He was shaped by tradition, propelled by the Spirit, widely read, richly tutored, fired-up by extraordinary personal encounters and life experiences, and haunted by self-doubt. He was also driven to propel a movement that has helped to change the world and seeks to be a portal through which God is working even now. This was one incredible fellow! And, I suspect, not very easy to live and work with.

And so as we revisit the heart, mind, and soul of Mr. Wesley, giving thanks for his life and witness, we might ask: Is our greatest fascination with the history his life reveals? Or is it rather with the challenge and possibilities for being the community that fosters reformation and scriptural holiness that his legacy entrusts to us?

Neil M. Alexander

President and Publisher

The United Methodist Publishing House

**Above all else
he wants people
to know that
God loves them
and is a reliable
presence in all
of creation now
and forever.**