

August 6th

Methodists are often said to be close to Lutherans. While there are theological divides of prevenient grace versus Lutheran complete grace, both groups love a life lived in grace alone. Both understand God's foreknowledge of the elect but no double election. Both honor traditional worship. In some ways, the Wesleyan movement was somewhat Anglican/Lutheranism electrified by a strong sense of the Holy Spirit and an urge towards Christian service.

Francis Asbury was born near Birmingham, England in 1745. The family was poor, just the kind of people who were often Methodist converts. Francis was apprenticed to a blacksmith. His mother was very religious and surrounded the family with prayer, scripture reading and hymns. That was enough to get Francis labeled the insulting nickname, "Methodist Parson", by his friends. In those days Methodism was new and strange to the English. At the age of 13 he began asking his mom a lot of questions about what she believed, so she arranged for a friend of the family to take him to Wednesbury where there was a weekly-meeting Methodist congregation. He was impressed with the spontaneity of their worship, in contrast to his home Anglican church. He found a friend and they prayed together secretly in a barn loft. It was at this point that God's salvation seemed to go from theoretical to intensely personal filled with excitement. He began to go about sharing his faith in various venues in the afterhours of his blacksmithing. Hammer by day; share faith by night. By the age of 20 he was ministering full-time in various preaching assignments on a traveling circuit.

Then came August 7, 1771. John Wesley gave a call for Methodist preachers to go to America. Asbury answered, "Here am I, send me!" Ironically, John and Charles Wesley had gone to Georgia to witness to the Cherokees in the 1730's but had given up. They weren't used to the tough life of sleeping on the ground and hiking miles in the woods to reach another village. Toughness has been a litmus test for many missionaries throughout the years. In America, there were only about 300 Methodists, far flung along the east coast. Asbury was chosen to be one of two superintendents of this new denomination. He had ideas. He was rugged. He could saddle a horse and keep its hooves in good condition, right? And so he rode off to become an itinerant preacher who humorously called himself bishop. He defined the role of a traveling preacher riding a circuit of towns. His motto was, "Go into every kitchen and shop; address all, aged and young, on the salvation of their souls." Camp meetings, revivals, even conventions were held under tents by the Methodists. For 45 years, he rode over 300,000 miles crossing the Appalachians over 60 times. He literally camped out for 45 years. By the time he died in 1816, the denomination had spread to every state and counted 214,000 members. Asbury really was called bishop by then and he ordained over 4000 ministers. He taught the expanding USA to adopt new church planting styles. Tents were used by the Second Great Awakening (1795-1820) that made Kentucky through Oklahoma the "Bible Belt". The LCMS used circuit rider pastors to serve churches through Missouri, and when a young Pastor Wetzel went to establish worship among the cavalry of Ft. Riley, Kansas, along the Smoky Hill River, he began riding east and west to found four other churches within 30 miles that became the nucleus of the

first Missouri Synod churches in Kansas in 1867. Virtually the same method was used in Nebraska and the Dakotas. So now you know how LCMS got the name “circuit” to designate churches in an area.