

I can think of no more appropriate way to honor this occasion than to offer our homage to the noble men who founded Methodism—such saintly men as the Wesleys, Coke, Asbury, Robert Strawbridge, George Whitefield, Nathaniel Perigau, Philip Catch,—to name but a few—righteous, God-fearing men who laid the foundation of a great Christian institution and contributed so much to the spiritual development of this great nation.

These were men who believed in the truth and pursued it relentlessly, oftentimes at great sacrifice to themselves. They were men who devoted their lives to Christian ideals and Christian principles, in search always of the noble and the righteous, and disdaining the cheap, the vain, the artificial. These were men who dedicated themselves to their families, their communities, their church, their nation, acknowledging that without these institutions of society a Christian civilization could not long exist. These were men who loved their neighbors, as they were taught to do by the Savior whose words they spread abroad in the manner and in the spirit of the first evangelists. These were men who respected the belief and the sacraments of others but who held firmly to their own concepts of Christian obligation and to their own manner of worshipping God. There was something of the simplicity and the nobility of the Man of Nazareth in the character and the bearing of these new disciples of Christ. And also, there was something Christlike in the courage and the determination of these men who sought to breathe a new life and a new spirit in the Church of Christ.

We hear and talk much nowadays about the evils of our age—about such evils as materialism, false values, lack of purpose. We are gravely concerned with the behavior of the people, with crime, delinquency, poverty, conflict, turmoil. In such circumstances, it behooves us, I think, to turn back to the “faith of our fathers,” in whose minds was the wisdom of the ages and in whose souls were the virtues of civilized mankind.

The rise of Methodism in the new world roughly parallels the rise of the United States of America as a free and independent nation, and the early Methodists, with their abiding love of liberty and justice, were a strong influence in the growth and development of our country. The origin of the liberty we cherish as Americans was expressed well by the greatest of all Methodists, John Wesley, the founder of our beloved church. In a message he sent to Americans in the first year of their freedom, Wesley said: “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith God so strangely made you free.” We Methodists know that the freedom we enjoy as Americans was divinely inspired and divinely endowed, and