

## ONE MISSION

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Saturday Plenary, September 3

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Conference Video: <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/wmc2016-videos/Wmc16-satconfplenary-v2-1.m4v>

It was In the midst of the Civil War in Sierra Leone, as I referenced this morning being in the refugee camps. But in the midst of that civil war, I was in a makeshift camp of people who were amputees. Now the word amputee is really a sanitized version for the way people were literally hacked. And some of you Sierra Leoneans may be in this audience today, you know what I am talking about. I was in that camp, I heard the stories here in the States but there's a whole different piece that comes to you when you are with the people. When they're touching you, when you're hearing the stories of how literally their bodies and their souls have been shattered.

I was in that camp, with hundreds and hundreds of people and I was with a Washington Post reporter. And he was overwhelmed by what he was seeing there. I was too. And as everyone was trying to talk all at the same time and all the stories were going, this man came up and he said the rebel literally tried cut off his face and you could see that. And a mother brought her 6-week-old baby that they just chopped the baby's arm off. It was indiscriminate: it didn't matter the age, the gender, anyone and everyone. And finally this slight woman made her way to the front. Everyone got quiet and she started talking. She said, the rebels came, they grabbed my 5-year-old daughter. I grabbed her back, like any mother would do. And then they took my 5-year-old daughter and they put her arm on the root of a cotton tree and with the machete they chopped it off. And then they took me, they put my arm on the root of a cotton tree and chopped it off. There they stood with no arms bellow their left elbows. That reporter was so kind and gracious and took pictures and listened more to their story. And that day, my heart was broken and walking back to our vehicle, that reporter said to me, "Jo Anne, this is the worst evil I have ever seen. What are you going to do about it?" And I remember that day responding, going through my mind, we didn't begin to have the human resources or the capital resources for anything like this. I responded back to him, "Only God can do something." And then, as I began to ponder evil, began to think of those words that Paul wrote to the Romans, that little fledgling church in Rome. And he said these words: "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." And then I began to ponder more. That reporter and I didn't talk because we were both pondering in our minds. And then I began to ponder, wait a minute, that was in Rome, the church in Rome, that was a post-Pentecost church. Pentecost had happened, and now Paul even in that passage, repeats what Jesus says about feeding your enemies, doing good to your enemies, etc. and then says "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." And then, I began to think about Pentecost. I began to think about that church in Rome. I began to remember that some of those people that were at Pentecost, Junia being one, went back to Rome and was a church planter as we would call this day. In a city, the most powerful city in the world at that time and the most pagan city and most secular city. In fact, philosophers taught at that time, that if you showed any kind of mercy you had a character flaw. Now think about that. In our own culture mercy is looked upon as gracious but I'm afraid in many places is not anymore. And then as you began to look at all the things that were happening in Rome at that time with no value for life and handicapped children thrown away, etc., etc. And how the church responded in not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good. And it's not just good deeds, it's God, is the power of God. It's a transformation, the transforming power of God that does that. But then I began to backup in my mind even more. And I began to look at John the 14th chapter. And Jesus is having a conversation with Philip. And he says these

words and I want them up on the screen at this time because I think, as I looked at the ping pong balls this morning in the first session, I thought, "I think this is what it's about." Read this aloud with me. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

Greater things. In this passage, the context of it, let's back up a bit, in John the 14th chapter the context of these words is in a conversation that Jesus is having with Phillip. If you remember, I like to think of Philip as a good follower of Jesus, he was faithful. In fact, in the first chapter of John we find that Philip was the one who said to Nathaniel, "Nathaniel, that's the Messiah." And Nathaniel, we struggle with this one, Nathaniel says, "well, where is he from?" I'm not gonna follow anybody unless they're from the right place, from the right family, you know. And he said, "well he's from Nazareth." "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" How many of us sitting here today can say, can anything good come out of that family? Can any good come out of that country? Can any good come out of that city? But we have a God who redeems and a God who transforms and I am here to say God had a dream for you when you were born and many times we live out the script, the story that has been given to us. You can't be this, you can't do this, and when God begins to intersect your life He said no, I have another story for you. As we begin to follow Jesus Christ we begin to live out the story he had for us when we were born. And that's what happened to Nathaniel at that time. And we know that later, Nathaniel believed but it was Phillip who already had seen and I love those words when Jesus says, Nathaniel, I see you. He sees us. He knows us. And so, we find Philip there, we find Philip with Jesus at the feeding of the 5 thousand as a matter of fact, in one of the accounts, Philip goes out and gets the stuff and brings it out to Jesus and he says, that sure isn't gonna go very far. I sure would have said that too. And Jesus looks at Philip and says, today you're gonna see something great. But you know what, Philip had ideas of what Jesus ought to be. And so, he's not seeing all the stuff come to pass, come to pass. And in this 14th chapter we find that Philip says to Jesus, "well Jesus, tell me one more time, are you really the Son of God?" And Jesus looks at Philip, sees those doubts, we've all been there, sees those doubts and he says to Philip, "Philip, I'm in the Father, the Father is in me, we are one." And he sees this blank look on Philip, he can't quite get it cognitively. How about you, me sometimes we don't get it cognitively. But then Jesus says to Philip, "Philip, then, if you can't believe that, can you believe in me with the evidence of the miracles?" Sometimes we have to go back and say, okay, God showed up here. God showed up here. God showed up here. It is not all cognitive, it's about experience as well. And so I think, Philip began to say, oh yes I was out there with the 5 thousand, I saw blind eyes open, I saw ears open and then, Jesus says these words. "Philip, you're gonna do what I've done." I think Philip could have passed out then because he was already having doubts. And to say that Philip would do what Jesus had done. And then Jesus just kicks it up another notch and he says, "you're gonna do greater things that I have done." But the key to this verse is that last clause, because I am going to the Father. Philip had no idea what that meant and he had no idea that in a few weeks his life would be turned upside down even worse. Because here was Jesus and he put his whole heart and mind into following Jesus and the next thing he sees is Jesus is arrested. That was not the plan. And then Jesus is put on a cross and Jesus is dead. Now everything looks terrible. And I think this happens to us many times in our ministries and in our work, we are working hard and we are doing everything that we can and then it looks like it just has come to a halt. I think all of us in this room has experienced that. It looks like it's flatlined. What is happening? What about that dream I had at the beginning? What about that I thought could take place? What about that? And then we see during this death of Jesus, finally the disciples don't know what to do they kinda wonder around, kinda go back to what they used to do for a short period of time. And then what happens on that great Sunday, is the resurrection. And I just wanna say, I wanna insert here that God gives us vision, ministry and dreams and many times it looks as if they have come crashing down and they will because many

times they are only our dreams and not God's dreams. And there comes a resurrection and when the resurrection comes, you're gonna give God glory and not yourself. And so, that's what we find. And then Jesus is resurrected and then we see Jesus with the disciples teaching them and I love the barbecues he has on the beach and all that with the disciples and then one day he says, I'm going away. But I want you to go to that room. There's a room I want you to go to and I want you to be there for 10 days until something happens. Now 120 people went, I think there were more but they couldn't believe, they went away, they didn't continue to follow. And I think that's one of the things with our discipleship is we need to continue to follow. We many times miss out on the greatest thing God has because we give up too soon. We give up, He doesn't want us to give up. Keep moving. And so those 120 went into the upper room and I've often wondered, that room must have been very smelly. A hundred and twenty people up there and no showers? You know the weather was a little warm. I can't imagine what that room was like. But you know I find as I read about those in that upper room the interesting thing was they didn't go up there and play games. They had to get forgiveness from each other. They had to work together. They had to get to unity. Now I don't know in that room they suddenly loved each other and fell in love with each other and never wanted to part. But you know what? They fell in love with the vision and the mission God had given them. Scripture tells us they came in unity and unity with that mission and vision. I wanna say that we as a people called Methodist, 80 million of us, that's a lot of folks, people. God can do a lot with us. And if we can get focused on the mission and vision God has for us literally at this time in history, the world can be turned upside down for his glory. And justice and peace can reign. And so what happened that day at Pentecost? They got focused on that. And then as you know, I'm telling you a story you know but many times we need to repeat the stories of who we are. And that day that mighty rushing wind blew through the wind of the Holy Spirit. Scriptures tells us that fire sat on their head. They were filled and suddenly they were courageous. They were no longer behind locked doors. They no longer feared the people on the streets. Historians tells us that there were 4 million people on the streets of Jerusalem that day because they were celebrating the feast of Pentecost which was the writing of the law and they had done this for centuries. But this was a different time. And I go back to that passage in Jeremiah 31 that says, there will be a day when I will write my law on their hearts. That had been written 500 years ago. But this was that day. And the Holy Spirit came and suddenly they burst out of those doors and they went to the streets and they went to people to whom they had been prejudiced against. Talk about racism, there was a lot going on there. They went to people they didn't like. They went to people they feared. They went to people they never wanted to be around. And God gave them, the Holy Spirit in them gave them courage and boldness.

And I want to say, it's interesting to me when you start looking at the breath of God, we sing about the breath of God. We go back to creation, scriptures say that God breathed in the chaos of the universe and creation happened and God spoke. And God said this is good. Then we see those dry bones in Ezekiel and God breathed on those dry bones and those bones began to connect and God said this is life. And then we see when Jesus was baptized and God spoke out of the heavens and thundered, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. We find other places where God thunders out of heaven and says things. And then when Jesus was here He spoke through Him. But my friends, on Pentecost day, the beginning of the church, the Holy Spirit came and God chose to no longer thunder out of heaven. He chose to speak through you and through me. That has been for 2,000 years. Can you grasp that? Now, if I were God I would not have done it that way because I would never have trusted me and I would have never trusted you. I would want to be in charge. But God chose to speak to this world for 2,000 years through us, his Holy Spirit in us. And you know it's interesting to me, then the courage and the love and the fear was gone. The baptism of love that took place when the Holy Spirit comes in and still does today. And even when we follow bashful, fearful Philip, we find in the 8th chapter of Acts, Philip goes to one of the darkest cities in Samaria and takes the gospel. In that same chapter we find out that Philip also speaks

to the Ethiopian eunuch and is bold and says let's just baptize you right here. And the gospel goes to Africa. It's interesting to me when we follow historically that Thomas went to India and actually in one trip Philip accompanied Thomas to the country of India. And those of you here from the country of India know about the church of St. Thomas that is still in existence today. And there are accounts that Philip even went to what we know today as Iran with the gospel of Jesus. Talk about greater things. I think they began to grasp what greater things meant, don't you? And God still wants to do greater things through us. Well it's interesting to me, when we take a look at this, we see it is this infilling, absolutely, overwhelming feeling of love and I'm not talking about some little flimsy love, sentimental love but love that comes from the very heart and soul. It's the cleansing of our own heart that gives us permission to love each other. Gives us the power to love each other in those contexts. I'm gonna take a skip now over to John Wesley. It's interesting to me how the world in our context today is very interested in Wesley. As it was mentioned earlier, I happen to be on President Obama's council on faith and neighborhood partnerships. So my first meeting there we had to go around the circle and tell who we were etc. So I gave a little bit about John Wesley and what he had done and afterward some powerful person in Washington came to me and said, "you know, I never get tired of hearing those stories about John Wesley. It gives me so much hope." And that's our heritage my friends. That's something we stand on. It's interesting when we think about John Wesley. We look at his heartwarming experience. I'll just read to remind us again on May 24, 1738 he said "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Suddenly he discovered faith. Prior to Aldersgate he used the word faith 7 times and following, his sermons were filled with the word faith. They can't even count. I wanna give a shout out to our Brazilian friends. Are you here? I wanna tell you, I don't think any other country has done this. I was in Brazil a few years ago with some of our Methodist brothers and sisters down there and one of the congressman took me to the congress in Brasilia and told me about your warm heart day. Right? And you know what these folks have done? They have put through congress in Brazil a national holiday that's called the Warm Heart day on May 24th. How about that? I'm proud of you all. And I think this is fantastic. The whole country of Brazil knows that, my daughter-in-law happens to be Brazilian, graduate of the Methodist University. And she's so proud, she tells me all the time, we need to celebrate this in the United States! I said you go to congress then maybe we can try to do that here, I don't know. That's a great witness. Thank you, thank you for what you have done. And how people began to know. But you know, one of the things we know about John Wesley is that he was able to so wonderfully began to integrate what it meant to live a holy life, holiness and at the same time transform a nation. They are not separate.

Joe Dongell who is a professor at of Asbury Seminary states "After reading through Wesley for myself, it seemed to me that love rushed through all 14 volumes like a tsunami." In this love we are not talking about a sentimental flimsy, conditional love. In fact, I travel a lot so I'm in airports a lot I must confess I eavesdrop on a lot of people's cell phone conversations. I guess my life is so boring I have to see what theirs is, I don't know. But you know, I hear most people conclude their conversations with love ya. And I thought, if we had that much pure, spirit-filled love our love would be different. So we are not afraid to say it. But that's not the kind of love I'm talking about. He goes on to say, "the love poured out by God through the Spirit is a mighty force set loose in the deepest chambers of the heart and community, manifesting a host of powerful internal and external effects." That is very powerful, can we grasp that? Wesley spoke of this infused love as expelling sin from the heart. And then when we began to see it in action, just to remind us again, where we are, where Wesley was, is at this junction that is not personal piety and nor justice over here but they are combined together. In fact, I think it's the lived out

version of Amos' words "Let justice roll down like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream." We can't have one without the other.

If we take a quick review of what happened in the country of England during those days. The child labor laws that were changed and Wesley saw child labor, he said this can't be, these children need to learn. These children are made in the image of God, just because they're poor it doesn't mean they should work on the coal mines. The laws were changed. I love the corn laws. At that time the price of ale had become high because people were buying a lot of ale for grain, I mean the price of grain had become high. And poor people could not buy bread. And he could have said all you rich people take bread to the poor people but he said the law needs to be changed. Justice, systemic evil. Change the law so that it is fair to all. And then of course literacy for the poor and for women and of course slavery. The last letter that Wesley wrote was to Wilberforce. And he talked about the evil institution of slavery. And then he has a line in that letter that says and the vilest of all is the slavery in the United States, so vile the sun has never seen such vileness.

Today as we look at our world in the tradition of Wesley and the scripture that we had and then the experience and reason, we look at our world today. Just a few things: gender based violence, 27 million slaves, racism, tribalism, poverty, inequality, climate change, 65 million refugees, and 40 million more internally displaced people. And I could go on and on with the list. And you sitting here have your own list from your own country or your own region. Do we just say, well, that's just the way it is, I can't do anything more about this. After all I have to go to a committee meeting. We Methodists are wonderful on those. After all I have to make sure so and so isn't mad at me. After all I have to keep this institution going. I'm here to say folks, those are diversions. Those can become distractions of the great ministry, the greater things that God has.

The last two verses of this passage are this, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son will bring glory to the Father. You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it." Ask, are we asking about these kinds of issues? Are we asking that God to open a door for us to somehow see this changed? The world doesn't have to be the way it is. God has called you, He's thundering through you, through me. He is calling to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. He is calling us. He will open doors, do you hear him opening the doors? Do you have the courage to walk through? Ask. Too many times in our prayers we are fearful to ask. I've heard people say I really don't want to ask God cause what if He doesn't answer then I kinda embarrass God. Don't worry, He can handle it. Ask. And I say to you this afternoon, what is your ask? I've had many of those in my life. I remember when I came in touch with human trafficking. In 1996, I was in Cambodia. At the end of my time there they said you need to come to this street, we don't know what to call it but there are 3,000 kids there. Today they tell us there are 15,000. They didn't even have a name, human trafficking was not even a name we had at that time. I'll never forget walking down and there were wooden structures on both sides of the streets. And children sitting in those plastic chairs for sale. I couldn't grasp it. There were two other women with me. Finally, after we walked and walked I took a picture and the pimp tried to get my camera. I was able to keep it and we kept walking. This was at 10 o'clock in the morning. Finally, we couldn't take it any longer and we stopped at a street corner, just the four of us. There was a missionary with us. He was tired and worn out and we were three old ladies. Three old ladies and a tired old missionary, that's a weak prayer group. And none of us had any resources. I had just started World Hope, didn't have any resources. We prayed, Lord, in the face of this evil, who are we but we know you are a mighty God. Here we are, work through us in ways that you want to work through. The next day we had the opportunity to help a family start a business and I thought, that's a great answer to that prayer, that's what I thought. But you know what, we didn't begin to know how God answered that prayer. And I can tell you many stories that took place in that. But God opened doors beyond my imagination and I moved to Washington, D.C. at that time

that's when the President and the State Department began to get involved and I was there. I never dreamed in a thousand year that would happen. A coalition came together and a variety, variety of things happened. But I'm here to say there were thousands of other people praying so I'm not gonna say that was my prayer but you know what, if I had never prayed, I would not have been involved. Because of that prayer thousands and thousands of children were prevented from being trafficked and thousands have been rescued and are living productive lives this day. This is about asking, asking beyond. Asking beyond. I've been in and out of Cambodia at times and they said to me Jo Anne have you been to such and such street? And I said you know what, I haven't been there since that time. So we're gonna take you out there and I couldn't believe it when I saw structures were gone. White chairs were not there. Children were playing in the street like normal. And they said, you won't believe this. A brothel that had been the most vile brothel in that community is now a church and a community center. That's the redemptive power that God does. And I sat there with that Cambodian pastor and I said I can't believe it and he said, God told us to move into the neighborhood. I thought about the way Eugene Peterson translates John 1:14, 'the word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.' That's us. And I sat there with young people who would have been sold or dead by now and they're sitting there about their dreams of being doctors, lawyers, missionaries, teachers, pastors, etc. Transformation. Things don't have to be the way they are. The power of God brings about the transformation. As we look at this passage it says ask. Don't be afraid.

In Sierra Leone, I said, only God can do something. And, well, God showed up. And God began to open doors beyond anything. That Washington Post reporter he kept writing and said do something, do something. We don't have any money. We can't do anything. One day he wrote me and he said a foundation in Grand Britain wants to put arms on Mrs. Kamar and her daughter. Now you have some money. Get busy! Nothing like a Washington Post reporter being God in your back. God opened doors and we opened an amputee care center. One day I got a call from a woman who told me she's famous model and she lost her leg and she knew what we were doing and she wanted to help. I don't keep up with the modeling world as you can tell so when I hung up some of my young staff said Jo Anne, that's Paul McCarty's then wife Heather Mills, she's on the face of People Magazine. I'm People Magazine challenged I guess. So I didn't know that but I sure wanted to take her money. And it was great. And they were wonderful. And they sent an inventor to work together with the materials that were there and I could go on and on with stories and the transformations that took place. You know the thing that I love? I kept hearing, the word on the street was go to the world hope center, God is there. Yes, they were physically and medically helped, but God is there. Isn't that what we want? God is there.

As so, we look at our world, probably this amputee has the best story for us. One day, one of our amputees was walking down the street. He came face-to-face with the man that cut off his arm, the rebel soldier. He said, I wanted to run, I was scared. I would be too. It was as if God but a rod right up my back. I walked up to that rebel soldier, put out my arm to him, my prosthetic arm and said, 'before Jesus and world hope gave me this limb I would have sought vengeance but today I can forgive you.' I thought about that. How many times when someone hurts my feelings. I don't want to forgive them. I want to hold on to the unforgiveness. But here is a part of a body that won't grow back again, it will never be the same. That day that rebel soldier kept holding on to my prosthetic arm, I didn't know what to do. I was scared and I looked up on his face and here it was this evil wicked rebel soldier, tears running down his face and he said these words. I never thought I could know forgiveness.

My friends, there's a world out there that don't know they can know forgiveness. That day that amputee literally became Jesus to that evil, wicked - he had done evil wicked deeds - soldier. That's what we're being called to this world. All these issues I just listed and you can list many more. I want us to close today. And I want us to close with prayer. And I want some silent prayer during this time. And I

want you to ask everything that's on this list and on your list are things that bring glory to God. They're not bringing glory to you. He desires for you to ask. In this discourse of Jesus, 8 times the word ask is there. He wants you to ask. And I think that it would be so powerful if from this great conference, you've had powerful preachers and speakers. That we would go somehow as people called Methodist and the world will not be the same because of the opportunity God has placed before us.

Just the other day I was on a call from the Council of Faith from the White House. And as you know here in the United States we are having a lot of difficulties on racial issues that are just breaking our hearts. And I was in this call with the Department of Justice and Health and Human Services and Homeland Security and we were all talking about policy and different issues. And at the end of the call one of the leading attorneys from the Justice Department said these words, finally folks, you faith leaders, what we're talking about is a heart issue and you are the only ones that can help us. It still brings tears to my eyes when I say that my friends because I'm thinking you know, this is the time when God is calling His people. Heart issue, only God can handle the heart issue. And the bottom line is this is how things will be transformed, the transforming power of God in people's hearts. He's calling you and me as leaders at this time and when I hear someone like that powerful attorney saying that what we're dealing with is a heart issue. Could our grandchildren have the story to say about us that we have about John Wesley? Could our great grandchildren when it come to the issue of slavery say the same thing about us today? Could racial healing take place? I use that word healing specifically. Because reconciliation means once we were together and we are not together again. No, we've never been together. It's about racial healing. Could we be that kingdom of God on earth that gives that example of what that is like. I believe we can. We go back to Pentecost, the beginning of the church. The power of God in each of us is beyond who we are. God wants to do that.

I want us to close today, I want us to take a few minutes and pray. If you want to write sometimes down, I know I need to write it down because we get so busy that I forget I prayed, God has answered and I've moved on to something else. So if you feel like God wants you to write some things down go ahead and we will take a few minutes of silence.

Lord we thank you for your presence in this place today. Thank you for the people of God called Methodists. We thank you for the heritage you have given us. But we can't just lean on that heritage. You want to build a people of God now and for the future. I thank you for the prayers that have been prayed in this room today. I thank you that they have risen up to you as sweet incense. And I thank you for the answers that have already begun. And I thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit that so fills every person in this room. That we will have the courage and the love, overwhelming love that comes over us like a tsunami that does the work you want. Lord I just sense in my own spirit that today you are doing some new things. Help us not to be fearful. Help us to be obedient and help us to know that you want us to do greater things than we can even imagine. Lord, your imagination is greater than ours. So I pray that you will even break our imagination that it will be like yours. I thank you that you want to answer every one of these prayers even more than we even want them answered. Because you're seeing your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. This I ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. God bless you.