

FULL VERSION PERUSAL SCRIPT

THE WORLD IS MY PARISH

By R. Rex Stephenson & Mike Trochim



Newport, Maine

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CAST OF CHARACTERS -- 9M 8W 2B 3G + 12-16 ensemble

GRACE Murray (old & young) -- supporter and significant other to John, needs a pleasant if not outstanding singing voice

SUSANNA "Sukey" Wesley -- Mother to John

SAMUEL Wesley -- Father to John

SAMMY Wesley -- son to John

EMILY Wesley -- daughter to John

MOLLY Wesley -- daughter to John

HETTY Wesley -- daughter to John

JOHN WESLEY -- The founder of Methodism

CHARLES Wesley -- Brother to John

James **OGLETHORPE**

Sophy **HOPKEY**

Peter **BOEHLER**

George **WHITEFIELD**

MARTHA HALL -- sister to Charles Wesley

James **ROGERS**

John **BENNETT** -- suitor to GRACE

John ROMELY

JANE KEITH -- a matronly woman in her 40s

Elizabeth **RITCHIE**

SARAH Wesley -- adult

HESTER Rogers -- wife of James

SON -- of James and Hester Rogers (non-speaking)

Townsfolk: (14m 2f)

LADY1, 2

MAN

Students 1, 2, 3

DEAN

MR. HAWKINS

MRS. HAWKINS

CONSTABLE

WOMAN

CAPTAIN

MATE

SAILOR 1, 2, 3

SERVANT (male)

JANE, another servant

MR. WARD

Wednesbury CROWD -- Man 1-9, Woman 1-2, Justice, Lusty Man, 3 other Men

Wasall MOB --

THUG 1, 2

3 Men (Man2 is **MR. WILSON**)

MUSIC USED IN THE PERFORMANCE (Appears in the back of the SCRIPT)

LOVE DIVINE -- The original composition with words by *Charles Wesley (1747)* and music by *John Zundel, 1815-1882 is set to the tune named BEECHER, after Zundel's Pastor, Henry Ward Beecher*). The words set in 1747 may have been sung to another already established tune. There are several other settings, one to the Welsh tune HYFRDOL, composed by Rowland Hugh Prichard, 1831. But we felt that the BEECHER tune more closely resembled the original song as sung in Wesley's day.

CHRIST, WHOSE GLORY FILLS THE SKIES -- The original composition with words by Charles Wesley (1740) and music based on a German folk melody adapted by Johann Werner in 1815, with harmony added by William Henry Havergal in 1847. There is also a setting of this hymn with music by Charles Gounod in 1872 entitled Lux Prima.

I'LL PRAISE MY MAKER -- Words originally by Isaac Watts in 1719, the text was altered by John Wesley in 1737. Set to a tune named "Old 113th" by Matthias Greiter, 1525

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE -- *The stage is set with a large kitchen table and several chairs, and a bench center. There is a church pulpit for stage right (GRACE MURRAY's area). In the upstage center area is a large eighteenth-century style map of England with locations mentioned in the script labeled. As the house lights fade, we hear a HYMN. Lights come up on GRACE, who sings.*

HYMN: LOVE DIVINE

[MUSIC fades.]

GRACE: Let me welcome all of you to City Road Chapel. To those of you not among we who call ourselves Methodists, let me say that we have come here today to pay tribute to the original Methodist: John Wesley. My name is Grace Murray Bennet, and I have been asked by the Conference to share with you the joys and sorrows, the successes and despairs, of Reverend Wesley's life. I will share with you his journey through this world to bring God's message to all that would hear. Some of you may be surprised to discover that a woman is hosting this tribute, but I have been asked to do so for two reasons. First, Mr. Wesley always allowed women to play a prominent role in Methodism, and secondly, I probably know as much about John Wesley as anyone living today. And in some areas of his life, I am the only one who can accurately recount certain events. But I get ahead of myself. John Wesley was raised at Epworth Rectory in Lincolnshire. His mother, Susanna Wesley, the woman whom some are now calling the Mother of Methodism, had some very definite ideas about how children should be raised. Since she had nineteen of them, all of us might do well to learn from her method. However, John once told me that all of his mother's rules and procedures for raising children were thrown right out the window when it came to her own grandchildren. His father, Samuel, was a stern man who often seemed more interested in writing theology and arguing about politics than in the upbringing of his children.

[Lights dim on GRACE, and come up on SUSANNA and SAMUEL.]

SAMUEL: Susanna, I forbid you to deal with Mr. Simms, the butcher. He is not a God-fearing man.

SUSANNA: Samuel, he is the only butcher in the village. Maybe by doing business with him we can bring him back into the fold.

SAMUEL: I'll not argue more with you about this. You're as strong-willed as your father. That's why he was expelled from the Church of England - for his stubbornness. You come from that same mold.

SUSANNA: Yes, Samuel, I am my father's daughter. And just as he taught me to cultivate an independent mind, that too will I teach my children.

[Four CHILDREN—SAMMY, EMILY, MOLLY, and HETTY—enter; they improvise some greetings to their parents, such as "Time for bed already," "Father can we have some milk before bed," etc.]

SAMUEL: Let us say our evening prayers, then I'll retire to my study to work on my learned treatise on the Book of Job.

[They assume the attitude of prayer.]

We thank God for all His blessings bestowed unto us, and we pray that He might continue to bless this

family.

ALL: Amen.

SAMUEL: We pray that He would bless our Bishop, who has charge of our souls.

ALL: Amen.

SAMUEL: We pray that He would bless our good King William.

ALL: [except for **SUSANNA WESLEY**] Amen.

SAMUEL: Let's have you all to bed now.

[**CHILDREN**, after kissing their parents, exit.]

Sukey, have a seat. Why didn't you say "amen" to my prayer for King William?

SUSANNA: [Sits] Because the Prince of Orange is not the rightful king. He was made king by parliament, not by God. James was *born* king by the grace of God, and he'll be king as long as he lives. And he's still alive.

SAMUEL: It's not for you to decide who's king, Sukey. Now consider this carefully. As your temporal lord and master, I order you to add your amen to my blessing on King William.

SUSANNA: Samuel, you are my husband, and I love you dearly, but this is for me a matter of conscience.

SAMUEL: Then you and I must part; for if we have two kings, we must have two beds. I am leaving, and may the judgment of God be upon this house if I return before you have had a change of heart.

SUSANNA: I will not violate my conscience.

SAMUEL: That settles it: I have ordered you, and you have disobeyed. I am for London!

SUSANNA: Samuel, do not act rashly.

SAMUEL: Mrs. Wesley, I am leaving this house. I am leaving the conjugal bed. And I will not return again until you submit to my will.

[He begins to exit; but turns back]

Well?

SUSANNA: Yes, Samuel?

SAMUEL: Have you had a change of heart?

SUSANNA: No, Samuel.

SAMUEL: Then I have no choice. I am really leaving.

SUSANNA: Shall I help you pack?

[**SAMUEL WESLEY** storms out. Four children—**SAMMY**, **EMILY**, **MOLLY**, and **HETTY**—enter.]

CHILD ONE: Is Father leaving forever?

SUSANNA: I don't know, child. Let's just finish our blessings and be off to bed.

[**SUSANNA WESLEY** leads the **CHILDREN** in prayer.]

God bless our home and the village of Epworth....

ALL: [The **CHILDREN** repeat after their mother.] God bless our home and the village of Epworth.

SUSANNA: And God bless our mother....

ALL: And God bless our mother.

SUSANNA: And may God bless your father, Samuel.

[There is no response from the **CHILDREN**.]

SUSANNA: Why did you not join in blessing your father?

CHILD TWO: Because he's left us. He's been cross with you, Mother, and he's left us.

SUSANNA: [To **MOLLY**] What is the fifth commandment?

CHILD ONE: “Thou shalt keep the Lord’s Day holy.”

[Other CHILDREN snicker at her error.]

Why are they laughing, Mother?

CHILD THREE: That’s the fourth commandment, ninny. The fifth commandment is “Honor thy father and thy mother.”

SUSANNA: Thus the Lord commands us to honor our father, whether he is here or far away. Now children.

CHILDREN: And God bless our father, Samuel.

[Lights fade. SUSANNA and CHILDREN exit. Lights up on GRACE.]

SCENE TWO

GRACE: Well, Samuel stayed away for about a year—until King William died and the source of his dispute with Susanna was removed. The fruit of their reunion was the birth of their second son, John, in June 1703. Jackie, as he was lovingly called by his parents, was educated at home by his mother, just as the other children had been, so that by the age of five he knew the alphabet and was beginning to read from the Book of Genesis.

SCENE THREE

GRACE: It was about this time that Samuel was called away once more, for an extended stay in London.

Susannah and the children remained at Epworth, in the lovely stone rectory with a large kitchen. Those of you who are part of our connection have often heard of Susannah’s kitchen Bible studies. It is true: Susanna held a Bible study in that kitchen. Many people have asked me why she did this. John Wesley told me personally that it was because the man appointed to take Samuel’s place at St. Andrew’s was...well, how shall I say it...was quite ill-equipped to meet the spiritual needs of the people.

[Lights fade: about fifteen TOWNSFOLK are gathered around the table to hear SUSANNA.

CHILDREN are also present. Lights up on SUSANNA line.]

SUSANNA: I thank all of you for coming tonight. I hope the Lord has touched your heart as much as He has touched mine.

LADY #1: Mrs. Wesley, I just feel so spiritually fulfilled after these Sunday evening Bible studies.

SUSANNA: So do I, Mrs. Adams.

LADY #2: Mr. Inman seems to preach only about paying one’s debts. I find no comfort in his sermons.

SUSANNA: Let us not speak unkindly of our minister. I’m sure that in time the Lord will touch his heart.

MAN: Mr. Inman has forbidden us to attend these meetings. He says that it’s not proper for a woman to be preaching.

SUSANNA: But I do not preach. I merely read from the Scriptures, the Book of Common Prayer, and sermons published by outstanding ministers.

LADY #2: Mr. Inman won't be able to stop these meetings, will he?

SUSANNA: I think not. We are only going about the Lord's business.

[SAMUEL enters; she speaks to him.]

I didn't expect you back from London for another month yet.

SAMUEL: Quite a large gathering here, I see. If you all will please excuse us.

[PEOPLE greet SAMUEL on their way out.]

As I said, quite a large gathering.

[SUSANNA speaks.]

SUSANNA: Yes, indeed. One night I think we had two hundred people here.

SAMUEL: I can't stay long. I'm only here because of a letter I received from Mr. Inman. He accuses you of holding preaching services here at the rectory. I have seen with my own eyes that Mr. Inman was correct.

SUSANNA: Samuel, that is not what you have seen. You know I would never do such a thing. But in your absence, the people have been in spiritual need, a need I have helped to meet. I feel as though every soul you leave under my care is like a talent committed to me by God.

SAMUEL: Yes, that may be true, but Mr. Inman believes that you are usurping his place.

SUSANNA: Samuel, I don't like to be judgmental, but it appears to me that he has little concern or understanding for the people of your parish. He is much more interested in his authority as curate than in his responsibilities toward the souls of his flock.

SAMUEL: I'll admit, he's not a perfect man, yet...

SUSANNA: Some families who seldom attended services at the church before now go regularly. And this is a result of the Bible studies we hold here.

SAMUEL: Susanna, I'm afraid I must ask you to stop holding these "meetings." There are rules and regulations that govern preaching in this land.

[Pause]

My desire is for you to stop.

SUSANNA: If you only "desire" me to stop, that will not satisfy my conscience. I will desist only on a direct command. For that will absolve me from all blame for neglecting an opportunity for doing good to my neighbors.

SAMUEL: Susanna, it is not your responsibility to save our neighbors' souls.

SUSANNA: When we stand before the Lord Jesus on Judgment Day, I would not want Him to look me in the eye and say, "You, Madam, did not do all you could have done for the saving of your neighbors' souls." And I will reply, "Lord, I tried, but my husband ordered me to stop."

SAMUEL: As always, Sukey, you have made a compelling argument. I will not interfere.

[Lights fade on SUSANNA and SAMUEL; they exit; lights up on GRACE.]

GRACE: Susanna continued to run a very successful Bible study group in their home while her husband was away. She also continued to teach all her children at home—especially the girls. Mrs. Wesley believed that until a girl could read, she shouldn't be taught to sew. Well, Susanna did do a good job in educating her children. At eleven years of age, John was admitted to Charterhouse School, a very prestigious private school in London, and was admitted to Oxford University at the age of seventeen. Mr. Wesley was a studious young man; however, one who tended to swim against the current. And the current at Oxford, at that time, was towards bawdiness and licentiousness. It was a place where students often spent as much time

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- THE WORLD IS MY PARISH by *R. Rex Stephenson & Mike Trochim*

in alehouses as they did in the classroom. Anyway, after earning his degree, John became a professor at Oxford. His younger brother Charles was also at Oxford, as a student.

SCENE FOUR -- JOHN and CHARLES enter from opposite sides of the stage; they meet in the center.

CHARLES: Did you visit Castle Jail today?

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, it's Thursday, and I always visit the prison on Thursdays.

CHARLES: I'm glad you've returned early. I'm afraid we may have more pressing business at the Holy Club meeting tonight than the usual Bible study.

JOHN WESLEY: Whatever could that be?

CHARLES: Well, as you know, several weeks ago William Morgan died, and it is my understanding that his father is blaming us and our methods for his death.

JOHN WESLEY: Charles, I feel as if I've just wakened from a dream. Pray, what are you talking about?

[Three STUDENTS enter; they cross to JOHN WESLEY and CHARLES..]

STUDENT 1: Ah, the two leaders of the Bible-bigots!

STUDENT 2: No, they are Bible-moths—they chew holes right through the book.

STUDENT 3: You're both wrong. They're "Methodists!" They do everything by a method. They pray at a certain time, they visit prisons at a certain time, and they study the Bible at a certain time. They are definitely Methodists.

STUDENT 1: Well, your method got young Morgan killed. Fasting two days a week. All this attention to religious works doesn't leave a soul any time for recreation or refreshment.

JOHN WESLEY: I beg you, please, tell me what I have done wrong.

STUDENT 2: The dean will tell you what you have done. I think now we have finally seen the end of the "Methodist Holy Club."

STUDENTS 1 & 3: Amen

[STUDENTS exit. JOHN WESLEY turns to CHARLES.]

JOHN WESLEY: Charles, you must tell me what has happened.

CHARLES: I've only heard some rumors, but, as I understand it, we are being accused of causing poor Morgan's death by bringing him to such a religious frenzy that he became unbalanced and jeopardized his health.

JOHN WESLEY: But Charles, when you founded the Holy Club, its basic principles then, as now, were to help us regulate our lives for the glory of God and to do good works among the poor.

CHARLES: Yes, John, but we are suspected and mistrusted here. It's as though we were going to subvert the university by our method.

JOHN WESLEY: With the number of deists infesting this place and the total lack of seriousness in this "religious" institution, it might be well if it were subverted. But, I can't imagine just the six of us in the Holy Club could do a proper job of it.

CHARLES: It's nearly four o'clock now. We are supposed to see the dean about this letter from Morgan's father.

[JOHN WESLEY and CHARLES cross to left, where the DEAN sits behind a desk.]

DEAN: Let me forgo the pleasantries, gentlemen. Before we discuss this letter, I think it important that you explain to me your strange religious sect—this “Methodist Society.”

JOHN WESLEY: Sir, with all due respect, it is not a sect. We are members of the Church of England. The word “Methodist” is not ours. It was given to us by the students as an insult. You know, sir, the first use of the word “Methodist” was by Greek physicians who recommended a proper diet and exercise to assist one in leading a healthy spiritual life.

DEAN: Yes, you have that annoying habit of fasting two days a week. And do you always rise at four in the morning?

CHARLES: Four or five, yes. It’s an ideal time, sir, to meditate and pray.

DEAN: And every afternoon you do some kind of good work?

JOHN WESLEY: Christ commanded us to take every opportunity to do good to our neighbors.

DEAN: But using your own money to hire a teacher for those street urchins in town seems to be carrying that too far.

CHARLES: Whom have we hurt?

DEAN: You have hurt William Morgan.

[Rises]

You encouraged him to fast and to lose sleep and drove him, in his weakened state, to madness and religious delusion, which led to his death.

JOHN WESLEY: Sir, I cannot accept that judgment. I will freely admit that we live a well-regimented life.

Probably due, in no small part, to the training we received from our mother. But by such self-denial and good works we believe that we, personally, can live a holy life.

CHARLES: Such methods guard us against sin.

DEAN: But you are deluded. Such extremism is simply improper and unbecoming of gentlemen at Oxford.

JOHN WESLEY: We only try to love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves. We try always to be meek and give thanks for that bounty God has given us. If that makes us “extremists,” and “Methodists,” and the kind of people you do not want at the University, then bring charges against us and we will dispute the matter... publicly.

[Lights fade on DEAN’s office; desk is struck; and all exit. Lights up on GRACE’S area.]

GRACE: It all turned out to be a tempest in a teapot. No charges were brought, and Morgan’s father exonerated the brothers from any blame in his son’s death. But, since Mr. Wesley was also attacked in a newspaper, the term “Methodist” became the word commonly applied to those of our persuasion.

SCENE FIVE

GRACE: Now, in 1735, two events occurred that profoundly affected John Wesley. First, his father, Samuel, passed away. And then he and his brother Charles decided to go as missionaries to the new American colony of Georgia. Although both brothers went with great expectations of success in the New World, what they found was much different than what they expected.

[Lights fade on GRACE. Lights up on CHARLES, and JOHN WESLEY, caught in mid-conversation; a bench is set stage left.]

JOHN WESLEY: I pray, brother, that you will have an easier voyage back to England than the one we had coming over six months ago.

CHARLES: I do hate to leave you in this desolate colony, but I am too sick, and too discouraged, to continue.

JOHN WESLEY: This wretched colony is enough to make any God-fearing man sick.

CHARLES: I know what you mean, John. With the exception of those few Moravians, this colony houses more profane and licentious people than almost anywhere else on God's earth.

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, it does seem that God has put them all in Georgia!

CHARLES: I wish you luck in savings souls in this place.

JOHN WESLEY: You know, Charles, I'm still worried about saving my own soul. I hoped to find a sense of peace through living a righteous life and encouraging others to do the same.

CHARLES: If they would only listen to us and stop all their petty intrigues.

JOHN WESLEY: Brother, I've preached about that until breath fails me. I've told these people how the Church of England expects them to live. I have sought to justify my existence before God by living in the most righteous manner as prescribed by the church, and I have sought to lead others in the same path. But I know of no place under heaven where there are more sinners than in this place.

CHARLES: Amen to that. And where you are going to find someone to help you? I have been utterly defeated here.

JOHN WESLEY: Well, they'll never defeat me. I will bend these people to the rule of the Church of England if it takes till doomsday.

CHARLES: It's time to board. I have here a letter, John,

[He hands JOHN WESLEY the letter.]

describing the conditions and people at Frederica that may be of help to you. Some of the more shocking information I have written in Greek.

[MRS. HAWKINS and OTHERS come in both stage right and left; they improvise some greetings.]

MAN: If you don't come quickly, Reverend Wesley, the ship will sail without you.

CHARLES: That would truly be a fate worse than death.

[JOHN WESLEY lays letter on table; everyone but MRS. HAWKINS exits; they are all saying "goodbye," "good sailing," "we will miss you," etc. MRS. HAWKINS sees letter, picks it up and reads, some of it aloud.]

MRS. HAWKINS: *[Reading aloud]* Dear John, I hope this letter will provide some useful information about the parishioners here at Frederica. They are for the most part a pleasant lot, but given to sinning, which they excuse. A sinner of note is Mrs. Hawkins...

[Stops reading]

Why, that scoundrel has written about me!

[Continues reading]

She is a woman to be watched carefully. I am most concerned about her morals. She is, I'm afraid, a...

[Stops reading]

now what's this word? And this other? I can't make heads or tails of it. It's Greek to me.

[JOHN WESLEY enters, stands looking at MRS. HAWKINS.]

JOHN WESLEY: Is that letter addressed to me, Mrs. Hawkins?

MRS. HAWKINS: Oh! Why yes, it is. It was just lying here open and I glanced at it.

JOHN WESLEY: [*Taking the letter from her*] But the seal has been broken.

MRS. HAWKINS: I wonder who could have done that? You know, people today have no regard for propriety.

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, well, I must be on my way.

[She takes letter back from him.]

MRS. HAWKINS: Mr. Wesley, before you go...I inadvertently happened to notice that my name is mentioned in that letter. But the words describing me, I can't seem to make out. I demand that you tell me what your brother wrote about me.

JOHN WESLEY: Since you have been so indiscreet as to have read a letter addressed to me, I must assume that whatever my brother says about you here is true.

[Reads.]

Mrs. Hawkins is a woman to be watched carefully. I am most concerned about her morals. She is, I'm afraid, a Jezebel of the worst type, and would not hesitate to seduce any man that she thought useful to her, even including the governor of the colony.

MRS. HAWKINS: Are you are calling me an adulteress, Reverend Wesley?

JOHN WESLEY: No, no. I did not. However, my brother did. And if it is true, I advise you to repent and mend your ways.

MRS. HAWKINS: [*Angry*] Your brother Charles is a dog! And if my husband ever learned of the contents of this letter...

JOHN WESLEY: [*Interrupting*] You should have considered that before you became involved in your...uh... intrigues. I will take my leave of you now. I encourage you to seek redemption from the hands of our Savior.

[JOHN WESLEY starts to exit...then pauses.]

MRS. HAWKINS: [*She changes her approach to him; she now becomes very repentant.*] Reverend Wesley, you are so right. And your brother Charles was right. Oh what a wretched sinner I am. Please stay and sit down here. Help me pray for forgiveness.

JOHN WESLEY: If a parishioner desires my help, I am bound to give it.

MRS. HAWKINS: Sit here in the parlor for a moment while I compose myself.

[She begins to exit; then turns back.]

And you've put that letter in your pocket?

JOHN WESLEY: Yes. I will start praying to our Lord to give you strength to mend your ways.

[MRS. HAWKINS exits.]

JOHN WESLEY: [*Praying*] Dear Lord, have mercy on this repentant sinner. Give her power from on high to overcome her sinful nature and the grace to live righteously before you.

[MRS. HAWKINS enters with a pistol and pair of scissors behind her back. JOHN WESLEY looks up from his prayers. She points pistol at his head.]

MRS. HAWKINS: Sir, you and your brother have wronged me and I will shoot you through the head and destroy that libelous letter.

[As MRS. HAWKINS fires, JOHN WESLEY grabs gun and the shot misses. She brings scissors down and tries to stab him.]

You villain! You dog!

JOHN WESLEY: [*breaking free; she still comes at him with scissors.*] Stop, woman...for God's sake, stop!

MRS. HAWKINS: I'll send you to hell this very day, you blackguard.

[*MRS. HAWKINS stabs at him again.*]

JOHN WESLEY: Mrs. Hawkins, control yourself.

[*JOHN WESLEY grabs her wrists. CONSTABLE and MR. HAWKINS enter stage left.*]

CONSTABLE: For God's sake, Mrs. Hawkins, put down the scissors!

JOHN WESLEY: Constable, get this mad woman off me.

MRS. HAWKINS: Touch me, Constable, and I'll cut your heart out, too.

CONSTABLE: Mr. Hawkins, control your wife!

[*MR. HAWKINS gets scissors away from her and she swings at him; she jumps back at JOHN WESLEY and starts biting him.*]

CONSTABLE: Help me, Mr. Hawkins, before she kills our only minister.

[*They pull her off of JOHN WESLEY.*]

MRS. HAWKINS: [*As she is carried off, she issues forth with an oath.*] I'll see you hang, if I have to go to the King himself.

[*Lights fade; all exit. Lights up on GRACE; bench is struck.*]

GRACE: Mr. Wesley often admitted that his time in Georgia was not a happy one. However, most of it wasn't quite as bad as all that. He was trying to do God's will as he then understood it. There were some bright spots, though. Mr. Wesley fell in love for the first time. Not all women reacted to him as Mrs. Hawkins did. He was, indeed, a most charming and handsome man. And don't I know it! This woman's name was Sophy Hopkey.

SCENE SIX -- **JAMES OGLETHORPE, JOHN WESLEY, and MAN** enter; lights come up on their entrance.

OGLETHORPE: Reverend Wesley, I think it's time you left Frederica and returned to your parishioners in Savannah.

JOHN WESLEY: General Oglethorpe, I am beginning to make some real progress with my religious society here and if I leave, I fear they will backslide.

OGLETHORPE: No, no, Reverend Wesley, the majority of those who need your pastoral care are in Savannah, and you need to be attending to them.

JOHN WESLEY: As you wish, Your Lordship. Uh, sir, have you given any more thought to allowing me to expand my ministry to the heathen Indians?

OGLETHORPE: We're still considering that. Now, I've arranged for a boat to take you back this afternoon, and I also need you to accompany Miss Sophy Hopkey as she returns to her uncle's house in Savannah. You are acquainted with her, are you not?

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, sir, I've been teaching her French and leading her in private devotions for quite some time.

OGLETHORPE: Yes, so I've heard. As we used to say in my day, she is a "a very comely lass." A man could do much worse than to marry Miss Hopkey.

JOHN WESLEY: She certainly is an attractive young woman, and very intelligent as well. But you know I believe that a minister can best serve the Lord by remaining celibate.

OGLETHORPE: Reverend Wesley, I like you. I really like you. But you have some of the most ridiculous ideas that ever came out of a man's head. Catholic priests stay celibate....

JOHN WESLEY: But General, according to St Paul...

OGLETHORPE: [*Interrupting*] I'm not going to debate with you, John.

[SOPHY HOPKEY enters.]

Ah, here she is, the most beautiful girl in all of Georgia.... Oh, and the most intelligent. Now, you two, be off. Enjoy your trip.

[Aside to JOHN WESLEY]

And for once in your life, Mr. Wesley, don't look for a religious doctrine or some ancient ecclesiastical rule to guide your every thought and feeling.

HOPKEY: I appreciate you allowing Reverend Wesley to accompany me. I always feel so safe in his presence.

OGLETHORPE: Be gone now, you two. You'll miss the tide.

JOHN WESLEY: Well, now, sir, I...

HOPKEY: [*In French*] C'est bon voyage.

JOHN WESLEY: As you wish, General.

[JOHN WESLEY and HOPKEY exit stage left.]

WOMAN: Governor Oglethorpe, you are well known as a former member of Parliament, as a General, as the founder of this utopian society here in Georgia...but a matchmaker?

OGLETHORPE: Wesley has the potential to be a great minister. He is just too rigid in his thinking. He wants to run his parish here as if it were his Methodist society at Oxford. But the solution is to get the man married. A girl like Miss Hopkey, I think, would soften him up. Marriage would make him less rigid—more flexible.

WOMAN: You may be right, General, and if this romantic cruise doesn't bring to two of them together, then Wesley must really be determined to remain unmarried.

OGLETHORPE: Yes, a lovely young woman and a young man, spending the night under the stars, on a beautiful beach...that should be enough to cause any man to waver.

[MAN and OGLETHORPE exit; lights fade. Lights up on GRACE.]

GRACE: It was indeed a very romantic trip. And John...er, Mr. Wesley...could be quite enchanting. But I digress. Mr. Wesley told me, years later, that Sophy seemed very much taken by him. Once back in Savannah, French did indeed prove to be a romance language.

SCENE SEVEN -- WESLEY, holding a French grammar book, and SOPHY enter.

HOPKEY: [*speaking in French.*] “Je me réjouis de mes leçons de français.”

JOHN WESLEY: [*He responds in French.*] “Vous êtes un très bon élève.”

HOPKEY: Merci beaucoup

[She takes book from him, closes it, and kisses him.]

HOPKEY: “Vous êtes un excellent professeur.”

JOHN WESLEY: “J’ai du mal à me concentrer.”

[He gets up and walks away from her. He resumes speaking in English.]

I don’t know what I should do, Sophy. I fear that I’m in love with you. But, I haven’t fulfilled my mission to the Indians. I feel somehow that to do God’s work I should remain unencumbered by a wife and family...and yet...

HOPKEY: *[Crosses to him; she also resumes speaking in English.]* Perhaps I should just return to England.

JOHN WESLEY: No, no! I don’t think I could bear it if we were parted. Still, I cannot take fire into my bosom and not be burnt.

HOPKEY: Does that mean that we should marry? I think you know, John, that people are beginning to talk. I should think myself very happy to spend the rest of my life with you.

JOHN WESLEY: And I with you, but I am torn.

[A pause as he ponders]

Let us leave the decision up to God.

HOPKEY: John, I don’t understand.

JOHN WESLEY: When I was back at Oxford, I would often let God decide by opening the Bible at random to see if the particular passage on which my eye fell would assist me in making a decision. Or sometimes I simply drew lots.

HOPKEY: John, I still don’t understand. Either you love me or you don’t.

JOHN WESLEY: I do love you, or at least I think I do. I will write out three different alternatives on three pieces of paper: first,

[He writes as he speaks.]

that we should marry...

HOPKEY: ...immediately, John.

JOHN WESLEY: On the second I will write: we will marry in one year, after I’ve had time to do missionary work among the Indians.

HOPKEY: And the third?

JOHN WESLEY: That we should never marry.

[Finishes writing]

Now to place them in my hat...we will both pray earnestly that God will choose the solution that is correct for us.

[He prays as they hold hands.]

All-knowing God, we pray that Thy hand will direct us in this decision so that our lives, together or apart, will be pleasing unto You.

[He draws lot.]

HOPKEY: Read it. What does it say?

JOHN WESLEY: *[Reads]* We should never marry!

HOPKEY: But perhaps we should try again. Perhaps God wants us to draw for two out of three, just to make sure?

JOHN WESLEY: No, I think this is the will of God. But let us pray about it for three days and then meet again.

HOPKEY: If that is God’s will, then I think He will also want me to return to England immediately.

JOHN WESLEY: No. Not to England. Stay here.

HOPKEY: Here with a man who won't have me.

JOHN WESLEY: It was God's choice, not mine.

HOPKEY: No, you don't want me as you wife.

[She starts to cry, exits.]

Good day, Mr. Wesley!

[OGLETHORPE enters, passing HOPKEY on the way.]

OGLETHORPE: Miss Sophy... *[She doesn't respond.]* A lovers' spat, Mr. Wesley? Those tears prove that the woman has a genuine affection for you.

JOHN WESLEY: I'm afraid, sir, my liaison with Miss Hopkey has ended.

OGLETHORPE: How can that be? The entire colony expects you to be wed in the spring.

JOHN WESLEY: We drew lots, and it is the will of God that we not marry.

OGLETHORPE: You drew lots!? Wesley, that's the most confounded stupid idea you have ever had! You think God has nothing better to do than make choices for you by lot, when he gave you a brain to make decisions for yourself? It seems to me that, if we're speaking of God's will, He's put you both in Georgia, made sure you both had an interest in French, and was helping nature to take its course.

JOHN WESLEY: You think I acted in haste, don't you?

OGLETHORPE: No, I think you acted the part of a fool. If you'd been in Eden, God wouldn't have needed a serpent—you would have destroyed the harmony of paradise all by yourself.

JOHN WESLEY: What shall I do, General?

OGLETHORPE: If I were you, I'd tear up these ridiculous pieces of paper, run after that girl, and get her to set a date...maybe next week.

JOHN WESLEY: That I cannot do, General. What if God really doesn't want me to marry Miss Hopkey?

OGLETHORPE: Then pray about it. But while you're praying, consider that if she does not marry you, she will indeed marry one of her other suitors.

JOHN WESLEY: Do you think that is possible, General? I told her we should meet in three days to discuss the matter again.

OGLETHORPE: Three days may be an eternity for a woman with a broken heart.

[Lights fade as they exit. Lights up on GRACE.]

SCENE EIGHT

GRACE: General Oglethorpe was quite correct. Three days can be an eternity. Believe me, I know it's true. I guess you know that something disastrous was about to happen. Sophy, on the rebound, agreed to marry another of her suitors. And it seems to me that what really happened was that both Sophy and Mr. Wesley were so strong-willed that neither could admit they were wrong. Now here I will have to admit that, subsequently, Mr. Wesley acted very foolishly, which resulted in his abrupt departure from Georgia. But on the voyage to England he had the opportunity to do some soul-searching.

[Lights fade on GRACE; scene is on the ocean with JOHN WESLEY and the CAPTAIN.]

CAPTAIN: Good to see you out and about for a change, Reverend Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: Thank you, Captain. It is a pleasant evening.

CAPTAIN: Aye—Red skies at night, sailor’s delight.

JOHN WESLEY: At Epworth, we say “Red skies at night, shepherd’s delight.”

CAPTAIN: Men are at the mercy of nature, are we not, Reverend Wesley?

JOHN WESLEY: Nature—the whims of man—and woman.

CAPTAIN: I heard about you and Sophy Hopkey.

JOHN WESLEY: Yes—I had not been in so much trouble since the Holy Club back at Oxford.

CAPTAIN: Beggin’ your pardon, if I’m too direct, were you really indicted by a grand jury and jumped bail?

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, that unfortunately is true.

CAPTAIN: Well, I’ve done that myself a time or two—no shame in that.

JOHN WESLEY: I’m innocent—I’ll present my case to the Board of Trustees of Georgia. I knew I would never get a fair hearing in Savannah.

CAPTAIN: I couldn’t imagine a man such as yourself having, shall I say, a liaison with a married woman.

JOHN WESLEY: No. It happened just like everything else in that miserable colony. Sophy—Miss Hopkey married another man. I was overly strict—but I could not allow her to take communion because she had broken a rule of the church. Also, I continued to see her for private devotions. Her husband brought charges against me in a civil court. It is an ecclesiastical matter.

CAPTAIN: Sounds like a jealous husband to me.

JOHN WESLEY: To be quite honest Captain—I was not well liked in Georgia. I simply tried to enforce the rules of the church, the same rules that I follow—rules we must all obey if we are to have any chance of getting to heaven.

CAPTAIN: People don’t much like rules.

JOHN WESLEY: No, maybe not—but how else can we live? How else can we ever hope to find God and thus earn salvation?

CAPTAIN: Aye—but beggin’ your pardon Reverend—I find in runnin’ a ship, that often rules must be tempered.

[CAPTAIN sees a MATE smoking a pipe.]

Mate, stow that pipe. These timbers are as dry as straw.

MATE: Sorry Capt’

CAPTAIN: You’ve been warned before—it should be the lash for ye.

MATE: I won’t let it happen again. Please not the lash.

CAPTAIN: I’ll trust ye, Charlie...don’t let it happen again.

MATE: Thank ye, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Rules must be applied with a bit of compassion.

JOHN WESLEY: The church laws can not be tempered! That is the only assurance we have of getting to heaven. And, there are many in Georgia that will never see heaven’s gates. I was the only one who rose up against the wicked and took God’s part against the evildoers.

CAPTAIN: So I imagine you’re anxious to get back to England and resume your teaching duties at Oxford.

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, I long to see my mother and brother Charles. And Oxford is definitely more civilized than Savannah.

CAPTAIN: It is a colony made up of debtors. Most I brought over here spent a part of their lives in jail.

JOHN WESLEY: But Christ loved and labored amongst the poor. I fear I served the Lord, not as I should have but as I was able.

GRACE: The calm seas soon turned into a violent storm, so severe that all aboard believed themselves doomed to drown.

[Lights up center stage in pools of blue and green; sounds of wind and an angry ocean can be heard. The audience should think the ship is in a hurricane.]

SAILOR 1: The topsail is loose! Down with the top mast!

SAILOR 2: Lash the tiller to lee-side.

SAILOR 3: *[A cracking sound is heard.]* The mast is split! We are doomed! *[Blows his whistle]* Cut the cable! Cut the cable!

JOHN WESLEY: Will we survive?

SAILOR 1: Reverend, if I were you, I would pray, for only God can save us now.

[To SAILOR 2]

She's drifting leeward!

SAILOR 2: The foremast is about to split. Someone lend a hand.

JOHN WESLEY: Is there anything I can do to help save us?

CAPTAIN: Don't let her drift!

SAILOR 1: Won't your God save you?

JOHN WESLEY: *[To sailor]* I don't know, I don't know...

[Aside]

I fear I am not ready to meet God.

CAPTAIN: You're a man of the cloth. If you don't trust God, then why should anyone else?

[To a sailor, a shouted order]

Pull in that canvas!

JOHN WESLEY: I have done the best that I could, but it is not enough to give me peace.

[Prays]

God, give me faith to believe. Show me the way to the faith I need to live as I should.

SAILOR 3: *[Wind sounds are heard.]* The ocean's like a hangman's noose and we are all dead for sure!

CAPTAIN: Hang you! Climb the mast, you blasphemous dog!

JOHN WESLEY: I don't want to die!

CAPTAIN: We need faith!

JOHN WESLEY: I don't have faith!

SAILOR 2: We are splitting! Lash yourself to the mast.

[Lights fade on ship scene, go up on GRACE.]

SCENE NINE

GRACE: The ship did not sink after all. But when Mr. Wesley arrived back in England, his doubts and

frustrations persisted. He felt that his life was like the Apostle Paul's, as described in Romans 7:18-19: "For to will is present with me but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do." On the 24th of May 1738, he opened the Bible....

[Lights dim on GRACE. Spotlight stage right on JOHN WESLEY; church bells ring.]

JOHN WESLEY: *[reading from II Peter 1:4.]* "There are given unto us great and exceeding precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature."

[He flips through to another passage.]

"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

[Spotlight out on JOHN WESLEY.]

GRACE: For some strange reason, Mr. Wesley went to St Paul's Cathedral to pray. I say "strange" because it was not his usual habit to do so.

[Spotlight stage center on JOHN WESLEY; a choir is practicing stage center.]

JOHN WESLEY: Dear Lord, I feel that I am in an abject state of bondage to sin. I fight continually, Lord, but I do not conquer. *[Hymn is heard.]* "Out of the deep have I called to thee, oh Lord, Lord, hear my voice..."

GRACE: Upon leaving St Paul's, he met his old Moravian friend, Peter Böhler.

[Spotlight stage left on PETER BOEHLER, and WESLEY moves into spotlight.]

BOEHLER: You do not have dominion over sin and a constant peace because you lack a sense of forgiveness, a forgiveness that can only come through confidence in the merits of Christ.

JOHN WESLEY: I know that my own merit is inadequate, but I can't seem to let go and trust in Christ alone.

BOEHLER: You must conquer this sin of unbelief, John, and do not delay. Let Jesus do for you what he has done for so many others.

JOHN WESLEY: How can I preach a faith I do not have?

BOEHLER: Preach faith until you have it and because you have it you will preach it all the more.

[BOEHLER exits; spotlight out.]

GRACE: Although Mr. Wesley was not feeling well, he went on his way to a prayer meeting at a house in Aldersgate Street. On the way there, he seemed to hear a voice...

JOHN WESLEY: *[Spotlight up downstage right.]* Believe and thou shalt be saved. *[Building in intensity]* Believe and thou shalt be saved.

[Lights up on MEN and WOMEN sitting around on chairs stage left; JOHN WESLEY crosses into the light.]

WOMAN: Mr. Wesley, I'm so glad you could join us. We were just beginning our scripture reading.

JOHN WESLEY: It's been a very unusual day for me.

MAN: Romans 1:16-17: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." Let us bow our heads and pray. Let us meditate silently on these words from Romans.

JOHN WESLEY: Dear friends, I feel my heart has been strangely warmed. I do now trust Christ, Christ alone for my salvation. Just now, an assurance was given to me that Jesus has taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from sin and death. Praised be God.

[Lights fade; ALL exit; strike chairs.]

HYMN: “CHRIST, WHOSE GLORY FILLS THE SKIES” (See back of script)

GRACE: He left the prayer meeting and went quickly to the house of his brother, Charles.

[CHARLES and JOHN WESLEY enter, CHARLES is seated on a bench stage left.]

JOHN WESLEY: Charles, I believe! And God has given me an assurance of my salvation.

CHARLES: Then you have found the same peace that I found three days ago?

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, brother, and now I can see the difference between my old self and the new creature Christ has made of me. Before I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might, but then I was sometimes if not always conquered. Now I am more than a conqueror through Christ who loved me.

CHARLES: *[Reciting words of his hymn]* “Triumph o’er the shades of night; Dayspring from on high, be near. Day-star in my heart appear.”

[ALL exit; lights fade. Lights come up on GRACE.]

SCENE TEN

GRACE: After this experience, Mr. Wesley’s approach to his ministry was markedly changed. More and more, he preached the forgiving power of Jesus Christ received by faith alone. But many among the clergy of the Church of England charged Mr. Wesley with being an enthusiast, playing upon the emotions of his hearers, and upsetting the orderly workings of the church. The result was that churches were being closed to Mr. Wesley. Can you imagine—Mr. Wesley was not allowed to preach in churches? And he wasn’t the only one being excluded. Even the great George Whitefield was denied the pulpit.

[Lights fade on GRACE. JOHN WESLEY is sitting at table center; SERVANT enters stage left.]

SERVANT: Mr. Whitefield desires to see you, sir.

JOHN WESLEY: Send him in. George needs no introduction; he is one of my dearest friends.

SERVANT: I thought you and he violently disagreed about some doctrinal point or other.

JOHN WESLEY: I’ll admit, we’ve had many spirited arguments, but George is a good man, and the work he’s done in America and in this country—I can think of no one in England better able to carry God’s word to those who so desperately need it.

[GEORGE WHITEFIELD enters. SERVANT exits.]

JOHN WESLEY: George, so good of you to drop by.

WHITEFIELD: I went to St Helen’s to hear you preach, but the rector there said that “Neither John Wesley nor George Whitefield would ever supply his pulpit again.” Realizing that the rector didn’t know who I was, I climbed into his pulpit, said a brief prayer for him, and came to find you.

JOHN WESLEY: Very clever. But the fact of the matter is that soon there will not be a church in England that we will be allowed to preach in.

WHITEFIELD: I know. The more I preach salvation by Christ alone, and the more people are converted, the more detested I become among the comfortable and complacent clergy.

JOHN WESLEY: I understand your frustration on that score, George. Whenever I seem to be making an impact on people, I’m asked not to return.

WHITEFIELD: You must come to the same conclusion I have, John—that preaching in the streets, the village squares, the open fields, is the only way we can bring God’s word to those whom the Church of England is ignoring.

JOHN WESLEY: But God’s word should be preached in God’s house.

WHITEFIELD: But God is being shut out of his own house by a clergy who care only to collect their tithes and dine with the local squires. Who is it that cares about the wretched coal miners who must turn to gin for comfort because they can find no comfort in Christ?

JOHN WESLEY: I’m aware of that, George. And what’s more, the Established Church seems incapable of civilizing, let alone bringing a healthy morality to the mining communities.

WHITEFIELD: Yes, it’s the same all over England...

JOHN WESLEY: ...Fathers deserting their families, children forced into workhouses, mothers thrown onto poor relief...and where are the ministers of the Church of England?

WHITEFIELD: Oh...they’re off seeing the bishop, hoping for a better appointment. John, preaching in the open air, underneath God’s blue skies, is the only way we can bring God’s message to the neglected masses.

JOHN WESLEY: I agree with you, George, that they need to hear. And I know you’ve had some great success with field preaching. But you have the voice and personality for speaking to thousands at a time. You have a dramatic quality in your demeanor.

WHITEFIELD: No, John, that’s not it. When I rise up to preach and see thousands of souls needing salvation, the Lord touches me, John. I am His instrument. Come with me to Bristol, and see the miracles that God’s Holy Spirit can perform.

JOHN WESLEY: Well, let me think it over, George.

WHITEFIELD: If you decide to come, John, I want you to be aware of the dangers attendant to field preaching. Many of the clergy have inflamed their parishioners to the point where I have often been threatened with violence.

JOHN WESLEY: But you are not trying to go into their churches or usurping their ecclesiastical positions.

WHITEFIELD: No, I’m not, but they see me as a threat. Some have even gone to local justices of the peace in hopes that the law would curtail my ministry. Well, John, I must be going. Think about going into the fields to preach.

JOHN WESLEY: Think about it I will, but somehow I can’t see myself preaching from the back of a wagon. It seems to have a bit of the devil in it.

WHITEFIELD: I really must leave now...the devil and I have an appointment to stand at the back of a wagon this afternoon. Pray about it, John.

JOHN WESLEY: I will, George. But first I must finish this message on Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. God go with you.

[WHITEFIELD exits; JOHN WESLEY continues, reading from the Bible.]

Luke 6:17: “And he came down and stood in the plain and a great multitude came to hear him.” Hmm “plain”...”field?”...”And he came down and stood in the field and a great multitude came to hear him...and many that were vexed with unclean spirits were healed.” That’s what the vexed people of England need, to be healed. Now Christ preached outside because of the great multitudes. On the other hand, the synagogues were closed to him, just as the churches in England are closed to me. Should I not follow Christ’s example?...Naturally the devil hates open air preaching, for that is where the Spirit of the Lord can work.

[Lights fade on WESLEY, and go up on GRACE.]

SCENE ELEVEN

GRACE: But Mr. Whitefield was right about the attitude of many of the clergy, as Mr. Wesley soon found out for himself. As Methodism began to grow, Mr. Wesley soon realized that he needed permanent places for his Societies to meet. So he built a series of what today might be called chapels, but Mr. Wesley preferred the term meeting houses. One of the first of these was in London, at an old abandoned foundry that Mr. Wesley bought and refurbished for his purposes. He lived there, and, in 1740, he invited his mother to take up residence. Susanna Wesley not only became very active in the local Methodist Society, but still continued to advise her two sons, even though her health was obviously declining.

[SUSANNA is brought on in a wheelchair; JOHN WESLEY and CHARLES enter.]

SUSANNA: So, John, how did your “field” preaching go? Were you successful?

CHARLES: Oh, very successful. Mother, I truly believe that many who had never darkened the door of a church have come to hear John’s preaching. And I’ll tell you something else

SUSANNA: Yes, go on, Charles.

CHARLES: ...on several occasions when I have been with John, and it would be raining, and a thousand people would gather...when John started the first hymn, the rain would cease...and when he finished the last prayer, the rain would begin again. The Lord works in miraculous ways.

JOHN WESLEY: *[adjusting Susanna’s blanket, etc.]* How are you, Mother?

SUSANNA: You boys are treating me like an invalid. I’m fine. It’s just the age is catching up with me.

CHARLES: You do have more color today, Mother.

SUSANNA: Yes, I’ve been taking care of things here at the Foundry while you have been gone.

CHARLES: Well, Mother, we both heard a rather disturbing rumor.

SUSANNA: Well, what have you heard?

JOHN WESLEY: We understand that Thomas Maxfield preached here last night.

SUSANNA: He did indeed. I was there. It was very inspirational.

CHARLES: But, Mother, he’s not ordained! A man must be ordained by a bishop to preach the word of God, whether it’s in our chapel or in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

SUSANNA: John, do you share your brother’s opinion?

JOHN WESLEY: Ordination does seem to be the indication of God’s blessing. And then there’s the Church of England....

CHARLES: Yes, the Church of England. Why, the bishops could brand us as Dissenters.

SUSANNA: Both your grandfathers were Dissenters.

CHARLES: But you yourself left the Dissenting movement to become a member of the Church of England.

And what would people think? I can imagine the bishop of London saying, “Who is this Thomas Maxfield that the Wesley boys have ordained to preach?”

[CHARLES crosses away from SUSANNA.]

SUSANNA: *[Following CHARLES in her wheelchair]* Charles, calm down. If you have had one fault your

entire life it is that you are too concerned about what others might think. Your father always acted according to the dictates of his conscience no matter what others thought. And I have always done the same. But someday, Charles, your concern over what people think might happen could cause a great deal of harm, someday.

CHARLES: But ordination is the keystone.

SUSANNA: Besides, I don't think either one of you should judge Mr. Maxfield until you have heard him preach.

JOHN WESLEY: We see your point, mother. But still...ordination seems to be necessary for a well-ordered church.

SUSANNA: Who ordained St. Paul?

CHARLES: Christ himself ordained the apostle Paul.

SUSANNA: Oh? Not the Church of England?

JOHN WESLEY: I've never been able to win an argument with you, mother. We will go and hear the man preach...

SUSANNA: And if you see that he has a call from God, then you will both accept him as a lay preacher and allow him to continue.

JOHN WESLEY: Yes, Mother.

SUSANNA: Charles?

CHARLES: I suppose so...

SUSANNA: Charles.

CHARLES: Yes, Mother.

[Lights fade on them, and come up on GRACE.]

GRACE: The brothers did hear Thomas Maxfield preach and agreed with their mother that he was as called to preach the gospel as they were. John soon realized that lay preaching was to be the backbone of Methodism, although Charles never embraced the concept as wholeheartedly. John not only recruited several others as lay preachers, but also trained them. I suppose I should now tell you about July, 1742. It was a dark day, not only for John and Charles Wesley, but for all of Methodism...indeed for all Christianity.

[Lights fade on GRACE. As lights come up, SUSANNA is slumped in her wheelchair, though this time she is not so robust. JANE, a servant, is placing a wet towel on her forehead. JOHN WESLEY enter left; he stops. JANE turns and crosses to him.]

JOHN WESLEY: Jane, how is she?

JANE: I hated to call you away from your preaching tour, but the last two days she has taken a turn for the worse. It took all her strength to get into this rolling chair this morning.

JOHN WESLEY: She has come back from worse episodes than this. Remember...

JANE: *[Interrupting]* I think this time is different, Mr. Wesley. She has been talking about preparing herself to meet her Maker. I think she knows the end is near.

JOHN WESLEY: If I didn't know you were here giving her such good care, Jane, I fear I could never leave the Foundry.

JANE: Go to her, Mr. Wesley. Seeing you always improves her spirits.

[JOHN WESLEY crosses to where SUSANNA sleeps in her chair. He stands over her for a second or two, then kneels beside her.]

JOHN WESLEY: [*Praying*] Dear Lord, I commend my mother to thy loving care. Restore her health if thou wilt. I have often preached that we must follow thy will, but, Lord, I don't know if I can live or work without my mother's help and guidance.

SUSANNA: [*Waking up*] John, it's good to see you, but aren't you supposed to be preaching in Kingswood?

JOHN WESLEY: Jane sent me a note saying that you...well...that you might need me.

SUSANNA: John, you need to be about the Lord's business. I knew that of all my children, God had something special in mind for you. And I was so proud, John, that our Lord had chosen me to be the mother of this appointed child.

JOHN WESLEY: Don't try to speak, Mother. Should I get you some broth?

SUSANNA: No, let me speak. I know that soon I will meet God face to face. I've waited my whole life, and now I'm ready.

JOHN WESLEY: Charles and Martha will be here shortly.

SUSANNA: I don't want any wailing or crying at my passage. I only want my children about me, singing a psalm as I go.

JOHN WESLEY: Mother, you can't die, it's not time. I don't think I can carry on the work without you. I've always prayed that I would precede you into glory.

SUSANNA: John, you were always the sweetest boy. But also one with the silliest ideas. God has set out a natural order in which children outlive their parents and stand on their own. And, John, I've already lost fifteen children. I could not bear...I don't think even God could give me the strength...to stand over the grave of another of my children.

[SUSANNA falls asleep again. CHARLES WESLEY enters with his sister, MARTHA HALL.]

CHARLES: [*Crossing to SUSANNA*] Mother, oh, Mother...

JOHN WESLEY: She just fell asleep, Charles.

[To MARTHA HALL]

Sister, I'm glad you're here.

CHARLES: Is she going to....

JOHN WESLEY: I'm afraid so.

CHARLES: Is there nothing we can do? Have you sent for a physician?

JOHN WESLEY: Calm yourself, Charles. It is the end, and she is ready to meet God.

CHARLES: How can we live without Mother?

MARTHA HALL: There will never be another woman like our mother.

[JOHN WESLEY and CHARLES walk away from the chair.]

JOHN WESLEY: I know. I don't think I will ever marry, Charles, for I will never find a woman as good, as loving, as Christian as that woman lying there on the bed.

CHARLES: I believe that, John. You will judge every woman by the standard set by our mother, and I can't imagine that any woman in England or America that could measure up to her.

JOHN WESLEY: I fear that is true, brother. But, just to ensure that I do not make a hasty decision, as I almost did in Georgia, let us vow, here on our mother's deathbed, that neither of us should marry without the consent of the other.

CHARLES: I do vow.

[They shake hands.]

SUSANNA WESLEY: [*Waking*] Charles,

[CHARLES and JOHN WESLEY cross to her.]

would you sing “I’ll Praise My Maker Whilst I’ve Breath”?

CHARLES: Mother, there’s so much that I want to say.

SUSANNA WESLEY: There’s no time for words. All of you kiss me, and let me go to my Lord with the sound of your voices in my ears...Sing. Sing, my children, with a glad heart.

HYMN: *They all sing* “I’LL PRAISE MY MAKER WHILST I’VE BREATH” (See back of script.)

[SUSANNA smiles, then dies. JOHN falls prostrate across her lap.]

JOHN WESLEY: Please, Lord, give her back to me.

[Lights fade; bed is struck. Lights up on GRACE.]

SCENE THIRTEEN

GRACE: Susanna was buried across the street from Mr. Wesley’s home. Soon, John resumed his preaching tours. While thousands gathered to hear him preach, some clergy from the Church of England were inciting people against him. He went to Wednesbury expecting no trouble. At noon he spoke to a large crowd in the center of the village. And then went to Mr. Ward’s house to rest.

[Lights fade on GRACE; evening lights fill the stage. JOHN WESLEY and MR. WARD appear. A CROWD enters and surrounds them.]

MAN 1: Bring out Wesley.

MAN 2: We want the Methodist.

MR. WARD: Reverend Wesley, they will do you great harm. Please, hide yourself in my house.

WOMAN 1: Bring out the minister.

MAN 3: We will have Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: No, I must go out, or they will pull down your house.

MR. WARD: Don’t go. I fear, Mr. Wesley, that they will kill you.

JOHN WESLEY: I will face these lions as a lamb. For the hand of God will protect me.

[More crowd noise; JOHN WESLEY crosses to the CROWD.]

What do you want with me?

MAN 1: We will take you to the justice.

JOHN WESLEY: Why the justice of the peace?

SEVERAL VOICES: That you shall find out directly.

MAN 4: I heard him preach this afternoon. He is a man of God.

[The CROWD turns on MAN 4. There are a lot of improvised lines such as, “He is an infidel,” “He’s no man of God,” “You must be a Methodist too,” etc. Then they beat him down.]

JOHN WESLEY: Harm not this man, I will go with you.

WOMAN 1: Off to the Justice’s house.

[CROWD crosses to stage left, pushing JOHN WESLEY. Someone tears his jacket.]

MAN 2: Here is the justice's house.

MAN 1: Awaken him and bring him out.

MAN 3: *[Calling]* Justice, come out. We have an infidel.

JUSTICE: *[In nightgown]* What do you want at this hour?

MAN 2: We have brought the Methodist preacher, John Wesley.

WOMAN 1: Vicar Eggington has told us to drive this man from the parish.

JUSTICE: What have I to do with Mr. Wesley? What crime has he committed?

WOMAN 2: He makes folks sing psalms all the day long.

MAN 3: And he makes folks rise at five in the morning to hear his preaching.

JUSTICE: Go home, Mr. Johnson, Mrs. Simms. Take this man back to where you found him and let him spend the night in peace. And trouble my sleep no more. That is an order!

MAN 1: Let's take him back to Mr. Ward's.

MAN 3: Have we been misused by our vicar?

[CROWD agrees that they have been. CROWD starts back stage right, but runs into the Walsall MOB, entering.]

MAN 5: *[of Walsall MOB]* Do you have Wesley the Methodist with you?

MAN 2: Yes, Justice Lane has ordered us to return him to Mr. Ward's.

MAN 6: *[of Walsall MOB]* Nay, give him to us. We'll take him before the justice in Walsall.

MAN 3: But we have been ordered by the justice to take him to Mr. Ward's.

MAN 5: He is an infidel. He hates both King and country. He should be hanged.

WOMAN 1: We will not release him.

MAN 6: Then let us take that Methodist.

[Fight ensues with lots of improvised lines as they beat each other. Finally the CROWD from Wednesbury flees the field.]

MAN 7: Now you Papist, you Jacobite, it's to a proper justice with you.

[As they start off, JOHN WESLEY breaks free.]

JOHN WESLEY: May I speak?

LUSTY MAN: *[Striking at WESLEY with a large oaken stick]* I'll kill him, and save the justice the trouble.

MAN 7: I'll pull out his hair by the roots.

[Grabs WESLEY's hair, then turns to MOB.]

What soft hair he has.

MAN 6: *[To previous speaker]* I'll show you what a strong fist can do to an infidel.

[He smacks JOHN WESLEY in the mouth.]

MAN 5: I'll help!

[He strikes JOHN WESLEY in chest, who is knocked down. Slowly, JOHN WESLEY rises.]

JOHN WESLEY: Are you not willing to hear me speak?

SEVERAL VOICES: No, no, -- knock out his brains.

[It starts to rain; all cover their heads with jackets, pieces of canvas, etc.]

MAN 8: Down with him.

MAN 6: Kill the papist!

MAN 5: Let's be done with it and get out of the rain.

WOMAN 1: Yes, kill the papist.

MAN 5: Friends join us, for today we kill a papist!

[More people enter]

JOHN WESLEY: I'm not a papist or a Jacobite, but a man of God, ordained by the Church of England.

WOMAN 2: Nay, you are a Methodist!

JOHN WESLEY: That I am, but what wrong have I done you? Who amongst my followers has caused you any harm? Tell me, what evil have we committed?

MAN 7: To the justice! Bring him away!

MAN 6: Nay, let him speak.

SEVERAL VOICES: Yes, let him speak.

MAN 8: By his own words he will convict himself.

WOMAN 1: And we will be his executioners.

MAN 6: Speak, speak now, if you have the courage.

[JOHN WESLEY pulls his coat off his head, steps out into rain.]

JOHN WESLEY: I will not defend myself nor any Methodist, but rather I surrender myself to you to do with me as you please.

MAN 9: Then I'll knock out your brains.

[He comes at JOHN WESLEY, looks him directly in the eye, and then the MAN stops.]

JOHN WESLEY: Do with me as you can. For I trust in God

[Then speaking more to himself than to the MOB]

Yes, I do trust in the will and power of God.

[To MAN 9]

I was once on a ship during a violent storm, and I knew we would sink, and I was terrified. I knew I would die and I was not ready to meet my Maker. But now I am. Hit me with that club if you must.

[MAN 9 starts to strike at JOHN WESLEY, but then he turns away.]

I have an assurance, an assurance that your sticks,

[JOHN WESLEY is hit by a stone.]

your stones, cannot hurt me. For I have the love of God to protect me.

MAN 6: Courage! We are many. Let us take this Methodist.

MAN 7: *[stepping into the rain.]* This surely must be a man of God if so many of us can't kill one man. *[To*

JOHN WESLEY] Sir, I will spend my life for you.

[Again MOB surges forward as if to finish JOHN WESLEY off.]

ANOTHER MAN: *[moving forward.]* I too will spend my life for you.

STILL ANOTHER MAN: *[also moving forward.]* So will I.

YET ANOTHER MAN: *[also moving forward.]* And I.

[The MOB freezes. Lights slowly fade. Lights come up on GRACE.]

GRACE: And many did spend their lives for him. But let me tell you what happened the next day. When Mr. Wesley was leaving Wednesbury, everyone he encountered wished him Godspeed and hoped he would soon return! The Lord does work in miraculous ways.

END OF ACT ONE -- 23 more pages in script -- 22 pages of NOTES and APPENDICIES