The earliest Christians had not yet started a new religion, but were Jewish people who were characterized by following “The Way” of Jesus in community through forgiveness, love and shared resources. This understanding is at the root of Methodism.

**John Wesley was not trying to start a new denomination. He intended to begin a movement, “a way” of life, within the Anglican Church. He proposed “a method” for how we could faithfully follow “The Way” of Jesus Christ as disciples.**

The first Christians practiced preaching, teaching, healing and sharing, and invited others to “The Way.” Many religious authorities however, understood “The Way” of Jesus contrary to the laws of Moses and God. They targeted Christians by arresting, imprisoning, and even killing men and women who were followers of “The Way.”

Saul was one of the leaders who was so legalistic in his faith that he made it his mission to arrest and condemn those who were following “The Way.” He was on his way to Damascus looking for followers of “The Way” so that he could arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem. On the road, he experienced a vision of Jesus with a specific message for him.

In this encounter with Jesus, Saul had a remarkable, transformative experience. With the help of a disciple, Ananias, who bravely trusted God, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and turned his life completely around. This former persecutor of Christians answered God’s call to follow “The Way” and to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to “Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.”

This story of amazing grace is so encouraging. In Saul’s transformation, we find many layers of hope and promise for humanity – even those entrenched in anger and hatred, even those who have unleashed unspeakable terror against others, and even you and me.

God’s amazing grace is a standing invitation to “The Way” of repentance, healing, forgiveness and love.

Sadly, our institutional church history is not filled with grace and love. Some shameful places must be brought out of the shadows and healed in order for us fully and authentically to follow “The Way” of Jesus. Native American the Rev. Chebon Kernell

**“Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”**

*Acts 9:1-20, NRSV*
is part of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. He leads Native American and indigenous ministries at the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

“The church,” he said, “has not fully acknowledged the damage done in the past, including the (1864) Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado – where a Methodist minister led the attack and destruction of a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho village, killing nearly 200 people, mostly women and children. (The church does not fully acknowledge) the harms that continue today, specifically in the area of wellness and the right to live a life of wellness and spirituality as each person sees fit.”

Nonindigenous United Methodists have engaged in prayerful confession and committed, through our denomination’s Acts of Repentance for the Healing of Relationships with Indigenous People, to:

• educate ourselves about the full history of our country and our church in relation to Native Americans,
• pursue healing with our Native American sisters and brothers, and
• contribute to today’s special offering that supports United Methodist ministries in these communities, including nurturing leaders through scholarships.

Sometimes we resist acts of repentance because we don’t believe participating will be enough. But in Saul’s transformation, we begin to understand the power that comes with belonging to “The Way.”

Through God’s grace, as followers of “The Way,” even the most negative and hurtful parts of ourselves can be transformed into healing messages and actions of love. And as that transformation happens, God also takes the best parts of us and strengthens and multiplies that love. We see how that happens through Special Sunday offerings like the one we will receive today. Responding out of love, we can be part of repairing the harm to our indigenous sisters and brothers. We can join them in strengthening the United Methodist connection with leadership opportunities, social services and sharing God’s love through Jesus.

As followers of “The Way,” when we turn to God for help, the Divine Creator takes what is broken and brings it back to wholeness. We are loved so much that, even after humans broke the body of Jesus, hanging him on the cross as a political prisoner, God still offered us an amazing promise through the way of Resurrection.

We are invited to participate in amazing grace.
We are invited to participate in the Resurrection.
We are invited to participate in The Way of the risen Jesus.
Thanks be to God.