



The Asbury Crossing: Responding to Call

Francis Asbury & Rural Ministry:

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Having been previously ignorant of Francis Asbury and his adventures as a pioneering early Methodist, I have to say I have been inspired by this ordinary yet extraordinary man. You or I may not ever feel called to leave everything behind and head out across the Atlantic, but we are all called and challenged to live out our vocation here and now, wherever we find ourselves and however inadequate we may feel in our attempts.

'Tis one great disadvantage to me I am not polite enough for the people. They deem me fit for the country, but not for the cities; and it is my greater misfortune I cannot, or will not, learn, and they cannot teach me.'

What does vocation & calling mean for me as a Methodist today? Personally it is a willingness to listen & step out into something or somewhere new, following where God leads and is already working. How many excuses do I make? Often along the lines of 'I'm nothing special, how could God ever use me?' Asbury obviously struggled with similar doubts and questions, as recorded in his journal. This extract above made me chuckle, but it does highlight that we can be used by God despite our faults. Maybe rural mission and ministry today still retains a bit of this 'bluntness' and may not be suitable for those of a more sensitive disposition!

'At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way.'

I see Asbury's calling as incredibly pioneering. He travelled into remote and rural areas, taking the Gospel to the early pioneers as they forged new communities across America. Going to where people are, rather than expecting them to travel to us, communicates how much we value and love these more isolated, often hard to reach communities. Does the imbalance and distance that still exists between rural and urban cause us to act as it did Asbury? How comfortable am I? How willing am I to pioneer? Will I follow the call to join the adventure to pioneer in my village or rural community?



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Asbury suffered much discomfort & risk, whilst remaining committed to his calling. He had determination and a clear vision: *'to live for God and bring others to do so.'* How often do I bottle it when presented with an opportunity to share my faith? In a rural area living for God cannot be compartmentalized easily. Thankfully being human, vulnerable and real often enables us to share our faith and struggles as part of life in community. This still requires boldness and risk on our part, but surely it's worth some potential embarrassment or discomfort in the long run if our hope is to bring others to know God too.

Finally, I think that Asbury inspires us to remaining faithful to our calling, even when it gets tough. Rural mission & ministry is as essential now in 2021 as it was in Asbury's day, it still risks being overlooked on occasion in favour of more densely populated areas. We will encounter difficulties. Some of the challenges may have altered over the years, but God is still missional and graciously comes to meet us wherever we are – in our rural communities as well as our more urban ones. How can each of us as Methodists today join in this calling to adventure and mission, ensuring that God is for all – rural as well as urban. How can we be a faithful Christian presence in our villages and communities?

Responding to our calling: If you would like further conversation around any of the challenges and opportunities rural mission & ministry brings, and the part of the adventure you may be called to join in with, please do get in touch: hulmes@methodistchurch.org.uk