My chains fell off!

“And can it be” was one of the hymns I cited in my presentation recently to the Baptist World Alliance/World Methodist Council International Dialogue which I co-chair. Meeting in Runaway Bay Jamaica 12 members of the dialogue met over a week for the fourth of their annual meetings which will conclude next year with the drafting of a report. The overall theme of the dialogue is *faith working through love*. The theme of the conversations this time centered on “Grace and faith: sung and preached, lived and shared”. Participants discussed a range of papers on the works of piety and mercy, in worship and preaching, including hymnody, and in the outworking of faith in practice among Methodists and Baptists in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean.

It was appropriate that we met in Jamaica where Methodists and Baptists made common cause in opposing the imposition of slavery by the colonial government of the early 19th century. Sam Sharpe, a black Baptist preacher, who features on a banknote for 50 Jamaica dollars and is a National Hero, died in the cause of emancipation which finally came on 1st August 1838. In the graveyard of the local Baptist chapel in St. Ann’s Bay is a grave where some of the chains and shackles are buried. [see photo]. In the same town is commemorated another National Hero, Marcus Garvey, who was baptised in the Methodist Church in the late 19th century. He went on to champion the rights of workers and the pan-Africa movement.

On the Sunday we participated in Sunday worship at Hoolebury Methodist Church in the St. Ann’s Bay Circuit of the Jamaica District. We were joined for the service and lunch by Bishop Everard Galbraith of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas (MCCA). The Rev. Dr. Oral Thomas of the United Theological College (UTC) in Kingston preached the sermon on Matthew 5:20, drawing on the theme of holy hands and helping hands in joining together worship and service. [see photo]
The Connexional theme for MCCA and the Americas for this year is \textbf{Heritage and Mission.} The stories of these heroic women and men who proclaimed the gospel often in difficult circumstances is a means of bringing to life the endeavours of early missions as well as speaking to us today through lively worshipping and witnessing communities in place steeped in the Methodist message handed down the ages.

Earlier in the week the group traveled to Kingston to visit the denominational offices of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) and Jamaica Methodist District and shared lunch at Saxthorpe Methodist Church. They then visited UTC on the campus of the University of the West Indies at Mona before calling at the Bob Marley Museum and having dinner hosted by the General Secretary of the JBU, the Rev. Karl B. Johnson. It was heartening to hear of the ways the denominations work together in unity and mission in reaching out to the unchurched and the marginalised in society.