

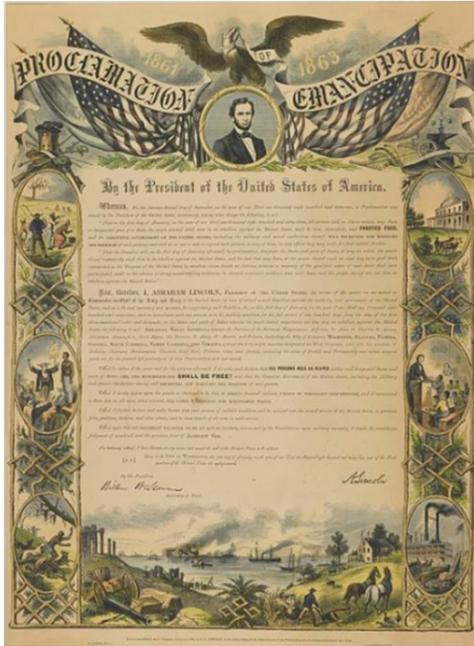


Greetings!

Nineteenth century evangelist Dwight L. Moody preached a revival service where he told the story of a Lake Erie boat<sup>1</sup> that was navigating a storm near Cleveland, Ohio. The waves were high, and the captain could only see the light of the lighthouse on the point at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. He could not see the lower lights along the shoreline. The captain asked the pilot, "Why are the lights out along the shore?" The pilot replied, "Because the waves are so high." The captain followed back with, "But we need the lights to see our way in." In his message, Moody likened the lighthouse light to Jesus and the lower lights as those who guide us along the way. The lower lights are crucial to finding the way to the lighthouse. In Moody's story the boat crashed against the rocks, beached and grounded with tearing steel and the grinding sound of a vessel breaking up.

In the congregation that evening was Phillip Bliss, the famous singer/songwriter of Gospel hymns. He was moved by this imagery and wrote the lovely hymn *Let the Lower Lights Be Burning*, its popular name, but officially, [\*Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy\*](#). I learned this hymn in my childhood and sang it in worship and family gathering hymn sings. It can be found in the 1964 Methodist hymnal called *The Book of Hymns*. For those from the EUB tradition, *The Hymnal* from 1957 includes it as well. Ironically just east of Cleveland, Phillip Bliss was killed in a train accident in Ashtabula, Ohio in 1876, just five years after this hymn was published. By the time of his death *Let the Lower Lights Be Burning* was a well-known piece of music, sung in churches and revival meetings across the United States.

I have thought of this hymn a great deal over my life. Am I a light that leads others to Jesus and his teachings? Not a bad self-awareness



Engraving by R.A. Dimmick, 1964.<sup>2</sup>

question to ask. When I was called to ministry that is what I wanted my life to be about. There is an important challenge in the hymn:

**"Brightly beams our Father's mercy from His lighthouse evermore,  
But to us He gives the keeping of the lights along the shore."**

The challenge, of course, is acknowledging that God does what **God alone** can do, but then gives us work that only **we** can do. Lights along the shore have been created for me in many ways. Those who guide and teach me God's word lead me to the light. Those who call me to action and engagement to speak out for others whose voice is not heard lead me to the light.

People who encourage and care for my soul lead me to the light. People who come and just hang out with me lead me to the light. John Wesley leads me to the light with the *General Rules of the Church* which are to Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay in Love with God.

A light to me is the speech by President Lincoln at Gettysburg prior to June 19, 1865. Another light is Saturday's celebration of Juneteenth's celebration of Juneteenth.<sup>2</sup> Juneteenth marks the day in 1865 when 2,000 Federal troops entered Galveston, TX and emancipated the remaining slaves in that region. In a historic moment yesterday, President Biden signed legislation into law creating [Juneteenth National Independence Day](#). During the signing ceremony, he was quoted as saying... "I think this will go down, for me, as one of the greatest honors I will have as president."



Emancipation Day celebration, June 19, 1900, Austin, TX.  
Credit: Austin History Center.<sup>3</sup>

Closer to home in our district, two gatherings are happening. One will be hosted at Wilmington College at 11am with ecumenical partners led by the Rev. R. Scott Miller, pastor of Wilmington UMC, and the Rev. Jim Nathan, pastor of the Clarksville/Olive Branch Charge. Wilmington College is a Quaker school. Quakers are dedicated to justice and were heavily involved, along with many Methodists and Brethren folk, on the Underground Railroad. From 1-3pm the ORV Racial Justice Team has a celebration planned at [New Vision United Methodist Church](#) with crafts, games, food and a special program led by the Rev. Jeaninne Walker. You are invited to attend either or both.

Lights can guide us from multiple angles but fear causes us to not see each other and when that happens, we miss out on many great relationships with multiple

communities. As we reflect more on Juneteenth, I hope that we keep the verses of the hymn in our mind, not only for our own transformation, but for the transformation of the world. After all, as United Methodists, is it not our mission to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World? It's hard to be very transformational without embracing the *lower lights*. I hope you might think about who has been that light to you and how you are light to others.

### Conversation

- Who has been a **light** to You?
  - When have you been **light** to someone else?
  - When have you withheld your **light**?
  - What sources, living or deceased, from your culture or other cultures help your **light** shine?
  - What next faithful **light** step do you need to take in your service to Jesus?
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<sup>1</sup> Lake Erie freighters are called boats. Learn more: [wikipedia.org/wiki/lake/freighter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_freighter)

<sup>2</sup> Publishers throughout the North responded to a demand for copies of Lincoln's proclamation and produced numerous decorative versions, including this engraving by R. A. Dimmick in 1864. National Museum of American History, gift of Ralph E. Becker

<sup>3</sup> <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/historical-legacy-juneteenth>

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Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

