

July 10, 2022  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Kingdomtide  
“Mission”

Announcements:

- Signups for the Listening tour going around again this Sunday, after this check in with the office or the SPPRC Chair to sign up.
- Ad Council meets Monday, July 18 at 6:30
- SPPRC meets Tuesday, July 19 at 6:30

Pastoral Prayer:

In peace, let us pray to the Lord, saying,  
**hear our prayer.**

Gracious God,  
You know our wounds, our troubles, and our needs even before we know them ourselves.  
As the Samaritan showed compassion to the wounded man, you offer mercy to us.

We pray for those who are sick or in trouble.  
Comfort them with your grace, and empower your church to minister to them.  
God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer the violence of human hands, especially for the people of Highland Park, and Ukraine. Shield them with your holy angels, and

motivate your church to bind up wounds, and to beat our own swords into plowshares.  
God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for children and for the defenseless.  
Safeguard them in your protection, and strengthen the church to tend to them.  
God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for elected officials and for civil servants.  
Stir them to heed justice, to serve faithfully, to lead responsibly, and rouse the church to hold them accountable for the outcomes of their policies.  
God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for pastors, teachers, musicians, bishops, and every disciple growing in faith as a saint who leads your church. Inspire them by your Holy Spirit, and guide the church to encourage them in faithfulness.  
God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

God of Compassion, receive our prayers, and lead us all to serve in love, through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**Luke 10:25-37**

*25 A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?”*

*26 Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?”*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Feasting on the Word: Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2*, Prayers of Intercession, p.88.

*27 He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."*

*28 Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."*

*29 But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*30 Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. 31 Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 32 Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 33 A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. 34 The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, "Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs." 36 What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"*

*37 Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

**May God add a blessing to this reading from God's holy word. Amen.**

One of the things that I like to remind folks that I study the Bible with is that not all Scripture is "Go thou and do likewise".

That saying comes from this story, which is

peppered with beautiful questions.

I'm not sure that I have a favorite among the parables of Jesus, but this one is certainly top five.

Last week, I asked what the church was for, what its purpose was, what was the vision of the world that we were working toward.

For me, it's a vision of the world transformed, healed, renewed, marked by wholeness in human beings and holiness in human relationships.

This week, as the lectionary brings us a bouquet of beautiful questions, I have one simple one:

What is the mission of the United Methodist Church?

**Will you pray with me?**

**God of grace, who shows us mercy, who loved us when we were yet sinners, who pursued humanity with a reckless love when we actively opposed the justice, and righteousness, and even the goodness that you intended for us, remind us of our mission. Make us intentional in our discipleship, methodical in our disciplines, that we may grow in the likeness of our Savior, who loved with all that he was and is. Through our faithfulness to Christ, make yourself known, that others might see the goodness and glory of your**

**kingdom, and leave aside the things that divide, all the petty kingdoms of ourselves, and follow the way of Jesus.**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.**

Last week I suggested that we all probably had somewhat different visions of what the world that God intended looked like, at least in the details – streets of gold!

The “how” of moving toward that vision, together, is the mission of the United Methodist Church, and although it might look different in each context, the mission is the same wherever you go, for members in the United Methodist stream of Christian tradition.

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I think it’s worth repeating.

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I didn’t make that up.

United Methodists from around the globe gathered for our quadrennial meeting (every four years, that

is, at least before the pandemic) and wrote that mission statement.

It’s part of our Book of Discipline, the collection of rules and church law that essentially is a record of how we have wrestled with beautiful questions, like “how are we going to follow Jesus together”, and our current set of working answers.

To be a disciple is to be under the discipline of another.

To be accountable, but also to be an imitator, to share beliefs, values, and commitments.

To be a disciple of Christ is to open oneself to being formed and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into someone who loves like Jesus.

Who makes the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ known in the world.

Someone who lives in ways that bring that kingdom of healing and justice and wholeness near.

And to be a disciple, eventually, and collectively, means to disciple others.

I had a class in college – my undergrad, not seminary – called Strategic Management.

In business, not only are mission statements a big thing, there's this idea of a strategic competitive advantage – the thing that is distinctive about your company that sets you apart, that you do better or differently from anyone else.

The professor suggested that God's strategic competitive advantage was the seed.

Not just the seed but the idea of the seed, that the things that were created were created in a way that continued the process, that they made more of themselves.

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Yes, disciples gain eternal life.

But the way of Jesus produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control.

Its fruit is justice now, right relationship now, a life so rich in the things that make life truly worth living that it might be called "abundant" life, in the here and now.

The foundation of that way?

Love God with everything that you are and love your neighbor as yourself.

In our Scripture lesson for today, Jesus has just sent out disciples, to go and heal and prepare folks for his in-person visit.

And they've come back, and they've done the justice and mercy part, and Jesus reminds them of the "walk humbly" part.

Our translation says that a "legal expert" stood up to test him, sometimes the word will be rendered as "lawyer", but really it's a Biblical Scholar.

An expert in the "Law" of Moses, what we have as the first five books of the Bible, and the commentary on it, the arguments about how to interpret it and apply it, and how the lessons of the prophets relate to it.

Sometimes we think that the Old Testament and the New Testament are very different, but the Bible before Jesus still points to a straightforward way of being: Love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself.

And just like then, we get in trouble when we try to fiddle with it.

When we try to make it less than it is, or limit it, because it's hard.

And it is hard, if we try to do it on our own, apart from a connection to the Spirit of a loving God, apart

from a community of mutual accountability and mutual support.

Not complicated, but difficult, challenging, because the human systems of exploitation don't work very well in a culture that truly loves God with everything and loves each other.

So that way is resisted.

The legal expert asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor"?

Who do I get to not love?

And in this beautiful parable Jesus describes not only who counts as neighbor, but what love looks like.

To really get the impact, you have to know two things:

First, that Samaritans and Jews are neighbors, literally, and that they're cousins, and that they are bitter enemies.

They disagree on politics AND religion.

Second, there's a convention in stories like the one Jesus tells called the rule of three.

It helps storytellers and listeners remember and it sets expectations.

The first two examples establish a pattern, the third disrupts it.

But the examples are all from the same category.

Three little pigs.

Three bowls of porridge.

And so on.

And the listener is invited to put themselves in the story.

And we all like to be the hero.

Jesus is answering a question for the legal expert.

The legal expert is not a priest.

The legal expert is not a Levite.

So at the point of the story where the third character is anticipated, the expectation is that it will be someone who the legal expert can identify with.

And it's a Samaritan.

And the only character left for the legal expert to occupy is that of the man in the ditch.

To follow Jesus begins with love of God and love of neighbor, and neighbor includes your bitter enemy.

To follow Jesus means to identify with those in desperate need of help from anyone, even their bitter enemies.

To follow Jesus means to show mercy, even to those who are identified as enemies.

And this is not a sentiment, it is concrete action that actually makes the world different.

That binds up wounds.  
That feeds.

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Go thou, and do likewise.  
Amen.

Invitation to the offering:

As a redeemed people, we live for giving thanks! We understand that everything we do and everything we have comes from God, whose unconditional love lifts us up each day.

Let us continue our thanksgiving, with grateful hearts, by giving of what God has provided.<sup>2</sup>

Charge:

God loves you with all that God is. Go and do likewise, teaching others about Jesus through loving your neighbor, doing justice, showing mercy, caring for the hurting, and defending the vulnerable and oppressed. Love everyone. Everyone. And so transform this world into one where everyone knows they are loved.

Benediction:

And so, beloved, go in peace, and may the love of God, the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit go with you now and remain with you always. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Feasting on the Word: Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2*,  
Invitation to the Offering, p.84.