

Graphics, Audio and Video - Media Notes are highlighted in this background

- Please record sermon at both worship services

Key Questions

1. What is this sermon about?
 - a. This sermon is about how we are connectional and diverse as a United Methodist Church
2. Why is this sermon important?
 - a. This sermon is important because staying connected with those that are different than us is part of being a United Methodist.
3. What are the next action steps?
 - a. stay connected with other people for support and accountability.
 - b. recognize and appreciate diversity
 - c. make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
4. What is the good news (bottom line)?
 - a. The good news is that Jesus sends us on our mission; God keeps us connected and the Holy Spirit works through our diversity.

Context

This is the fourth sermon in the series, Restoring Joy: 5 Habits for Living Well. In this series we explore five important lessons the Bible teaches us about living well and experiencing real joy.

What makes United Methodists different from other denominations? How do I tell my friends what it means to be a Methodist? Does being a United Methodist make any difference at all? Join First United Methodist Church for a five-week journey to explore the defining characteristics of a United Methodist Christian. We will consider our history as a church, our approach to faith and look for ways that our heritage can defines our faith and challenge us to rediscover our spiritual passion.

Metadata

- Topic(s)
 - connection, diversity, United Methodist
- Books of the Bible
 - Matthew
- Series
 - Love Divine: Life as a United Methodist Christian
- Tags
 - United Methodist, Methodist, connectional, diversity, connection, diverse, global,

1st Sunday after Pentecost / in Kingdomtide / Trinity Sunday

Love Divine: Connectional and Diverse Community

First United Methodist Church of El Dorado

Text online at <http://j.mp/1IOVGeM>

June 15, 2014

Matthew 28:16-20

Target Word Count: 2,366

Video online is currently unavailable.

annual conference, general conference,

Matthew 28:16-20, CEB

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Sermon Starter Video

- Play sermon starter video.
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Introduction

Series Review and United Methodist Handbook

Today, as we continue our sermon series, Love Divine: Life as a United Methodist Christian. We will consider how the people of the United Methodist Church are connected with each other around the world and that in our diversity we are seeking to accomplish one mission.

You can find some of the themes of the sermons from this series as well as additional information about the United Methodist Church. These are free for you. I encourage you to pick one up and take it home to read more about who we are as United Methodists.

Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Perspective on your life or something in your life that gives additional meaning to the message today.
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

Opening Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Called to be Connectional

Organized to Accomplish our Mission

“United Methodist leaders often speak of the denomination as “the connection.” This concept has been central to Methodism from its beginning. The United Methodist structure and organization began as a means of accomplishing [our mission, which Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, described as to spread scriptural holiness across the land.] He recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the “connexion,” an interlocking system of classes, societies and conferences.”¹

What does it mean to be connectional?

Simply put, no one congregation is the total body of Christ. United Methodist churches and organizations join in mission with one another and with other denominations. Connectionalism shows through the clergy appointment system, through the mission and ministry that United Methodists do together and through giving. Mission endeavors around the world, whether a new university in Africa or tornado relief [right here in Kansas], are the work of “the connection.”²

Transition

United Methodists are organized in local communities around the world. I want to share some of ways that our denomination is connected as an organization around the world.

Our Organization

- General Conference
- South Central Jurisdictional Conference
- Great Plains Annual Conference
- Wichita East District
- First UMC El Dorado

General Conference

¹ The United Methodist Handbook, 16.

² The United Methodist Handbook, 16.

“The General Conference is the only body that speaks officially for the church. Meeting once every four years to determine legislation affecting connectional matters, it is composed of no fewer than 600 and no more than 1,000 delegates.”³

Jurisdictional Conference

“Five geographic jurisdictional conferences (regions) in the United States include 8 to 15 annual conferences each. Jurisdictional conferences meet simultaneously every four years to elect and assign bishops and some members of general church agencies and, in some cases, to develop jurisdictional programs.”⁴

Annual Conference

“Local churches are organized into annual conferences, regional bodies that meet yearly for legislative purposes. They are the primary link to the church’s connectional structure. Annual conferences approve programming and budget, elect delegates to General and jurisdictional conferences, and examine and recommend candidates for ministry.”⁵

Local Churches and Districts

“When it comes to the United Methodist organizational structure, all roads lead back to the local church. [The local church is the most significant place for the church to accomplish its mission.] Each congregation in the United States is part of a district, an administrative grouping of approximately 40 to 80 churches with a full-time superintendent. A charge conference governs each local church, with a church council as the year-round supervisor.”⁶

Connected in Mission

Annual Conference in Lincoln

This week, I attended the annual meeting of the Great Plains Conference in Lincoln, NE. As you might imagine, there are all kinds of people who are part of United Methodist Churches across Kansas and Nebraska. Yet, no matter what their church was like - urban or rural, worship under 50 or over 1,000 - everyone was connected around our mission as United Methodists - making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The Great Commission

We find the heart of our mission in Jesus’ words from the scripture passage for today. In the gospel according to Matthew, these are the last words Jesus has for his disciples before he

³ The United Methodist Handbook, 17.

⁴ The United Methodist Handbook, 18.

⁵ The United Methodist Handbook, 18.

⁶ The United Methodist Handbook, 18.

ascends into heaven. Hear Jesus' words again from [Matthew 28:19-20](#)

Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Transition

Our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world is why all of the organization in our denomination exists. It is why Methodists get together in every group from the global gathering of General Conference to our local church, right here in El Dorado.

Diversity

Grace and Holiness

"Wesley placed major emphasis on two seemingly contradictory ideas: grace and holiness. Methodists recognize that it is only by God's grace (God's undeserved favor and blessings) that we have life and salvation. Our salvation is purely a gift from God. Methodists tend to emphasize, with the psalmists, that God is "merciful and gracious, / slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 86:15; 103:8). ...

At the same time, ... Wesley emphasized a doctrine called sanctification, or what was also referred to as Christian perfection or simply holiness, championing this ideal as the lifelong goal of the believer. Sanctification or holiness means to have one's heart so transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit that one manifests perfect love for God and neighbor.

[In Matthew 5:48, we read these words, "Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete."]

Wesley believed that it was possible to be wholly sanctified in this life and that, by the pursuit of God and the yielding of one's life to the work of the Holy Spirit, anyone might receive from God this gift of sanctification."⁷

Personal Holiness and Social Holiness

"Holiness for Methodists, has two dimensions: the love of God, which means surrendering completely to God while avoiding anything that would offend God in one's thoughts, words, and deeds, and the love of neighbor, which includes caring for the poor, the sick, and those in need, thereby addressing injustice and seeking to shape our communities so that they are patterned on the kingdom of God."⁸

Unexpected Connections

⁷ Hamilton, *Christianity's Family Tree*, 121.

⁸ Hamilton, *Christianity's Family Tree*, 122.

One of the things, “I value most about Methodism is its attempt at holding together so many seemingly disparate ideas and practices: the emphasis on both the social and evangelical gospels; the linking of God’s grace with a call to holiness and good works; the coupling of personal, passionate experience with a serious intellect; the love of both liturgy and simplicity in worship; and Wesley’s firm belief that God is sovereign and yet has given human beings free will, inviting all to receive God’s grace. These beliefs are not necessarily unique to Methodists ... but ... these polarities tend to be one of the defining characteristics of their faith.

Our Bishop, Scott Jones, describes Methodism in this way:

“In the Christian faith, there are people who are extreme right and people who are extreme left. But whether it’s clergy clothing or how our services of worship are conducted or how we read the Bible, we tend to be people of the extreme center.

The extreme center means that The United Methodist Church at its best is conservative in some areas and liberal in other areas. We don’t fit a stereotype very well. For example, some denominations are good at helping nominally religious and nonreligious people enter into the Christian life. Well, that’s part of the gospel; and it’s part of what we do as United Methodists. Other denominations want to help the poor and address social issues, however they define them. Well, that’s part of the gospel; and Methodists embrace them as well.

The center is a very hard position to maintain because there are always people who are sniping at you from the extremes. Sometimes it’s easier to hold an extreme position because you can be really clear and really forceful, but what you are lacking is the perspective of your brothers and sisters who disagree with you. By occupying the extreme center, we see the value of both sides and try to carve out a position, whether it involves theology or social justice, that embraces the whole gospel.”⁹

Conclusion

Symphony in the Flint Hills

Last night, I had the opportunity to attend the Symphony in the Flint Hills. It was incredible event and was only possible by the work of hundreds of people to make sure that everything was prepared:

- Ranchers
- Musicians
- Caterers
- Educational speakers
- Volunteers

Everyone had a particular role to play and each was different.

Those that were playing instruments were not asked to ride horses.

⁹ Hamilton, *Christianity’s Family Tree*, 122-3.

The caterer was not responsible for making sure that there were enough bathrooms.

All of these people had particular roles which were distinct and yet they were all connected to create a magical event on a single day. The Symphony in the Flint Hills describes their mission in this way, "Heighten appreciation and knowledge of the tallgrass prairie, by providing opportunities to experience symphonic music and place-based education in the Kansas Flint Hills."¹⁰

Good News

The good news is that it is Jesus who sends us on our mission. It is God who keeps us connected. It is the Holy Spirit who works through our diversity.

Call to Action

As you live as a United Methodist Christian,
Stay connected with other people for support and accountability.
recognize and appreciate diversity
and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Invitation

¹⁰ <http://www.symphonyintheflinthills.org/about/>