

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B (May 5, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Love One Another

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to mind when you hear the word “love”?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 15:9-17](#).

- What is Jesus’ commandment in the passage today? [“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:2).]
- Today’s Preaching Notes say, *“Joy is a shared experience, rather than a solitary one. That might help us understand when Jesus said, ‘That my joy may be in you and your joy might be full.’ He is saying that our joy, the human experience, that fleeting but powerful passion that fills us up and threatens to burn us out, is not complete until it is joined to his joy, the holy, divine joy that knows that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. Our joy is complete – or mature, or perfect; it is all the same word in Greek - only when woven into his joy.”*
 - What do you think it would be like to live life with “Jesus’ joy in you”?
- Jesus said, “I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). Reflect on the transition from servants to friends. What does it mean to be called a friend of Jesus? How does this change your relationship with Him and with other people?
- “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16a). What does it mean to you that Jesus chose you? How does knowing that you have been chosen by Jesus to bear fruit affect your understanding of your purpose and actions in the world?
- “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another” (John 15:17).
 - What does loving one another look like in your context? What could you do this week to work on loving one another within your families, church, workplace, or community?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, as we conclude our time together, we thank You for Your word to love one another as You have loved us. Empower us to carry this command into our daily lives, showing Your love in all we do and say. Amen.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B (May 12, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Share Christ

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to mind when you hear the word “unity”?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 17:6-19](#)

- Today’s Preaching Notes reflect on unity: *“Jesus prays that we (that’s you and me and everyone else) would be one as “we are one.” We are to be as close as Jesus and God; we are called to function as parts of the Trinity, aspects of the same thing, different, but one in essence and in hope. That is what community really means. It doesn’t mean individuality is lost; differences make the whole what it is. But it does mean that we acknowledge our need for the other, acknowledge that we are somehow incomplete without the other. How can we fight among ourselves? How can we hate and cast stones at one another when we are part of the same whole? We are hating and casting stones at ourselves. The church is many things, but in this prayer, it is clear that the church is called to be one, to be united.”*
 - How might you foster unity within your own community despite differences in opinions or backgrounds?
 - How might you cultivate a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation when conflicts arise within your community?
- “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (John 17:14). Jesus emphasizes the distinction between His disciples and the world.
 - How can you maintain your identity as a follower of Christ while engaging with the world around you?
 - When have you faced challenges in maintaining your Christian identity while engaging with the world? How did you navigate through it?
- *“Our argument in this series and especially this week is that our calling is to live a life of love, and our fundamental belief is that sharing Christ is the loving thing to do. However, the methodology for sharing is as important as the sharing itself. Loving is an act of respect; it is a way of honoring others, the objects of our love—especially those whom society has neglected, overlooked, or ignored”* (5/12 Preaching Note). “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).
 - This week, how might you be sent to the world to share Christ? How does Jesus' mission to the world inspire you to live out your own mission as a disciple of Christ?
 - How does it challenge your comfort zones and call you to step out in faith?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, we thank You for calling us to be One. Guide us as we go forth, so that we may live in unity and bear witness to Your grace in our every word and deed. Empower us to fulfill this mission with courage and joy. Amen.

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Rev. Motoe Yamada Foor, Director of Adult Discipleship, served in local churches for twenty years. She has a wealth of experience at a variety of organizational levels of The United Methodist Church as well as in ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC). She also enjoys serving as a coach to help people and churches grow.

Pentecost Sunday, Year B (May 19, 2024) – These Bones Will Live

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants respond to the following: How do you experience the Holy Spirit in your everyday life? Are there certain times you are aware of God's guiding presence?

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Acts 2](#) and [Ezekiel 37](#).

- **What first comes to mind when you hear the terms “Holy Spirit” or “Holy Ghost”?** [When we pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are stating our belief in a trinitarian God. The Holy Spirit is a triune Spirit that encompasses the Spirit of Jesus Christ and our Creator God. The Holy Spirit exists so that we, God's people, might intimately know and experience God in our everyday lives.]
- **What does the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2:1-21 have to do with the Holy Spirit?** [Acts 2:1-21 is traditionally understood as the moment when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples of Jesus for the first time after the Resurrection. It is a moment that fulfills Christ's words in Acts 1:8: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*]
- **What strikes you as odd or confusing about the passage in Acts or Ezekiel?** *Acts 2:12 says “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’”* [Bones, breath, rattling (in Ezekiel) ... tongues, language, fire, wind (in Acts). What is going on in these passages!? Both scriptures are full of vibrant and poetic imagery used to help explain the unexplainable—God's mysterious blessing of the Holy Spirit.]
- **Do you often talk about the Holy Spirit in Church or Christian study?** [The study or doctrine of the Holy Spirit is called *pneumatology*. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is known to be one of the most neglected doctrines in Christian teaching. Why? For many, it is often hard to describe the Holy Spirit and its function in our life.]
- **What does it mean for God's Holy Spirit to be within us?** *Ezekiel 37:14 says “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...”* [In the scripture, the word for *breath* is the same as the word for *Holy Spirit*. In the Hebrew language, it's the word *ruach* (pronounced “roo-akh”). In the Greek language, it's the word “pneuma” (the root word for *pneumatology*.)]
- **What seems to be the importance of the Holy Spirit's function in our faith?** [John Wesley says the Spirit of God is “the immediate cause of all holiness in believers.”[1] As United Methodists, we believe in “holy living;” the act of loving God and neighbor. The only way we can do this is through the grace, presence, and guidance of the Holy Spirit.]

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

We, the people of the Cross and the Flame, pray to you O God! Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit!

We pray your Holy Breath might rattle and shake within us— dismantling the old and resurrecting the new.

We pray your Holy Wind will blow the embers of our souls afire— giving warmth to our hearts and light to our lives.

We pray your Holy Language of love will override all barriers— bringing us closer to one another in life and in faith.

We, the people of the Cross and the Flame, know your gospel story is alive within us—granting us the power through the Holy Spirit to transform the world for the sake of the kingdom! May it be so!

We pray this in the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

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Trinity Sunday, Year B (May 26, 2024) – Ascribe to God: Consuming Presence

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “When was the last time you felt ‘in the moment’ and gave your full attention to whatever was present? Was it on a walk or looking over a vista that took your breath away? Was it watching a young one in a school play or on a walk noticing the seasons change?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Isaiah 6:1-8](#).

- As Isaiah lays out this scene, who is present with Isaiah, and how is God portrayed in this vision (Isaiah 6:1-2)?
- Can you describe the scene using each of your senses? Let this be an immersive experience together! What do you see, hear, feel, taste, smell, throughout this encounter with the Divine?
- “Here am I” is a phrase that shows up time and time again in the scriptures. Can you recall times that this phrase has come up for other figures in the Bible? Is there a particular figure who stands out? Why do you think this figure comes to mind for you today?
- The Preaching Notes for May 26 say that there was something about *Presence* that drove Isaiah to his knees. Do you agree that this may be *Divine Love*? If not, how do you see this force (e.g., awe, fear, regret, shame, or confusion)? If yes, what does this “drive-you-to-your-knees-love” look like in your life?
- Notice how an encounter with God’s presence changes Isaiah and seems to open him to new possibilities in his life. Most of us are not ready to listen to the callings of God without some preparation of the heart. What are the experiences you are called to put into your life (e.g., poetry, quiet, hiking, scripture) to be ready to respond with the kind of openness of Isaiah?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

God, who touches our lips and pours over our senses a fresh sense of your Divine presence, open in us a readiness to respond to your presence with our own. Help us to put down our cell phones, our disruptions of life, and the constant list of to-dos long enough to notice your greatness around us. May that presence move us and invite us to say, “Here I am, send me.” Amen.