

Baptism



picture from <http://www.grandsalinefumc.org/baptism>

See insert. Any who wish to join in the verbal responses as a reaffirmation of their faith are welcome to do so.

<Hymn "Hymn of Promise"

UMH #707>

Gospel lesson

After Jesus finished teaching the puzzlers of last week, He noted to His disciples about the widow giving all she had in donating just two small copper coins to the temple where rich people donated much larger sums – and for what?



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-taxes-caesar/>

Luke 21:5-19

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said,

⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

⁷ They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?"

⁸ And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them.

⁹ "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately."

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;

¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.

¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify.

¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance;

¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.

¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name.

¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

The word of God for the people of God

Message: Open-Mouthed Tourists



Foreground picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty God who calls us to focus on You,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may not be distracted by mundane things
instead. Amen.

We continue our "Face to Face with Jesus" series this

week with “Open-Mouthed Tourists.”



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

“What are you distracted by? That’s a question underlying our text this week. What is it that draws your attention away from your call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

Not that followers of Jesus aren’t allowed to enjoy the beauty and wonder that this world has to offer. The Christian life is marked by joy and surrounded by wonder.

Yet, like the disciples in our text, we can be distracted by what we see around us and lose sight of our reason for being, to live a life of proclamation and invitation.”



picture from <https://www.habitatoakland.org/volunteer/>

How many of you are familiar with Habitat for Humanity? It is a great opportunity for people to become homeowners, by getting help to build their own dwelling with an affordable mortgage.

The default rate on such mortgages is low, but typically follows a pattern when it happens. As Gaston Warner described in the book *From Relief to Empowerment*,

“Quite often the homeowner would have a large SUV in the driveway with an equally impressive monthly payment, many times what the home payment was. There would be furniture and electronics also on lease in the home, in what seemed a flagrant disregard for financial planning, even though financial training was part of the vetting process for Habitat homeownership.

“...the underlying cause in many cases was...a lack of hope...for some people who had grown up in a generational cycle of poverty, the promise of breaking out of that cycle seemed unimaginable. An enjoy-it-while-you-can mentality had set in.

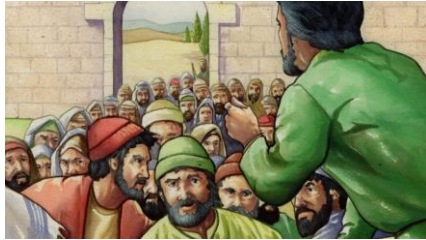
“If a person’s entire experience of anything good was that you should take full advantage because no matter what you did it would either disappear or be taken from you, then the concept of sacrificing to build a better financial life made little sense.

“Hope is a fundamental need...The cycle of poverty has many tools to hold people in its clutches, and hopelessness is chief among them.”¹

¹ Warner, Lacey and Gaston, *From Relief to Empowerment: How Your Church Can Cultivate Sustainable Mission* (Nashville: Foundery Books, 2018), p.114.

I have heard folks dismiss those who live in mobile homes with three or four snowmobiles parked outside as being foolish. Yet, in light of what I learned from that book, I have to wonder if those snowmobilers similarly have no hope of better.

Maybe instead of being obsessed with having good things and dismissing those who do not, we can focus on encouraging others to have enough hope for the future that they can make better decisions accordingly.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/cef-nehemiah4/>

The struggle to find hope in difficult times is nothing new. Isaiah had to describe a future of hope for the Israelites who had just returned from exile in order for them to shake off [the hopelessness and despair they had lived in for multiple generations] in the Babylonian exile. They needed to understand what living as children of God actually meant in order to benefit from the opportunities and blessings inherent in the return to Jerusalem.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul and company had to remind people not to be lazy and give up on working, but to strive not to be a burden to others; to earn their keep, as it were. Jesus did not die for us to give up on doing what it takes to live!

Jesus understood that people get sidetracked, lose focus on God and forget what is really important. Think of all those people donating to the temple, helping to maintain and beautify the building when poor widows were being neglected, and for what end? Even the strong stone walls would not last forever.



*picture by Wilson44691 -
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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/
w/index.php?curid=7586805](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7586805)*

Yet when Jesus told the disciples that the temple would eventually be destroyed, did they thank Him for leading them instead to eternal life? No! They asked about when the temple would fall, to be prepared.

They were looking to a false hope, an enjoy-it-now-while-you-can mindset about their relationship with God. Jesus promptly redirected them.

Yes, the world will go through chaotic times; every generation we see things that make us wonder how anyone survived that. But we do not need to deal with all of that. Our time is now, our work is here. And God is walking with us, helping and guiding us in it.

How are we responding to God's call on our lives? When we accept Jesus as our Savior and proclaim our faith, are we doing it like open-mouthed tourists,

checking out the physical results of what people have done before us instead of focusing on God and working on our faith journeys?

Do we waste opportunities before us because we are too focused on the immediate, not trusting in God to guide us for the better way long term? We just celebrated today God coming to us in water and the Spirit to transform our lives. How are we using that to transform the world?

Do we judge others for not making the same decisions as we would? What about getting to know them, understanding why they make those decisions, and painting a more hopeful picture for them when they are caught in a cycle of hopelessness?

I am not just talking about financial concerns. When we are baptized, it is not just an outward washing.



background image from <https://newdirectionspgh.com/counseling-therapy/grief-counseling/>

It is an outward expression of the inward work of the Holy Spirit, something that completely transforms every aspect of our lives into something better.

It is up to us to take that into the world, to everyone we meet in every experience that we have. If everyone who came to church on Sunday lived Christ

throughout the week, there would be a sea-change of love and nurturing in our culture and in the world.

Let's work on healing the rifts felt during election season, whenever we have hurt feelings, whenever we or someone we know are struggling yet being judged inadequate by others (including us).

In those situations: stop, take a deep breath – and breathe in the Holy Spirit, praying for God to guide you – and then apply the teachings of Jesus in love and faith. Enjoy the beauty of this world and this season, but keep your heart focused on the much more beautiful and eternal kingdom of God.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Holy God who calls us to the journey: it is so easy for us to become distracted so that we wander off the path you have put before us.

The chaos of the world around us catches our attention, and we neglect the inner journey that keeps us closer to you.

As we set aside this time to bring our gifts to you, may you draw our attention back to the wisdom and guidance that you put before us, and may it lead us to endurance that will carry us to kingdom presence!

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
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- Thanks for
 - **Wenda West/Matt Sheldon** - home from hospital
 - **New members** - reminder of hope for our future
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 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray:
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine"UMH #606>

<Benediction>



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Go into the world, not as open-mouthed tourists, but as disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Seek to be face to face with Jesus and ask for God's wisdom.

Bring the message of hope and love, of justice and peace, to all you meet.

Let others see the love of God, the face of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit within you.

Amen.