

Interactive lesson



picture from
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/stone-statue-of-leader-of-civil-rights-movement-in-washington-dc-5214869/>

February is Black History Month. Are any of you doing anything special for it? <Let them respond>

Have any of you taken the “Imagine No Racism” study offered by the United Methodist Church (UMC)?

If so, what was most surprising to learn?

If not, why not? <Let them respond>

Can anyone here explain why the UMC has the “Imagine No Racism” course? <Let them respond>

The Methodist Church does not have a great history with African Americans. It started out really well, as the teachings of everyone equal in God’s eyes was very popular among the oppressed.

- The leaders of early Methodism condemned slavery.
- At the official formation of Methodism (MEC) as separate from the Church of England in 1784, clergy were not to own slaves and a policy was enacted to require all members to emancipate any slaves that they had over the next decade.

What do you think happened? <Let them respond>

Methodism grew most rapidly in the South at first, so the politics of anti-slavery became more problematic.

Racism and power struggles by white Southern clergy led to African Americans walking out of the church

and forming their own denomination, AME; another group in NY did so shortly thereafter to form AMEZ.

Do you think racial segregation resolved the issue for the MEC? <Let them respond>

As tensions grew toward the Civil War, there was division in the MEC over slavery. Recognizing unreconcilable views, they split in 1846 into the MEC (for the north and midwest) and the MEC South (MECS).

After slavery was made illegal, do you think reconciling the two into the Methodist Church was easy? <Let them respond>

At the time, both the MEC and MECS were organized in Annual Conferences (like our UNY) with a General Conference for their entire church. In order to appease the racism of the Southern Methodists for reuniting into the Methodist Church (MC) in **1939**, they created a middle organization level called jurisdictions. For whites in the US, five geographical jurisdictions were set up; for African Americans in the US, one Central Jurisdiction was set up. Segregation had become official church policy.

How do you think the members of the Central Jurisdiction behaved toward the rest of the MC?

<Let them respond>

The Central Jurisdiction used their influence to empower African Americans and to witness against the racism that it represented. Do you know what ended the segregation? <Let them respond>

It was not until 1968, when the MC merged with the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) to form the UMC, that the Central Jurisdiction was merged into the geographical jurisdictions - and they only did it at the insistence of the EUB for the merger. The UMC did not formally repent of its history of racism until the 2000 General Conference.

Do you understand now why the UMC has the “Imagine No Racism” course? <Let them respond>

What do you think Jesus would have us do in our community, to undo or prevent racism?

<Let them respond>

Gospel lesson

We conclude our delving into the Sermon on the Mount today with:



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/snow-sea-man-beach-7539515/>;
credit: Anastasia Shuraeva

Matthew 5:21-37

NRSV

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'

²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be

liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.

²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.

²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose

one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.'

³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

³⁷ Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive"

UMH #390

Message: But I Say



background picture and overlay from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/glimpses-of-the-kin-dom/sixth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty and ever wise Savior,

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 live for the glory of God. Amen.

The "Glimpses of the Kin-dom" series brings us today to "But I Say":

"Relationships within the body are important, but so is the relationship of the church with the wider community.

How can you lift community concerns or needs?

What acts of service within the community are already in place that you can celebrate?

What additional needs could be met, or invitations issued?

Who is missing from the body of the church?

Jesus calls us to go above and beyond in our attempts to see all the people."



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/nfl-stadium-field-full-with-crowd-watching-the-game-during-daytime-128457/>;
credit: Robert Hernandez Villalta

Who is missing today? It is Superbowl Sunday, but the Bills are not playing and the game does not start till 6:30 anyway, so that should not be keeping folks around here away. I saw that for seats at the stadium, tickets last Monday were up to \$6,000 each, with VIP box costs from \$200,000 up to \$2 million - for a seat at one game. 30 second ads for the Superbowl average \$7 million.

Am I the only one who thinks that maybe the costs for sports fans have gotten a little out of hand? I wonder if anyone attending live donated as much money as they spend on sports to helping people in need. How many homeless people could be housed, how many home help aides could be funded, how many school programs could be bolstered - the list goes on and on, of ways that money could be spent to directly help people.

I know that the professional sports industry is legal and brings excitement to many hearts. I just wish many of those hearts did not put wanting extra money or seeing their team win ahead of needs much closer to home, supporting professional sports ahead of helping others - or worse, picking fights with or dissing others because of team loyalties.

Christ calls us to put God first. We heard in the Old Testament readings how worshipping anything else leads to curses and death, but those who seek God with their whole heart are blessed. When we are focused on God, our entire outlook changes.



picture screencaptured from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGbNw855ksw>; credit: BibleProject

The team mentality goes away when we realize we are all children of God, each to be treasured for who we as individuals are. In the primitive church, initially they lived as one unified community, until people got distracted from God and began to identify with the apostle who led them to Christ instead of focusing on Christ Himself as our Savior. Paul had to remind them to refocus for the sake of God's kingdom.

Throughout history people have looked to groups with an "us vs. them" mindset. They may not even have realized that they were breaking God's commandment to love one another with that. We just talked earlier about racism and how segregation does not work. The kingdom of God calls us to better relationships, united in Jesus. We need to refocus on Christ.



picture from MMMS collection

The worldly minimums are no longer adequate. The love

of God calls us to go above and beyond the basics set by the law. Seeking to nurture someone and help them flourish is much different than just keeping them dressed, unharmed, and fed. Similarly in our relationships, we need to pay attention and work for one another to flourish in love, not just be polite to their face and then ignore them.

Put aside hate and anger. Put aside fear of others, selfish thoughts, and team mentality. Trust God's wisdom and God's ways instead.

Look for areas of tension and pray for guidance to a cooperative solution, where all have their concerns addressed and are lifted up. Consider how to think "we" or both/all of us. Work on projects reinforcing that view, and celebrate the love of God for all.

Do not do merely as the sinful world thinks is enough, but do as Jesus says. In this way, we can begin to emulate Jesus in living so far above the minimums that we would have to go out of our way to break God's commands.

Let us now respond with **A Modern Affirmation** UMH #885

Pastor:

Where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is the one true church, apostolic and universal,
whose holy faith let us now declare:

Pastor and People:

We believe in God the Father,
infinite in wisdom, power, and love,
whose mercy is over all his works,
and whose will is ever directed to his children's
good.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
Son of God and Son of man,
the gift of the Father's unfailing grace,
the ground of our hope,
and the promise of our deliverance from sin and
death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit
as the divine presence in our lives,
whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance
of the truth of Christ,
and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself
in the service of love
as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord,
to the end
that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth.

Amen.

*<Doxology>**<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>*

Let us pray:

Holy God, as we offer to you gifts from the abundance you have provided us, we recognize that the offering that concerns you is more than what is in our wallets and purses, but in our hearts.

You desire from us hearts that are a fit place for you to live and dwell.

Help us [as we present this offering] to clear out long-held anger, resentments, prejudice, and hate.

Help us to furnish our hearts with love, mercy, justice, compassion, and forgiveness, so they might be a place where you feel welcome and at home.

(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:

- **Brett Gilbert** - ongoing issues
- **Matt Sheldon, Annette Sheldon** - illnesses
- **Ruth Sheldon** - living situation
- **Turkey/Syria** - 7.8 earthquake killed over 22 thousand
- -
- -
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- Thanks for

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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.

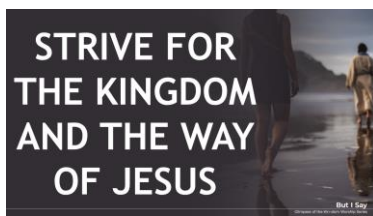
- Family far off
- Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we lift up in Your holy name, praying as you taught us to pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Hymn "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"

TFWS #2223>

<Benediction>



background picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/glimpses-of-the-kin-dom/sixth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-graphics>

Go now, striving for God's way,
 that the world does not understand.
 Welcome the Holy Spirit, serve Jesus,
 and help others to life in Christ with us,
 that all may join the Kingdom of God
 and give thanks for all the blessings
 God has provided in wisdom and love. Amen.