

A Harvest of Hope (Prayer for UMCOR slide)

From Harvest Prayers, posted on the Christian Aid website, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk>. Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/04/prayer-harvest-of-hope.html>.

God of grace and glory,
we are so grateful for the leadership of
extraordinary people,
shining light into the darkness of climate disaster,
transforming a curse into a blessing,
the gift of salt into a new harvest of hope.

Make us like that, Lord,
so that our faith is not in our words but in our
lives,
not in what we say, but in what we do;
passing on your love like the salt that blesses,
like a city on a hill, like a lamp on a stand,
light for life, your light for the world.
Amen.

Interactive lesson



picture from from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/unrecognizable-friends-gossiping-together-on-street-6147138/>; credit: Keira Burton

Remember this ad? “If you want to get someone’s attention...” what do you do? <Let them respond>

Does whispering always get the attention of the one you are trying to attract? <Let them respond>

What if you want a lot of people, such as a crowd, to hear – does whispering work then for getting their attention? <Let them respond>

Do you always know who hears what you say? <Let them respond>

Have you ever regretted saying something because of who heard it when you did not realize they were listening? <Let them respond>

Have you ever judged an organization by what one of its members said or did? <Let them respond>

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “I like your Christ, but not your Christianity...I believe in the teachings of Christ, but you on the other side of the world do not; I read the Bible faithfully and see little in Christendom that those who profess faith pretend to see.

“The Christians above all others are seeking after wealth. Their aim is to be rich at the expense of their neighbors. They come among aliens to exploit them for their own good and cheat them to do so.

Their prosperity is far more essential to them than the life, liberty, and happiness of others.”¹

What a condemnation of Western society! Do you know the story of the critical moment which alienated Mahatma Gandhi from Christianity? <Let them respond>

According to Rev. Pattison: “One Sunday morning Gandhi decided that he would visit one of the Christian churches in Calcutta. Upon seeking entrance to the church sanctuary, he was stopped at the door by the ushers.

“He was told he was not welcome, nor would he be permitted to attend this particular church as it was for high-caste Indians and whites only. He was neither high caste, nor was he white. Because of the rejection, the Mahatma turned his back on Christianity.”²

Have you ever told someone (or seen someone told) they were not welcome because of what they are? <Let them respond>

What do you think the individual would say about those who turned them away? <Let them respond>

How do you think Jesus would have dealt with a situation like that? <Let them respond>

God calls all people to be God’s children. How do you think you are doing with sharing that message?

¹ <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1927/1/11/mahatma-gandhi-says-he-believes-in/>, accessed 2/3/2023

² <https://www.vvdailypress.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2016/08/26/why-did-gandhi-say-x2018/985856007/>, accessed 2/3/2023

<Let them respond>

It is important to live in every aspect of our lives as Jesus taught us to, so that we do not alienate anyone from coming into God's kingdom.

Gospel lesson

We continue now with more of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount:



pictures from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-salt-light/>

Matthew 5:13-20

NRSV

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Bring Forth the Kingdom">

TFWS #2190>

Message: You Are



picture adapted from

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

Please pray with me?

Amazing Lord who blesses us

with so much to celebrate, 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 be beacons of Your grace to [this world desperately in need of You]. Amen.

Today's theme from the "Glimpses of the Kin-dom" series is "You Are":

"Here again, Jesus asks us to reflect on the power we already have. "You are salt. You are light." Not, "Do you want to be salt, or do you want to be light?" You already are. So, given that declaration from our Lord, how will we season? What will we light up?"

Can I have a show of hands, how many of you have professed in church that you are a Christian?

OK, another show of hands: How many of you talk regularly about church or being a Christian to people who are not affiliated with our church?

And one more show of hands: How many of you have been approached unexpectedly with a comment by someone who knew you are Christian, even though you never told them?



pictures from MMMS collection

Thank you. I have been pleased on a few occasions

when someone noticed the cross jewelry I had on and surprised me with a compliment on it: “I like your cross.” However, like many mainstream Christians, rather than get into joyful worship of Christ with them right then and there, I typically have just said, “Thank you,” with a smile and moved on with whatever tasks were at hand.

I would proceed more consciously that I need to be on good behavior because someone expects me to be Christ-like. I do not like to think of how often someone may have watched me without my realizing, possibly being put off from Christianity when I acted less Christ-like than they thought I should.

I am not the first person to claim a special relationship with God who went on to act poorly. The ancient Israelites had a covenant with God as the Chosen People, yet we hear in Isaiah how the people forsook God, using worship for their own ends instead of behaving with love and mercy for all.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jonah-disobeys/>

The scribes and Pharisees thought they knew how to be righteous, making a show of humility without humbling their hearts. Isaiah admonishes them, “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the

oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

That last line about kin really got to me this week, as one of the biggest things highlighted about my mother was how she kept our extended family in touch with one another, connected and aware of what was going on. I have never been great about reaching out, yet when I contacted family about speaking at my mother’s memorial service, grace shone through. We need to reach out to others, that God may bless both them *and* us through our Christian community.

What do you think those who observed those so-called “faithful” [doing their rituals and then walking past the homeless poor and hungry with disdain] thought of the Lord? Both the psalmist and Isaiah say that those who deal generously and justly with others rise as a light in the darkness. This is a world darkened with sin, and God calls us to light it with God’s love.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/flaming-gray-candles-289770/>; credit: Hakan ErenLer

Faith is not a private, personal thing: the call to share God’s kingdom goes out to all, and we cannot share if we keep to ourselves. If we love God, then

we must be open with others about the Good News throughout all aspects our lives. Be light that God uses to brighten someone else's life! And accept the light of others too: blowing out someone else's candle does not make yours shine brighter, but when shining candles are brought together, the whole area is brighter.

Paul went among the Corinthians, not pompously, but humbly - letting the Spirit of God drive his words and deeds, that their faith would be in and glorifying God. Christ crucified as a leader made (and still makes) no sense to the militant powers of this world, yet again and again we see how living in Christ strengthens both individuals and humanity.

Do not brag about yourself, that you know how God would have others behave, for you do not know all of their circumstances - and even your behaviors may need to change as time goes on. Brag about God instead, that through Jesus God forgave even you and calls all to live in love.

Seek to understand through discussion with others what that looks like for them, talking about the scriptures and how God has been moving in each of your lives. Pray with one another, celebrating the connections God gives you in Christian community.



pictures from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-salt-light/>

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Do not waste the precious and good gifts that you are! Flavor the lives of all you encounter with the salt of Jesus's love, that God may be glorified. Let the Lord's glory shine through your words and actions for all to see the grace of Heaven.

Share love of God everywhere to be the full blessing in the world that God intends for you to be!

<Invitation

UMH p.12>

Christ our Lord invites to His table

all who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.

Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

<slide change>

<Confession and Pardon

UMH p.12>

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray.

**Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Hear the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen.**

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of all creation, source of every blessing: you
have given us so much.

As we bring our tithes and gifts to you this day,
these seem so small by comparison,
unless we see that we are truly called to give
ourselves back to the world.

May we be the salt that brings value and flavor into
relationships with those around us.

May we be the light that helps others find their way
to your love and care.

(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:

- -
- -
- -

- -
- -
- -
- -
- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- 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 in the mighty name of Jesus, who came to help us see all we could be. Amen.

<THE GREAT THANKSGIVING Communion – UNCOVER elements>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

<hold hands out over bread/elements>

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

<hold hands out over juice/elements>

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

<slide change>

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

<hold hands out over elements>

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on
on these gifts of bread and juice.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each
other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at
his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit
in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours,
almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
let us pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup>

<Serving of the elements/music background>

<Hymn "Light of the World" TFWS #2204

<Benediction>



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

Go forth as sharing yourself as salt of the earth
and reflecting the love of Christ
as the light of the world.

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.