

## Interactive lesson



*pictures from MMMS collection*

Do you know how many kids we had for VBS this year vs. previous years?

The sign on the left was put up on the church building; how effective do you think it was in drawing kids to the program?

We mailed postcards with the image on the left to the families that came last year; how effective do you think they were?

What do you think made the most difference in getting more kids to attend VBS?

When I substituted for the younger grades at the school, some of the children who came to VBS in 2022 recognized me from that and asked me about VBS for 2023. I found that I was a like a sign, a reminder to them about VBS.

Other children heard us talking and asked their friends about it. The children who had experienced VBS before became a sign for their friends to learn about VBS.

Our VBS outreach became more successful when not only Chris and I talked it up, but when the kids themselves got involved in spreading the word.

How many signs had God done for the Israelites and Egyptians in Egypt prior to today's reading? <

Did the people have to do anything to make the signs happen?

Why do you think God had the people put blood on their lintels in preparation for this last plague? Did God not know where Jacob's descendants were?

By putting the signs on their doorways, the people invested themselves in what God was doing and were a sign to others in their community to trust God.

What about us as Christians? How invested are we in what God is doing today?

How are we a sign to our community?

What message are we sending to our neighbors about Christ?

May we all observe the signs of God's handiwork around us, invest ourselves into what the Holy Spirit is doing with and for God's people, and be a sign to others of Jesus's love in action within our community and the world.

### **Gospel lesson**

Prior this reading, Jesus responded to a question about who was greatest by putting the least forward. He then spoke about the importance of avoiding stumbling blocks to heaven and told the parable of the lost sheep. That brings us to:



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/priest-and-nun-reading-the-bible-together-8718062/>;

picture credit: Mikhail Nilov

## Matthew 18:15-20

NRSV

<sup>15</sup> "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

<sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

<sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

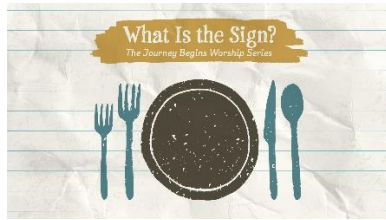
<sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Just As I Am, Without One Plea"

UMH #357>

## Message: What Is the Sign?



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Glorious Word of God,

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 see the signs You give us and become living signs of Your grace for all people. Amen.

We continue "The Journey Begins" series this week with the question: "What is the Sign?"

"As we launch or continue our journey of faith, are we called to look for signs of God's presence or are we called to be a sign of God's presence? The answer, as you might expect, is yes!"



picture from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci\\_\(1452-1519\)\\_-The\\_Last\\_Supper\\_\(1495-1498\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_Vinci_(1452-1519)_-The_Last_Supper_(1495-1498).jpg)

When I was growing up, suppertime involved our whole household, Mom and Dad and all six kids, gathered

around the table. We knew it was suppertime because the table was set (by whoever had that chore that week), Dad had gotten in from work, and Mom called to us that it was time to come.

As kids, we were expected to leave whatever we were doing (put down our books, turn off the TV, leave toys where they were, hang up the phone if we were talking on it - this was before electronic gadgets); we were to wash our hands, and to sit in our chairs around the table without too much disruptive teasing or drama. As my dad put it, "Keep the chaos down to a dull roar!"

However, even if our food was already on our plate, we were not allowed to start eating as soon as we sat down. We had to wait until everyone was there; then, we folded our hands and said grace before finally digging in.

If anyone was missing, we had to find out why and resolve the issue before saying grace. Sometimes the older kids had to help the younger ones get washed up. Only rarely did anyone misbehave badly enough to be sent to bed without supper. Everyone mattered; everyone had to be present and prepared; and we had to acknowledge God's handiwork before eating.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-washes-feet/>

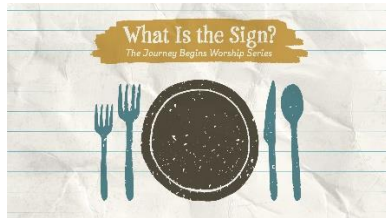
In the gospel lesson, Jesus was teaching about preparing to partake in the kingdom of heaven. Everyone is invited, and everyone expected to be at the table matters; if there is something preventing anyone's being ready for the kingdom, we need to get it resolved - gracefully, keeping the chaos and drama to a minimum, helping one another even if it means doing tasks most consider distasteful.

Paul wrote to the Romans about how if we love our neighbor as ourselves, we fulfill the law and do no wrong to the neighbor. I have spoken before about how people (tempted by sin) look to the wrong things for guidance, which leads to disputes, lawsuits, and worse, even the breaking down of society.

Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (as Paul put it) and living in love enables reconciliation, redemption, nurture of one another, and the building up of society instead. It is a sign the kingdom of heaven is near. Perhaps more established Christians need to help those newer to the faith live it more fully.

Note that Jesus does not expect us to put up with sinful behaviors, things that hurt us. Anyone who chooses to behave sinfully enough may miss out on the

fellowship banquets we share with one another. Yet if they repent, we may welcome them back to the table.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Also note that we are a part of the sign the kingdom of heaven is near. The Israelites begging to be released from captivity were not freed until they took action and became part of the sign. At my childhood dinnertime, I was one of the people who had to be around the table ready to say grace for dinner to start.

If you want the kingdom of God to be present on earth, you need to heed the call and join in being the sign of God's love on this earth. Get yourself ready first - wash your soul with repentance and the Holy Spirit. Once ready, do not hide your faith, but sit up straight at the heavenly table: tell people about the love of Jesus by all that you are, your words and your actions.

Let the Holy Spirit work through you to share the Good News and the invitation to Christ's table. Be the sign, that others, in observing you, may also choose to put the blood of the Lamb on the doorways of their lives and be freed from the slavery of sin.

