

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

Do you know how to make a paper airplane?

<Let them respond>

| <If yes> | <If no> |
|---|--|
| <p>Can you show me how? <Let them respond> <Follow what they do but flub it unless they correct you; e.g., exaggerate 1st crease but if they do not, do not crease other folds> <If appropriate, offer to show them the dart></p> | <p>Can I show you how? <Let them respond> <After showing them the dart, make a less efficient one, sloppily></p> |

<Have each person test their airplanes by throwing them. Note any differences in the way airplanes were made or perform when thrown>

Why do you think they were different?

<Let them respond>

What happens if someone tries to copy again what they were shown, but their instructor is sloppy about what they do instead of being as careful as when they were giving instructions? <Let them respond>

Who do the unchurched look to, to learn about Jesus?

<Let them respond>

As Christians, each one of us showing those who observe us what we think living for Jesus means. Do you think you are modeling faith that others would want to copy? Why/why not? <Let them respond>

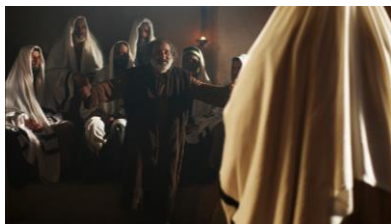
What stumbling blocks to following Christ have you seen (perhaps even put up)? <Let them respond>

How can we better nurture others toward life in Jesus? <Let them respond>

I pray that each of you become so wrapped up in living the love of God that {everyone who encounters you} is inspired to know more about Jesus because of you.

Gospel lesson

We continue right from where we left off last week, after Jesus called disciples to fish for people.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-synagogue/>;
credit: LUMO

Mark 1:21-28 (NRSV)

²¹They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with

an unclean spirit,

²⁴and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

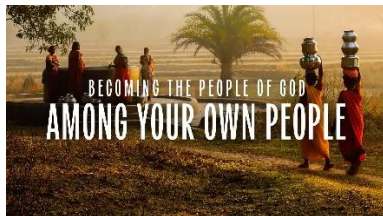
²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit" UMH #264>

Message: Among Your Own People



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/becoming-the-people-of-god/fourth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Gracious Lord who brings us together,
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 develop more fully into the grace-filled community You would have us be. Amen.

“Becoming the People of God” we now are “Among Your Own People”:

“[T]hrough this series...we encountered Jesus, [w]e listened for the voice of God,...we received [God’s] persistent and grace-filled invitation... So,...[w]here does the path take us now? Discernment.”

I am not the best at keeping in touch with people, particularly when it comes to letters and phone calls. I never have been; my mother always did that for our family, to keep us connected. I was a receiver, not an initiator, of communication.

The pandemic was a time unlike any the church had experienced in a century. No one knew quite how to deal with it, what was needed to keep the love of God present when our community members were in isolation.

My District Superintendent at the time had gifts more aligned with business administration than for pastoring of pastors. In four years that I reported to him, I think he only made a personal call to me

once, after he learned that my mother had died.

All other interactions were focused on meeting church needs. He did not visit this church after the PPRC meeting where he introduced me as your new pastor. So he was not really the best example for me of how to pastor others, though comfortable enough for me after twenty-five years of supervisors in industry.

When the pandemic hit, I knew that keeping communication going between people was important for our community bonds, but I did not realize that most people wanted to hear from their pastor directly – so I tried to delegate.

I thank those who tried to make calls and who sent out email updates during that time; you were doing what was needed. I apologize to everyone for not doing a better job of calling more frequently, for not leaving messages when I got answering machines instead of people, and for thinking that contact with others would substitute for contact with your pastor.

I am still not the model for staying connected that I should be, but I am trying to do better, to not leave people feeling alienated by unmet expectations. I thank everyone for your patience with me to date.

I think that when each of us realizes our shortcomings in living a faithful Christian life, we

try to do better, but overcoming old habits is really, really hard – let alone trying to undo damage we may have already done. Facing the ideal that God would have for us can be overwhelming and terrifying.

In Deuteronomy, we hear about how people were so afraid of God – the awesome source of all creation – that they requested an intercessor. In love for the people, God provided exactly what they needed.

I want to note two things here: 1) the people needed redemption and 2) God promised to deal with those who did not heed the Word offered or who spoke falsely – in other words, those who put up stumbling blocks for anyone seeking God.

This is scary! And I do not mean just for a pastor, it is scary for all Christians, because nonbelievers look at all of us to try to discern who/what God is.

Paul wrote about that to the Corinthians in the days of the early church. Pagan temples would put out food dedicated to the idols for anyone to eat, presumably as a mission for the poor. Some of the early Christians in Corinth justified eating that food as coming from the one Creator of everything, giving thanks to Jesus for providing.

Others, that only saw them eating in the pagan temple, not hearing the thanks to Jesus, were

confused about who the Christians truly worshipped. Thus, Paul pointed out how believers' actions may be sensible to them, but lead others into sin.

Our faith is not lived in a vacuum. We need to look at those around us and consider how we can nurture their faith too as we go about trying to live Christ-filled lives - or at least not put up a spiritual stumbling block for them to crash into.

Jesus came and preached with authority, the Word of God. He drove out unclean spirits, helping people to live faithfully. I found it kind of interesting that an unclean spirit was in the midst of those worshipping at the synagogue, and wonder what propagators of sin we may have similarly welcomed into our church.

I pray to God to guide us, to help us discern when we go astray, to purify our souls and to help us live more faithfully. I pray for God to give us discernment in how to nurture others' faith in love, not driving them with terror and not putting up stumbling blocks for their faith journeys.

How hard do you search to discern God's guidance in your life? How often are you in prayer, meditation, studying your bible, or talking about God in Christian community? How often do you apply that discernment among your neighbors, where you may be

the representative of Christ and His church for them?

Are you helping others to grow in faith, nurturing their love of God and one another, or putting up stumbling blocks to their knowing Jesus?

You are among your own people here, Christians called by God to live in community. Let each of us work to expand this community to others in our neighborhood, inviting the sharing of gifts and graces - even if it just the ability to fold paper airplanes - that all may know life nurtured in love and interdependent cooperativity, and that all may see God's kingdom here on earth, among their own people.