

Interactive lesson *Native American Ministries Sunday*



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Today is Native American Ministries Sunday, one of six special collection Sundays the UMC has designated each year since 2016. Do you know what these monies go toward? <Let them respond>

Part of the funds collected allow us to collaborate with existing native ministries, create programs and support seminary scholarships for United Methodist Native Americans. Fifty percent of the offering remains in the donating annual conference to develop local ministries.

Why should we? I mean, what's the big deal?

<Let them respond>

In past years we have spoken about both harm done to and beauty produced by Native American people within the United Methodist Church. Rather than purging other ways of worship from our Christian community, the UMC now hopes to reconcile with and embrace the gifts of those native to countries wherever we are.



picture from Lorraine Kupiec

Has anyone seen this picture before?

<Let them respond>

It is a photo of a print titled “Hawks Along the Mohawk” by Eli Thomas, a Native American artist of the Onondaga Nation. What do you see in this picture?
<Let them respond>

There is some astounding beauty and creativity evident in this painting. Native Americans have a rich cultural history and deep faith in our Creator. When we talk about loving and worshipping God with all that we have and we are, wouldn't we want to include things like this? <Let them respond>

This Sunday recognizes and supports the contributions of Native Americans to the church and society.

Through the distribution of funds mentioned earlier, the Good News is shared with and by Native Americans in ways unique to their culture and gifts.

In this way, we learn about the beauty inherent in all of Creation, as our differences become strengths supporting one another in the love of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of our Creator. May you be blessed with joy in this. Amen.

Gospel lesson

Last week we heard from the Gospel of John about Thomas reacting to the Messiah's return after the crucifixion. Today the story is from the Gospel of Luke, about how all of the disciples reacted upon seeing Jesus, just after hearing from those who had rushed back from Emmaus after walking there with Him.



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

Luke 24:36b-48

(NRSV)

^{36b} While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,

47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

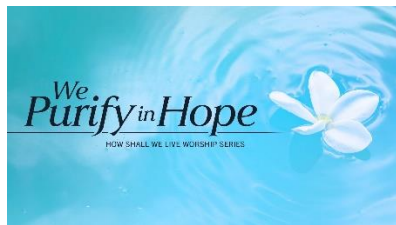
48 You are witnesses of these things.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Open Our Eyes, Lord"

TFWS #2086

Message: We Purify in Hope



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/third-sunday-of-easter-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-of-easter-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Amazing restorer of all of Creation, and Startling Hope and Joy of all who seek 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 purify ourselves with Your grace and proclaim your glory with our lives. Amen.

Happy Easter! We will be celebrating this until Pentecost, as we look at how we live and love as Easter people.

“Easter is such a joyous, colorful, and vibrant celebration! Now in Eastertide, this second Sunday [after Easter], Christ is still risen! The Creation is still waking up!”

Today we consider how “We Purify in Hope.”

When I worked in Quality Assurance, one of the things I got to do was look into problems that came up and try to figure out what the root cause of it was – kind of like I spoke a couple of weeks ago about the size of booster rockets on the space shuttle being based on the size of a horse’s rear end.

Knowing the root cause was important, not just for fixing the immediate problem, but for preventing it from happening again. It is sort of like if you notice water on the floor sometimes after running the dishwasher but not always, how do you address that?

- † Do you just stop using the dishwasher?
- † Do you replace the dishwasher and hope the new one does not do the same thing?
- † Do you call a plumber to tear everything apart and rebuild it?

† Or, after determining what in combination with running the dishwasher causes the leak to happen, do you resolve the issue where that combination triggers it, or simply prevent the combination?

How you address a problem depends on what you understand about it. You are not likely to resolve something if you do not know the underlying issues or do not have what is needed to resolve it.

Peter and John saw a man, lame from birth, begging in front of the temple. To help him, they did not give him silver or gold, but rather in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, enabled him to stand up and walk.

Why was the man lame? God only knows, and thus only God could heal him. The people who saw it were astounded and stared at Peter, John, and the man who could now walk. They did not understand, but inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter did.

Peter presented the problem that the people, under the influence of Sin, did not even realize they had. And he did not leave it there. He told them the solution to the problem, calling them to God, telling them to repent so that their sins could be wiped out.

The [author of our epistle for today] notes that the world does not know God, but those who believe in Christ are God's children. Why does the world not

know God? Because it is full of sin.

In my class on church history, we learned about colonizers coming to the New World and going to Africa and Asia to spread the Good News. Those who stayed focused on God had some success, because they were able to introduce Jesus within the cultures they encountered. Those who insisted on pushing their way of worship, their culture, upon the natives, alienated them instead of showing them God's love.

And even where people were successful at integrating Christianity with the natives, selfish members of the colonial powers often undid much of the good by taking what they wanted at great harm to the natives.

Even today, subcultures will not accept Jesus unless someone introduces them to God's love within that subculture. We need to purify ourselves in Jesus, to make sure our focus is on God, not on anything else, in order to be sure the Holy Spirit can work thru us.

Because when we open our hearts to God, we can witness to miracles. Look at the disciples, so confused after the resurrection. Jesus came in their midst and let them do things that were normal for them, so that they could wrap their minds around what He was and what God's love meant for them.

They could reach out and touch him, feel that He was

real. They watched Him eat. They understood He was not a ghost. From there, He explained how the Messiah had to die and rise again, that all could know that God seeks to forgive our sins when we repent.

And because the Apostles knew that, they were tasked with sharing the Good News. Because we know Jesus, we are tasked with sharing it, too.

God is actively working in the world today; the Holy Spirit is among us. Have you opened your ears lately to God's call in your life? Have you done some soul-searching and repented of your sin, purifying yourself to share the Spirit wherever you are or go?

Try to do that more deeply this week. Pray to Christ for guidance, to understand where you have been shutting someone out the love of God for selfish reasons. And then, because repenting is much more than just fessing up to mistakes, think about what you need to do both to reconcile with the one shut out and to prevent yourself from making that same mistake again.

Cherish all with hearts open to learning about the Lord, regardless of how different they may be from you. We purify ourselves in the hope that all may come to know Jesus through the Holy Spirit working within us, that God's kingdom may be evident upon this earth. May your work be particularly fruitful.

