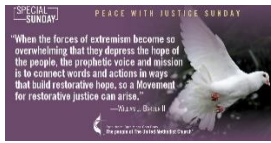


Interactive lesson

Peace with Justice Sunday



picture from https://www.resourceumc.org/-/media/umc-media/2023/04/18/13/14/2023_PWJS_SM_William_Barber_1200x628

William Barber said, “when the forces of extremism become so overwhelming that they depress the hope of the people, the prophetic voice and mission is to connect words and actions in ways that build restorative hope, so a Movement for restorative justice can arise.”

Do you feel like extremism is overwhelming in this country? <Let them respond>

Do you think we could use a prophet of the Lord? <Let them respond>

Was Isaiah fit to be a prophet at the start of the vision we read about today? <Let them respond>

Did he cleanse his own lips? <Let them respond>

Someone already clean, living in God’s kingdom, showed Isaiah [through an encounter with holy grace] that God’s power cleanses people. What did Isaiah do in response to getting cleansed? <Let them respond>

Today has been designated “Peace with Justice Sunday” in the United Methodist Church. What does that mean to you? What should we do for it? <Let them respond>

The little bulletin insert says:

“Our Social Principles call us to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict. We insist that the first moral duty of all nations

is to work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them.

Each Annual Conference has a Peace with Justice Coordinator developing local social justice ministries. Fifty percent of the offering remains in your annual conference to support this ministry.”

What do you see as a local social justice need?

<Let them respond>

How can we as community members work to address that need, individually and as a group? <Let them respond>

Whatever our situation, it is important that we put God at the center of how we address it, that we focus on sharing Christ’s love, and let the Holy Spirit work through us. When we do that, we enable the “Peace with Justice” that is so needed in this world.

In that Spirit, let us turn to number 481 in the UM hymnal and pray together the Prayer of Saint Francis.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

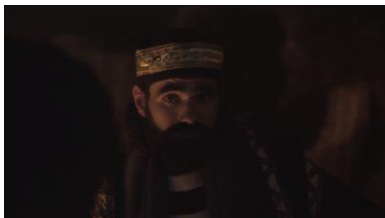
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

Gospel lesson

We go back to earlier in the Gospel of John, just after when Jesus caused a disruption at the temple.



picture screencaptured from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gECGNeSz6pk>

John 3:1-17

(NRSV)

¹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."

³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born

after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

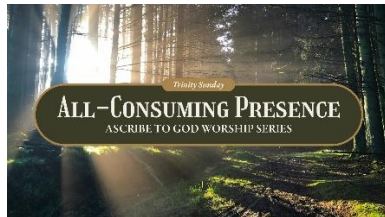
The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Womb of Life">

TFWS #2046>

<Children's Time>

Message: All-Consuming Presence



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/ascribe-to-god/trinity-sunday-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/trinity-sunday-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of Creation, Savior of the World, Holy Spirit,
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 as You relate to us in multiple ways, we learn to relate more fully in Your grace with others and to share your restorative peace more readily. Amen.

We begin a new series this Trinity Sunday, “Ascribe to God,” with “All-Consuming Presence”:

“How often do we plan and show up to worship expecting to encounter God? It feels like the right answer should be, “Every week!”

But, in reality, I’m sure many of us would prefer not to be scared witless by the glory of God as Isaiah was in today’s passage.”



picture screencaptured from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG_oNMLXRQ

I saw a video this week of some sort of gazelle giving birth. As with the start of any new life, it looked like a lot of work. It struck me that I could not really tell if the baby was actually helping in the process – it took a lot of the mother pushing to get the baby all the way out, and she instantly began tending to it once it was.

Naturally after hearing today’s Gospel lesson, I draw parallels to our faith lives beginning much like that. We are created to live – not merely in the physical sense but in a spiritual sense as well.

We develop until we are ready, and want to think that we have done the work for our salvation in turning to God, when in reality God is the one who enables our spiritual rebirth through what Jesus did on the cross, and through the Holy Spirit tends to us once we are redeemed.

Isaiah was living in the Judaic kingdom as the time of exile approached – kings were successively getting worse, and many people were going through the motions of rituals in the temple without the faith connection those rituals were supposed to enable.



picture screencaptured from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0A6Uchb1F8;>
credit: BibleProject

Called to serve God from among a people taking the Lord for granted, Isaiah realized in his vision that God truly was holy and almighty beyond measure, and was overwhelmed. Do you think you would (or could) be unawed if confronted by the glory of God's presence?

Isaiah had thought he could proclaim God's Word as he was, but it took God intervening to enable Isaiah's ministry to truly proclaim what God wanted. The imagery of the coal from the altar – where burnt sacrifices were offered – demonstrates that God connects with us when we obey God's commandments.

Isaiah had cried out “Woe!” upon realizing his sin and the sin of his people, expecting destruction – but what he received was purification and enablement. It was as Jesus said in John 3:17, “[God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.](#)”

Paul wrote to the Romans that “[all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God](#)” – our amazing Creator seeks to nurture us in life, not punish our inadequacies. We need to seek God through rebirth in Jesus, that the Holy Spirit can guide us to live in safety and health for our soul. We die without God.

And so living, we respond with joy to God’s call to serve, that others may live in the love of Christ too, through the power of the Holy Spirit.



picture from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/cemetery-of-fallen-soldiers-and-veterans-930711/>;

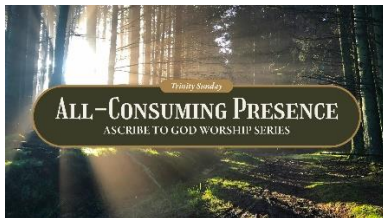
photo credit: Veronika Valdova

This is Memorial Day weekend, when we recall the sacrifice of others so that we are able to live in freedom and peace, safe from repressive nations. Jesus died so that all can live freed from sin and in peace with one another, assured of God’s justice. So how do we best serve our heavenly commander?

- † Look around – where do we see God denied through the hurting of self, others, or the environment?
- † Pray – humble ourselves to ask for God’s guidance

and help.

- † Trust the love of Jesus and strive for better – that born anew, we can live by the grace of the Spirit rather than by the sin of the world.
- † Share the truth about God and the gifts you have been given. Tell people *why* you:
 - clean up trash where others litter,
 - drive someone to the store,
 - prepare meals for those hungry in more ways than empty bellies,
 - create an inexpensive boutique shopping experience in a farm town, andall the other acts of love you do because of your faith in Jesus. Share caring and respect for the holiness inherent in others, even if you do not understand or even see that holiness manifest.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/ascribe-to-god/trinity-sunday-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/trinity-sunday-year-b-graphics>

Seek for the glory of God to overwhelm you so that you can do nothing else but serve in love. Through this living as Jesus taught and the Holy Spirit enables, we bring peace with justice so that all may live in the grace of God's kingdom.