

Interactive lesson



picture from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tree_with_red_apples_in_Barkedal_4.jpg

Are you familiar with *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein? <Let them respond>

What happens in it? <Let them respond>

- boy plays on it, carves initials in trunk
 - teenager gathers apple to sell
 - young man takes branches to build home
 - older man takes trunk to make boat
- in between, tree misses the one who accepted gifts
- elderly sits on stump – and tree is happy again

Is this a good example of how to share, of a healthy relationship? <Let them respond>

There is debate about whether this is a beautiful story of giving out of love, like a parent gives to their child, or an abusive one-sided give-take relationship that killed the giver in the end.

How did Jesus give to us? <Let them respond>

How are we to give to God? <Let them respond>

How are we to give to others? <Let them respond>

How do we give to others? Is it always out of the goodness of our hearts? <Let them respond>

What makes a difference in how/what we give to others? <Let them respond>

As I read the Gospel today, pay attention to whom Jesus is giving and why.

Gospel lesson

We continue today from where we left off last week, during Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples after the Last Supper.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-086-washing-feet/>

John 15:9-17 (NRSV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because

the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Help Us Accept Each Other"

UMH #560

Message: We Love One Another



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/how-shall-we-love/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Amazing Lord of love,

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,

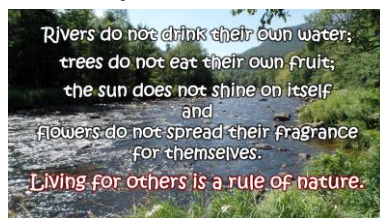
That we may share Your grace with all whom we meet, to Your glory. Amen.

This week in the “How Shall We Love” series, we consider how “We Love One Another”:

“Every single one of us can probably use a refresher on what it means for us as Christians to bear fruit. God has put down roots of Love, so that we might bear the fruit of loving one another in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.”

Oftentimes when people think of what they do as bearing fruit, they think of benefits for themselves. And to be fair, we do benefit greatly from the blessings of God in our lives when we bear fruit of the Spirit.

I recently ran across this quote that is sometimes attributed to Pope Francis, but was also linked by a 2009 website post to ancient Hindu scriptures:

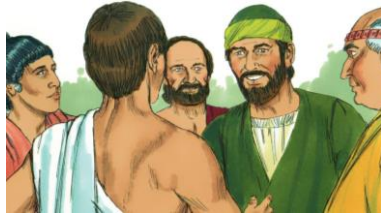


picture from MMMS collection

"Rivers do not drink their own water;
trees do not eat their own fruit;
the sun does not shine on itself and flowers
do not spread their fragrance for themselves.
Living for others is a rule of nature.

“We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is ... life is good when you are happy, but much better when others are happy because of you.”

Peter and the other disciples had been commissioned by Jesus to share the Good News, and they were doing so with other Jews in the Promised Land, Jews in the diaspora (meaning those Jews who lived in other parts of the world) and even Samaritans: all members of the Abrahamic family. And the church was growing fast.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/paul-athens/>

Yet in today's reading from Acts, Peter had been sent by God to this Gentile's house to share the Good News with an uncircumcised Roman soldier and his non-Abrahamic family. And the Holy Spirit came upon them, this family of others, people who were not from the Judaic tradition. So because God was clearly blessing them to join the church, Peter baptized them.

This was astonishing and confounding to the other apostles. How could anyone understand the Messiah's salvation without understanding the history of their people? All their lives they had been told their people were set apart to be blessed as a blessing to the world. All of their religious rituals set them apart for worship of the one true God.

How could an outsider with totally different customs become part of their family? It was breaking down the separation between the Chosen people and the rest of the world! ...And that was entirely the point.

Jesus had commissioned the disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name “to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47), to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), but they were fixated on teaching their own nation.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/how-shall-we-love/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-graphics>

Today we heard that Jesus appointed them to bear fruit; last week we heard that branches that bear fruit get pruned to bear more fruit. To bear fruit, Jesus told them that they had to love one another as Jesus loved them. And how did Jesus love them?

After being betrayed, abandoned, denied, and crucified, Jesus came back to those who had sinned against Him and offered God’s love to those who repented of what they had done.

The Jewish people had been oppressed for a very long time, with many reasons to feel betrayed, abandoned, denied, and crucified by non-Jews. So when the centurion invited Peter in, Peter was doing as Jesus had asked, modeling Jesus’ love. It was eye-opening,

stunning, to all of the disciples, including Peter.

And what came of his obedience? Jesus was glorified, the fledgling Christian community gained the support *and protection* of a Roman centurion (who now himself had the power of the Holy Spirit), and the Word began to spread faster. Through God's transformative love, a traditional enemy had become a blessed friend.

We read in 1 John today,

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world.” (NRSV)



picture created from pieces of UMC images

So what does this mean for us today? It means we are to look beyond our comfort zone for people we can connect with, for relationships to restore and build. And when we reach out in God's love, we come to realize that we need that transforming love poured out on us.

† I think the UMC just went through a pruning with the recent disaffiliations, very similar to the ones that produced other Methodist denominations, and now it is time for reconciliations.

† We have spoken before about horrors done to Native Americans by Methodists; internationally, sharing the Word has often been done badly by so-called Christians who sought material gains or power. Today we reach out instead with God's love, appreciating diversity and respecting cultural identity in seeking to let the Holy Spirit be revealed through sharing the Good News of Jesus.

Can you imagine how much better the politics in this country would be if we could apply God's love to those interactions instead of anger/hate, striving to help one another instead of tearing one another down?



picture from

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Maybe we feel like we cannot change the world, because as individuals we are too small. Well, God is pretty big - infinite, even - and has commanded us to help out by loving one another.

- † The neighbor who upset you? Receive them with compassion and try to understand their situation.
- † Make your acts of kindness intentional and community-building, not just random.
- † Teach others about Jesus by being a living example of nurturing love for them. Let them grow through struggles but not be overwhelmed beyond hope.

Tell everyone the Good News of Jesus, that they may know the forgiveness available if they repent. Share the gifts you have, that you may produce abundant fruit of the Spirit in the name of God, that others may live and thrive because you (because we) love.