

## Gospel lesson

We continue in the Gospel of John today, after the disciples sailed and Jesus walked across the sea.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-061-jesus-blind-man/>

### John 6:24-35

(NRSV)

<sup>24</sup> So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

<sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

<sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

<sup>30</sup> So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?"

What work are you performing?

<sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Come Sinners to the Gospel Feast"

UMH #616

<Interactive Time>



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/portrait-of-businessman-showing-sign-language-in-office-10031276/>;  
credit: RDNE Stock project

How do we communicate? <Let them respond>

What about the guy in the picture, how is he communicating? <Let them respond>

He is not speaking. Do words matter?

<Let them respond>

Does a given word always mean the same thing?

<Let them respond>

In ASL, a given sign can mean very different things depending on the body language and facial expression that goes with it. <Demonstrate “watch/look/see”>

How does God speak to us? <Let them respond>

Does a given sign or parable always mean the same thing? <Let them respond>

The Bible is known as the Word of God, and it may take much study to understand the context of Scripture and the lessons it has for us today. Yet much as someone signing communicates much without using English words, I think God communicates with us in ways other than the written language of Scripture.

How do we know what God is telling us? Is there a filter we can apply to discern? <Let them respond>

I believe the filter is love – God’s love for us and our love for God. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, strength and soul (Mark 12:30). John Wesley, founder of Methodism, wrote a whole sermon on how that is “The One Thing Needful” for our redemption and eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

So how do we tell the Good News to the world?

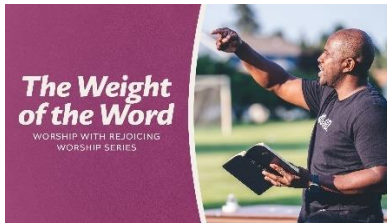
<Let them respond>

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<sup>1</sup> Outler, Albert C. and Heitzenrater, Richard P., eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp.34-8.

To communicate the gospel to the world, we need to open ourselves to the love language of God, ask the living Word of Jesus to be written on our hearts, and let the Holy Spirit speak through us in loving words and actions with all whom we encounter.

## Message: The Weight of the Word



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/eLeventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/eLeventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Holy Lord of transformative 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 have Your Word inscribed upon our hearts and let Your holy power work through us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the "Worship with Rejoicing" series today we consider "The Weight of the Word":

"[T]his week is about ... the Word of God for the people of God. When we hold the weight of the Word together in worship, we grow together in love of God and neighbor as the Word encourages, challenges, edifies, and instructs us as the

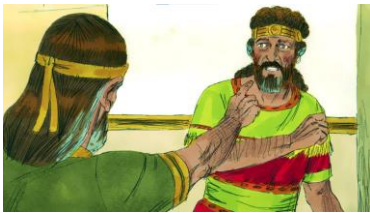
gathered Body of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-wearing-face-mask-3733516/>;  
credit: Viễn Đông

Remember wearing masks during the pandemic, and trying to talk with someone? What did the person talking often do? Pull the mask down while they were speaking! To say what they wanted, they completely undid the effectiveness of having a mask in the first place. Did anyone take you to task for it?

We spoke last week about how King David had sinned and the need to repent. As king, his sin undid the effectiveness of being in covenant with God.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/david-bathsheba/>

This week, we hear God (through Nathan) taking David to task for it. Note that He does not just say, “You sinned and shall be punished!” Instead, Nathan tells an analogous story and asks David what should be done. Does David ask God for council about it, or respond to Nathan’s quandary with love and mercy? No!

But before we get all judgy about David, let us not forget that – as discussed last week – all of us

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<sup>2</sup> Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/eleveth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes>.

humans at times do sin, are hypocritical, and withhold love/mercy; but that does not make it good or okay.

In today's world we see the effects of that with people ignoring facts they do not like, letting media fearmongering whip them into a panic, and looking at worldly concerns with care only for self rather than with God's love and care for all. We use the anxiety of the moment to justify breaking Jesus' command, to love one another.

Charles Wesley described our tendency to sin in the hymn "Depth of Mercy" (UMH #355 verses 2-3):

"I have long withstood his grace,  
long provoked him to his face,  
would not hearken to his calls,  
grieved him by a thousand falls.

"I my Master have denied,  
I afresh have crucified,  
oft profaned his hallowed name,  
put him to an open shame."<sup>3</sup>

The hymn goes on in verse 4 to point out that "God is love!...Jesus weeps and loves me still." True to divine nature, God did not implement the swift and fatal punishment David suggested. Instead, God kept the covenant promise that David and his line would live, but warned David of turmoil and grief to come

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<sup>3</sup> Wesley, Charles, "Depth of Mercy" in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #355.

through family infighting because of David's actions.

God sets the standard of what is right. Sin will be made known. Sin has consequences, and until we feel them we may not even realize how far off-track we have gone. It was not until God judged him that David said, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13a, *NRSV*). He wrote today's psalm afterward, pleading with God to cleanse his inner being, to create in him "a clean heart...and put a new and right spirit within" him (Psalm 51:10, *NRSV*).

How better than to have the Word of God written upon your heart? God is just and merciful. When we look at the world under God's direction rather than whipped by Sin, the media storm calms and peace fills our souls, enabling us to act in love instead of fear.

We have been blessed with Christ, that we may be cleansed of our sin through faith in Jesus. As John Wesley put it, "When they believe. In that very hour the righteousness of Christ is theirs...There is no true faith, that is, justifying faith, which hath not the righteousness of Christ for its object."<sup>4</sup>



picture screencaptured from  
<https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch/Lumo-the-gospel-of-matthew.html/Lumo-matthew-15-21-16-20/english.html>; credit: LUMO

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<sup>4</sup> Outler, Albert C. and Heitzenrater, Richard P., eds., *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1991), p.385.

And speaking of Christ, in today's Gospel reading the crowd did not really understand the full extent to which Jesus wanted to bless them, even after seeing Him heal the sick and feed all of them. He had to explain to them that He was their connection to eternal life, the means by which they could have a personal relationship with God, the source of all. Our Christ is "the bread of life" (John 6:35, *NRSV*).

Jesus showed them that God was not merely some distant entity to be obeyed for good rewards; God was in front of them, in their midst, loving them and taking care of them. God is ultimately in control, and calls us to put the needs of people ahead of excess wants or special interests. All people, not just the Israelites of Jesus' day, are summoned to come have the bread of life.



*picture from MMMS collection*

As we just sang in that Charles Wesley hymn ("Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast," UMH #616 verse 1):

"Come, sinners, to the gospel feast, let every soul be Jesus' guest. Ye need not one be left behind, for God hath bid all humankind."<sup>5</sup>

For this reason, our communion table is open to all

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<sup>5</sup> Wesley, Charles, "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast" in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #616.



who seek to know Christ as their Savior more fully. In the partaking, we reaffirm our union in Jesus with all Christians, as one body in faith and love.

That is not to say we should expect everyone to respond exactly the same. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we are given different gifts: “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12, *NRSV*).

Our commonality, however, is grace – the undeserved love of God. We look to the Scriptures, the written Word, to try to understand what living in grace looks like. Paul wrote, “[W]e must grow up in every way into ... Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16, *NRSV*).

John Wesley valued holy love above any doctrine (and he preached a great deal of doctrine).<sup>6</sup> He preached, “May we all thus experience what it is to be not almost only, but altogether Christians!  
Being justified freely by his grace,  
through the redemption that is in Jesus,

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<sup>6</sup> Chilcote, Paul W., *Multiplying Love: A Vision of United Methodist Life Together* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2023), p.31.

knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us!”<sup>7</sup>

Last week I asked you to look for where you need to confess, where relationships are broken. Consider this week what God would direct you to do moving forward with the consequences of that sin. It is better to thrive under the “Weight of the [Living] Word” on your soul than to die under the weight of the world. Pray, search the scriptures, consult with other Christians, ask God for wisdom, invite Jesus to feed your soul with grace, and ask the Holy Spirit to provide the means for healing and renewal.

I truly hope you invite the transformative love of Jesus – the living Word – to be inscribed upon your heart, and that the Holy Spirit’s power may work readily through you, proclaiming God’s love uniquely and beautifully for a better way forward in whatever situation you may find yourself.

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<sup>7</sup> Outler, p.380.