

Gospel lesson

We move over to the Gospel of Mark today, to after Jesus had fed the five thousand, walked across the sea, and healed the sick. Crowds followed Him, and religious officials had even come from Jerusalem to see what He was about.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-yeast-pharisees/>

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NRSV)

¹ Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him,

² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;

⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

⁶ He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about

you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand:

¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,

²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's time>

<Hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be"

UMH #399>

<Interactive Time>



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-man-wearing-a-pair-of-sunglasses-while-playing-the-ukulele-9789893/>;
photo credit: Paige Deasley

Do you like to sing? <Let them respond>

When do you start singing (aside from Sunday morning hymns)? What causes you to sing? <Let them respond>

What happens if you are singing by yourself and someone else joins in? <Let them respond>

Does everybody have the same voice range, or sing the same part? <Let them respond>

What happens if instruments join in, harmonizing with the singers? <Let them respond>

Music can get very rich and full when good harmonies are woven together. What is it like for your soul to sing? <Let them respond>

What triggers your soul to sing? <Let them respond>

What happens if someone else joins in with you? <Let them respond>

What about if the Holy Spirit is invited to join you?

What if prayers, scripture quotes, or church traditions are added to those moments?

<Let them respond>

God created us to live fully and joyfully, in community with other people and our Creator. Let us as a community now review the Word we have heard today and see how our Lord calls us to sing.

Message: The Time of Singing Has Come



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Beautiful Creator of all melodies and harmonies, 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 learn to sing joyously with our souls, celebrating and sharing Your love and glory with all. Amen.

We begin a new series today, "Uncommon Wisdom," with a focus on Old Testament scriptures that are often glossed over (yet much needed) in today's world. This Sunday, "The Time of Singing Has Come":

"It is fitting that we begin with a passage from Song of Solomon that is, at its heart, an invitation to notice, to pay attention, and to respond to the love of the beloved with singing."¹

You know I am a grandma, and I love to see my granddaughter. When I arrive at her house, I call her

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom/fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes>.

name and she responds with joy, typically bringing whatever toy she is holding over to me. Grandma's arrival signals a change from the normal routine, a time for more interesting and usually fun things than day-to-day living entails.

Often I will sing some of her favorite songs to her like "The Wheels on the Bus" or "Old MacDonald," and she joins in as she can, such as "E-I-E-I-O." It is one of the ways we express our happiness at being together: through song.

In the Old Testament reading, the beloved calls to the speaker, letting her know that he is there and telling her that it is a new season, time to celebrate and sing, to be together.

Jesus coming to earth is like that for us. God loves us and came to be in our midst, that we may live more fully. It is a time for our souls to leave off the tiresome focus on material world overages in order to sing and celebrate our relationships with God and with one another in God's love.

All too often we get sidetracked with mundane priorities, like we heard the psalmist doing. He focused on the physical looks, riches, and popularity of the king. I believe one of the reasons Jesus ascended into heaven after the resurrection rather than continuing to walk in human form upon the earth

was to prevent people from getting so focused on His physical attributes - hairstyle, clothing, mannerisms, etc. - that we miss the fundamental message of love and relationship-building that He came to make known to us.

Look at the Pharisees of His day: they wanted to honor God, but got so caught up in the specifics and actions they thought God wanted to see that they lost understanding of what God asked of them. They focused on the [what and how] instead of on the who and why.

I have said before that science and religion answer different questions; science focuses on the what and how, and religion focuses on the who and why. They each have their place, complementing one another.

But, we need to remember that with the wrong who/why, we will be doing the wrong what/how - and it is our God, Creator of all, that is the "Who" who sets the "why." When we insist that we know better and try to put our ways first, that becomes the sin from within the human heart that Jesus said defiles us.

An example of this is when we judge other people for making different decisions that we do, when their decision does not harm anyone - such as choice of purchases at the store, clothing that they wear, hairstyles, tattoos. Before we start justifying our judgments with environmental effects and such,

perhaps we should look at the choices we make and where we may be similarly held to account.

James wrote that we should be quick to listen, not to get angry, because God's righteousness does not come through anger; it comes through showing God's love. It is not enough to ignore those of whom we think less; we need to help them in their distress, that all of society may be lifted up.

People have lost focus on what matters as society has turned away from God. Focusing on personal and material gain, prioritizing want of stuff and comforts over helping others' needs be met, people have lost the ability to connect socially. The New York Times Magazine published an article about loneliness this past week, calling it an epidemic.

In the article, Harvard psychologist Richard Weissbourd was quoted as saying that to combat the problem, "we have to figure out how to reproduce those aspects of religion in secular life" "where adults engage kids, stand for moral values, engage kids in big moral questions, [and] where there's a fusion of a moral life and a spiritual life."²

That sounds to me like souls today are in sorrow, not singing. We need to show this generation that we are

² Shaer, Matthew, "Why Is the Loneliness Epidemic So Hard to Cure?" in The New York Times Magazine, 8/28/2024 and posted at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/27/magazine/loneliness-epidemic-cure.html>

meant to live in communities of Jesus' love, that there is joy in the Lord, that the time for singing with the Spirit has come!

- † Begin by giving God thanks - through prayer, through song, and through helping others.
- † Celebrate those in your life - use grace to compliment others rather than complain; if you need to, pray for patience and guidance.
- † Look for ways to honor and celebrate God in partnership with other Christians in the midst of our community - trunk or treat, mission work, etc.

Let your life be a song of joy for God. The world needs it, and the time for singing has come!