

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Promised Power

Gospel Lesson

Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)

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. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week starts a new sermon series for us titled, "Make Us One." This series will focus on the theological theme of *unity*. As a people of the Way of Jesus we are united not by our own sameness, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are united by God's priorities, not by our own. In a society that uplifts ideals around individualism, embracing our diversity as well as embracing the unity of God's priorities may be difficult for us to understand.

We live in a county where partisan identity is so prevalent. It can be difficult to parse out what "unity in the Holy Spirit" means, especially after the week that we've had. In our sermon for this week Pastor Andy quoted the United Methodist Book of Resolutions, specifically our denominational stance on gun control. We need to name that this is a hot button and often partisan issue in our nation, taking on different forms with each year, decade, and generation that passes. We also need to name that United Methodist stances on these issues, as described in our denominational Book of Resolutions are not universally agreed upon within our denomination. Like many issues, we are divided. So, again, what does it mean to be united by the Holy Spirit in our differences?

Our scripture for today is the story of the ascension. After Jesus had been killed, and was resurrected, he spent 40 days with his disciples. 40 days to instruct them on what had happened, and moreover to explain what was going to happen next. Most of these teachings he had already expressed in his life and ministry, but it was beginning to "click" a bit more with the disciples. In the ascension story Jesus tells the disciples that they will have work to do. They are to preach and teach about the forgiveness of sins and the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus is then taken up to the heavens and he tells his disciples to wait. To wait on the paraclete, the helper, the Holy Spirit who God will send to them. Jesus knew there would be a time between his incarnation and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the disciples are instructed to wait. But they didn't have to wait alone. They waited together. They spent all day in the temple together praising God.

It's been a really rough couple of weeks in this nation. And many of us are pretty tired of waiting on the Lord. We want reform. We want things to change. We want to send our children to school knowing that lawmakers are doing everything possible to ensure that our children will not meet the end of their lives at the end of a gun while they are just learning how to read. We are tired of holding our children as they cry in fear to get on the bus or out of the car in the morning at school. We are tired of learning from our own children about what we are to do in the case of an active shooter because they have had trainings in their classrooms.

We've all heard the quote that "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." We are tired of thoughts and prayers. We are tired of excuses. We are tired of waiting.

As I sat in my small groups last week and witnessed to the tears flowing from parents, grandparents, and shaken people, who are also tired of waiting, I found only one very real piece of hope, one piece of peace. I found a community that could hold space for all of these feelings. I found a community that was fed up, together. Anger is a gift and we have an opportunity to hold each other in this time.

There are times when Jesus has ascended and we are waiting. But we will wait together. And while we are waiting, we focus our attention on what we can do. And we will do those things together.

Many people are feeling helpless and are looking for *something* to do in response to gun violence. If you would like to send a letter to your senators supporting House Resolution 8 (HR 8), The Bipartisan Background Check Act of 2021, a letter has been provided at the end of this study.

Discussion Questions

1. How do we stay united as a people in the midst of mass shootings and partisan politics?
2. How do you feel about the United Methodist stance on gun violence?
(<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/our-call-to-end-gun-violence-3428>)
3. How good are you at waiting?
4. How young should we begin running our children through active shooter drills?

Prayer

God of Unity, when we struggle to be united, when we are in pain, when we are angry, send your Spirit into our bodies. Unite us, O God that we may use these big feelings, together, for the transformation of the church and the world. Amen.

"As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God's dream of shalom as described by Micah, we must address the epidemic of gun violence so "that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in God's paths." Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context." -Book of Resolutions

Dear Senator,

I attend Manchester United Methodist Church in Manchester, Missouri and am your constituent. In light of the recent shootings in Buffalo, New York, Uvalde, Texas and the many other mass casualty shootings in our country, I strongly urge you to take immediate action to pass House Resolution 8 (HR 8), The Bipartisan Background Check Act of 2021. Background checks save lives and protect communities from gun violence.

Since 1994, over 3.5 million sales have been blocked to violent criminals and other prohibited people because of a background check. However, current Federal law only requires a background check on a prospective gun buyer when a seller is a licensed gun dealer, leaving all other sales—such as gun sales between strangers negotiated over the internet or at a gun show—unregulated and with no background check required. This loophole has deadly consequences. That is why the Senate must take bipartisan action on background checks to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

Background checks are the foundation of any effective effort to reduce gun violence in this country, and these laws enjoy broad public approval, with poll after poll demonstrating overwhelming support. In fact, over 90% of American voters support requiring background checks on all gun sales, including over 80% of gun owners.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter of great urgency,



Mail your signed letters to these two addresses:

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