

## Introduction

## *Celebrating One Another*

Check-in & Introductions

## Epistle Lesson

Ephesians 6:10-20 (NRSV)

<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; <sup>11</sup>put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, <sup>12</sup>for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup>Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness <sup>15</sup>and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup>Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. <sup>19</sup>Pray also for me, so that when I speak a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

When I was the Young Adult Pastor at Manchester UMC I made a point to reach out to our young adults and invite them to have a one-on-one over coffee with me a couple times a year. Here's an encounter I had on 6 different occasions over a two week period, each with a freshman in college returning home for winter break, all students who grew up at Manchester UMC, students now involved with ecumenical faith groups on their new college campuses.

Them: "Do I need to get rebaptized as an adult to really be a Christian? Also if I don't believe that the Bible is absolutely factual am I really a Christian?"

Me: "Yeah, so what's happening here is that it's not that you're not a Christian, it's just that you are Methodist."

So many Methodists do not know how to define what Methodists believe. Like Pastor Andy mentioned in his sermon, "Ask some people what they like about United Methodism and they have no clue. Ask them what they like about their particular church and you will hear a long list. That list, it turns out, is always a very *United Methodist* list. The things they like about their congregation are also broadly true about the UMC."

The United Methodist church has a diversity of Biblical interpretations among it. And those ideas are welcome. We do not use the Bible as a weapon to bash others. With our history of small class/group formation, we read the sacred texts together to form an interpretation using our reason, experience, and our tradition to guide us.

The United Methodist Church has a history of making space for marginalized people, admittedly, sometimes too slowly. Ordination of black people and women happened earlier in

our denomination than many others. Hopefully soon, none of God's children will be kept from the process based orientation.

The United Methodist church believes and lives into a salvation that is not just for the hereafter, but deeply for the here and now! We experience God's grace and forgiveness here and we are called to respond! Our understanding of *social holiness* means we are called to help others in mission and in justice beyond the walls of the "official" church. Because as Wesley said...The world is our parish. And our connexional system of polity and structure make it possible for us to organize and help others on a global scale.

Our future is bright and we can see where we are headed if we just look at our past. We are a brave people who know that we can do hard things. We have been through controversy and reconciled. We have been oppressors who have had our hearts softened, who have repented and changed. We have remained active in our world living into our salvation as we continue to imagine a more perfect world and church together. We're Christians, yes! And, we are Methodists.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does the future of the United Methodist Church look like to you?
2. What is the difference between being welcoming and celebrating someone's presence?
3. Does it feel like the world is your parish? How so?
4. John Wesley broke the rules of his denomination multiple times? Do you ever feel it's appropriate to break rules? When?
5. Reflect on this quote from Izzy Massey, *"We blame society for this world we have ended up in. But, aren't we the society? Aren't we the people we are complaining about? We are quite literally our complaints. I don't know about any of you, but that doesn't make sense. If we want a better place, we need to work on it."*

## Prayer

God of our Ancestors, God of our children, you have remained with us and guided us for all generations. Move us, as your people, to better live in love, to move in you, and to be transformed by your grace, as you people and church. **Amen.**

*"The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt." - Frederick Buechner:*