

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Count the Stars

## Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 15:1-6 (NRSVUE)

<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." <sup>4</sup> But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

## Epistle Lesson

1 Corinthians 12:14-31 (NRSVUE)

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work powerful deeds? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our last week of a three week sermon series called "Homecoming." We began by reflecting on the diversity of our congregation, especially the diversity that comes from being an almost 200-year-old congregation. Last week we reflected on the amazing things that have been taking place at Manchester UMC and how we can be involved with those things. We talked about how ministry happens in the real world and takes real resources like time, staffing, and money. And in this, our final week, we are reflecting on our Welcome Statement, and what

it means to open our doors to the world and invite more people in. All three week weeks have been focused on being part of the church, and not just the church of Jesus Christ, or the Methodist church in general, but being part of Manchester UMC specifically.

The church is a diverse body made of many different parts, and as such those who are of the body extend a welcome to all. MUMC makes this clear with a Welcome Statement that calls us to extend love to all, no matter what. Our welcome statement says:

*We extend God's love and grace to ALL people. Therefore, as we journey toward a greater understanding of one another, we respect our human family's diversity of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, family structure, marital status, socioeconomic status, education, political perspective, faith history and life experience.*

Last week, while reflecting on the work of the Spirit, we used the word "scandalous." Grace is scandalous, mercy is scandalous, and the work of the Spirit is so different, so miraculous, so outside of the normative that it, too, seems scandalous.

John Wesley's idea for this was found in his decision to "be more vile." To offer the Gospel freely to the world, in any and every setting, in any way that he could. Our Welcome Statement is a big part of who we are as Manchester UMC. It wasn't always like that, but it is now. In God's great sanctification process our hearts are torn open and we are changed. Like Wesley we may start off not knowing if being so loving, so caring, so open to the Gospel in the world is safe, or right, or good. But we ultimately discover that this love has created a more authentic community than we have known. And if we stay the course, we become part of the promise, the covenant that God made with Abraham, we will be as many as the stars in the sky.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to extend God's love and grace?
2. Reflect on the Wesley quote at the bottom of this page. How do you live into that?
3. What is something new that Manchester UMC is doing that resonates with you?
4. We are a diverse body as described in the epistle lesson for today. What part are you and why?

## Prayer

God of our ancestors, we praise you and thank you that we too, are counted among the stars of your people, the grains of sand of those of your movement. Help us to submit to be more vile with your love and more scandalous with your Gospel. **Amen.**

*"At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people." – John Wesley*