

OneWith

A topical sermon series that draws on the Table 2 Communion Ritual from the United Methodist Book of Worship and the RCL to foster unity grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit, our shared work in ministry, and our common bond of humanity.

Time of Year/Length of Series (The When?):

Ordinary Time – 5 weeks, February to March.

Synopsis (The Why?):

According to Scripture, the nature of the church is to live as the body of Christ: each person and each church a diverse and interdependent part of a unified whole. Unity. Not uniformity. Unity is both difficult and essential to living faithfully. One way in which we practice unity is through the sacrament of Holy Communion. In this sacred act, the Table is open to all and as United Methodists our challenge is to remain at the Table, even in times of discord and disagreement. We have crafted this worship series outline to resource and inspire churches seeking to proclaim this identity moving into and beyond General Conference 2019.

Frames:

Week 1 – February 3

- **By Your Spirit**

Week 2 – February 10

- **Make Us One**

Week 3 – February 17

- **In Ministry to All The World**

Week 4 – February 24

- **Until...** (Christ comes in final victory)

Week 5 – March 3

- **And...** (We feast at his heavenly Banquet)



Week 1: By Your Spirit February 3, 2019

RCL Readings

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalms 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. -1 Corinthians 13:12

One of the themes in this week's RCL lectionary texts is how little we finite people understand about the one who knows us fully. Jesus angers the crowd in his hometown by reminding them of the prophets who healed Gentiles. His listeners did not know—or even want to know—that God's kingdom would include Gentiles.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes to a church that is full of disagreement. :Help your congregation get past wedding memories of flowers and white lace. It's a recipe for day to day living with people to whom we are joined in a baptismal covenant.

One key to being "one" in the middle of disagreement is to recognize that we know only in part. We will never know ourselves fully or one another fully. It's the misunderstood motivations and justifications that fracture relationships. Can you give someone the benefit of the doubt?

In Jeremiah 1:4-10, Jeremiah resists his call. He doesn't know how God has prepared him for this calling as a prophet. Just as Jeremiah is uniquely equipped, and leaders need to hear him, we need the unique gifts in which the Holy Spirit has equipped the members of the church. Can we listen to one another, not with boasting, but with humility? What can we learn from those who support each of the plans being considered at General Conference?

Psalms 71:1-6 reminds that God is faithful. It's God that is the constant and is the foundation for hope. We aren't going to come out of General Conference with a perfect theology and perfect church structure. But perhaps we will grow in humility and a sense of how God is at work through those with whom we disagree. And perhaps today we will leave with the determination to love even those with whom we disagree.

So we pray "By Your Spirit". Only the one who knows us fully and loves us fully can empower us to treat one another with love, empower us to be patient, kind, not boastful, bearing. Only the Spirit can grow us to be more perfect in love.

Engage / Interact / Illustrate

Make 1 Corinthians 13 real. Prepare a handout with the 1 Corinthians 13 passage for the congregation. Replace “love” with a _____ wherever this appears. Read the passage with love in the blank. Read this with God, who is love, and remember that God is patient and kind with us. Have the congregation substitute their own name. At the end of the passage, admit that own name doesn’t abide, and is certainly not “the greatest”. While you and I don’t live forever, the love that you show is what abides, the love that is given is true greatness, a glimpse of the one who loves fully acting through us.

Children’s Sermon: Use a sharpie to write the “Love” words of the 1 Corinthians 13 passage on ping pong balls. One ball would say “patient”, another “kind”, and so on. Invite children to read the words on the balls. Unlike other words that sometimes hurt, the love ping pong balls don’t hurt, and are even fun.

Pick a word. How do you throw a word like “patient” at some one? How would you throw a word like “kind” at someone?

Invite a person familiar to the children to come up and be the target. Invite kids to throw the ping pong balls at them. Love has to have a target, it’s more than a vague feeling.

Even when we miss the target completely, just throwing love balls will generate smiles and joy. Return the balls to the basket, and invite them to come get a word as a reminder after the worship service ends. Their ball will remind that God’s love targets them, and God doesn’t miss!

Illustration: Some traditions, such as Mennonites of Switzerland, South Germany, and Holland, set aside the Sunday before Holy Communion as a day of seeking reconciliation. If there is difficulty in reaching reconciliation, Holy Communion is delayed.

Amish congregations have been known to postpone communion for a year, until reconciliation is achieved. This willingness to postpone the sacrament reflects their understanding that Communion is not merely an individual transaction with God, but a celebration of unity.

Musical Suggestions:

Week 2: Make Us One (With Christ, One Another) February 10, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

- Luke 5:5-6

Last week we acknowledged our need for the Holy Spirit. God calls us to a love far beyond our own capacities. Our inability to understand and know one another and God can lead to misunderstandings and division.

Paul, who wrote the magnificent love chapter, now acknowledges his differences with the other disciples (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). You might even detect some remaining resentment and competitiveness! Yet Paul is clear, there is something greater than those disagreements, and more important than the words and work of any particular disciple. We are bound together by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The heart of our faith is a God who comes in the flesh and dies for our sins. We tell the stories of others who have seen Jesus, whether or not we fully agree with them. We tell our own stories. Because each of us has known resurrection, are bound to Christ, we are bound together in proclaiming resurrection!

Many of us are familiar with Isaiah's answer, "Here I am Lord" when God asks whom shall be sent. Less familiar is the message that God gives in the optional part of the reading, Isaiah 6: 9-13. Do you think Isaiah would have said, "Here I am" so quickly had he known the message he would be carrying? The world they know is ending. Nothing will be left of God's people, less than a remnant. At times, it feels like little will be left of the institutional church. Churches close or merge. In many places and groups, people are not interested in the institutional church. Even so, we are bound together by the gospel and call to be disciples of Jesus. While the church as an institution has changed over time, the underlying message that calls us remains. Difficult circumstances do not change the gospel.

In Luke 5, we are reminded that Jesus calls us to act in ways that seem crazy. Fishermen are told to put out their nets at the wrong time of day, in the wrong place. The empirical evidence (they haven't caught any fish all night) suggests that putting nets is futile. Yet they let a carpenter tell them how to fish, and they experience more than they expected. Isn't that often the case? As we wait for General Conference, let's not let our own voices get in the way of hearing Jesus, or look for reasons to top loving Christ and one another.

This is the first calling of disciples. What a diverse group they will be. It's likely that Peter would be a modern day republican, a business owner with several employees, who wants to reduce government regulation of his business and keep government out of his wallet. In contrast, Matthew is a tax collector, who has found a way of working with the government. Perhaps he sees a role for government in building roads and cities. He is more likely to be a democrat. And maybe Judas Iscariot was a libertarian. If part of the Sicarii zealot movement, he wants no government at all! From the beginning, God calls diverse followers and binding us to Jesus, we are bound to one another.

Engage / Interact / Illustrate

Engage. This could be a children's sermon or a sermon illustration. In the children's book, *Pete the Cat*, Pete walks along, singing his song. "I love my white boots, I love my white boots." Each time he steps in something, his boots are messed up. After stepping in strawberries, he sings, "I love my red boots". After stepping in mud, he sings, "I love my brown boots." Get the congregation involved, at each stage saying "Oh no!" when Pete missteps, and singing the simple tune. At the end of the book, the moral of the story is given. No matter what you step in, keep singing your song. Our song is one of God's faithfulness, of a God who perfects us in love for one another. Paul is clear that they are singing the same song, the gospel story. Peter doesn't own the story. Neither do James and John. Keep on singing the gospel song, no matter the circumstances.

Illustrate Visually. Use plain fabric to make two banners. The left banner is empty with a net stretched across it. The right banner is constructed in the same way, but with the addition of fish secured to the cloth under the net. Or alternatively, stretch a fish net across the altar table, with fish attached to the cloth under the net. Keep this illustration the following week, when you will expand the illustration by naming fish.

Illustration: In *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell describes a researcher who studies which marriages survive. The researcher can predict, in only a few moments, with great accuracy as to whether a couple's marriage will survive. The key? In those few moments, did the couple make eye contact with one another? Did they roll their eyes? In the church, how do we make eye contact? When do we roll our eyes with disrespect?

Musical Suggestions:

Week 3: One in Ministry to All the World February 17, 2018

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. Psalm 1:3

Last week we read of Jesus calling fishermen as disciples. You may want to point out that calling is always paired with commissioning: "From now on you will be catching people." Sometimes we assume that the process is first a disciple (follower, student, apprentice) and then we grow enough so that later we become an apostle (one who is sent). But from the beginning, from now on, the fishermen would be fishing for people.

The theme of fruit is found in all four texts. In both the Psalm and Jeremiah, people are divided into two groups based on whether they depend on themselves or on God. There are consequences to these choices. Those who trust in God live with abundance, despite drought and the desert heat. Deep roots tap into hidden springs, not only keeping them alive, but bringing life-giving fruit to others.

Jeremiah lives in a time in which it seems like the wicked will prevail. He sees the coming onslaught of Babylonian forces and the destruction of his homeland. Whatever change there is in the church, God will be at work, and fruit will still be borne.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes Jesus as the first fruits of those who have died. This is the ultimate promise in which we place our hope. Resurrection isn't a unique occurrence. Christ is the first, and will not be the only one, to know resurrection. In bearing fruit, plants give energy to animals, who then carry and spread the seeds that will produce more plants. God so loved the world that he gave his only son...and we are part of spreading these seeds that will bring resurrection life throughout the world

Luke 6

What does resurrection life look like? What are the fruits we bear now? As always, look to Jesus. His very presence brings healing to the crowds. The blessings, the beatitudes, are a glimpse of Jesus, who was poor, hungry, hated, reviled. And yet these steps he took in love for the world. We who follow Jesus, bear these blessings to the world. We prayed for the Spirit to make us one in ministry to the world, knowing that when Jesus is at work in us, we are in ministry with the poor, and there is a glimpse of the kingdom of God; we are ministry with the hungry, and together we are filled; we are in ministry with those who mourn, and even in pain

experience laughter and hope. Our ministry even includes those who are “enemies”. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, that like Jesus say, “Father forgive them.”

Engage / Interact / Illustrate

Illustration. (Need to get the details on this, heard this in a Disciple Bible study group.) When Wilke wrote the Disciple Bible study, he was disappointed that they wanted another study. His intention was that people would do Disciple bible study and then go out and serve. Instead, this became the first in a series of studies, and we could get caught up in Disciple I, II, III, IV, Jesus in the Gospels, Christian Believer, and never really go out. This is not to say there is no role for spiritual formation and Christian education , but these should always be with the intention of shaping us as disciples that are actively part of how God is transforming the world.

Engage. Use the banner or communion table fish and nets. What are the “fish”? Pick up a fish and name one of the ministries of your church. If you have a lunch bag ministry, a blue fish for each lunch bag recipient; green fish representing the children impacted by VBS, orange fish for the people impacted by music ministry. They may seem like different ministries, but the same resurrection hope undergirds them all. In their own way they tell the gospel of a God who loves and is not content with the status quo. We are one in ministry to the world.

Interact. Put additional fish nets where they are accessible to the congregation, such as on the altar rail or tables around the sanctuary. Provide pieces of paper cut to look like fish. What are the ways you are in ministry? Invite people to write a way that God is at work in them to minister and bear fruit. Refer back to the 1 Corinthians 13 chapter with which we opened the series. When are they patient? How is that building up another person? When are they kind? How is that bringing hope to someone who mourns?

Musical Suggestions:

Week 4: Until (Christ Comes In Final Victory) February 24, 2019

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Luke 6:27-38

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:59

We live in an **until** world. When his brothers show up in Egypt looking for food, Joseph is in a position of power (Genesis 45:3-11, 15). Rather than revenge, he sees the good that God has brought good out of his own pain. For a long time, Joseph has lived in an “until” period. He’s trusted in God’s faithfulness, all the while experiencing betrayal from his brothers, in the home of Potiphar, and in prison. Many of us know people for whom hardship has resulted in bitterness. But here we see some of the best evidence for the work of the Holy Spirit—a life transformed. Joseph, who once seemed a braggart full of self, bragging about dreams of power, has become a person of forgiveness. The until is a time of transformation.

While the story of Joseph is the transformation of one person, Paul describes the transformation God desires for all of us (1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50). Every one of us resembles Adam. We are finite. We disobey. We die. And yet, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are becoming more like Christ. We are already growing more like Christ, even as we wait for his coming, when we experience resurrection.

All of the gospel shows what it is we are becoming, as we grow more like Christ. But here in Luke 6:27-38, we are given guidelines for how to live and for transformation in the until time period. We experience forgiveness, but also give forgiveness. We experience peace but give peace. We experience hope but give hope. Experience love but give love

This is indeed transformation. You don’t need to know Christ to understand that if you help someone, there’s a chance they’ll help you in return later on. In the same way, there’s no extra credit for loving those who love you. That’s usual, to love those who love them.

The transformation God desires moves us beyond care of those who can return the favor, love for those with whom we disagree. It’s not natural!

Engage / Interact / Illustrate

Interact. Remember the infomercials where the audience says “ooh” and “ahh”. But wait, there’s more! Not only will you get the showtime six star knife set, order now and you’ll receive the egg chopper.

Prepare a sign or Powerpoint slide with words like “ooh” and “ahh”. Tell the congregation that you want them to react as enthusiastically as any studio audience who hears, “But wait there’s more”. In your church, there is a Stephen’s Ministry or congregational care ministry. And when there is mourning, there is comforting (ooh). But wait, there’s more. There are children in the schools who are hungry in the summer when there is no school lunch provided. You are packing backpacks (ahh). But wait, there’s more. There are people who mourn the loss of homes in the hurricane, and you are giving to UMCOR and putting together buckets (ahh). Even in this time of until, the promises, the fruits are being borne.

Yes, the time of until is one in which there are still hungry children, lonely people, and people who mourn. But the time of until is also one in which we bear fruit in serving and sharing the good news. Fruit will continue to be borne until that time when Christ comes in final victory.

Engage: Transformation of society as well as individuals. Walter Wink describes how society can be transformed by the acts Jesus describes: carrying a pack a second mile, offering a right cheek after the slap on the left cheek, and giving undergarments when someone takes your coat (*Engaging the Powers*, summarized at http://www.cres.org/star/_wink.htm). He argues that these are not being a doormat, but a third way, a way to engage violence rather than acceptance or a violent response. Walk into the congregation to show what it takes to slap in this way. Carry a pack, and insist on carrying it the second mile. You probably don’t want to strip your clothes! The Walter Wink argument shows how nonviolent resistance can also be part of transformation of the world, as we live in this until period. These are similar to acts of nonviolent resistance encouraged by Gandhi and in the Civil Rights movement.

Musical Suggestions:

Week 5: And (we feast at his heavenly table) February 24, 2019

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" – Luke 9:35

General Conference has ended. No matter the outcome, there will be those who are disappointed. But this is not a time to emphasize win/lose. No matter the outcome, we still gather the first of the month (or other regular times) around the Holy Communion Table. We still pray:

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

When Moses meets with God in the tabernacle, he is transformed physically, his face shines (Exodus 34:29-35). The transformation was frightening to others in the wilderness camp. Yet Moses continued to meet with the Lord in this way.

Paul will compare to the physical transformation Moses experienced to the transformation we know through Christ (2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2). Whenever we turn to the Lord, the veil is removed, and we see God more fully. Don't lose heart! It is God at work, bringing about the transformation we need.

The voice from heaven, that once spoke at Jesus' baptism, now speaks again (Luke 9:28-36-43a) In Luke 3, at Jesus baptism, heavens opened and the a voice indifies Jesus as the beloved son. Now, a command is given. Listen to him. Whatever the decision at General Conference, this is the true "way forward". We continue to listen to Jesus.

Jesus and his disciples leave the mountain, where they encounter a child in need of healing. While the disciples have been healing others, this case is beyond their capacity. It may be that we leave General Conference with a sense that conflict or new structure is beyond our capacity. Once again, there is an AND. We listen to Jesus, and feast on his words, example, death and resurrection.

In particular, listen to him in the Holy Communion meal

The words Christ said long ago are said today when a server says, “the body of Christ”, “the blood of Christ”. Christ is still speaking through disciples down through the ages. Each person needs to know that the body and blood are for them.

We trust Christ is present, and keep an open table. We would not want to deny anyone the experience of being in the presence of Christ.

We require an elder to be present, someone to remind us that our church is connected to others in the denomination.

We kneel, with open hands, a posture of humility and obedience.

We serve one another. You can't take Holy Communion alone.

Engage / Interact / Illustrate

Engage. This [Transfiguration/Scout Sunday video](#) was made with an iphone, a few scouts, and inspiration from a Chapel Roswell video. Scouts try to change water into wine, multiply loaves and fish sticks, raise the dead, and even shine bright white like the transfiguration Jesus. The video ends with the tag line “Can't do everything Jesus did? Try listening to him.” Adapt the script to fit your context. If you don't have a screen, it be done as a skit.

Illustration. It's a familiar illustration, and one your congregation likely knows, but worth reminding. A visitor tours hell and heaven. In hell, people are hungry, despite plenty of food at the banquet table. Forced to eat with long stemmed spoons and they cannot feed themselves. In contrast, at the heavenly banquet, they use the long stemmed spoons to feed one another. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory_of_the_long_spoons

Illustration. Not everyone appreciates another person's transformation. Family members may express concern about someone giving to the church or other ministry. They may express concern about whether weight loss or improved physical activity was done safely...all while offering sweets. How do you hold on to the transformation, keep looking to Christ, when it seems like everything else is trying to sabotage this?

Musical Suggestions: