

AFTER EPIPHANY: THE GREAT INVITATION

Series Overview

Advent starts the Christian Year by focusing us all on beginning with the ultimate end in mind. Likewise, every worship series you pursue needs to keep its end, its purpose, out in front of the people at all times, as well as lead the people through a process that moves them all closer to that end.

The purpose of the Season after Epiphany is to prepare the congregation for its work of preparing people to live out the way of Jesus during the season of Lent that follows.

The two tracks of readings (Epistle and OT/Gospel) help the church accomplish that in two different ways. In both tracks, the season is “bookended” by Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration Sunday, days that call us to remember and recapitulate the beginning and the glorious end of the discipleship journey we’ve undertaken and are actively inviting others to join in during these weeks.

Between these two bookends, the Epistle track in the lectionary helps the church identify and address internal issues that may be hindering it from doing that Lenten formational work well. The OT/Gospel track guides the church to extend Christ’s invitation to “Come and see” with us what he is all about and what discipleship to him looks like.

We’ve chosen to focus this year’s resourcing on the OT/Gospel Track, in a worship series we’ve called “The Great Invitation.”

January 8, Baptism of the Lord: “The Heavens Are Opened”

We witness the baptism of Jesus, reaffirm the baptismal covenant, and enter anew into the mystery of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from “opened heavens” for the work of evangelism that lies ahead of us during the coming weeks.

January 15: “Come and See”

In the story of the calling of the first disciples from John’s gospel, we are inspired and challenged to come and see how Jesus lives ourselves and to continue to invite those we know to come with us.

January 22: “Follow Me”

At the end of the story of the calling of the first disciples in Matthew’s gospel, we follow Jesus with his disciples into the places of greatest need and opportunity and offering teaching, good news, and healing love.

January 29: #Blessed

We’ve seen Jesus in action. Now we settle in for the first of four weeks to hear him teach his first disciples with a large crowd in the background. Today he sets us straight about who and

what God's kingdom is blessing in the world.

February 5: Salt and Light and Righteousness Abounding

In light of who and what God is blessing and how different that is from what the world and sometimes even the church seems to bless, how do we then live? As salty, light-shining people whose righteousness abounds!

February 12: This, Not That

Jesus continues to offer concrete examples of what life in God's kingdom does, and doesn't, look like.

February 19: And Now Your Reward

Blessings are a gift of God in God's kingdom. Rewards are the result of living more fully into the ways of God's kingdom, or as we might say, "growing in holiness of heart and life." Jesus reminds us of ways we can stay on or stray from the trail God's kingdom blazes for us in this life.

February 26: Shine!

Today we exult in the vision of God's exaltation of Jesus and in anticipation of our own transfiguration now and in the age to come. That hope, that vision, drives us not to stay where we are on the mountaintop, but to get into the valley of sin and suffering and be a healing and formative presence for all who seek God's salvation with us in the weeks of Lent that lie ahead.

**THE GREAT INVITATION
WEEK 1**

**BAPTISM OF THE LORD:
THE HEAVENS ARE OPENED!**

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

"Down to the River to Pray"

Worship & Song, 3164

Acolytes or others slowly carry the lit paschal candle and the baptismal bowl, filled with water, around the worship space, and finally to the front of the worship space as the congregation

sings the last stanza a capella. At the words “crown” or “robe and crown,” someone in the processional lifts a crown or a robe and crown for all to see; or the images may be projected on screens.

Prayer for Illumination:

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on us.
As you led Jesus to the waters of baptism in the Jordan,
opened up the heavens,
and came down upon him,
come down, O Love Divine, upon us.
Open our eyes and our ears
that we today may hear afresh in our own hearts
that voice from heaven which said to him,
“This is my beloved child,
in whom I am well pleased.” **Amen.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

“Down by the Jordan,” stanzas 1-2 *Worship & Song*, 3045

or

“When Jesus Came to Jordan,” stanzas 1-2 UMH 252 (Suggested Tune: AURELIA UMH 545)

Reading

[Matthew 3:13-17](#)

“Down by the Jordan,” stanzas 3-4 *Worship & Song*, 3045

or

“When Jesus Came to Jordan,” stanza 3 UMH 252 (Suggested Tune: AURELIA UMH 545)

Sermon

“The Heavens Are Opened”

Preparation for Baptismal Reaffirmation

Band or Ensemble

“Let the Heavens Open,” [CCLI #7007819](#)

Baptismal Reaffirmation

[BOW Version](#)/ [English](#) (New Affirmation)/[Spanish](#) (Neuva Reafirmacion)

Song during Acts of Reaffirmation

“Come to the Water” (Tomlin)

Worship & Song, 3114

Commitment to Invitation

Prayers of the People

Interweave spoken or sung petitions from [BOW 571](#) within a sung congregational continuo or response (Bridge from “Let the Heavens Open”)

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table and Peace

Sisters and brothers,
the heavens are opened,
God's love and the Spirit's presence
are pouring down on us.
Give thanks, church!

Alleluia!

Give thanks, church!

Amen!

And this same Jesus Christ,
God's beloved,
invites to his table of love
all who love him,
all who have turned from their sin
as you have just done,
and seek to be at peace with one another.

So, sisters and brothers,
may the abundant, life-changing, overflowing
peace of Christ that pours from the opened heavens
be with you, each and all!

And also with you!

Share Christ's peace with one another,
and your gifts for the outpouring of God's ministries
in the world.

Offering/Peace Music

["We Would See Jesus"](#) (Henry)

Choir or Ensemble

Great Thanksgiving

[Great Thanksgiving for Baptism of the Lord](#)

Music During Communion

"Set a Fire"

[CCLI Song #5911299](#)

"Open Up the Heavens"

[CCLI Song #4119999](#)

Thanksgiving after Communion

**You have opened up the heavens, O God,
and poured out love and refreshment.
You have given us yourself, O Christ,**

and united us with you and one another.
Now send us, O Spirit,
to flood the world with the good news of salvation
today and all days. Amen.

SENDING FORTH

Song/Hymn of Sending

We Would See Jesus

We have seen Jesus,
and the heav'ns opening,
Spirit fall down and
the Father smile.
We've tasted Jesus,
bread and wine here taking,
filled with his presence,
You've made us alive!

Now send us Spirit!
Send us out this morning
To join with Christ calling,

“Come, follow me!”

Let us arise, all
lesser service scorning.
Lord, we are thine, we give
ourselves to thee.
Lord, we are thine, we give
ourselves to thee.

Deacon or Worship Leader:
So go, people of God.
You've been cleansed and fed
and clothed anew in Christ.
Go, and let the world see God's love shine
through you!

Postlude

Reprise of “Come to the Water”

MUSIC NOTES

“Down to the River to Pray”

Many now know of this American folk song because of its prominence in the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Though it quickly arose to popularity from the movie, it has deep meaning for people in relation to the sacrament of baptism. This hymn makes a wonderful procession and creates a lulling, walking rhythm. Its repetitive text also makes it an ideal choice to sing while walking without hymnals or songbooks. If singing this selection *a cappella*, don't let the tempo drag. The processional nature of the hymn depends on a moderate, *andante* tempo that continues to beckon people forward. If it is being accompanied by a keyboard instrument, be sure not to play each chord in succession. For instance, in measure 2, play the first F Major chord and the last one at the most. Another example would be in measure 3, where the left hand should hold the first C/Bb for 1 ½ beats. Playing each chord as written makes it too choppy and keeps the character too tense. Whatever happens, make it invitational! Depending on the character of baptismal reaffirmation, this hymn also works as a processional as people come forward to touch the water and remember their baptism. A melody-only, noncopyrighted setting of this hymn can be found here: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/down-to-the-river-to-pray> **Please note: I (Jackson Henry) am the one who penned the copyrighted transcription. You have my permission to reprint it as needed. It is a public domain text and tune and should stay that way.*

Down by the Jordan

This hymn by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette combines a paraphrase of the worship scriptural narrative and commentary related to the Scripture. Because of this, it pairs exceptionally well alongside the Scripture reading in worship. As is suggested in the full service, sing the first two stanzas before the reading, and sing the last two stanzas after the reading as a segue into the sermon. LOBE DEN HERREN is a tune that demands singing with gusto! The climax of each stanza occurs in measures 13-16 (with particular emphasis in measures 13 and 14), so make sure the music crescendos to this point, or at least builds in energy. The phrase that follows the climax will become more of a bold proclamation if measures 13-16 serve as a “heralding” to announce the message of measures 17-20. As an interesting commentary, see two of the phrases that are created musically with measures 13-14: “God will forgive!” “This is God’s sign!” This is a sermon in and of itself.

When Jesus Came to Jordan

In grace and style, Fred Pratt Green has also combined Scripture and commentary into one hymn. The use of this hymn seems to boldly inform the congregation of the direction for this season as well--the beginning of a journey that leads to Pentecost. As directed in the full service, sing stanzas 1 and 2 before the Scripture reading, and follow the reading with stanza 3 as a transition into the sermon. COMPLAINER is a great tune for this text and is easy to teach to a congregation because of its repetitive form: A A' B A'. This means that almost 3 out of 4 phrases of each stanza are the same melody! There are other options that support the text well, however, including AURELIA, ELLACOMBE, MUNICH, and MERLE'S TUNE.

Let the Heavens Open

The use of this hymn after the sermon would be a wonderful way to bookend the message with Green's text above. The final stanza of “When Jesus Came to Jordan” invites the

Holy Spirit to “aid us to keep the vows we make.” Jobe’s setting here begins with the statement to the Holy Spirit, “You are welcome in this place,” and follows with more urgent imperatives, such as “come,” “move,” and “breathe.” We also see the cosmological imagery of the heavens opening and all creation giving witness to the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The tune is quite simple and is easily teachable among a congregation, but it must be sung simply. Too often, these kinds of tunes are overcomplicated by instrumentalists who try to do too much (see the overplaying comment in “Down to the River to Pray” above). Keep the accompaniment simple, and lead the congregation with a voice, praise team, or even an instrument with a voice-like character (i.e., a flute, violin, cello, oboe, or clarinet). A piano doubling the melody can make things too precise and choppy.

Come to the Water

Placing “Come to the Water” at the baptismal reaffirmation can be a powerful sacramental statement. It serves as an invitation to the baptismal waters and to be a part of what the reign of God is about: deliverance from sin (both personal and corporate), which includes issues like violence and injustice. Being baptized means being claimed by God, and it is also a means of grace that leads us toward sanctification by taking the authority as a child of God, standing up against the evils of the world, and moving on toward perfection by loving God and one another. The best instrumentation with this song is a full worship band, but it can also be done with piano only or rhythm section (piano, bass, and drums). Even a piano with some added percussion--cajon (or other instrument with multiple pitch options) or tambourine--would work in many settings. However you sing it, proclaim it boldly!

We Would See Jesus

This hymn begins at Jesus’ birth and continues through his young life and ministry. Finding a place to use the entire song in a single worship service may prove difficult. However, this day marks a transition and a new beginning as we pivot toward Lent. Therefore, singing this hymn can be most appropriate. I have recently set this hymn to a fresh, new tune (in “old-time” or Appalachian style) that can be found here: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus> It is intended to be accompanied by an ensemble of acoustic guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and bass, but it can easily be adapted to an instrumental accompaniment of any combination of those instruments or simply piano. This piece can be sung congregationally or led by a soloist, but it is preferable to have a vocal trio to support the melody and harmonies. It may be possible to use this as a connecting theme song throughout the season after Epiphany. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Set a Fire

When reviewing this modern cyclic song as a part of Discipleship Ministries’ CCLI Top 100 Vetting Project, I remember commenting that it can be thought of as notably Wesleyan. The image of a heartwarming by the presence of the Holy Spirit is a part of the very lifeblood of Methodists and all Wesleyan Christians. I would approach this song in the way it is intended--as a meditative chorus that beckons the work of the Spirit within us. The ideal key for this song is G, and it can be accompanied by a number of different instruments, all the way from piano or

organ to full worship band. Keeping it simple might be a good way to present this to a congregation, and it would be very easy to have some treble and bass instruments improvise on an ostinato pattern during the singing of this hymn. Get children's and/or youth choirs involved by teaching them the song and having them lead and model it for the congregation! They can also support with a variety of ostinato patterns to accompany the simple chord progression.

Open Up the Heavens

Another modern cyclic song, this Hillsong creation conjures the imagery of the heavens being opened and the glory of God falling upon the church and the world. There are obvious connections between the text and the Scripture narrative for this service, so this would be a timely choice. If you listen to this song online, you will notice a series of climaxes within the presentation, but the song is cyclic, and therefore malleable to the needs of worship. If it needs to remain quiet, let it be an opportunity for sung meditation. If there is a way to transition into an act of thanksgiving, then go for it and build to more of a climax. This song is easily accompanied by guitar, piano, or band. The ideal key for singing is G because it keeps the voice in a moderate range.

Other Suggested Hymns for Baptism of the Lord:

"Baptized in Water"	TFWS 2248
"You Are Mine"	TFWS 2218
"Come to the Waters" (Choral/Cong.)	GIA Publishing, G-6062
"Shout to the Lord"	TFWS 2074

PREACHING NOTES

Over the next eight weeks, as we embark this new series, "The Great Invitation," we are going to be talking about *evangelism*. In particular, we will be exploring the role of all baptized believers in the evangelistic mission of the church by encouraging disciples to share their faith and invite someone who is not yet a follower of Jesus Christ to come and see who he is.

When I hear "evangelism," I am reminded of several specific things that, for me, have created negative associations with the word. (This is my experience, but I encourage you to think about how you can share your own as you read about mine.)

I think, for example, of the tent revivals I attended as a child each summer with my grandparents in Nebraska and the way the preaching rose to a fever pitch and continued relentlessly until a suitable number of converts had come forward to confess their faith in Jesus Christ. I picture the billboards I see along the route from my home in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to our Discipleship

Ministries building in Nashville, that warn in grave terms about where drivers will go if they crash and die without having confessed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

And I think about the father-son team I encountered in downtown Madison, Wisconsin, just a couple of months ago when I was in that city to visit my young adult son. This man and his toddler were part of a group of Christian disciples handing out tracts in the busy area around the capitol building during the farmers' market on a sunny Saturday morning. Their goal was to save souls by stopping people and inviting them to make a decision for Christ right there and then. In a manner similar to the billboards, I watched as this man shared his concern about the eternal destiny of a farmers' market shopper he'd stopped. I listened as he assured the young woman that her salvation would be secure if she would only say aloud the words printed on the card. Once the prayer was offered, he told her she was now saved for eternal life. He then congratulated her, gave her a brochure about his church, and moved on to find another soul to save.

Because of experiences like these, I think for a lot of years I simply equivocated the word "evangelism" with "converting people." And, truth be told, evangelism had become something I didn't feel gifted or called to do, in part, because I wrongly understood the term to refer to a single event that was focused on manipulating, coercing, or even scaring people into making a decision for Christ.

In his book, [*Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*](#) (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2016), author Mark Teasdale notes that my experience of the word "evangelism" is not unusual. And, based on my experience, my reluctance to invite others to make a decision for Christ is not unusual either. Teasdale argues that when we set evangelism up entirely around making a decision, it naturally implies an either/or conclusion: either you are with me and you convert, or you are not and you suffer the consequences. Teasdale writes, "Evangelism. . . demands a competition between the evangelist and the evangelized in which only one will have their initial beliefs remain. The evangelist wants to expunge the evangelized's existing beliefs about the purpose and meaning of the world, replacing those beliefs with his or her own" (p 33).

Teasdale suggests that the key to reclaiming our ability to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others is to move away from presenting our own experience of faith as an either/or proposition:

We should not deny that evangelists seek to augment or replace people's existing beliefs. Evangelism entails sharing the good news of God with the hope that people will hear it and receive it. If the person believes something that is harmful toward others or inaccurate about God, then we want the person to accept the good news in place of those beliefs. By the same token, an evangelist should never condemn people. As evangelists we invite others to consider and be challenged by the good news of God in Jesus Christ. We do not issue a blanket condemnation of those who disagree with that good news.

The difficulty many of us have in dealing with this nuance is that evangelism has traditionally been understood as dealing in propositions. The evangelist makes propositional truth claims about who God is and how people must respond to him. The evangelized must either accept or reject these truth claims, with no means of engaging in thoughtful dialogue with the evangelist. We can overcome this by understanding that evangelism trades in stories more than in propositions. This is because stories have more capacity to convey nuanced and meaningful goodness to people than propositions do (Teasdale, [*Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*](#), pages 33-34).

In recent years I have grown to understand evangelism in a more holistic and Wesleyan way. In the Wesleyan tradition, as in other denominations, we do believe each person must at some point make a personal decision for Christ. But for Wesleyans, converting people to Christ is not an end-goal; nor is it necessarily a one-time event. Rather, conversion for Wesleyans is a lifelong process of growing into deeper discipleship and deeper relationship with God in Christ.

Our journey toward discipleship begins with baptism. When we baptize an infant or child, we are initiating them into the community of God's people. We mark them with water, symbolically recognizing before the community of faith that even though they do not yet recognize it for themselves, God's grace is within them. We pray for the Holy Spirit to guide them on their journey. And we covenant as a community of faith to show them, by our example, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ so that one day they will experience God's saving grace and make a confession of faith in Christ for themselves.

SIDEBAR: "Invoking the Flood at Baptism"

By Taylor Burton-Edwards

The "Thanksgiving over the Water" in our current baptismal rite includes a reference to the Great Flood of Noah (Genesis 6-9). There, the authorized presider prays, "In the days of Noah you saved those on the ark through water. After the flood, you set in the clouds a rainbow." Where does this language come from? And why do we include this language in our baptismal rite?

The clearest antecedent to including language about the Great Flood in the prayers at baptism is in Martin Luther's revision of the Western baptismal rite in 1526, where he added what Lutherans often refer to as "[The Flood Prayer](#)." Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury responsible for developing the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (editions in 1549 and 1552) drew inspiration from Luther's flood prayer in constructing a prayer for the baptismal candidate included near the beginning of the baptismal rite. This prayer was continued in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer the Wesleys used in their day, and was thus likewise continued in the 1784 Sunday Service John Wesley gave and the 1784 General Conference authorized for official use in the Methodist Episcopal Church. With minor alterations, it continued even in the face of substantial liturgical revisions made in 1786 and 1792, but disappeared again in the later ritual

revisions (North and South) in the nineteenth century, along with any form or reference to any form of thanksgiving or prayer over the water as such.

Here are the relevant pieces from Wesley's version (1784):

"Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water...and by the baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ in the river Jordan, did sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin.." (James F. White, ed. *John Wesley's Prayer Book: The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 1991, p. 139).

So why is it back? It is back in part because it restores the reference to the flood in the original Sunday Service. But it is back more importantly because of the effort of United Methodists and many others to settle on an ecumenically agreeable form for baptism grounded on what we have come to know in the past century and a half about the practices of early Christianity. There are two elements, in particular, that can be said to be common to the early Christian practice of baptism. It included a blessing of the water (what we call a Thanksgiving over the Water) before baptismal candidates entered or used the water. And while we don't have many specific examples of what these ancient blessings looked like, we do know across many examples of references to these liturgies in catechetical and mystagogical materials that they drew deeply on references to the baptism of Jesus and particularly on other biblical texts related to it.

Today's gospel reading is one of these texts, and in particular the phrase "the heavens were opened" (Matthew 3:16). Mark's verb in 1:10 (schizomenous) is even more dramatic: "the heavens being split." Both point to the "opening" or "splitting" of the firmament in the Great Flood (Genesis 7:11) allowing the "waters above the earth" to pour forth. It represents an "uncreation" that leads ultimately to a new beginning, a new creation. And so the opening of the heavens at the baptism of Jesus also functions as a foretaste of the renewal of all things to come in and through the Beloved One of God.

Another of these texts is I Peter 3:20-21. Here, the writer directly connects God's saving work for those on the ark through the Great Flood with baptism. It even names the Great Flood as an "antitype" (foreshadowing) of baptism. The language in our current baptismal liturgy draws explicitly from this language in I Peter.

Our Anglican heritage, the history of using rich biblical imagery with baptism, and the biblical story of Jesus' own baptism all inform why the Flood Prayer is an integral part of our baptismal ritual once again.

END SIDEBAR

As United Methodists, we believe that experiencing assurance of God's grace is a critical step in the journey toward a deeper relationship with the living Lord. But we also believe that the way it happens varies widely. Unlike in the examples I gave above, for Methodists, there is no single way, and not even necessarily a single moment, in which someone suddenly changes status from "unsaved" to "saved."

For some, especially those who come to a relationship with Christ as adults and seek Christian baptism as a mark of their conversion as well as God's prevenient grace, assurance might take place at the moment of baptism. When that happens, it is very exciting and should be celebrated in the life of the congregation!

But I suspect that for the majority of United Methodists, particularly those who were baptized as infants or young children, encountering the living Lord happened at a time other than baptism. Perhaps it happened at confirmation. Perhaps it was at a revival service, or during a camping experience, or at a gathering of young people, or through campus ministry, or when receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion.

SIDEBAR “The Wesleyan Way of Salvation”

By Dawn Chesser

One of the simplest and most helpful summaries of the United Methodist view of salvation that I have read is from a book written for youth by F. Belton Joyner Jr.: [*Being United Methodist in the Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide for Youth, Parents, and Other Confused United Methodists*](#) (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

John Wesley wrote, “Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself” (Rupert E. Davies, ed., [*The Works of John Wesley, vol. 9*](#) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, 227).

Joyner unpacks Wesley's metaphor this way: “Salvation is like a house. To get into the house, you have to first get on the porch (repentance) and then you have to go through the door (faith). But the house itself—one's relationship with God—is holiness, holy living” (Joyner, 3).

He goes on to note that while United Methodists do not dismiss the importance of repentance and asking for pardon, the critical component for us is holy living. Furthermore, all three of these components—repentance, faith, and holiness—are not something we can earn by saying certain words or doing certain things. They are, for United Methodists, gifts of God's grace. And for Wesleyans, the gifts of God's grace come in many ways, some ordinary and others extraordinary.

The ordinary means of grace are the familiar ways God has provided. Wesley described them as “outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby God might convey to humankind preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace” (Albert Outler, ed., [*The Works of John Wesley, vol.1*](#), 381). Wesley divided these ordinary means into two categories: Works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety include the public worship of God, the ministry of the Word (either read or expounded), sharing in Holy Communion, family and private prayer, searching the Scriptures, and fasting or abstinence. Works of mercy are the things that we do as we practice holy living. And let us be

clear: holy living is, in part, specifically for the purpose of “spreading scriptural holiness over the land” (Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., [*The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook, vol. 2*](#) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000, 82). We practice holy living by the way we love the world around us and all that is within it. Through our loving words and actions, we offer Christ and invite others into a relationship with the living Lord.

Joyner notes, “United Methodists see a Jesus who heals, who teaches, who forgives, who restores, and who is just, and the seek to be advocates of those systems that heal, that teach, that give new beginnings, that bring justice. . . This work is nothing less than the redemption of the whole created order. The theological term for it is ‘entire sanctification,’ which means the full love of God and the full love of neighbor. Persons in the Wesleyan family use ‘Christian perfection’ as another way of speaking of entire sanctification” (F. Belton Joyner Jr., *Being United Methodist in the Bible Belt*, 60).

So yes, as United Methodists, we desperately desire for people to be saved for Christ and to have a personal relationship with their Lord and Savior. But United Methodists believe that salvation also involves something that we do, something that we practice and get better at and live into more fully into as we move through our lives.

END SIDEBAR

Or maybe it happened in a more casual and unexpected way. Maybe it was when God spoke to a person’s heart through a beautiful sunset. Or perhaps the heavens opened up and God spoke unspeakable grace and overwhelming love through the birth of a baby, or through the courage of a struggling father. Maybe the voice of God was heard in the memories and murmurs of someone close to death.

For many of us, the heavens have been opened, God has spoken, and conversion has happened more than once. Conversions can occur throughout our lives, in experiences big and small, formal and informal, public and private. As United Methodists, we don’t limit conversion to being a single, definable event. Conversions are steps along the path in our journey to live more fully and perfectly as sanctified disciples of Jesus Christ. Conversions happen whenever we are reminded that God’s grace, which was recognized in our baptism, has not just been planted, but has taken root and is continuing to grow in us. This is why it is so important for us to ritually remember our baptisms and celebrate them as a worshiping community. Because as Methodists, we don’t believe it is something we have done, such as saying the right words, that has saved us. We believed it is God who has saved us. It is God who reached out to us first, in love and prevenient grace. It is God who sent Jesus into this world to show us how to live as God’s people. It is God who has saved us and offered us eternal life!

Experiences of life-altering assurance and conversion are not something we can manufacture, coerce, or manipulate. The assurance of being saved, of trusting in Christ alone, and feeling the

relief that our sins have been taken away is simply a profound response to what God has already done for us.

I've always loved the story of John Wesley describing his experience of God's assuring love one night after a society meeting in a Moravian chapel on Aldersgate Street in London. In his journal entry dated May 24, 1738, Wesley wrote these words: "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

While this is certainly the most well-known and beautifully articulated description of John Wesley's personal experience of feeling assurance of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ, the truth is, it was not an isolated experience. Indeed, his brother Charles described a similar experience a few days before the experience John describes, and both men report other experiences of assurance—moments when the heavens opened up and they heard the voice of God speaking directly to them—that occurred throughout their lifetimes.

When were the heavens opened up to you? When did you hear the voice of God speaking in unmistakable terms to you, offering words of assurance and acceptance and a deep sense of knowing that God's grace was not just for others, but for you particularly? When did you feel the intense relief that comes from knowing that Jesus took away your sins, even yours? When did Jesus reach out a hand of invitation to you to join him in the adventure of Christian discipleship?

Every person is different, and God speaks to each of us in the way that we can most easily hear. There is no single way that is right or wrong, better or worse, typical or unusual. But one thing is certain: the seeds of the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ are planted in our hearts long before we recognize them for ourselves. This is what Wesley called prevenient grace. It is grace that goes before us. It is the grace by which we are marked in the sacrament of Christian baptism. It is the grace that lifts us up when we struggle, fills us with joy, and enables us to strive to be more loving all our days. And we believe this grace is available to all. We believe it is the seed that is planted in the heart of every single person who has ever lived. Today, as we join together in the ritual of remembering our own baptisms, let us be reminded that first and foremost we are saved because God first reached out in love to us. Let us remember, and let us be grateful.

Mark Teasdale (*Evangelism for Non-Evangelists*) notes that because the seeds have been sown in people's hearts, our jobs as disciples called to share our faith with others is made easier. We don't have to plant the seeds, because God has already done that. All we have to do as evangelists is to cultivate them. All we have to do is make sure the conditions are right for those seeds to grow. All we have to do is show by our own lives that those seeds have been planted in us too. All we have to do is bear fruit that is so heavy and sweet with God's love that everyone who meets us is able to see we are disciples of Jesus Christ. All we have to do is

share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. All we have to do is share what we have known personally.

Over the coming weeks, as we move through the season after Epiphany, we want to issue two challenges to every pastor and layperson in the United Methodist Church: First, we hope that through this season of worship, study, and personal devotion, each baptized member of Christ's beloved community will take time to consider deeply why he or she has chosen to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We want you to encourage the members of your congregation to name and claim their own personal faith stories and to practice sharing those stories.

Second, we are asking you as a preachers to challenge your members to invite someone to worship with your community of faith.

That means that you, as pastor, will need to be attentive not only to the "insiders" in your congregation—the members that you are asking to work on their own evangelism skills—but to the visitors they will be bringing to worship. As you plan your worship services and think about your sermons, keep both contexts in front of you. How can you both encourage your congregation to claim and offer their witness, and at the same time speak to people who may be exploring the Christian faith for the first time or in a new way?

As you close your sermon, invite your members to join with you in remembering their own baptism and invite them to be thankful.

PLANNING NOTES

The First Sunday after Epiphany: Baptism of the Lord The Great Invitation: "The Heavens are Opened"

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Isaiah 42:1-9

"Here is my servant . . . my chosen . . . I have given you as . . . a light to the nations."

Psalm Response: Psalm 29 (UMH 761)

The response is to a familiar tune. Sing the Psalm with the sung response, using Tone 1 in C major.

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

Peter, preaching to Cornelius and his household, summarizes the life and ministry of Jesus, "beginning in Galilee after the baptism . . ."

[Matthew 3:13-17](#)

Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan.

Calendar Notes

“The Heavens Are Opened”

Today, a new season begins, the Season after Epiphany, and with it our new series, “The Great Invitation.”

The theme for this season historically and in the series we have provided is *evangelism*. It's a time for the church to invite people to “Come and See” who Jesus is, what following him means, and what he teaches about life that is truly life. The season traces out the arc of the life of disciples of Jesus, from baptism to resurrection in the age to come, by tracing out the arc of the ministry of Jesus himself, from his own baptism to his transfiguration. So by walking through this season the church is strengthened in the basics of its life and ministry as it invites others to consider walking this journey with them. The season concludes with an invitation to prepare for discipleship during Lent.

January

- January 8 [Baptism of the Lord](#)
New Series Begins: The Great Invitation
- January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)
- January 15 [Human Relations Day](#) (2017 resources coming soon)
- January 16 [The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#) (USA)
- January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)
- January 23 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

February

- All Month* [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)
- February 2 Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas. See BOW 316
- February 12 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (preferred date since not during Lent)
- February 20 [Presidents Day](#) (USA)
- February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

- March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)
New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling
- March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins](#) (USA)
- March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

- April 9 [Passion/Palm Sunday](#)
New Series Begins: Holy Week
- April 13 [Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

In the Series: Overture

Today is the opening of a season designed for evangelism and invitation. As with all series, the first service functions as an overture for all the services to follow. In addition to the particular focus for this day, be sure to provide ways for your congregation to know *where* you're going, and especially, *why*. This season of evangelism and invitation is an opportunity for your congregation to invite others who have not been part of the church to "come and see" what Jesus is about and what following him with you might mean for them.

This series may functionally have two "opening days." This week might be primarily about getting those who are already on board ready for their work of evangelism and invitation during the weeks to come. Next week might be the launch you specifically target for the first invitation to newcomers in your publicity and marketing for this series. So keep in mind you may actually have two "overtures," one this week for your existing congregation, and another next week to make sure those invited to begin the journey with you are also oriented.

However you decide to handle the "series opening" (single starting this week for all, or double including next week as a new start for newcomers), keep in mind that a good series overture is more than a list of topics you'll explore. What you do in overture is not so much explanation as foretaste. One of the ways we've built a bit of foretaste into this series is through the use of the hymn "We Would See Jesus" (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) in a variety of ways throughout the season. In today's service, it shows up as a Communion anthem. If you use projection, consider displaying a series outline using our series graphics in your opening announcement set and accompanying the set with the tune in the background, either live or recorded within the slide set. If you do not have projection, consider placing the themes and images for each week either around the worship space or in a place where folks can easily see them all at once upon entering or leaving the worship space. Overture is best when it is more about *showing* than *telling*.

Today: The Heavens Are Opened!

Today's service is about radical new beginnings. The opening of the heavens (see Sidebar in preaching notes for this service) at the baptism of Jesus signals and is a foretaste of the breaking of the powers of this present age and the inflowing of the age to come. Our baptisms participate in this beginning of the renewal of all things. Every time we reaffirm our baptismal vows, as we do this day as a Response to the Word, we are saying "Refresh in us this all-renewing love, grace, and power."

We begin this season with baptismal reaffirmation not only because baptism marked the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, but because we really need such refreshing in the all-renewing love, grace, and power of our Triune God as we undertake the work of evangelism and invitation for the season ahead. Starting today.

Act of Commitment to Invitation

Starting today. But not on hiatus until next Sunday! There is work to do between now and then, work for which the Holy Spirit prepares us through our reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. This is work for each and every one of us to do. It is not up to the church office, the pastor, or whatever marketing your church has done for this new series. It is primarily up to each of us, individually, to invite people we know and perhaps some we don't yet know to the life of God's kingdom made known in Jesus Christ.

So pastor and planning team, there is additional work for you to do, or make sure is happening, this week! In this service, ask those present to identify one partner who is present in the service today. This may be a spouse, a friend, or a person on seat nearby. This includes children and youth! Ask them to write down (on paper or their phones or other devices) the names of *at least* three people they know whom they will invite *personally* this week to come to worship next Sunday morning. Then ask them write down the date on which or by which they will issue that invitation. Then ask them to make a copy of this and either give it or send it electronically to their partner. During the week, the instructions are to check in with the partner to see how each person has progressed, and to challenge each other to complete the list (or more!), and encourage each other along the way. You might do this immediately after the reaffirmation of baptism.

Then starting Monday and at least two other times during the week (maybe Thursday and Saturday), send out reminders via email and social media to encourage and challenge folks to follow through with one another and with those they said they would invite.

The heavens have been opened! Invite all to "come and see" what this is all about!

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for Baptism of the Lord](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Iran, Iraq

**THE GREAT INVITATION
WEEK 2**

COME AND SEE

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

Font with water may still be in place front and center, with Paschal candle (if you have one) lit alongside. If on a stage, put spotlight on the font, and another on the Lord's Table--empty.

"Agnus Dei"

[CCLI Song # 626713](#)

"Come Let Us Worship"

[CCLI Song # 4241771](#)

OR

"Ye Servants of God"

UMH 181

"Fairest Lord Jesus"

UMH 189

Prayer of Illumination

The people may be seated.

Instrumental of "We Would See Jesus" may play in the background.

**We would see Jesus
in the Scripture story.**

**Open our ears, God,
and open our hearts.**

**Take every barrier
to your Spirit's teaching.
Give us your Word, God,
and pour out your Truth. Amen.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

A processional cross may be carried and placed at a point on a line between the font and the Lord's Table or alongside the font during the singing of the first two verses.

Choir or Ensemble

"Now Behold the Lamb" (st. 1 & 2) W&S 3081

OR

"Come and See" (Chorus, 2x) [CCLI #7000700](#)

Reading

[John 1:29-42](#)

All Sing:

OR

“Now Behold the Lamb” (stanza 3) W&S 3081

“Come and See” (Chorus, 2x) [CCLI #7000700](#)

Sermon

“Come and See”

Preparing for Prayer: *What are you seeking?*

Prayers of the People

Interweave spoken or sung petitions from [BOW 571](#) within a sung congregational continuo or response

THANKSGIVING**Offering (ensemble, soloist or choir)**

“There Is a Redeemer”

[CCLI Song #11483](#)

SENDING FORTH**Song of Sending**

“Come and See” Chorus (reprise)

[CCLI Song #7000700](#)

MUSIC NOTES**Agnus Dei**

This popular song by Michael W. Smith has been in modern music repertoire since 1990, and it still remains powerful today. Whether you are familiar with it from Smith’s recordings, bands like Third Day, or the worship band at your church, there is something eschatological about singing “Worthy is the Lamb” together as a gathered body. This song can be accompanied by any instrument or ensemble, but the triplets can be tricky for inexperienced keyboardists. It is best to have vocalists to sing the triplets while allowing a keyboard instrument to play straight quarter notes and the guitar to strum in straight eighth notes. For maximum effect, begin with a soft “Alleluia,” and work toward a climax at the chorus. The ideal key is A.

Come Let Us Worship

With its simplicity and concise structure, “Come Let Us Worship” gives the opportunity for the church to offer praise to God in a lyrical way. If you are using a recording as a guide, however, I believe Chris Tomlin’s own setting is a little too slow for congregational singing, which is evident in the number of breaths it takes him to sing a phrase. I recommend singing at 76 beats per minute. Also, the way to avoid the overabundance of masculine language is to sing the Chorus 2, which uses “you” language in an effective way. As with many songs in this genre, if accompanied by a keyboard instrument, don’t allow the accompaniment to become overly

complex by playing each note of the melody. When pianists play too much, the tempo gets bogged down, and the rhythm is too choppy. Simpler is better. The ideal key is G.

Ye Servants of God

Charles Wesley has conjured the image of Revelation 7: 9-12 with this hymn of praise to Jesus Christ, the bringer of salvation. Jesus is identified as “the Lamb,” which is the same name he is given by John in this week’s Scripture passage. Therefore, singing this hymn is an effective way for the congregation to become a crowd who lives in the midst of the scriptural narrative. Even though the organ or piano is the standard accompaniment for this tune (HANOVER), I always favor adding a little bit of musicality to its singing by placing emphasis on beat 1 of each measure and giving it a bit of a lilt. Save the dramatic *pesante* approach for the last stanza, which is the ultimate climax and an eternal outpouring of praise from Wesley:

Then let us adore
and give him his right,
All glory and power,
All wisdom and might;
All honor and blessing
With angels above,
And thanks never ceasing
And infinite love.

A melody-only setting can be found here: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/ye-servants-of-god>

Fairest Lord Jesus

Though this hymn does not include the Revelation language of “Agnus Dei” or “Ye Servants of God,” it is a beautiful hymn on the Lordship of Jesus Christ from the heavenly hosts, who offer eternal praise (“Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forevermore be thine.”) in a setting known by many churches. The first three phrases are a beautiful representation of praise as they all ascend in a sequence that moves from Eb to G to Bb, forming a major triad--a musical source of strength and power. Because of its prominence among hymns and tunes, many choral and instrumental settings of this piece exist for all experience levels. This hymn is a great starter piece for choirs who are just beginning to sing *a cappella*. Sing it with boldness and confidence, but take time to soak in the beauty of both the text and the tune. Click this link for a melody-only setting: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/fairest-lord-jesus>

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to continue the musical and hymnic thread begun last week by simply playing this instrumentally under the Prayer of Illumination. Again, the use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Now Behold the Lamb

This short chorus can serve as a great liturgical piece, which this week is as a setting for the Scripture reading. John identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” so the song itself ushers us into the story as those who behold the Lamb. The choral parts are simple and are written in typical three-part gospel harmony. Accompaniment can be as simple as a keyboard instrument or as complex as a full band with a vocal ensemble. As we discovered in the CCLI Top 100 project (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/ccli-top-100>), however, numerous modern songs contain errors in references to “the Lamb” in Revelation. “Now Behold the Lamb” contains the same error when it uses the language, “Holy is the Lamb.” According to Scripture, this should be, “Worthy is the Lamb.” Make note of this as you sing, knowing that there is no reason why the Lamb would not be holy, but making the distinction that it is not the language used in Scripture.

Come and See

An alternative to “Now Behold the Lamb” is this simple song by the powerhouse writing team of Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Matt Maher, and Matt Redman. The chorus can be used as an invitation and framework for the Scripture reading, which includes the same call Jesus gave his first disciples in the Gospel of John: “Come and see.” Only using the chorus gives the opportunity for this to become a living, breathing part of the liturgy as it weaves in and out of the Scripture reading. Continue the instrumental accompaniment softly while the Scripture is read. Allow a solo guitarist to strum or a keyboardist to play underneath the melody, or use a full band. The ideal key for this chorus is G.

There Is a Redeemer

Whether singing this song in its entirety or using the chorus only, “There Is a Redeemer” can be used as an effective act of thanksgiving. It is not a formal doxology because it only offers praise to God the Father, but it does so on behalf of the work of the Son and the Spirit. Written in a chorale style, this would also be a wonderful pick for a choir to sing *a cappella*. It is easily accompanied by a keyboard and serves as an intimate expression of thanks, both personal and corporate. When singing this song in D, you could even create a medley by singing one stanza of it and then moving into the “Agnus Dei” (if not chosen at the beginning of the service) in the key of A. However you choose to sing it, this song is sure to be loved by most congregations once they learn it. Take the time to teach it to them!

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 2:

“Stay with Us”	TFWS 2199
“Like a Child”	TFWS 2092
“Jesús Es Mi Rey Soberano”	UMH 180
“Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”	UMH 340
“Come and See”	TFWS 2127
“Somebody’s Knockin’ at Your Door”	W&S 3095

PREACHING NOTES
John 1:29-42 Come and See

SIDEBAR: Referral and Welcome
by Taylor Burton-Edwards

The story we read this week in John's gospel is not a story of Jesus calling disciples. We'll hear that kind of story next week. This week's story is about people seeking out Jesus because someone has referred them to him, and how Jesus responds when people come to him by that route.

If you think about it, this is likely the primary way that most people we know, and likely you yourself, would say they first came to Jesus. Some may have stories of some sort of direct encounter with Jesus apart from anyone else pointing to him first. Or perhaps some may have stories of another person directly calling them to join in some work relating to Jesus. But primarily, for most of us, we got to Jesus because someone else, someone we trusted, told us about him.

Most of us-- and maybe nearly all of those we'll be inviting during this season-- got to Jesus by referral-- referral like many of you may have offered during this past week.

When the people in today's story came to Jesus by referral, Jesus did two things. ***First, he asked them what they were seeking.***

When we invite others to Christ, and they actually express some interest, do we ask this question? Do we ask what they are seeking, or do we presume we know? Or do we presume that whatever they are seeking, we already know the answer?

Jesus didn't do that with those who came to him by referral.

He asked them what they were seeking. How do we ask folks we refer to Jesus what they are seeking?

Their answer reveals their motives. Jesus cared about their motives. Jesus cared about the particular "why" that led them to come to him in the first place.

"Where are you staying?" they ask.

This question is a bigger one than something like, "We'd like to see your house," though it has some of that as well. It is more like, "We're interested in the possibility of joining up with you and living with you. Can we check that out?"

Second, after they said what they were seeking, Jesus said, "Come and see." He didn't

say “I live over there,” as if he misunderstood their question as being only about where his house was. He didn’t say, “Sign up for the rest of your lives here, on the spot,” as some revivalists might do. Instead he said, “Come and see.” “Come” points to Jesus actually taking them there and spending time with them to get to know them and for them to get to know him. “See” indicates Jesus intended to open their eyes and to make room for them to make their own decision about their next steps. They might come and stay after what Jesus would show them. They might not.

How do we invite those who come to us by referral to “come and see”?

END SIDEBAR

“Why are you a Christian, mom? And why are you a Methodist?” my twenty-one-year-old son asked me in the spring when he was home for a visit. I have to admit that at first I was taken aback. How could he not know the answer? I mean, this is a young man who for the first eighteen years of his life spent every Sunday morning in church listening to me preach, and whose entire circle of support came from relationships he made through church, and whose mother and grandfather are both United Methodist ministers! Besides, he might have been on vacation, but for me it was a work day, and I was busy trying to write sermon notes. I didn’t have time for a conversation about faith.

But I made time. I stopped what I was doing, and for the first time, I talked to my son about my faith in a deeply personal way. We talked about faith for a couple of hours that day. I told him that, in part, I was a Christian and a Methodist because of the family I was born into. But at some point in my life, it became more than that, and I made a personal decision to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I told him I loved Jesus. I told him I believed that in Jesus we see the very nature and person of God. I told him about an experience I had when I was working as a chaplain in which I felt deep in my heart that I had come face to face with the living Lord. I told him that this encounter had changed my life. I told him that for me, there was nothing more important I could do with my life than follow Jesus. My faith in Christ is the center of my being. It is who I am. I then explained in great detail why I found The United Methodist Church to be the best context for me to practice my discipleship.

As we talked over the next two hours, I answered his questions as honestly as I could. I know that he has stopped going to church and for all practical purposes has joined the ranks of the “nones” at this point in his life. I didn’t tell him his eternal life was in danger. I didn’t try to convince him that my way should be his way. I didn’t tell him he should go back to church, or be a Methodist, or even be a Christian. I simply shared my own faith with him as honestly and authentically as I possibly could, because he asked.

Last week, we began our series, “The Great Invitation.” Over these next seven weeks, we will be talking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will be examining why we decided to say yes to following Jesus. We will be practicing telling our own personal story of why we became Christians. And we will be not just sharing that story with someone, but inviting that someone to “come and see” for himself or herself why we decided to follow Jesus.

Was my conversation with my son an act of evangelism? I believe it was.

An evangelist is, quite simply, a disciple who shares the good news of Jesus Christ with someone else. It is inviting others in the most authentic way we can to come and see the Jesus we have seen! To share faith effectively, each of us must be able to say exactly why we made a decision to follow Jesus. We must share our story with others. And we must find ways to connect our personal story with the bigger faith tradition we share that is found in the Bible, in the tradition, and in the other historic documents of the church.

Why are you a Christian? Why do you practice your faith as a United Methodist? How would you answer those questions? What could you say that might invite another to come and see what you have seen in Jesus Christ?

The fact is, every person will have a different answer, a different reason, a different story from the Bible, or from the tradition, or from personal experience, that gives shape to his/her story. And we connect our story to a unique story from the Bible.

What story from the Bible inspires you? Where do you find your faith story mirrored in the biblical witness? What characters from the Bible do you really connect with? Whose story grabs you and makes you want to learn more?

Today's lesson from John's Gospel, with its series of testimonies about who Jesus is and how his earliest disciples came to follow him, offers several possibilities to consider as you think about your own story of faith.

First, we hear a testimony from John the Baptist. John has been baptizing people in Bethany across the Jordan. Some folks had come down from Jerusalem to see who he was and what he was doing. When they asked him who he was, he replied that he was not a prophet and not the Messiah, but he was sent to announce the coming of the Messiah. He said that he baptized with water, but the one who was coming was much more powerful than he.

The next day, the crowd gathered again. When Jesus comes among them, John begins to further identify who Jesus is. He says Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He says he is the one who ranks ahead of him. He says he saw a Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and alighting on him. He says the one who sent him to announce the coming of Jesus spoke directly to him and said, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So John has a lot to say in his testimony. He has deep reasons, personal reasons, for calling Jesus the Messiah.

Perhaps some of you identify with John's testimony. Maybe you have seen or experienced something that personally confirmed for you that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God who

takes away the sins of the world. I had an experience one time in my life in which I felt like John the Baptist. I saw the very face of Christ, and I heard the voice of God confirming that I had been in his presence. It is a story I don't tell often. I alluded to it above, in my story about my conversation with my son. I didn't tell him my story that day, although I have shared it with him before. I won't share it here either, because it is so deeply personal to me that I am not completely comfortable even trying to put it into writing. I have told this story to a few people, and even a couple of times from the pulpit. But it is not my everyday story.

Some people, however, do have a story like John's, in which they have witnessed clearly who Jesus is and had it confirmed by God, and they have no problem sharing it with others. If you identify with John's story in your own story of faith, by all means, work on telling that story well, and share it with others as you invite them to come and see who Jesus is. It is possible, however, that you might not find your faith story in John the Baptist's story. But you might identify with the next story.

The next incident takes place a day later. John the Baptist is standing with a couple of members of his own community, and they see Jesus walking by. John points to Jesus and tells his friends, "Hey, I want you to look at that man. He is the Lamb of God." Upon hearing this, the two friends turn and follow after Jesus.

Let's think about that. I imagine that since the gospel writer calls these two friends of John the Baptist "his disciples" that John must have earned their trust. Perhaps you can identify with this story from the point of view of friendship. Maybe it is easier to share our personal beliefs with those with whom we have a relationship of trust. I know that's how I feel about my very personal story that I mentioned above. I would be more likely to share it with people I know well.

The story continues with Jesus turning around and spotting John's disciples following after him. Jesus asks them what they are looking for. They don't answer directly. Rather, they call him "teacher" and ask him where he is staying.

Maybe calling him "Rabbi" is an answer, but I think the more interesting development is that they ask him where he is staying, and he invites them to "come and see." It is interesting turn of events, because it seems like it is during this extended time in the presence of Jesus that they really become his followers. It isn't like in the story we will hear next week from Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus walks by and calls out to some fishermen, "Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of people!" and the fishermen drop their nets, quit their jobs, and go with him without first getting to know who he is. Here we see an investment in relationship first, before the men decide to follow Jesus.

I think sometimes people need a little time. Sometimes people need a LOT of time! I am hoping and praying that is what will happen with my younger son, about whom I wrote at the beginning of these notes. Maybe he just needs some more time. Even though he spent all those years going to church, I'm not sure he has ever had the experience of spending time in the presence

of the Lord. We need to be patient with people and give them the time and space they need. There's no hurry. Jesus invites us to take all the time we need.

Have you spent time in the presence of the Lord? How did that happen? What was it like? What happened as a result? Is this a story that you can connect to because you, too, have had the experience of "remaining with him" for an extended period of time?

The last vignette concerns one of John's disciples who followed Jesus to the place he was staying and remained with him for a while. This man's name was Andrew. According to the Gospel writer John, Andrew was so influenced by his time with Jesus that he wanted to share the experience with his brother Simon Peter. So Andrew went looking for him, and when he found Simon Peter he told him, "We have found the Messiah!" and he invited Peter to come and see Jesus for himself.

How does Jesus reach out to us? It isn't always through a direct communication. Sometimes Jesus reaches out through other people, especially his followers. Sometimes it will be through us, his disciples in the world today, that others are able to learn about Jesus. Maybe it will be you who tells your brother or sister, "I have found the Messiah! Come with me and see for yourself!"

The good news is that Jesus is walking by and he invites us to come and see for ourselves who he is! He reaches out to each of us in just the way we need for him to.

How is he reaching out *to* you?
How is he inviting followers *through* you?

PLANNING NOTES

The Second Sunday after Epiphany The Great Invitation: "Come and See" Human Relations Sunday

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Isaiah 49:1-7

A Servant Song of Isaiah — "I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

[Psalm 40:1-11 \(UMH 774\)](#)

Sing the response and the psalm to Tone 1 in C major.

[1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

(first of 6 Sundays in 1 Corinthians) Paul's greeting to the Corinthian community.

[John 1:29-42](#)

John the Baptist tells of the baptism of Jesus and points out the Lamb of God. He invites them to come and see, and they tell others they have found the Messiah.

Calendar Notes

The Great Invitation:

“Come and See”

We're now into the evangelistic work of the season proper. Today we see Jesus inviting potential disciples to come and see, and they do likewise for others.

Today is also [Human Relations Day](#) on the UM Program Calendar. The special offering taken today supports neighborhood outreach efforts by local churches and ministries with at-risk youth in the US and Puerto Rico.

The [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#) begins on Wednesday of this week. Consider how you may partner with other congregations and denominations in your area to observe this week together. On [Ecumenical Sunday](#) (two weeks from today, January 23), consider holding a special ecumenical service of evening prayer in which all Christian bodies in your area (including Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians) may participate.

January

January 15 [Human Relations Day](#) (2017 resources coming soon)

January 16 [The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#) (USA)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 23 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

February

All Month [Black History Month](#) (USA)

February 2 Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas. See BOW 316

February 12 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (preferred date since not during Lent)

February 20 [Presidents Day](#) (USA)

February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)

New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins](#) (USA)

March 26	UMCOR Sunday (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)
April	
April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

In the Series: Week 2 AND Week 1

If you've followed our guidance about focusing your marketing and personal invitation to newcomers for today as the series launch rather than last week, keep in mind the kind of overture work you began with last week needs to be offered again this week-- at least! Last week was about opening yourself to the Spirit to be energized for the work of evangelism throughout the coming season, and then start it! This week may mark the "first contact" in worship, at least, for those who have responded so far.

Once again, overtures are more about showing than telling. They point where you're going, rather than trying to explain it all. Art and music may be more powerful channels for conveying this than just words on a screen, on a wall, or in a bulletin. Be sure to include the words, too! But focus more on the movement.

Every series needs to begin strong, with plenty of positive energy. And the second service in a series needs to pick up the energy at least one level from the week before. Keep that in mind as you plan for today. Yes, this is a beginning for your newcomer guests. But it's also a continuation for those who were with you last week.

Today: "Come and See"

Perhaps response to the word today is twofold, just as the responses from Jesus to the seekers were twofold. During worship, we have placed Preparation for Prayer immediately after the sermon in the worship order as a way to give time to invite all of those who have come, newcomer and regular alike, to identify and write down what they are seeking. After worship, plan for a good reception or "coffee hour" after worship that launches people into a shared meal or meals at homes or local restaurants where "What are you seeking?" may be asked and

answered by all who wish to reply and where church members may share their own stories about what they have sought and found as part of the fellowship with Jesus in your congregation.

But don't stop there. Encourage church members to contact newcomers, and vice versa, for at least one other church event (Bible Study, mission activity, or other event sponsored through the church) or an informal get together over coffee or dessert as a means to continue the process of "come and see" beyond Sunday morning. Send out an email or other social media prompt at least twice during the week (Monday and Thursday) to help remind folks of the opportunity to do so.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Second Sunday after Epiphany](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Cyprus, Greece, Turkey

January 22 (3rd) Follow Me
[Matthew 4:12-23](#)

**THE GREAT INVITATION
WEEK 3
FOLLOW ME**

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

"Follow Me"	CCLI # 7016097 (Beth Farris) (solo)
"Follow Me"	Mark Miller
OR	
"Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult"	UMH 398

Prayer of Illumination

["We Would See Jesus"](#) (st 4 and 5)

WORD AND RESPONSE

"Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" (st 1-2)	UMH 344 OR
"Two Fishermen" (st 1-2)	TFWS 2101

Reading

[Matthew 4:12-23](#)

"Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" (st 3)	UMH 344 OR
"Two Fishermen" (st 3-4)	TFWS 2101

Sermon

"Follow Me"

Call to Follow: I Will Follow By... (Collect via text, Twitter, or preparing card for the offering basket)

Song during collection or preparation: "Somlandela" ("We Will Follow"), W&S 3160

Prayers of the People Interweave spoken or sung petitions from [BOW 571](#) within a sung congregational continuo or response. Add the following two petitions to the list of petitions provided:

After "the people of this congregation..." add "for all who have made commitments to follow Christ in writing or in their hearts this day..."

At the end of the petitions, add, "for the forgiveness of our sins..."

Leave time for silent confession of sin, and conclude with an act of pardon in these or similar words:

Pastor: Jesus, who calls us to follow, declares forgiveness of sin to all who turn to him for help. In his name and by his power, you are forgiven.

People: In his name and by his power, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God. Amen!

THANKSGIVING

Pastor: The peace of Christ be always with you.

People: And also with you.

The peace is exchanged and the offering is collected.

Offertory (choir/soloist and/or congregation):

“When Jesus the Healer Passed Through Galilee” UMH 263, st 1, 5, 6

To make this a song of thanksgiving, replace the second refrain with “Thank you, Lord Jesus.”

SENDING FORTH

Deacon or Pastor:

Jesus calls us all to follow,
and to join him every day
In his work of healing, deliverance, and restoration,
wherever he leads us.
Go forth and join him in his mission!

“The Summons”

TFWS 2130

Postlude

Reprise of “Follow Me” (Miller) or “Jesus Calls Us”

MUSIC NOTES

Follow Me

This setting by Beth Farris can be found on the CCLI website and is recommended this week as a solo to begin worship. This is a great song for a lower female voice in your congregation. The original recording uses a folk ensemble to accompany, including guitar, banjo, bass, and a simple drum kit. If you have access to the Vocal Sheet on CCLI (through SongSelect), you will also find harmonies that can be sung with the primary vocalist.

Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult

I would guess that this hymn is sung with this Scripture more than any other, and that would be for good reason. “Jesus Calls Us” is a classic dialogue between Jesus and us. Sing it at a moderate tempo, making sure not to sing it too slowly. Accompany with organ or piano.

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to continue the musical and hymnic thread begun last week by simply playing this instrumentally one time through and then singing stanza 4. The use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore

This lyrical hymn puts the singer in the place of the disciples sought by Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. It is very emotional, simple, and easy to sing, and can be accompanied by a variety of instruments. The accompaniment is written quite idiomatically with this Spanish song, and can therefore be played as is with piano or organ or translated into an easy, lilting guitar part. A flute, other woodwind instrument, or violin could easily alternate between the melody and the harmony, a third or sixth below (be sure to have them play up an octave when necessary!). In this service, we have recommended it to accompany the reading of Scripture to creatively frame the narrative found in the Gospel reading. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-lord-you-have-come-to-the-lakeshore>

Two Fishermen

Suzanne Toolan has created a beautiful narrative of the calling of the disciples by the Sea of Galilee in the fitting style of a sea shanty. Sea shanties were created for sailors to sing while working, and the rhythm found in this hymn gives the singer the sense that there is work being done, and work still to be done. If it is new for the congregation, take the liberty of teaching them the short refrain, and have soloists sing the stanzas. However, know that the stanzas are two exact phrases and easily teachable. Most phrases move in a simple, stepwise motion. Enhance the accompaniment of this hymn by using organ, piano, or guitar, along with a bright percussion instrument, such as a tambourine, to add rhythmic vitality. Like the other suggested hymn, we have recommended it to accompany the reading of Scripture to creatively frame the narrative found in the Gospel reading. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-two-fishermen-by-suzanne-toolan>

Somlandela (We Will Follow)

This short, cyclic song in the Zulu language has an almost marching quality that serves as the perfect setting as a response to the proclamation in this service. This is among the easier of some songs from other cultures to teach to your congregation if you should choose to sing the Zulu text. Pronunciation is as follows:

Sohm-lahn-deh-la Sohmlahn-dehl oo-Jeh-soo
Sohm-lahn-deh-la Yahn-keh een-dah-woh
Sohm-lahn-deh-la Sohn-lahn-dehl oo-Jeh-soo
Lah-poh eh-yah-koh-nah sohm-lahn-deh-la

If your choir is interested in singing songs that help work their way into singing more selections *a cappella*, this is a wonderful option to use. The parts are easy, accessible, and repetitive. Another way to sing this would be for the choir to sing the Zulu text, and then have the congregation sing in English when they are invited to sing. The preferred performance practice for this hymn would be to sing it *a cappella*, along with a variety of drums and percussion for rhythmic vitality and intensity. However, if that is not an option, it can also be accompanied by organ or piano. Encourage clapping on all beats, and have the song leader sing the cantor part at the end of each stanza to signal a repeat.

When Jesus the Healer Passed Through Galilee

This modern folk hymn contains an engaging call-and-response dialogue in which the leader serves as the narrator and the congregation serves as the crowd. Participating in this dramatic rendition of the Scripture will help the congregation internalize the story of Jesus calling the disciples and sending them out to cast out demons, heal the sick, and spread the good news. The folk quality of the song lends itself to be accompanied by a guitar and light percussion, but keyboard instruments such as organ or piano would also work as long as the accompaniment is not too heavy. Keep the instruments and voice light within this style. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-when-jesus-the-healer-passed-through-galilee>

The Summons

The hymnic repertoire is not lacking when hymns are needed with this particular scriptural narrative, and John Bell's "The Summons" offers a series of challenging questions to consider when listening for Jesus' call to us. Nothing does more harm to this text than singing it too slowly. The phrases are too long to sing at a slow pace and require a lilting sense of forward motion. Accompaniment works best with an organ, piano, or guitar, along with a treble instrument to double the melody. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-the-summons>

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 3:

"Follow"	CCLI 2756024
"I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light"	UMH 206
"Just a Closer Walk with Thee"	TFWS 2158
"All Who Hunger" (with Eucharist)	TFWS 2126

PREACHING NOTES

SIDEBAR: The Land of Deep Darkness

We hear in Matthew's account this week a reference from Isaiah of the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee as "Galilee of the Gentiles" and "land of deep darkness" (Matthew 4:15-16, quoting or paraphrasing the OT reading for this Sunday from Isaiah 9:1-2). But just why did

Isaiah describe this territory that way, why was it still relevant in the time of Jesus, and why does this designation matter for the story Matthew tells about Jesus, in essence, setting up his base camp there?

Let's start with Isaiah. During the time of Isaiah's prophetic work in Judah, Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria, had conquered and annexed the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali and exiled many of its people, never to be heard from again (726 BC, I Kings 16:29). At the completion of the invasion of Israel and its complete subjugation and exile, Shalmaneser V, King of Assyria, ordered multiple other captured people to be relocated into the captured territory, including Zebulun and Naphtali, which was already a ruins (722 BC, I Kings 17:5, 24 ff). This was typical Assyrian policy. Take over territories, exile the strongest of the natives, leaving the "poor of the land," then resettle the area with people groups of other languages, cultures, and religions so that they are all thoroughly disoriented and demoralized, and thus unlikely to be able to work together to rebel against the king's sway. No wonder Isaiah called it "land of deep darkness." It wasn't an ethnic or racial epithet. It was a reference to just how difficult and gloomy life had become there, and there appeared to be no near term likelihood of any improvement.

Things never substantially improved for this region of Palestine, even centuries later by the time of Jesus. It was still a multi-ethnic blend of peoples who had little wealth or power and no resources to defend themselves against whatever the next overlord (whether Babylon, or Syria, or Greece or Rome) would do to them. It was still "Galilee of the Gentiles" or "Galilee of (many) nation(alitie)s." Under Roman occupation, it had become a place of relative peace, no more wars fought there by other powers, no more resettlements of other peoples by other peoples. But the history had left its deep wounds. The scars were still everywhere and still wreaking damage on the image of these people.

It was still a "land of deep darkness."

And it was precisely to this place, in the heart of Herod's territory-- Herod the governor who had just arrested John the Baptist-- that Jesus established as the center of his public ministry.

END SIDEBAR

In my first appointment, I met an extraordinary young man named Scott. Scott was away at college when I first went to the church, and so I didn't meet him until he came home for summer break. Scott was a student at a conservative Christian college. When I first met him, he described himself as an evangelical. He was on fire to spread the gospel. He had been very involved in the youth group in high school and had become active in collegiate ministry at his school.

During his senior year, Scott began to feel strongly that God was calling him to the mission field. He came to talk to me about possibilities for service through The United Methodist Church. I shared with him what I knew about United Methodist programs and gave him website information.

After Scott graduated, he returned home and he and his sister began attending a class I taught on Wednesday mornings. In the class, we read and discussed books on Christian history and theology, biblical studies, and other topics of interest to the members. During the time when Scott and his sister came, I believe we were studying work from the Westar Institute: Marcus Borg, Stephen Patterson, Dominic Crossan, and others. Scott was intrigued by these thinkers, although he often found himself in strong disagreement not only with the authors, but with members of the class.

In the meantime, Scott continued to investigate potential mission programs. I was very surprised when he decided to serve through a Mennonite team that was known for their radical actions and their service in some of the world's most dangerous war zones. Scott went through training and was soon reporting back from his post in Chiapas, Mexico, where he and other team members were serving as international witnesses to atrocities being committed against indigenous people by paramilitary groups. I kept in touch with Scott, and our study group prayed for him. We were all amazed as he became fluent in Spanish, even as he became fluent in issues of injustice and oppression that most of us have never even heard about. The next year, I flew down to visit him and learn more about the work his organization was doing so I could share his work with his home church more succinctly.

Scott continued to serve in Mexico for several years. Then 9/11 happened. As the drumbeat for war in Iraq increased, Scott's organization began making plans to serve as witnesses in the emerging war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though we knew it was a possibility, I don't think any of us were really prepared when Scott announced that he would be leaving for Baghdad so that he and others could be in place when the United States and our allies began making airstrikes in 2002.

I prayed and worried about Scott as I watched the twenty-four-hour coverage of the bombing of Iraq. I knew he was there, sitting alongside Christians who had lived in that city for many generations, joining in their suffering and putting his own life at risk to provide a witness. I am grateful that Scott survived the many weeks and months of bombing, and eventually was able to make his way out of Iraq, by way of Jordan, although the story of his escape is incredible in and of itself.

After Iraq, Scott went to Arizona to work along the border with Mexico for a number of years. Then he went to seminary. He did not pursue ordination, but instead continues to work as an advocate for the poorest among us in a major city in the United States. He has married a woman he met while serving in the mission field. They have settled down to a more normal life and are raising a son together, but these two people are different sort of Christians than I have ever been.

When I read this story about these four men—Simon, Andrew, James, and John—and others, men and women alike, who left their jobs and homes and families to become disciples of Jesus Christ, I am reminded of my friend Scott and the sacrifices he made to answer God's call on his life.

While Scott's story is certainly unique and dramatic, as are the stories of the fishermen, all of our stories of answering Jesus' call to "follow me and I will make you fishers of people" are equally important. If someone is sitting in the pew, it is because he or she has heard the call to serve God by serving others. Perhaps our greatest service as disciples comes not from big and dramatic things, but from the small acts of kindness and compassion and the one-to-one acts of justice that we practice every day.

Jesus' call to "follow me" is for each one of us, and he calls us to answer that call in the specific context in which we have been placed. We don't have to go to a war zone to follow Jesus. We don't have to go to another country, or another city, or even another neighborhood. As my father always tells me, all I have to do is hoe my own row. I have to tend the garden in which God has planted me. I have to nurture the people God has placed in my community. I don't have to try to do it all! I just have to concentrate on my row. But just think: If each one of us hoes our row, imagine how that can change the world! Greg Garrett reminds us:

Joseph Campbell, who did groundbreaking work into the archetypal stories found in cultures around the world, spoke of *the beginning of something* as a Call to Adventure. In this opening moment in the ministry of Jesus, when he has begun to call others to join him, we can see the moment when things begin to change: "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (17). Campbell said that such moments signify "that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity to a zone unknown." All of us face such a moment in our lives (or many such moments) that challenges our center of gravity, that wants to shift it from a story of self to one that will mean something in a larger context. What things in your community are struggling to be born? Is your community beginning a major program or project? Have spiritual seeds been planted in your community just waiting to sprout? Are there particular calls that individuals or the larger community might need to hear? . . . ("Homiletical perspective for the Gospel reading, Third Sunday of Advent, Year A," [*Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*](#) edited by Barbara Brown Taylor and David Bartlett, Westminster Press, 2008)

Jesus calls some of us to the adventure of serving in the mission field in a foreign land. Others are called to adventure closer to home, serving God's people through service organizations and schools, through foodservice and legal assistance, through volunteering and voting, through offering prayer and healing. There are so many ways for God's people to follow Jesus into the adventure of serving.

Where do you hear God calling you to join Jesus in the adventure of being his disciple? What row is yours to hoe? What need in your church, or community, or in the wider world, cries out to your heart? How can you respond?

SIDEBAR: "Healing" in Matthew 4:23

Taylor Burton-Edwards

New Testament Greek uses a variety of verbs to talk about instances of healing. One is “*iaomai*” and its derivatives, which typically point toward cure. Another is “*swzw*,” which speaks of healing as deliverance.

The Greek participle in Matthew 4:23 translated “curing” in the NRSV or “healing” in some other translations is “*therapeuwn*,” the root of our word “therapy.” This word in Greek has a double usage, and the second informs the first. The first is, as many biblical translations have it, “healing.” The second is “serving,” and more specifically “attending to the needs of.” So the idea of the healing involved in this verb is healing that comes as a result of attending to the needs of others.

“Jesus went around everywhere throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and *attending to* every disease and every sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23, translation mine).

Matthew’s choice of verbs to describe the healing ministry of Jesus among a people known as living in a land of deep darkness, a people at best seen as second class citizens of Judea and perhaps lower among the religious leaders in Jerusalem, couldn’t be better. These people didn’t need another teacher and a preacher, nor even a miracle worker. They needed someone to *attend to* their needs. They needed someone who would listen and respond to their pain, their loss, their suffering. They needed teaching and proclamation of good news, yes. But the *healing* they needed most of all was the kind that comes from listening and caring. They needed therapy. And that’s just what Matthew says Jesus offered them.

END SIDEBAR

The good news is that Jesus came to bring salvation to all people, no matter who they are, no matter where they live, and no matter what kind of life they have led. He came especially for those who struggle in this world: for minorities, women and children; for those who have known trouble and are paying their debt to society in prison; for those who find themselves struggling to make it through the day because of sickness, or addiction, or depression, or disability, or mental illness. He came for those whom the culture has judged negatively or sought to hold back or oppress. He came for those who will never even have a chance to learn about him. He came for all people, for all of God’s children, all across this world. He came for you, and he came for me, and he invites each one of us, no matter who we are or what we’ve done in this life, to join him in the work of discipleship, to join him in the work of transforming the world.

Answer the call from Jesus to “follow me!” Take that step to join in the adventure of serving in the name of Jesus! All we have to do is answer the call in the way outlined by Jesus’ own practices in the final verse, where he models discipleship for us:

Go throughout your community, teaching in many different contexts, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ through your words and your actions, and attending to every disease and sickness among God's people!

SIDEBAR: The Use and Ultimate Rejection of the Diatessaron

Taylor Burton-Edwards

The gospel readings last week and today present contradictory accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples. In last week's reading from John 1, Jesus calls Andrew, then Andrew invites James. And these first acts of calling appear to happen in or near Judea, where John was baptizing. In Matthew 4, which we read next week, Jesus calls Peter, James and John at the same time, and this happens not in Judea, but along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. From a historical perspective, these two accounts cannot both be correct.

It was in part to bring about a harmony between otherwise contradictory stories in the four gospels that a second-century Christian leader named Tatian, a student of Justin Martyr, created an alternative version of the gospels known by its Greek name, "Diatessaron" (literally, "through the four.") Tatian's Diatessaron became used in various places either as an alternative gospel book for study or worship, or in the case of several churches in Syria into the fifth century, the primary source of gospel readings for Sunday worship.

The use of the Diatessaron in those areas that used it, notably in the Syriac churches (Syriac was the common language of Eastern Churches from Palestine to Iraq), became curtailed rather dramatically after one of the Syriac bishops, Theodoret, began to take seriously the accusations of some of Tatian's contemporaries (notably Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria) that Tatian was a heretic. He subsequently ordered the removal of hundreds of copies of the Diatessaron from churches in his diocese and replaced them with copies of the four gospels. His action led other Syriac churches and ultimately churches worldwide that had adopted some form of the Diatessaron to do likewise. (Source: <http://earlychurch.org.uk/tatian.php>)

One effect of Theodoret's action across the larger church was the assertion of the primacy of the gospels themselves for authoritative teaching about Jesus. That approach to the gospels continues to this day.

A corollary effect is that Christian churches and theologians, faced with four different accounts, have generally chosen not to try to harmonize differences, but instead treat each gospel and each account within it on its own merits. Truth is sought less in the specific historical details, independent of the gospel accounts, and more in the context of the narratives each gospel writer has put forward.

END SIDEBAR

PLANNING NOTES
Third Sunday after Epiphany

The Great Invitation: "Follow Me" Ecumenical Sunday

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

[Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." A word of hope for a land where Israel (Samaria) and Syria had fought most of their major battles in the past and were about to fight (or had already begun fighting) Judah without regard for the good of the people who called that land home.

[Psalm 27:1, 4-9 \(UMH 758\)](#)

This Psalm works as a response to the first reading if we join it as a prayer of those who live in a "land of deep darkness." With the sung response, sing the psalm to Tone 2 in D minor or another minor key setting.

[1 Corinthians 1:10-18](#)

Paul says, "I appeal to you ... that there be no divisions among you ... be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ... Has Christ been divided?"

[Matthew 4:12-23](#)

Jesus begins to announce the kingdom of God by the Sea of Galilee, healing, teaching, and calling fishermen to be his disciples.

Calendar Notes

The Great Invitation: "Follow Me"

We're well into the Season after Epiphany now. Today, we focus on the call of Jesus to move beyond "Come and See" to "Follow Me."

The [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#) began on January 18. Continue to partner with other congregations and denominations in your area to observe this together. Today is [Ecumenical Sunday](#). Consider holding a special ecumenical service of evening prayer in which all Christian bodies in your area (including Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians) may participate.

If you have not already started planning for how you may observe [Black History Month](#) in the worship and programmatic life of your congregation, start doing so now!

January

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 23 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

February

All Month [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)

February 2 Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas. See BOW 316

February 12 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (preferred date since not during Lent)

February 20 [Presidents Day](#) (USA)

February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)

New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins](#) (USA)

March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9 [Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week

April 13 [Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14 [Good Friday](#)

April 15 [Holy Saturday](#) ([Full Twitter script with audio links](#)) #holysat17
[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16 [Easter Sunday](#)

April 23 [Festival of God's Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25 [World Malaria Day](#)

April 30 [Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

In the Series

Here in week 3, we've moved from prompting the congregation to invitation, from welcoming newcomers, to hearing together the explicit call of Jesus to follow him. We move today from a place of hospitality toward a place of at least *considering* a commitment. Last week's service led toward fellowship and getting to know one another better, leaving space for what may evolve in that. This week is about saying, "Let's go. Let's see what this is REALLY about." Next week, we begin to see what it's all about as we begin a four-week period of listening to Jesus teaching what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount.

In terms of energy, the progression from last week's "come and see" to this week's "follow me" marks a distinct increase in intensity. There is a greater sense of urgency about this week's call from Jesus. Let that greater sense of intensity inform the kind of energy you give as worship leaders in song, word, and prayer this week.

Today: Follow Me

The heart of this story is not the experience of the *calling* of the disciples. It's the fact *they actually followed* him. So the focus is on the *end* of the reading. They followed him as he went, taught, proclaimed the gospel, and attended to the sicknesses and diseases of all he encountered. Today's invitation to all present, and especially to newcomers, is to commit themselves to follow Jesus in some concrete way during the coming week.

Call to Follow

As indicated in the worship order, use the conclusion of the sermon to lead into a time of writing down and/or collecting commitments to follow Jesus during the coming week. These may be written on cards and placed in the offering plate, or they may be collected via text or to a hashtag you select. If you use **#followme4people**, you may be able to find and share your tweets with others around the connection and around the world using these planning helps for this day.

Then, during the week, perhaps midweek, and again on Saturday, issue an email or social media prompt asking folks to report what happened when they did follow Jesus as they said they would this week!

This is also Ecumenical Sunday on the program calendar.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Third Sunday after Epiphany](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia

January 29 (4th)

[Matthew 5:1-12](#) #BLESSED

**THE GREAT INVITATION
WEEK 4
#BLESSED**

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

“Blessed”

[CCLI # 3490547 \(Hillsong\)](#)

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

[NEW EBENEZER \(LINK!\)](#)

OR

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

UMH 400

“Blest Are They”

TFWS 2155

Prayer of Illumination

[We Would See Jesus](#), st 3, alt. (Unison speaking, instruments in background)

**We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching,
with his disciples listening, gathered round,
while birds and flowers and sky above are preaching
the blessedness which simple trust has found.**

**So open our eyes and our ears
and all our senses
to receive your Word
and follow where you lead. Amen.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

Reading

[Matthew 5:1-12](#)

During the reading, show examples of #Blessed from Twitter or Instagram, either on projection screens or on signs placed around the worship space.

Sermon

“#Blessed”

Prayers of the People

Use “Cuando El Pobre” as a frame for intercessions.

Sing Stanza 1

Play stanza while praying:

With people who are poor, who need lack clean water, who have disabilities, and all whom your kingdom blesses...

Sing Refrain

Sing Stanza 2

Play stanza while praying:

With people who are sick and suffering, with people in desperate situations, with all who show love even toward those who hate or harm them, and with all whom your kingdom blesses...

Sing Refrain

Sing Stanza 3

Play stanza while praying:

With all who are rejoicing, with all who bravely speak the truth, and with all who live simply so they may bless others, with all who work to preserve our environment for future generations, and with all whom your kingdom blesses...

Sing Refrain

Sing Stanza 4

Play stanza while praying:

With our families, with leaders and candidates for leadership of nations who work for peace, with all who turn strangers into siblings, and with all whom your kingdom blesses...

Sing Refrain

The Lord's Prayer (spoken, or sung to "Cuando El Pobre," as follows)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread.

Refrain

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive,

And tempt us not, but rescue us from evil.

For the kingdom and the power are yours forever!

Refrain

Change opening "then" to "and"

THANKSGIVING

Draw from the sermon specifics God blesses that you can give thanks for in the service today.

Perhaps also give an opportunity for people to respond in worship via Twitter

(#blessedatXUMC) to share how they are blessed or have seen God's blessing in the ways described by Jesus in the gospel reading. Or write their "#blessed" items on cards and pass them forward during the offering.

Offering Music

“Oh, How Good It Is” (stanzas 1-3)

[CCLI # 6399212](#) (Getty)

Choir or ensemble sings while congregation posts or hands in #blessedatXUMC cards at the offering. Band plays the “da-da-da” section as plates are brought forward. Then all stand and sing again stanza 3.

SENDING FORTH

Reprise of “Come, Thou Fount” (whichever tune you started with) with these words:

You have shown us what you’re blessing,
filled us with your truth this hour.
Send us forth, your love confessing,
Source of mercy, grace, and power!

Make our hearts to long for justice.
Cleanse our lives, that we may see
all the joys your Spirit’s bringing,
and the peace that sets us free!

Send us, fount of every blessing,
tuned now by your grace to be
streams of mercy, never-ceasing,
in your name, blessed Trinity!

Send us forth to love each other,
love to friend and enemy;
lives restored and friendships thriving,
in your kingdom’s harmony.

Deacon or Pastor:

Go forth, blessed ones.
Bless all whom God blesses.
Rejoice with those who mourn.
Make peace wherever you can.
And know God goes this road with you.

People: Thanks be to God!

Postlude

Variations on “Cuando El Pobre” or another song used in the service

MUSIC NOTES

Blessed

In a modern Psalm (not scriptural quotation), Hillsong has created a beautiful prayer song--great for centering prayer and gathering together. It can be sung in a full band setting with the climax you would expect to see in an opening set, or it can be done acoustically with one guitar in a much more intimate fashion. The main consideration when singing a song like this is proceeding with the awareness that it is not a scriptural quotation, even though it might sound like one (We encountered this often in the midst of the CCLI Top 100 Project: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/ccli-top-100>). However, the song is easy to sing, and it is most effective in the key of D.

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (NEW EBENEZER)

Taylor Burton-Edwards has created a new setting for this beloved hymn. It is full of energy and set in the perfect range for this song of praise. Accompany with a piano, organ, band, or any combination of instruments. Keep the tempo moving! If the key of C is too high for your congregation to sing the highest note, feel free to lower it, but not past the key of A. Otherwise, the lowest note will be too low, especially on such a vital word as “grace.”

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (NETTLETON)

A long-time favorite of many churches, this setting of Robert Robinson’s hymn text has its origins in the folk hymn tunes of the nineteenth century. One of its best characteristics is its ability to relate to congregations of all ages, nations, and races. Whether accompanied by organ, piano, or worship band, the melody is very accessible, and its motivic quality and interesting contours make it both fun to sing and memorable. Make sure the tempo never lags behind. The phrases of this tune call for intensity to reflect the praise in the text. In our hymnal, the setting is in Eb, but it could also work in either D or E. If transitioning to “Blest Are They” as suggested in the worship order, keep it in Eb, which will transition easily to Ab in the next song.

Blest Are They

David Haas has written what has become for many the standard of hymns on the Beatitudes with his paraphrase of Matthew 5:3-12. Even though this is found in *The Faith We Sing*, the accompaniment and SAB parts in Haas’ choral setting of this from GIA Publications (https://www.giamusic.com/search_details.cfm?title_id=1170), embody the spirit of the text so well that it will be well worth the investment in the music. Allowing the congregation to have access to the printed music can be helpful with this selection because the rhythms differ from stanza to stanza because of the irregular meter of the text. As with many hymns of this contemporary folk genre, supplement the piano part with a guitar and some light percussion. See the note above with “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing (NETTLETON)” for a comment on the key and the transition between songs. History of Hymns:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-blest-are-they>

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to speak the words of stanza 3 while the instruments accompany underneath. The use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Cuando el Pobre

Whereas the Beatitudes point toward the paradoxical nature of God's reign, another expression of this can be found in the hymn, "Cuando el Pobre." Living within the tension of these paradoxes are those who have nothing, yet share with strangers. Here is where God is found. This hymn is a ballad that can be easily accompanied by piano, organ, or guitar, with preference on guitar or another string instrument. If you choose to sing the entire hymn and have the congregation sing in Spanish, it might be wise to alternate between English stanzas and the chorus in Spanish if they are unfamiliar with this hymn. No matter how it is sung, keep it stark and simple, and allow the words to stand on their own with minimal accompaniment. In the recommendation of this service, use the refrain only as a beautiful response within the Prayers of the People, and the prayers will come alive. In addition, it will be a great way to teach the song. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-cuando-el-pobre>

Oh, How Good It Is

This modern hymn contains allusions to the Beatitudes Scripture of Matthew 5, when we see the paradoxes of rejoicing/mourning, weak/strength, and affliction/grace. If you are familiar with the Getty/Townend song, "Across the Lands" (*Worship & Song*, 3032), the overall character of this hymn is very similar. The 6/8 meter gives it a boisterous quality that is a morale booster within a singing congregation, and its very nature, when learned by the gathered people, lends toward spirited singing. The best instrumental support would be an acoustic band with guitar, bass, and percussion. Have a choir sing in four-part harmony (found on the "vocal sheet" on the CCLI website), or a praise team sing in three-part harmony. The ideal key is C or D, depending on the comfortable singing range of your church.

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 4:

"The Beatitudes" (As scripture reading)	<i>Songs from Taizé</i> , 99
"More Like You"	TFWS 2167
"Oh, Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"	GIA Publications 1985 (OneLicense or LicenSing necessary for reproduction)
"Bring Forth the Kingdom"	TFWS 2190
"We Utter Our Cry"	UMH 439
"You Who Are Thirsty"	TFWS 2132

“Build Your Kingdom Here”

[CCLI # 6186078](#) (Rend Collective: See cautions [here](#))

“We Will Wait”

Eucharist Church, Hamilton ON ([recording here](#);
[lyrics here](#)) (intercessions)

PREACHING NOTES

And away we go. As we move into the fourth week of our series, the scene changes. Now that Jesus has called his disciples to follow him, and now that your members have begun doing their work of bringing guests to “come and see” who Jesus is, the training period begins. For the next four weeks, we will be hearing Jesus’ first lesson for his followers, known to people familiar with the Bible as the Sermon on the Mount. We will listen in as Jesus instructs his disciples and the growing crowd of people who are coming out to hear him speak and to receive healing. As we listen to his teaching for these first disciples, he will be teaching us too.

When we met as a planning team to study this opening part of Jesus’ sermon called the “Beatitudes,” we were reminded of the current social media phenomenon around #blessed. As I peruse the tag today, I am struck by the sheer volume of sports references associated with this tag:

*A night I've always dreamed of...tonight is my homecoming playing the Titans. #blessed
5 catches, 136 receiving yards, 3 touchdowns on my senior night. Hard work paid off. #blessed
Blessed to receive an offer from the University of North Carolina! #blessed
Very excited for next year blessed to be a part of the [rugby team] for 2017. #blessed*

But it isn’t just sports stars. It’s all kinds of people!

*Happiness is finding leftover chipotle in the fridge that you'd forgotten about. #blessed
As long as I was able to encourage/inspire at least one person, then I did what I was suppose to do ☐☐ #blessed
Thank you God for all the blessings. Gracias a Dios por todas las bendiciones. #Blessed
#Bendecido*

Even President Barack Obama uses it on [Instagram](#): @barackobama: *Have a #blessed Halloween.*

There is one from Upper Room!
Be a blessing each and every day. #blessed

Lots of stars on Twitter are feeling #blessed by their opportunities to be in movies, on television, and in concert. There are families starting vacations and ending them, all feeling #blessed. #blessed appears for babies being born, for the Starbucks drive-through, and for getting an extra McNugget at McDonalds.

Not having been involved personally in this phenomenon, I have to admit I'm a little shocked. One thing is clear though: this is not what Jesus meant when he used the word "Blessed" as the opening word of his teaching ministry.

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," he isn't making a statement of cause and effect. He isn't saying you are blessed with the kingdom of heaven *because* you are poor in spirit. He isn't saying you are blessed with comfort *because* you are in mourning.

What Jesus is doing here is *pronouncing a blessing* on the people who have gathered as he begins to teach. He is giving a blessing to all the people who have come to hear him. He is blessing them for a purpose. He is blessing them to think differently about the way the world works because of what he is teaching and doing. He is describing how we are to live as God's people in this world—not simply by calling attention to all the many ways God has #blessed us personally—but by, as Upper Room's tweet put it so succinctly, "being a blessing for others."

This was a radically new teaching for the people in Jesus' day. In the ancient world, just like today, many people believed strongly in cause and effect. They believed that if they were good people who followed God's commandments, worked hard, and tried to do their best in all circumstances, God would reward them with good health, food to eat, stable jobs, happy families, and prosperity. Likewise, they believed that God punished the sinful with illness, poverty, imprisonment, blindness, divorce, and other personal tragedy. Many believed that God even punished entire sinful populations through war, famine, droughts, and other disasters.

If a man was sick, or mourning, or poor in spirit, or starving, or persecuted, it was his own fault for sinning. A woman who suffered did so as the consequence of her own bad behavior because suffering was understood as punishment for sin.

But Jesus is saying it doesn't work like that in the kingdom of God. It isn't that we are wrong to feel #blessed when something goes our way. But when things do not go our way, that doesn't mean God is punishing us either. God's kingdom is a whole different playing field.

Jesus blesses everyone who has gathered, no matter who they are and no matter what they have done. God's blessing in Christ is not just for the righteous ones. God's blessing is not just for certain religious groups, or certain genders, or certain sexual orientations, or certain cultural or racial groups. God's blessing is not just for those who are pure, who go to church and give to charities and treat people with kindness. And God's blessing is not evidenced by a big bank account or a fancy title or a luxury home.

In this new kingdom that Jesus is showing us, God blesses the saints and sinners alike. Jesus offers a blessing on the poor in wallet and the poor in spirit. He blesses the blind, the lame, the imprisoned, the outcast. He blesses the leper and the prostitute. He blesses the murderer and the thief and the adulterer. He blesses the Jews and the Christians, the Muslims and the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Ba'hai. He blesses the Democrats and the Republicans and the

Independents alike. In Christ, God's blessing does not discriminate. God's blessing is for all. God's blessing is for you. God's blessing is for me.

That's good news, don't you think? It means that no matter who you are or what you have done, you are blessed and you are welcomed into God's family, and there is nothing you can do, ever, to lose God's love, affirmation, and blessing.

#blessed is our identity

#blessed is our condition

#blessed is who we are because of God's saving love shown in Jesus Christ

So in this first teaching for his followers, his disciples, in his first teaching for you and for me, Jesus is telling us as clearly as he can that *these people*—"look around you," he says to his disciples—*these people* in the crowd that gathered that day near the shores of the Galilean lake—*these people* who live down the street and let their kids run wild, *these people* who don't work and are collecting welfare, *these people* who are in jail for dealing drugs, *these people* who got pregnant out of wedlock and now want an abortion, *these people* who are members of a gang, *these people* who are members of a white supremacist group, *these people* who are chanting #blacklivesmatter, *these people* who sit in judgment, *these people* who pray to Allah, *these people* who carry guns into Walmart, *these people* who are crazy feminists, *these people* who are pro-life, *these people* who are pro-choice. . .well, you get the idea. . . Jesus his telling his disciples that *ALL THESE PEOPLE* are #blessed.

And we who call ourselves disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, need to not just understand this, but we need to live it out by our words and our actions. We are #blessed in order that we may be a blessing to others says the tweet from Upper Room. Right on.

Well. There is really no other way to say it. This is a tough opening line for these folks, and for us, whether we are already disciples or we are here at the invitation of someone from this church to "come and see" for ourselves who this man Jesus is and what he has to say.

So do you hear him? Can you hear him speaking to you? Can you hear him saying, "YOU ARE BLESSED"?

Consider ending your sermon by walking through the sanctuary and offering a blessing to the people in your congregation. You can't get to everyone, but make eye contact and make your way all the way to the back rows.

Blessed are YOU. Blessed are YOU. Blessed are YOU.

An alternative suggestion is to invite members of the gathered worshiping community to turn to the people around them and offer their neighbors a blessing.

PLANNING NOTES
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
The Great Invitation: “#Blessed”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

[Micah 6:1-8](#)

The Lord has a controversy with Israel, and the prophet asks what the Lord requires.

[Psalm 15 \(UMH 747\)](#)

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Sing the response with Tone 1 (UMH 737).

[1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#)

God's saving love confounds every source of human boasting. Let your only boasting be in the cross of Christ.

[Matthew 5:1-12](#)

The Sermon on the Mount begins with eight words of blessing.

Calendar Notes

**The Great Invitation:
“#Blessed”**

Today we begin the first of a four-part miniseries focused on the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

If you have not already started planning for how you may observe [Black History Month](#) in the worship and programmatic life of your congregation, start doing so now!

February

All Month [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)
February 2 Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas. See BOW 316
February 12 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (preferred date since not during Lent)
February 20 [Presidents Day \(USA\)](#)
February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)
New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling
March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins \(USA\)](#)
March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

May

<i>All Month</i>	Christian Home Month Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
May 4	National Day of Prayer (USA)
May 5	May Friendship Day
May 8-14	Christian Family Week
May 14	Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day (USA)
May 21	Heritage Sunday
May 24	Aldersgate Day
May 25	Ascension Day
May 28	Ascension Sunday (if transferred)
May 29	Memorial Day (USA)

In The Series

Here in week 4, we're coming up to a plateau in the series, and we'll stay here, with the Sermon on the Mount, for the next four weeks. In a way, you might view these next four weeks as its own miniseries within the larger series.

We've been introduced to Jesus (two weeks ago), and have spent some time journeying in ministry with Jesus (this past week). Now, we settle in to hear the heart of his teaching about what God's kingdom blesses (this week), the life God's kingdom seeks to make in us and through us (next week), what God's kingdom calls us to do differently from what we may have learned in the wider culture (in two weeks), and, finally, what helps us grow in alignment with God's kingdom now and for the age to come (three weeks from now).

That this part of the series functions as a plateau does not call for a reduction in energy or creativity. Indeed, for this week, there's still more energy to put in as we begin this series within the series. Instead, it means we travel across the plateau from week to week to take in four different but related vistas. And then, to conclude the whole series, we climb another mountain with Jesus and his closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) and become witnesses of his transfiguration as a foretaste of our own as we choose to learn to live as his disciples fully.

Today: #Blessed

The hashtag **#blessed** is one of the most popular hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. As of this writing, on Instagram alone there are nearly 60 million posts with that hashtag! So, the word "blessed" still has high currency in U.S. culture.

The question is whether what others call blessed is what Jesus calls blessed. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it's not. And sometimes it's hard to tell.

Today is about making it less hard to tell.

Plan to show images of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook posts with **#blessed**, appropriately filtered (doing it live could be a bit risky!) as the gospel is read today, or include printouts of them as an insert for your bulletin. And consider using them as literal illustrations during the sermon.

During or as a response to the sermon, consider inviting people to tweet, Facebook, or Instagram out their own **#blessedatXUMC** (you fill in the X) messages that are directly related to the Sermon on the Mount, along with at least one **#blessedatXUMC** message or image that offers a commitment to one way they want to live more like those Jesus calls blessed in God's kingdom during the coming week.

And then during the week, consider sending out one or two "blessing reminders" each day (like, "Blessed are the poor in spirit and Blessed are those who mourn on Monday, for example), and encouraging especially newcomers to be part of a Thursday or Saturday small-group gathering (perhaps with those who invited them or have worked with them)-- whether in person or online-- to talk about how they're experiencing what Jesus says God is blessing in this world in their lives during this past week, and what difference they see that is making in themselves and the world around them.

Finally, have someone from your planning team or church staff collect your congregation's **#blessedatXUMC** posts during this week and include them in the opening slide set (if you use projection) or on posters around the worship space, or as an insert for your print bulletin next Sunday.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia

February 5 (5th) Righteousness Abounding
Matthew 5:13-20

THE GREAT INVITATION WEEK 5

SALT AND LIGHT AND RIGHTEOUSNESS ABOUNDING

Music Notes
Preaching Notes
Worship Notes

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

Give everyone a small bag of an interesting salt and a small flashlight as they enter. These will be used later in the service.

“Say So” [CCLI #4944016](#) (Gungor/Houghton)
“This Little Light of Mine” Text, UMH 585; Tune, *Africana Hymnal*, 4150
“I’ve Got a Robe” *Africana Hymnal*, 4053
I’ve got salt/shake out my salt, shake it all over God’s heaven
I’ve got light/shine my light, shine it all over God’s heaven
“Say So” (Reprise)

OR

“Bring Forth the Kingdom,” st 1-2 TFWS 2190
“Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God” UMH 405
“Bring Forth the Kingdom,” st 3-4 TFWS 2190

Prayer of Illumination

[We Would See Jesus](#), st 3, alt. (Unison speaking, instruments in background)

**We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching,
with his disciples listening, gathered round,
while birds and flowers and sky above are preaching
the blessedness which simple trust has found.**

**So open our eyes and our ears
and all our senses,**

and shine in our hearts
that we may know your Word
and your righteousness
and follow where you lead. Amen.

WORD AND RESPONSE

Reading

[Matthew 5:13-20](#)

During the reading, invite people to taste the salt and shine their lights all around.

Sermon

“Righteousness Abounding”

The World Methodist Social Affirmation

UMH 886

Prayers of the People

Deacon or Lay Prayer Leader

The prayer leader may pause after each ellipsis (...) for silent or spoken responses.

Seasoning God, preserve and strengthen the flavor of your love through us and all with whom we interact:

With our families, friends and neighbors...

With our colleagues at work, school, and play...

With sisters and brothers in Christ in other congregations and denominations, and especially our district superintendent (*Name*), our conference staff (*Names*), and our bishop (*Name*)...

We pray as Jesus taught us:

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Light of the world, Lord Jesus, shine in and through our hearts and lives, that we may be beacons of your compassion and justice with one another and in witness to all who lead:

With all who are sick and those who care for them...

With all who are being oppressed and those who advocate for them...

With all who are hungry or naked or homeless and those who offer food, clothing and shelter...

With our local, county, state, and federal elected representatives and leaders, especially our mayor (*Name*), our governor (*Name*), our state and federal representatives (*Names*) and our President (*Name*).

With leaders in government, politics, and corporations around the world...

With the earth and all creatures, and for all who work to sustain our common life...

We pray as Jesus taught us:

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Spirit of Righteousness, stir up in us, among us, and through us such abundance of goodness,

truth, and love, that as others see us in action they can only give glory to you, with the Father and the Son, who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

If the World Methodist Social Affirmation or the Lord's Prayer have been used before the Invitation to the Table, no further confession of sin is necessary, and the Lord's Prayer is not used at Communion.

Invitation to the Table

Deacon, Worship Leader, or Pastor:

Salty, light-bearing, seekers after righteousness,
all who love Christ and seek peace with one another,
all who know the power of Christ's forgiving love,
come to this sacrifice of thanksgiving,
this meal at Christ's own table.
Come as you are.
Come to be changed.
Come, offering peace to one another,
and your gifts to God.

The peace of Christ is exchanged.

The offering is collected.

The table is prepared.

Offertory Music

"Let It Be Me"
No Sweeter Name

Indigo Girls OR
Kari Jobe ([CCLI #4447984](#))

Suggestion: On last choruses, invite the congregation to join, first with the words as printed, then (without printing them) changing "you are" to "we are."

Great Thanksgiving

Pastor

The Light of the world is among us.
Yes, he is.

The Spirit has seasoned us.
We lift our lives and our voices in justice and praise.

Praise our Triune God with me!
**Honor and glory and wisdom and might
are yours forever!**

Honor and glory and wisdom and might are yours,
Holy Triune God,
Life-Speaker,
Law-Giver,
Deliverer, Savior, and Lord of all.

Your love illumines the universe.
Your infinity multiplies the colors, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes
with joys that fill our senses beyond all overflowing.
The diversity of your radiance exceeds all knowing.

In awe and love
we join our voices with angels and saints,
martyrs and cherubim,
with those who came before us,
and the generations that will follow,
in words ancient and ever new:

**Holy Holy Holy
Lord God of every power,
the universe declares your glory
from everlasting to everlasting.
Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is Christ who has come in your name.
Hosanna in the highest!**

Pure brightness of the Everliving One,
Jesus Christ, holy and blessed,
to you we turn,
before you we bow,
behind you we follow,
with you we go into the world,
salt and light,
fulfilling your law of love
toward God and neighbor,
family and stranger,
enemy and friend.

Lead us, Lord.

You have taught us the way of love
in your life, in your death, and in your rising.
And you have shown us such love

in the meal you first shared with your disciples
on the night you were betrayed.

You took bread and blessed it,
broke it and gave it to them, saying,

Take this now and eat.

This is my body broken for you.

Do this to remember me.

You took the cup of wine and gave thanks,
then passed it to them, saying:

Drink from this, each one of you.

This is my blood for a new covenant

that delivers the world from the power of sin and death.

Do this to remember me.

Obeying his command, Triune God,
and looking for his return at the last day,
we offer here ourselves,
with this bread and this cup,
our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving
for all you have done and will do to save us.

Receive our prayers, our gifts, and us.

Even so, come, Holy Spirit,
upon us and these gifts.
Make them be for us
a sharing in Christ's body and blood,
and make us, receiving them,
his body for the world.

And make us one:
With you, with each other,
in ministry and mission to the world,
and in joyful anticipation of that day
when we shall feast at the heavenly banquet
of Christ's final victory.

We give you all the praise and glory,
Holy God,
Source, Sustenance and Crown of All,
now and forever. **Amen.**

The bread may be broken in silence. When all is ready, the people may be invited to come with a simple gesture.

Music During Communion

“Let Us Be Bread”

TFWS 2260

“Let Us Offer to the Father” (“Te Ofrecemos Padre Nuestro”)

TFWS 2262

After this song, instrumentalists begin segue to “Salt and Light” or “You Are the Seed”

Thanksgiving after Communion

**Eternal One, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Now send us forth in the strength of the Spirit
to be salt and light,
enlivening and illumining every corner
with your truth and love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

Song of Sending “Salt and Light”

Ecuyers [CCLI # 3470093](#)

OR

“You Are the Seed” (“Sois la Semilla”)

UMH 583

Deacon or Pastor

Go forth, salty ones.

Season and shake up the place!

Go forth, beacons of light,
and let God’s love and truth shine.

Go forth all of you,
filled with and practicing God’s righteousness
and make righteousness abound!

Go forth, in the name and power and blessing
of our Triune God,
and draw all kinds of glory to God’s name. **Amen.**

Postlude

“Salt and Light” (Reprise), or “You are the Seed” (chorus)

MUSIC NOTES

Say So

This is a very energetic song that is capable of being performed across genres, as is done by the writers of this song, Michael Gungor (who performs it more with a heavy rock feel) and Israel Houghton (who adds a lot more harmonic color and rhythm found in black gospel and pop). Note that it can be difficult for congregations to sing, and it might need creative solutions to teach. In many cases, you can divide up the stanzas to be sung by soloists and the refrain with the congregation. With this song, however, even the refrain is a bit tricky with syncopations, but the drive makes it worth singing if you are able. Remember that congregational participation is not limited to singing, so create a rhythm they can clap as the song progresses (for instance, quarter-note claps on every beat). Another option would be to have a band to sing this song as people enter and invite the congregation to sing beginning on the next entry. Suggested key here is G--both for singability and to provide a seamless transition into the next song.

This Little Light of Mine

This spiritual is a favorite among many congregations, but the often preferred melody and accompaniment is the one found in *The Africana Hymnal*, 4150, as suggested in the worship order. As with many spirituals, even a solo piano can play this accompaniment with some light improvisation (it doesn't take much!) to jazz it up a bit. It will also work with a band accompaniment. Some of the most creative endeavors are when bands reimagine how to sing an older hymn or song in a new way. To guarantee authentic performance practice, appoint capable clappers in the congregation and the choir to clap on beats 2 and 4 of each measure. Ideal key is G.

I've Got a Robe

You will find this most interesting text and tune in *The Africana Hymnal*, and when considering the variety in a service, this would be a point where a vocal quartet might lead the singing *a cappella* with claps, light percussion, and even a walking bass line. We suggest you use words in this song to tie in with the theme this week (I've got salt/shake out my salt, shake it all over God's heaven; I've got light/shine my light, shine it all over God's heaven). This will allow the Scripture to speak through the singing in a way that reading the Scripture is unable to do! For the purposes of this opening set, the recommended key is G, which will provide continuity between songs as a part of the entrance into worship. Follow up this song with a reprise of the song, "Say So."

Bring Forth the Kingdom

Not many songs speak to this Scripture as directly and poignantly as this offering from Marty Haugen. It is musically interactive with alternating parts in stanzas for a leader and the congregation/choir. The refrain and congregational stanza parts are very easy to teach, so be sure to take time before worship to offer a moment of rehearsal as an expression of Christian hospitality! Simply sing *their* stanza parts a phrase at a time and have them sing by echoing the phrases. Reinforce with them that the first phrase begins higher, and the second phrase begins lower. The refrain is a set of 4 simple phrases, the first three of which are almost exact

repetition. This is a great song to use with children, too, having them either sing the “Leader” or “All” parts, and then inviting the congregation to sing the refrain. Written in a folk style, this hymn can be accompanied by a piano, light organ, guitar, or small instrumental ensemble. Using a guitar or piano in particular will help provide a pulse that is often difficult for a solo organ. For this service, we recommend singing stanzas 1 and 2 and transitioning into the next hymn, “Seek Ye First,” which is in the same key of D. History of Hymns:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-bring-forth-the-kingdom>

Seek Ye First

One of my earliest memories was singing “Seek Ye First” and hearing the soprano soloist in the choir of my small church singing the “Alleluia” descant while we sang the text of the chorus. Regardless of church size, many congregations know this song by heart because of its scriptural authenticity, motivic recognition (the “Hey, I know that song!” characteristic), and singability. Even if you don’t have a soprano who can sing the sustained “Alleluia” line with clarity, use a flute, violin, recorder, or other treble instrument to provide the same effect. If children are indeed singing as a part of this entrance rite, have a child play this line on the recorder. Accompaniment can be piano, organ, guitar, or any combination of these or other instruments. Sing in the key of D and transition back to stanzas 3 and 4 of “Bring Forth the Kingdom.” For an article on Karen Lafferty, writer of this hymn, click here:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/celebrating-womens-history-month-3>

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to speak the words of stanza 3 while the instruments accompany underneath. The use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Let It Be Me

This title may not be familiar to you or your church, but it is a way to incorporate a song in the secular catalog into a sacred place of worship as an offering to God. The Indigo Girls often write songs of social consciousness, which apply to the insistence of United Methodists upon works of social holiness. If you have a couple of vocalists who would like to sing a duet with some light instrumentation, this is a great option. However, please note that this song is not recommended for congregational use. Reprinting lyrics will not be allowed under a common church copyright license like CCLI or OneLicense, and doing so would require contacting the copyright owner for permission. You may also expect to pay a fee to do so. Our recommendation is for a soloist, duo, or small group to perform it live without reprinting any lyrics in any form.

No Sweeter Name

This song by Kari Jobe focuses on the light imagery of the Scripture reading in this service. Whether sung by a soloist or the congregation, keep it simple. An effective

accompaniment for this hymn would be a guitar, shakers, and a cajon or djembe. Jobe's recording also features an accordion as a different timbre to offer beautiful counter melodies throughout. Ideal key is G.

SIDEBAR: Music During Communion

The choices of songs during Communion this week are just that--choices. If other songs speak to your context more effectively, we encourage you to use them! There are some helpful tips we want you to consider, however, when singing songs in the middle of a ritual action that involves movement (i.e., coming forward for Communion, visiting prayer stations, or other spatial transitions).

- 1) Sing simple songs. Whereas some of the songs we might even recommend to you are more complex at times, allow those to be used as is appropriate in your setting. Simple songs, however, give life to spatial movement of a congregation. It is almost like a work song. You would never sing something incredibly complex when digging a hole or hammering nails, so why would you do that when moving in worship and participating in the work of the people? Short refrains and simple choruses work best.
- 2) Consider the dynamic of your Holy Communion ritual when selecting songs. Sing within a vocal range that allows a meditative spirit or a celebrative atmosphere if that is in order in your church. Experiencing a variety of worship dynamics during ritual actions also helps prevent them from becoming stagnant.
- 3) Don't forget to offer Communion to the musicians in your church. This is a simple thing, but it allows the table to be open to all.

END SIDEBAR

Let Us Be Bread

This song rises out of the twentieth-century folk singing tradition in the church and focuses upon the role of those at the Communion Table to be bread for the world by the Spirit of Christ. This language is key to being a part of the reign of God, and the refrain of this song highlights the need for unity in extending the table. Have soloists sing the stanzas, and allow the congregation to sing the refrain. It is easily singable, even as people move during Holy Communion.

Let Us Offer to the Father (Te Ofrecemos Padre Nuestro)

If you happen to have a skilled guitarist in your congregation, this Central American Eucharistic hymn is a wonderful option that speaks to the Communion elements, offering, the reign of God, liberty, and peace. The last stanza is a brilliant doxology that creates a sense of *fiesta* coming out of the Eucharist. The melody can be tricky and is best taught to a congregation over time, repeating when possible on Communion Sundays. Ideal accompaniment is a guitar and light percussion. Should you have a bassist (either double bass or electric bass) in your congregation, have him/her experiment a bit on hemiolas on the first, third, fifth, and seventh measures of the stanzas. And if you are truly brave, try the Spanish text! When choosing "You Are the Seed" as the final hymn, this song makes a great transition to that

celebrative song of mission. History of Hymns:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-let-us-offer-to-the-father>

Salt and Light

This song is a prayer and a plea for God to make us salt and light as we go into the world. A perfect option for a band, there is lots of energy found in this song. The syncopations can be a little difficult for a congregation, so it may be best to invite them to sing on the refrain only. This could also be an option for an acoustic guitar with light percussion, but it does not work very well with piano and/or organ. It is more idiomatic with a strummed instrument. The ideal key for congregational singing is G.

You Are the Seed (Sois la Semilla)

Cesareo Gabarain has created a beautiful song that sings of the presence of Christ in each of us. By using images of the seed, dawn, flame, and life, we sing of the fruits of ministry by working to gather in the harvest. These images are especially rich when sung as a means of spurring us to live what we pray in the world. The imperative is given to “go to the world” and “be a loyal witness,” so sing this song of sending forth confidently, knowing the mission field that lies ahead. The tune itself allows a number of ways to accompany, including piano, organ, guitar, percussion, or a combination of all of the above. The most important part of singing this song is keeping the tempo lively enough to fit four measures in each musical phrase. This is a song of celebration, so don’t turn it into a dirge! History of Hymns:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-great-commission-inspires-spanish-hymn-you-are-the-seed>

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 5:

“Build Your Kingdom Here”

[CCLI 6186078](#)

“We Are”

CCLI [6129877](#)

“Trust and Obey”

UMH 467

“I Will Trust in the Lord”

UMH 464

“Jesus, The Light of the World”

The Africana Hymnal, 4038

“Dear Jesus, in Whose Life I See”

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/dear-jesus-in-whose-life-i-see-3-stanzas>

PREACHING NOTES

Last weekend, after I had spent the entire morning contorted in one uncomfortable position after another under the kitchen sink, wrestling an old, rusted, leaking faucet fixture off my old, rusted cast iron sink, and replacing it with a shiny new one, I went out to my backyard with my husband to enjoy the beautiful fall day. Scot sat down on one of our Adirondack chairs, guitar in hands, and began to play a tune to accompany the lovely sound of the breeze rustling through the orange and yellow canopy of leaves shading our patio.

I did not sit down. Instead, I immediately noticed the broken air conditioner that I had removed from a window the day before and snarled at Scot, "We need to take that to the dump." Then I continued on, adding to our never-ending list of projects we needed to work on in our backyard and inside our house.

Scot stopped strumming and looked angrily at me. And then, my mild-mannered, always patient and understanding husband began to spew harsh words: "There is always more and more things to be done! It is always do, Do, DO!! Why can't we just DO nothing! Don't you think we've done enough today?"

He's right. I am a doer, and I have trouble stopping. I confessed to my covenant group the next day that because of Scot's words, I realized that I have not been completely honest about my weekly report of taking Sabbath time over the weekends. I understood taking Sabbath to mean not working on work stuff. I had not considered that spending the entire weekend working on home improvement projects probably did not count as taking Sabbath.

I don't think I'm alone in calling myself a doer. I think lots of people are doers. Americans are doers, prompted along, no doubt, by the Protestant work ethic. I may be a Methodist in name, but when it comes to my practices, I behave more like a Calvinist.

And furthermore, it isn't that doing is wrong. When Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the law or the prophets, he is affirming that there is a place for law in this world. The law is about doing. It is about practicing righteous living by following the commandments of God. We need the law, so we can know what to do and what not to do.

When Jesus says he has come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, I think he is suggesting that being his disciple is not as much a matter of DOING as it is a matter of BEING.

The people of Israel were facing a period of enormous theological and social change during the time of Jesus. The temple in Jerusalem was gone. Parties and factions within the faith community had different ideas about the future of Judaism, and they were often in conflict with one another. The present was unstable, and the future seemed uncertain.

Likewise, you and I are living in a time of enormous theological and social change. The number of people joining the Christian faith is in decline. The United Methodist Church has parties and

factions with very different ideas about the future of the denomination, often in conflict with one another. Congregations are shrinking, and buildings are being sold. People are forming faith communities and worshiping in different places and spaces and redefining what it means to be Christian and Methodist in an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing culture. The present is unstable, and the future seems uncertain.

How are we, the disciples of Jesus Christ today, to be in this situation? How are we to live? How are we to practice our faith? How are we to share it with others?

Jesus says we are to be salt, intensifying the flavor of the world around us. Jesus says we are to be light, shining God's grace into the despair and fear many people feel. Our goodness is to be so obvious, so in evidence, that, through our presence, the very presence of God's love and grace is felt in those around us.

So many of our congregations get caught up in the do, Do, DO that we ignore the importance of the "be."

*What does it mean to **be** a disciple? How do we as disciples let God's light shine through us? How do our lives enhance the flavor of God's love in the world? (As you consider these questions, focus on staying away from "do" answers.)*

These are good questions to discuss, both in terms of how we can **be** disciples as individuals, and how we as congregations can be lamps through which God's love and grace shine into our communities, and how we can be salt that intensifies God's presence in the world.

As I ponder these questions, I am reminded of my time in clinical pastoral education. Anyone who has been through this type of education knows that, as a chaplain, when you go into a room to visit a patient, your role is not to do something. Your role is to be a comforting presence. Your role is to listen if a family or an individual needs to talk. Your role is to offer prayer if it is appropriate, but not to force your religious views on anyone. As my CPE instructor used to tell us, our role not to *do*; it is to *be*.

The good news we need to hear out of this teaching from our Lord and Savior is that it isn't our job or our responsibility to bring someone into a relationship with the living Lord. It is God's job alone to convert a heart. Our role is simply to be witnesses, vessels through which God's love and grace and flow, and lamps through which God's light can be seen.

BEGIN SIDEBAR

In his book, [*Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*](#), Mark Teasdale spends some time on the need to unleash our creativity for the task of letting God's light shine through us as we seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others:

. . .the goal is to fire our imaginations so that we can be creative in developing our practices of evangelism. We are freed from the constraints of a reduced range of evangelistic activity. In this freedom we can let our practices flow creatively out of our authentic beliefs, embodying the good news that we treasure and would like others to receive.

One of the best ways to unleash this creativity is to make use of the experiences we have had being evangelized. Think about how the evangelist treated you and how you responded. If you could rewrite that moment of history, how would you improve on what happened? Take into account everything you have articulated about the good news through your theological reflection and contextual sensitivity in reimagining the scenario. Would the encounter have taken place in a different location? Would it have happened over several days, weeks or months rather than in a single setting? Would it have involved the evangelist speaking or acting differently? Would the message itself have been articulated differently? -- Mark Teasdale, [*Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*](#) (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 86

If you are not able to find a way to address this from the pulpit, are there ways in which these questions and Dr. Teasdale's book might be discussed and studied in small groups or in Sunday School classes or through other church programs as part of a churchwide effort to equip people for faith sharing?

END SIDEBAR

Maybe the the best way to witness to the saving power of Christ in our lives is simply to be transparent and open windows through which the love that comes from the heart of God can freely pass.

As you close your sermon, invite the members of the gathered worshiping community to come to the Table of the Lord in a spirit of gratitude, giving thanks to God for planting the seeds of grace in their hearts and calling them to be disciples of Jesus Christ and praying that, through them, in the coming week, the light of God's grace may shine brightly upon someone who needs to know Christ's saving love.

SIDEBAR: THESE Commandments by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Next week our theme is "This, not That." It represents the way Jesus teaches (this) over the way people had normally taught the law and the prophets (that).

"This" and "that" are "pronomial adjectives," or adjectives that may be used as pronouns. They are also both four letter words. And they are related to each other as distinguishers. "This"

(plural, these) usually points toward what's right in front, right here, or about to come next. "That" (plural, those) usually refers to something that is somewhere else, over there, or back in time.

The distinction between "this" and "that" we have in English is not unique to English. It exists in many other languages, including Greek. And it is operative in Matthew 5:19. "So, whoever loosens one of the least of **these** commandments and teaches other people to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of the heavens."

Did you catch that? *These* commandments. If Jesus (or Matthew) had intended to say "those commandments," there is a different Greek pronomial adjective (ekeinwn) to describe them. He didn't. He used "toutwn" (these). So the direction of Jesus' reference to "one of the least of **these** commandments" is not backward toward the aforementioned law and prophets. It is instead forward toward the teaching (commandments) he is about to offer, a teaching that will truly lead people to have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20) and fulfills both the law and the prophets, even down to the jot and tittle (vs. 17-18).

END SIDEBAR

PLANNING NOTES
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
The Great Invitation: "Righteousness Abounding"

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectioinaire en français, *Le Lectioinaire Œcuménique Révisé*

[Isaiah 58:1-9a \(9b-12\)](#)

The fast God chooses and honors reflects real change toward justice and mercy in the lives of people and communities.

[Psalm 112: 1-9 \(10\) \(UMH 833\)](#)

Sing the response with Tone 3 in D major (UMH 737).

[1 Corinthians 2:1-12 \(13-16\)](#)

Paul's proclamation in Corinth was not based on elegant human wisdom, but on spiritual wisdom displayed with power.

[Matthew 5:13-20](#)

The Sermon on the Mount continues: You are salt and light. I have come to fulfill the law and teach you to do likewise.

Calendar Notes

The Great Invitation:

“Righteousness Abounding”

On this fifth Sunday after Epiphany, we are introduced to the nature of the righteousness Jesus teaches, a righteousness made possible by the coming of the kingdom of God.

[Black History Month](#) begins today.

February

<i>All Month</i>	Black History Month (USA)
February 2	Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas. See BOW 316
February 12	Scouting Ministries Sunday (preferred date since not during Lent)
February 20	Presidents Day (USA)
February 26	Transfiguration of the Lord

March

March 1	Ash Wednesday New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling
March 12	Daylight Saving Time Begins (USA)
March 26	UMCOR Sunday (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

May

<i>All Month</i>	Christian Home Month Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
May 4	National Day of Prayer (USA)
May 5	May Friendship Day
May 8-14	Christian Family Week
May 14	Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day (USA)
May 21	Heritage Sunday
May 24	Aldersgate Day
May 25	Ascension Day
May 28	Ascension Sunday (if transferred)
May 29	Memorial Day (USA)

In This Series

Last week, we joined Jesus and his disciples at the top of the plateau and scanned the world to see what God and God's kingdom actively bless. It may have taken some time to get our eyes adjusted to this view, and we may still be adjusting. Probably all of us are. We forget what we're

supposed to pay attention to, and we need the reminders, constantly. It also helps to hear testimonies of what others are seeing. What we can't see with our own eyes initially, the stories of others can sometimes help us begin to see.

All of last week was about what God is doing and blessing "out there" now that God's kingdom has drawn near.

But for those of us who are seeking to become followers or disciples of Jesus, God is doing something more. God is seeking to transform our own lives. God wants to make us super-salty, radiant with light for all to see, and abounding in righteousness. That's what this week is about. It's about those inner- and outward-facing transformations God wants to work in each of us-- and that we are invited to cooperate in helping to happen.

Today

In this week's text, we don't yet know what "righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees" will look like. We'll start to hear more about that next week ("This, Not That"). But we do know, or at least can reliably imagine, what being salty and beaming with the light of God might look like. We hear the invitation today, or perhaps even the command, to do that.

The point of today is, in part, to remind people of the salt that is in them and to start "living salty" every day and to remind people of the light that is theirs as disciples of Jesus and to keep that light shining, 24/7/365. We're invited and called to habitual salty radiance. So plan, along with worship on Sunday, to keep the reminders and invitations to share salt and light flowing through the coming week. Prompt this on social media. And gather both written and video responses-- salt sightings, beacon opportunities-- ways in which people are either given opportunities to be salt and light or ways they see others doing so. Gather these and include them as part of the opening slide set next Sunday to help keep the momentum going.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

February 12 (6th) This, Not That

[Matthew 5:21-37](#)

Framing: The righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees looks like THIS, not THAT....

THE GREAT INVITATION WEEK 6

THIS, NOT THAT

Music Notes
Preaching Notes
Worship Notes
FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”

UMH 384

(maybe alternate tune, like HOLY MANNA or FUSION: <http://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/worship-music-downloads/LoveDivine-FUSION.pdf>)

“Now Praise the Hidden God of Love”

TFWS 2027

OR

“Righteousness, Peace, and Joy”

[CCLI # 862436](#)

“Knowing You” (All I Once Held Dear)

[CCLI # 1045238](#)

Prayer of Illumination

[We Would See Jesus](#), st 3, alt. (Unison speaking, instruments in background)

**We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching,
with his disciples listening, gathered round,
while birds and flowers and sky above are preaching
the blessedness which simple trust has found.**

So open our eyes and our ears
and all our senses,
and shine in our hearts
**that we may know your Word
and your righteousness
and follow where you lead. Amen.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

“More Like You”

TFWS 2167

Readers move into place during the singing of this song.

Reading

Matthew 5:21-37

(Translation Taylor Burton-Edwards)

Reader 1 (lectern or pulpit)

You have heard that it was said to those of old,

Reader 2: (from the back of the worship space)

Do not commit murder. Whoever commits murder should be tried in a court of law.

Silence

Reader 1:

But I say to you,

Congregation:

Anyone who is rageful toward a sister or brother should be tried in a court of law.

And anyone who curses at a sister or brother should be up for a death sentence.

And anyone who shows contempt to a sister or brother should be commended to hellfire.

Reader 3: (from the Lord's Table)

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and right there you remember that your sister or brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, and go first to be reconciled with your sister or brother. After that, come and offer your gift.

Congregation:

Come to an agreement with your accusers quickly, while you are walking with them down the road. Otherwise your accusers may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the attendant who will throw you in jail.

Reader 3:

Truly I tell you, you shall not come out of there until you have paid the last penny.

Reader 1:

You have heard that it was said,

Reader 2:

Do not commit adultery.

Reader 1: But I say to you,

Congregation:

Whoever gazes at another's spouse with desire to have that person sexually has already committed adultery with that person in their heart.

Reader 3:

So if your right eye makes you stumble, remove it and throw it away. It would be better for you to destroy one part of your body than to cast your whole body into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It would be better for you to destroy one part of your body than for your whole body to go to hell.

Reader 1:

And it was said,

Reader 2: Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

Reader 1: But I say to you,

Congregation: Everyone who divorces a spouse except for reason of sexual immorality by one or both of them forces the other to commit adultery, and whoever marries the spouse so divorced commits adultery.

Reader 1: Again you have heard that it was said to those of old,

Reader 2: Do not swear falsely, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.

Reader 1: But I say to you,

Congregation: Do not swear at all.

Reader 3: Not by heaven, because it is God's throne.

Nor by earth, for it is God's footstool.

Not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the Great King.

And do not swear by your own head, because you cannot make a single hair of it white or black.

Congregation: Let your yes be yes, your no, no.

Reader 3: Anything more than this springs from evil.

Readers stay in place for a moment of silence, then return to their places during the singing of the song.

"More Like You"

TFWS 2167

Sermon

"This, Not That"

Call to Righteousness

See Planning Notes for more detail.

“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”

UMH 402

Prayers of the People

Deacon or Lay Leader or Worship Leader

We have committed ourselves to the way of righteousness Christ has taught us and the kingdom of God empowers.

In the power of that righteousness,
and overflowing with the love of God,
we are bold to pray:

For the gift of life in every form, for all who care for and seek to preserve it,
and against all forces and practices that support disease, death, and destruction.

Silence (include written list of names of persons active or affected)

Sung: “Hear us, O God”

UMH 490

For respect for the dignity and freedom of every human being, for all who build community across every kind of difference,

and against all forces and practices of disrespect, divisiveness, and diversion.

Sung: “Hear us, O God”

Silence (include written list of names, including local, state, national, and international leaders)

For listening, mercy, forgiveness, and hope, for all who demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation that brings justice and peace, increasing the common good, (including our scouting troop and all who work with them)

and against all forces and practices of defensiveness, revenge, and self-centeredness.

Sung: “Hear us, O God”

Silence (include written list of names, including diplomats, counselors, and others who work for reconciliation)

For the loving expression of human affection, including the gifts of sexuality, and for all who model joyous and faithful relationships,

and against all forces and practices of violation, possessiveness, and unfaithfulness.

Sung: “Hear us, O God”

Silence (include written list of anniversaries)

For truth spoken in love in all our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, in work, school, and play, and about leaders and all of our institutions

and against all forces and practices of dissimulation, sidestepping, or misrepresenting

the truth.

Sung: “Hear us, O God”

Silence

As Jesus taught us, so we pray:

The Lord’s Prayer

THANKSGIVING

As forgiven and reconciled children of God, united in the prayer of Jesus, let us offer our gifts to God for the mission of this community, and signs of reconciliation and love to one another.

The peace of Christ be always with you.

And also with you.

The peace of Christ is exchanged.

The offering is collected.

Music of Thanksgiving during the Offering “For the Beauty of the Earth” UMH 92

Add this stanza:

*For your teachings from the heights,
where you spoke of salt and light,
human love, and blessedness,
going forth in righteousness:
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

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SENDING FORTH

Song of Sending “Christ for the World We Sing” UMH 568

Deacon or Pastor:

You know the way.

You’ve committed to it.

God has empowered us for it.

It’s this, not that!

So go forth in the strength of the Spirit,
and with one another’s support,
and do it!

Postlude:

Reprise of “Love Divine” (variations) or “Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost”

MUSIC NOTES**Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

Arguably the most prominent Wesleyan hymn in our collections, this hymn serves as a cornerstone for our hymnody and speaks of the Wesleyan understanding of grace in ways other hymns simply cannot. Lots of discussion has been made about the ideal tune for this hymn, and in many situations, it depends on your context. We have offered here two suggestions for an alternative tune, bearing in mind there are plenty of other options. The first tune is HOLY MANNA, from the shape-note singing tradition. It offers a singable and quickly paced setting that can be played and sung with an organ or a band and every combination in between. Another tune is FUSION, which was written for the 2016 Fusion Conference in Raleigh, NC. It can be found at this link: <http://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/worship-music-downloads/LoveDivine-FUSION.pdf>. It was written with a band in mind, but it could easily be accompanied by solo piano or guitar and light percussion. Each phrase of the first half of each stanza begins with the same melodic contour, and the second half of each stanza is characterized with repetition as well, thus making it somewhat accessible for congregational singing. Either setting can be sung in the key of G, which makes the transition into the next hymn seamless. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-love-divine-all-loves-excelling>

Now Praise the Hidden God of Love

Because of its lyrical phrases and gentle, folk quality, the hymn tune O WALY WALY may not be seen initially as a setting for a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, but Fred Pratt Green has written a hymn that pairs with it beautifully. Pratt Green was almost unmatched in his skill and eloquence, as is evidenced in the inclusion of the text, “to storm the citadels of wrong,” within this hymn. Every stanza is vital to the message of this hymn, and this is made clear with the use of a colon at the end of stanzas 1 and 2. “We have still a work to do” also seems to spur us on in our journey toward Christian perfection, and this in particular makes this a wonderful companion to the previous Charles Wesley hymn, “Love Divine, O Loves Excelling.” The tune can be accompanied by organ, piano, or guitar, with plenty of possible options, composed or improvised, among almost all instruments. Keep this hymn in the key of G because of the movement toward the climax on the D in measure 5. To promote musicality in singing, encourage your choir and congregation to crescendo (not overdramatically) on all the longer notes, which can be found on the downbeats of each measure. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-now-praise-the-hidden-god-of-love>

Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost

This classic gem within the Contemporary Christian genre offers a Caribbean flair to worship and includes possibilities for a praise team, Latin percussion, and repetitive rhythms that are quite catchy. The song is an invitation to live and work in the kingdom of God. The tempo is very quick and needs to stay in a 2/2 feel. If sung in 4/4, it loses some rhythmic

intensity that moves the song along and makes it culturally interesting. The ideal key is C. This would also make a great song for children and youth to lead. Even if they are not singing as the choir or lead ensemble, children of all ages could be taught a simple percussion accompaniment to make this piece an expression of praise in your worship.

Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)

“Knowing You” is a perfect complement to the Scripture for this week. The first stanza states, “All I once thought gain I have counted loss,” which illustrates the “You have heard that it was said”/“But I say to you” language from Jesus this week. Graham Kendrick has created this hymnic modern song to address the disparity between what Christ teaches us and what is learned from the world. Keep this song in C to seamlessly follow the previous song. This is also an ideal key for singability, but it also leaves room to modulate up for a closing chorus in the key of D. Accompany with any variety of instruments, including organ, piano, or band.

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to speak the words of stanza 3 while the instruments accompany underneath. The use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

More Like You

Bookending the Scripture this week is this great short song akin to the same sentiment as “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian.” “More Like You” embodies a prayer of one moving toward Christian perfection and gives a concise reframing of the scriptural narrative as it implies becoming more like Jesus and less like the temptations of the world. The accompaniment edition of *The Faith We Sing* includes a stanza with this hymn, but with the purpose found here of accompanying the Scripture reading, I would recommend using the chorus only. Any number of instruments can accompany, but make sure the song doesn’t become so complex that it overshadows the Scripture reading here. Use a simple instrumentation like guitar or piano, along with a solo wind or string instrument (flute, violin, clarinet, etc.). The purpose of singing here is also accompanying another liturgical piece, so encourage the congregation to do whatever is liturgically appropriate in your context: either remain seated (if they will be seated during the Scripture reading) or stand (if they are used to standing during the Scripture reading). Keep in mind, however, that this song should be sung in whatever place the congregation will be for the reading. In other words, do not sing it seated if the congregation will stand for the reading (or vice versa). Allow the song to be a part of the proclamation of the word by creating continuity with it. The key in *The Faith We Sing* is Bb, which, though low, is appropriate for such an introspective, intimate song as this.

Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

One of the more prominent and well-known spirituals in the church today, this hymn offers yet another prayer in the journey of Christian perfection. In this setting, “I want to be a

Christian” means “I want to be more loving, holy, and like Jesus.” With many pianists and organists in the church who volunteer and may not have spent an entire lifetime honing an intense level of technical skills, the choice of setting this hymn in Db may be perplexing for some church musicians. Why set a text in a key with five flats? The answer is two-fold: 1) Vocal range, and 2) tone color. For more information on these key components of hymn tune settings, see the sidebar for this week’s music notes. Since this selection will fall in Black History Month, click this link for more resources from *The United Methodist Hymnal* for this important month in our civic calendar: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/united-methodist-hymnal-resources-for-black-history-month-february>

SIDEBAR: Hymn Tune Keys and Considerations

When choosing an appropriate key in which a hymn or song can be sung, there are a number of things to consider. Know that this can be frustrating at times, but the ultimate goal of any issue related to hymns and tunes is the encouragement and enlivening of congregational song. Here are a few thoughts when choosing appropriate keys:

- 1) **The most important consideration is the encouragement of singing and the ability of the congregation.** Know that hymns will often have to be different in one church versus another because of the nature, history, and ability of each community. The needs of the instrumentalists, even though they are important, are secondary to the ability to foster a culture of singing in the church.
- 2) **Know the vocal capabilities of your congregation.** The congregation is your largest choir in the church, and you need to know their ability. Can they sing above a D? Can they sing below a Bb? Most congregations will refuse to sing if a song exceeds their range, and I don’t blame them. Some can sing wider ranges than others. Note that Bb to D (just over an octave) is not the range for every single church, and you must know if they are able to sustain high notes or sing them only briefly before coming back down. If you continuously program high keys for them to sing that are out of their range, they will not trust you to lead them, and they will eventually quit singing. They must trust their worship leaders, so when the music or the message gets challenging, they will know you won’t simply stand by and hope they get it. Be the musical shepherd they need.
- 3) **Consider the context of the songs.** Is the song featured as a part of a high-energy set at the beginning of worship? Is it a prayer song? Will it accompany a ritual action in the church? Will the congregation be standing or remain seated? These questions can all help determine what the best key is for singing. Take, for instance, the entry “More Like You” this week. The key of Bb works well for those sitting throughout the Scripture reading or leading into a time of prayer. The ability for a congregation to support higher notes while seated is quite difficult, so choosing a lower key while seated is appropriate. It may make more sense to take it up a step when standing.
- 4) **Tone color can affect the mood of worship.** For those who might not know what I’m talking about here, keys sound different from one another. True, those who haven’t spent a lifetime of ear training might not hear the subtle nuance in frequency, but keys actually become brighter and darker in color depending on the key. “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian” is set in the key of Db, which is not the easiest of keys for musicians with

limited experience to play. However, Db is a very dark key (I actually see it as a deep purple color), while D, which is just one half-step higher, is one of the brightest keys (yellow). You may find it interesting to read about synesthesia (or, more specifically, chromesthesia), which is a condition that causes people to associate sounds with colors. Many musicians throughout history have had this condition, and I am one of them! Singing in a dark key can effectively bring people into a prayerful mood in the same way that a bright key can incite rejoicing in the good news of the Resurrection!

- 5) **Lastly, consider the needs of the instrumentalists.** Keep in mind that every church is different, and this may be of ultimate importance in your church if you wish to keep your organist! Since the ultimate goal of congregational singing is the gathered people of God, however, let the focus be on the singing if it is possible, and make decisions about keys and other musical considerations thoughtfully and confidently.

END SIDEBAR

For the Beauty of the Earth

This week, we have featured a song of thanksgiving, and there aren't many better choices than this hymn by Folliot S. Pierpoint. It is simple, teachable, singable, and capable of being adapted by a variety of accompaniments and instrumentations. We have recommended the inclusion of a stanza in the worship order that focuses on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and it offers an opportunity to create some retroactive connection with previous weeks. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-for-the-beauty-of-the-earth>

Christ for the World We Sing

The tune of this hymn is one of the most interesting compositions in hymnody. It is one of few hymns that contains multiple measures of unison notes, even from those who accompany (See the measures of "with loving zeal/with fervent prayer/with one accord/with joyful song" for the first example). Written in 3/4, this hymn would be musically appropriate with a slight lilt to the tune and emphasis on count one of each measure. Felice de Giardini composed this tune in 1769, which was when Mozart was an adolescent, and European culture was still moving out of a dance-influenced era. The nature of this tune could best be described as a minuet, with a light character. Don't sing it too heavily or slowly, or the character changes and the dance-like quality is lost. If you are in a band setting and need something other than 3/4 for the meter, feel free to sing in 4/4 and syncopate the melody by beginning with two dotted-quarters and a quarter to follow. The rhythm becomes fairly easy to work out after that.

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 6:

"Amazing Grace"	UMH 378
"Rule of Life"	W&S 3117, <i>Africana Hymnal</i> , 4056
"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"	UMH 400
"Covenant Prayer"	W&S 3115
"I Give Myself Away"	<i>Africana Hymnal</i> , 4066

PREACHING NOTES

The title of this sermon is “This, not that.” So the logical place to start is to unpack what “this” is and what “that” is in the context of this long and difficult teaching from Jesus.

Last week my colleague, Taylor Burton-Edwards, provided these comments to be thinking about over the week:

[This week’s theme] represents the way Jesus teaches (this) over the way people had normally taught the law and the prophets (that).

“This” and “that” are “pronomial adjectives,” or adjectives that may be used as pronouns. They are also both four letter words. And they are related to each other as distinguishers. “This” (plural, these) usually points toward what’s right in front, right here, or about to come next. “That” (plural, those) usually refers to something that is somewhere else, over there, or back in time.

The distinction between “this” and “that” we have in English is not unique to English. It exists in many other languages, including Greek. And it is operative in Matthew 5:19. “So, whoever loosens one of the least of **these** commandments and teaches other people to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of the heavens.”

Did you catch that? *These* commandments. If Jesus (or Matthew) had intended to say “those commandments,” there is a different Greek pronomial adjective (ekeinwn) to describe them. He didn’t. He used “toutwn” (these). So the direction of Jesus’ reference to “one of the least of **these** commandments” is not backward toward the aforementioned law and prophets. It is instead forward toward the teaching (commandments) he is about to offer, a teaching that will truly lead people to have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20) and fulfills both the law and the prophets, even down to the jot and tittle (vs. 17-18).

Next week our theme is “This, not That.” It represents the way Jesus teaches (this) over the way people had normally taught the law and the prophets (that).

According to Taylor's read on this passage, the *this* in the text refers to the commandments as they have come to us not through Moses, but as interpreted in light of the person and message of Jesus Christ. Jesus is calling his disciples, and us, not just to *understand* the law differently, but to *live* differently because of this new understanding. As we talked about last week, again Jesus calls us not so much to "do" something as his followers, but to "be" something as his disciples.

Don't just do this outwardly because the law prohibits it. Be a different kind of person altogether because you follow not just the letter of the law, but because you live the Spirit of the law.

Then, of course, Jesus goes into detail about what *this* entails. And let's not mince words. The details are difficult. Jesus gets into not just the disciples' business, but ours as well. He crosses over into "meddlin,'" as we like to say in the south; and I don't know about you, but it makes me uncomfortable to talk about some of these subjects from the pulpit.

What does he take on? Our *anger*, our *relationships*, and our propensity for not just telling lies, but accepting *dishonesty*, including everything from outright falsehoods to half-truths and what we have innocuously named political "spin."

So let's talk about anger first. According to Jesus, it is anger that is underneath the commandment to not commit murder. Murder is the presenting issue, but anger is the underlying condition that disciples need to address. Anger left unchecked might not culminate in murder, but it can still be incredibly destructive.

As I sit here writing, as I noted above, it is one week until the presidential elections. By the time you read my words not only will the election have taken place, but the new president will have been recently inaugurated. I don't know how people will be feeling in early February. But I do know that anger is fueling the last weeks of this presidential race in an unprecedented way. According to an article written in July 2016, the anger of American people is rooted in a dissatisfaction with the economy. Do you want to know why people are angry? Follow the money.

Economic issues that fuel anger include high unemployment, pay inequality, stagnant incomes, and massive debt. Many hardworking people have not had a raise in five or more years, and the median household income is stuck at the level set in 1995. While in past decades Americans believed that hard work would eventually pay off with higher wages and upward mobility, as we approach 2017, faith in the American Dream has declined. People no longer think the future is secure. Middle-aged workers worry they will have enough money for retirement. Many do not believe their children will be able to enjoy the same or better economic status than they have achieved.

Anger has led to playing the blame game on a whole new level. As immigrants and women have entered the workforce in large numbers, at the same time many companies have closed down

or moved operations overseas. As a result, those who believed that a middle class lifestyle was in reach have become bitter, enraged, and even violent.

This (anger), and not *that* (murder) is the real concern, not only for people today, but for the people to whom Jesus was speaking. *This* (anger) is what fills us up and threatens to boil over. And it is *this*, says Jesus, that his disciples need to address first.

As it turns out, *this* is something that the church is particularly well-equipped to help people navigate. Jesus tells us straight out that we must be reconciled with our brothers and sisters; that is, we need to have dealt with our anger and have tried to find a way to make peace—before we can come to the Table of the Lord to share in the bread and the cup. Now I realize that as Protestants we may gloss over or even miss entirely this demand to be reconciled before we come to the Table. But let me remind you that our liturgy for the Great Thanksgiving begins with these words: “Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.” Despite the fact that Methodists go out of their way to explain that all are welcome at the Table, the truth is, not all are welcome. Specifically, those persons who have not earnestly repented of their sin and/or are not seeking to live in peace with others are not welcome.

That is to say, those who are holding on to anger, resentment, and ill-will toward others are decidedly not prepared to join Christ and their brothers and sisters around the Table.

How often do we in the church take this invitation seriously? How many of us recuse ourselves from participating in the holy meal because we are clinging to our righteous indignation or holding onto a grudge against an individual or a population of people? How many of us refuse, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, to work past our feelings of animosity, and continue to engage in name calling and insults, even while we consider ourselves to be faithful Christian people?

Jesus says, “You’ve heard it said ... “You shall not murder,” but I say to you, work on your anger and find a way to make peace even with your worst enemy.” *This* is what transforms the world.

The next thing Jesus asks us to confront is the nature of our relationships. This time we have two presenting issues: adultery and divorce. Again, Jesus is pointing not to *that*—the laws themselves around the actions adultery and divorce—but rather, to *this*, one’s motivations, one’s heart, and one’s thoughts. Feminist scholar Amy Jill Levine notes that *this* is especially important for women, since it calls into accountability the way that men viewed women and thought about women. She believes this extension to thought, not just action, implies a teaching against the sexual objectification of women by men. I want to suggest that Jesus’ words here, although explicitly directed at the marriage relationship, could be expanded to help us consider not just how we act toward other people, but what is inside each one of us, in terms of how we think about other people. We are the keepers of our brothers and sisters, after all.

When have we had thoughts about others that could fall into the category of objectification, either sexual or otherwise? How have we failed to care for sacred relationships with friends or family members by holding on to our grudges, harboring resentments, and refusing to find a path to reconciliation and peace?

The final category Jesus asks us to consider is that of what I am calling *dishonesty*, although Jesus speaks of oaths. An oath is a ritual action of swearing to honor a promise made to another person. When we swear falsely, that means we have failed to uphold our end of the bargain. In essence, we have lied in our promise by failing to deliver on it. I want to suggest here that we live in a time when honesty and truth-telling are no longer normative. People swear to tell the truth, and then they blatantly lie, whether in court, in politics, in the media, or even in communities of faith. A man's word is no longer assumed to be his honor.

Again, the *that* Jesus is speaking of is the breaking of an agreement, but the *this* is an issue of character. If we are not honest ourselves, how can we expect others to be honest with us? If we accept lies as truth and judge truth as lies, what happens to our ability to know the difference? What happens to society when telling the truth is no longer an expectation? What happens when we start to act as if there is no objective truth, no objective right or wrong, and no trust that people will honor their promises?

What Jesus is saying to his followers and to us is that we need to think about our character by concentrating on our roots. Discipleship is less a matter of what we do as it is a matter of who we are. We need to pay close attention to what is on the inside, on our thoughts and our feelings, on what is deep inside our hearts. Once we do this, and if we all do this, then *that* (murder, adultery, divorce, and other dishonorable and harmful acts) will take care of itself.

The good news is God knows we can't do *this* perfectly. We can try, and we can pray, and we can work on healing our anger through reconciliation, and we can work on our relationships by doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, and we can work on honoring our commitments. We can work on our spiritual selves. But we will surely be working on it for all our lives and continuing to make mistakes. But we need not worry. This is not the end of us because, as John Wesley put it, we are going on to perfection when our righteousness will be abounding, exceeding even that of the scribes and the Pharisees. And in the meantime, there is grace enough to carry us along, despite our human failure. Praise be to God for grace in Jesus Christ.

PLANNING NOTES

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany The Great Invitation: "This, Not That"

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

[Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)

From Moses' final sermon: There are two ways—life and prosperity or death and endless troubles. The way of life requires us to walk in God's ways and not bow down to or serve any other gods.

[Psalm 119:1-8 \(UMH 840-841\)](#)

Response 2 better fits the theme of the OT/Gospel stream today. Sing with Tone 1 in B-flat major (UMH 737).

[1 Corinthians 3:1-9](#)

Despite their spiritual riches, Christians in Corinth were still living by the flesh as cliques forming around preferred leaders. To live by the Spirit is to recognize they are God's field, God's building.

[Matthew 5:21-37](#)

"You have heard it said... but I tell you." Part I of two weeks of Rules of Relationships. This week: Overcoming sin.

Calendar Notes

The Great Invitation:

"This, Not That"

Last week, we were introduced to the righteousness that fulfills the law and prophets. On this sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, we start to see exactly what that entails, as Jesus shows us the contrast between how the law and prophets are normally interpreted on a variety of issues related to interpersonal relationships and then gives us his own.

[Black History Month](#) continues.

Today is also the recommended day to observe [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#), as the later date falls during Lent. This is **not** a day to "hand over" to the scouts for planning, nor to scouting themes. But if you have scouts in your congregation, do consider enlisting (and training!) them as ushers, acolytes, and at least one of the Scripture readers for today's service, and be sure to include the scouts in your corporate prayers today.

February

All Month [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)
February 12 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (preferred date since not during Lent)
February 20 [Presidents Day \(USA\)](#)
February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)
New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling
March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins \(USA\)](#)
March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

May

<i>All Month</i>	Christian Home Month Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
May 4	National Day of Prayer (USA)
May 5	May Friendship Day
May 8-14	Christian Family Week
May 14	Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day (USA)
May 21	Heritage Sunday
May 24	Aldersgate Day
May 25	Ascension Day
May 28	Ascension Sunday (if transferred)
May 29	Memorial Day (USA)

In This Series

We're in week three of the four-week "miniseries on the mountain." We saw in Week 1 what God is blessing, and we joined in acts of blessing and naming blessing during the following week. We got in touch with the reality that God's blessing works through us like salt and light as we pursue God's righteousness thoroughly, a righteousness we are told exceeds that of most religious leaders and that fulfills everything the law and the prophets have established. So this past week, we've sought to be such salt and light, and perhaps today we may hear or see some of the results of that either in the worship space or by other means.

In a very real way, the past two weeks have been building up or leading us to today and next week, just as this whole season has been building up to Transfiguration in three weeks.

Today

This week and next, we get down to brass tacks. What are the commandments of Christ? What does the righteousness that fulfills law and prophets actually look like?

Jesus addresses this in the form of contrasting statements. "You have heard it said... But I tell you." Or, it's this, not that. One of the ways we seek to help underline the righteousness Jesus teaches is by the way we've laid out the Scripture reading for this week and next. We place the "typical interpretation" in the back of the worship space. We locate it "back there" to emphasize what Jesus himself emphasizes: That is past. We then place the words of the teaching of Jesus in the mouths of the whole congregation, the body of Christ. This, here, among us, this is what we're called to be and do. We place explanatory words in the mouth of a reader from the Lord's Table-- perhaps the pastor? The Lord's Table is the heart of the celebration of "this holy

mystery” of Holy Communion. So it is from there we listen for unpacking the mystery and meaning of Christ’s simple, concrete teaching on our lips.

Don’t explain this to the congregation during worship. Don’t take up sermon time for it. Just do it. Write a note on Monday or later or Sunday on your Facebook page, or send out an email, or include something about it in your weekly newsletter, after the fact. Trust the ritual action to do its work, and then, shortly thereafter, explain it.

Call to Righteousness

The teaching of Jesus we hear today addresses the ways we relate to one another both emotionally and physically, whether in situations provoking anger, in terms of how we manage our sexual desire, and within the bonds of marriage. Jesus is teaching us here what a righteousness that fulfills law and prophets looks like in each of these contexts.

SIDEBAR: Divorce and Remarriage

The way the institution of marriage is structured and the role of both men and women in Western cultures, at least, have changed dramatically from those of first-century Palestinian Judaism, so the churches in these cultures have taken a path that seeks to honor the heart of the teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage (we allow for them, and seek the fullest healing and justice for all parties involved) ,though not following the absolute prohibition on divorce and remarriage unless other sexual sin was involved “to the jot and tittle.”

End Sidebar

We offer as a response to the preached word today an opportunity to commit or commit more deeply to the way of righteousness in our own relationships. For those of us who’ve spent any time on social media at all, we know how easy it is to move from anger to contempt, not just for others, but for ourselves. We have work to do here. We are surrounded and bombarded by messages all the time that hijack our sexual desires to associate them with products, or even (if you have to check your spam filter) just flat out invite us to have sex with others to whom we are not married, either online or in person. Per a BBC report in 2013, a reliable estimate is that 14 percent of searches are for pornographic materials and four percent of all websites are for pornography (<http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-23030090>). Faced with such constant bombardment, which – short of disconnecting from all media – may be nearly impossible to “cut off,” some of us, like former President Jimmy Carter, struggle with committing adultery in our hearts. And though divorce rates have generally been declining in the US since at least 2000 (per CDC stats, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm), as of 2014, the percentage of divorces versus marriages per capita (rate per 1000) was still 46 percent. All sorts of personal failures in righteousness account for failures in marriage longevity. Even if we are married and haven’t divorced, our relationship within the marriage may not be all it could or should be. We have work to do.

A call to righteousness gives us an opportunity to recognize the work we have to do in any of these three areas, to name it, and to seek the prayers of others to help us do this better.

Consider in your planning team how best to organize this for worship today. You know your setting and who can be trusted to handle requests people may speak confidentially. If you do this, be sure that lines are not long. This probably means setting up multiple prayer stations, either with people who will pray on the spot, or places where prayer requests may be collected for later review by a trusted pastoral care team if it's not possible to place enough trusted people at stations.

Plan for each person to receive thirty seconds to a minute of personal attention if you have stations. Keep in mind that not everyone will come forward for prayer. In a congregation of one hundred, maybe twenty will do so. Many others may simply keep a written record of their prayer request and handle it more privately. Still, if this whole action is to take five minutes, you should plan for at least four stations to cover twenty people in that time frame. Alternately, you may simply invite those who wish to come forward to pray to come to a prayer rail or pray at their seats.

However you handle this, frame this as good news. It truly is. We can live more righteous lives than we do. We can have better relationships. This is God's desire for each and every one of us. And the church, Christ's body, is here to help that happen for everyone. We're not alone in this. We are accompanied by the Holy Spirit and a community of healing, strengthening love.

For the Week Ahead

Continue social media and other contacts with your folks throughout the week prompting them to take one step-- just one step-- in the direction of greater righteousness in these three areas in their lives. And encourage folks to share the step they've taken, and what has happened because they did. Gather these and include them (without names!) in displays for worship next Sunday as a means of encouraging the whole body to keep on.

This is also the recommended day for observing Scouting Sunday. The other possible date is during Lent. Two dates are chosen each year with the intention that one may not fall during Lent, depending on the calendar.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany](#)
[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Ireland, United Kingdom

February 19 (7th) And Now Your Reward
Matthew 5:38-48

THE GREAT INVITATION WEEK 7

And Now Your Reward

Music Notes
Preaching Notes
Worship Notes

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

“God’s Children” [Aaron Niequist and A New Liturgy](#)
([Teaching video – God’s Children Live at Willow Creek](#))
“O Fount of Love” Matt Boswell and Matt Papa [CCLI# 5760323](#)

OR

“Jesus, United by Thy Grace” UMH 561
“Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” UMH 432

Prayer of Illumination

Readers move into place during this prayer.

[We Would See Jesus](#), st 3, alt. (Unison speaking, instruments in background)

**We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching,
with his disciples listening, gathered round,
while birds and flowers and sky above are preaching
the blessedness which simple trust has found.**

So open our eyes and our ears
and all our senses,
and shine in our hearts
filled by your love
**that we may know your Word
and live your righteousness
and follow where you lead. Amen.**

Instrumental music continues in held chords during the reading that follows

WORD AND RESPONSE

Reader 1 (from the lectern):

You have heard that it was said,

Reader 2: (from the back of the worship space)

An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

Reader 1: But I say to you,

Congregation:

Do not stand your ground against the evildoer.

Left side:

But if anyone raps you on the right cheek,

Right side:

turn to them also the other one.

Left side:

**And to anyone who wants to take you to court
and take away your robe,**

Right side:

release also your undergarment.

Left side:

And whoever forces you to walk and carry their load one mile,

Right side:

go with them two.

All:

**Give to anyone begging from you,
and if anyone wants to borrow from you
do not turn them away.**

Reader 3: (from the Lord's Table)

And so you shall be perfect, as my heavenly father is perfect.

Reader 1:

You have heard that it was said,

Reader 2:

Love your neighbor,

and hate your enemy.

Reader 1:
But I say to you,

Congregation:
Love your enemies,
and pray for those who are hunting you down.

Reader 3:
Then you'll be children of your heavenly father,
the One who makes his sun to shine on the wicked and the good
and sends rain upon the just and the unjust.

For if you love those who love you,
what reward do you have?
Don't the tax collectors do the same thing?
And if you welcome only our own people,
what have you done above anyone else?
Don't all the people who aren't our people do the same thing?

Congregation:
So be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.

Song of Response (Choir or Ensemble) "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart," st 5 (alt.)
UMH 500

Teach us to cherish enemies with love,
One holy passion filling all our frame;
The kindling of the heav'n-descended dove,
Our hearts the altar, and thy love the flame.

Sermon

And Now Your Reward!

Call to Perfection in Love

See planning notes for more details.

Song: "Perfect Us in Love" (Charles Wesley, arr. Taylor Burton-Edwards © 2016 GBOD) Tune:
UMH 561 (without refrain) or PERFECT US ([Link-- Tune: Taylor Burton-Edwards, © 2016
Discipleship Ministries](#))

Help us to build each other up,
Our little stock improve.
Increase our faith, confirm our hope,

And perfect us in love.

*Perfect us in love,
Perfect us in love,
Come, Holy Spirit, dwell in us,
And perfect us in love.*

Still let us own our common Lord,
And bear thine easy yoke,
A band of love, a threefold cord,
Which never can be broke.

*Perfect us in love,
Perfect us in love,
Come, Holy Spirit, dwell in us,
And perfect us in love.*

Grant this, and then from all below
Insensibly remove:
Our souls the change shall scarcely know,
Made perfect first in love.

*Perfect us in love,
Perfect us in love,
Come, Holy Spirit, dwell in us,
And perfect us in love.*

Yet, when the fullest joy is given,
The same delight we prove,
In earth, in paradise, in heaven,
Our all in all is love.

*Perfect us in love,
Perfect us in love,
Come, Holy Spirit, dwell in us,
And perfect us in love.*

Prayers of the People

Filled with the Spirit's love and power, let us pray to our God:

O God, let your rains fall!

With the just and the unjust, those who seek to build peace, (including our President, *Name*, and all past presidents of our nation), and those who tear it down:

The leader or congregation may name persons silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With the wicked and the good, those who waste their lives, and those who invest their lives wisely:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With our enemies and our friends, those who seek to harm us, and those who build us up:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With the cruel and the kind, those who delight to harm others, and those who seek their welfare:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With the fearful and the courageous, those who shrink from needed action, and those who take it:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With outcasts and those who cast them out, those who need mercy and those who deny it:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With those who give and those who hoard for themselves, those who share and those who steal:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With those who conserve and those who pillage the earth, those who sustain life and those whose actions threaten life for all:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With all who need and give your healing grace to others, and with those who make the lives of others miserable, those who weep now, and those who laugh at them:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With all who run, or walk, or sit, or lie down, or move no more, the newborn, the living, the dying, and the dead:

The leader or congregation may name people silently or aloud

O God, let your rains fall.

With all of us, sinners in your sight:
The people may confess their sins in silence.

THANKSGIVING

Pastor:

New every morning are God's mercies.
Abundant is God's grace.
Perfect is God's love for us, one and all.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God! Amen!

Pastor: The peace of Christ be always with you.

People: And also with you.

The people exchange the peace of Christ.

The offering is collected.

Offertory Music

"You Are Holy" ("Eres Santo") Per Harling (*Global Praise* 3,
40 or *Glory to God*, 596)

"I Thank You, Jesus" (*Africana Hymnal*, 4079)

*If Holy Communion is celebrated, use the Great Thanksgiving and Prayer of Thanksgiving after
Communion from Word and Table I.*

SENDING FORTH

Song of Sending

"We Would See Jesus"

Deacon or Pastor:

Love is the way.
Love for all, everywhere, always.
God is love.

So go forth in the love of God,
with the blessing of Jesus,
and the strength of the Spirit,
and be made perfect in love.

Reprise of "You are Holy" or "I Thank You Jesus"

MUSIC NOTES

God's Children

Aaron Niequist has written an interesting song that can cross contexts, although it is primarily what could be considered a modern worship song with band accompaniment. If using the score from the link provided, make note--if each phrase is to contain four measures as in the video, there is an error in the score. At the beginning, the Gsus chord lasts two measures, and the Em lasts only one. The Em should be played through two complete bars, thus making a four-measure phrase. Also, the range on this particular song is questionable because there are so many sustained high Es. I would recommend singing this in F to make those notes more accessible for your congregation. The words and message of this song are very poignant, so with these changes, this could be a great song for your worship.

O Fount of Love

"O Fount of Love" is a strophic, hymn-like modern song that is written very much in the same style as songs of Keith and Kristyn Getty. This atonement hymn contains very singable stanzas with a most reflective text that could be used many times throughout the year, including Holy Week and Christ the King Sunday. When you download the song file from CCLI SongSelect, there is much more music on the page than you might need. All the extra instrumental accompaniment sections are included, but if you feel the need to sing only the stanzas straight through and avoid the instrumental sections, that is perfectly acceptable! Remember this is what is often referred to as a "blood" hymn, and it may require some extra explanation for those attending your church for the first time. (For those who have never been to church, singing graphic songs about blood can be somewhat horrifying.) Be empowered in knowing that explaining the setting of the song in a worshipful way is welcomed in worship. Although it does get a little low in places, the range is good for congregations, so I recommend the key of Bb. Accompaniment possibilities include organ, piano, and guitar. Keep the accompaniment minimal to enhance the reverence within the textual imagery.

Jesus, United by Thy Grace

Charles Wesley crafted a hymn of Christian fellowship that, in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, includes six of the original twenty-nine stanzas. Wesley's point of being held together is reinforced by his imagery of the lodestone, which is a naturally occurring magnet. He includes such text as "united," "ever toward each other move," "ever move toward thee," "inseparably joined," "cleave," and "bond" to support the hymn's theme of connectedness with God and one another. Each stanza moves toward the end of the hymn, when we encounter "the bond of perfectness," which is one of the defining characteristics of Wesleyan theology: being made perfect in love. ST. AGNES is a beautiful tune, but I would encourage singing it with more of a 3/8 feel in order to keep the tempo moving forward. This would also require holding the dotted half notes in measures 7 and 14 for one extra measure to avoid surprising the congregation and making the phrases feel short. Even though this hymn is in common meter (CM), there are not many tunes that are suitable for the text because this is one of the few CM hymns in our hymnal that begin on an accented syllable. Take this as an opportunity to teach the tune if your congregation does not know it.

Jesu, Jesu

I have found this to be one of the most singable hymns in our United Methodist collections because of the lilting nature of the tune, the key, and the possibilities for accompaniment. A hymn that models the kingdom of God by recalling the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet from John 13, "Jesu, Jesu," calls us all to serve one another in love and humility. Pronunciation of the word "Jesu" is *Yeh-soo*. Accompaniment can vary on this hymn depending on the context, but I have found one of the best approaches by using fingerpicked arpeggios on a guitar with very light percussion (shakers, bongos, or a conga). This is also easily learned by a choir; sing the refrain in unison or four parts, and on the stanzas have sopranos, tenors, and basses sing the melody with the altos on the harmony a third below. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-jesu-jesu-fill-us-with-your-love>

We Would See Jesus

Our recommendation with the use of this resource (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>) this week is to speak the words of stanza 3 while the instruments accompany underneath. The use of a folk ensemble (guitars, mandolin, fiddle, etc.) can go a long way in helping this become a heart song of the congregation. Later in the service, we encourage you to sing the hymn in its entirety with the folk ensemble described above. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-we-would-see-guides-us-from-nativity-to-epiphany>

Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart

In this worship service, we recommend singing stanza 5 only as a response to the Scripture reading. This stanza expresses the sentiment of a prayer to help refine and make us perfect: "Teach me to love thee... one holy passion filling all my frame." The prayer is that God would continually work in us that love might consume us and be our only desire. MORECAMBE is a beautiful tune that your congregation should know, especially in its musical passion in the last two lines as it moves to the climax at the beginning of the final line. However, if your church is not familiar with this tune, another option would be to use the tune FINLANDIA ("Be Still My Soul," "This Is My Song,"), and sing the last two lines twice to complete the stanza for that tune.

Perfect Us in Love

This Charles Wesley text has its roots in the *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), but the opening stanza of this setting by Taylor Burton-Edwards has often been overlooked in hymnals because of a syllabic issue in the fourth line related to the word "perfect." We have found a way to work through this and present it to you here as a lead sheet, with a choice of either using the tune ST. AGNES (without the refrain composed by Taylor) or the new tune PERFECT US. This hymn can serve as a wonderful prayer related to sanctification and the journey toward Christian perfection. Accompany with a piano, guitar, or small instrumental ensemble. Be sure not to make the accompaniment too complex, or the gracefulness found in its simplicity will be

muddled. The ideal key is D. The refrain alone would also make a great prayer response for your church, regardless of style of worship.

You Are Holy

You might not think you would encounter a great Brazilian *bossa nova* by a Swedish composer in the ever-growing repertoire of congregational song, but Per Harling has written one of the most enjoyable songs in this style you will encounter when singing praise to God. This hymn has two parts--A and B sections--that are built over the same chord progression and can be sung simultaneously. However, I recommend singing the entire hymn through at least once before trying this. If you have a choir, simply divide them in a two-part arrangement (men and women, SB and AT, ST and AB, etc.) to help support the work of the congregation. Accompaniment can be varied, but piano and/or guitar should not double the melody. They should be played rhythmically, along with light percussion and a bass instrument (double bass, electric bass, etc.). A flute played one octave higher is the recommended instrument to double the voice in this piece. God is holy, so let the overall tempo and feel inspire you to move with the leading of the Spirit!

I Thank You, Jesus

This song from *The Africana Hymnal* can also be found in *Worship & Song* (3037) and is sure to be a congregational favorite, no matter what the church. A choir goes a long way on this by being able to offer the rocking choral parts along with the melody. If a choir is not available, however, don't worry. The piano and any other accompanying instruments, which can go to a full band, will be able to support the overall spirit of the hymn well, and the hymn is very singable (and unforgettable). I suggest a tempo of 84 (per dotted quarter note in 12/8) as comfortable, accessible, and stylistically appropriate.

Other Suggested Hymns for The Great Invitation, Week 7:

"Christ Has Broken Down the Wall"	W&S 3122
"There's a Spirit of Love in This Place"	W&S 3148
"Help Us Accept Each Other"	UMH 560

PREACHING NOTES

As we begin to wind down this series, we come to one of the most difficult and important teachings that our Lord has for us. I feel grateful to God this morning for bringing inspiration in the form of pain. I pray that as I share my own grief with you that my words will bring you courage and strength to not just hear Jesus' call for us all, but to find ways to be vulnerable and honest with the people with whom God has brought you into relationship and called you to serve. Sometimes as preachers, we have to put our own hard truths and struggles out there to illuminate a path of healing for others.

I was struck this morning reading my colleague Taylor Burton-Edwards's words in his Worship Planning Notes on this passage. Taylor wrote,

There is no reward either in loving those who love you already (Matthew 5:46) or in taking even proportionally limited revenge against someone who has harmed you (Matthew 5:38 ff.). Both reflect an imperfect righteousness, the righteousness of this world, this age, even the righteousness of the best of the religious people in Jesus' day. He calls us to a righteousness beyond that. Living out of that righteousness does generate real reward.

Yesterday I learned through Facebook that a person I used to know had died. As I read the witnesses to the ministry of this man, and the celebrations of his life, and the heartfelt words of grief, I found myself in a difficult position. While I, too, celebrate the accomplishments of this man, at the same time, I grieved for what he took from my life.

Like so many other women, I have found this election season difficult as I have witnessed a number of women from both sides of the presidential race step forward to share that they had been sexually abused in the past. Whether or not the abuse was years and years ago or more recent, or whether the women had told someone or not, or whether or not the abuse was documented in a way that would hold up in a court of law, the fact that these women took the risk to come forward and speak their hard truths aloud, voluntarily putting themselves in harm's way for all kinds of unwanted attention, accusations, and potential lawsuits, really struck a chord with not just me, but many women. I don't believe that any of these courageous women did it for notoriety. They came forward because they believed it was the right thing to do. The experiences these women shared brought to the fore my own experience as a young and vulnerable woman who was taken advantage of by a repeat sexual predator. For the last two months, these feelings have been bubbling just below the surface of my consciousness.

The truth is, I don't want to think about what happened to me all those years ago. (I suspect the same is true for others who have experienced sexual harassment of any sort.) I don't want to be reminded of it. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to tell people about it. And most of all, I don't want to deal with the feelings of anger and shame and resentment that emerge when I am forced to remember. I would rather just leave my experience in the distant past and spend my time enjoying the wonder of my present, in which I am happily married to a loving and kind and generous man.

But alas, this election season had already had the unfortunate effect of reminding me of this man. And now he has died. I am unable at this point to avoid dealing with my feelings. They are flowing out of me like a waterfall that cannot be stopped, even as my own tears of grief are flowing down my face as I write these words.

I am angry, and I don't want to turn the other cheek. I want revenge. To use my colleague's words, right now I am sorely tempted to take "proportionally limited revenge against someone

who has harmed” me. More than anything, I want to tell these people who are celebrating the life of this man and sharing their stories about the profound meaning that his ministry brought to their lives, that like everyone else in this world, he was not perfect. In my experience he was an evildoer. He not only struggled with some mighty demons, but he brought those demons to bear on others.

But alas, my colleague, and Jesus, are both right. My desire for revenge is but an unpleasant reminder of my own imperfect righteousness and the righteousness of this world, this age, and even the righteousness of the best (and the worst) religious people of our day.

Jesus is calling me, and you, and all of us who would call ourselves his disciples, to move beyond *that* way of responding. Because a righteousness that only involves loving those who are easy to love, while at the same time feeling hatred and wishing vengeance upon a person who has brought us harm, will not generate a real or lasting reward, nor will it generate a real or lasting society. Seeking revenge will not satisfy my longing for the innocence I once enjoyed. It will not bring justice. It will only bring more harm, especially to those for whom this man’s ministry really was a Godsend.

I know the reward I seek is much greater than any temporary reward that would come from tarnishing someone’s legacy. But I have to say, today it doesn’t feel like much of a reward.

And yet, I know in my heart that it is the ultimate reward.

I simply cannot say it better than Jason Byassee, writing in *Feasting on the Word*:

We are called here to love as God loves. This cannot be done out of our own resources. So this is no admonition to try harder—if it were, it would indeed be recipe for despair. It is a plan of action rooted in the promise to be made "children of your Father in heaven" (v. 45). The Sermon here and elsewhere is a *portrait of the very heart of God*, one who loves the unlovable, comes among us in Christ, suffers our worst, and rises to forgive us. Turn the cheek, give the cloak, go another mile, lend, love the enemy—because that is how God loves. If you want to follow this God, fleshed in Jesus, you will be adopted into a life in which you find yourself loving this way before you know what you are doing. ("Theological Perspective" on the Gospel reading for the Seventh Sunday after Epiphany in [*Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*](#). Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 382. *Italics mine.*)

It is not easy, this being a disciple of Jesus thing. It would be easier, and perhaps even feel more satisfying, at least in the moment, to live by the saying, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." But I believe, I really believe, that this is the better way. It is the only way.

For me, Jesus is not some character in a story. He is not a sage from the past. He is not a wise and important teacher. He is my Savior. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of the Living God. And so, not only do I believe him when he says that seeking the reward of my Heavenly Father is

worth more than any temporary human feeling of worldly satisfaction, but I believe that the really difficult teachings like this one give us a portrait of the very heart of God.

BEGIN SIDEBAR

The key to evangelism is being able to talk in your own words about why Jesus speaks good news for you personally. I have shared above some of my core beliefs about why I believe Jesus and follow him. It is our hope that you will find a way to not only share your own, deeply personal, beliefs about why you hear good news in Jesus' words, but also encourage each of your members to work on his or her own faith sharing.

Where do you personally hear good news in this passage? What about this news is good? How is it transformational for your thinking and living?

END SIDEBAR

My friends, *this*, not that, is what God wants for me, and for you, and for this world that God has created.

I seek a kind of healing that can be accomplished only by the hands of the one who made me. I know I can't do it on my own. I can't generate the healing I need. Healing can come only by way of the paths Jesus has laid out: forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation. I can't do this for myself, and I can't get there on my own any more than I can be perfect in my own righteousness. But God can show me the path to healing, and God can make what is imperfect in me more perfect, just as God can heal you and make you more perfect. God can bring true, deep healing to anyone and anything. That is the true miracle, the true reward.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that his way comes from the very heart of the God who made us, and who knows each one of us to the core. It comes from the God who has counted and knows the number of hairs on each one of our heads. It comes from the God who loves the unlovable, and who makes the sun rise on both the righteous and the unrighteous, and who sends the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike.

I am not saying that predators should not be brought to justice. But I am saying that becoming fixated on anger and pain and a desire for retribution is not a path to healing for victims. It is not a way to finding a peace that is lasting. I believe with my whole heart that Jesus is right about that.

Jesus Christ IS the way and the truth and the light. He is the only way for me. He is the way forward today and the way to everlasting life. And I'm going to follow him and trust in him and know that the reward in heaven that we will all one day receive will indeed be great— greater than any of us can imagine.

PLANNING NOTES
Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
The Great Invitation: “And Now Your Reward”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

[Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18](#)

Social holiness defined— loving your neighbor, whatever their condition, as you love yourself.

[Psalm 119:33-40 \(UMH 841-842\)](#)

Response 2 again fits best with the theme of the OT/Gospel stream today. Sing with Tone 1 in B-flat major (UMH 737).

[1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23](#)

Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth they are the temple of God. They are to honor their bodies as God has made them and be grateful for all leaders who lay or build on the foundation of Christ.

[Matthew 5:38-48](#)

"You have heard it said... but I tell you," Part 2! The nearing of the kingdom of God means we are to (and now can!) treat those who harm us, oppressors and enemies very differently than we may have been trained.

Calendar Notes

**The Great Invitation:
“And Now Your Reward”**

We conclude our time in the Sermon on the Mount today with a deeply Wesleyan focus. Our reward is being made perfect in love as we learn to love even our enemies.

Black History Month continues.

Presidents Day (USA) is tomorrow. You may wish to include a prayer for the sitting president (*by name*) and for all past presidents in your intercessions today.

Next Sunday is The Feast of the [Transfiguration of the Lord](#), the conclusion of this series, and the segue into Lent. Be sure to start announcing your Lenten Series (ours is called “Living Your Baptismal Calling”) and inviting participation in this season of deep formation in the way of Christ.

February

All Month [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)

February 20 [Presidents Day \(USA\)](#)

February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)

New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins \(USA\)](#)

March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9 [Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday

April 13 [Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14 [Good Friday](#)

April 15 [Holy Saturday \(Full Twitter script with audio links\) #holysat17](#)

[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16 [Easter Sunday](#)

April 23 [Festival of God's Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25 [World Malaria Day](#)

April 30 [Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

May

All Month [Christian Home Month](#)

[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)

May 4 [National Day of Prayer \(USA\)](#)

May 5 [May Friendship Day](#)

May 8-14 [Christian Family Week](#)

May 14 [Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day \(USA\)](#)

May 21 [Heritage Sunday](#)

May 24 [Aldersgate Day](#)

May 25 [Ascension Day](#)

May 28 [Ascension Sunday \(if transferred\)](#)

May 29 [Memorial Day \(USA\)](#)

In This Series

We're at the conclusion of the four weeks of teaching on the mountain, and next week we go with Jesus, Peter, James, and John to another mountain for the series wrap (Transfiguration) and segue into Ash Wednesday and Lent. That service forms the other bookend of this series and season, begun by Baptism of the Lord. So through this season we have seen the journey of the Christian life, from new birth to resurrection with Christ in the new creation. And, if we've been doing the core evangelistic work of this season, we've invited others to join us in exploring what this life could be for them, should they choose to join us in preparing for it or deepening our disciplines in it during Lent.

Today: And Now Your Reward

This week concludes the “This, Not That” teaching begun last week, and then focuses on the reward of righteousness as God’s kingdom defines it here and now. We use the latter in this service as a lens for the former. That’s why verse 48 is placed in the reading we have provided twice, in two slightly different translations.

There is no reward either in loving those who love you already (Matthew 5:46) or in taking even proportionally limited revenge against someone who has harmed you (Matthew 5:38 ff.). Both reflect an imperfect righteousness, the righteousness of this world, this age, even the righteousness of the best of the religious people in Jesus’ day. He calls us to a righteousness beyond that. Living out of that righteousness does generate real reward.

The chief reward is the possibility of perfection, and specifically, as the Wesleys put it, perfection in love in this life. Love everyone. Specifically, be able to love persecutors and enemies. Love all. Bless all. That is the chief reward. And it generates many more.

Call to Perfection

The primary action we’ve “scripted” as a response to the word today is the singing of a Charles Wesley text, a mashup, actually, of two different hymns (“Try Us, O God,” and “Jesus, United by Thy Grace”). The text calls on God to continue the work of perfecting us in love and dedicates the gathered assembly to continue to pursue such love and righteousness in our own lives. You may wish to add other actions to the singing of this hymn. You may invite people to come forward for prayer with the pastor and other leaders as the congregation sings. You may invite people to kneel where they are as they sing it. Or you may have a choir or ensemble sing the verses and the congregation join in the refrain. And during the verses, you might ask the congregation to identify, write down, and pray for one or a number of people whom they are struggling most to love. You may then encourage people to share their list with at one or two other people this week as prayer partners.

You and your planning team know your congregation. You know what they are best prepared to do and what may be too much of a stretch. Seek a slight stretch in what you choose.

For the Coming Week

Keep the call to perfection in love going throughout the week through social media, email, on your website, or through other means. And, once again, elicit testimonies of what happens as people pray for those with whom they have struggled. Becoming perfected in love is fully imaged in our celebration next week of the transfiguration of Jesus. Find ways to share some of the testimonies you collect as part of worship or in the worship space (or nearby) next Sunday.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Seventh Sunday after Epiphany](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands

February 26 (Transfiguration) SHINE!

[Matthew 17:1-9](#)

**THE GREAT INVITATION
WEEK 8**

SHINE!

**Music Notes
Preaching Notes
Worship Notes**

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

“Shine”

Matt Redman [CCLI# 4831435](#)

OR

“O Wondrous Sight! O Vision Fair“

UMH 258

“Shine, Jesus, Shine“

TFWS 2173

Prayer of Illumination

“Transfiguration” UMH 259

OR

[We Would See Jesus](#) (Transfiguration)

**We would see Jesus on the mountain, shining,
Radiant in glory and ablaze with power,
Talking with Moses and Elijah beaming;
Come Holy Spirit, and fill us this hour.**

So open our eyes and our ears
and all our senses,
and shine in our hearts
filled by your love

**that we may know your Word
and live your righteousness
and follow where you lead. Amen.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

Reading

[Matthew 17:1-9](#) (pause for silence after verse 6)

Sermon

Shine!

Call to Continue the Journey

“Set a Fire”

Will Reagan [CCLI # 5911299](#)

OR “Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory” TFWS 2102 (Alt. Tune: NETTLETON, UMH 400)

Prayers of the People

Leader: We have seen Jesus, dazzling in glory. We have heard the voice of God, calling us to listen to him. And we have been terrified.

But Jesus has come and touched us, and told us, “Get up! Be not afraid.”

We may not be able to explain what we’ve seen and heard to others.

But we know the voice of the one who calls us.

And part of his call to us is to pray.

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Leader: For all who are terrified today, for whatever reason: illness, oppression, abuse, war, other threats of violence against themselves or those they love:

People: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Leader: For all who are rejoicing today, for whatever reason: birth, health, friendship, love blossoming, joy unspeakable in your presence:

People: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Leader: With all who hunger, and all who seek to feed them; with all who need medical attention, and all who provide it; with the good earth, and all who work with soil and water to provide the food we eat.

All: Give us this day our daily bread.

Leader: With all who have wronged us personally, or wronged our nation, or our people, or the earth, or other creatures, or anyone we know or love:

All: And forgive us our trespasses, and we forgive those who trespass against us.

Leader: With all whose lives are a constant trial, and those whose actions or inaction cause or fail to help them:

All: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Leader: With all among us who have today committed to learn to follow in your way in the weeks ahead, or learn to follow you more nearly, and with all of us who will accompany one another in this journey, we lift our prayers and praise:

All: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

Pastor or Deacon

Christ our Lord, shining in glory
yet stooping to come and touch us,
frightened and confused as we may be,
invites to his table
all who love him,
all who will listen to his voice,
earnestly repent of their sin,
and seek to live in peace with one another.

Therefore, let us confess our sin to God:

Confession, Pardon, and Peace (*Pastor*)

[UMH 8](#)

Offering

“We Are Marching in the Light of God”

TFWS 2235b

The Great Thanksgiving

Pastor and people

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessed are you, Source of Life and Light,
Praise is yours, Summit of all creation,
Mysterious Love beyond all measure.

You called all worlds into being,
Created and made covenant with your people,
gifting us with breath and freedom.

Through commandment, prophecy and revelation
you call us to worship you with all our being,
heart and mind, body and soul.

And so, with all your creatures on earth
and with all the hosts of heaven,
we join in singing their unending hymn,

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might;
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy is your Name
and blessed is your Anointed One, Jesus,
who appeared on the mount with Moses and Elijah,
dazzling his disciples in resurrection glory,
in the midst of confusion and fear,
saying "Be not afraid!"

Holy is the One who healed the sick,
restored the sightless, fed the hungry,
ate with sinners, gave life to the dead,
and preached the Rule and Reign of God.

Through his suffering, death and resurrection
You delivered the faithful from slavery to sin and death
and made a new covenant by water and the Holy Spirit,
in which the church was given birth.

On the night he was delivered to death,
at table with those who would desert him,
Jesus took bread,
gave you thanks and praise,
broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying,
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

When supper was over he took the cup,
gave thanks and praise, and said,
"Drink from this, all of you;

this is my blood of the new covenant
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
For the remembrance of me.”

So, in remembrance of all your mighty acts
in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves as a holy, living sacrifice,
in union with Christ’s self-giving for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died; Christ is risen;
Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us
gathered out of love for you,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Be for us Christ’s life-giving body and blood
signs of your incarnate Glory.

So the church cries:

Come, Holy Spirit!

So the church shouts:

Come, Holy Spirit!

So the church pleads:

Come Holy Spirit!

Guard our unity in Christ.
Empower our ministry to all the world.
Keep us and your churches awake until
Christ comes in final glory
when all will feast at his table,
and all manner of thing be well.

Through your beloved child,
Jesus Christ, with your Holy Spirit
All honor and glory is yours,
Ever-living God,
Here, now, and always.

Amen.

The pastor breaks the bread in silence, then begins to serve the servers and the people.

Music During Communion

“Shine on Us”

“We Have Come at Christ’s Own Bidding”

[CCLI # 1754646](#)

TFWS 2103

Thanksgiving after Communion

Leader: Let us pray.

**Source and Ending of all,
thank you for giving yourself to us
in this holy mystery,
You have come to us,
and touched us,
and quelled our fear.
Bid us again to get up,
and we will go
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others
in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The Transition to Lent

Simple instrumental of “Lord, Who Throughout These 40 Days” plays in the background as the paraments and graphics are changed from white or gold to purple and the pastor or deacon continues with the Sending Forth and Invitation to Lent.

SENDING FORTH

Pastor or Deacon

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:
the early Christians observed with great devotion
the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection,
and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration
there should be a forty–day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins
and had separated themselves from the community of faith
were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness,
and restored to participation in the life of the Church.
In this way the whole congregation was reminded
of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ
and the need we all have to renew our faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church,
to observe a holy Lent:

by self-examination and repentance;
by prayer, fasting, and self-denial;
by living the vows of the baptismal covenant,
and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

Song of Sending

"Lord, Who throughout These Forty Days"

UMH 269, st 1-4

Dismissal with Blessing

We are headed toward transfiguration in Christ!
Keep shining!
And go forth to walk in his way
to that glory. **Amen.**

"Lord, Who throughout These Forty Days"

UMH 269, st 5

Postlude

"Beautiful Things" (Gungor) [CCLI #5665521](#)

MUSIC NOTES

Shine

Matt Redman has crafted a new hymn that radiates light as much as the Scripture does this week with the Transfiguration. We decided to use this as the opening of worship at our first Fusion conference (*Fusion: The Future of Worship in The United Methodist Church*) in 2016, and it served as a beautiful expression related to this scriptural narrative. The words, "living for your glory," seem to point to our response to the story of Jesus bathed in light on the mountain. The song in its entirety is singable, but if it is unfamiliar to your congregation, you might want to teach them the refrain and instruct them to sing it only. The worship leader, choir, or soloists can sing the stanzas. Accompaniment can be as simple as piano or guitar, but this song will truly shine when played with a full band. The ideal key is G.

O Wondrous Sight! O Vision Fair

One of the classic hymns on the Transfiguration, this selection recalls the narrative from Matthew 17. Be sure to keep the tempo lively for this tune with strong emphasis on the first beat of each measure, no matter the instrumental accompaniment. It was obviously scored for four-part singing and keyboard, but I have also composed a new setting of this hymn that uses the existing tune, WAREHAM, with a refrain to be sung between stanzas:

*O wondrous sight! O vision fair,
Your brightness casts a holy glare.
Upon the mount, we find you there;
Dispel the darkness everywhere.*

Click this link for the file: [INSERT LINK HERE](#) Instrumental accompaniment for this setting can vary, but a strong, pulsing acoustic guitar would be able to drive the rhythm boldly. The ideal

key for the new setting is as printed: the key of G. History of Hymns:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-wondrous-sight-o-vision-fair>

Shine, Jesus, Shine

Graham Kendrick may have never known just how popular this song would become in the global church, but it has been printed far and wide as an illustration of the brightness of Christ's glory. The most poignant text may be found in the line, "Ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here our lives tell your story." We are invited into the story of Jesus and to reflect Christ's light to others as a part of the continuing story of God's people. This song is set in a way that can be accompanied by piano, guitar, full band, or other ensemble. The tempo must be lively, but take care not to go too fast, lest the second part of each stanza become unwieldy with the amount of syllables and notes in each phrase. Breathing and pronunciation can both become an issue if the song is too fast. The ideal key is A. Anything lower risks making the voices pressed and heavy because of the low *tessitura* (average range) of the stanzas. History of Hymns: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-shine-jesus-shine>

We Would See Jesus

This week's rendition of the hymn during the Prayer of Illumination contains an added stanza by Taylor Burton-Edwards that specifically addresses the Transfiguration and completes its use throughout this season after Pentecost. Continue to use this file--

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/we-would-see-jesus>--with folk ensemble to bring new light to a hymn from *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Set a Fire

I tend to think of this modern worship song as a recent expression of sung contemplative prayer. Found in the CCLI Top 100 in 2015, this was rated by our team of scholars and practitioners in the CCLI Top 100 Project (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/ccli-top-100>), and some found it to be strongly Wesleyan. It evokes the sentiment of John Wesley's own heartwarming experience and is simple enough that no music or words are needed for the congregation. Simply singing it enough times in repetition (as you would a song in the manner of the Taizé community) will be a means to teach it to your congregation. The entire melody is within four notes, so a variety of keys can be chosen, depending on the liturgical action in which the song is used. A good starting place would be the key of G.

Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory

In an interesting hymn that moves us from Transfiguration to Christian perfection, Thomas Troeger gives a vivid recounting of the story from the mountain. The hymn moves us from building our own shrine in worship within the church into the world, where we live day-to-day by following Christ. While there are numerous choices for a hymn tune for this meter (87.87 D), a couple of choices are GENEVA, which is already contained in *The Faith We Sing*, or NETTLETON (commonly associated with "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"). Geneva is a fairly traditional hymn tune setting best accompanied by organ or piano, but NETTLETON may open some more possibilities with a band or ensemble.

We Are Marching in the Light of God

This South African song is of great importance to the people of South Africa and around the world who stand for justice in the world. Marching in the light of God requires boldness and action, and this song continues the pivot presented in the last hymn, directing the attention toward moving from the mountain of the Transfiguration and into the world. This hymn contains lively rhythm, but it is supported well by choral parts that work quite easily with a choir. Supplement with djembe, shakers, and any variety of instruments, from piano and guitar, to supporting wind instruments. Invite the congregation to join in, or offer this as a special piece from a choir or vocal ensemble.

Shine on Us

Deborah D. and Michael W. Smith wrote this classic that addresses the brightness of the glory of God in a prayer-like setting that draws us near to God's light, directing it to our path as we journey through the darkness. This song also makes a wonderful song of dedication for those who share testimony in worship. The choral sheet on CCLI lists this in the original key of C, but it can also work in D. Accompany with piano, guitar, or band.

We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding

Reflection on this Scripture would not be complete without this hymn by contemporary hymn writer Carl P. Daw. Sing it with the prayer that "our daily lives may prove us people of the God we bless." The tune HYFRYDOL is used with this hymn in *The Faith We Sing*, but just as mentioned earlier, the 87.87 D meter opens it up to a number of other options as well. Be especially thoughtful in your consideration of tunes, however. Notice that the first phrase of the hymn addresses a "high and holy place." The use of a familiar tune like BEACH SPRING might not be the best choice here because the music doesn't support the image of a "high and holy place" (the melody drops considerably lower on this phrase). NETTLETON, EBENEZER, or BEECHER might be better options to elevate the congregation's perception of the mountain described throughout this service.

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

We have left the mountain, and we are beginning the move toward the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday will follow this service, and this song and the liturgy surrounding it serve as connection points to move us forward to a time when we will be formed as part of the Lenten journey. LAND OF REST is a brilliant American folk melody, and it would be best accompanied here by a simple accompaniment of piano or arpeggiated guitar alone. There is almost a longing tone to the tune, so be sure to use a gentle, rocking tempo. This is possible in a slower 6/4 or a quicker pace like a 6/8.

Beautiful Things

Moving into Lent, this is a good time for people to hear the good news that God makes "beautiful things out of the dust... out of us." The simplicity of the tune longs for a simple accompaniment as well. If you are familiar with Gungor's original recording, you will note that it begins with a piano, guitar, and cello. This would be a beautiful accompaniment throughout if desired. Full band can be used, but don't feel like you have to use *all* the instruments *all* the

time. Find ways to show creativity with the instrumentation you may have within your church. Also, make note that the best key for this song is D. However, the original melody leaps an octave in the second chorus, which is far too high for a congregation to sing. Though the timbre will be different, you can accomplish the same effect by having a male voice on the stanzas and opening choruses before the leap, and then supplement with a mezzo female voice at the leap. When a congregation hears a male voice singing that high, the immediate thought is, "I can't sing that," and the voice oftentimes shuts down instead of continuing singing an octave lower. A female voice in the same frequency range assures the congregation that it is ok to not strain and leave the voice in a lower range when singing.

SERMON NOTES

Today our series, and the season, concludes with the story known popularly as the "Transfiguration of Jesus." *TRANSFIGURATION* is a big, churchy word, and one that may be meaningless not only to those who are new to the congregation or visiting, but to the more seasoned members as well.

So the story goes that Jesus took Peter and James and his brother John on a journey up a high mountain. When they arrived, suddenly Jesus began shining like the sun so that his clothes looked a dazzling white color. And as if that were not enough, Moses and Elijah appeared alongside him.

Peter apparently decided that the best way to cope with the situation was to initiate a casual conversation with Jesus. "Hey there Moses and Elijah! How y'all doin'? Anyway, uh, Jesus, I'm really honored to be here for this momentous occasion. I'm sure you three have a lot to talk about. If you'd like, I could put together three tents for you guys so you could camp out here on the mountainside for a few days and catch up!"

While Peter was making his offer, a cloud came and hovered over the entire gathering. A voice began speaking out of the cloud: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Now, for those of you who have been here since the beginning of this series, you may recall that these words are very similar to the words that came at the moment of Jesus' baptism, when the heavens opened up and God's voice could be heard speaking. So we begin and end with a remarkably similar message from God: "This is my Son, the beloved. I am pleased with him." Only now, up on the mountain, God adds a final note to the message: "Listen to him!"

Matthew tells us that when the voice spoke from the cloud, Peter and James and John were scared out of their wits. They threw themselves on the ground and buried their faces in the dirt so as not to have to see or hear anymore.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever been so scared that you just wanted to close your eyes and stick your fingers in your ears and not see or hear another thing?

Well, it was right about that time, when the disciples were lying prostrate in the dirt with their arms over their heads like kids in a tornado drill, that Jesus tapped them on the shoulder and said, gently, "Hey there. It's okay. Get up. You don't need to be afraid." When they looked up, all the bad stuff had gone away and only Jesus was standing there.

It is an awful feeling to feel terrified and out of control, isn't it? And make no mistake about it – It was fear that the disciples experienced that day on the mountain: mouth-drying, heart-thumping, knee-buckling fear. And it was this scene of sheer terror that the church now recognizes each year as the Transfiguration of the Lord.

What happened on that mountain? We don't really know. All we know is that whatever it was, the disciples simply could not cope with it. They could not comprehend the magnificence of the divine presence, nor the implications of what the voice was saying. The entire experience was a mystery *way beyond* their ability to understand, and it terrified them.

The glory of the transfiguration event shines as brilliantly and as incomprehensibly today as it did for those disciples over 2000 years ago. But even if we don't have a clue about what really happened or what it meant, we can at least learn how Jesus would have us act and react to events that challenge our comprehension and threaten to paralyze us with fear. Because while Jesus did not explain the meaning behind the Transfiguration mystery, he did give us a strategy for dealing with debilitating attacks of fear that seem to strike us all at one point or another.

So what is the strategy offered by our Lord? Well, it's pretty simple: "Get up and do not be afraid!"

It seems to me that when Jesus told the three disciples to "Get up and do not be afraid," he was saying to them and to all would-be followers that part of having faith is having the courage to keep going forward even when we are uncertain, confused, or even frightened out of our wits.

All of us have had those moments. We've all had times when it took everything we had to find the strength and courage to face our worst tragedies and fears: our fear of inadequacy, our fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, our fear of failing our families, or our friends, or ourselves. Our fear of judgment. Our fear of change. Our fear of heading in a new direction. Our fear of illness and disease and suffering. Our fear of terrorism and disaster, both natural and human-made. Our fear of failing God, of facing the Lord in our final hour, of the accounting of our lives and the journey into the life that is to come.

I don't know how any of us do it. How do we even get up each morning and face the day? How is it that we are able to "get up and not be afraid" day in and day out, in the face of terrifying challenges, of life-threatening illnesses and the difficulty of living in this trying time in history.

It is only by God's grace that any of us are able to get up to do anything.

And that, my brothers and sisters, is the good news in this passage.

Because when we find the courage and the strength to get up in the face of our fears, that's when Jesus taps us on the shoulder and reassures us. That's when the Spirit breathes God's very power and grace into us and we are transformed—transfigured—to use the words from Scripture. That's when we are transformed from being frightened, helpless people into being strong, able disciples who are able to go forth and minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

When God comes to us in Christ, when the Lord appears right before our very eyes, yes, our first reaction might be, like the disciples, one of fear and trembling. It can knock us off balance. It may even take us to our knees. But then something incredible happens. God lifts us back up, up from our fears, up from our trembling, up from our lack of faith, and sets us right back on our feet.

These last eight weeks have been a journey. It was a journey that began with the heavens opening up and the voice of God breaking through, identifying in no uncertain terms who Jesus is. And the journey ends with the voice of God speaking through the cloud, once again telling us very clearly who Jesus is.

Jesus is God's own beloved Son, with whom God is pleased. We should listen to him.

And so, during our eight-week journey, we have listened to some of what he had to say. We listened as he invited his first disciples to come and see for themselves who he was, and we heard the invitation to come along with them and see for ourselves. We listened to him calling his first disciples away from their work and invited them to follow him.

We heard his invitation to follow him into the adventure of being his disciples, to offer grace and healing love in his name, in whatever places and spaces God has called us to be. We listened as he offered each one of us his blessing, even as he challenged our assumptions of what it means to be blessed. We listened as he encouraged us to be like salt, enhancing the flavor of God's love in this world, and to let God's saving love shine through us like beacons of light in the world. We listened to him reinterpret the law of the prophets, and to hear a deeper message in the covenant, one that had the potential to transform not just us, but the entire world. We listened as he called us to strive for a different way of being in this world—for righteousness that comes not through revenge, but through grace, forgiving love, and a deep commitment to reconciliation. And today, we listened to him say to us, "It's okay. Don't be afraid. Get up, keep going, walk with me a little further and I will show you a more excellent way."

It is frightening to make a decision to go with Jesus on this unknown journey that we call Christian faith. It is a journey that turns our assumptions about how things ought to be on their heads. It is a journey that challenges the ways of this world, and potentially puts us out of step with those who seek to uphold the status quo. It is a journey that could take us into danger as we disrupt the powers and principalities at work in this world and try to bring justice and blessing to the least of these among us.

Following Jesus is not a decision to be made lightly.

But if you have heard his great invitation to follow him and you want to keep going, then we encourage you to join us for the next stage of the journey: the season of Lent.

SIDEBAR ON THE SEASON OF LENT

Lent is popularly known as a season for individual self-examination, penitence, and “giving something up” as a spiritual discipline. It seems, in this popular view, to be primarily inwardly, and perhaps largely negatively focused. It’s commonly seen as being about what’s wrong with me, as an individual, and what I’m willing to do to improve myself. Or at least to make me feel like I should.

In reality, while self-examination and some individual work are part of the work of Lent, the early church developed Lent to be very much “other-focused.” Lent was created as the “final leg” of intense preparation and support for people who have chosen to learn to live the way of Jesus among us. It was, we might say, a kind of finishing school for those preparing for baptism and lifelong Christian discipleship.

The church in the West had generally begun to drift from such a clear formational focus for this season by the Middle Ages. From that point forward, essentially until Vatican II, Lent in the Western Church, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Anglican, had taken on a more “generically penitential” hue. The still-popular impression of Lent as an extended season of “navel-gazing,” self-deprivation, and generally feeling bad about oneself was not all that far off-track from what Lent had become in practice.

That changed with the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, many of which were then also carried out by Protestants and Anglicans worldwide. The early Christian approach to Lent as a season of intentional formation and baptismal preparation has been moved front and center again. The readings for Lent every year in both the Roman Catholic Readings for the Mass and the Revised Common Lectionary, widely in use by many Protestant bodies in the world, as well as by Anglicans in the US, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, have been developed to support that work. So has the language of our own version of the baptismal covenant.

Each week during Year A, the readings correspond to a section of our baptismal vows. Worship becomes an occasion to focus on what it means to live out each of these vows, one week at a time. Worship alone does not fulfill the purpose of Lent. It takes focused, accountable work in small groups where we watch over one another in love. So each week, in the planning notes of this series, we’ll provide some guidance for formational groups to work on during the days

ahead.

END SIDEBAR

As you conclude your sermon, be sure to invite everyone to continue the journey and join you as you begin the season of Lent, and the next series, starting with Ash Wednesday:

Come with us to follow Jesus! Join us on this journey into a different way of living and being in this world. And if you are worried or frightened, don't be! We will be right here with you, every step of the way. When you stumble, we will pull you up. When you fall, God will lift you and set you back on your feet again. It is a journey that you don't want to miss. It is the way to life everlasting.

PLANNING NOTES

Final Sunday after Epiphany The Transfiguration of the Lord The Great Invitation: "Shine!"

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectioinaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

[Exodus 24:12-18](#)

The mystery and awe of God's holy presence: God calls Moses up on the mountain, and Moses enters the cloud of God's glory.

[Psalm 99 \(UMH 819\)](#)

Tone 1 in D major (See p. 737.)

[2 Peter 1:16-21](#)

Peter says, "We had been eyewitnesses of his majesty ... we were with him on the holy mountain ... So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed."

[Matthew 17:1-9](#)

Matthew's account of the Transfiguration.

Calendar Notes

The Great Invitation:
"Shine!"

Today we reach the end of the series and this season of evangelism and invitation to consider the way of discipleship to Jesus. Celebrate boldly today! This Wednesday ([Ash Wednesday](#), March 1) marks the formal beginning of Lent, and the season of intensive formation in the way of Jesus. Our Lenten worship series, **Living Our Baptismal Calling**, will help you do this work well together, grounded in the Scriptures and the vows of our baptismal covenant.

[Black History Month](#) concludes today. The next month-long heritage celebration is [Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#) in May. Start your planning now to observe this well in your congregation.

February

All Month [Black History Month \(USA\)](#)

February 26 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

March

March 1 [Ash Wednesday](#)

New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 12 [Daylight Saving Time Begins \(USA\)](#)

March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9 [Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday

April 13 [Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14 [Good Friday](#)

April 15 [Holy Saturday \(Full Twitter script with audio links\) #holysat17](#)

[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16 [Easter Sunday](#)

April 23 [Festival of God's Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25 [World Malaria Day](#)

April 30 [Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

May

All Month [Christian Home Month](#)
[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)

May 4 [National Day of Prayer \(USA\)](#)

May 5 [May Friendship Day](#)

May 8-14 [Christian Family Week](#)

May 14 [Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day \(USA\)](#)

May 21 [Heritage Sunday](#)

May 24 [Aldersgate Day](#)

May 25 [Ascension Day](#)

May 28 [Ascension Sunday \(if transferred\)](#)

May 29 [Memorial Day \(USA\)](#)

In This Series

And so we come to series' and season's end. You've spent these eight weeks preparing for and engaging in the Great Invitation Jesus himself offers to life in the kingdom of God. You've invited others to join you and consider with you what such a life might look like for them and perhaps whether it's something they want to consider for themselves and with you. You've done this work of inviting not only in worship, but in your daily lives with folks you've known and folks you've only recently met.

Today

Series end always needs to deliver on two things: First, it must bring the series promise to fruition. The promise of this series has been to invite and introduce people to the way of Jesus. It has not been to "compel them to come in," but rather a more open invitation to "Come and see." See, and then, after seeing, after dwelling with us for a time as we consider the core ministry and teachings of Jesus together, decide, perhaps, whether or how they may continue among us.

Second, it must segue well into the next series. We provide two elements in this service to help you do just that. First, the response to the word today is a Call to Continue the Journey. This is a call not only to newcomers you've invited, but to all among you who have come to value perhaps more deeply through this series what life in God's kingdom could mean for them if they were to pursue it seriously. The specific invitation is an invitation to undertake with you the Lenten journey, a journey that digs deep into the vows of the baptismal covenant. It's a journey that moves from "Are you interested?" in this season to "Are you ready, or willing to get ready, not simply to live with Christ, following his way, but, indeed, to die and rise with him?"

Not everyone among your newcomers or among your long-time attendees will say yes to this invitation, which is the ultimate invitation of this season. Some of those who say yes will be more committed to what comes next than others. Our work today is not to judge how people respond to the invitation to the journey, but simply to encourage them to do so, and then to continue to focus our chief attention as church leaders to support and encourage those who say yes.

The second form of segue into Lent we offer is at the Sending. We all know not everyone will attend an Ash Wednesday service (we provide full ritual for this in the next series). So we anticipate Ash Wednesday today with an altered form of the traditional invitation to Lent as our Sending Forth and the singing of a Lenten song/hymn. After the Eucharist, we encourage the changing of the paraments or other color elements during this singing of this song to make that transition as well. That's why we provide two kinds of graphic elements for today's service (gold and purple-- gold for beginning and throughout the service, purple for the sending forth). It's also why the bulletin cover for this week transitions from gold to purple.

So rejoice fully in the hope of the radiant transfiguration life in God's kingdom promises us today.

And then take the turn, with as many as are willing to take it as seriously as they are willing to take it, to the process of preparing our lives to allow them to be as aligned with and transformed by the work of God's kingdom as they can be.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Portugal, Spain, Italy, Malta