

LIFE IN THE VINE

Grow

June 20, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciple for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

John:

The Gospel of John was probably the last of the four Gospels written. The "John" who is named as author in the title is not the same one who is introduced in John 1:6, that is, John the Baptist. Nor is a "John" ever identified within the text as the Gospel's author. Instead, the author is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved", an anonymous follower of Jesus who makes brief appearances at the Last Supper; the crucifixion; the empty tomb; and at the Sea of Galilee after Jesus' resurrection. Tradition identifies this disciple as John, son of Zebedee, but his actual identity remains unknown.

Like the other three Gospels, John is written "so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son". But at the heart of it is something more. Jesus' intent for his disciples is that "you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you". This deep relationship is the heart of what has been called Jesus' "high priestly prayer" of John 17, and Jesus invites his disciples to enter into this intimate union in life and in prayer. Perhaps this is why John is the favorite Gospel of so many Christian believers. More than any other it draws its readers into the ancient story, assuring all who believe that they are "God's children, born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God". Its legacy is nothing less than a new birth, a promise of eternal life that begins not at death, nor even at the coming of God's kingdom, but here and now.

-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 167-68 (NT)

Reflect on this Scripture:

John 17:20-23

²⁰ "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

This Week:

Last Sunday, we began a new Sermon Series for the titled 'Life in the Vine.' This series is based on the theme for the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity based on the words of Jesus found in John 15:1-17. In that Scripture, Jesus refers to himself as the Vine and his disciples as the branches meant to bear fruit. Jesus gave the picture of the Vine to describe his life with his disciples and their lives in relation to each other. Today, we look at what it means to mature and grow in unity.

We find our Scripture for this lesson in the 17th chapter of John. This chapter gives us Jesus' prayer to God on the night before his death. When Jesus talks about unity in this prayer, we need to remember that Jesus is talking to, praying to, God. He is not talking to the community. These are not words of instruction (be united) but rather a prayer (please may they may be completely one, may they be united).

In this prayer we hear the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with God. Jesus offers this prayer in the complete and total confidence that God is present and hears. Throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus insisted that he and God are engaged in ongoing conversation. This prayer embodies that truth.

As we look at this prayer of Jesus asking for us to be united, we have to remember this is not something that happens automatically. We grow into this unity, as we grow in our faith. We remember how Jesus grew and matured. Before his public ministry began, he lived a simple life, rooted in the practices of his Jewish faith. In those times, the presence of God nourished him.

We too need a long period of maturations, an entire lifetime, in order to plumb the depths of Christ's love. It is through prayer, through communion with God, that we are connected to other Christians. The more we live in this communion the more we are connected not just to other Christians but to all of humanity.

When we look past our differences and see each other as children of God, we find ourselves on a path of unity of reconciliation; we find ourselves committed to unite

our prayer with Jesus' "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believed."

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. How do you respond to Jesus' prayer that we may live in unity? How do you feel knowing that Jesus prayed for all those who believe and that through those believers others may come to believe?
2. How have you grown over the years? How have you grown and matured as one who seeks to live in unity with others?
3. In your prayer life, do you lift your voice with Jesus' that we may all be as one?
4. What do you do to stay connected with other believers so you can continue to grow?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: John 17:23 NRSV
²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.