

LIFE IN THE VINE

Reconcile

July 18, 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 disciples 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.

Mark:

The Gospel of Mark is universally regarded as the earliest of the four canonical Gospels. It is a relentless story about Jesus' announcement of God's righteous kingdom and the acts that accompany this proclamation. Throughout his ministry, Jesus encounters resistance. Evil is manifested in the demonic and in the actions of human beings. Human characters in Mark are often fearful and stubborn, and at times extremely violent. Self-seeking and the desire for honor work at cross-purposes with God's will. Evil, however, is being defeated: Jesus banishes demons, teaches about God's kingdom, and challenges religious and political structures that are harmful to human well-being. At times, people respond in faith, trusting in Jesus' compassion and divine authority. Though Jesus dies on the cross, once again evil is overcome as God raises him from the dead.

-adapted from the Wesley Study Bible, pp1207)

Reflect on this Scripture:

Mark 4:30-32

³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

This Week:

We're in the last week of our Sermon Series 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 reconciliation.

Reconciliation, in human relationships, is the restoration of friendly relations. In Christian theology it is the end of the estrangement, caused by sin, between God and humanity. The immediate effect of reconciliation is peace with God. The scope of reconciliation goes beyond God and the individual. The world is also affected. As our personal relationships are restored, as our relationship with God is restored, our world is able to see the coming kingdom of God.

This is something that happens gradually and it happens with each small step we each take. The parable of the mustard seed helps us see just how each small step can grow into something amazing.

In this parable we see the contrast between the smallest of all the seeds on earth and the greatest of all shrubs. The prospect of God's rule on earth may not appear reassuring. The newspapers in the Roman Empire hardly carried banner headlines trumpeting the success of Christianity, its overthrow of slavery, or its winning converts in high places. The promise nevertheless is there. Inconspicuous beginnings will lead to a vast conclusion God's rule will not be thwarted.

It is critical to observe that the promise does not have to do with the immediate success of the church or with the prosperity of individual believers, but with the ultimate triumph of the reign of God, the coming kingdom of God. That reign is always shrouded in mystery, not sketched as a blueprint for the course of history but talked about in stories, compared to planting and harvesting. It certainly "happens" in the context of churches and in the lives of individuals, but it also erupts in the most unlikely places, like the slums of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) or the corners of hospital emergency rooms, whenever the power of God overcomes the destructive forces of evil.

Each instance of us seeking to be reconciled to another, to be reconciled to God, is another step, another small seed planted to lead to the fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Think about times in your life when you have needed to be reconciled to another. How have you approached the other? Did the reconciliation happen quickly, or did it take time?
2. Now, think about your need to be reconciled to God. How did you approach God? Did the reconciliation happen quickly, or did it take time?
3. What small steps can you take now, today, to lead to reconciliation? What small seeds can you plant?

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:
³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."