

CELEBRATING GLOBAL COMMUNITY IN CHRIST
International Sunday
August 8, 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.

Revelation:

The book of Revelation is traditionally considered to be written by John, the beloved apostle and eyewitness of Jesus, but many biblical scholars think that it probably was written by someone else named John. The message of the book was addressed to the seven churches in Asia mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, and to believers elsewhere, who biblical scholars believe were experiencing persecution under the Roman Emperor Domitian toward the close of his reign (AD 90-96). Domitian began to demand that his subjects address him as 'Lord and God' and worship his image and many Christians were put to death, exiled like John, and threatened for refusing to do so. John begins his book by explaining where and how he received this revelation from God; records specific messages from the glorified Jesus to the seven churches; gives a mosaic of dramatic and majestic images that burst before his eyes as visions which portray the future rise of evil, culminating in the antichrist; then recounts the triumph of the King of kings, the wedding of the Lamb, the final judgment, and the coming of the new Jerusalem; and concludes with the promise of Christ's soon return with the prayer that has been echoed by Christians through the centuries, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." The final chapters of the book depict the consummation toward which the whole biblical message of redemption is focused. The book belongs to the genre of

Jewish and Christian writings known as Apocalyptic literature which are revelatory in nature by 'lifting the lid off' to let its readers know that which is hidden from others, in this book's case the revelation of what would take place in the future – judgment and the ultimate triumph of God over evil. Belonging to this type of literature, the book uses symbolic imagery, comparable to the prophetic symbolism of the Old Testament that shed light on the intended meaning, to communicate hope (in the ultimate triumph of God) to those in the midst of persecution as the events are ordered according to literary, rather than strictly chronological, patterns. Therefore, Revelation may be described as an inspired picture-book that, by an accumulation of magnificent poetic imagery, makes a powerful appeal to the reader's imagination. Many of the details of its pictures are intended to contribute to the total impression, and are not to be isolated and interpreted literally. The book can be best understood when one takes into account the following considerations: 1) The book comprises the substance of real visions that convey great principles of God's just and merciful government of all creation and focusing on these principles, the church in all ages can be encouraged and sustained despite the fiercest opposition of both human and demonic forces; 2) The message of the book is couched in symbolism, involving numbers, strange beasts, and other typical apocalyptic features and throughout the author describes the symbols and not the reality conveyed by the symbol; and 3) The structure of the book, involving a series of parallel and yet ever-progressive sections, bring before the reader, over and over again, but in climacteric form, the struggle of the church, and its victory over the world in the providence of God Almighty.

- Adapted from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 364 NT and Life Application Bible, p. 2295

Reflect on this Scripture:

Revelation 7:9-12 NRSV

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;

‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ ”

This Week:

As we observe this Sunday as International Sunday, celebrating Global Community in Christ, we are to be reminded that God’s purposes for the world has always been global or universal, which means that God has always desired for all people to belong to him in one community of God’s Kingdom. Even as the Fall of humanity occurred as recorded in Genesis 3, the first proclamation of the Gospel was made in a cryptic manner in verse 15 where the ‘offspring of the woman will strike the serpent’s head even as the serpent will strike the offspring’s heel.’ As humanity represented in Adam and Eve were estranged from God due to the sin of self-centeredness and rebellion and the consequences were put forth, God continued in commitment to humanity and all creation to redeem them back to self and declared that there would come a Redeemer sent from God in human flesh who through a costly struggle would crush the spiritual enemy of God and

humanity and win back lost humanity and creation to God. This is the universality of God.

However, to fulfil this purpose of universality, God in wisdom worked through particularity with the choosing of one nation and race through by calling Abraham to be blessed by God in order to be a blessing to all nations. This blessing would be that his descendants would be a holy nation that would bring light to other nations in knowing the eternal God and be the race through whom would come the Savior into the world for its salvation. That Redeemer, Savior, as the Israelite and Jewish nation referred to as 'Messiah' in God's fullness of time came in Jesus of Nazareth, God in human flesh, and fulfilled God's plan by dying on the Cross and rising again to life. Through faith in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord of all humanity and creation, the particularity that God worked in opens out again to God's universality where all people, Jews and Gentiles, are called to receive this salvation of reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit. However, through this all the struggle with sin and evil continues as the spiritual enemy continues to deceive the world and discourage believers in Christ. The final solution is awaited when Christ Jesus will come again to make all things new and the final vision of the end is revealed in the book of Revelation where before God's throne with the Savior, the Lamb of God slain for the salvation of the world, risen and glorified, people from all nations who have put faith in Jesus and have received God's salvation through Christ, having overcome the trials and persecutions of the world and remained faithful, worship the Father and the Son in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. How have you understood Genesis 3:15? Would you consider it strange for it to be mentioned among the words of God's condemnation of rebellion by the serpent, the woman, and the man?
2. Why do you think God would work God's universality through particularity, i.e. choose a specific nation and race, to fulfill God's purpose of salvation?
3. What emotions well up in you when you imagine the great multitude of people from every nation and peoples worshipping before the throne of God at the end of time?

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: Revelation 7:10 NIV
 - ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:
"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."
 - ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
3. Prayerfully approach God in asking to understand more about God's universality worked through particularity and to remember that in God's grace all people are connected to each other and all believers in Christ belong to each other in a global community.