



**HUMAN
RELATIONS
SUNDAY**
JANUARY 17, 2021

Introduction

Invitation

Prelude

Call to Worship: (adapted from Rev. Thom M. Shuman)

Young or old, slow or fast; tall or small, know-it-alls or eager learners: God has called each of us here. Wrinkled, white-haired, stooped with age; bright-eyed, smooth skinned, people of all colors and races: Each of us is made in God's image. Parents, kids playing tag, medical personnel, front line workers; retirees: God works through each of us. We are called to worship together as the Body of Christ.

Hymn: "Be Thou My Vision," vv. 1,3

Reading the Word: John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Ministry of Music

Message: "Prejudices"

In today's scripture from John 1, we hear about Jesus calling disciples to follow him. Interestingly, Philip was one of the people who was called, and apparently, he was so impressed with what he saw and experienced, that he found Nathanael and invited him to meet Jesus. However, when Philip said that Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathanael had a rather adverse reaction, asking, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Apparently, there was a prejudice against the town of Nazareth, most likely because it was located along a road that was well travelled by people from many countries, ethnic backgrounds, races, and economic situations. The road connected the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, leading down to Egypt. Jesus would have grown up in a very diverse culture, with a variety of influences, which was not always seen as a good thing in ancient Israel.

For Nathanael, Nazareth represented everything that was NOT purely Jewish, and he held a prejudice against the town with the idea that it had been tainted. I suspect we all have had those reactions to places, thinking, "Can anything good come from that place?" I'm reminded of Harlem in New York City many years ago. It tended to have a very bad reputation for crime, violence, drugs, and poverty, and many African Americans. Fortunately, things have gradually improved, but the stigma is still there.

Nathanael's comment made me think of the prejudices we all have. Tomorrow is Martin Luther King, Jr day in our country, when we remember this powerful preacher and speaker who moved a nation to realize how blacks have been treated as second-class citizens. He fought for equality for all, and his "I Have a Dream Speech" continues to echo in our country as we realize that racism may have changed, but we know it hasn't gone away. We saw that this past year with the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

This week, I read a story about another person of color who was not African American, but middle Eastern. Here is a short version of his story:
"He was called 'filthy' because his skin was dark, unintelligent because he could barely speak English. When he arrived in this country, he was placed in a special class for immigrants. But, a few of his teachers saw something in the way he expressed himself, through his drawings, through his view of the world. He would soon master his new language . . . He was born in poverty on January 6, 1883, in what is now modern day Lebanon. He believed in love, he believed in peace, and he believed in understanding.

His name was Kahlil Gibran, and he is primarily known for his book, "The Prophet." The book, published in 1923, would sell tens of millions of copies, making him the third best-selling poet of all time . . . published in 108 languages around the world . . . He was very outspoken, attacking hypocrisy and corruption. His books were burned in Beirut, and in America, he would receive death threats. Gibran was the only member of his family to pursue scholastic education . . . He was inspired by the

strength of the women in his family, especially his mother. After one sister, his mother, and his half-brother died, his other sister, Mariana would support Gibran and herself by working at a dressmaker's shop . . . Gibran would later champion the cause of women's emancipation and education. He believed that, "Safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being."

He would write in "The Prophet":

"Let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow." (Source - Facebook and Wikipedia)

I think about the assumptions and privileges I have as a white person and realize how many of my non-white friends face prejudices just because of the color of their skin or their ethnicity.

Divisions happen when we stop seeing the face of Christ on another person, when we can't move past looks and see the Child of God. We become so entrenched in our own ideas and wanting to be "right," that we tend to stop listening, stop putting ourselves in the other person's place, and build walls between us.

Jesus broke down those walls. Jesus welcomed everyone. Jesus interacted with everyone, and he grew in his own mission and ministry as he brought the love of God to others. That is our call as the church, too.

Today is Human Relations Sunday in the United Methodist Church. It is intended to support programs that reach across race, prejudice, and assumptions by, as the UMC.org web site says, "making an impact in communities where people struggle because they don't have the tools or resources to reach their God-given potential. Our gifts are part of building beloved community through faith-based volunteer programs, community developers and programs that work with at-risk teens." If anyone would like to contribute to this, go to UMC.org and look up Human Relations Sunday where there is a donation button.

We, as the church, are called to heal divisions, listen to each other, work together, and see the face of Christ on each other as we carry on his work in the world. As Gary Melville from the United Methodist Foundation wrote in his reflection this week:

“The Church is a place of healing. The church - the Body of Christ - is the physician to a hurting and divided country. We need our churches more than ever to offer Jesus, the merciful and forgiving Jesus to our divided congregations, communities, and country. Large or small, urban, or rural, our churches have the vaccine for hate and division. It is time to get to work: ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.’”

May we get to work! We bring Christ to the world! May we move past prejudices and assumptions. Let us learn and grow and be the agents of positive change wherever we live, work, and play. Amen.

Prayer: (written by Rev. Thom M. Shuman)

It doesn't matter how far we go to run from you, God-who-calls-us: you reach out and touch us with healing in your hands, and turn us around so we can follow you home. It doesn't matter how suspicious we are of you, God-who-invites-us-to-follow: you remove our fears with your compassion, you take away our doubts with complete acceptance of who we are. It doesn't matter how often we ignore your words, God-who-speaks-to-us: you whisper to us until our ears tingle with anticipation and we listen with eager hope. God in Community, Holy in One, continue to call us by name as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: “He Leadeth Me,” vv. 1,3

Blessing



PRAYER LIST

Pastor Sue Ellery, Jim Slater, Jeanne Westcott, Bill and Gayle Gardei,
Earl, Dennis Hoskins, Charles Gilman, Barbara Clement,
Vicki Fernandez and her daughter,
Barbara Glidden, Gil & Marilyn Stebbins, Danny Westbrook,
Dan Strange, Bobbie Noble, Joanne Stebbins Family, Earl Dixon,
Durgin Pines Residents & Workers,
Riverside Rest Home Residents & Workers,
Kittery Estates Residents and Workers
Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19
Those in nursing and assisted living care,
Our Denomination – Our Church Family



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



One way to make a donation to FUMC is to point your phone camera on QR code and it will guide you through the process... thanks for making a difference.



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