



Week 1 Preaching Resources: When You Have to Wait

Scripture Passage

Luke 24:13-32 (13-21; 27-32)

Focus Statement

There are times in life when we don't know what do, we find ourselves having to wait for direction. Jesus calls us to get back to the basics. He calls us to the table of grace, to find him in the community.

ME

Share about a struggle with something and how the situation was made better by people in the community around you. Often, we don't fully grasp how important community really is. There are times when people can celebrate our gifts and graces, and it fully changes the narrative that we have in our head.

WE

During road trips, kids often ask, "Are we there yet?" As parents, we usually know the answer, we know where we're going and how to get there. Yet, we don't give the answer instantly. Often, Jesus doesn't give us the answers to our questions right away along life's journey. This is a good time for people to claim the big questions in their life. Have them shout out or write them down to bring to Communion to leave at Jesus' feet. Explain that Communion can be a turning point in our lives. Wesley believed that it could very well be a salvific moment. It reminds us that, together, we find the answers to life's questions and problems, in Jesus.

GOD

Central themes in Luke and Acts are that God's grace is for everyone; but that grace works through the community of the church. In verses 14-15, two disciples are walking, pondering events surrounding Jesus' death. Suddenly, Jesus appears and walks alongside them, but they do not recognize him, even when he interprets the scriptures about himself. This interpretation helps them understand things they could not understand before Jesus' death. They had to wait for the right moment for it all to make sense.

It is only when the disciples invite this "mysterious man" for table fellowship and Jesus' recites the same words as the Last Supper that they recognize who he is. Communion was then and is now a special place where Jesus' presence is made known to us. It has always been understood as the spiritual food for the journey of life. In this life, as we are searching to find answers for questions, Jesus strengthens us during our struggle, especially as we come together in community.

YOU

Sometimes in life, we find ourselves in difficult places waiting for answers. Just as Jesus shows up along the walk on the road to Emmaus, Jesus puts the right people in our path; not always to give us the answers we want but to strengthen us along the journey.



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

WHAT TO DO

When You Don't Know What To Do

Keep your eyes open. God is speaking through the everyday things of life.

WE

Imagine if we took time to be really present to God's movement in the world around us. A big part of this passage is about seeing Jesus "in the moment." We aren't the only ones looking for answers; there are people all around us searching for answers too. We all have Emmaus moments. How will we allow Christ to use us to strengthen others around us along the journey? As you bring the questions forward, let's commit to praying about them throughout this series, and finding someone in our community who we can talk to about that part of our journey.



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY



Week 2: When You Have To Listen

Scripture Passage Exodus 3:1-17

Focus Statement When you're struggling with how to answer the big questions, it's important to remember to have faith in God and also to remember that God has faith in you.

ME Have you ever tried to listen to someone when there are a lot of things going on around you? Share a story where there were a lot of distractions, someone was trying to tell you something important and it was hard to listen with all the distractions; just like when God is trying to reach out to us.

WE We've all been in situations where it was hard to hear something; maybe we've been so preoccupied with our current circumstances that we can't seem to hear a clear, obvious voice telling us what to do. Or maybe we don't believe that voice is talking to us.

GOD At this point in life, Moses is running away from a murder charge. He has become a shepherd and has hidden himself in ordinary life. God needs to get Moses' attention to listen, so God actually appears to him in a fire. Describe some metaphorical "fires" God might use to get people's attention now. Also, consider subtler ways God speaks in our lives.

This story was put to paper during the Babylonian exile. It is a story about a time when people are struggling with the questions, "Has God forgotten us? Does God still care about us? Will God still talk to us?" The writers are struggling with that question, and they use the story of the Exodus to answer it. God will not forget us. God prepares Moses to go to the Israelites, including the promise of a sign. Notice how Moses does not believe he is up for what God is asking of him. He has lots of questions and doubts. God is persistent and patient with Moses, promising to be with him while he carries out the task he has been given. And Moses continues to listen. It is an ongoing conversation.

YOU So often, we have the negative voice in our head that shuts down the possibilities that God is putting in our lives. Some of us need to put on spiritual noise-cancelling headphones to remove the distractions to hear what God is saying. Some of us, like Moses, also struggle to believe that we can accomplish transformational, powerful things. Imagine a world where people believe that God is still acting and moving and speaking.

WE What if we were to start believing together that God still speaks and shapes what we're doing? What if we were willing to commit as a community to help each other listen to God? God is calling us to be intentional about reaching out to those in the world around us, removing the distractions, even the ones we create ourselves, to help one another hear God's voice. How can you help someone listen to God this week?



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

WHAT TO DO

When You Don't Know What To Do

Week 3: When You're Struggling with Where God is Leading You

Scripture
Passage

Jonah 1:1-3

Focus
Statement

Sometimes we know the right answer to our questions, but we struggle with where that answer will take us.

ME

This is a moment of possibly uncomfortable transparency. Share a story of when God was calling you somewhere or to do something, and you just didn't want to. Talk about how when you finally did it, it was a blessing. This is a place where you want to preach from a scar, not a wound, where you're at the end of your story, and not still in the struggle. This is a place, though, where we need to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to take the leap of faith.

WE

We have all had things in our lives that we procrastinated on, and often we know exactly why we were procrastinating. A lot of times that reason is fear. Fear of failure, shame, not being good enough. Oftentimes, fear is what keeps us from the life God is calling us to have.

GOD

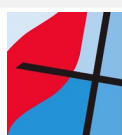
Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. There was deep bitterness in the Jewish community towards Assyrians. Jonah didn't necessarily like the idea of the people of Nineveh being rescued and saved. He thought they deserved judgment and wrath, and so he fled to Tarshish when God called him to deliver a message of repentance to the Ninevites. It is only when Jonah fears for his life in the belly of the big fish that he returns to God in prayer, asking to be rescued. Perhaps out of gratitude for saving his life or fear of another bout with the fish, Jonah obeys the second time God tells him to go to Ninevah. Through Jonah, the Ninevites are saved from destruction. Even then, Jonah is upset with God for calling to have a hand in rescuing his enemies. But God soon reminds him that God loves and is willing to save his enemies. The text reflects a deep human tendency to struggle with how wide God's grace is. It also reflects how often God is calling us somewhere, or to do something, and we simply don't want to. But there is little use in running away from God, as Jonah's story shows. Yet even as Jonah runs, God provides safety and shelter along the way. In the end, God shows Jonah that just as God loves and protects him, God loves and protects Ninevah, and all creation.

YOU

What scares you the most about God having a call on your life? You, we, all of us, have a call on our lives. Whatever that situation is in your life, when you run away, you still find yourself in the realm of God. It's like running on a treadmill, working hard and getting nowhere. God is everywhere and hiding from God never really works. God has a way of getting you to where God wants you to be. Let's get off the treadmill and back on the ground, the path of life, helping people to experience God's grace and love.

WE

We need to have the courage to walk into the struggle of our community. How can we encourage each other to walk into that? How can we help someone finally say the "yes" that God is so graciously waiting for? And finally, what "yes" is God waiting for from you today? And who are we connecting with to help us get to that yes?



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY



Week 4: It's Okay to Not Be Okay

Scripture
Passage Ruth 1:11-21

Focus
Statement So many of us struggle with the difficult moments in our lives because we don't realize that it's okay to not be okay. But troubled times do come. They will come.

ME Share a story where you shut the door on hope or there was a big failure in your life. Leave the audience hanging a little bit and bring it back around later with a sneak peek of the better ending, which will come next week where you found a way to move on with your life. This is the setup for a "to be continued" story....

WE We have all had moments where we were just not okay. Many of us are still in that place in one area of our lives or another. What are you still angry about? What are you still not okay with? Where have you felt abandoned?

GOD Ruth and Orpah are walking back to Bethlehem from Moab, and Naomi is telling them that their best bet is to go back to Moab and hope that someone will take them in. Naomi herself is hoping to go back to Bethlehem, where she is from, to find someone to take her in. Sadly, it was a time when a woman's identity was wrapped up in the man in their life. They were suffering because of the social struggle. Ruth is refusing to leave Naomi, which actually lessens her chances of a secure future, because it is less likely that a man will take both women in. Naomi goes from being called, "Naomi," which means pleasant; to being called, "Mara," which means bitter. She is choosing to be defined by her bitterness, so much so that she literally renames herself. In her state of "not being okay," she expresses her anger towards God, whom she feels has "brought calamity" upon her. Note that instead of turning away from God or disbelieving in God, she brings all those feelings to God in prayer. She is not chastised (either by God, religious leaders, or her loved ones) for having negative feelings or being honest with God. Stay tuned next week to hear about how Naomi experiences grace and learn that our frustrations, while valid, do not have the final say over our lives.

YOU When have you chosen to redefine yourself in a negative way because of something that happened? Or when have you chosen to stay away from people who are struggling or suffering? Often our first reaction is to become bitter and blame God. It is okay to be angry. Expressing anger and fear is a healthy and normal part of anyone's faith journey. We need not fear anger and bitterness in ourselves or others. God's love and grace are bigger than all our pain and anger. Reference 2 Corinthians 12:9, which speaks about God's grace being sufficient for you and what you go through.

WE How can we be supportive and walk alongside one another regardless of where we're at? How can we build healthy ways of expressing our honest emotions to God? God gives us room to not be okay but calls us to be together in the midst of our struggles.



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY



Week 5: Celebrating God's Grace

Scripture
Passage Ruth 4:13-17

Focus
Statement God blesses us through suffering and troubled times. Remember that God's grace moves through unexpected people and things.

ME This is where you give your to be continued "happy" ending to the story from last week where things fell apart. It is important for people to be reminded that bad times don't last forever.

WE Last week when we discussed a difficult time in life, what things came to mind? Do you remember seeing a light at the end of any of those tunnels? There are moments in all those tough times in our lives where we can see evidence of God's grace at work.

GOD This text illustrates there's no limit to where God's blessing can come from. Moabites were considered to be the enemies of the people of Israel. Scripture tells us that they were outside of God's blessing. This is also one of the few texts where women are the central characters of the story. Pushing past the pressures of society, Ruth, a Moabite woman, makes a bold choice and takes control of her life. The text shows us how God works through human agency and human action. After her husband's death, Ruth chooses to remain faithful to her mother-in-law Naomi, an uncomfortable choice as it requires her to live apart from her family of origin and native land. She chooses to glean in the fields to feed both herself and Naomi, and by grace, finds a protector and eventually a husband in Boaz, who is impressed by Ruth's bravery and faithfulness. By grace, this time of suffering becomes a blessing, as Ruth becomes a part of Jesus' lineage. Through Ruth, Naomi's steadfast companion, Naomi was "nourished in her old age" by her care for the baby Obed. While Naomi suffered the loss of her husband and sons, as well as the security and meaning that family structure carried with it in her society, through God's work in unexpected ways and relationships, Naomi found new joy and meaning in her relationship with Ruth and Ruth's family.

YOU In moments when you think you are out of reach, beyond any point of refuge, God's grace can still reach you. God's grace can still reach all of us. How are you seeing God work in your life this week? How can you reframe your focus on dark places in your life to see God's light shining?

WE Naomi's life, in the height of darkness and bitterness, took a major turn because Ruth walked alongside her and supported her. This week think about someone who has journeyed with you in a difficult time and reach out to them and thank them for being a light in the dark tunnels. Show your gratitude for God's grace working through them in your own life. And then consider who is God calling you to be a Ruth to? To walk alongside and support them. Even though we may still be struggling through our own difficulties, God is nevertheless calling us to walk alongside one another.



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY