

SERMON STARTER

HUMAN RELATIONS DAY



These worship resources are part of the Human Relations Day pastor and leader kit. They can be adapted for your context and integrated into your worship service with the other material in the kit.

**They are based on Isaiah 49:1–7,
Psalm 40:1–11, 1 Corinthians 1:1–9,
John 1:29–42**

There's a weariness in the air these days. Ask any pastor, teacher, nurse, or parent, and they'll tell you: it's not just exhaustion, it's something deeper. It's the ache of compassion fatigue. It's the dull throb of justice fatigue. It's the spiritual depletion that comes from caring and seeing so much, and not knowing what to do next. And yet, on this Human Relations Day, Scripture does not chastise us for that weariness, it meets us there.

The prophet Isaiah gives voice to the cry of every tired soul: "I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing." And haven't we all felt that? When change moves too slowly. When systems of inequality keep mutating. When our small acts of goodness feel like drops in an ocean of injustice. But God responds not with pity, nor with a patronizing pat on the head, but with a breathtaking call: "It is too small a thing..."

Too small a thing – to restore only the tribes of Jacob. That's what God says to the weary servant. God doesn't narrow the call, God expands it - to restore all the nations so salvation reaches the ends of the earth!. This isn't about shrinking into safety, it's about leaning into purpose. As Dr. Yolanda Pierce

reminds us, "Let holy anger and holy love wake us from our complacency." That's the call of Isaiah 49, a call that does not deny our fatigue but reorients it toward sacred resolve.

Psalms 40 joins the conversation with a different kind of honesty: "I waited patiently for the Lord... He inclined to me and heard my cry." Here we find the slow, trusting patience of those who refuse to let the weight of the world deaden their hope. There's no timeline given for how long the psalmist waited. And yet, the promise is clear: God hears. God lifts. God sets our feet on rock. And then, God puts a new song in our mouths. Not a recycled melody, but a new one. Could it be that part of our call on this Human Relations Day is to sing new songs of justice, joy, and courageous faith?

Dr. King once said, "There comes a time when silence is betrayal." That time hasn't passed. The betrayal of silence remains tempting, especially for those of us with privilege. In his book *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove shares about relearning when to shut up and when to speak up. Many of us could benefit from doing the same. In 2026, the silence of the Church is not neutral, it is formation. If we are not formed by justice, we are being formed by its absence.

And yet the Spirit never leaves us to do this work alone. Paul reminds the Corinthians, and us, that we are "not lacking in any spiritual gift." The Church has what it needs. We have what we need. The question is not whether we are equipped, it's whether we are willing. And in a time when some congregations feel too small or too tired to make a difference, Paul's words are a reminder that what we need most is not scale but faithfulness.

Then Jesus turns and says, "Come and see." That's it. Not a dissertation. Not a strategy document. Just an invitation.

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Come and see. Come and see where Jesus is staying. Come and see where he's already at work. Come and see where the Spirit is healing and troubling and stirring.

And here's where Otis Moss, III is such a gift to the Church. He reminds us that even in the darkest places, "The darkness around us is not greater than the Light within us." He tells a story of watching his daughter dance in the dark, and how that image stuck with him as a metaphor for what discipleship looks like: dancing anyway. Choosing joy even when the world is unjust. Resisting despair not by ignoring the pain, but by moving through it with grace.

That kind of joy is not denial, it's defiance. Austin Channing Brown tells the story of a young white student who, after witnessing the pain racism causes, said, "Doing nothing is no longer an option for me." That's it. That's the turn. When the pain of others finally becomes unbearable for us, too, that's when transformation begins. This is what's at play as we are witnesses to the continual dehumanization to immigrant and migrant communities. Where many have fled atrocious harm, violence, and abuse, to now endure it at the hands of our own nation. The distinction we must draw as Christ-followers is not to merely shake a fist and say, "this is wrong and terrible, how dare they?!" We must become active, vocal, and present: court watchers, advocates, marching to be a public display to educate the broader community that this isn't to be tolerated. And as we preach into this, we must err on the side of bravery, of being a prophetic voice that calls attention to our purpose to no longer do nothing. Not in a performative way. Not in a temporary way. But a steady decision to love with your whole life.

Rev. William Barber preaches with a cane and chronic pain, yet his voice rises with power: "You don't quit. You be steadfast." He reminds us that the moral arc doesn't bend

on its own, it's bent by people who choose to stay in the fight. Not because it's easy. Not because they're unafraid. But because they know deep down that to love their neighbor is to show up for them.

So here is the question for us today: What does it mean to stay in the work of justice with joy? What does it look like to let your fatigue become fuel, not for burnout, but for transformation? Can we build a community where we tend to one another's wounds *and* keep marching toward the dream?

Beloved, come and see. Come and see that God is not done. Come and see that the Spirit is still stirring in sanctuaries and shelters and streets. Come and see that even now, God is putting a new song in our mouths. And when you do, sing it boldly. Live it fully. Preach it like it matters. Because it does.

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