SPECIAL SUNDAY

UMCOR SUNDAY
SERMON STARTER



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®

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This sermon starter is part of the UMCOR Sunday pastor and leader kit and connects with the theme "God's Promise of Restoration." It can be adapted for your context and integrated into your worship service with the other materials in the kit.

Share a story about a meal that you remember as nourishing in body, mind and spirit. Offer details about what you enjoyed about the food and what about the experience made you feel completely welcome at the table.

The Twenty-Third Psalm is one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. It is a psalm that speaks comfort into situations of grief and despair. God, the good shepherd, is with us. We belong. There is a place for us at that table that is plentiful. In this space, we are safe.

In Ukraine, in the midst of violence and scarcity, the verse "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" can feel aspirational. But people of faith are responding to make it a reality.

An ACT Alliance partner of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, provided food packages to people trapped in Bucha and other communities surrounding Kyiv during the Russian occupation. (**https://umcmission.org/umcor/umcor-works-with-partners-to-relieve-distress-inside-ukraine/**)

One young woman who came for food and water thanked the Hungarians for their presence. She said that she and her mother hid during days of occupation in the cellar of their house with their dog, who kept them warm. They had only canned food and potatoes.

"Thank you for coming to us," the young woman exclaimed. When she picked up her food box, she invited them to come meet her mother.

And then, displaying typical Ukrainian warmth, she said, "Come see us also when this is all over. We will wait for you with a table fully set, you'll see what Ukrainian hospitality looks like."

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God prepares a table before us—often through the goodness and merciful acts of others. There is something sacred that happens when we gather around the table together. It is no coincidence that when Jesus instituted the sacrament of Communion it was around a dinner table.

This unthinkable pain that was about to happen was given meaning in the breaking of bread, the outpouring of love.

God "prepare[s] a table before me in the presence of my enemies," is the full verse. *Does the psalmist mean it's a table for me to eat and enjoy while my enemies look on jealously?* Or is it a table for us to eat together and find reconciliation?

Remember, God doesn't see other people as your enemy. God sees the person you are calling an enemy the same way that God sees you—with goodness and mercy!

Too often, we feel rushed and we dilute our sources of nourishment. We turn to fast food instead of food prepared slowly and with care. Time with loved ones sitting face to face in conversation becomes harder and harder to manage. How many cell phones have crept onto the dinner table? How many dinner tables are set in front of a television screen? And for too many people, the table is empty. I wonder if we treat spiritual nourishment the same way we approach mealtimes.

REMEMBER, GOD DOESN'T SEE OTHER PEOPLE AS YOUR ENEMY. GOD SEES THE PERSON YOU ARE CALLING AN ENEMY THE SAME WAY THAT GOD SEES YOU—WITH GOODNESS AND MERCY!

Signs of disconnection are everywhere. But it's not stronger than God's love for humanity. We are invited into building deeper relationships, entering into spiritual commitment and discipleship.

And we each can take responsibility for the work of restoring community with acts of goodness and mercy. Today we have an opportunity to set places at the table for others through UMCOR.

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Our denominational connection through UMCOR allows workers and volunteers to be among the earliest to arrive and the last to leave when people are in need.

Our connection strengthens communities through both disaster preparedness and long-term recovery.

Our connection is a ministry of presence that stills the waters of chaos and crisis, restoring hope and offering healing around the world.

Through UMCOR, we set the table of our faith with nourishing food, the finest linens, the best parts of who we are and share it with one another through acts of mercy and goodness. Today we are invited into that partnership with God who is our strength.



This mother and her daughter (left) who hid in their basement while Russian soldiers occupied the Ukrainian settlement of Glibivka, near Bucha, sit beside the food package they received from Hungarian Interchurch Aid, an UMCOR ACT Alliance partner. PHOTO: HIA