SPECIAL SUNDAY



SERMON STARTER

UMCOR SUNDAY

"GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS"

This sermon starter is part of the UMCOR Sunday pastor and leader kit and connects with the theme "God's Faithfulness in the Midst of Crisis." It can be adapted for your context and integrated into your worship service with the other material in the kit. **It is based on the lectionary reading for March 30, 2025: Joshua 5:10-12.**

Scripture Reading: Joshua 5:10-12 (NIV)

"On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan."

In the aftermath of natural disaster like a storm or a manmade disaster like war, many of us have witnessed unimaginable devastation – homes destroyed, lives disrupted and communities torn apart. Yet, even in the darkest of times, we have seen the light of God's grace shine through, often through the hands and feet of those who serve. One such organization embodying this light is the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). UMCOR's tireless efforts in providing immediate relief, long-term recovery and ongoing support to those affected are a testament to God's faithfulness and our shared responsibility to care for one another.

In our Scripture reading today, we find the Israelites on the brink of a new chapter in their journey – a chapter of promise and hope, but also one of transition. They've just entered the land of Canaan, and for the first time in decades, they are no longer reliant on manna from heaven but can now partake of the fruits of the land.

In the same way, as we look to recovery efforts in the wake of disaster, we see that God's provision is not just a matter of miraculous intervention but also of faithful, committed hands helping others rebuild their lives and communities.

In Joshua 5:10-12, the Israelites are celebrating the Passover, commemorating God's faithfulness in their exodus from Egypt. For 40 years during their journey in the wilderness, they relied on God to supply them with

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manna – bread from heaven – to sustain them as they wandered in the desert. It was a miraculous provision that reminded them of God's unwavering presence and care.

But now, as they enter Canaan, God calls them to a new season. They no longer need manna because they will begin to harvest the fruits of the land. It is a moment of both fulfillment and transition. The Israelites have arrived at a place where their dependence on direct miracles gives way to the blessings of the sustainability of their new normal.

Similarly, in the aftermath of disaster, many communities are reliant on the generosity and immediate aid from organizations like UMCOR and local churches, whose teams work tirelessly to provide food, water, shelter and emotional support in the early days of recovery. This is the "manna" of our time – the immediate relief that God provides through the work of the church.

But as time passes and the communities begin to rebuild, God's provision continues, through the hands of those who respond to the call to rebuild homes, schools and lives. Just as the Israelites left behind their dependence on manna and entered into the blessings of Canaan, so too do those affected by disasters move from mere survival to restoration.

UMCOR has been a key player in providing this sort of "manna" for the storm-torn communities in the wake of Hurricane Helene in fall 2024 and many other crises around the world. They have brought hope to places of despair and healing to places of brokenness. Through our hands, through the United Methodist connection, God has provided more than material goods, bringing emotional and spiritual support to survivors, reminding them that they are not alone and that God's love transcends every storm.

In Joshua 5:12, we see the Israelites transitioning from the wilderness to a land of abundance. They eat the produce of the land, marking the end of their years of wandering. In the same way, as communities recover, the work of UMCOR is a tangible expression of God's promise that after the storm, there will be a harvest – a harvest of new beginnings, restoration and renewal.

Yet, the recovery process doesn't end with the arrival of goods or financial assistance. UMCOR's commitment to long-term recovery and its partnership with local churches and communities is where true transformation happens. The God who provided manna in the wilderness is the same God who is at work through UMCOR today, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and providing for the hurting, not just for a moment, but for the long haul.

God has been faithful in the past, and God is faithful still. But we are not called to sit back and wait for a miracle; God calls us to be part of the miracle. When we contribute to UMCOR's efforts, whether through donations, volunteering, or praying, we are participating in God's work of bringing healing, justice and hope to a broken world.

As we reflect on the aftermath of disasters and the role of UMCOR in the recovery process, let us remember that God is always present, even in the most challenging of times. Just as God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, God continues to provide for those in need through people. Let us respond with open hearts and willing hands so that, like the Israelites, we too can move from a season of crisis into a season of restoration and hope.

United in Impact: Our Generosity Fuels Hope, Relief and Ongoing Recovery for Communities in Need