

UMCOR SUNDAY

SERMON STARTER: EXTRAVAGANT GRACE



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

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JOHN 9:1-41

Under the leadership of coordinators trained by the United Methodist Committee on Relief, a team of local volunteers spent a week cleaning out a man's basement apartment in Brooklyn, New York. The apartment had taken in five feet of water in 2012 during Hurricane Sandy. The super storm displaced the resident for more than three years while he lived with family members.

The volunteer team removed the trash and began the process of pulling out the bathroom and kitchen fixtures and wood paneling that had mold growing behind them. The following week, a team from Virginia came and renovated the apartment so that, finally, the man could return to his home.

Sorting through photographs and other items of sentimental value, the man said how thankful he was for the assistance because he experienced health issues and other hardships that prevented him from helping himself. He was overwhelmed with the amount of work that had to be done. He commented that, for the first time in three years, he could see his floor.

This man had such clear needs following the hurricane, but, for whatever reason, his situation had fallen through the

cracks. He was connected with UMCOR and finally received the assistance he needed to go home. He experienced a sense of extravagant grace through UMCOR.

In today's Gospel reading, we meet a man who was blind from birth and was forced to beg by the side of the road. People, including the disciples, in the context of the time, believed that either the man or his parents had sinned and that was why he couldn't see.

**"WE MUST DO WORK
THE WORKS OF HIM
WHO SENT ME."**

JOHN 9:4b, CEB

Jesus turns the presumption upside down and recognizes the wholeness of the man as a sacred child of God regardless of whether or not he can see. He instead invites the disciples into God's work. "We must do work the works of him who sent me." (John 9:4b, CEB)

The man has clear needs. Instead of ignoring him, condemning him or giving him a few coins, Jesus meets his deeper need and restores his sight. In a sign of extravagant grace, Jesus spreads saliva and mud on the man's eyes and instructs him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man finally has what he needs to return home.

His new vision, though, is met with skepticism. People wonder if he is the same person whom they knew since birth. The religious authorities are confused. They wonder how, if Jesus is a prophet who heals, he could break the law by healing on the



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Sabbath. Even the parents of the man who had been born blind distance themselves out of fear.

The one whose sight is restored has a choice to make. He can reject who Jesus is and be restored to his family and society. Instead, he chooses to follow Jesus who is on his own journey to the cross.

What must we let go of so that we can follow Jesus with the confidence of this man?

Who are the people with clear needs that we simply walk past without extending a glimmer of grace, let alone extravagant grace?

Life sometimes can be overwhelming.

- We read or watch the news and see communities overwhelmed by natural disaster.
- We hear about humanitarian crises arising from civil unrest and war.
- We know that famine and drought are caused by climate change and see in our own community signs of food insecurity.

It can seem like too much. How could we possibly make a difference? How can our limited resources make a dent in the seemingly never-ending need of the world? We begin to shut out the reminders of suffering. We willfully ignore the great needs of our siblings in Christ.

But the reality is that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to respond with extravagant grace. Just as Jesus invited the

disciples into the work saying, “We must do the works of him who sent me.”

Through the United Methodist Committee on Relief, we can make a difference in the lives of communities and individuals whose lives have been upended by storms, wars, climate change, and displacement. Through UMCOR, we see the impact of extravagant grace through the generosity of United Methodists.

The volunteers who worked on the man’s basement apartment in Brooklyn provided more than a restored home. They were there to connect, listen and remind him that he is a sacred child of God. And in turn, they received signs of extravagant grace through their relationship with the man and in community with one another.

This man said that other organizations had promised to help but fell short on their promises. He felt alone in his situation and had lost hope. But with the presence of The United Methodist Church and the people who helped him, his faith returned. He has hope again.

As we approach these next few weeks of Lent in our journey to the cross and the promise of resurrection and as we follow Jesus, how will you extend signs of extravagant grace to others?

In what ways can you connect with someone who might feel invisible or alone?

Today, I invite you to offer hope through your special offering for UMCOR Sunday. Together we will “do the works of him who sent” Jesus. Know that your gift touches people around the world. It relieves suffering and restores hope with extravagant grace.



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