

# HUMAN RELATIONS DAY

SERMON STARTER



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## COME AND SEE

This sermon starter connects with the liturgy and offering talk “Come and See” based on John 1:35-51.

In today’s Gospel reading, disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus where he is staying, and he replies, “Come and see.” They spend the day with him. In this account of disciple-making, Andrew goes and tells his brother that he has found the Messiah. He invites his brother to come and see for himself.

Jesus finds Philip, who was from the same town as Andrew and Peter, and says, “Follow me.”

How strategic is God, who will find a way into our hearts and use others to draw us into relationship with God?

But then, in an interesting turn, Nathaniel nearly misses his chance to know Jesus because he brushes off his friend Philip’s invitation by asking, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

This week we remember the faithful life, leadership and service of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. He was part of a movement that responded to the questions, “Can anything good come from Selma?” and “Can anything good come from Montgomery?” by saying, “Come and see.”

And while there were and are churches that perpetuate racist systems, the civil rights movement in this country was led by the church and other faith-based groups who were willing to risk their lives for justice.

When we read the Gospel and keep the love of God through Jesus in the center, the church shows up very differently from how the Nathaniels of the world perceive it.

In his letter from a Birmingham Jail, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. writes, “If today’s church



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does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.”

This letter was written nearly 60 years ago. For too many people, however, that perception is still held in the 21st century.

Often, we see this attitude in our increasingly secular society. When people’s experience of the church has been one of judgment or hypocrisy, they brush it off saying, “Can anything good come out of the church?”

How many who yearn for a relationship with Jesus don’t know where he is staying because they don’t believe they will find him inside a church building?

Today is Human Relations Day. It is an opportunity to recognize that Jesus is not staying behind the walls of the church building. Among other lessons we learned during the

pandemic was that even when United Methodist churches must close their doors to physical worship gatherings, we continue to partner with God in ministry.

Jesus is at work in our communities, building relationships that may seem unlikely and that transform hearts, minds and spirits. Our congregation’s Human Relations Day offerings join with those of other United Methodist churches to connect and build up new realities that reflect God’s desire for wholeness.

In Chicago, IL Maple Park and Englewood-Rust United Methodist Churches are in partnership to engage in community based alternatives to juvenile incarceration. Mentorship and leadership development support local youth, create healing relationships and reduce recidivism. Jesus is staying in the parks, gardens, and homes of Chicago youth.

The Sons of David program, through Lincoln Memorial Church in Buffalo, New York, provided academic tutoring, after-school basketball opportunities, and mentoring to African American preteen and teen boys who were not in school.



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Through the program, grades significantly increased, providing new opportunities for the youth who participated. Jesus is staying in the heart of urban cities.

Underpinned by arts, culture and music spaces, The Beacon Center in Washington, D.C., houses state-of-the-art affordable housing, a gymnasium, classrooms, a food pantry, immigration clinics and small-business services. Jesus is staying at the Emerson Beacon of Light Center.

And Jesus is staying in communities around the world. In the Philippines, community organizations are strengthening family resiliency to address substance abuse, particularly with those who are living in the Manila North Cemetery. And in West Congo, United Methodist Churches are working with ecumenical partners to provide pastoral support and advocacy for children and youth who are in prison.

The church is called to treat human needs as holy. We are called to care for the people we meet as children of God – fearfully, respectfully and wonderfully made in God’s own image.

How do we invite others to come and see that they are neither alone nor forgotten? In relationships formed through Christian community, no matter where people are on the journey, “Jesus is staying there” and the promise of resurrection is real.

In his letter from a Birmingham Jail, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “There was a time when the church was very powerful — in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”

People are hurting and fearful. We have endured a challenging year of pandemic, societal uprising and political turmoil. And that is on top of personal crises and trauma that may include illness, grief, financial instability and educational concerns.

Values and attitudes have shifted in a way that what once was unacceptable is often considered normal behavior.



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- How will we embody the place where Jesus is staying?
- How will our behavior reflect the justice, love and grace of Jesus?
- How will your actions and witness bring hope to the hopeless and amplify the voices of those whose voices are often drowned out in the cacophony of partisan divisiveness?

When we show up as Christians in our community, standing up for those who are oppressed, bringing food for those who are hungry, and offering a prayer and a listening ear for the lonely or sick, we begin to change the perspective of how church can look.

Today we have the opportunity through our Human Relation Day Sunday offering to be part of building relationships and through the church's actions. We usher in the kingdom that welcomes all people to come and see and to invited in to experience the joy of the good news of God's love.

Friends, we can do so with the confidence that we are wonderfully made to be instruments of God's grace, justice and peace in the world.

Amen.



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