

# United Methodist Church

Elmore, Worcester

November 22, 2020

*“Caring for the poor, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned means we are caring for Christ. Loving our neighbor is really loving God.”*

*Prelude, Gathering\*\* and Announcements*

Moment of Silent Preparation

\*Call to Worship (One - All)

*One: Make a joyful noise, a noise of love and care!*

**All: Praise God with generosity and compassion!**

*One: Sing to the Lord with acts of kindness!*

**All: Give God glory with missions of mercy!**

*One: Make a joyful noise, a noise of love and care!*

**All: Praise God with justice and righteousness!**

\*Hymn of Praise

(open) [The Trees of the Fields](#) # 2279 (TFWS – *black*)

\*Opening Prayer

*Glorious God, shine upon us with your Spirit of wisdom and truth. Enlighten our hearts. Help us to know the hope to which we are called. Reveal your ways, that we might share hope and joy in all that we do, and all that we say. In the light of Christ’s love, we pray. Amen.*

\*Gloria Patri # 71 (UMH)

Choir: Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore

Readings:

**Matthew 25:31-46**

Young Disciples Talk and Prayer

\*Hymn of the Reflection

[Open My Eyes, that I May See](#) # 454 (UMH – *red*)

Reflection

\*Hymn of Response

[Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service](#) # 581 (UMH – *red*)

Joys, Concerns, & Thanksgiving

Pastoral Prayer & Lord’s Prayer

Wesley Covenant Prayer (UMH, # 607)

Sending Hymn

[Crown Him with Many Crowns](#) # 327 (UMH – *red*)

Benediction

Postlude

*\*Please stand as you are able.*



# Sermon

(November 22, 2020: **(Matthew 25:31-46)**)

*I had every (and the best) intention to offer a reflection – this Christ the King Sunday, which included material from a reflection I found in Christian Century. However, I have yet to receive permission from the publisher to use that material. Hence, the following two articles from Ministry Matters are timely and I believe useful for our spiritual and communal good health. If you do (will) read them, please let me know your thoughts feelings and reactions as they pertain (or not) to you and our local communities. I genuinely do want to hear from you.*

*As well, for those who participate in our zoom this week, you will hear a different story than the ones reflected below. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time of fluid pandemic social unrest. May the peace of Christ reign in your heart and surround your family with love, compassion, grace and good health as you prepare for Thanksgiving. Pastor David*

## **CAN WE REBUILD TRUST IN AMERICA AND IN EACH OTHER?**

November 18th, 2020



\_By Rebekah Simon-Peter

On election day and for days afterward, I was glued to the TV. I flipped between channels, absorbing election results, minute by minute, county by county. Along with many other Americans, as they counted same-day ballots and mail-in ballots, I watched percentages rise and fall.

My throat tightened, and tears of joy slipped down my cheek as Kamala Harris, the first female Vice president-elect, spoke to the gathered crowds. I felt my heart fill as President-elect Joe Biden spoke of an America working together and giving each other a chance. This America is the America I know and love. This is the America I know we can rebuild trust in.

I know I am not alone. Friends old and new reached out and shared their relief and joy with me. At the same time, there are plenty of others — including family members, colleagues and friends — who aren't relieved with the results.

Almost as many people voted for a second term for Donald Trump as voted for Joe Biden. As the political parties have grown increasingly distinct, and bipartisanship seems increasingly out of reach, these are not small differences. While about half the country held its breath for the last four years, the other half of the people felt heard, vindicated, and represented. Now the shoe is on the other foot.

Vindication aside, can these two Americas come back together again? Can we have a shared vision even if we don't share everyday realities? Can trust, even understanding, in each other be restored?

To rebuild trust, we have to do better by each other. We need better politics that serves the people, not special interest groups.

### **How can we rebuild trust?**

If we're going to have better politics, we would need a shared morality. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says, "Morality matters more than we commonly acknowledge. It's all we have left to bind us into shared responsibility for the common good. Morality is our most powerful resource. Morality helps us turn disconnected 'I's' into a collective 'we.'" We use morality to shore up an "us vs. them" mentality, with each side claiming a higher ground.

Rabbi Sacks envisions a morality that "turns selfish genes into selfless people." It turns "egoists into altruists, and self-interested striving into empathy, sympathy, and compassion for others." That's something perhaps ALL Americans could get behind.

If we're going to have a shared morality, we would need to see each other as worthy. We would need to see each other as beloved human beings and become willing to understand each other's grievances, hopes and dreams. That means we would need to stop looking for scapegoats and deal with our problems. America's problem isn't immigrants, people of other religions, ethnicities or cultures, or even people of another political persuasion. It's that we have gotten disconnected from each other and lost our shared vision.

Americans are a creative lot. Guided by the wisdom of the ages, we can figure this out. First, we must rise above fear, let go of judgment and be willing to do the work of rebuilding a country that works for everyone.



## ***HOW TO OVERCOME NEGATIVITY WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE***

by Rebekah Simon-Peter (October 7th, 2020)

People are on edge with each other, hypervigilant, buffeted in a sea of negativity. Clergy colleagues report that otherwise stable church folks are having meltdowns and launching into attack mode. My husband, a cordial golfer, returned from the links last night telling me that a fellow golfer threatened to beat him up for a mild offense. Even a recent Master Gardener meeting I attended, made up of low key vegetable gardeners, turned into a verbal slugfest.

What's up? And what can faith leaders do about it?

### **Toxic stew**

Americans are caught up in a toxic stew of relentlessly polarizing politics, the uncertainty of the future, an ongoing pandemic with all its economic fallout, and the raw exposure of systemic racism. All of this has been further complicated by the recent un-presidential debate. Negativity has saturated our common airwaves. No one is exempt from its ill effects.

Faith leaders, while you are not exempt, you can overcome negativity with emotional intelligence.

### **Practice emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence includes five abilities. I'll address them and simple ways you can incorporate them into your day-to-day dealings with others:

**Self-regulation.**

Don't go to every fight you are invited to. When you feel your hackles rise, or the perfect retort forming on your tongue, take a moment to breathe first. Instead of cutting someone else off, a good way to defuse the moment is to say, "Tell me more." Listening can help another person re-regulate. Chances are they just need to blow off steam, too.

**Empathy.**

I once read this wisdom on a tea bag: "Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Even as the rain falls on the just and the unjust, the negativity in our common airwaves affects people indiscriminately. That makes empathy more important than ever. As a faith leader, you can both model empathy with the people in your circles and ask them to practice empathy with others.

**Self-awareness.**

Be aware of your own tendencies, tiredness and need for time-away. Staying tuned in to these three T's will give you greater ability to both self-regulate and to practice empathy.

**Motivation.**

When interviewed, people all along the theological and political spectrum want similar things: safety, love and an ability to live life according to their most prized values. We hold these motivations in common. What differs is the method by which we believe we will achieve them. Understanding the deep motivations of people allows faith leaders to practice empathy, and to self-regulate in the midst of chaos.

**Social skill.**

The most important skill, and indeed the responsibility, that you have as a faith leader is to practice social skills. The social skill has little to do with making small talk, and more to do with the ability to move people in the same direction. Another word for social skill is leadership. Leadership that unifies people is a rare commodity these days. Given the divided nature of our common life, chances are you won't unite people around theology, or politics. Instead tap into our

common treasury of values: the words of the gospel, the love of God, and the Kingdom of heaven. Quietly, persistently, and lovingly, bring people back to the overarching vision that Jesus laid out for us: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is heaven.

### **You are not alone**

Lastly, I want to remind you that you are not alone. Isolation is the enemy of love so don't try to go it alone. Personally, my mission is to empower church leaders and the congregations they serve. I invite you to tap into the resources my team and I offer by watching [Spiritual Mojo](#), joining us for [How to Create a Culture of Renewal](#), or attending the next [Uncomfortable Conversation series](#). In the meantime, breathe deep, and stay connected to the Source that supports us all!

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rebekah is passionate about reconnecting spiritual leaders with their God-given powers to co-create miracles with the divine. Her award-winning group coaching program, **Creating a Culture of Renewal**® has energized church leaders across the country to reclaim their calling and to grow their ministries. Known for teaching leaders how to bring out the best in the people who frustrate them the most, her work transforms church leaders and the congregations they serve.

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## *Pastoral Prayer*

Thank you - Holy Spirit, we offer our prayers to you (...)

Lord Jesus, this day, we pray that your reign might be extended and acknowledged over all the earth. We know that your intention is not only to love us but also to graciously rule over us.

Forgive us, Lord, for our timid discipleship. Stir up in us a desire to reach out to our neighbors and all the world in your name, to show the world love and mercy, so that through us, even us, the world might see you and, in seeing you, come to worship you as Lord of all. This we pray in the name and Spirit of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

...together, saying, *Our Father, who art in heaven... Amen*

## Quotes

I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! (John Wesley, "Preface," Vol. 5; p.. 3.)

There is no one right way to pray. The more we pray and the more we learn about the way others pray, the more sure we become about this. Different approaches abound to provide room for each of us to explore, improvise, and find his or her own way in prayer. They support us as we begin to take hold of the astounding truth that God loves us in the flesh, that our reality is reality.... The many different kinds of holy men and women, the lovers of God, each so different in temperament and psychological type, embolden us to believe that each of us can find our own way. (*Primary Speech*, Ulanov; p. 115.)

Wisdom teaches that the goal of our lives is to live with God forever. We're pilgrims passing through, and Jesus counsels us to count how few days we have and thus gain wisdom of the heart. When I accept in the depth of my being that the ultimate accomplishment of my life is *me* – the person I've become and who other persons are because of me – then living in the wisdom of accepted tenderness is not a technique, not a craft, not a Carnegian ploy of how to win friends and influence people, but a way of life, a distinctive and engaged presence to God....(*The Wisdom of Tenderness*, Manning; pp. 2-3.)

A renewed Christian Spirituality will be a spirituality which looks to the faith of the Apostolic Church as exhibited in the New Testament: the faith in God who brings unity to the human race, and who has wrought salvation and reconciliation through Christ; a

God of light and love; a God whose spirit brings freedom; a God who nourishes and builds up the body of Christ. In the New Testament, and in the Old, it will seek to deepen knowledge of the living and true God. (*The Eye of the Storm*, Leech; p. 218.)

## Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

(UMH, p. 607)

*I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*