

Worship Brainstorming Summary September and October

Monday, August 8, 2016

Members present: Lynne Richmond, Roger Richmond, Dave Booth, Glenn Chilson, Ken Lockett, Kathy Lockett, Kate Robbins, Rose Emmons, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Vicki Zuker, Jean Kelly, Ron Zuker, Karen Booth, Ivan Ivanov; Ana and Luka Ivanov for dinner

“The worship we hope to develop will be rooted in Scripture, centered on Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It will be relevant to local and emerging culture, while addressing the needs of believers and unbelievers alike. Above all, it will intentionally engage people physically, emotionally, intellectually, and soulfully.”

Felt needs: What physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual need are we addressing in this service so that worship is engaging and a means of making disciples? What question needs to be posed/answered so that we are making disciples?

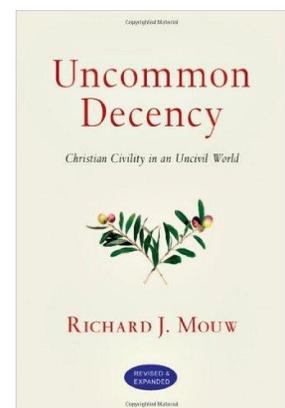
“Can We Talk? Where Faith and Politics Meet”

People say you’re not supposed to talk about politics and religion, but we have to be honest about the fact that our faith should affect every area of our lives including our political leanings (and vice versa). Even in Christian circles, there are political and social issues that divide Christians and can disrupt churches, communities, and even families. Disagreements over key issues are not new; Scripture addresses them multiple times. Paul’s letter to the Galatians is one example, and he encourages them to “work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:10). We may not be able to “solve” problems or come to an agreement on certain issues, but we do need to have a willingness to share honestly and listen to and honor one another.

FYI from Karen: As a non-profit organization, we cannot endorse any candidate or political party without threatening our status as a non-profit. So yes, we’ll talk politics, but no, we’re not going to say who to vote for. **It was really, really hard to summarize the discussion. I don’t mean to misrepresent what was said. Please feel free to correct or clarify that which follows.**

Background information and resources from Pastor Mary:

- Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World by Richard Mouw (<https://vimeo.com/146061022>): In April, Karen and I attended a workshop at GR 1st UMC with Richard Mouw, a retired pastor from the Reformed tradition. He taught at Fuller Theological Seminary in California and wrote the book, right. He adopted the term, “**convicted civility**,” to describe how one can have conversations about hard topics, like politics, in light of one’s convictions (faith). “Can we talk?” is his invitational way of inviting people into hard conversations.
- “Social Principles of the United Methodist Church 2013-2106 (UMSP)” <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/social-principles-social-creed>: “To help guide our



thinking and acting about how we live in, and are in engaged in ministry in the world, The United Methodist Church has created statements to guide the church in its efforts to create a world of justice.” They are not church law, but they are meant to guide how we live out our faith in the world and are available as attractive bulletin inserts (<https://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/social-principles-bulletin-inserts-available>).

- We can talk about political issues. We cannot be partisan. (Bruce Eckerman)
- Now is a time of incredible importance, in light of the fall election and current world situation.
- Church members are not all on the same page in this congregation or in any other that Mary has served. There are members at each end of the spectrum and many in the middle.
- Adam Hamilton preached a similar series earlier this year: “Facing Issues that Divide” (<http://www.adamhamilton.org/facing-issues-that-divide-blog-series/> and <http://www.cor.org/bridges>. Also Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White)
- All four Sundays are very personal. Ivan came to the US as an immigrant in 1991. He became a citizen in 2005. Mary’s grandfather was a State Police trooper who taught shooting.
- Additional resource: The Year of Living Like Jesus by Ed Dobson

Background information from Karen’s notes on Uncommon Decency Workshop:

- In hard (aka high octane) conversations, there is a need for trust; a need to sort out that which is essential and that which is not (most things are not; and a need for pastoral care (nurturing relationship that deals with fear).
 - I Peter:
 - Calls for us to be ready to give account for our hope and do so with gentleness and reverence. *I Peter 3: 15*
 - Honor the emperor (civil leader).
 - Fear the Lord.
 - Love the family of believers (agape love).
 - Honor all humans.
- } I Peter 2: 13-17
- Wesleyan leaders believed that the world was their parish, therefore every place is holy ground and that everyone is made in God’s image.
 - John Calvin believed in “just war.” To believe a war could be just, he called people to:
 - Look at their motivation and assume the worst possible interpretation.
 - Contemplate our shared humanity and assume the best possible interpretation.
 - “Where there is love there is seeing.” *Josef Pieper in Only the Lover Sings*
 - The (biblical) role of government is to nurture and promote good. Churches should function as a school of public virtue. This is where faith and politics meet.
 - Trust and a sense of belonging are nurtured in family relationships, then in friendships, and lastly in citizenship. What happens when we lose our sense of belonging and community? It leaves us with a profound sense of loneliness; we see this most clearly in people who say they have no faith (nones) or are done with faith (dones).
 - Strong convictions need to be told within the context of a journey for them to be understood.
 - Maturing means learning to live with mystery and



messiness.

Images: Cross and elephant/donkey. Speech bubbles. Street signs, previous page and below.

Visuals: Make street signs and have them in strategic areas – welcome center, aisles, altar.

Hands-on items: What might we hand out each week that would promote peace and civility? Ideas: Rules for discourse (Ephesians). Prayer for Holiness (Sept. 11). Coexist sticker.

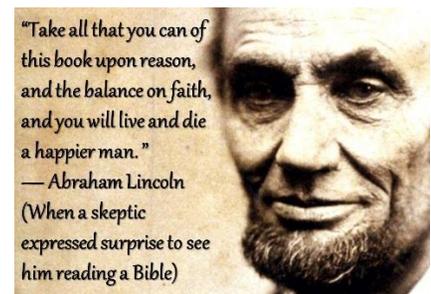


General discussion points/questions:

- What do we do after we've discussed how our faith butts up against hard issues?
- Few issues are black and white. We live in the gray zones most of the time.
- Today's political environment is different than it once was; even in the past couple decades.
- Key points: We can't separate politics and faith. Where do we place our trust? We are called to pray without ceasing. Are we bringing this to God?
- We are saturated with media, yet short on facts. The nature of "news" has changed: more commentary, more ratings driven.
- Rick Warren quote: How do you know when God is at the center of your life? When God's at the center, you worship. When he's not you worry.
- "If you pray, don't worry. If you worry, why pray."
- Pastor Mary: The Dialogue Institute has some useful guidelines (<http://dialogueinstitute.org/dialogue-principles/>). Here's why:

Dialogue in the interreligious, inter-ideological sense is a conversation on a common subject between people with differing views undertaken so that they can learn from one another and grow. These principles, originally called the "Dialogue Decalogue" formulated by Professor Leonard Swidler, set forth some fundamental ground rules for dialogue.

- Thoughts from Karen's experience as a High School debate coach: A debate is an organized clash of ideas. Its focus is a resolution, a statement of fact, policy, or value that is fairly balanced between the affirmative (supporting) and negative (opposing) sides. The best resolutions are also significant and timely topics. As debaters research their cases, they learn to search for facts and analyze whether those facts are credible evidence that support, oppose, or have little or nothing to do with the resolution. Good debaters are careful listeners and good note takers. They understand that issues are complex.
- Show Bible quotes by past presidents. Example, right.



"The Good Samaritan"

Guiding scriptures #1: Luke 10: 25-37 (CEV)

²⁵ An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"

²⁷ The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.'"

²⁸ Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life."

²⁹ But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, "Who are my neighbors?"

³⁰ Jesus replied:

As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.

³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. ³² Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side.

³³ A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him ³⁴ and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine^f and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."

³⁶ Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"

³⁷ The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity."

Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"

Guiding scriptures #2: Matthew 7: 12 (CEV)

¹² Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.

Media: "How Doritos Gave Us Trump." Length: 5:38. Phil Vischer, creator of Veggie Tales, has a theory about how Doritos led to Trump running for president. Hint: We have been conditioned to crave the extreme. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEvSJbwNbWI&noredirect=1>

Comment: While a good analogy, it's not something we would use in worship, but on the website with some information about the series.

Helpful article: <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/7576/tis-the-season-idolatry>

Being a Christian during this political season begins with repentance. *Lord, I confess that the very thing that drives me crazy in the other guy has strangled me too. Forgive me, heal me. Heal all of us.*

Being a Christian continues with humility. Republican Senator John Danforth warned us, "If we believe our political positions are absolute implementations of God's will, then our political causes become religious crusades, and reasonable accommodation becomes impossible. If our faith brings modesty about ourselves and our politics, our effectiveness is more likely. I believe that such modesty is, or at least should be, Christianity's gift to American politics."

September 11, 2016: "Practicing Politics and Keeping Faith"

17th Pentecost

Scripture: Ephesians 4: 29-32 (CEV)

²⁹ Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Synopsis: We're always told that religion and politics are off limits in conversation, but our faith in Jesus Christ is inherently political. Believing and trusting in God puts us in relationship with the world God created and challenges us to engage issues. We are called to community, and even when we disagree, how can we be honest, civil, and caring so that we continue to be a witness of God's grace to the world?

Discussion points:

- Pastor Mary will use "Christianity and Health Care" as a starting topic.
- Today will mark the 15th anniversary of 9/11.
- Lakeside offered an opportunity to speak with the pastor after worship in a class called "After Thoughts." This might be a good series for us to try that---possible in Glenn's class.
- John Wesley pursued holiness. See <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5398/john-wesleys-rule-of-life>.
- Growing up, it seemed like disagreements were a sign that we couldn't be friends. We need to move away from that mentality and agree to disagree.

Visuals: Cross and elephant/donkey. Speech bubbles. Seven mile bridge in Key West (Adam Hamilton's series).

Media possibilities: We only looked at "A Prayer for Holiness" as a group.

- "Members' Moments: Sara Boersma." Sara noted that church friendships have room for disagreements because they are rooted in Christ. **Comments:** Show at the end of the announcements. <https://www.dropbox.com/home/LHUMC?preview=Members%27+Moments+9-11-16+Sara.mp4>
- "A Prayer for Holiness." Length: 1:28. Cost: We own it. We live in a world that can be confusing and discouraging at times. Amidst the turmoil, God has called his people to be holy, set apart for Him. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/a-prayer-for-holiness> **Comments:** Excellent. Use it in some form each week during the series. Script:
God, today we ask you to hear our prayers. We ask for healing in a day where we are so connected to the world, set up apart. In a time of great unrest and uncertainty, we ask for holiness. Search our hearts, renew our minds, and help us love like You love us. Make us holy. Use us to do your will on this earth. God, today we ask that you would restore us. Gather up the bits and pieces of our souls and mend them with your loving hands. Search out those parts we try to hide from You. Today God, we invite you in. Our faith is in Jesus Christ. We trust You. May we be set apart for You. May we be holy.
- "Promises, Promises – Primary 2016." Length: 2:09. Free (subscription). Every election season there are promises being thrown all around. As Christ-followers, it is often hard to know how we should handle the promises being made. <https://journeyboxmedia.com/product/promises-promises-primary-2016/>
- "Pray for Election Day." Length: 1:00. Cost: \$5.00. The 'Pray for Election Day' campaign is an effort to remind people of faith of the importance of praying for those in leadership. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/20863/pray-for-election-day>

- “On Civil Discourse.” Length: 0:37. Cost: Free. Guidelines for civil discourse: 1) Have an open mind. 2) Be respectful, listen, and seek to understand. 3) Stay on topic. 4) Challenge the idea, not the person. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35raGubWkMQ>.

Activity: Drawing closer to God – make a circle with God at the center.

Music: “Live Like That” by Sidewalk Prophets

Family Camp

UMSP: Political Community, paragraph 164. Social Community, paragraph 162 V

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-social-community#health-care>

September 18, 2016: “A Christian Response to Islamic Extremism” 18th Pentecost

Scripture: Romans 12: 14-21 (NLT)

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them.

¹⁵Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!

¹⁷Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD.

²⁰Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

²¹Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Synopsis: Extremists exist in every religious tradition, including Christianity. In Scripture, specifically in the Old Testament, we may struggle with the stories of leaders killing other groups and condoning genocide. Still today, there are those who claim to follow Jesus and seek violence in his name. If we hear God’s call that says, “Do not be afraid,” how does it change our response to terror in our country and around the world? With Paul’s words to the Romans as our guide, how do we seek peace today?

Discussion points:

- Abraham was the father of three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. How did children of the same father get so divided? National Geographic’s “Journey of Faith,” Dec. 2001 and New York Public Library’s “Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam,” Oct. 2010 (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/23/arts/design/23faiths.html?_r=0). Even the Blue Mosque in Istanbul has a map showing how the faiths are related.
- Every religion has extremists and it is very scary to meet them face to face. Pastor Mary’s example: Westboro Baptist Church’s hate speech against LGBT people, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, American soldiers, and politicians in Kansas. Glenn’s example: Patriots in Harbor Springs, MI. 3) Roger: Islam is more than a religion; it is also a legal system (Sharia law https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law) and cradle to grave culture. While Christian extremists have done some awful things in the name of religion, how can we dismiss the

much larger number of Islamic extremists? Does state sponsored (Saudi) funding for 9/11, mosques, and madrasses change our response?

- There are parallels between Hitler's rise to power and now. Hitler's followers were able to "overlook" the Holocaust as it unfolded because he pulled them out of a depression. Couldn't the same thing happen now in Muslim countries?
- Christianity is a way of life too. Christ called us to "take up his cross and follow him." He did not say it would be easy. Pastors paid a high price to speak out against Hitler,
- Jean's friend emigrated here from Poland when she was 5 years old and converted to Catholicism. She had never told anyone that one parent was Jewish as she still fears for her life if certain people found out.
- Today, Europe is facing a situation where the Muslim immigrants are not assimilating into the host countries. Christianity is under attack. There are no Christian churches in Egypt. Jews are leaving Europe. Will a similar situation occur in the US?
- "Turning the other cheek": In the garden, Christ chose the cross. He did not choose to see his disciples die by inciting violence.
- Old Testament: OT violence does not justify violence today. Note from Karen: The August 21 bulletin art, right, paints a similar picture. Our past does not have to dictate the future.
- Ken: Reflect on how, due to Islamic extremism with all its violence, there is actually a growing number of Muslims turning to Christianity where they encounter a message of peace and love.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-islamic-extremists-muslims-turning-to-jesus-christ-christianity-message-of-peace-159764/>



Visuals:

Media possibilities: We only previewed "Like Me" as a group.

- "Like Me." Length: 1:34. Cost: Free (subscription). A reflection on grace (and politics). We often want to pick and choose who extends grace to, and many times those happen to be the people who look a lot like us. But God's amazing grace is for all. <https://journeyboxmedia.com/product/like-me/> **Comments:** We like this. Use it. It also fits with the October 2 message on immigrants.
- "Bob Appleby 9/11." Length: 2:40. We own it (no longer available for preview online – Karen can show it to you if you like). A former Marine turned priest, Bob Appleby, was the Ground Zero chaplain. For a related video visit <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/41794/cross-and-the-towers-church-event> (The Cross and the Towers video illustration). **Question:** Bob Appleby's response to horrible event was amazing. How do we deal with a problem like this when it persists for decades?

Activity: Picnic.

Music: "If We've Ever Needed You" by Casting Crowns (If we've ever needed you, Lord, it's now); "If We Are the Body" by Casting Crowns (Jesus paid much too high a price for us to pick and choose who should come)

UMSP: Social Community, paragraph 162

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/prejudice-against-muslims-and-arabs-in-the-usa>

Background information: Here are the first few paragraphs of some excellent material:

Summary

Why is it that some Muslims become Islamists and some Islamists turn to violence? A summary of some basic convictions held in varying degrees by *all* Muslims is followed by an explanation of how Islamists have developed these ideas in response to various challenges (especially political) of the modern world. This analysis brings us face to face with what has been called 'the struggle for the soul of Islam'. [1] It is only against this background that we are in a position to suggest how Christians can respond at many different levels to Muslims in general and to Islamists in particular.

Introduction

One of the reasons why we have such difficulty in responding to issues related to Islam is that we find it hard to distinguish between 'Islam' (the whole system of beliefs and the way of life of 1.3 billion Muslims), 'Islamism' (Islamic Fundamentalism – sometimes called Revivalist, Radical, Activist or Political Islam), and 'Islamic terrorism' (terrorism carried out by Muslims in the name of Islam). As a result of the failure to make these distinctions, many suggest, for example, that terrorism carried out by Muslims is a natural expression of Islamic beliefs. [2]

If we are to avoid giving false testimony against our neighbour (Exodus 20:16), it is essential that Christians should allow Muslims to define themselves and therefore recognise that most Muslims would want to distinguish between 'Muslims', 'Islamists' and 'Muslim/Islamist terrorists'.

<http://www.jubilee-centre.org/christian-responses-to-islam-islamism-and-islamic-terrorism-by-colin-chapman/>

September 25, 2016: "Christianity and Guns"

19th Pentecost

Scripture: Isaiah 2: 3-5 (CEV)

³Many people will come and say, "Let's go to the mountain of the Lord God of Jacob and worship in his temple."

The Lord will teach us his Law from Jerusalem, and we will obey him.

⁴He will settle arguments between nations. They will pound their swords and their spears into rakes and shovels; they will never make war or attack one another.

⁵People of Israel, let's live by the light of the Lord.

Scripture: Matthew 26: 47-56 (NLT)

⁴⁷And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people.

⁴⁸The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss." ⁴⁹So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Rabbi!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.

⁵⁰Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for."

Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear.

⁵²"Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"

⁵⁵Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. ⁵⁶But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures." At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Synopsis: The Second Amendment gets the most press among the Bill of Rights. As we consider the right to bear arms, we also must face the question about where we put our ultimate trust and what God's vision and hope is for us.

Discussion points:

- Pastor Mary has had a discussion on guns in each church she has served. Each congregation has a diversity of opinions. Can we separate “guns” and “gun violence”? We are not assuming Jesus didn't have weapons.
- History would be different without guns.
- 2nd Amendment: “A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”
- A call for common sense usage is in order. Shouldn't the CDC be allowed to study gun violence?
- What roles do the “everyone is special/winner” mentality and instant gratification play in how people handle conflict? Maybe we don't have a gun problem as much as we have a coping/tolerance problem. How can people learn to deal with losing and failure if they have never been allowed to lose?
- Areas with the highest crime rates have the tightest gun control. Current gun laws are not evenly enforced.
- Violence pervades our society: video games, movies, television shows, internet, etc.
- Assault weapons: How accessible are they?
- Presidential campaigns: Some of the protests have turned violent. Are there parallels between now and protests of the 1960's?
- Ken: Weapons of Jesus' time compared to modern weapons. Then – sword, dagger, sling. Now – pistols, automatic rifles. The threat of violence was just as prevalent then as it is now. A dagger or short sword was a weapon of choice for personal protection for the traveler against robbers in Jesus' time. Would Jesus' message of peace and love be any different if he were physically here today? Weapons technology has changes. How has humankind changed in the past forty generations?
- Ken: Self defense could be the greatest example of love. Christ said, “Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15: 14) When protecting one's family or neighbor, a person is unselfishly risking one's life for others.

CDC study back story (from Karen):

CDC officials published an article in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (1989) stating they “were going to systematically build their case that owning firearms causes death.” In October 1993, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published, “Gun Ownership as a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home,” a CDC study that cost \$1.7 million. It was discredited as unreliable and biased by numerous scientific organizations. Congress then pulled funding in 1996 on studies that “advocated or promoted gun control.”

In response to the Sandy Hook school shootings, President Obama issued an executive order on banning CDC fund to study gun violence. The report, “[Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence](#),” released in June 2013, outlines key finding about guns and gun violence. You can read the report by clicking on the link. The bottom line is that

banning guns or tightening controls is ineffective and there is evidence to show that guns are used effectively for self-defense.

Visuals:

Media possibility: "Should a Christian Defend Himself against an Intruder?" Length: 8:41. Cost: Free. We ask Christians are told to "Turn the other cheek" when we are attacked, but what if our life is in danger? The Hard Questions panel delves into the issue of self-defense and defending others. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX-YA8ziRrg>

Activities: Mortgage Burning and Celebration of Ministry dinner at the Holiday Inn in downtown Muskegon. Ministry Fair between services.

Music: "Whom Shall I Fear" by Chris Tomlin (You hear me when I call. You are my morning song. Though darkness fills the night, it cannot hide the light. Whom shall I fear?)

UMSP: Social Community, paragraph 162 <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/gun-violence>

October 2, 2016: "Immigrants and the Bible"

20th Pentecost

Scripture: Leviticus 19: 33-34 (MSG)

³³"When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don't take advantage of him. ³⁴Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. I am God, your God."

Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-46

"Sheep and Goats"

³¹"When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne.

³²Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, ³³putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. ³⁵And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, ³⁶I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.'

³⁷"Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸⁻³⁹And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' ⁴⁰Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

⁴¹"Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. ⁴²And why? Because—I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison, and you never visited.'

⁴⁴"Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?'

⁴⁵"He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'

⁴⁶"Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward."

Synopsis: The treatment of immigrants (i.e. aliens, foreigners, stranger) is addressed throughout Scripture. God calls for people to be treated with love and care. The commandments to “love God and love your neighbor” are so closely connected that they are difficult to separate. How do we respond putting faith in Jesus first?

Discussion points:

- Even though we’ve seen God’s call to welcome all, including immigrants, and treat them well, we need personal conversations and experiences to show what that should look like.
- Pastor Mary’s best childhood friend’s mother was from the Philippines. Mary had no idea the hurtful comments her friend and mother endured because of their background.
- Citizenship: Becoming a United States citizen is a huge ordeal. Unless you have someone to guide you through, sufficient financial resources, and language skills, you won’t be successful. It is great that the final ceremony is public celebration (Grand Haven & Ellis Island).
- How would people views change if they went on ancestry.com and found out where they came from based on their DNA?
- Some immigrants have been received differently than others. Jean’s Swedish grandma found it easier to assimilate than people whose dress and customs are substantially different than people who are already part of the community.
- Glenn: While living in Australia, people asked him if the Midwest was anything like the movie, “Fargo.” He would ask them if Australia was anything like “Crocodile Dundee.”
- Have Muskegon Methodists ever helped a refugee family? Not to our knowledge.
- Julie Jones is spending time on the island of Lesbos in Greece working with refugees.

Ivan’s perspective:

- There are so many stories and pictures in the news of refugees and even a refugee Olympic team. Being a refugee is much harder than being an immigrant. Some of the have had to travel so far and endure great hardships. They don’t have good options.
- We apply stereotypes when we meet new people. He has had some interesting conversations with people he has just met as they ask about his Slavic name and accent. Connections: James Bond, Russian literature, electrician/communications/Russia
- He came here because there was a war in his home country.
- Small acts of kindness were (are) very meaningful. He remembered being invited to a Lutheran Church on East Hile by one of his high school friends.
- After 9/11, he shaved his beard before international travel so that he looked like his passport photo and would be less likely to be profiled.

Visuals:

Media possibilities: We did not preview any of these as a group.

- “Kathryn Maurer: Methodist Angel Welcomed Immigrants.” Length: 3:16 (stop at 2:39). Cost: Free. She served the Methodist church for 40 years, and this deaconess earned the title “The Angel of Angel Island” for her kindness and devotion to thousands of families making their way to a new world.

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/kathryn-maurer-methodist-angel-welcomed-immigrants>

- “Brother.” Length: 3:32. Free (subscription). Jesus was clear when he told us to love our enemies. <https://journeyboxmedia.com/product/brother/>
- “Johnny.” Length: 5:22. Cost: \$19.98. Cost: How do you invest your time? Meet Johnny, a man who has spent the majority of his life investing in his work, leaving little time, he says, for God’s work. Watch as he serves a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of Congo. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/57356/deidox--johnny>

Activities: World Communion/Holy Communion. CROP Walk in Muskegon.

Music: “Open Arms” by Michael W. Smith

UMSP: Social Community, paragraph 162 H, “Rights of Immigrants”

We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all.

“Defying Gravity”

Stuff. And more stuff. And even more stuff. The next thing you know, we’re pulled into the orbit of materialism! In Defying Gravity, Tom Berlin takes a look at the difference between “want” and “need” and illustrates how possessions can create an unbearable weight on our lives. He shows us how too much stuff affects our ability to serve and thrive, and then he helps us explore what is required to sustain a vibrant life.

Resource: Defying Gravity by Tom Berlin

Images: Deep space. Black holes.

Potential monologue: The dilemma of tithing (Ken is willing to write a script).

October 9, 2016: “Discovering Gravity

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Matthew 19: 16-30 (CEV)

“The Rich Young Man”

¹⁶A man came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?”

¹⁷Jesus said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? Only God is good. If you want to have eternal life, you must obey his commandments.”

¹⁸“Which ones?” the man asked.

Jesus answered, “Do not murder. Be faithful in marriage. Do not steal. Do not tell lies about others. ^{19f}Respect your father and mother. And love others as much as you love yourself.” ²⁰The young man said, “I have obeyed all of these. What else must I do?”

²¹Jesus replied, “If you want to be perfect, go sell everything you own! Give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come and be my follower.” ²²When the young man heard this, he was sad, because he was very rich.

²³Jesus said to his disciples, “It’s terribly hard for rich people to get into the kingdom of heaven! ²⁴In fact, it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into God’s kingdom.”

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly surprised and asked, “How can anyone ever be saved?”

²⁶Jesus looked straight at them and said, “There are some things that people cannot do, but God can do anything.”

²⁷Peter replied, “Remember, we have left everything to be your followers! What will we get?”

²⁸ Jesus answered:

Yes, all of you have become my followers. And so in the future world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, I promise that you will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹All who have given up home or brothers and sisters or father and mother or children or land for me will be given a hundred times as much. They will also have eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are now first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Synopsis: Financial gravity is what makes us pursue our basic needs, but we can be pulled into pursuing wants rather than needs. We can get sucked into the pull of more and forget the value of Jesus – humility, trust, forgiveness, and sacrifice.

Discussion points:

- Gravity itself is not a bad thing. The problem is when we gravitate to money and stuff, not God. We often hear people say that the weight of their things drags them down.
- “The Mission.” In a scene from this 1986 movie, a former slave trader, played by Robert De Niro, atones for his sins by dragging a net of armor up the mountain. The indigenous people cut the rope in an act of forgiveness. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzhFRqjF_o
- The weight of stuff and debt make them hard to control. It’s like pulling a trailer.
- Momentum: It is hard to change direction or stop when you are going fast (“Gravity”).
- Marriage struggles are often money related.
- Ron: After moving from his apartment, Erik’s Muskegon bedroom is like a black hole.
- We don’t know the ending of the rich young ruler’s story, but tend to assume he didn’t follow Jesus since verse 22 says, “When the young man heard this, he was sad, because he was very rich.”

Visuals: Using “Gravity” as a model, create a cross from solar panels, and add silhouettes of the two astronauts tethered together.

Media possibility: We only watched the “Gravity” clip as a group.

- Scene from “Gravity” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiMMfI0hcGw>) **Comment:** This has possibilities.
- Scene from “Star Trek” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_F422arRuQ)
- “American Nightmare.” Length: 3:03. Cost: \$15.00. This is a spoken word rap that presents a powerful message about the meaning of success and the dangers of falling in love with wealth and riches. **Comments:** It may be hard for people to understand. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/33785/american-nightmare>

Activity: Gravity as a force.

Music: “My Own Little World” by Matthew West

October 16, 2016: “Breaking Free”

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Luke 15: 11-32 (Prodigal Son)

¹¹Jesus also told them another story:

Once a man had two sons. ¹²The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons.

¹³Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

¹⁵He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. ¹⁶He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

¹⁷Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! ¹⁸I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

²⁰The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

²¹The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

²²But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. ²⁴This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

²⁵The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"

²⁷The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." ²⁸The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. ²⁹But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. ³⁰This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."

³¹His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

Synopsis: We can get sucked into the pull of more so quickly that we lose ourselves and our call to be generous. We forget our mission to love and serve God who is generous to us. God calls us not to simply benefit for the Kingdom of God, but to participate in expanding the Kingdom of God through our investment in acts of generosity and compassion.

Discussion points:

- Inheritances are not gifted until a person has passed, so to have the young ask his father for it early is the equivalent of wishing his father were dead. His priorities are messed up.
- When we get sucked in by gravity, we miss the call to generosity.

Visuals:

Media possibilities: We only watched "Stuff People Say" as a group.

- "Stuff People Say." Length: 2:07. Cost: Free (subscription). Ever stop and listen to people? Most of us are blessed with great things, yet we complain about the most ridiculous

inconveniences. This light-hearted mini-movie is a great way to open a message on being content, thankfulness, or entitlement. <https://journeyboxmedia.com/product/stuff-people-say/>
Comments: Hilarious. We love this. It is so true!

- “Ludmilla.” Length: 5:03. Cost: \$19.98. An elderly Czech woman lives at the “Embassy of the Kingdom of Heaven. This film documents how one woman is living out her purpose and the effect it has on her neighbors.
<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/37098/deidox-ludmilla>
- “Jesus and the Kingdom.” Length: 3:44. Cost: We own it. Last used 7/27/08. Author Brian McLaren discusses the liberating yet disturbing message from Jesus about living in the Kingdom of God. <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/jesus-and-the-kingdom>

Activity: Kingdom assignment – give \$5 to every person to use for the building up of God’s Kingdom. They can decide how to use it; there is a timeline. Possibilities: 1) Give it away. 2) Buy supplies to make a craft or food to sell, returning the proceeds to our church. 3) Purchase an item from the sale. 4) Give it back to church. Lakeside and Fenton UMCs have each done this with great success. They both gave different amounts to different people on faith (inspired by the story of the shrewd manager). Fenton turned \$2,000 into \$25,000. During the celebration dinner, they showed all the ways people completed the assignment.
This was of great interest to the group.

Music: “With Every Act of Love” by Jason Gray

Message illustrations: Chinese finger trap (p. 54) – we like this (\$6.86/72 on Amazon). Force of gravity on different planets.

October 23, 2016: “Tethered to God”

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Matthew 6: 19-24 (CEV)

“Treasures in Heaven; Light; Money”

¹⁹“Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars.

²⁰Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. ²¹It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

²²“Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. ²³If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

²⁴“You can’t worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you’ll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can’t worship God and Money both.

Scripture: I Timothy 6: 6-19 (CEV)

⁶And religion does make your life rich, by making you content with what you have.

⁷We didn’t bring anything into this world, and we won’t take anything with us when we leave. ⁸So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes. ⁹People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them. ¹⁰The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.

“Fighting a Good Fight for the Faith”

¹¹Timothy, you belong to God, so keep away from all these evil things. Try your best to please God and to be like him. Be faithful, loving, dependable, and gentle. ¹²Fight a good fight for the faith

and claim eternal life. God offered it to you when you clearly told about your faith, while so many people listened. ¹³ Now I ask you to make a promise. Make it in the presence of God, who gives life to all, and in the presence of Jesus Christ, who openly told Pontius Pilate about his faith. ¹⁴ Promise to obey completely and fully all that you have been told until our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

¹⁵The glorious God is the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords. At the time that God has already decided, he will send Jesus Christ back again.

¹⁶Only God lives forever! And he lives in light that no one can come near. No human has ever seen God or ever can see him. God will be honored, and his power will last forever. Amen.

¹⁷Warn the rich people of this world not to be proud or to trust in wealth that is easily lost. Tell them to have faith in God, who is rich and blesses us with everything we need to enjoy life. ¹⁸Instruct them to do as many good deeds as they can and to help everyone. Remind the rich to be generous and share what they have. ¹⁹This will lay a solid foundation for the future, so that they will know what true life is like.

²⁰Timothy, guard what God has placed in your care! Don't pay any attention to that godless and stupid talk that sounds smart but really isn't. ²¹Some people have even lost their faith by believing this talk.

I pray that the Lord will be kind to all of you!

Synopsis: Generosity doesn't just happen, but requires careful planning and goal setting. It requires that we are intentional in our decisions including opportunities for tithing and giving in our family budgets. It means that we evaluate how we're living and seek to live as simply as we can instead of being weighed down by our possessions. Being connected to God and allowing God to be at the center of our lives offers us freedom.

Discussion points:

- Some of us fill basements, garages, and storage units. Junk not only weighs us down, but is dangerous....just like space junk. Note that the space junk that is no longer tethered is useless and dangerous.
- Being tethered is not a bad thing as long as we are tethered to God.
- Pastor Mary will offer practical tips leading us into next week's pledge. They are the three challenges listed in the activity below. The budget includes a line for giving. It is the same form that she uses in counseling engaged couples who plan to be married in our church.
- Tiny House movement: The Cass Community in a poor area of Detroit is developing a tiny house neighborhood to address three needs: 1) Turn the homeless into homeowners. 2) Bring density to an area that has empty lots and abandoned buildings. 3) Create inexpensive, green-friendly housing. This is a project of Cass Community UMC with Rev. Faith Fowler. <http://detroit.curbed.com/2016/5/19/11713616/tiny-homes-community-detroit-homeless>
- Financial education: Could we offer a short-term finance class? Brian McLellan offered Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace course at Lake Harbor years ago. People need budgeting help at the very least as many grew up role models who were tethered to debt or stuff.
- Marriage sore point: His and her bank accounts/money. They can be used to fuel a race for stuff.

Visuals: Space junk. Lindbergh's plane. North Star.

Media possibilities: We only watched the space debris video together.

- “Space Debris: 1957-2016.” Length: 1:00. Free. This visualization shows how the amount of space debris increased from 1957 to 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPXck85wMSQ>
Comments: It is a great illustration.
- “Millions of Pieces of Junk Orbiting Earth.” Length: 1:24. Free. CNN news report. <http://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2016/01/08/space-junk-explainer.cnn/video/playlists/out-in-space/>
- “Free to Serve.” Length: 2:02. Cost: We own it. Last used 6/23/13. God has made us free. This freedom is an amazing gift and a great responsibility. Based on Galatians 5:13. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/25187/free-to-serve>
- “I Like Car.” Length: 6:02. Cost: \$25.00. A woman gives everything she has to a widow and is surprised by the response of those around her. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/57140/i-like-car>

Activity: Three challenges. 1) Make a budget. 2) Live simply. 3) Set goals for doing good with time and money.

Music: “Christ in Me” by Jeremy Camp (In this obsession with the things this world says make us happy, can't see the slaves we are in all the searching all the grasping...)

October 30, 2016: “When We Get It Right”

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Luke 16: 10-15 (NLT) “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager” (ending only)

¹⁰“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities.

¹¹And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? ¹²And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?

¹³“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

¹⁴The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. ¹⁵Then he said to them, “You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.

Synopsis: Generosity is something we learn from others, but it's rooted in God's love for us. We grow in grace and holiness as we open ourselves to generosity. We are transformed as we give – not something that we've done ourselves, but as the work of God in us.

Discussion points:

- We learn generosity from watching other people.
- Stories of extravagant generosity:
 - A fallen police officer's son bids on his father's cruiser and receives an amazing surprise. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-YyebEuhTA>
 - A story of kindness comes full circle when thirty years later, a unaffordable medical bill is paid in full. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXOXsolDhKE>

Visuals:

Media possibilities: We only watched “I Like Giving” as a group.

- “Cheerful Giver.” Length: 2:01. Cost: What are people really thinking as that offering plate goes down the pew? <http://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/2946/cheerful-giver>

- “I Like Listening: I Like Giving.” Length: 3:41. Cost: \$25.00. The joy of a simple act of generosity changes the way a couple lives. **Comments:** This is a great example of joyful giving. It might make a good lead-in for the \$5 activity on October 23.

<http://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/57145/i-like-listening>

Activities: Faith Commitment Sunday – offering our Faith Commitments of prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness for 2017.

Music: “Do Something” by Matthew West. Would Abby (or Ellie) Keessen and Skylar Epplert be willing to dance again? On a loosely related note: Would anyone else be interested in doing liturgical dance or signing?

Message illustration: 1) St. Francis DeSales illustration (p. 95-96) of receiving God’s grace (ostrich → chicken → eagle). 2) Tiny House Movement.

Hands-on item: Feather (to go with St. Francis’ illustration above)