

"ARE WE THERE YET?"

April 4-May 16, 2021 (6 weeks)

Brainstorming Summary

Monday, March 22, 2021



Members present: Diane Gordon, Jimmy Epplert, Dave

Booth, Rose Emmons, Carole Koch, Jill McMahon, Diane Thompson, Betty Kinney, Mike Post, Kate Robbins, Larry Jorgenson, Jim Post, Pastor Mary, Karen Booth

2021 theme: Still Blessed

2021 theme connection/synopsis: Easter is a season when we celebrate resurrection and the call to live as people who claim new life and have hope in Christ. Spending time focusing on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus starts with words of blessing challenges us to understand blessing more fully – not simply as a gift or reward, but as a way of living the Kingdom of God. Are we there yet?

Social Justice issue (April): Creation Care

Social Justice issue (May): Inequities in Health Care

Key words: Reflect/Reflection, Redeem/Redemption (Easter)

Series theme: Jesus taught us to pray (and work) for God's "kingdom on earth as it is in heaven." Are we there yet? In the 2,000 years since he came, many things have changed for the better, but we still have a long way to go. Civility, integrity, truth-telling, grace and forgiveness have fallen out of favor. Being right has replaced being kind. Face-to-face conversations that might lead to understanding and cooperation have been replaced by often divisive social media encounters. The 24/7 media cycle feeds the ugliness. Wow! In this series, **we'll look at Jesus' teaching from The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7** so we can heed his call to be a part of building God's Kingdom.

Discussion point: Matthew 5-7 is an encapsulation of the whole Gospel.

Notes for series: Use the image of a road trip (journey) to underscore the theme. It's a constant question when we're trying to get to our destination: **Are we there yet? How much longer?** Thinking in terms of Kingdom living, we describe it as "already, but not yet." Seeking God's Kingdom first and working for God's Kingdom has been the work of the church since its beginning. The scenery has changed along the way, but the journey toward the Kingdom in full view is still our focus.

From www.umc.org – *Our Christian Beliefs: God's Reign*

Christian faith is, in part, a matter of hoping. We believe in and trust the Lord of the future, and we lean into the future that God has promised. God goes before us, beckoning us into the new world that is already being created, calling us to join in the challenging work of fashioning it.

However, when we're confronted with personal disasters or with the daily horror stories of society's ills, we may falter. Hope may seem to be unrealistic, naive optimism.

Yet our hope is not in trends. Our hope is in the Lord of all creation and all history—a God who is still in charge and is actively at work transforming the world. How do we know this?

The coming *shalom*: The Bible is a book of God's promises. It may seem to be about the past, but its outlook is toward the future. From promises in the Book of Genesis to Abraham and Sarah for a new land, a son, and countless descendants (chapter 17), to promises in the Book of Revelation of a "new heaven and a new earth" (21:1), God was helping biblical people live into the vision of creation's ultimate goal.

The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) uses the word *shalom* to describe God's future. We often translate this word as "peace," but it means more than that. *Shalom* means a world of plenty, of personal and interpersonal harmony and righteousness, of liberation, of just economic practices, and of ordered political relations.

The coming kingdom: For Jesus, the *shalom* of God was the kingdom of God, the coming reign of God in human hearts and in all human affairs. In fact he proclaimed that this reign already "has come near" (Mark 1:15) and that the decision about one's part in it was an urgent necessity: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

In the resurrection of our Lord, his amazed followers recognized that God's reign was breaking into their lives: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old regime of hostility, greed, injustice, and violence was obsolete and dying. The new order was coming in: "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). For those who see with the eyes of faith, it is apparent that our common human future on earth is indeed the promised reign of God.

The church as a sign of the future: There are signs of the coming Kingdom all about us—from random acts of kindness by individuals to the worldwide family's growth in tolerance and cooperation. In particular we see the church as a sign of the Kingdom. Imperfect as it is, the community of believers nevertheless provides the best clue we have to God's vision. Day after day, we see deeds of Christian courage, of compassion and reconciliation, of integrity in the face of temptation, and of witness for truth and justice.

Our part: And what is our role? To sit back and simply wait for God's kingdom to arrive? By no means! We are to pray earnestly for the Kingdom to come on earth (Matthew 6:10). We are to watch faithfully for any signs of its coming (Matthew 25:13). We are to put away our old selves and clothe ourselves "with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). As renewed people, we're to do "the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). As Easter people witness and serve, we take part in the Kingdom's dawning. Thy Kingdom come!

Additional resources:

- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3460/heaven-on-earth-sermon-series>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2518/sermon-series-the-sermon-on-the-mount>

- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4108/sermon-series-missions-with-the-lords-prayer-in-mind>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3534/sermon-series-the-radical-sayings-of-jesus>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1147/the-model-prayer-matthew-69-15>
- “Kingdom justice is not up for partisan political debate. All who become part of Jesus’ movement will be working together in community to change oppressive systems that fail to honor the least and the lost.”
https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10524/being-the-church-in-divisive-political-times?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Being%20the%20church%20in%20divisive%20political%20times%20&utm_campaign=MM%20Newsletter%2009-30-20
- <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/after-epiphany-worship-series-overview/blessed-planning-notes/blessed-preaching-notes>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10424/whatever-became-of-the-sermon-on-the-mount>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9646/the-jesus-lens>

Ideas for the series: How could the road trip theme tie in each week?

Sanctuary visuals: Inspiration images can be found on our website at

<https://lakeharborumc.org/2021/03/march-22-2021-brainstorming-are-we-there-yet/>.

- Car or parts of a car – hood fenders, tires. Could be made from cardboard, like one Jill made, a pink Chevy, for a daddy/daughter dance at Campbell. Little Tykes or other kids’ car (Ivanov parents). Examples:
 - 2D Hippie van https://www.etsy.com/listing/938728748/60s-party-decorations-hippie-van-large?ref=pla_similar_listings_top_ad-2&plkey=810edaf37326d7981076729090256b0db833d008%3A938728748
 - 2D Jeep to build from cardboard <https://www.allthingsthifty.com/girls-camp-lds-army-military-battalion-theme/>
 - 3D Car made from boxes <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/123919427221894504/>, <https://www.etsy.com/listing/208676439/build-your-own-cardboard-box-car>
 - 3D car paper sculpture to hang on a wall <https://creativemarket.com/PolyFish/2780707-DIY-Plymouth-Barracuda-3D-template>, <https://creativemarket.com/paperamaze/2017106-DIY-Car-Front-3d-papercraft#fullscreen>
- Directions for the journey: Maps. GPS. Bible. Street signs (detour, stop, work ahead). Orange cones or barrels for construction season. People with stuff: Carole Koch’s boys, Myke Bos, Jerry Scott.
- Road: We have a winding burlap road that hangs from the ledge used in “Journey to Bethlehem.”
- Luggage: Suitcases. Activity bag. Duffel bag.
- Repair/maintenance: Car tools. Pit stop.
- Refueling: Gas station.

- Other modes of transportation: Bike. Skateboard. Train. Bus. Plane.

Series introduction:

- “Journey.” Length: 1:10. Cost: \$19.99. Life is a journey. Each of us has a road to walk and decisions to makes. Are we looking forward or looking back? Are we watching our steps or looking to Jesus? The road of life was not meant to be walked alone. It was meant to be walked with Jesus. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59111/journey>
Comments: Needs narration. Focuses on “walking” with Jesus, not a bad thing, but not as relevant to the idea of a road trip.
- “It Starts with Me.” Length: 1:00. Cost: \$19.99. There are lots of distractions and wrong turn that can land you “lost” in life. You are ultimately responsible for your journey, your health, and your faith... no one else. Spiritual health begins with reflection on your route, where you are and where you’re headed.
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59040/it-starts-with-me>
Comments: Needs narration. Could be used every week to open the service. Use it.
- “Road Maps.” Length: 0:36. Cost: \$15.00. Have you ever felt lost? Maybe you’ve taken unexpected detours, or maybe you’ve found yourself at a few dead ends. This sermon intro will help you get your congregation to take a look at how they can make the most of the journey as you step out onto the highway of life together. **Comments:** Music by Johnny Cash. Not a great fit for the series, but we might draw inspiration from the images.

From Pastor Mary: Seeking to be counter-cultural is different than cancel culture. Being counter-cultural seeks to transform the world; buying into cancel culture seeks to ignore and undo without a care for others. What’s the difference between making boundaries to be faithful to Jesus (not playing into negativity, choosing not to engage in certain things or watch/listen to certain people) and cancel culture?

Music: Build Your Kingdom Come, Seek Ye First (UMH 405)

April 11, 2021: “Upside-Down Blessings”

Easter

Rev. Diane Gordon preaching

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12 (TMSG) “You’re Blessed” Lectionary: 2/2/20

⁵ ¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

³ “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

⁵ “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

⁶ “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

⁷ “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

¹⁰ “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

¹¹⁻¹² “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Synopsis: We live in a world inundated with messages about what “the good life” is, which can leave us with mixed messages when it comes to living faithfully. The Beatitudes serve as a way of getting our bearings as to how God operates, what God values, and where the “good life” is truly found.

From Pastor Diane: I’ve been reflecting on the blessings that came out of the time of pandemic for me. Those are certainly upside-down but became an opportunity to learn about myself, our culture and how to proceed into a future where God’s kingdom living comes to life in real time.

Felt need: To understand what “blessed” means when Jesus says it

Visuals: packing the vehicle, mode of transportation

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities: We also own, “Matthew 5: The Bible in Rhyme,” which is no longer available to purchase or preview.

- “Blessed” by Centerline New Media. Length: 1:45. Cost: \$19.98. The world tells us one thing about being blessed, yet the Word tells us something very different. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/39852/blessed> **Comments:** Fast and a bit hard to read (could be slowed down). Needs narration. Gives the impression that our ultimate blessing is going to heaven, which is not where Pastor Diane’s message is headed. Betty scale: 4/5.
- “The Beatitudes” by Rype.tv. Length: 1:00. Visual liturgy. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/98111/the-beatitudes> **Comments:** Like the diversity of people and situations. Gives us a chance to see unmasked faces. Uses a familiar translation, a good complement to The Message.
- “The Beatitudes” by Clements Media. Length: 2:23. Cost: \$19.99. The (be)Atitudes seeks to present the portion of the sermon on the mount found in Matthew 5:1-12 in a beautiful compelling way.
- “The Beatitudes” by Fervent.” Length: 1:36. Cost: \$15.00. The Beatitudes are a timeless reminder of God’s blessings for all people. This video highlights the Beatitudes in a contemporary interpretation using audio from one of the greatest evangelists of all time

- Dwight L. Moody. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/18180/the-beatitudes>

Music: Blest Are They (FWS 2155), Be Thou My Vision (UMH 451), Open the Eyes of My Heart, Trading My Sorrows

Children's Time: Kate Robbins and/or Sandy Colella, Paraphrase of Beatitudes (Forbid Them Not, Year A)

Worship Leaders: Rose Emmons & Jim Post

Discussion points: 1) Use The Message, which is a paraphrase, not a direct translation. It makes Gods seem "bigger" than other translations. 2) Pastor Diane: Keeping the road trip metaphor in mind, what upside-down blessings have we discovered in the past year's journey? Don't keep/pack stuff you no longer use. Be more selective about what to keep. Sometimes luggage gets lost. Plans change. Don't take too many things. Our stage of life affects the journey. 3) Families and children crossing the border on foot can only take what they can carry. 4) Wealth allows us to buy stuff we forgot to pack or discovered we needed once on the road. 5) Packing the vehicle versus a pair of shoes – totally different journey. 6) The reason for the trip matters, i.e. necessity versus pleasure. Most of us cannot imagine sending kids away, hoping they will have a better life, unsure if we would ever see them again. 7) Our perspective changes over time. Example: Ivan has been in the US for 30 years. His feelings about leaving Yugoslavia were much different five, ten, or twenty years after he left than they are today. 8) To some extent, being an introvert in a pandemic may be blessing as introverts can be very comfortable staying home. Even so, introverts like to be with others and get out at least some of the time – and travel. 9) Big question for the series: What does "blessed" mean? We often associate it with positives like happiness, feeling lucky, or pleasure. The meaning in the beatitudes is different - a favor or gift from God that is a blessing in disguise.

April 18, 2021: "You Make a Difference!"

Easter 3

Scripture: Matthew 5: 13-20 (TMSG)

"Salt and Light"

Lectionary: 2/9/20

¹³ "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

"Completing God's Law"

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ "Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the

sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ "Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

Synopsis: We're called to be difference-makers – just like salt and light make a difference.

How do we reflect the nature of God our King and his Kingdom?

Felt need: To understand that discipleship is vital to fulfilling Jesus' mission

Visuals: fuel gauge

Hands-on item: salt packet, lightbulb

Activity: Holy Baptism – Ellie Louise Aamodt

Media possibilities:

- "This Little Light." Length: 2:14. Cost: \$14.98. Jesus calls us the light of the world. But are you just covering your light up? Or are you going out into the world and using it for the glory of our God? <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/58922/this-little-light> **Comments:** Pastor Mary scale 5/5. Needs narration. The little girl reminds many of us the Hilleary's Bailey. Would Bailey be willing to bring a light forward, narrate the video, or participate in some other way?
- "Your Light." Length: 1:28. Cost: \$20.00. We all shine a light and that light symbolizes God's love. We all possess the power in helping others shine their light for the good of mankind. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/22469/your-light>
- "Lights." Length: 2:07. Cost: \$17.00. We live in a dark world. But there are lights everywhere. The bible says... "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." The brighter we shine... the more people can see what God has done in us. Will you let your light shine? <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/59056/lights>
- "Light of the World." Length: 0:56. Cost: We own it. Last used 2011. A stylized interpretation of Matthew 5: 13-16. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/13248/light-of-the-world>
- "Lights." Length: 0:48. Cost: We own it. Last used 2011. What type of light are you? <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/20884/lights>

Music: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light (UMH 206), This Little Light of Mine (UMH 585), We Are Marching (FWS 2235)

Children's Time:

Worship Leader: Ken Lockett

Discussion points: 1) We'll focus on verses 13-16, being salt and light. If we are following the spirit of the law (verses 17-20), we will reflect God's light and love. 2) Why were salt and light so important in Jesus' time? A small amount of either one had a powerful effect, salt for flavoring and preserving food, and light for being able to see without electricity. 3) Possible God moment: Talk about the effects of living with macular degeneration, an eye disease in which the central portion of the retina wears down and vision is gradually lost. 4) Both Carole and Rose noted how dramatically their vision improved after having

cataracts removed – improved color and brightness. Related video: Birthday gift of glasses that help someone who is color blind see color (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZagAqp6g6pc>). 5) Pastor Mary’s big question: What small acts made a big difference for you? Negative acts often come to mind; damaging remarks can scar for life (Jimmy). On a more positive, a phone call to a depressed friend at the right moment saved his from committing suicide. Parenting advice from a seminary colleague, 40-years Pastor Mary’s senior, who was already a respected physician: Respect your kids. What other things have teachers, coaches, parents, friends, co-workers said to encourage you?

April 25, 2021: “Hard Words from Jesus”

Easter 4

Scripture: Matthew 5: 21-48 (TMSG) “Murder” Lectionary: 2/16/20 (v. 21-37)

²¹⁻²² “You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

²³⁻²⁴ “This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

²⁵⁻²⁶ “Or say you’re out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don’t lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you’re likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. If that happens, you won’t get out without a stiff fine.

“Adultery and Divorce”

²⁷⁻²⁸ “You know the next commandment pretty well, too: ‘Don’t go to bed with another’s spouse.’ But don’t think you’ve preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those ogling looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.

²⁹⁻³⁰ “Let’s not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here’s what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have to chop off your right hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump.

³¹⁻³² “Remember the Scripture that says, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights’? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are ‘legal.’ Please, no more pretending. If you divorce your wife, you’re responsible for making her an adulteress (unless she has already made herself that by sexual promiscuity). And if you marry such a divorced adulteress, you’re automatically an adulterer yourself. You can’t use legal cover to mask a moral failure.

“Empty Promises”

³³⁻³⁷ “And don’t say anything you don’t mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you,’ and not meaning it. You don’t

make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say 'yes' and 'no.' When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.

“Love Your Enemies”

³⁸⁻⁴² “Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look: ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: ‘Don’t hit back at all.’ If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

⁴³⁻⁴⁷ “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

⁴⁸ “In a word, what I’m saying is, *Grow up*. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Synopsis: Jesus invites us to envision and enter into a way of living that is different from the world around us. The Ten Commandments are the foundation for this new life, but we also have to reorder our desires. And to do that, we have to rely on the power of God.

Felt need: To admit that we can’t follow God trusting in our own strength

Visuals: Project Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), tune up

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities:

- “The Heart of the Matter.” Length: 1:53. Cost: \$20.00. This video exemplifies what Christ warns His people about during his sermon on the mountain found in Matthew 5. We must always protect our heart first because that is where the root of sin takes hold.

<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/38075/the-heart-of-the-matter>

Comments: This is a helpful reminder about what Jesus says about our thoughts and how they can lead to bad things like murder, adultery, etc. Don’t show this.

- “Love – No Exceptions.” Length: 2:36. Cost: \$18.00. Jesus said that one commandment was greater than all others: To love. Love God, love your neighbor, even love your enemies. It was a commandment with no exceptions. <https://skitguys.com/videos/love-no-exceptions>

Comments: Like the twists. Favorite: Love people even when they think differently.

Music: Freely, Freely (UMH 389), Make Me a Channel of Your Peace (FWS 2171)

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader: Dave Lorenz (creation care)

Discussion points: 1) We’ll break the scripture reading into smaller sections and read them at different times in the service in different voices. Volunteer: Jill McMahon (if

available). 2) Murder - verses 21-26: What does anger do to you? This is a call to forgive. 3) Adultery and divorce – verses 27-32: Pastor Mary has had many members/couples come to her office and what all of this means. How does it apply to them? 4) Empty promises – verses 33-37: Bill Barton came back to church before we had officially opened for in-person worship. He had spent a month in the hospital with Covid and another month in a care facility. Rose introduced herself and said she had been praying for his recovery. That is a promise kept! Bill had felt the prayers. 5) Love Your Enemies – verses 38-38: This is usually what we focus on. How many of the recent ugly events (politics, race relations, unrest) would disappear if we loved our enemies? 6) Jesus said, “You’ve heard it said, but I say to you...” Why do we need more explanation? Are we looking for loopholes? Yes, we should keep the law, but this is about how we should live, i.e., the spirit of the law.

May 2, 2021: “How We Pray”

Easter 5

Scripture: Matthew 6: 7-15 (TMSG) “Pray with Simplicity”

⁷⁻¹³ “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
 Reveal who you are.
 Set the world right;
 Do what’s best—
 as above, so below.
 Keep us alive with three square meals.
 Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving
 others.
 Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
 You’re in charge!
 You can do anything you want!
 You’re ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ “In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can’t get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God’s part.

**A Paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer
 by Sarah Dylan Breuer**

Loving Creator
 we honor you,
 and we honor all that you have made.
 Renew the whole world
 in the image of your love.
 Give us what we need for today,
 and a hunger to see the whole world fed.
 Strengthen us for what lies ahead;
 heal us from the hurts of the past;
 give us courage to follow your call in this
 moment.
 For your love is the only power,
 the only home, the only honor we need,
 in this world and in the world to come.
 Amen.

Synopsis: The Lord’s Prayer is a source of great comfort for many people, but when Jesus first taught it to his followers, it was shocking! How does this model prayer continue to strengthen us to witness faithfully?

Felt need: To understand the challenge of the Lord’s Prayer and hear the call to action

Visuals: car maintenance

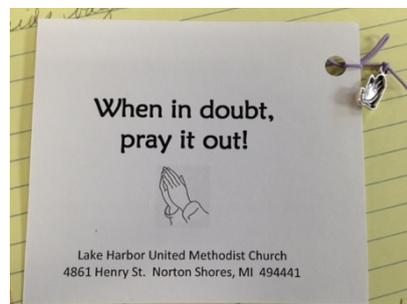
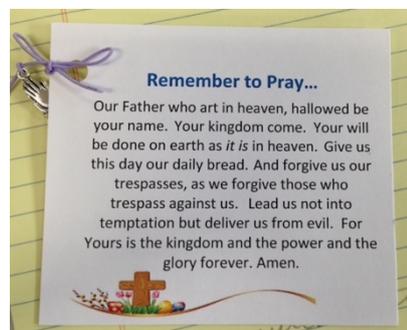
Hands-on item: Card with praying hands – next page

Activity:

- Holy Communion.
- Read the prayer in three different translations or paraphrases with three voices reading taking turns reading the same line in turn before moving on to the next line. Example: **Our Father, who art in heaven. Loving Creator.** Our Father in heaven. **Hallowed be thy name. We honor you and we honor all that you have made.** Reveal who you are..... Potential volunteers: Rose Emmons, Jill McMahon, Patrick Miles, Brian Mosely.

Media possibilities:

- “The Lord’s Prayer” by Centerline New Media. Length: 1:26. Cost: \$19.98. In Matthew 6, Jesus taught us to pray in this way. The download includes two versions – one with the modern translation and one with the traditional one. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/46795/the-lords-prayer->
- “Our Prayer (Matthew 6).” Length: 1:18. Cost: \$19.99. This visually stunning video is a moving retelling of The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6. <https://skitguys.com/videos/our-prayer-matthew-6>



Music: Sung version(s) of The Lord’s Prayer

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader:

Discussion points: 1) The Lord’s Prayer is a source of comfort. It is often overheard before it is prayed. In Jesus’s time, it was shocking. People went through priests rather than praying directly to God. 2) This model prayer puts things in the right order. “Our” Father puts us in community right away; it’s not “my Father.” It calls us to pray for that which we need, not what we want. It acknowledges forgiveness (vs. grudges), temptation and evil. 3) Refueling: Electric cars need to be plugged in. Regular cars need gas. People need prayer. 4) Pacing: Some need to pray it at their own, slower pace. Do we miss something when we blaze ahead? How many people struggle with this? 5) Interesting: debts, trespasses, sins. 6) Being vulnerable is difficult, but key to be authentic. Example: Admitting temptations give others ammunition, especially if you are part of a dysfunctional family/group.

May 9, 2021: “Trust or Worry?”

Easter 6, Mother’s Day

Scripture: Matthew 6: 24-34 (TMSG) “A Life of God-Worship” Lectionary: 11/22/18

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.

²⁵⁻²⁶ “If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don’t fuss about what’s on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far

more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

²⁷⁻²⁹ “Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

³⁰⁻³³ “If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

³⁴ “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

Synopsis: Trust in God is a cornerstone of a faithful life that helps other areas fall in line. Do we spend our time and energy on worrying (depending on ourselves and others) or on trusting God (depending on God) and going forward in faith?

Felt need: To choose trust in God rather than worry and find the balance between trust and precaution and preparation

Visuals: GPS, map

Hands-on item: Chocolate for all women in congregation

Activity:

- Special prayers honoring all experiences of mothering
- Game show hosted by Dirk Fuller. Panel of contestants. Dirk would ask questions about different scenarios and contestants would need to answer them. Example #1: What would you do if your best friend posted this picture on FaceBook? Trust or worry? Example #2: What would you do if your child broke a bone? Trust or worry?

Media possibilities:

- “Stressed Out.” Length: 1:38. Cost: \$20.00. Several people in stressful situations completely “lose it” as opera music plays. This video is a humorous way to identify with the things that stress us out and a great lead in to sermons about worry, peace, or anger. <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/22499/stressed-out>

Comments: Humorous, but not exactly where we are headed.

- “Do Not Worry.” Length: 1: 48. Cost: \$19.98. Worry... In times like these, it seems so easy to be consumed by it. But what did Jesus say about worrying?

<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/13284/do-not-worry>

- “May Today Be Enough.” Length: 2:12. Cost: Free with our subscription. Life on earth is full of twists and turns that often leave us feeling like we’re riding an emotional and spiritual roller-coaster. Whether we’re feeling up, down, or even lost somewhere in between, it’s important to remember today is enough.

<https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/88182/-may-today-be-enough>

Comments: We won't use this now, but download it for later.

Music: This Is My Father's World (UMH 144), God Will Take Care of You (UMH 130), All Things Bright and Beautiful (UMH 147), 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus (UMH 462); "Oceans" by Hillsong United

Children's Time:

Worship Leader:

Discussion points: 1) Normally we hear this scripture reading during Stewardship. Our focus will be trusting God at all times. 2) Pastor Mary acknowledges that she has worried most of her life. Her mom tells how she practiced walking to the end of the driveway so she would be ready for the bus in anticipation of Kindergarten. She has passed that trait on to Ana. Other pro level worrier: Karen Post (cars/kids/trust but verify). 3) Love of money (v. 24) and nice clothes (v. 25-26): Betty was surprised when her niece asked her daughter Stacy about whether she owned brand name jeans when she was in middle school. Stacy didn't and didn't care either. How many kids have felt bad because they didn't have the latest greatest whatever? Jimmy notes that youth who have secure family foundation don't need to find their identity through "stuff." 4) Not even loosely related thought: Having a pajama party on Sunday at church. 5) Sometimes Mary believes she trust GPS more than Jesus. Too many of us have had less than glorious experiences with GPS to believe that completely, but having it set for walking or biking when you are driving is one reason it led you down the wrong path. 6) Big question: When do you find it hard to trust? When things are going poorly. When we have no control. When someone has proven untrustworthy before. When we are afraid or overwhelmed. When there is no end in sight. When we are biased. When a person or system has failed us before. 7) Betty's kids now ask her to call when she gets to her destination, a reversal of the parent/child relationship. 8) Larry asked Bonnie not to look into their daughter's mini fridge in college knowing it probably wasn't stocked with health food. It wasn't.

May 16, 2021: "Location, Location, Location!"

Easter 7

Ascension Sunday, Children's Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 7: 21-29 (TMSG) "Being and Doing"

²¹⁻²³ "Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance—isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our super-spiritual projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'

²⁴⁻²⁵ "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

²⁶⁻²⁷ “But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.”

²⁸⁻²⁹ When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

Synopsis: Foundations matter because they hold up the rest of the structure. Our grounding in God must be authentic. Jesus warns that it is not enough to claim his name—we must live as his followers.

Felt need: To understand that salvation isn’t an ending point, but a journey of becoming more like Jesus every day with humility

Visuals: new views along the journey, new sites to see

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities:

Music: How Firm a Foundation (UMH 529), Great Is Thy Faithfulness (UMH 140)

Children’s Time:

Worship Leader: Youth & Kids

Resource: “Travel as a Spiritual Act.” Length: 1:54:00. Cost: Free. TV host and travel author Rick Steves, along with General Board of Higher Education and Ministry’s Rev. Dr. Tammy Gieselman, leads an online discussion focused on “Travel as a Spiritual Act.” Steves shares how his travels and experiences with people from different places and cultures have shaped his faith and broadened his perspective on life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ3sL-RKnTM>

Discussion points: 1) To use John Wesley’s terms, we are passively justified by the saving acts of Jesus Christ, but we are sanctified by how we respond to the saving acts of Christ. We grow in grace and service by practicing our faith; it is not only “talking the talk” but also “walking the walk.” 2) “Don’t look for shortcuts to God,” Jesus says (v. 13-14 MSG) “The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.” 3) Our foundations of faith include the Beatitudes, Ten Commandments, and Lord’s Prayer. 4) Could the story of the three little pigs have been based on this reading – building on a firm foundation? 5) Authenticity – verses 21-23 – we don’t want to miss the boat. 5) Jesus’ followers are known by what they do, not what they say. Love God. Love neighbor – and everybody is our neighbor. 6) Mixing faith and politics (Christian Nationalism) is a scary proposition. There is a whole lot of bad behavior that runs counter to what it means to follow Jesus. 7) Salvation calls for a response on our part.