

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 17: The Word Became a Human Being**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Incarnation**

Theme Verse

*The Word (logos)* is a theological phrase that expresses the absolute, eternal, and ultimate being of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament spoke of the word of God as the divine agent in the creation of the universe (“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” Psalms 33:6). In the New Testament, the Gospel of John declared, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). Through the incarnation of Christ, God has come to dwell in our midst. In Christ, the Word of God, God’s plan and purpose for mankind is clearly revealed (*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*).

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL :** We will study chapter 1 of John in three sections:

**The Prologue**

**John 1:1-18**

Read **John 1:1-18**, then scan the account of the Creation in **Genesis 1:1-5**:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (NIV) and*

the giving of the Law in **Exodus 20:1-17**:

*And God spoke all these words:*

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous god, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

*You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days shall you labor and do your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor*

*your son, or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

*Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

*You shall not murder.*

*You shall not commit adultery.*

*You shall not steal.*

*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*

*You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (NIV).*

In what ways does John's Prologue use of the term **logos (word)** draw upon the concept of God's word as depicted in Genesis and Exodus?

### **The Testimony of John, the Baptist:**

**1:19-34**

Why does the Prologue establish John the Baptist's identity before introducing Jesus?

### **The Testimony of the first disciples:**

**1:35-51**

Jesus' first words in the Gospel of John are "What are you looking for?" What did Jesus want the two disciples of John the Baptist to hear in that question?

When Jesus says, "Come and see" (1:39) what is Jesus inviting his disciples to do? In what ways can we respond to this invitation to "come and see" ?

## **ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**John 1:40-51**

Read the passage of Scripture.

In those days most people had two names, one Greek and one Jewish. Simon was the Hebrew name. Cephas (translated "rock") was the Aramaic name given to him by Jesus. Cephas translated into Greek is "Peter."

What drew the divine-human Jesus to these men?

What about the divine-human Jesus draws you to him?

What does allegiance to the divine-human Jesus require of us?

### **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We hope for something new and something different, but when it comes and it doesn't match our expectations, it surprises us, confuses us, and put us on the defensive. What is there to be joyful about?

Can these feelings be associated with "unanswered prayer?" Or disappointment in other people? Or "slights" we endure from other people? What is the answer?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we receive and claim the teaching of the community that Jesus is God in the flesh.

The **Radical Disciple** lives in a pluralistic society and at the same time believes that Jesus is the unique Word of God. What issues does this create for us as believers?

### **PRAY THE PSALMS**

**Your word O Lord, will last forever;  
It is eternal in heaven.  
Your faithfulness endures through all the ages;  
You have set the earth in place and it remains.  
Psalm 119:89-90**

**DISCIPLE 4**  
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**Week 18: Born of Water and Spirit**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **New Birth**

Theme Verse

The Fourth Gospel presents those who study it with two things: a simple surface story that anyone can understand and retell and a wealth of deeper meaning for those who have the eagerness to search and the eyes to see and the minds to understand. The Gospel of John, though probably the last Gospel to be written, was Christianity's first statement of the message of Jesus made in a way that would relate to the thought forms of its day.

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

As you read the Scripture passages, use the following questions to discuss each event:

Explore the content of the conversation between Jesus and each individual. What changes take place in each character's understanding of Jesus over the course of the conversation?

What images does Jesus use and how are they appropriate to each person?

Discuss John's purpose. What aspect of Jesus' identity is clarified through each conversation?

**John 3:1-21            Nicodemus by Night**

There are certain things that we know about Nicodemus. (1) He must have been wealthy. When Jesus died, he brought for Jesus' body a "mixture of Myrrh and aloes", weighing about a hundred pounds (John 19:39). Only a wealthy man could have brought that. (2) He was a Pharisee (the name means *the separated one*). He had entered into the brotherhood by taking a pledge that he would spend all his life observing every detail of scribal law, which we know was very detailed and very legalistic. (3) He was a ruler of the Jews or a member of the Sanhedrin, a court of seventy members which was the supreme court of the Jews (*The Gospel of John* by William Barclay).

**John 4:7-42                    The Samaritan Woman at the Well**

The Jewish day runs from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the sixth hour is 12 noon, the hour that Jesus took rest at the well, hot and thirsty from his travels. Samaritans and Jews had a bitter relationship which began after the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were carried off into Babylonian in captivity. Those few Jews who were left behind had intermarried (strictly forbidden in the eyes of Orthodox Judaism) and pagan rituals had invaded Samaritan worship. After the Jews returned from captivity to rebuild the Temple, the Samaritans came and offered their help. They were contemptuously told their help was not wanted. The Samaritans had lost their Jewish heritage and they had no right to share in the rebuilding of God’s house. This quarrel took place about 450 BC and was as bitter as ever in the days of Jesus, nearly 500 years later. (*The Gospel of John* by William Barclay).

**ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**John 2:13-22**

The story of Jesus cleansing the Temple is not told by the four gospels in precisely the same way. They all remembered their own version. It is only by putting all the accounts together that we get a true picture of what Jesus said. Read the other Gospel accounts, looking at the ways the writers recorded the words of Jesus:

**John 2:13-22** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matthew 21:12-13** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mark 11:15-17** \_\_\_\_\_

**Luke 19:45-46** \_\_\_\_\_

What message about Jesus do you think John intended to convey in the way he tells the story of Jesus’ cleansing the Temple?

**Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We are born, and we die. In between we attend to our physical needs. What can give life to our living? What can give purpose to our dying?

Contemplate and discuss what answers an unbeliever might give to these questions.

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we see life as both physical and spiritual, and while we exist in the physical, we live in new life graciously offered by God in Jesus Christ.

The **Radical Disciple** bears witness to the new life in Christ through daily acts of faithful living. What acts of faithful living answer the above questions asked by unbelievers?

### **PRAY THE PSALMS**

**In the assembly of all your people, Lord,  
I told the good news that you save us.  
You know that I will never stop telling it.  
Psalm 40: 9**

**DISCIPLE 4**  
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**Week 19: Bread of Life**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Bread**

Theme Verse

There were times when Jesus desired to withdraw from the crowds for rest and prayer. Sometimes, it was necessary that he should get the disciples alone to lead them into a deeper understanding of himself. Since the Feast of the Passover was near, there were even larger crowds on the road and Jesus was sympathetic to the people who were tired and must be fed. How does the manna story illuminate Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowd? (See Study Manual page 153-54).

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

Look closely at Jesus' works and his explanation of those works.

**John 5:1-11            Healing on the Sabbath**

Sabbath was the capstone of the covenant. This commandment had been enhanced by 39 laws defining work plus hundreds of interpretations. For example, one could not tie a knot on the Sabbath. However, a woman could tie a knot in the sash which closed her tunic. Therefore, one could tie a knot in a woman's sash to lower a bucket into a well for water, but not tie a knot in a rope for the same purpose.

To Jews, sin and suffering were inextricably connected. If people suffered, they had sinned. Try to put yourself into the Jewish way of thinking when you consider this story. If you were a Jew of that day, what would be your reaction to the man who was healed, then carried his mat on the Sabbath?

In our secular society, we can find merchandising and endless entertainment on a 24/7 basis. How can Sabbath rest with its healing power be established without reestablishing legalisms? If not for society, at least for Christians?

**John 5:16-30            Son of Man**

This is an amazing passage because it is woven together of thoughts and expressions which are all claims by Jesus to be the promised Messiah. The prophets of the Old Testament claimed that dominion over the brutal, savage empires such as Media, Babylonian, Persia and Macedonia would pass away and dominion

over all would be given to *one like a son of man*. The Jews took this title and gave it to the chosen one of God who would bring in a new age of gentleness and peace; hence, the Messiah was called the *Son of Man*.

In this passage, what problems did the Pharisees have with Jesus' teaching?

For Jesus to speak like this was an act of the most extraordinary and unique courage. He would have known that these claims would sound like the blasphemy and would call for his death. Those who listened to his words had only two alternatives: they must either accept Jesus as the Son of God or hate him as a blasphemer! How do you think you might have reacted?

### **John 6:35-59          Bread of Life**

This passage contains one of the great "I am" statements of Jesus: *I am the bread of life*. The crowd could not comprehend the deeper meanings: to "eat" and "drink" meant to trust, follow and obey---to feed on his spirit, to believe. When John wrote this passage, Christians had been eating the bread and drinking the cup as a "participation" in the body and blood of Christ.

What do Jesus' words "I am the bread of life" mean to you?

How would you explain to another, who has no understanding, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" and "will live forever"? (6:56-58)

How are you nourished by the "bread of life"?

## **ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

### **John 5:36-47**

Describe the relationship of Jesus and God the Father.

What message does this passage convey to believers in our day?

### **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We respond to our ever-present hungers by seeking more excitement, more pleasures, more possessions, more recognition. The basics are not enough.

In what ways does this statement apply to today's society?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we seek nothing less than “the food that endures for eternal life,” Jesus the living bread.

The **Radical Disciple** hears the hard sayings of Jesus and does not turn away. What teachings of Jesus in this week's Scripture did you find difficult?

## **PRAY THE PSALMS**

**We give thanks to you, O God,  
We give thanks to you!  
We proclaim how great you are  
And tell of the wonderful things you have done.  
Psalm 75:1**

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**Week 20: Light of the World**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Guidance**

Theme Verse

The Pharisees lived their lives trying to honor God and obey His commands. The *problem* was that the system they created to honor God was full of interpretations which were wrong. They created hundreds of man-made rules then over time fell in love with their system rather than the One whom the system was designed to honor. The result was a failure to believe even when the evidence was clear.

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (Sukkoth in Hebrew) was a Thanksgiving, harvest festival, vacation, cookout, feasting and singing all rolled into one event. Three parts of Sukkoth remembered the time Israel spent in the desert:

- The building of booths out of branches with roofs open in order to see the stars reminded them of the time they lived and worshiped in tents in the desert.
- During a procession of people and the high priest to the Pool of Siloam, the priest filled a pitcher from the pool and poured the water at the base of the altar in the Temple courtyard remembering the time when Moses brought water from a rock in the desert.
- The lighting of four 75 foot high lamp stands remembered God's guiding of the people in the wilderness by a pillar of fire.

Read the story of Jesus' journey to the Festival in Jerusalem in groups or pairs. In your group, summarize your section then tell each story in order to the whole group:

**John 7:1-36**

**John 7:37-52**

**John 8:12-30**

## John 8:31-59

**Discussion Questions:** What claims does Jesus make about himself? Why do his hearers question or object Jesus' claims? Remembering the descriptions of water and light in Sukkoth, what do Jesus' claims to be water (7:37-39) and light (8:12) say about his relationship with the world? with the believer?

Typical of John's Gospel is a threefold account: *a sign, discussion among people, then the teaching of Jesus*. Read the story of the Blind Man in 9:1-41 silently. As a group, discuss

What was the sign?

What was the discussion among people?

What was Jesus' teaching?

## ENCOUNTER THE WORD

### John 8:1-11

(The oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John omit 7:53-8:11, the story of the woman caught in adultery. Other manuscripts add this section after 7:36 or at the end after 21:25).

Jesus accusers were setting a trap, one which would require him to go against the Roman courts or be in direct conflict with the law of Moses.

What *sign* does John relate about this event? What might Jesus have written on the ground?

What is the *discussion* on the part of the people?

What was Jesus' *teaching*?

In what ways did the works and words of Jesus create blindness in the eyes of the Pharisees?

## Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

**Human Condition:** For the most part we determine the course of our lives. We don't need anyone to guide us. We'll find our own way.

Our society tells us to be in control, to take charge of our lives, to be our own master in command. Does this mean that "we don't need anyone to guide us"?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we choose to be diligent witnesses to the light of Christ.

The **Radical Disciple**, having seen the light of Christ, becomes a bearer of that light. Each day this week, decide where, how, and to whom you will take the light of Christ.

This challenge may seem overwhelming at first. Discuss the many ways we can take the light of Christ to others, looking for a way that would work for you.

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Your word is a lamp to guide me  
And a light for my path.  
I will keep my solemn promise  
To obey your just instructions.  
Psalm 119:105-106**



What do these statements say about what he does in our lives?

### **The Death of Lazarus**

### **John 11:1-44**

This final miracle in John's Gospel is the climax of Jesus' signs, proving that Jesus was master over even death.

Not surprisingly, the miracle caused many to believe in Jesus (11:45). What did this sign say about death?

In your opinion, why did Jesus weep at Lazarus' tomb (11:35)?

Note that Jesus prays a prayer of thanksgiving before commanding Lazarus to arise (11:41-42). Why?

Explore the symbolism in this sign. Jesus raised Lazarus from death in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. Many believed. The event took place around two significant festivals, when Jerusalem was thronged with people. It was this kind of publicity the leaders especially feared. Why?

Plots were formed to kill Jesus, even Lazarus. In arranging for Jesus to die, what did the leaders unwittingly set in motion?

## **ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

For the Hebrews, preparation of the corpse for burial probably fell to the women. The body was washed and scented with fragrant oil, an act of devotion that might be repeated at the tomb. The oil that Mary used for Jesus (12:3) was probably nard, a perfume used by women, imported from India. It was extremely costly and had a strong fragrance. After the corpse was washed and scented, it was wrapped in sheets or dressed in the person's clothes. Then as soon as possible it was carried to the tomb. Relatives, friends and mourners formed a procession to show honor to the deceased. The body would be placed on a shelf in a tomb, which was sealed with a heavy stone or slab. Jews were expected to visit a tomb often, partly as a precaution against burying someone who only seemed dead (or who might be in a comatose state.) **Read aloud John 12:1-8.**

Put yourself in this story: what would you experience with your sense of sight, sound, smell, or touch?

What was Mary enacting when she poured the oil on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair?

### **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We move between life and death, nor sure what to believe about either. We look for groups or ideas that promise to free us from our uncertainty.

Explore some of the false promises or ideas that promise this freedom? Why would people "fall" for these promises?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we live and die believing Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24) What must the **Radical Disciple** die to and/or let go of in life in order to bear fruit?

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Lord, you will always be proclaimed as God;  
All generations will remember you.  
Psalm 135:13**

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**Week 22: Power to Bear Fruit**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer  
Theme: **Abide**  
Theme Verse

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

**John 13:6-10. Peter's Reaction**

What do Peter's three statements reveal about his understanding of the foot washing?

**Jesus' Response**

Analyze Jesus' three responses to discover what he wanted Peter to understand.

**John 13:31-38 Peter's Questions**

In light of Peter's questions, what does he want from Jesus? What does Jesus want from Peter and the other disciples?

Reread verses 34-35: In what ways would our lives and society change if we practiced this command in to the extent that Jesus asked?

**Study Manual page 176 "The Paraclete"**

According to Jesus' description of the Paraclete's functions, what will a community who receives the gift of Jesus' Spirit look like?

**John 15 The Vine and the Branches**

Verse 1, Jesus says, "I am the true vine"

Verse 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Verse 6 "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers;

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”

What do you find to be the most challenging in these metaphors and similes used by Jesus? Which are the most comforting?

**John 14:1-14**

**The Mansion with Many Rooms**

What is the meaning of the metaphor that Jesus uses of the House with Many Rooms?

What does he mean when he says he “is going to prepare a place” for us?

**ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**Read John 17 – The Priestly Prayer**

Only John records this prayer --- Jesus’ longest recorded prayer. The prayer has three parts:

- What does Jesus pray for himself?
- What does Jesus pray for his disciples?
- What does Jesus pray for all who believe?

**Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We live with the illusion that we are connected. Technology tells us so. But we feel isolated, cut off. We don’t know our neighbors; we have little time for our families. We wither on the vine for lack of relationships that sustain.

Reflect silently on the word(s) or phrase(s) that are true in your experience. Then read the mark of faithful community.

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we abide in Christ in order to bear the fruit of service.

The word disciple means “one who follows, one who is called.” **Radical Disciple:** describe what for you would be an act of servanthood. Pray during the week for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. *Then act.*

**PRAYING THE PSALMS**

Your teachings are wonderful;  
I obey them with all my heart.  
The explanation of your teachings gives light  
and brings wisdom to the ignorant.  
Psalm 119:129-130

**DISCIPLE 4**  
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**Week 23: Where No One Else Can Go**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Cross**

Theme Verse

**DVD**

In what ways is the nature and design of our church influenced by the cross? **The Radical Disciple:** in our society the cross is displayed as a decoration as often as a sacred symbol. What message do these crosses give you?

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

**Crucifixion:** There is no evidence that Jews used this form of execution, but Law did permit the public display or “hanging” of a lawbreaker’s body on a tree with the strict command that the “body shall not remain overnight on the tree but you shall surely bury him that day (Deut. 21:23). This perhaps explains Jesus’ being killed “by hanging on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39).

Scholars are not certain when a crossbeam was added to the simple stake, but the Assyrians and Persians used impalement with a stake as a form of execution. Crucifixion on a stake or cross was practiced by the Greeks, notably Alexander the Great who crucified 2,000 people when Tyre was destroyed.

From the early days of the Roman Republic, death on the cross was used for rebellious slaves and bandits, although Roman citizens were rarely subjected to this method of execution. (We recall that Paul claimed his Roman citizenship on several occasions when imprisoned and beaten. Paul was executed by beheading; the method most used for Roman citizens). Following the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine to Christianity, the cross became a sacred symbol and its use by Romans as a means of torture and death was abolished.

Those sentenced to death by crucifixion in the Roman period were usually beaten with leather lashes which resulted in severe loss of blood. Victims were then generally forced to carry the upper crossbeam to the execution site where the central stake was already set up. After being fastened to the crossbeam on the bound with ropes, or in rare cases nails through the wrist, the naked victim (nakedness was another humiliation to a Jew) was then hoisted with the crossbeam against the standing vertical stake. A block or peg was sometimes fastened to the stake as a crude seat. Often the legs were bent to the side and the feet were then tied or nailed to the stake. Death followed by suffocation as the lung and heart cavity filled with blood and fluid or by exhaustion only after a long period of agonizing pain (*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*).

**Jesus' Hour** (Read the following Scriptures, then discuss the questions)

The Wedding in Canaan	John 2:4
In Jerusalem	John 7:30
Speaking in the Temple	John 8:20
The Last Supper	John 13:1
Gethsemane	John 18:4-8
Before the High Priest	John 18:20-21
Sentenced to Die	John 19:11

What evidence do you find that Jesus is in control of the events of his "hour"?

How does this evidence shape your understanding of the purpose of Jesus' death?

**Jesus and Pilate**

**John 19:1-22**

Review the information about Pilate on page 181 of the Study Manual. What are your reactions to the following players in this story?

Pilate

The Jewish Leaders

**At the Cross**

**John 19:25-27**

Imagine you are one of those close to Jesus in life and have just witnessed his death. What are your reactions, your thoughts, your feelings?

**ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**Who Caused the cross? Who killed Jesus?**

John contains so many layers of meaning. Just as Jesus was being crucified, the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in preparation for the Passover meal. The soldiers used a branch of hyssop to give Jesus the wine on the cross; hyssop was used to put blood on the doorframe to protect the first born before the Angel of Death passed over Egypt.

Read John 18:28-38; review pages 180-82 in the Study Manual.

What does this information say to today's church of Jesus' kingdom?

To our world?

To you?

## **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We love ourselves. We build our lives around ourselves. Selfless love makes us uncomfortable. When offered to us, we don't know how to receive it, so we usually push it away.

What types of kindnesses, in addition to selfless love, make us uncomfortable? In your opinion, why is this so?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we receive with gratitude the selfless love of God in Christ shown on the cross and proclaim it in our living.

Do you experience difficulty in receiving the selfless love of God as shown on the cross? In what ways can we accept this selfless love without guilt?

### **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Lord, you will always be proclaimed as God;  
All generations will remember you.  
Psalm 135:13**

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**Week 24: Weeping Turned to Witness**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer  
Theme: **Go Tell**  
Theme Verse

Notice how the first witnesses to the empty tomb struggle to understand and believe what they see. According to *Barclay's Gospel of Luke*, the women's story was not believed because **a)** they were women; **b)** their story was considered an idle tale; **c)** the word used is one employed by Greek medical writers to describe the babbling of a fevered and insane mind. To the Romans and the Jewish leaders, the consequence of a *woman* making the discovery was embarrassing. Only Peter went out to see if it might possibly be true.

The resurrected body of Jesus is a problem for scientific moderns and was a problem for Jesus' contemporaries, too. Since the grave clothes were still in the tomb, this was an indication that no one had taken Jesus away. Does this story strengthen your own belief? Why or why not?

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

**The Resurrection**

Read the following Scriptures. Look for details to compare and contrast with each version:

**Matthew 28:1-7**

**Mark 16:1-8**

**Luke 24:1-10**

**John 20:1-8 (Identify the "other disciple")**

Why are certain details contained in one or more of the Gospels and not in others? What are the differences? Can you explain?

## Post Resurrection Appearances

Read the following Scripture stories about Jesus appearances to his Eleven (Judas Iscariot is no longer part of the group)

**John 20:26-29**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

**Mark 16:12-20**

**Luke 24:36-43**

In what ways can you identify with the Disciples' confusion and unbelief? What might you say to someone who is struggling with this unbelief? How would you share this story of faith in the Resurrection?

## ENCOUNTER THE WORD

### John 21

#### Verses 1-6

John's Gospel is full of layers of meaning. Some of the Disciples were professional fishermen and would know the approach to take for success. What symbolic meaning is contained within this story of "catching a net full of fish"? (Note: verb translated "to haul" in verse 6 can mean to pull or to draw)

What message does this story convey to the community of believers?

#### Verses 15-19

Note that Jesus calls Peter *not* by the name He gave him, but by his given name, Simon son of John. Why does Jesus ask Peter **three** times "Do you truly love me?"

In **verses 18-19**, Jesus says to Peter "you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." What does your Bible commentary said about these verses?

What does this passage say to believers today?

## Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

**Human Condition:** We believe only what we see; otherwise, we are skeptical. And convincing others to believe what they cannot see is nearly impossible. So why try?

Read the Mark of Faithful Community and explore reasons for sharing the Good News.

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we believe in the resurrected Christ and witness boldly to that victory with joy.

The **Radical Disciple** risks taking the good news of the empty tomb where others hesitate to go. Where is that for you?

## PRAYING THE PSALMS

Save me, O God! Lord, help me now! Psalm 70:1

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**Week 25: Our Life Together**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

*“Enable me to speak the truth at all times,  
because my hope is in your judgments.  
I will always obey your law, forever and ever.  
I will live in perfect freedom,  
because I try to obey your teachings.” (Psalm 119:43-45 TEV)*

Theme: **Unity**

Theme Verse

The author of the Johannine letters is John the Disciple. The Letter of Jude has two possibilities as author: Jude (being a common form of Judah (Greek, Judas), which most likely could have been Judas (not Iscariot) the apostle or Judas, the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:33, Mark 6:3). The NIV Bible says Judas, brother of Jesus is the more likely author for in Jude 1:1 he describes himself as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” The letters of John trace a disagreement in the early church over

**Christology and ethics:**

- **Christology:** belief
- **Ethics:** behavior

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals the early church was struggling to survive, struggling to be faithful. The Greek and Roman culture set an alien stage for Christians. The letters of Paul to the Romans and Ephesians and the letters of John and Jude have one clear intent: to maintain the community’s central belief in Jesus Christ with loyalty, harmony, and faithfulness within the fellowship.

Read the following Scriptures and share your reactions with the group:

**Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13**

**Unity in the Body of Christ**

If the members of the church are “of one body”, what are some of the threats in the secular world that challenge that body?

Why does Paul mention individual spiritual gifts as part of that unity? Share your own spiritual gift(s) with the group and discuss the diversity within this “unity.” Why is this diversity necessary?

## Psalm 133

Read this version from “The Message”; compare to your translation

How wonderful, how beautiful  
When brothers and sisters get along!  
It’s like costly anointing oil  
Flowing down head and beard.  
Flowing down Aaron’s beard,  
Flowing down the collar of his priestly robes.  
It’s like the dew on Mount Hermon  
Flowing down the slopes of Zion.  
Yes, that’s where God commands the blessing,  
Ordains eternal life.

The anointed person belonged to God in a special sense. Oil was poured on the head of the one being anointed. The dew of Israel is heaviest near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and seaward slopes and does not occur at all in parts of the Jordan Valley. The dew descends and departs suddenly. It is vitally important in the summer when no rain falls, amounting to as much as 4”-5” of moisture.

Why does the Psalmist use these images to talk about brothers and sisters getting along?

In what ways do these images describe being “set apart” as a child of God?

## ENCOUNTER THE WORD

## Letters of 1 John and Jude

### Unity Within the Church

Tradition holds that **1, 2, 3 John** were written by John the apostle, son of Zebedee and author of the Gospel of John and Revelation. The author of **Jude**, another form of the Hebrew name Judah (Greek Judas), most likely was (1) Judas the apostle (Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13) – not Judas Iscariot or (2) Judas the brother of the Lord. The latter is more likely. He describes himself as a “brother of James.”

Read the following passages: **1 John 2:15-17; 3:23-24; 4:9-10; 4:19-20; Jude 1:17-23**

How can the church be open to sin-sick people, and at the same time, confront arrogant, divisive people or false prophets?

**The Radical Disciple** says “When faced with new situations that call old assumptions, old commandments into question, the radical disciple views the situation with a clear eye, knows the limits of tolerance for change, and holds self and community to the central teaching of Christ.”

We hear the phrase “this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century!” many times to validate new ways of living and thinking. In what ways can the church stay “clear eyed” and “know the limits of tolerance for change” staying central to the teaching of Christ in today’s world?

## **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** We want to belong to the group and to think and act independently. What must we say yes to, and what can we say no to? What boundaries and benefits shape our relationship to others and to the group? What defines our life together?

What issues or concerns do you hear in these words?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we are shaped in our relationship to one another by the message we have heard from the beginning: Love one another.

Review the Radical Disciple statement again. What questions and opposition would the radical disciple face in the church family?

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Enable me to speak the truth at all times,  
Because my hope is in your judgments.  
I will always obey your law,  
Forever and ever.  
I will live in perfect freedom  
Because I try to obey your teachings.”  
Psalm 119:43-45**

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 26: The Power of the Tongue**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

*“Father God, You command me for my own good not to merely listen to the Word but to do what it says. If I only listen and do not obey, I will undoubtedly deceive myself. Help me to comprehend that the word of God is my perfect law of liberty! (James 1:22; 1:25)*

----Praying God’s Word by Beth Moore

Theme: **Speech**

Theme Verse

Who was James? There are at least 5 men in the New Testament known by the name James. James the brother of Jesus has traditionally been viewed as the author of this book. James was probably the oldest of Jesus’ four younger brothers (Mark 6:3). Apparently he was at first skeptical about his brother’s claims and ministry (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 7:5). But after meeting the risen Christ, he became a strong believer and was numbered among the apostles. He oversaw the church at Jerusalem and helped resolve the dispute about whether Gentiles had to keep the Law. Assuming Jesus’ brother wrote this letter, it may have been about A.D. 62, but could have been written very early in the late 40s. (*Word in Life Bible*)

**DVD**

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

We live in a day of the “fast track,” the “sound bite,” and the “hurried child.” Make a list of your responsibilities and demands on your life: family, children, work, organizations, church, neighborhood, community, friends, relatives, etc.:

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**James 1:19-27**

**Hearing and Obeying**

James cautions Christians against speaking in haste, hearing but not doing, having loose tongues. Give examples of how we struggle with these problems even in today’s society. How can we guard against these problems?

**James 2:14-18****Faith and Works**

James is fairly clear in this message to the twelve tribes. How would you interpret his message for today's world?

**James 3:1-10****The Tongue**

How often is the tongue at work for good? How often is the tongue at work for evil? *Webster's New World Dictionary* says the word "gossip" comes from an old Middle English word meaning a godparent, a close friend. Interestingly, the word has evolved into today's meaning: "a person who chatters or repeats idle talk and rumors, especially about the private affairs of others." In what ways are we guilty of gossip? What is James' position on using the tongue to speak idle talk? When is talk concern and when is it idle?

**James 5:1-6****Warning to the Rich**

When James blasts the rich, is he condemning the possession of wealth? Is wealth itself evil? In what ways can wealth be used to an advantage by the person who possesses it?

**ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

A study of James 1 shows that God wants people to be *someone* more than to get *somewhere*. Rather than measuring our worth through achievements and possessions, he evaluates our character, looking for such virtues as peace, truth, serenity, and strength of character. He values us for who we are and who we are becoming. Read the statement and the corresponding verses. What is the message for the church and Christians today?

- People who can discern between good and bad choices and make wise decisions (1:22-25)
- People who give generously to others, just as God has given generously to us (1:17-18)
- People who listen well and respond thoughtfully (1:19-21)
- People who act instead of just talking and whose actions benefit others (1:22-25)
- People who value and show compassion toward others who are in need, especially those forgotten by society (1:26-27)

Take a few minutes to review your list of responsibilities. Think about what ways you might apply James' teaching to your life today, tomorrow, next month, next year. What would you change?

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**Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** People talk about people. Everybody does. Talk is easy. We don't always mean what we say. Our actions sometimes speak louder than our words, but not always. Everybody stretches the truth sometimes. Few people hold us accountable for what we say. We keep talking.

After you have read this statement, how might you rewrite the definition of “gossip”?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we recognize words have power to build up or destroy. Therefore, we do not take lightly the use of our tongue. .

The **Radical Disciple** challenges us to listen for talk that tears down, belittles, degrades, undercuts---on radio and television and in the movies; in conversations at home, at work, at play. Examine your own participation in such talk. Listen for positive uses of the tongue. Consider the relationship between your faith and your speech.

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Help me to speak Lord,  
And I will praise you.  
Psalm 51:15**

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 27: Vision of the End Time**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Apocalypse**

Theme Verse

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

**The Author:** *Revelation* was written by a man called John. This John was a Christian who lived in Asia in the same sphere as the Christians of the Seven Churches. He calls himself the brother of those to whom he writes and says he, too, shares in the tribulations they experience.

He was most probably a Jew of Palestine who had come to Asia Minor late in life. We deduce that from the kind of Greek he writes. While vivid and powerful, from the point of grammar, it is easily the worst Greek in the New Testament. It is often clear he is writing in Greek and thinking in Hebrew. He is steeped in the Old Testament: of the 404 verses, 275 have some kind of Old Testament allusion.

There are various opinions about who this John was. Tradition holds he was the Apostle (NIV); however, Dr. William Barclay says, "It is not likely he was an apostle. The Greek of the *Gospel of John* is simple but correct; the Greek of the *Revelation* is rugged and vivid, but notoriously incorrect. The writer of *John* avoids any mention of his own name; the John of the *Revelation* repeatedly mentions it."

*The New Interpreter's Study Bible* indicates that the writer of Revelation simply refers to himself as "John" and as a "brother" – that is, a fellow Christian, a servant/slave of Christ who writes prophecy. Vocabulary, style, and content indicate that he is a different person from the author of the Gospel of John. Nothing further is known about him except what can be inferred from Revelation itself. Later Christian tradition identified him with the apostle John as a way of affirming that the document represents the apostolic faith. John wrote from the island of Patmos, about 60 miles southwest of the mainland of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to the seven churches on the mainland. Most modern scholars agree that the internal evidence supports the ancient tradition that the document was composed in the last days of Emperor Domitian (c 95 CE), though some argue for a date in the time line of Nero (54-68) or Trajan (98-117.)

**Historical Context:** There is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome. Originally a group of villages, Rome developed into a city and gained dominance over the entire eastern Mediterranean by the time of Julius Caesar. By the time Christ was born, Rome had achieved its world empire with its highly disciplined army, diplomatic skills, and the policy of granting Roman citizenship to all those under its control.

Herod, the tetrarch or ruler, was a cruel puppet of the pagan Romans and was feared and hated in Judea (*Don't Know Much About the Bible*, Davis).

Rome is portrayed as a Babylon, the mother of harlots. By the time of *Revelation*, Caesar worship was the one religion which covered the whole Roman Empire, and Christians were persecuted and killed because of their refusal to conform. Once a year, everyone in the Empire had to appear before the magistrate to burn a pinch of incense to the god-head of Caesar (emperor) and say: "Caesar is Lord." After he had done that, a man might go away and worship any god or goddess he liked, so long as that worship did not infringe on decency and good order, but he *must* go through this ceremony in which he acknowledged the Emperor's divinity. To refuse to do so was to surely bring death. (*Barclay's The Revelation of John, Volume 1*).

- **Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century: How are Christians tempted in small ways to live by the world's thinking?**

### **Main Interpretations of *Revelation*:**

- The *idealist* separates the interpretation entirely from any reference to historical events and sees it is good overcoming evil which is applicable to all times.
- The *preterist* regards the book as referring entirely to its own day: Christianity's struggle with the Roman Empire.
- The *historical* interpretation sees it is a prediction of the whole period of church history from John's time to the end of the world; the church's struggle to final victory.
- The *futurist* interpretation centers the book largely around the time of the Lord's coming and the end of the world; most events are yet to be fulfilled. This view is held most widely in American evangelical churches. (the *Left Behind* series is an example of this interpretation)
- **You must decide what interpretation will shape your own understanding of *Revelation*.**

### **Three Parts of Revelation:**

Chapter 1: "Write, therefore, what you have seen."

Chapters 2-3: "What is now...": seven letters to seven churches; introduction to the main body of the book

Chapters 4-22: "And what will take place thereafter.."

### **Rev. Adam Hamilton has shared this summary in a sermon:**

***"God wins—Devil loses—Jesus returns."***

**The Number Seven:** the number **3** is the numerical signature of God; the number **4** is the numerical signature of nature, creation; **3 + 4 =** the number **7**, the signature of **totality or perfection**.

### There are **Seven Beatitudes in Revelation:**

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, hears it, takes it to heart (1:3)

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (14:3)

Blessed is he who stays awake (for the Lord's coming) (16:5)

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb, who become Christ's own (19:9)

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection (20:6)

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book (22:7)

Blessed are those who wash their robes --- repent and receive forgiveness (22:14)

### **Revelation** is built around the number seven:

Seven letters to seven churches (each letter has seven elements) Chapters 1-3

Seven seals and seven trumpets (chapters 4-11)

Seven lampstands (chapters 15-16)

Seven stars (1:16,20)

Seven angels (1:20)

Seven spirits (1:4)

A lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6)

Seven lamps (4:5)

Seven thunders (10:3-4)

A red dragon with seven heads and seven crowns (12:1)

A leopard-like beast with seven heads (13:1)

A scarlet-colored beast with seven heads (17:3,7)

Seven hills (Rome was built on seven hills) (17:9)

Seven kinds (persecution under seven emperors: Vitellius through Hardrian) (17:10)

Seven beatitudes

- **As you look over this list, why do you think the number seven represents totality in these categories?**

### **Symbolism in Color:**

**White** is the color of dazzling light, in opposition to darkness and night. It may reflect purity and innocence, but more often joy and triumph. God dwells in light unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:16); Jesus' garments in the Transfiguration were white (Mark 9:3).

**Red** is the color of demonic beings: red dragon, scarlet beast. Red is indicative of a murderous nature. Red is portrayed in nature as "Red in tooth and claw...." ("*In Memoriam*" by *Alfred Lord Tennyson*)

- **What emotions do these colors evoke in people?**

### **Seven Seals and Seven Trumpets (Chapters 5-10)**

These symbols form the mail frame of **Revelation:**

Open warfare, famine, death, martyrs, terrible natural disasters and plagues.

The trumpets signal the onslaught of locusts, an army of 200 million horsemen in retribution for the refusal of unbelievers to repent of worshipping idols, magic arts, fornication, stealing.

- **Review the plagues God sent when Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. (Exodus 7-12)**

**Who are the Two Witnesses? (Chapter 11)**

Some would say Paul and Peter (whose bodies lay in the city of Rome at that time), but the most common theories are Elijah and Moses who appeared at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8).

- **Why would God send two witnesses to preach to the lost one last time?**

**The Woman, The Child, The Red Dragon (Chapter 12)**

The woman is commonly thought to represent Israel; the child is Christ (Christ was physically born out of the nation of Israel), and the dragon is expressly identified as the Devil. The seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns represent Satan's dominion as print of the fallen world, but he is not God neither all-powerful or everywhere nor does he know everything.

**The Seven Bowls (Chapter 16)**

The seven bowls contain plagues which are the final judgments by which the power of Babylon is broken.

**Babylon, the Great Prostitute (Chapter 17)**

Babylon, in the Ancient World, was a city that had taken God's Old Testament people captive and destroyed Jerusalem. This reference may describe Rome: a giant political power with an idolatrous religious system which received pay for her prostitution (taxed the citizens) and persecuted Christians unto death. Or, it may describe a false prophet and the entire ungodly religious system.

**Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet, the New Jerusalem, Jesus is Coming**

What will heaven be like? God's redeemed people can eat all they want from the Tree of Life. It is for each individual to decide---choose life or choose death. This decision has eternal consequences.

---*Halley's Bible Handbook*

- **What are the risks for the church and for Christians in taking a stand against ideals in the prevailing culture which go against Biblical teachings?**

**ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**Revelation 4**

(You may want to read this chapter from *The Message*). Have one person read this chapter aloud and ask members of the class to close their eyes and listen with their senses: sight, sound, touch.

- **Which senses were affected during this reading? What was your reaction? What insights did you get from the reading?**

## **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

**Human Condition:** The world has been here a long time, and it will continue for a long time. The world goes on. Life goes on. The end is nowhere in sight.

How would you respond to someone with this viewpoint?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we live and work in the present, expecting God's victory in the future, secure in knowing the end---whenever it comes---is in God's hands.

**The Radical Disciple:** While society in general thinks culture---behavior patterns, beliefs, arts, entertainment, products---is benign, the Radical Disciple resists the power of everyday culture, knowing it undermines the sovereignty of God.

**Are these cultural phenomena truly benign? Why or why not?**

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**You guide me with all your instruction  
And at the end you will receive me with honor.  
What else do I have in heaven but you?  
Since I have you, what else could I want on earth?  
Psalm 73:24-25**

## **REFERENCES**

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**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 28: Letters to the Churches**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Listen**

Theme Verse

**DVD**

The 7 churches actually represent all the new Christian churches. These 7 were on a postal route through Asia Minor. Looking back at the Old Testament history, we remember that Jews were carried into exile throughout what were the Persian, Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Many Jews were able to establish businesses, solidify their families and remain in these areas long after the conquering empires were gone. Because of this, there were synagogues scattered throughout this area – and to these synagogues the Disciples and the Apostle Paul went to take the Good News. So, we have a scattering of Christian churches, some of whom are represented by The Seven.

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

Use notes from daily readings and Study Manual pages 216-221 to discuss John’s vision of the seven churches (see map on page 216 for the location of each city):

- What is the message in the letter to each church?
- What cultural influences did the church have to contend with?
- What message to this church is applicable to the church in every age and location?

**Ephesus**

Ephesus was the Gateway of Asia, the wealthiest and greatest city in all Asia. It was a free city: self-governing and exempted from ever having Roman troops garrisoned there. Ephesus was the center of worship of Artemis (Diana) and the Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Pagan religion was at its strongest; amulets and charms were sold and people came from all over the world to buy them. Since the Temple area possessed the right of asylum, this area was a center of crime and immorality.

**Smyrna**

Of all the cities of Asia, Smyrna was the loveliest, the “ornament of Asia.” Magnificently situated, its harbor was the safest of all and the most convenient. Originally a Greek colony, it, too, was a free city and long before Rome became the ruler of the world, it had cast its lot with her, never to waver in its fidelity. There were a host of temples, a stadium, a magnificent public library, and it flourished in trade and culture. Jews were especially numerous and influential. It is clear Smyrna was hostile to the Christian movement.

## **Pergamum**

Pergamum has a place all its own in Asia and was not on any great roads. A capital city for almost four hundred years, it was built on a tall conical hill and was a center for culture, famous for its library. *Parchment* is derived from *Pergamum*. For centuries ancient rolls were written on papyrus. The scholars of Pergamum invented parchment or vellum which is made of the skins of beasts, smoothed and polished, a much superior material for writing. Pergamum regarded itself as the custodian of the Greek way of life and Greek way of worship. The Temple of Athena stood on the conical hill. Worship of Asclepius, the god of healing, was known as the Pergamene god (the symbol of Asclepius was the serpent which still appears on the traditional medical emblem). Pergamum was also known as the center of Caesar worship for the province.

## **Thyatira**

The longest of the seven letters is written to the least important of the seven cities. A commercial town, it has no special religious significance but possessed a fortune-telling shrine. Its commercial trade specialized in the dyeing industry and trade of woolen goods. Lydia the seller of purple (a much coveted dye) came from Thyatira. One of the proposed problems of this church involved the guilds. To refuse to join a guild would be much the same as to refuse to join a trade union today. The guilds held common meals and very often these were in a temple with a sacrifice to the gods and the meat eaten had been sacrificed to idols. Often these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and slack morality. Was it possible for a Christian to be part of such occasions?

## **Sardis**

Built on the top of a narrow plateau, Sardis was almost impregnable. Sardis in Greek is a plural noun meaning two towns, one on the plateau and one in the valley beneath. When the town could no longer expand on the plateau, it grew around the foot of the plateau. A town of legendary wealth, the greatest of the Sardian kings was Croesus (“As rich as Croesus...”). When John wrote this letter, Sardis was wealthy but degenerate; the Sardians were soft and had twice lost their city because they were too lazy to set guards to watch for enemies. The Christian Church too had lost its vitality.

## **Philadelphia**

Philadelphia was the youngest of all the seven cities. *Philadelphos* is the Greek for *one who loves his brother*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is called the “city of brotherly love”). Founded for a special purpose, it was intended that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia. By A.D. 19, the Lydians had forgotten their own language and were all but Greeks. Philadelphia was situated on the edge of a great volcanic plain which was fertile land with grape-growing areas which produced famous wine. For centuries it was a free Greek Christian city amidst a pagan people; it was the last bastion of Asian Christianity. It was not until midway through the fourteenth century that it fell.

## **Laodicea**

Of all the seven Churches, Laodicea is most unsparingly condemned. It had no redeeming feature. Because the Laodiceans were neither cold nor hot, they had about them a kind of nauseating quality. *Cold* is *psuchros* meaning cold to the point of freezing. *Hot* is *zestos* which means *hot to the boiling point*. Hot food and cold food can both be appetizing, but tepid food will often make the stomach turn. The tragedy of Laodicea was that it was convinced of its own wealth and blind to its poverty. Humanly speaking there was not a more prosperous town in Asia Minor; spiritually speaking Christ declares that there was not a more poverty-stricken community. Laodicea prided itself on its financial wealth and on its clothing trade. The garments made there were famous over all over the world. Although Laodicea had much to be thankful for, they were spiritually naked and blind.

## ENCOUNTER THE WORD

## Colossians 1:9-23

This letter written to the Christians in Colossae addresses a people in a city near Laodicea. Judaism, Platoism, and mystery cults from the surrounding mountain peoples blended into strange, often contradictory religious practices. Cultic worship of angels persisted, with Michael as the favorite. He was credited with sparing the town in a time of disaster. As you hear the passage read, think about the following questions:

- What did Paul intend to communicate in this passage?
- As 21<sup>st</sup> century people, what do we say to this passage?
- What does God say to you through this passage?

## Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

**Human Condition:** That early zeal, commitment, dedication couldn't last. It demanded too much. Life has more to offer. We're compromised but comfortable.

What fallacy do you see one of more of these statements?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to our congregation and strive to be faithful.

**The Radical Disciple** leads the way in calling the congregation to accountability and Christ-like faithfulness when the pull toward accommodation and compromise is strong.

- Give examples of where and when we might take up the call to accountability when compromise is threatening Christians around us.

## PRAYING THE PSALMS

**None of us can see our own errors;  
Deliver me, Lord from hidden faults!  
Keep me safe, also, from willful sins;  
Don't let them rule over me!"**  
Psalm 19:12-13

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Peterson, Eugene. *The Message: The New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs in Contemporary Language.*

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 29: What Must Take Place**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Woe, Woe, Woe**

Theme Verse

**DVD**

Now the scene in heaven changes to the Court of Heaven:

- There is a door of opportunity – Jesus stands at the door and knocks
- There is a door of revelation – the heavens are being opened
- There is the opening for the descent of the Spirit – the Slain Lamb comes forth
- There are the 24 elders

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

***“Write what you have seen and what is and what will happen after these things (Revelation 1:19)***

***“....What is...”***

The letters to the Seven Churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, chastising them for their unfaithfulness, unorthodox beliefs, and their lukewarm attitude.

- The letters are obviously historical, yet what message do they still have for the churches today?

***“Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22 NIV)***

***“.....what will happen after these things”***

**JOHN’S VISION OF THE THRONE ROOM:** Last week we listened to the reading of Revelation 4 describing the scene in the throne room of Heaven: images which appealed to our senses of sight, sound, smell and touch. The reading this week suggests explanation of some of the symbolism. Review page 224 of the Study Manual to identify the following:

The number *four* :

*Lion*  
*Calf*

*Son of Man*  
*Eagle*

## The *Twenty-four elders*

## The *Lamb*

If you take the **preterist** viewpoint, the following events can be applied to historical events during Christianity's struggle with the Roman Empire and the persecution of the Roman emperors.

If you take the **historical** viewpoint, the following events are symbolic of the struggle of the whole period of church history to the end of the world: the church will have the final victory.

If you take the **futurist** viewpoint, the following events are yet to come and will predict the Lord's coming and the end of the world. These events are yet to be fulfilled.

- Review the Judgments to come and discuss how one or more of the above viewpoints might be applied

### THE SEVEN SEALS

### Revelation 6-8

1. The white horse who will savage the earth
2. The blood-red horse who will cause war and take away peace
3. The black horse who brings famine
4. The pale (green) horse who represents Death
5. The souls of martyrs who have suffered ugly deaths: fire, torture, wild animals
6. A gigantic earthquake

....the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is delayed.....

marks of God on the forehead of the believers, those who are to be brought safely through the tribulation, a sign of people who belonged to God and were under his power and authority.

7. Silence. A time to reflect. A time to repent. No light, sun, moon or stars. Darkness.

### THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

### Revelation 8:6 – 9:21

- Why are trumpets important in the Jewish faith? (see page 226 of the Study Manual). What would these trumpets mean in the heart of a Jew?
1. Hail, fire, blood. One-third of the vegetation destroyed. (A southeast wind in the mid-east known as the Sirocco is a dreaded wind like a blast of hot air from a furnace. It withers all vegetation.)
  2. Something like a fiery mountain thrown into the sea. One-third of the sea turned to blood.
  3. A great star falls from heaven. One-third of the water turned bitter.

4. Sun, moon, stars lose one-third of their light: 1/3 of day and 1/3 of night without light.
5. A star falls from the sky into a pit from which come locusts that cover the earth. They only punish people who *do not have* God's mark by scorpion-like stings. (The sting of a scorpion is worse than the sting of a hornet, and though not necessarily fatal, it can kill. Their attack is to last about five months. The suffering caused by the locusts will make men long for death but will not be able to die – **Barclay**).
6. Two hundred million war horses breathing smoke, fire, sulfur set loose to kill one-third of all people (the demonic locusts were allow to injure but not kill; now comes the 200,000,000 horsemen of vengeance; the number simply means they were beyond numbering – **Barclay**).

***“The people who lived through these terrible troubles did not turn away from the idols they had made, and they did not stop worshiping demons. They kept on worshiping idols that were made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood. Not one of these idols could see, hear, or walk. No one stopped murdering or practicing witchcraft or being immoral or stealing.” (Revelation 9:20-21 Word in Life)***

- What keeps people from believing when strong evidence and witness is given to them? How would you approach someone who is resistant to hearing the Word? Are some people destined to remain lost?

## **THE LITTLE SCROLL**

### **Revelation 10**

- How do the Scriptures describe the physical appearance of the angel delivering this Scroll?

This describes his size and power; the sea and land stand for the sum total of the universe. This pronouncement is not to be shared by John. Paul experienced a similar thing when caught up to the third heaven and “heard things that cannot be told, which many may not uttered” (2 Corinthians 12:4). God sometimes tells a man more than that man can say or than his generation can understand. (**Barclay**).

- **The Temple:** How important was the Temple to the Jews? John glimpses a vision of a new, heavenly Temple.

## **THE TWO WITNESSES**

### **Revelation 11**

It was always part of Jewish belief that God would send his special messenger to men before the final coming of the Day of the Lord. Malachi actually identifies the messenger as Elijah. Some speculate the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah, neither of which was said to die. “*Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him*” (Genesis 5:24); Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind and in a chariot of fire to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Much more likely the witnesses are Elijah and Moses: Elijah was held to be the greatest of the prophets; Moses was the supreme law-giver. It was these two who appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (**Barclay**).

- What is the mission of the Two Witnesses? What is their fate?

7. **The 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet:** voices are heard from heaven. What do they say? Huge hailstones fell to the ground.

## THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

## Revelation 12

Review the information on page 228 of the Study Manual, then discuss the following:

- Explain two possible interpretations of the following symbols. How do they help tell John's story?
- Who is the woman?
- Who is the red dragon?

## ENCOUNTER THE WORD

## Revelation 7

Verses 4-8

- The number 144,000 stands not for limitation but for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12 – the perfect square – then rendered even more inclusive and complete by being multiplied by 1,000. This does not tell us that the number of the saved will be very small; it tells us that the number saved will be very great (*Barclay*).

Verses 11-17 (read aloud):

- What does this passage tell us about the promise God has made to his people?
- What hope for the future does this passage give us?

## Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

**Human Condition:** The clock rules. The calendar dictates. The car is waiting. Never enough hours in the day or days in the week. Have to stay focused now. No time to think about what will take place after this.

How accurately does this statement describe our society? Your own life?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we refuse to be defined and confined by the routine; we take our place in the universal struggle, knowing that victory is assured.

In what ways is this Mark as point/counterpoint to the Human Condition?

**The Radical Disciple** is described as a “prayer warrior”; their prayers rise like incense. In what ways is prayer a powerful tool? How might you become a more powerful person of prayer?

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**I thank you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I sing praise to you before the gods.  
I face your holy Temple,  
Bow down and praise your name  
Because of your constant love and faithfulness,  
Because you have shown that your name  
And your commands are supreme.  
Psalm 138:1-2**

## **REFERENCES**

Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John, Volumes 1 & 2, Revised Edition. Find it Fast in the Bible.* Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville, TN.  
Hamilton, Adam. *Confronting the Controversies.*  
*Word in Life Bible, CEV.* Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville, TN.

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 30: The Power of Evil**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer  
 Theme: **Persecution**  
 Theme Verse

**DVD**

Whatever interpretation of *Revelation* you choose, we remember that **Revelation is about judgment: God wins; Devil loses, Jesus comes again.** Whether we are talking about past history or future history, the message is the same: Christians cannot think of themselves as neutral onlookers, but must see themselves in the midst of the conflict of being called to repent, resist and to endure. We remember Revelation 3:22

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

Christians cannot think of themselves as neutral onlookers but must see themselves in the midst of the conflict being called to repent, resist, endure. As we discuss Chapter 13-18, we will look at explanations of Revelation’s symbolism through two viewpoints: *preterist and futurist.*

<b>The First and Second Beast</b>	<b>Revelation 13: 1, 5-7; 11-14</b>
<i>Preterist</i>	<i>Futurist</i>
“Beastly” Empires: Babylon, Assyria, Media, Persia, Greece, Rome Roman Emperors called: Savior of the world False Prophet: priesthood who set in place Emperor worship	Antichrist 10 rulers of geographic regions under Antichrist “Revived” Roman Empire False Prophet—brings about one world religion
<b>Mark of the Beast</b>	<b>Revelation 13:16-17</b>
<i>Preterist</i>	<i>Futurist</i>
Jewish phylacteries Slaves, soldiers branded Contract receive with burned pinch of incense	cashless society everything marked, scanned
<b>The Number of the Beast</b>	<b>Revelation 13:18</b>
<i>Preterist</i>	<i>Futurist</i>
Alphanumeric system	ID computer chips?

Nero = 666  
Hitler = 666  
Jesus = 74 (Perfect + Creation)

One world economy/ one world dollar  
(Euro dollar?)

<b>The Lamb and the 144,000</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 14:1</b> <i>Futurist</i>
Martyrs slain by fire, torture, execution Roman Persecution of Christians	“Marked” for the Father or “marked for the Antichrist Two choices: fear God or follow Antichrist

<b>Harvest of Judgment</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 14:14-20</b> <i>Futurist</i>
Winepress = judgment; like trampling of grapes, Rome will be trampled	Sharp sickle: never used to harvest good grain = something terrible!

<b>Avenging Angels</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 15:5-7</b> <i>Futurist</i>
Dress is priestly, royal, heavenly	

<b>The Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath</b> (There is a difference from the former destruction limited to 1/3 of the earth; this is <i>complete</i> destruction of or God’s enemies). <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 16</b> <i>Futurist</i>
1. Sores on men 2. Sea like blood 3. Rivers like blood 4. Sun scorches 5. Darkness 6. Euphrates dries up 7. Pollution of air/earthquake/hail	Epidemics:SARS, Ebola, AIDS, MERSA Pollution of the earth and waters  Ozone layer destroyed Climate changes? Water shortages and restrictions Major earthquakes that kill hundreds of thousands, natural disasters

<b>Armageddon (locate on map in Bible Atlas)</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 16:13-16</b> <i>Futurist</i>
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Mt. Megiddo – Plain of Esdralon: storied  
 Battleground in Jewish History  
 Also known as Har-Magedon

China & India = 40% of world population;  
 army of 200,000,000 not unimaginable  
 Antichrist meets defeat

<b>The Woman on the Beast</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 17:4-6</b> <i>Futurist</i>
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Woman and Beast are the Roman Empire  
 And the Roman Emperors. Rome is  
 Located on 7 hills

In 1980, Iraq began rebuilding the city of  
 Babylon. \$6,000,000 spent each  
 year on archaeological and  
 construction work, even the  
 Tower of Babel constructed

Rome punished because she worshipped wealth  
 And lived wantonly

<b>Fall of Babylon – a Decadent Society</b> <i>Preterist</i>	<b>Revelation 18:9-10</b> <i>Futurist</i>
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Decadent Society of Rome – examples  
 From **Barclay's** commentary

Fall of Communism paved way for global  
 economy-world government?  
 Atomic/nuclear devastation?  
 What does the impending Islamic rise  
 portend?

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 3:22 NIV)*

### **Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community**

<b>Human Condition:</b> We live in the real world. We have to make a living, get along with our neighbors, live in our culture. Compromise is the name of the game. People who insist on being different can expect to suffer.
--

How might a Christian live *in the world*, yet not be *of the world*?

<b>Mark of Faithful Community:</b> Being faithful community, we choose to be faithful rather than fearful, bold in our witness whatever the cost.
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**The Radical Disciple** is willing to accept suffering but also know how to give encouragement to others who are paying a price for their faith. Who needs your support?

## **PRAYING THE PSALMS**

**Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful  
Because I come to you for safety.  
In the shadow of your wings I find protection  
Until the raging storms are over.  
Psalm 57:1**

## **REFERENCES**

Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John, Volumes 1 & 2, Revised Edition.*  
Duck, Daymond R. *Revelation: God's Word for the Biblically-Inept.*

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 31: A New Heaven and a New Earth**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer  
 Theme: **Hallelujah**  
 Theme Verse

This lesson contains the best things of **Revelation**: Jesus comes again! A thousand years of peace. Alpha and Omega: A Ω . Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; Omega is the last letter. All life begins and ends with God.

**Revelation: A Worship Experience**

Keep the following themes in mind as you read the remaining Revelation Scripture:

- God is in control
- Revelation addresses the church today as it did the early church
- Worship of God is Revelation’s answer to a church that has accommodated that culture and society whose allegiance is to idols
- A comfortable church may be unable to recognize the significance of God’s victory

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

<b>Hallelujah !</b>	<b>Revelation 19:1</b>
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*Preterist*  
 Hallelujah literally means praise to God  
*Halal (praise to) Jah (the name of God)*

*Futurist*  
 The multitude is most likely the Tribulation Saints with the Old Testament Saints and the angels praising the destruction of Babylon (revised)

	<b>Revelation 19:7</b>
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God Almighty (*pantokrator*) literally “the one who controls all things.” There was never a time when the Christian suffered so much, yet John calls God *pantokrator*.

A special union will exist between Jesus and the Church which is very similar to a bridegroom and bride --- “the two become one.”

Often we find Bible stories told in the **parable** form, Jesus’ predominant method of teaching. Robert Frost, the poet, said a **parable** is a story “that means what it says, and something else besides.”

<b>Christ, the Warrior</b>	<b>Revelation 19:14-16</b>
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*Preterist*  
 Christ the warrior has with him the armies of

*Futurist*  
 The first time Jesus came into Jerusalem, he rode on

Heaven. This is a picture of God in control.

a donkey. The next time he will come in the final world riding the white horse of war. Kings rode a donkey when they came in peace; horses in time of war. The Antichrist will amass an army but will be no match for Christ the Warrior. Not one of the antichrist's army will escape.

The Antichrist will perhaps be the greatest intellectual, politician and statesman, the greatest economist who ever lived. In usurping the throne of God he will also be the greatest "fool."

### **The Thousand Year Reign**

### **Revelation 20:6**

*Millennium* means a *period of one thousand years*; *chiliasm* from the Greek *chilios* means *a thousand*. Certain Jewish beliefs about the Messianic age were common in the time after 100 B.C.

#### ***Preterist***

2 Baruch 29 (Apocrypha) relates there will be no disease, no untimely death, beasts will be friendly with man. This is a time for the martyrs and saints to have their reward.

#### ***Futurist***

David Jeremiah says, "How else can we respond to the disciple's prayer, "*Thy Kingdom come*" without the literal establishment of the kingdom? The Tribulation Saints will repopulate the earth and return with the Jews to Jerusalem once a year to worship Jesus.

### **One Last Try**

### **Revelation 20:7-9**

#### ***Preterist***

In the ancient church *Martyrs* were those who actually died for their faith; *confessors* were those who suffered everything short of death for their loyalty to Christ. These are to be part of the first resurrection. The general resurrection is not to take place until after the thousand year reign.

#### ***Futurist***

The first resurrection (*resurrection of life*) is for the believers. The second resurrection (*resurrection of the damnation*) is the resurrection of the unbelievers. There may be two thousand years between the two.

Phase 1: resurrection of Christ; some OT Saints

Phase 2: resurrection of Church at Rapture

Phase 3: resurrection of the two witnesses

Phase 4: resurrection of Tribulation Saints and OT Saints

Phase 5: unbelievers, end of the 1,000 years

\*Those born during the *Millennium* will be tested just like everyone else.

### **Gog and Magog**

### **Revelation 20:8-10**

#### ***Preterist***

In Jewish thought Gog and Magog stood for everything that is against God. The rabbis taught that Gog and Magog would assemble

#### ***Futurist***

When Satan is released, he will take up where he left off. At the Battle of Gog and Magog, Satan will repeat what he tried at Armageddon

themselves and their forces against Jerusalem and would fall by the hand of the Messiah.

As the armies under Satan come up against the camp of God's people and Jerusalem, the hosts are consumed with fire; Satan destroyed.

to become greater than God with a gathering from all over the world including Gog and Magog.

Satan will no longer be allowed to lure people into destruction and suffer unending torment.

### Judgment

#### *Preterist*

Now comes the final judgment. The present Earth passes away. Throughout life we write our own destiny and God judges those deeds. Those whose names are not written in the Book of life are given over to destruction. In ancient times, a king had roll book of living citizens under his control; when a man died, his name was removed from the roll.

### Revelation 20: 11-13

#### *Futurist*

The consensus seems to be that earth and heaven are moved to make room for the **new earth** and **new heaven**. When a person is born, the name is recorded in the Book of Life. It remains there until they become accountable for sin and then choose to reject Jesus. If so, their name is stricken. *All* will be judged as individuals according to their deeds.

### The New Creation

#### *Preterist*

John has seen the doom of the wicked, and now sees the bliss of the blessed. Here, again, is the dream of the restoration of Jerusalem, the holy city, a vision of precious stones, streets of gold, the light of God making the sun and moon unnecessary.

Fellowship with God brings certain things: tears and grief, crying and pain are gone.

God speaks, "I am Alpha and Omega." Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and *omega* is the last. John is saying that all life begins and ends with God.

### Revelation 21:2-6

#### *Futurist*

Here the Church will spend eternity.

The New Jerusalem is where Jesus has been preparing mansions for his own. *The old order of things passed away* is a reminder that God will bring an end to sin and death.

A special union will exist between Jesus and the Church similar to the union that exists between a bridegroom and bride upon marriage.

### The Holy City

### Revelation 21:16

Both interpretations remark on the shape of the Holy City which forms a perfect cube. The length, breadth and height were the same. This is significant. The cube was the symbol of perfection. Both Plato and Aristotle refer to the fact that in Greece the good man was called "four square." The Jews had the same cube represented in the altar of the burnt offering, the altar of incense, and the High Priest's breast plate.

According to the measurements, the total area of the city was 2,250,000 square miles, or reaching from Damascus and covering the whole of Palestine. A city with that area would stretch nearly from London to New York. In a city of this size, *there would be room for everyone.*

#### **Revelation 21:25**

The people of some ancient cities opened their gates during the day and closed them at night. The continuous presence of God in the Holy City will mean the continuous presence of light. Darkness will not be known, thereby eliminating any need to *shut the gates.*

#### **The River of Life, The Tree of Life, The Curse Lifted    Revelation 22:1-3**

*The River of Life, the water of life, the living water* is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Water, a physical substance, is used to help explain a spiritual truth: it possesses life-giving qualities.

*The Tree of Life* takes us back to the Garden of Eden. In Jerusalem, trees will produce a different kind of fruit every month, a continuous supply of food from God.

The curse of Adam and Eve is lifted. In the New Jerusalem, there will be no more

- Death, mourning, crying, or pain (21:4)
- Temple (21:22)
- Sun or moon (21:23)
- Night (21:25)
- Impure, shameful, or deceitful thoughts (21:27)
- Curse (22:3)

“Behold I am coming soon” (22:7) says “When Jesus comes, it will happen very fast...”. Why is prophecy so important? The importance does not lie in predicting the future, rather in changing of our lives. God means for prophecy to be obeyed, and those who do obey are promised a blessing; this is a message to the church today.

#### **Washing of Robes**

#### **Revelation 22:14**

The implication is a choice between washing our robes or leaving them dirty. The **Beatitudes** are one of the best known teachings of Jesus. Revelation also contains the following Beatitudes: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14

#### **Access Denied**

#### **Revelation 22:15**

Jesus provides his list of those who will not be blessed with access to the tree of life and the Holy City

#### **Do Not Add to the Word**

#### **Revelation 22:19**

This becomes a message to the church today. Some religious groups add or take away from the Word of God. We remember the words of Paul, “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8, 9).

The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, was made by seventy Jewish scholars at the request of the King of Egypt. When the task was done, “they bade them pronounce a curse in accordance with their custom upon any who should make any alteration either by adding anything or changing in any

way whatever any of the words which had been written or making an omission” (*Letter of Aristeas 310,311*).

### One Last Promise

### Revelation 22:21

These last words of the Bible serve as a reminder that grace makes salvation possible.

**GRACE IS God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.**

### Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

**Human Condition:** Evil is loose in the world. Wars slaughter millions; economic systems squeeze the poor; diseases cause untold suffering. Arrogance and prejudice, violence and greed rule. And we accept things as they are. That’s reality.

Might this be a description of a comfortable church? The Revelation was written amid great persecution. What meaning does it have for your faith now?

**Mark of Faithful Community:** Being faithful community, we live fully in the present, confronting the evil that surrounds us and fully in the promise of God’s new heaven and new earth.

**The Radical Disciple** acknowledges the reality of evil and calls it what it is, sees evil and confronts it, decides what action is necessary in the face of evil and proceeds with active hope.

Is this statement too ambitious? In what ways might Christians practice this statement in today’s world?

### PRAYING THE PSALMS

O, Lord, you live forever;  
Long ago you created the earth  
And with your own hands you made the heavens.  
They will disappear, but you will remain.  
You will discard them like clothes and they will vanish.  
But you are always the same,  
And your life never ends.  
Psalm 102:24-27

### REFERENCES

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Duck, Daymond R. *Revelation: God’s Word for the Biblically-Inept.*

**DISCIPLE 4**  
**Under the Tree of Life**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Week 32: Under the Tree of Life**

**GATHERING AND PRAYER**

Opening Prayer  
Theme: **Forever**  
Theme Verse

**SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL**

The daily scripture readings are passages we have read before, so we read not for knowledge but for introspection. The issue is this: How might God's revelation in Scripture become revelation to us? What would it take for us to yield our hearts to those things that lead to life abundant and eternal?

**CARING**

**Ruth left her family to move to a new land because of her love and faith; Queen Esther was willing to sacrifice her life for her people; James stressed action not just caring; John stressed love for Christian brothers and sisters within the community. Through performing caring acts, how might we**

Strengthen our family?

Assist congregation, community, country?

Assist the needs, hungry, widowed, orphaned, homeless?

Move to action in help others in need?

**GUIDANCE**

*Disciple (n.) A student, learner, pupil. In the Bible the word is used most often to refer to a follower of Jesus....In general, the term "apostles" refers to a small, inner group of Jesus' followers while "disciples" refers to the larger group of Jesus' followers. (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)*

**During our journey this year, we have gained guidance from pastors and teachers and fellow disciples. We have been taught by Scripture.**

What insights into life have you gained from this study?

How are you incorporating these insights into daily living?

Jesus said, “*I am the light.*” In what ways is His light guiding you right now?

## **BUILDING**

**We like to build, create, restore or invent things. Sometimes we think about the *thing* more than we think about what it symbolizes and its use. Pastor Adam Hamilton has said the COR church building is nothing more than a “tool.”**

What did Pastor Adam mean by that statement?

**Read Galatians 5:22-23.** We are cautioned to “bear fruit.” In what ways is “building” incorporated into this idea? In what ways are you “*bearing fruit or building*” in your life? How might you “bear more fruit?”

## **HOPE**

**The Psalms inspire hope in our hearts. We can use the Psalms to pray, sing or worship God.**

In what ways have the Psalms given you hope?

Do you have a favorite Psalm? You have read and prayed many Psalms throughout this study. Talk about a Psalm that spoke to you or a favorite Psalm.

Although Revelation contains some graphic images of destruction and punishment, how does the description of a new heaven and new earth give hope and assurance to you?

## **ENCOUNTER THE WORD**

**John 15:1-8**

If I take this passage seriously, what changes will I have to make in my life?

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## **DVD**

**Presenters: Richard B. Wilke, Julia K. Wilke  
Co-writers of DISCIPLE**

This video segment prepares the group for the love feast. We will observe a hand washing as we move into the Love Feast and Communion. Please do not talk during the transition.

**Handwashing:** We each in turn will pour water over another’s hands, then dry with the towel. We are symbolizing Jesus’ role of servant to His Disciples on that last night. Through performing this handwashing, we become servants to one another.

We take our seat at the Love Feast.

## THE LOVE FEAST

Leader:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

**Response:**

**And also with you.**

Leader:

Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

**Response**

**Christ has prepared a feast of love.**

### SCRIPTURE READING

**John 15:9-17**

*I have loved you just as my Father has loved me. So remain faithful to my love for you. If you obey me, I will keep loving you just as my father keeps loving me, because I have obeyed him. I have told you this to make you as completely happy as I am. Now I tell you to love each other, as I have loved you. The greatest way to show love for friends is to die for them. And you are my friends, if you obey me. Servants don't know what their master is doing, and so I don't speak to you as my servants. I speak to you as my friends, and I have told you everything that my Father has told me. You did not choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last. Then my father will give you whatever you ask for in my name. So I command you to love each other.*

---Word in Life Bible, CEV

Jesus lifted up for us two great commandments. First that we should love the Lord our God

with heart, mind, soul, and strength. And the second, that we should love neighbor as self. Whom shall we love? Who is our neighbor? Sometimes those whom we know well are the hardest to love. Jesus ate with those very near to him. He ate, knowing Thomas; he ate, knowing Peter; he ate, knowing Judas.

As we eat together, we recall that through Christ, God's love reached out to make us acceptable. We remember that through Christ, God's love makes us acceptable to one another and empowers us to be in community, beginning in this room and extending to the far reaches of the world.

### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING - ALL

**O God, when Jesus ate in the world, he ate and drank with sinners and outcasts welcoming them, enjoying them. For the hungry, Jesus was food and the people ate and were full.**

**O God, as we eat the bread of fellowship and are sufficiently fed, we pray that you make out of us something of nourishment. Enable us to be bread for our sisters and brothers who are starved for gladness and hope. And may we, by feeding them, ourselves be made full of rejoicing. Amen.**

### THE FELLOWSHIP MEAL

This meal is symbolic of a meal that would have been eaten by Jesus and the Disciples. As you eat, remember that last meal shared in an upper room on the night before

Jesus demonstrated his unlimited love for all mankind.

## HOLY COMMUNION

LEADER:

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said: Do this in remembrance of me." When the supper was over, he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to his disciples and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is the covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

**ALL: The bread which we break is a sharing of the body of Christ. The cup which we drink is a sharing in the blood of Christ. Thanks be to God.**

Partake of the Bread and the Cup and exchange words of blessing:

*The body of Christ given for you.*

*The blood of Christ given for you.*

### PRAYER - ALL

**Almighty and loving God, we thank you that through your great love you have fed us from our Lord's table. We give thanks that we are members of the body of Christ. By your grace help us be strong and faithful in our**

**witness through Jesus Christ  
our Lord. Amen.**

**SENDING FORTH - LEADER**

*Go now; go in safety for you cannot  
go where God is not.*

*Go in love, for love alone endures.*

*Go with purpose and God will  
honor your dedication.*

*Go in peace for it is the gift of God  
to those whose hearts and minds are  
in Christ Jesus. AMEN.*