

Sermon for 4 January 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Second Sunday after Christmas

Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalter: Psalm 147:12-20 (Page159ff); Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Sermon: I spoke last week about a book I've been reading by Hall Recinos, a retired professor @ Wesley Theological Seminary who grew up in a New York City ghetto, poor, addicted, who became free of his addiction and went on to a career as pastor and teacher.

I have been deeply moved by it. His point is that the center of both power and diversity in the church, and in the world, is in urban areas, and that working there to heal differences and achieve equality and happiness is our major purpose and hope.

He points out that cities are highly important throughout the Bible, and to build on that reality is crucial for peace and health worldwide.

In chapter after chapter he illustrates how all the varieties of humankind: nationality, race, justice along sexual lines, intelligence, balance between humankind and all aspects of nature, illustrate this outlook, and he shows again and again how our religious wisdom bears it out. God wants harmony and creativity of a wholesome kind between humans and the rest of nature, and urban areas are where that is most achievable..

So, with this start of a new year, I am called to center our Bible lessons not only on the positive texts from the Old Testament, including the ever-candid Jeremiah, as well as the early church founder and developer, the Apostle Paul, to look at life in this wholistic way, and specifically to reflect on what this means for our ministries in 2026.

Using the first chapter of the last Gospel, the one that flies highest and dares most to expand our religious perspective, let us close with the Gospel of John. Let us trust that everything is of God, nothing is left out in our conversation with Jesus, there is no end to integrating our insight with fresh events and acquaintances, and there's no reason to hold back when better approaches emerge.

That relates to the events of the last couple of days as well as to the rest of eternity.

So, let us close with prayer about that.

Dear God, help us keep out of war, give us the wisdom and charity to resist abuse among our powerful leaders, enlighten our spark of charity every hour and minute, and walk with us now as we share the communion of bread and cup and join again in the vows of our Wesleyan tradition, Amen.