

Sermon for Sunday 6 September 2020 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost/Labor Day Sunday
Scriptures: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18 :15-20
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Monday I called Charles Melchior to tell him I'd just been on a zoom conference with Melvin Gardner. We were both excited, because Melvin had been in the hospital for some days, seriously ill We chatted for a few moments about other church business, and then Charles said, "Where's my bulletin?"

This was Monday, you understand. I was just recovering from Sunday, and I recognize Charles feels under pressure, with the slow mails these days, to get things going ... but I've always felt like I needed to come back from last week and smell the roses and pray about the storm clouds or whatever new was happening either in the next Sunday's assigned Bible texts, or in my own walk, or in the church, or the world ... My body and spirit need ...

Well, anyway, the Lord doesn't wait these days, and neither does Charles ... and so you got this sermon title, "More," before I knew much of anything except that life, and Moses, and Jesus, our own personal path ... everything is saying, "More!" Sort of like, "Ready or not, here we come!" like we used to play as kids.

A little bit of this is related to our own agenda as Baltimore-Washington Conference members of the United Methodist Church, for this is the season when we put together annual reports for ourselves and the Bishop. Methodists. We're methodical. And, this year, we're doing Annual Conference itself on-line, in one swoon ... ONE DAY! We don't even get a chance to argue, or shake hands, or sing, or all those things church means to us old-timers ... we just take a number and sit down @ a screen and look and listen, mostly, although the engineers and experts have worked out some ways we can communicate, and question, and watch, and learn, and shake our heads, and vote, and try some more, in our good old Methodist way.

But it really does seem like the very moment we find a place to stand for a minute, the whole crowd, the universe, the virus, the Lord, and certainly the Bishop, are asking for "More!"

I wonder if that's the secret of life.

Do we only come alive if we respond with more than we've come up with so far?

What about meditation, and rest, and inner peace, and true loving communion with one another?

I give my life to those things. I would be lost if I didn't keep a routine of daily scripture-reading, and prayer, and walking and sitting and waiting beyond my mind's business into the stillness of my body, just breathing, just pushing back from all the thoughts and imaginings that come when I'm still.

But there's more. We are constructed to love more if we DO a little. It's never enough to be still for long. The charm, the source, of breath and everything that goes with it is more breath. Like the burning bush we read about last week, God entices us to come out more, to look and see, to give even as we hold back some to make sure we know what's really going on.

I wonder if that's not what we're seeing in all these so-called "abnormalities" around us. Things really aren't totally off-center, even now.

So much of the world has been going through what we're going through now, all the while we were thinking about being normal. Whether we're now looking at things we've done the wrong way, and grasping at fresh ways of cooperating, forgiving and rebuilding, or just listening so much it seems we rarely take the lead any more ... we've NEVER been in charge. Not the way the Holy Spirit is in charge. Not the way the writer called Matthew described Jesus being in charge, when Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

All we have to say this Labor Day week-end is that we are one with all these people we call essential workers. All we have to recognize in this stand-off between unions and non-union employees is that equality is the point and justice is the mutual concern. We have so far to go ... Come on! Jesus never lets up, if we give him a chance to take over our direction. The table is set. The gifts are here ... "Owe no one anything, but to love one another." "This day shall be a day of remembrance to you." "Praise the Lord!"

The point is being already home, even as we keep asking, "Are we there yet?" "More," even as we just handed over our lives. There is no way but together, even if we are grieving and alone. Being alive is being asked to give more, even as we rest and relinquish control.

As we go into planning and adding up, this season of meetings and accountability, and asking each other for opinions and telling each other what we really think ... including being truthful about what we see in each other that is valuable and needed and suited just right for this task or that ... let us be patient, as I tried to be patient with Charles on Monday right after Sunday's work was done. He honors me, even as he pushes me. We do that with one another. Methodists push one another. They push back, too ...and the mix is potent But this is the real thing. We believe ... we are asked to believe ... we are offered the privilege of believing ... that what we have is valuable, that the world around us needs our response, that our souls and bodies are integrated into the whole mystery of living and dying we call eternity, not a forced and separated matter but union, constancy, trustworthiness ... love.

Through Jesus Christ ...

More!

Amen.