

Sermon for 15 January 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Second Sunday after the Epiphany/Human Relations Day/Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 1/15-1/22)

Scriptures: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalter UMH 774/Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42
"One world"

Isaiah 49:1-7 gives encouragement to the Jews about their captivity by the great power of Babylonia. It adds the conviction that this time of trial enlarges Israel's mission to international status. Like so often in the life of faith, we grow through hard times. We become more sympathetic and constructive to people, pets, and things in general.

Psalm 40 builds on this point: I learn to teach practical skills through my own hard times. My example helps others.

! Corinthians, which we'll be reading regularly for several Sundays, compliments this local church in Corinth for its brave and down-to-earth lifestyle, and urges all its members to keep up the good work. Jesus is among them, and at work not just through their leaders, but through the quiet ones among them.

All these texts build up to the reading from John's Gospel, which describes more than any of the other three Gospels what Jesus was willing to allow about himself. Whether these are his literal words, or a general agreement the church was coming to about him, the conviction that he was unique, and deserved to be trusted and followed, was clearly stated by Peter here and accepted by Jesus himself.

Thus we have plenty of Bible verses and stories for this moment in the church year. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is an ecumenical call to work together based on Peter's confession of faith, that we call to mind on January eighteenth, and our remembrance of the Conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus on January twenty-fifth, urges all of us to work together under God through our loyalty to Jesus. The other Bible readings remind us that the aim of all our life as individuals and in groups is to affirm it's one world under God.

Nobody's in charge but God.

Big powers and little ones all have equal status and obligation to love, and share, and creatively to respond to all the circumstances of our moment.

Let us pray:

We hear you, Lord.

We get the Good News.

We're a long way from living up to it fully --- Heaven help us.

Inspire us.

Heal us.

Forgive and teach us. All of us --- for we pray for everybody in all faiths and for those w/out clear faith on this Sunday.

Continue mercifully to make equality real, for can't do it alone.

Train us to cooperate, not just with humanity, but to do much better towards Nature and the vast elements of the Universe.

It is one world. We know it in our bones.

Help us say so and live so, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.