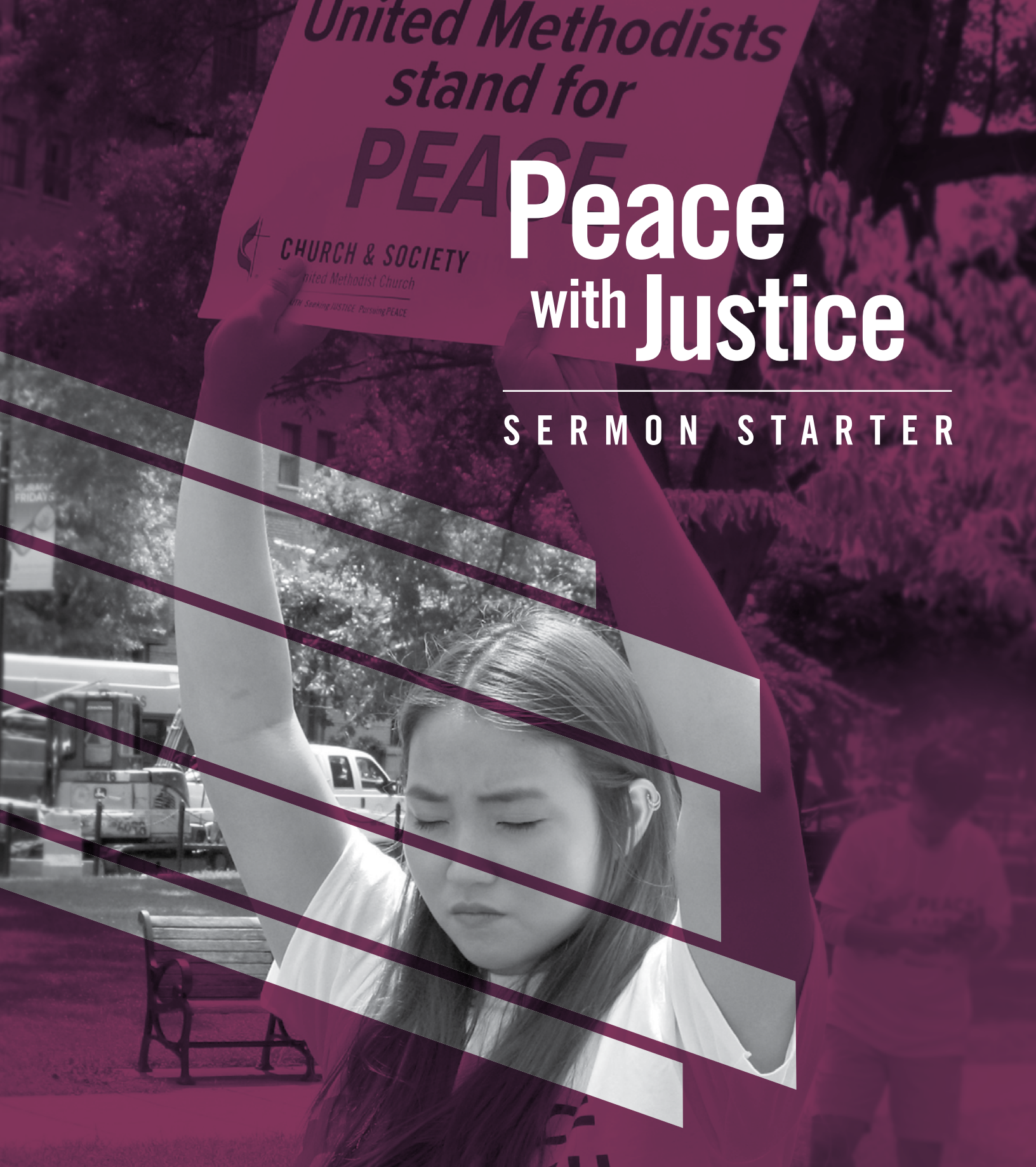


*United Methodists
stand for
PEACE*

 **CHURCH & SOCIETY**
United Methodist Church
With Seeking JUSTICE. Pursuing PEACE.

Peace with Justice

S E R M O N S T A R T E R



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®

Peace with Justice

SERMON STARTER



Though congregations may observe Peace with Justice Sunday at any time, they are encouraged to celebrate with a special offering on the Sunday after Pentecost, May 30, 2021. This sermon starter may be used to connect the lectionary text with Peace with Justice Sunday. Feel free to adapt it to fit the context of your congregation. Consider including the liturgy in a printed bulletin or handout to remind your congregation of this special day in the life of the church. Tie the fullness of this Special Sunday with a coordinated offering talk along with children's resources, and adult discussion questions at ResourceUMC.org/PWJS.

Today's letter from Paul to the Romans reminds us that we are heirs to the Kin-dom, the family, of God. When we live in the Spirit, we become partners with God, working for justice with and for all of our siblings.

Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, DC, has two striking stained-glass images. One is an image of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Motivated by his time in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, he later became an activist in Germany and was executed by the Nazis. Right next to his image in Luther Place is a window

with the image of Harriet Tubman, a formerly enslaved woman who escaped her captors but then went back to help liberate more than 700 enslaved people in the US.

These two very different people from very different backgrounds faithfully answered God's call on their lives to be justice seekers. They faithfully saw in others a family connection and risked their own lives as disciples of Jesus to work for justice for people they didn't even know. They very much exemplify the life that Paul encourages the early church to embody.



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We see in the global United Methodist Church how connected we are as God's children. One of the ways we experience this is through our Special Sunday offerings. Today we celebrate Peace with Justice Sunday and how our gifts together are shared across the United Methodist family.

Living into the words of Paul, the more our behaviors, attitudes and actions model Jesus, the more we begin to live in God's economy. We begin to release anxiety and fear. We begin to see our neighbors as kin.

And while it can be risky, we can also find joy in living in the Spirit, living in ways that are countercultural to what our society has tried to convince us are signs of success. We begin to truly live with abundance.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, wrote in his sermon "New Birth" (and paraphrase for inclusive language):

In this image of God humans were made. "God is love": accordingly, humans at our creation were full of love, which was the sole principle of all our tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so were humans as we came from the hands of this Creator.

When we cry "Abba, God," we acknowledge we are full of the creator's justice, mercy and truth. Praying to our heavenly parent, the one whose very image we reflect, we recognize the one who loved the world enough to become human.

God's love connects and moves across social class, age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, language, criminal record and political party. Everyone who lives in the Spirit as followers of Jesus Christ will have abundant remarkable life—not in some distant future but right now.

Through Jesus we find, as Paul writes, our inheritance. We are children of God and are loved without question.

Our creator liberates us from the fear and the shame that try to consume us because each one of us sitting here today has received a spirit of adoption.

Our divine parent loves each one of us sitting here without condition, wholly and completely.

We all became recipients of God's grace when God came to earth as Jesus. Through our faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we are brought closer in relationship with one another and with God.



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As we exhibit Jesus' love through our relationships, the closer we come to perfect, encompassing, all-loving relationship with God. The trinity: Abba, Son and Holy Spirit as a community of love shows us how we are set in a context of community and relationship that is interconnected.

When we operate in isolation, we might begin to feel a sense of scarcity and lose sight of the abundance found in God's economy. We get trapped in fear. *What will I lose? What if people leave the church because they are uncomfortable? What if I lose friends who disagree with me?*

But dear relatives, when we live as part of the beloved community, working for the common good through ministries of peace with justice, in connection with others, we begin to experience the fullness of the peace with justice of God's Kin-dom, God's family, right here and right now.

We are made in God's image, but we are broken. And in our brokenness, we are not yet reflecting the perfect love that casts out all fear. We

- still mess up our relationships,
- engage in systems that hurt others,
- fail to stand up for those who are being harmed, and
- walk by our neighbor who is hurting.

And still grace, or as Paul says, adoption, is the gift we are all offered every day of our lives. That is the promise found in resurrection.

When we follow Jesus, we reflect that grace into the world. Through grace, as God's children, led by the Spirit we can be restored to God's perfect image.

Today's special offering gives us the opportunity to move toward that perfect image.

For example, last year Peace with Justice grants included:

- An East Congo roundtable to discuss equitable educational justice; especially how to address the illiteracy that makes Pygmies vulnerable to deception and exploitation.
- "Letting Girls be Girls" health education programming and services for young girls in the Rotifunk community of Sierra Leone.
- An Economic Empowerment program for Gypsy women in Canon Nagar, India.
- And half of the funds raised remain in our own annual conference to fund ministries closer to home. *(Specific information is available by contacting your conference office's Peace with Justice coordinator: <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/annual-conference-connections>)*



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Peace with Justice Sunday is just one way that we share our resources with family members across the world.

As a faith community, how can <CHURCH NAME> more fully align our ministries with the family of God as a community of love that embodies the peace with justice we want to see in this broken and hurting world?

God's love is total and complete, purely divine, drawing all of creation back into union with God.

How wonderful is it that even in our imperfections, we are invited to participate in God's wholeness and grace? Our Peace with Justice Sunday offering is one way that we partner with God as siblings through Christ our brother.

I look at those images of Harriet Tubman and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and I see a sister and brother, born generations apart in different countries and into vastly different circumstances. I look at each one of you and I see your family resemblance to both of these courageous and faithful saints and to Jesus our sibling, all of us made in the image of God our parent.



How will you live in the Spirit, moved to dismantle unjust systems and build up the Kin-dom, the family of God?

(It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in every congregation. It is further recommended that "Our Social Creed" be frequently used in Sunday worship.)

Please stand and say with me our United Methodist Social Creed:

OUR SOCIAL CREED

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016



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Peace
with **Justice**

SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

**We believe in God, Creator of the world;
and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
through whom we acknowledge God's gifts,
and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts
to idolatrous ends.**



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Peace with Justice

SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

**We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork
and dedicate ourselves to its preservation,
enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.**



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Peace with Justice

SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

**We joyfully receive for ourselves and others
the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage,
and the family.**



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Peace
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SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.



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SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.



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OUR SOCIAL CREED

**We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world,
to the rule of justice and law among nations,
and to individual freedom for all people of the world.**



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SUNDAY

OUR SOCIAL CREED

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.



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