



LEAD COURAGEOUSLY -YOU ARE NOT ALONE-

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... pumpkin' spice was released this week. (Yes, IN AUGUST!) Let the annual debate begin. Are you thrilled, having already ordered your pumpkin spice donuts, candles, and dog treats? Are you anti-PSL, avoiding everything pumpkin-y? Or, do you not care, to each their own latte?

OPENING PRAYER

God of Encouragement, help us to see the places to which you have called us to lead, then give us the boldness to take the leap.

INTRODUCTION

After the last bite of apple, you realize the day is winding down, and it's time to head home. Your brain is swimming with the gravity of what you've come up with today, but your heart is full. You simply started out to get a grasp on what it means to

be a disciple of Jesus Christ, but these three characteristics have become something so much more. This vision statement is a “to do” list for new followers of Jesus, and a litmus test for existing Christians... *love boldly, serve joyfully, lead courageously*. It’s a tall task and no one could do it perfectly. But it’s a great start, and something to aspire to. As you walk home, the vision becomes clear. If more people lived out these three characteristics of a disciple, the world would change in dramatic and lasting ways for the better. We’d build bridges instead of walls. We’d lift up instead of tear down. We’d come together instead of divide. “Huh, isn’t that exactly what Jesus described as ‘*the Kingdom of God*’? Guess that’s what he had in mind all along,” you think. It is then you commit to living out this vision, Christ’s vision, and teaching others to do the same.

Setup Question: If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be? Would you end world hunger or give everyone access to clean drinking water? Maybe you’d end our system of currency and capitalism so that everyone was on an equal playing field, a la Star Trek? Maybe you’d just give the Cards a decent bullpen. Discuss!

SETUP

Let’s review for the final time the vision statement given to us by the United Methodist Council of Bishops...

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus
Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit,
LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY**

AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY

in local communities and worldwide connections.

Here's your Week 10 recap... deep breath: we begin with *loving boldly*. The radical, revolutionary love to which Jesus calls us includes, sacrificing of ourselves, building relationships with and seeing the God-given worth in others. This bold love then calls us to *serve joyfully*. When we use our spiritual gifts to tend to the needs of others, a contagious joy wells up within us and overflows to those we serve. And finally, all this is good... but if we don't lead others to do the same thing, the movement dies with us. Thus, we are called to *lead courageously*. Jesus has commanded us to produce "lasting fruit," which means we must invest time in others who look to us for spiritual guidance. Take another deep breath. Yup, it's a lot. But there's one final piece that gives us the courage to do all this. We'll get to that in a minute.

Question 1: Okay, we've covered (mostly) all three characteristics, so let's take stock. Which of these do you think you have a good grasp on? Which do you not do well? Which scares you the most, or you need more time with? Discuss!

SCRIPTURE

Overwhelmed? Yeah, Jesus's followers were, too. All the commands we've covered came from the night before he'd be arrested and crucified. We've taken ten weeks to work through it, so you can imagine having all of this thrown at you in one

might. Which is why, at the end of the night, he spends what amounts to a whole chapter praying for them. Last week, we looked at a Scripture (John 15:1-5) where Jesus told his followers that in order to produce good fruit, they needed to stay connect to the vine. For us and for them, that means saying, “yes,” when Jesus gives you a job to do. Today, we’ll look at the prayer Jesus prays to end the night, and the words of encouragement that come with it.

Read John, chapter 17, verses 20 through 21.

How cool is that? Jesus prayed for you...says it right there in verse 20. But there’s another implication here, one that will set the stage to take our three-point vision statement and give you the courage to share it with the world.

Question 2: Jesus is praying for you... that you’d be a united group, that you’d remain in him, and God would be with you. How do you feel hearing this? What do you think he meant? What does it mean for us now?

REFLECTION

As we wrap up our conversation about this final characteristic, leading courageously, let’s take a look at the description the Bishops gave us to go with it. They said we should...

Follow Jesus’ example by resisting and dismantling all systems of evil, injustice and oppression, striving for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

As Pastor Kyle elaborated on these on Sunday, these words reflect the vows we take when baptized in the United Methodist Church. Now as then, this is a high calling. There seem to be systems of evil and injustice wherever we turn. Our society is still full of oppression in so many ways. Dismantling them seems impossible. That's why this vision is so important. We impact these systems when we share these characteristics with others one by one. We can change the world.

Even that, though, seems daunting... which is where this scripture and Jesus's prayer come in. Now, this part of Jesus's prayer, verses 20-21, can be a little confusing. We are to be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one. But we're also to be united with them, and they with us. (Draw a Venn diagram if you need to.) So, let's simplify... Jesus was trying to get a very specific point across. Remember, Jesus is praying in front of his followers, out loud. They're listening. So, whereas I'm sure Jesus meant these words genuinely, and they are an honest request to God the Father, this prayer is as much for them to hear as it is for the One Jesus is talking to. You can just imagine him praying to the Father, "I pray that they will get along," then glancing out the corner of his eye to see if they're listening. But the point here, and the summation of this prayer, what he wants his disciples to hear is this... "you will not do this alone." He's given them a lot to live up to, just as we have seen and felt the last 10 weeks. So, it's a comfort to hear these words said to us, as well. They give us courage as we seek to live out the difficult commands to *love boldly* and *serve courageously*, and to lead

others to do the same. You do not do this alone. God goes with you every step of the way.

Question 3: The last two weeks, we asked, “who are you called to lead and how will you go about doing it?”

Consider your answers to those questions. Does Jesus’s prayer give you the courage to fulfill that calling, or is it still a daunting task? What one small step can you take this week to lead as you have been called?

CLOSING

Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously. As we close this series, take this vision statement seriously. Make it a priority in your life. Write these down somewhere you will see them often, and regularly ask yourself, “am I loving as boldly as Jesus did? How am I serving, and am I joyful when I’m doing it? And how am I stepping out courageously to lead others to do the same?” Use these characteristics as a litmus test. Then get to work. When you commit to living out this vision statement, God will transform you, and if you let Him work through you, you can help God transform the world.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.