

## Thursday Church Epistle

March 18, 2021

Hello Church!

This week I am planning a sermon based on our Old Testament reading, Jeremiah 31:31-34, the same passage I wrote from on Monday. But it will not be the same sermon. On Monday I looked back. On Sunday I will look forward.

As readers of our DCE, I invite you to prepare your hearts by looking forward with me. In our church we often say we want to grow, that we want to include new people. A couple of ways I have expressed our identity and had quoted back to me are these: “A church for all generations” and “the best local Methodist church we can be.” We are aware of our connections with our circuit, district, conference, and global church.

But we are also aware of our call to be the best Methodist church we can be here in Hudson. I did not say “United Methodist” because of the pending August 2022 General Conference or even the May 2021 Special General Conference. I did not use “United” because at our core we still carry the DNA of our 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) founders who reached out to new people while caring for those already in the church. My read of us, and I am also a cradle Methodist in the MEC tradition, is that whatever outcomes happen at the General Conferences we will still want to be “the best local Methodist church we can be” as a congregation that includes “all generations.”

Does what I just wrote ring true with you? If so, you have a place in the plan God has for us post-pandemic.

This brings me to the gospel reading for this week, John 12: 20-33. It is a long passage, but in writing the DCE there is a message specifically for us who read our church blog. Those verses with my history comments in parenthesis are these:

“Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks (probably Jews on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover from Greek communities in places such as Corinth or Ephesus). They came to Philip (a Greek name, not a Hebrew name) who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew (another Greek name); then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.” John 12:20-22, New Revised Standard Version

As I considered this passage for our sermon text, the commentaries I own and read were useless beyond those inserted historical notes. Why was that? They were all written before 2008, before the Great Recession and before the global COVID-19 pandemic. One even assumed that a working pastor remembered nothing from seminary. As I read his writing, I could only conclude the author only knew his pew as his place in his local church. I am so thankful my Bible professors all taught me to read the Bible in both its historical setting and my current parish. Which is what we, my dear DCE readers, are going to do right now.

The Greeks, who I assume to be Jewish merchants because I watch Rick Steves' European travel programs as well as read my Bible, were probably in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover at the Temple. They were probably ordinary people accustomed to being away from the Temple because of the demands of family and business. I could be wrong, but then again during my caring seminary years John financially supported me and our kids by working in a Silicon Valley corporation. We experienced how hard it was for John to do much more than get to an hour of worship on Sunday morning in those years. If the coming rebound from this pandemic rhymes at all with the rebound from both the Great Recession and the 1918 Influenza pandemic, these economic demands will be back affecting our church neighbors here in Hudson. Yesterday's business news was very bullish, the indicators are that all business is on the rise.

Friends, these Greeks are in our families and in our neighborhoods. They are our spouses, our adult children, and the people who will be serving you Sunday brunch as soon as we have enough vaccines in enough arms. What we have to offer our "Greeks" is our podcast and other internet ministries, a way to be church that accommodates the demands of the world on them.

You notice that the Greeks in John's gospel did not go directly to Jesus. They went to the two disciples who had Greek names, disciples we should imagine spoke Greek as a first language. That puts us in the role of Philip and Andrew. How will you answer our "Greeks" when they see the spiritual growth now happening in your life? How will you answer when they say "(your name here), we wish to see Jesus?" (John 12:21) Will you say, "We have worship services at 8:30 and 10:30 in our sanctuary every Sunday" even when you know they cannot attend as they serve you your Sunday brunch or travel to earn the income that supports their household?

Therefore, I believe we need to continue our on-line ministry, expand it even. Then we can say, "I find our weekly worship at Hudson United Methodist Church helpful for me in knowing Christ better. If you want, you can check us out anytime on our internet services." We all know folks who want to go to church but cannot. It isn't just youth sports either. It is caring for a homebound loved one. It is business travel to support a family. It is working to earn a minimum wage.

Friends, as we prepare for our worship this Sunday both by podcast and in our sanctuary, please pray for yourself and how you can be ready to stand in Philip's place in the world.

See you Sunday, one way or the other!

Rev. Dawn