

Messaging a New Way of Leadership - UMW Assembly - Script (Slides 1-12)

(Slide 13) Back in the mid 2000s, Bill Keane, a much loved cartoonist, created a column that was meant to capture the Globalized nature of our world.

I'm sure it was a strip that caused many to chuckle, with Billy proclaiming at the end of the strip ... "You're looking at a meeting of the United Nations!"

And, I suspect that the cartoon, meant to bring a bit of joy in people's lives, probably assumed by the vast majority of people to be quite neutral in its intent and certainly could not be construed as having anything to say about the relationships of power, greed, exploitation, or death ...

And most assuredly, this beloved comic strip which often showed the family at worship, the children saying prayers at bed time, or the actions of familial love and support, would be seen by most as offering up a message that was fully congruent with the life, love, and justice of Jesus Christ

Except that of course, in naming the economic connections on Billy's shirt, and naming them as neutral, Mr. Keane, unintentionally I hope, made a statement that was largely inconsistent with standard of economic and social justice that is woven throughout the whole of scripture.

(Slide 14) For as historian Howard Zinn, once wrote,

"In a world where justice is mal-distributed there is no such thing as a neutral or representative recapitulation of the facts." I agree. Jesus and the prophets of old whom he often quoted, certainly did not see the world from such a point of neutrality, and clearly named their reality. As followers of Jesus, we should do no less.

For a vast portion of the earth, the realities that we face are grim.

Workers around the world are being exploited ...

the sweat of the poorest among us is driving increased stock prices for the wealthy few.

Our waters are being polluted and our air is being poisoned.

Our earth is being warmed at an ever-increasing rate where we are only now beginning to feel the results of what may well be irreparable destruction to vast ecosystems and possibly to the whole of the earth.

More and more public space is becoming privatized where basic resource that once belonged to the community is being commoditized and then used in ways which offer little or no benefit to the community ... such basic things as water and land.

And at the heart of it all is a spiritual deadness that seeks to fill the void with ever more consumption and a pursuit to find spiritual meaning in physical things.

This is a reality wholly inconsistent from that place we pray about each week, "On earth as it is in heaven."

(Slide 15) Fortunately, as United Methodists, in our better moments, we remember this and proclaim in our Social Principles that: we are called to support the poor and challenge the rich and to seek to create systems that bring about that life that Jesus talked about when he said, "I have come that they may have life and have it how? Abundantly!"

(Slide 16) We also note that the debilitating impact of our global reality falls most heavily and harshly on the most vulnerable among us ... our children.

As we note in our current book of Resolutions.

This is who we claim to be as a people, from the time of John Wesley until this.
When we have followed Jesus most closely, we have realized that
in order to fully love God, we are forever called to love our neighbor.

However, sadly, we are living in a world far from this reality,
And if we are honest, we must admit that many of us good United
Methodists are being formed much more readily the worldly cultures that
surround us than we are by the formation of our faith.

I think Pope Francis well captured this truth in a recent proclamation when he in
part said,

Divisions, which are sometimes quite deep, continue to exist within our
human family.

On the global level we see a scandalous gap between the opulence of
the wealthy and the utter destitution of the poor.

Often we need only walk the streets of a city to see the contrast
between people living on the street and the brilliant lights of the
store windows.

We have become so accustomed to these things that they no
longer unsettle us.

Our world suffers from many forms of exclusion,
marginalization and poverty, to say nothing of conflicts
born of a combination of economic, political, ideological,
and, sadly, even religious motives.

(Slide 17) So, let's take a check on this in this room? Please turn to your neighbor
and discuss the following questions:

**Where in your environment do you see disparities between over-
abundance and the marginalized? Which group are you?
Are there possibilities for connecting these worlds in your context?**

(Slide 18) As a United Methodist people who state in our church polity that we are to support the poor and challenge the rich,
As a United Methodist people who make resolutions regarding our claim and concern for the vulnerability of children,
and as Believers in the Way of Christ who claim to follow a Lord who said he is found in "the least of these,"

we desperately need to empower and animate leadership who are committed to create, as Pope Francis eloquently noted, "a culture of encounter."

Encountering one another across our many divisions,
encountering the Christ who dwells within the margins,
encountering the systems of violence and oppression,
and encountering our own reluctance to the gospel's invitation to the cross,
and encountering and enacting economic practices that reflect the will of God.

In order to create such a culture of encounter, I think we will need to tend to three primary points of movement. The first goes like this:

I have a friend, Hugh Hollowell, who directs a ministry for impoverished and marginalized peoples in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Hugh is a Mennonite street pastor who is often known for saying it the way he sees it.

It's a bad habit and gets him disinvited from a lot of the more respectable religious gigs. I guess prophets are like that.

One thing Hugh is oft to say to good cleaned-up church folks is this:

Homelessness is not usually caused by someone's moral failings,

It is more usually the result of our churches' relationship failings.

We don't connect our congregational life inside the church with the people outside the church.

If we are to be the disciples of the Jesus,

then we must get out of our walls and connect with the streets.

(Slide 19) Theologian Ched Myers puts it like this:

Faith communities engage when they create connections between our spiritual reflections, the practical life of the local parish, and public issues.

It doesn't take a long read in the gospels to figure out that most of the ministry of Jesus is found out there, out in the world.

You see, Jesus was all about theology on the road.

Yet, for most of us, most of our time is spent, not on the road, but in the sanctuary. I think it is a bit humorous to note that when Jesus goes into the synagogue, it is generally to cause a riot. Just saying.

Thus, if we are to create a culture of encounter, we must connect the seminary, the sanctuary, and the streets.

(Slide 20) Secondly, we must re-encounter our life as a people with a primary story that begins with an Exodus from bondage and then immediately is forced into the desert and to a place of total reliance on God where Sabbath is the operative way of being.

Take a moment with your neighbor and share a bit about what Sabbath means to you?

Sabbath concerns the communal discipline of setting limits, so that we can rightly recognize the Creation as a Gift, instead of as a possession or a commodity.

(Slide 21) This is best articulated in the manna story, a parable about God's provision of what we need to live. The "instructions" of this archetypal tale, are economic; the newly liberated Hebrew slaves are tutored in the old ways of sharing:

(Slide 22) Everyone must gather "enough" and no one must accumulate "too much." So Sabbath is not an individual spiritual discipline only; it represents a communal practice of constraint within the context of economic sufficiency for all.

(Slide 23) These "instructions" attempt to constrain our Fallen human impulse to work compulsively, to consume addictively, and to use and exploit resources and labor mercilessly.

Sabbath represents a cautionary discipline that seeks to constrain this addiction/compulsion (which the Bible calls Sin).

So the entire tradition of Sabbath-keeping is introduced in scripture even before the laws given to Moses.

Sabbath distribution and limitation are God's instructions, and are specifically social and economic in nature.

This economic notion of Sabbath is codified in the Jubilee Laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy and then later proclaimed by Jesus when in his inaugural sermon, he proclaims, "I have come to Bring Good News to the poor and to proclaim the year of Jubilee!"

Now, make no mistake, this encounter with the life-giving economic practices of Sabbath is going to be most difficult ...

(Slide 24) For cross the planet, we are more and more becoming a people who are literally consumed by our consumption.

As Matthew Colwell wrote in the excellent little book Sabbath Economics, The message hammered home in the estimated 3000 advertisements the average American sees every day is the assertion that we can fill our social and spiritual emptiness by the purchase and ownership of material goods. The emptiness such consumption leaves behind can lead to yet more consumption in the futile effort to fill the emptiness.

It becomes a cycle of addiction.

And though other places may not feel the brunt of 3000 daily advertisements, even in the most undeveloped nations, advertising is fully prevalent.

The pressure to consume more and more is the ever present pressure among us. The power and principalities of the age create narratives using powerful psychological tools and fueled by billions of dollars. The messages are incredibly persuasive and utterly relentless.

I have some of these powerful stories to share with you.

And indeed, they are stories that mold us and form us in predictable ways. For as all good educators know, the best education, is the education you get when you don't even realize it is happening.

(Show slides 25-30)

(Slide 31) It may seem most almost impossible to push back the power of the God of Opulence ... but it can be done and it is essential for life.

(Slide 32) Speak to an older wiser story that has the power to supplant other dominant narratives.

That has the power to transform our reality.

Must read the story anew and allow it to speak from its context into our context.

(Slide 33-39)

(Slide 40) Discover the reality in its place.

Dream of the ways that reality overlays our reality.

Design new ways of being.

Live into a resurrection destiny - the new life of Jesus which is the prophetic life of justice, love, and forgiveness.

(Remainder of Slides with Animation 41-50)

What do you See - A Dinner Party - Luke 7:16 - 50

Luke 7:36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.

Luke 7:37 And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment.

Luke 7:38 She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Luke 7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him--that she is a sinner."

Luke 7:40 Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak."

Luke 7:41 "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

Luke 7:42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?"

Luke 7:43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Luke 7:44 Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

Luke 7:45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet.

Luke 7:46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Luke 7:47 Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."

Luke 7:48 Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Luke 7:49 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Luke 7:50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

"Meals in Mediterranean Antiquity"
(from: Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, "Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospel" (Fortress, 1992))

Meals, 14:7-11

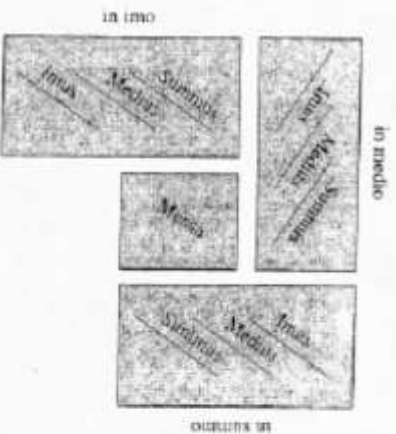
Meals in antiquity were what anthropologists call "ceremonies." Unlike "rituals," which confirm and effect a change of status, ceremonies are regular, predictable events in which roles and statuses in a community are affirmed or legitimated. In other words, the microcosm of the meal is parallel to the macrocosm of everyday social relations.

Though meals could include people of varying social ranks, normally that did not occur except under special circumstances (e.g., in some Roman *collegia* or clubs). Because eating together implied sharing a common set of ideas and values, and frequently a common social position as well (see 13:26), it is important to ask: Who eats with whom? Who sits where? What does one eat? Where does one eat? How is the food prepared? What utensils are used? When does one eat? What talk is appropriate? Who does what? When does one eat what course? Answering such questions tells us much about the social relations a meal affirms.

There is much evidence from Hellenistic sources of the importance of such matters. Old Testament food regulations are also well known, as are the provisions for the ritual purity required when eating. In the Hellenistic period it was common for persons to form associations whose members met for table fellowship on the occasion of "religious" feastsdays, for funerals, and at other times. In Israelite Yahwism, it seems that the Pharisee group was such a permanent association of table fellowship formed to keep group members away from any and all outgroups. In order to avoid pollution, they would not accept an invitation from the *'am ha-'aretz*, literally, "the people of the land" (that is "the natives," "the Canaanites"). This outgroup of fellow Israelites could not be trusted to provide tithed and consistently pure food. If they invited such a person to their own home, they required the guest to put on a ritually clean garment which the host provided (*m. Demai* 2:2-3). In a similar fashion, Roman sources describe meals at which guests of different social rank are seated in different rooms and are even served different food and wine depending on their social status (Martial, *Epigrams* 1.20; 3.60; Loeb, 43, 201; Juvenal, *Satires* 5; Loeb, 69-83; Pliny, *Letters*, 2.6; Loeb, 109-13; these passages have been cited in the reading scenario on Meals in Matt 22:1-14 and the one on Meals in Mark 2:15-17).

The Gospel of Luke is likewise full of small hints about the importance of behavior at meals. Thus it is noted whether one washes (11:38), who eats what, when and where (6:4), what is done or fails to get done at the table (7:38, 40, 44, 49), who is invited (14:12-14), where people sit (14:7-11), with whom one eats (15:2), and in what order persons of different rank come to the table (17:7-8).

Exclusive fellowship required an exclusive table, while inclusive fellowship required an inclusive one. The statement in 13:29 about people coming from east and west and from south and north to sit at the table in the kingdom is thus a statement of inclusive social relations in Christian movement groups. The refusal of those first invited to the great banquet (14:18-21) is similarly a statement of social exclusivism among the elite, while the invitations to the "poor, crippled, blind, and lame" (14:13, 21) are evidence of inclusive Christian social practices that are reflected in their meals.



LUKE 14:7 The usual way of dining was to recline on couches or mats (see illustration at 7:36). This diagram shows one arrangement for nine guests at such a dinner. The *mesa* is the table. The *diners* lie on the left side, supporting themselves on the left elbow. Of the three couches or mats (see diagram), that on the middle (in medio) was regarded as the most honorable of the three places on it, that on the left (the *summa*) was assigned to the guest of highest rank, and no one was reclining behind him on the couch. The couch to his left (in *summo*) was the next in dignity; that on the right (in *imo*), being held in lowest esteem, was occupied by the host and his family. These arrangements explain the necessity of refusing from occupying the highest place, which had perhaps been reserved for a "more distinguished" guest (14:8). (Parrot Graphics)

1. Who were the Pharisees and what did they do?

How do you think the Jewish leaders think of themselves?

- Keepers of the faith
- Obedient to God
- Love of the law
- Cherishers of the nation

Deeply concerned with following the demands of their religion

The Pharisees who had been the keeper of the law of the nation

- It was they who had passed the law down from generation to generation

- It was they who held to the faith during times of foreign occupation of the land and the Jewish expulsion from the land

- It was they who gave their very lives to the history, faith, and law of the Jewish peoples

- It is the Pharisees that gave the world today's normative Judaism

This next view is that of a picture of the Pharisees. Rebuild a bit of political life. They were zealous about getting people to take things more seriously. They were engaged religious, social, and political renewal movement in 1st century. It doesn't do us any good to caricature them. But the issue is that the gospels do. Today, we might caricature the political figures, religious, etc. We don't get confused on the difference of the real thing and the fake thing. When you don't know the full spectrum of reality and settle on the caricature as the real thing, then you settle on the straw man view. This has happened with the view of the Pharisees. Great problems when text is taken out of context. So, it is often better for us to substitute analogies for the Pharisees. We know that it is a complex reality. There is a lot to caricature in real social change.

Jesus struggling with the Pharisees is often about issues that are important with both parties. Gospels show that the Pharisees are always immensely critical of Jesus. The one movement of the Pharisees coming out of the destruction of the temple, is the surviving movement. The rabbinic writers say was largely thanks to the great work of the Pharisees to reinvent, re-imagine Judaism as a Torah based faith.

2. What is the scene in 7:36? What is the function of the formal meal in that time? In this time? Where would Jesus take his place? Who would you think would be at this dinner party?

(SET THE SCENE)

Everything is looking good.

- Everyone is at their places ...

- Things appear to be going well.

Formal dinner ... bring honor to those who attend.

Bring honor to the one who throws the party.

His honor is intimately tied to the guest list and to the importance and function of the dinner.

3. In 7:37, who else shows up at the party? What has she brought as a gift? What does she begin to do? Might there be some problem with social codes here? What? What about in our time and place?

So what is wrong with this picture???? It has gone to hell in a second.

How is the woman named? What does the use of such names do? Any such use in our time?

And a woman ... who is from the city ... who was a sinner. Does that sound like a medical description. It was a social label. The politics of how we language people. Bum. Nerd. Geek.

Radical. So ... pay attention to the power of social labeling. She is doubly socially labeled. She is using one of the tools of that trade, she is using expensive massage oil - that used in the sex-trade industry. He is getting an education now. Anointment is also used in death and also the anointing royalty.

How did the woman get here? Having learned that he was at the table at the Pharisee's house. We are being given the sociology of how Jesus moved. How did this thing go down. Through the kitchen help??? All we know is that she knew Jesus and knew his social schedule. Maybe the Pharisee visited him last weekend.

4. What is the response of the guests? The Pharisee? Have you seen this lived out in our time? Where?

Does she recognize me??? It is bad enough when she arrives with the company but when they recognize her, whoooooaaeee. I hope she doesn't recognize me.

She obviously felt it was okay for her to show up. You would not do that in polite society. All his funky friends come on. How do you know a catholic worker at a party ...they are the ones with all the tooth picks in their hands. Maybe she knew folk in the household. Have some midrashic fun. FEEL in the DETAILS.

Gets worse. She set herself behind him and bathed his feet and kissed his feet. What are the problems here. The best way to see this story is to see this story. Have someone come up and act this out. Now when you act this out in church and with a church group, everybody laughs nervously. Work through this, and persist at it for everyone to see it. She continued kissing his feet.

Very intimate. She continued to do this. Erotic, sensual. The only way to see this text is to see this text. If it is a story about bodies, get a body to preach it.

It is very powerful gesture. She is wiping his feet with her hair. Would have violated all kinds of codes with this. This is a very risky thing. You do not do this in public and especially with men. The only folks here in this room are men. This thing goes to hell.

IMPURE!!!!

What is the most political meal you know ... Thanksgiving Dinner! Everybody is there. Betty is there, Grandmom, Aunt Susie. So all of a sudden, Betty says, heh everybody, I am a Lesbian! Oooop! Everybody looks the other way.

The woman's act expresses love and gratitude, but it also violated social conventions. Touching or caressing a man's feet could have sexual overtones, as did letting down her hair, so a woman never let down her hair in public. Moreover, the woman was known to be a sinner. Assuming she was unclean, she would have made Jesus unclean by touching him. The sinner has, therefore, created a scene at the Pharisee's dinner, and he is scandalized. But how will he respond? And how will Jesus respond? In the Pharisee's eyes, the woman's act represents a challenge both to his honor and to Jesus'.

5. Jesus begins to tell a story. What is the story about? To whom is the story being delivered? How is the woman connected to the story that Jesus tells? What about in our time and in your place?

"Simon, I have something to say to this." Simon says, "Please tell me that my life isn't over!!!???"

First, he infers that if Jesus knew what sort of woman was touching him, he would not allow it. Second, he infers that since Jesus has done nothing to stop the woman, he is not a prophet. The Pharisee's assumption, therefore, is expressed as a condition contrary to fact: "If this man were a prophet [which he is not], he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him [which he did not because he did not stop her]."

He frames her and Jesus tightly in his perspective and value system of the world.

Both are unworthy ... both are unclean ... both have brought shame to his household
He is most probably mad enough to spit ... or kill them

Story about banking offered to bankers.

One owed \$2500 and the other \$25000.

Folks about to go into a rant about such debt and what happens?

But what did this particular banker do ... he forgave all the debt.

Immediately convicting ... what do you mean by that???!!!

6. Turning to the woman Jesus says, "Do you see this woman?" Why did Jesus ask this question? What is the significance of the question to us in our place and culture?

Power ... the minimization of the woman
Never seeing her, and not even seeing her now.

7. What does the gesture of Jesus say to Simon, to the Pharisees gathered, to the woman? The actions to which Jesus speaks are washing the feet, kissing, and anointing of the head ... what is the larger issue here?

She welcomes Jesus, because Jesus sees her. She welcomes Jesus because he makes space for her when others don't. She welcomes Jesus because he has honored her presence.

Jesus is intentional with Simon and the others, their enactment and disrespect or her. Jesus critiques their actions by repeating their action.

8. Why were her many sins forgiven and to whom do those sins belong? Who is it that is forgiven little? Why?

She acknowledges who she is ... and knows that her tears should be revered, her life should be honored, and that she matters.

Simon doesn't see the need for forgiveness, does not see how her brokenness is tied to the power structure that he enjoys, and never understands that his contempt for her is HIS SIN ... and part of her sin ... too.

9. How are the debts of the woman and the sins of Simon connected? If Jesus "forgives sins," and John is the greatest prophet, and the smallest in the Kingdom is greater than John, what does that say about our role in such forgiveness?

10. What is the final disposition of the story?