

# Re-Write Your Story

## Traditional Worship • October 28

### Our Pastors:

- Lead Pastor Andy Payton [leadpastor@methodisttemple.church](mailto:leadpastor@methodisttemple.church)
- Associate Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg [associatepastor@methodisttemple.church](mailto:associatepastor@methodisttemple.church)

### Sunday Morning Volunteers:

- Ushers (28): Eric Eades, captain; Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, John Oberhelman, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Ushers (4): Kathy Zelle, captain; Chuck Taylor, Warren Heinsohn, Jack Buttrum, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Greeters (28): Pat & Ken Haynie, Tom Harvey, Janet Kissel
- Greeters (4): Sue Anderson, Patricia Helm, Nancy Hughes

\*An usher remains in the Narthex during worship. Please reach out to them with any questions or special needs you may have. They are happy to assist!

### Additional Information:

- Prayer Concerns: John Keller, the family of Jim Kendall in his passing.
- Today's Sanctuary flowers given by Mike & Teena McGregor to the glory of God in memory of Leo McGregor.

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

### PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

### WELCOME

### PRELUDE

"Blessed Assurance" by R. Hobby

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Peace upon each who comes in need.

**People: Peace upon each who comes in abundance.**

Leader: Peace upon each who comes with desperate prayers.

**People: Peace upon each who comes with joyous songs.**

Leader: Peace in the name of the Maker, the Son,

**People: in the name of the Spirit; the Triune God.**

### CHORAL INTROIT

"Come to Me" by C. O. Beck

### \*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

### \*FIRST HYMN UMH #596

"Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word"

### \*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Please turn to those around you and pass the peace of Christ.

### CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Let us listen for God in the silence.

### PASTORAL PRAYER

All: God-with-us, come close. Help us come close to You - to step back, to breathe, to be. May we treasure each moment in Your presence. O God, hear us now as we pray, each in our own hearts and our own ways...

### GIVING OFFERING

"Spirit of Gentleness" by R. Rowland-Raybold

### \*DOXOLOGY *the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.*

#94 in Hymnal

### ANTHEM

"Before the Throne of God Above" by Vikki Cook, arr. by Dan Forrest

### KIDZ MOMENT

Noisy Offering

### SCRIPTURE READING

Joshua 7:1-2, 5-7, 10-14

### SCRIPTURE RESPONSE TFWS #2176

"Make Me a Servant "

### MESSAGE *by Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg*

Individualism/ Community

Can we have some clapping for Don for pronouncing all the really difficult Hebrew words? That was on point. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm guessing- shot in the dark- that most of you have not heard that particular scripture read in worship before. It's one of those biblical stories that we pastors like to pretend don't exist because it's weird and uncomfortable and we may even be a bit afraid of the questions it will make you ask about God in the Bible in the Christian faith. At Methodist Temple we are not afraid of questions because questions can bring us to even deeper, more beautiful truth. In fact I submit to you that the bizarre story of Aikin stealing from the Treasury points us to a solution to one of the greatest struggles of our age.

Before we get into all of that will you pray with me. Gracious God as I strive to deliver your message this morning, may you increase and we decrease. For it as written that only in losing our lives- giving them up freely- only then will we find them.

In our current sermon series, Rewrite Your Story, we've explored the power of the stories we tell ourselves. One of those stories is individualism- the idea that each human being is self-sufficient and if they aren't, they should try to be. Since the Enlightenment, our culture has taken as a given that the basic unit of humankind is the individual. According to individualists thought, when I was born I was in an independent blank slate, not inherently connected to anyone or anything. That kind of thinking has given us some tremendous gifts- freedom of speech, democracy, the value of pursuing your passions and dreams; but when we swallow individualism whole, we stray from God's intentions for creation because we forget who we are.

What does any of that have to do with Akin and the death of 36 Israelites? We find this story in The Book of Joshua which tells the larger story of how the Israelites settled in the land that was promised to them by God. The Israelites had been wandering the desert for 40 years after God freed them from slavery, and now it's time for the Israelites to make a home. There's just one problem. There are already people living there, and they're not excited about these foreigners moving in; so Joshua sends a group of Israelite men to scout out Ai. Until this point, every time the Israelites encountered other tribes God, had protected them from harm- even in the face of terrible odds. But for some reason, this time God allowed 36 of the Israelites to be chased down and killed. Understandably the Israelites are devastated. They wonder if God has abandoned them forever.

Joshua, for his part as their leader, comes before God screaming and mourning which is when God reveals to him that Israel has sinned. They have transgressed my covenant. You see God told the Israelites that they weren't allowed to take any plunder or riches for themselves when they fought the tribes in the Promised Land. They weren't going to profit from war. The book of Deuteronomy chapter 13 says all plunder would be devoted to the fire, but apparently Akin set a little gold aside for himself instead of burning it. God was furious. His anger burned against the Israelites which is when I start asking, how is any of this fair?

Why is God mad at all the Israelites when only one dude did anything wrong? Why does God let 36 people die because Akin stole some treasure? In fact later in the story we learn that Akin wasn't even one of those 36 guys. He only got punished once Joshua found out what he did. How can we call God just if he lets other people suffer for the consequences of one mans choices? That's when I have to remember that I am making some pretty big assumptions that the Book of Joshua doesn't. My questions are premised on beliefs that I just accept as true. I'm listening to the voice of individualism that I've been taught rather than the voice of God speaking through Scripture.

Akin's story is only horribly unfair if we believe that each person is solely responsible for his or her actions. But the stories in scripture show us again and again that God doesn't see things that way. The basic unit of human kind isn't one individual. It's one community. Each person is a fraction of that one whole. Think about it. Why did Akin steal from the devoted to things? Had his community not properly taught him? Was he so poor that he felt he had to steal to survive because no one was going to show him any generosity? Akin did not magically appear one day to steal some plunder. He was a part of and product of a community, so God saw the entire community as equally responsible for what we would consider Akin's crime alone.

Now this way of thinking may sound ridiculous to our western ears, but for most of the world's people, it's obvious that none of us lives in a vacuum. Who we are and what we do is tied to a great web of community. The Bantu people of South Africa call this connection Ubuntu. Roughly translated it means 'I am because we are'. There's a reason that the biblical text calls him Akin, son of Carmi, son of Zarah from the tribe of Judah. Human beings cannot exist without other human beings. In the Bible's second version of the creation story, humankind was created when God took one creature and split it into because it is not right for humans to be alone. We were made for deep, authentic, loving community which brings us to a crisis today.

In May of this year, Signa published a study that showed half of American adults feel lonely and isolated. The groups most at risk were people over 60 and people who have to work more than 40 hours a week. Adults aged 18 to 22 were most likely to believe that their generation is the loneliest in human history. A similar study by the University of California Santa Barbara revealed that protracted loneliness is more dangerous to our health and life expectancy than smoking 15 cigarettes per day. But the statistic that most breaks my heart is that 54 percent of American adults- more than half- feel that no one really knows them. Not their parents or siblings or spouses. Not their co-workers or friends. Some of those folks are in this room, and a lot of them are in our neighborhoods schools and workplaces. Church that should be a wakeup call for us. The connect part of our mission and vision statement Connect Share Explore is not trendy marketing, it is a desperate need for millions of people who long to be known.

Of course Akin's story also shows us that this community and connection thing has teeth. It means that I am accountable for what my community does or fails to do just by virtue of being a part of it. For example, I didn't choose to be born white. I never owned a slave or put up a whites only sign, but my people did, so I have a responsibility to make things right. I'm a baptized person who never led a crusade or a pogrom or burned a synagogue, but that is a thousand year long legacy of baptized people. The events in Pittsburgh yesterday prove we have not done enough to break the cycle. Simultaneously, as the massacre at Tree of Life synagogue shows, we must be careful about drawing the lines too sharply. That's why it's so important that when we try to put this stuff into practice we look to history's best example of creating community, Jesus Christ.

Just look at some of the people who Jesus chose to take into a traveling community- a tax collector who worked for the Romans and a political zealot who was fighting the Romans- Judians and Galileans, lepers and Pharisees, rich men and poor widows. Jesus understood that he could be at the same time a faithful Jew and a member of the human race. He was devoted to his Jewish community, but he also took every opportunity to draw a wide circle. Jesus's community included anybody who believed in the ultimate power of God's love. Love came before any other identity or allegiance. Mother Teresa once said, if we had no peace it is because we have forgotten that we belong to one another. If I have food on my plate, it is because someone else took the time to plant and nurture a tiny seed. If I have good friends and loving family, it is because they've given of themselves for my sake. The self-made man is an illusion. We're bound to one another.

What we do and say may touch people we will never even know for better or worse, so if you are one of the many people who feel alone, I'm sorry because that is a heavy burden to carry. I want you to know that you're welcome with all your warts and scars in this church community. Regardless of where you find connection, please remember that in the midst of bitter loneliness, there is a God who is always at your side and who knows you completely. Church, let us be the kind of community where no one is left out in the cold. Let us reach over boundaries and across tables to meet the brothers and sisters we didn't even know we had because connection- real community- is what God has wanted for us all along. Amen.

### \*LAST HYMN UMH #568

"Help Us Accept Each Other"

### \*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

### BENEDICTION

### POSTLUDE

"He Is King R. Powell"