



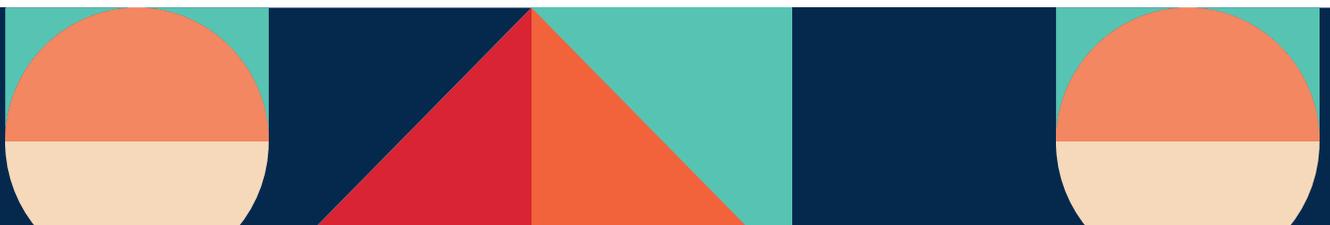
FAITH & RACE

Lenten Sermon Series
and
Small Group Guide



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THE SAINTS BEFORE US

SIX-WEEK SERMON SERIES OR SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Series Overview

“The Saints Before Us” sermon series or small group curriculum is designed to help faithful people host conversations about race, faith and the Church. Each week has a specific focus to help listeners intentionally think about the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice.

The title draws on Hebrews 12, and its description of the cloud of witnesses, and Ephesians 4 with its directive to equip saints for the work of ministry. The phrase “saints before us” invites participants to honor both the legacy and work of the saints that came before us and an invitation to today’s “saints” to carry forward that legacy.

The series has been designed for preaching and teaching during the season of Lent. Emphasis on self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation will pair well with core Lenten themes. However, the subject matter is flexible enough, and important enough, to be preached throughout the Christian calendar year – excluding Easter, Advent and Christmas.

This six-week series utilizes content from Season 3 of the Faith and Race podcast. It is for congregations that have been, or are currently, listening to the podcast. The series offers a biblically based foundation from which to proclaim God’s desire for Black and White United Methodists, and all people of faith, to participate in the creation of the Beloved Community.¹ Through the prophetic witness of five historically Black United Methodist churches in Missouri, participants will receive a deeper understanding of how past and present-day trauma and discrimination can impact purpose and mission. Hear how God has prompted each church to remake hostility-filled communities into those where justice and love reign true.

¹The phrase “The Beloved Community” was first coined by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce and then popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. Source: <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>. Accessed 8 December 2022.

- **Pitts Chapel United Methodist Church in Springfield**
- **Union Memorial United Methodist Church in St. Louis**
- **Samaritan United Methodist Church**
(now a merged ministry named **New Horizons**) in **St. Louis**
- **Centennial United Methodist Church in Kansas City**
- **St. James United Methodist Church in Kansas City**

This resource is intended for you to use and adapt as appropriate for your ministry context. This planner includes weekly message themes, titles, texts and teaching points, kids' message starters, prayers, image suggestions, promotional language and small group discussion starters.



Faith and Race Seasons 1 - 3, can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast or streamed on Stitcher, Spotify, Apply podcasts and Google Play.

Session 1 – INTRODUCTION

Sermon Theme: Testimonies

Sermon Title: Talk is Not Cheap

Sermon Texts: John 8:12-14; Revelation 1:9-11 (CEB)

Promotional Language: Join us as we begin a new series called “The Saints Before Us.” Each week will focus on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference. The six-week series will focus on their tragedies and triumphs amid predominantly White communities and churches. Biblical accounts will challenge all of us to be more mindful of the cultural diversity that is among us.

Key Points:

- **Verifiability** – The Pharisees did not believe Jesus’ testimony because it was personal and not told by other Jewish leaders. Some White people struggle to believe Black peoples’ testimonies because they are not told by White people or are outside of a White person’s personal experience.
- **Credibility** – John’s writing-in-exile to fledgling Christian churches provides a comparison with our five Black churches recording their experiences to share with predominantly White churches.
- **Reliability** – Jesus commands disciples to be witnesses by spreading the gospel to all nations. God relies on followers to share their faith by telling how Jesus makes the difference in their lives.

Kids’ Connection Starter: Our families, friends and teachers tell us stories to help us learn about life. Today’s message is about people who share what happened to them, so we can know more about one another and get along better by honoring the image of God in every human being.

Prayer:

Gracious and merciful God,
We thank you for the legacies of the saints who have joined the Church Triumphant,
and for the saints who are still with us.
We earnestly ask to be endowed with their courage
to speak up for the causes and circumstances that impact faith and race.
Use our voices to proclaim equality and acceptance for all.
We pray in the name of Jesus,
who embraces both outsiders
and those who live inside the boundaries of religious acceptance.
Amen.

Suggested Images:

- Courtroom witness stand
- Racially diverse witnesses/bailiffs being sworn in to testify
- Something other than the traditional scale of justice

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- Are you, like the cloud of witnesses (saints before us), willing to unload the baggage of prejudice and inequality to help build God's Beloved Community?
- How does the phrase "winners write history" explain the omission of invaluable Black information from religious education resources?
- If you are White, discuss why it is important for Black United Methodists to share their past and present church experiences. If you are Black, discuss why you think it is important for White United Methodists to listen and learn from past and present Black church experiences.
- If God values human testimonies, why do Christians seem to struggle when it comes to sharing their faith?

Session 2 – RESILIENCE AND REPENTANCE

Sermon Theme: Repentance is a Process

Sermon Title: I'm Sorry, Now What?

Sermon Texts: Genesis 37:12-28; 45:3-8 (CEB); Exodus 9:1-2, 12; Joshua 1:6 (NRSV)

Promotional Language: Our second session in the series “The Saints Before Us” will focus on repentance through the story of Pitts Chapel United Methodist Church, a 175-year-old congregation in Springfield. Founded by slaves, today Pitts Chapel UMC is a safe place for all people to worship God and practice social justice and political action. Each week of this series focuses on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference.

Key Points:

- God’s prevenient grace provides the power, strength and courage to make faithful choices, but if we choose unfaithful choices, our hearts are hardened. Examples of resisting God’s call to repentance: Pharaoh and the Egyptians did not repent for oppressing the Hebrew people. Prejudiced Springfield mobs did not repent for murdering three innocent Black men who were falsely accused of assault and rape. The United States has not repented for consistent oppression of Black people.
- The Hebrew word for strength or boldness, *chazak*, is found in both Old Testament scriptures. God’s prevenient grace provides the power, strength and courage to make faithful choices. However, if we use that graceful power for unfaithful choices, our hearts are hardened.
- We must choose to be resilient under oppression. We must choose to repent and make restitution. Twelve-step programs, Celebrate Recovery², plus the teachings of Maimonides on repentance³ are excellent resources. In *On Repentance and Repair*, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg outlines the teachings of medieval philosopher Maimonides’ five steps of forgiveness: naming and owning harm; starting to change/transformation; restitution and accepting consequences; apology; and making different choices.⁴

²Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered 12-step program based on biblical principles, designed to heal hurts, hang-ups and habits. Many United Methodist churches sponsor such groups. Visit www.celebraterecovery.com.

³In *Maimonides on Teshuvah: The Ways of Repentance* (10th Anniversary Edition, 2020), Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides (1138-1204), created the first comprehensive study of repentance (teshuvah) in Jewish literary history. Maimonides was a Jewish philosopher who became one of the most influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

⁴See Chapter One: “A Repentance Overview,” in Danya Ruttenberg’s *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World* (Beacon Press, 2022), 21-46.

- Three crowds gathered for good and/or evil: 1) God formed a largely diverse group into God's chosen people to declare that there is only one God. 2) Two vigilante mobs formed to exact revenge for an alleged race-related crime against two White people. Three innocent Black men were murdered in Springfield. 3) Michael Brown's killing in Ferguson sparked worldwide protests by diverse racial/ethnic crowds to end violence against unarmed Black people.

Kids' Connection Starter: After someone does something wrong again and again, if they say they are sorry, what comes next? In this week's message we will learn what you and they could do.

Prayer:

Gracious and pardoning God,
 Thank you for giving courage and perseverance to the marginalized.
 Strengthen those who grow weary in fighting repeated assaults of injustice.
 Lead us onto paths of repentance.
 Teach us to make amends that heal and make whole relationships
 among people who look like us, and those who don't, we pray.
 Amen.

Suggested Image: Marchers of all ages, races, genders and ethnicities.

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- Three crowds – Unrelated peoples being formed into the people of Israel, God's people; Springfield mobs lynching three innocent men because of their skin color; and Ferguson protesters from a variety of religions, races and ages looking like the kingdom of God. What impact have these protests had on your thoughts and behavior toward other races?
- What is the significance between the Good Friday lynching (hanging) of three people in Springfield, and the Good Friday crucifixion of Jesus (hanging) on the cross with two others? How might the Holy Spirit be working to transform us through these experiences?
- Repentance is so much more than an apology. How must White United Methodists think and act differently? How must Black United Methodists think and act differently? A deep commitment to advocacy work is a powerful way to fight injustice.



Faith and Race Season 3 Episode 1: Faith and Resilience at Pitts Chapel can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast

Session 3 – RENEWAL AND RESTORATION

Sermon Theme: The Holy Spirit Guides and Restores

Sermon Title: A Stone Foundation

Sermon Texts: Psalm 118:21-24; 1 Peter 2:4-10 (CEB)

Promotional Language: Week three in the series “The Saints Before Us” will focus on restoration through the story of Union Memorial United Methodist Church, a 176-year-old congregation in St. Louis. Established in the home of a former slave, it has planted four new churches, despite being forced to move several times for land redevelopment projects that destroyed thriving Black communities. Each week of this series focuses on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference.

Key Points:

- The Holy Spirit restores prophetic ministries that cannot be destroyed by human actions.
- What White culture calls “redevelopment” often causes “displacement” for the Black community.
- Forty Black churches were destroyed in the once-vital cultural district of Mill Creek Valley. Mill Creek Valley was a historic neighborhood between 20th Street and Saint Louis University populated by German immigrants and African Americans, before and after the Civil War.⁵ Union Memorial has planted four new churches: Asbury, North Park, Unity and Beloved Community.
- William J. Barber II writes about the third major effort to undo attempts to atone for slavery and racism. *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear*. Read the last chapter, “America’s Third Reconstruction.”

Kids’ Connection Starter: Think about how you feel when someone breaks your toys more than once. Today’s message is about what to do when bad things happen to your favorite things.

⁵Hemphill, Evie (March 1, 2018). “Remembering Mill Creek Valley once home to 20,000 black St. Louisans.” St. Louis Public Radio. Accessed 09 December 2022.

Prayer:

Gracious and merciful God,
Thank you for the stamina to start over and over despite insurmountable odds.
Help us to fight for renewal and restoration
when faithful works are trivialized, overlooked and destroyed.
Motivate the hearts and minds of the powerful
to respect and partner with the marginalized to rebuild your ministries.
We pray in the name of Jesus, the stone that the builders rejected.
Amen.

Suggested Images:

- The foundation of a new construction build
- A cornerstone
- A boulder.

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- What harm can several forced moves have on a congregation? What is redlining,⁶ and does it continue to exist?
- What do the terms “home church,” “mother church” and “flagship” church mean to Black Christians? To White Christians?” Is the level of reverence higher, lower or the same in both cultures?
- What impact does church influence play on individual self-worth in Black churches? In White churches?



Faith and Race Season 3 Episode 4: Engaging the Community for Justice, can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast

⁶Jackson, Candace. (Aug. 17, 2021) “What Is Redlining?” New York Times. Accessed 09 December 2022.

Session 4 – ROOTED AND REORGANIZED

Sermon Theme: Grow and Make Disciples

Sermon Title: Deeply Rooted

Sermon Texts: Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 2:6-10 (CEB)

Promotional Language: Week four in the series “The Saints Before Us” will focus on discipleship through the story of Samaritan United Methodist Church, a 105-year-old congregation in St. Louis. Community service to low-income residents remains a primary goal. Each week of this series focuses on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference.

Key Points:

- In both texts, Paul writes about spiritual maturity that only comes from trying to grasp how much God loves every human being. All of us are part of an ethnic group. Christians must love as Jesus loves.
- Faith in God grounds followers to fight racism and White privilege and to fully embrace anti-racism despite cultural pushback.
- White flight, urban decay, two tornadoes and a major fire could not destroy this Black congregation’s determination to remain a vital house of worship. Many moves were caused by racial discrimination, but now, two mergers later, the church is still serving Black children, youth and adults.

Kids’ Connection Starter: Today’s message teaches us that plants come from seeds in good soil that gets water and sunlight. Then they start to grow under the ground where we can’t see them. When something starts to come up, look out, it’s growing, it’s alive!⁷

Prayer:

Loving Master Gardener,
Thank you for good soil and for those who tend the natural and spiritual fruit we seek. Despite all manners of disasters, you provide the resources we need. May we share the faith and love to be deeply rooted people with one purpose — to transform the world by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

⁷ In *Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village*, Barbara A. Holmes quotes Kenneth V. Hardy, *Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma, Reclaiming Children and Youth*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Spring 2013, p. 25. The concepts of devaluation and degradation are the result of wounded rage.

Suggested Image: Massive, sturdy old tree with roots beneath the soil.

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- What evidence do you have of the deeply rooted faith and love it takes to accept all of God's people on an equal level?
- How can you tell if your church is deeply rooted and grounded in faithful love for all people? Where do you see signs of anti-racism being practiced?
- Internalized rage is caused by constant devaluation and degradation. It is a symptom of racial trauma, wounds in Black children, youth and adults. How can White churches and Black churches be allies in the healing process?



Faith and Race Season 3 Episode 2: New Life and Legacy in St. Louis can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast

Session 5 – MUSIC AND MINISTERING

Sermon Theme: Community Outreach

Sermon Title: Location, Location, Location

Sermon Texts: 1 Samuel 16:14-23; Psalm 137:1-4; Ephesians 5:18-20 (CEB)

Promotional Language: Week five in the series “The Saints Before Us” will focus on community outreach through the story of Centennial United Methodist Church, a 115-year-old congregation in Kansas City. Located in the historic 18th & Vine district, the church treasures its connections to the arts, social service and political engagement. Each week of this series focuses on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference.

Key Points:

- A reputation for being a safe space for community gatherings can be leveraged to accomplish ministry goals.
- It is dehumanizing to demand joyful celebrations from sufferers. Yet scripture teach us that joy, the second fruit of the Holy Spirit, can bless and heal both oppressors and the oppressed. Barbara A. Holmes, in *Crisis Contemplation*, writes about performing joy as a path toward healing in the Black community. Joy as a spiritual practice expresses hope and resistance.
- David was required to play music to sooth King Saul’s torment; exiled Israelites were told to entertain their Babylonian captors; Christians in Ephesus were reminded to use music to lift spirits and praise the Lord; and African slaves were required to perform for their owners. Rejoicing in good and bad times, wherever you are, is a spiritual practice worthy of lifelong commitment.

Kids’ Connection Starter: The next time you’re feeling sick or a little sad, sing a song or play some music. Music is powerful. You’ll feel better! Today’s message teaches us that God wants us to be happy.

Prayer:

Creator God,
No one is more creative than you.
Thank you for the gift of music.
Thank you for how it enhances worship
and brings us into your presence as a community.
Forgive us when we allow personal preferences to fuel worship wars
and further separate us from the unity you crave for your followers.
We pray in the name of Jesus our joy.
Amen.

Suggested Images: Musicians playing musical instruments, including a Hammond B3 organ.⁹

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- Does God send evil spirits to those who, like Saul, are so diligently and flagrantly disobedient that God regrets choosing him as king of Israel?
- How can being a safe place and space for community gatherings help to make disciples of Jesus Christ?
- The Central Jurisdiction was a gerrymandered organizational structure that put all U. S. Black Methodists in one conference. How did this segregation affect faith and race relations in White Churches? In Black Churches? Does systemic racism, in any form, still exist in our Conference? In our churches?



Faith and Race Season 3 Episode 3: Keeping time in KC's Jazz District can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast

⁹In the 1930s Black gospel churches in the North originally began using the Hammond organ, which had been newly invented, in services. This trend quickly spread to St. Louis, Detroit, Philadelphia and beyond. The Hammond was introduced in 1935 as a cheaper version of the pipe organ. Stephens, Robert (February 28, 2018). "African rhythms, ideas of sin and the Hammond organ: A brief history of gospel music's evolution." The Conversation. Accessed 09 December 2022.

Session 6 – ADVOCACY AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

Sermon Theme: Confrontational Gospel

Sermon Title: Speaking for God and God's People

Sermon Texts: Exodus 3:7-12; 14:30-31 (CEB)

Promotional Language: The final week of the “The Saints Before Us” series focuses on the Gospel’s confrontation through the story of St. James United Methodist Church, a 67-year-old congregation in Kansas City. St. James UMC is a long-term prophetic witness speaking on behalf of oppressed people and advocating on the front lines of social action – working within the system to change the system. Each week of this series focuses on the intersection of scripture, history, race and justice by exploring the experiences of five historically Black United Methodist churches in the Missouri Conference.

Key Points:

- Moses’ obedience to God by confronting Pharaoh resulted in God freeing the enslaved Israelites and initiating faith in God and acceptance of Moses as their leader. Publicly working against systemic racism by becoming trusted leaders within systems of power or by challenging those structures in plain view is an effective way to bring about change.
- Anti-racism is more than reading and proclaiming, it includes publicly working for equality and equity. Hearts, minds and souls can be changed by confronting oppressive powers.
- Speaking truth to power is risky and dangerous but necessary for change to occur.

Kids’ Connection Starter: What are you supposed to do when people won’t stop picking on you? You tell the bullies to stop. If they don’t, you go and get help. Today’s message is about people who stand up and speak out for us. Not just in private, but out front, so everyone knows they’ve got our backs. It’s the right thing to do. When they speak for us, they are speaking for God.

Prayer:

God of justice, grace and mercy,
From the beginning of humanity, you have shown your steadfast love
by giving us undeserved sacrificial love and unearned reprieve from punishment.
Thank you!

Now we humbly ask for strength to publicly fight discrimination.
Remind us of our Wesleyan heritage of no differences between personal and social
holiness.

Help us long to be prophets who speak for you
and confront powers that withhold opportunities for your people.

May we be voices in the streets, in the halls of government and corporations, and at
the polls.

We pray this in the name of Jesus our champion.

Amen.

Suggested Images:

- A handheld bullhorn/megaphone
- A ballot box

Small Group Discussion Starters:

- How can advocacy and leadership in the secular arena challenge and disprove the “church is irrelevant” mantra?
- Transformation takes place over time with Christians being the tools and the Holy Spirit being the grace that empowers. What gifts do you have to be an activist?
- Which is more effective – working for change within systems or working from the outside?



Faith and Race Season 3 Episode 5: Social Justice and taking a Stand At St. James
can be found at www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast

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Recommended Reading

Barber II, William J. *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear*. Beacon Press, 2016.

Bell, Ronald. *The Four Promises: Journeying through Past and Present Trauma*. www.DrRonBell.com, 2021.

Holmes, Barbara A. *Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village*. CAC Publishing, 2021.

Missouri Conference and General Commission on Religion and Race. *Implicit Bias Course: What We Don't Think We Think*. UNITED METHODIST CHURCH General Commission on Religion and Race, 2022.

Parks, Arnold C. and John A. Wright, Sr. *American United Methodist Churches in Missouri: A Pictorial History*. Parthenon Press, 2012.

Ruttenberg, Danya. *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*. Beacon Press, 2022.

Music Recommendations

African American Spirituals

- Songs of Zion, J. Jefferson Cleveland and Verolga Nix, editors. The United Methodist Publishing House, 1981.
- Zion Still Sings: For Every Generation, Myron F. McCoy, general editor. Abingdon Press, 2007.

Contemporary

- The Faith We Sing, Hoyt L. Hickman, general editor. Abingdon Press, 2000.
- The Brilliance music duo. Hear Our Prayer, Will We Ever Rise, See the Love, Gravity of Love, Brother. Permission to use must be granted.

Traditional

- The United Methodist Hymnal, Carlton R. Young, editor. The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.

Series Writers



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Visit www.moumethodist.org/faithandracepodcast to see episodes and resources from all three seasons.