**Holy Huddle - United in Hope**

What does it mean to be united in hope?

Jesus’ hope and prayer for the church is that we be one in following his call to participate in the building of God’s kingdom.

It is not always easy to be hopeful, let alone united. These uncertain times in our world and in our church serve as a constant reminder of that.

God has called the church to be a beacon of hope despite the uncertainty. However, if we abandon our hope in Christ, not just as individuals, but as a body we will never truly imagine, let alone experience, God’s fully realized kingdom of love, justice, and well-being for all of creation.

Indeed, the inability to hope is rooted in fear and division. When we are afraid we take for ourselves, we exclude our neighbors, and we resist God’s active love and presence in our lives.

Yet, despite our fears and our differences, we don’t need to look far to see what unites us.

Through communion we unite around God’s table. It is in the Eucharist that we are not just reminded of God’s vision of a transformed world, but that this vision will be fulfilled in Christ. It is this vision that unites us. At the end of Eucharistic prayer we pray, Make us one with Christ, one with each other, one in ministry to all the world. Despite our fears and uncertainty, the Eucharist compels us to put our hope in the risen Christ who calls us to be one body, united for God’s kingdom.

Often, we are united around mission and service, our desire to share Jesus’ compassion and love with those hungry, hurting, longing for something more and better in life. When we engage in acts of love and compassion together we catch a glimpse of what God’s kingdom, fully realized, looks like, feels like, and sounds like. Throughout his ministry Jesus showed us that going beyond ourselves for the sake of others brings both personal and social transformation. He showed us that when we come together a better world can truly be realized.

John Wesley knew it was ultimately God’s great love and the promise of eternal life in Jesus

that could bring us together, change our hearts and help us lean into God’s future. Wesley felt that Hearts striving together in perfecting love were more important than minds united in doctrinal agreement. That would seem more consistent with way UMC’s live our faith.

We can easily focus on our differences, all the things that make us unique, separate, distinctive as congregation but then Jesus calls us to be One-to transcend all that separates us. Jesus calls us to unite in hope.

We are more easily united and one when there is trust between us, when we respond to each other with values of compassion that override our self-interest. When we value relationship and collaboration we are moving closer together as god would want.

Hope not sentimental/nostalgic. Jesus did not die/was not resurrected so that we could re-live the past. Hope is indeed grounded in courageous things. It’s not an easy path but the path God calls us on. It is the only way we get there. This is a robust hope, maybe edgy, willing to take some risks, willing to stand with others, willing to take chances that just maybe, God has a different future for us. Let us take some time now to imagine what that future looks like and feels like, so that we may begin to unite together for the building of that future.

**Activity:** Guided meditation about our future and our vision. Imagine what church is like, when our vision is truly being lived out, when your congregation is faithfully, regularly, courageously loving like Jesus, acting for justice. What will it look like in your church? What will sound like, what are people like…what people doing… when vision lived? It will be different. It will be exciting.

**Question 1:** What does it feel like when your church is courageously loving like Jesus and acting for Justice? What does it feel like to you, as this is happening.

**Question 2:** How do we act in the present? How do you/your church come together and live into this hope together so it can begin to happen, so your church can move in this direction?

**Question 3:** How will you help the leaders in your church experience what you just experienced and share it when get back? Share this around your table.

**Homework:** As you connect with this feeling, let it feed/shape your hope. Share this with others back home. Let it unite you.