

Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of April 28, 2024
5th Week After EASTER SUNDAY



Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS:

Connected to Christ through the power of love, we become the presence of God for the world.

OPENING PRAYER:

Loving God, send your Spirit among us now. Bind us to you in love this day, that we may worship in unity and friendship. Bind us to you in love this hour, that we may be strengthened to bring abundant love to your world. In love and gratitude, we pray. Amen.

Be the Word: New Testament Scripture Lesson: Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, "At noon, take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) ²⁷ So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of Candace. (Candace is the title given to the Ethiopian queen.) ²⁸ He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Approach this carriage and stay with it."

³⁰ Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?"

³¹ The man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him. ³² This was the passage of scripture he was reading:

*Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent
so he didn't open his mouth.*

³³ *In his humiliation justice was taken away from him.*

*Who can tell the story of his descendants
because his life was taken from the earth?*

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. ³⁶ As they went down the road, they came to some water.

The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Lord’s Spirit suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip found himself in Azotus. He traveled through that area, preaching the good news in all the cities until he reached Caesarea.

Scripture Lesson: John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. ² He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything. ⁶ If you don’t remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

L: The Word of God for all people

P: Thanks be to God

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a deep breath. How is it with your soul?
2. Rev. John Miyahara preached that life is full of choices, some we make well, some we make not so well. Is there a specific choice you’ve made in life that altered your life journey?
3. He also said, “Some choices have short-term effects while others have long-term effects.” Is this true for you? If so, why?

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

1. Rev. Dr. Miyahara said the following: *Acts 8 tells us the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, a court official to Candace the queen of the Ethiopians. As the Eunuch (who is not named) was riding home in his chariot, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. It is here he encounters Philip who asks the eunuch if he understands what he is reading and replies to Philip, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Their conversation evolves and the eunuch receives the good news of Jesus’ teaching from Philip. In verse 36, the eunuch sees water and says to Philip, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” They both go down to the water and Philip baptizes the eunuch.*
 - a. Rev. Miyahara spoke about his niece, Michelle. His cousin Shelly lives in Albuquerque,

NM. She has two daughters, Shannon and Michelle. Michelle has developmental disability.

- i. Michelle asks out of the blue for Rev. John to baptize her -- realizing God the Holy Spirit was working through Michelle's heart.
 1. Sometimes others choose us to be a part of their lives and faith journey, whether we realize it or not. In this situation, Michelle chose Rev. John.
 2. The important part for us is to realize the Holy Spirit chooses us as well to accompany, witness, and testify in the lives of our fellow journeyers.
 - a. Thoughts? Do you agree?
 - b. The sermon Sunday shared that at the beginning of last week, the UMC's quadrennial General Conference commenced in Charlotte, NC. Approximately 862 clergy and lay delegates from our global church are gathering in Charlotte and will be there from 23 April-03 May. This assembly is the only body that speaks for our global church as it determines the UMC's mission and ministries every four years. This assembly in 2024 will decide the future ministry directions of our denomination as we anticipate major changes in our theological stances, as we make choices and choose to be a more welcoming and inclusive church for all of God's children. As Rev. Allison shared last week, the 2020 postponed General Conference is finally happening in 2024.
 - i. What are your hopes in the choices that will (or have been) made in this General Conference of 2024?
 1. Once all been voted and passed, how do you think the Holy Spirit is calling you to accompany, witness, and testify in the lives of our fellow journeyers?
2. Rev. John shares the following: *In the Gospel lesson from John this morning, Jesus says in verses 4-5, "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Jesus is inviting us to "abide in him." He is not threatening or coercing us to do so, but he is inviting us, giving us a choice to choose life with him. However, in verse 6 Jesus makes it clear of the consequences of poor choices when he says, "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers, such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned."*
- a. While these words from Jesus can seem harsh, he is telling us that if we turn away from God, our lives will not be nourished by God's love and grace, and we will wither away.
 - i. Do these words come in a timely manner given the season?
3. Rev. John says, *"John's lesson this morning reminds us how God is the vinegrower, carefully nurturing branches in the vineyard to make sure they will grow purposefully and bear fruit. The Vinegrower carefully and purposefully prunes the branches that are not fruitful. The Vinegrower chooses the direction for the vine to grow and prosper. God the Vinegrower purposely and lovingly chooses us and our lives to prune, water, nurture, weed, and care for so we too can have a life abiding in God's love and grace. Thus, we too have the ability to choose to abide and be under the love, care, nurturing, forgiveness and grace of God the Vinegrower throughout life."*

- a. Even when we fall or turn away from God, God always welcomes us home through our acts of repentance and realigning our lives with God through Christ's example.
 - i. Thoughts? Comments?

Be transformed: [Call to action]



1. Rev. John shared this picture in his conclusion. A picture from Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade where Indiana is given instructions by one of the knights of the round table to "choose wisely."
 - a. We too must also be like Indiana Jones and make choices, choose wisely as we continually live out our journey of faith. **What call to action does this mean for you?**
2. In today's world we are called consistently to make choices, to choose paths in life, at times whether we want to or not....
 - a. Just look at any news source and current events throughout the world, politics, religious movements, the economy, and a host of other issues are calling us to choose and select a choice. Many times without hesitation or time to fully weigh in and grasp the issues, we make choices and choose a path in life.
 - b. Other times we are persuaded to make choices due to loyalty, cast, clan, politics, theology, or a particular affiliated group. Commonly religious and political institutions persuade, ask, chide, manipulate, guilt or intimidate us to make a choice, to choose, under significant duress or strain. This is unfortunate.
 - c. Sometimes we choose to make choices. At other times or the Holy Spirit chooses us whether we are ready or not! **How will you choose?**
3. Please continue to see what's happening in the greatest United Methodist Church? Check out the "legislative body" of the UMC at work and live stream parts of the conference. (You can look at the schedule and calendar agenda to see what interests you!--and Rev. Allison will send out updates when the good stuff happens!):
<https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/structure/general-conference>
4. Please continue to PRAY for the 1000 delegates at GC as we try our best to be the arm of the church that is Truth and Faith in Action, as well as all of the leaders of the UMC who are in attendance! (There are another 1000+ folks here for that too!)



5.

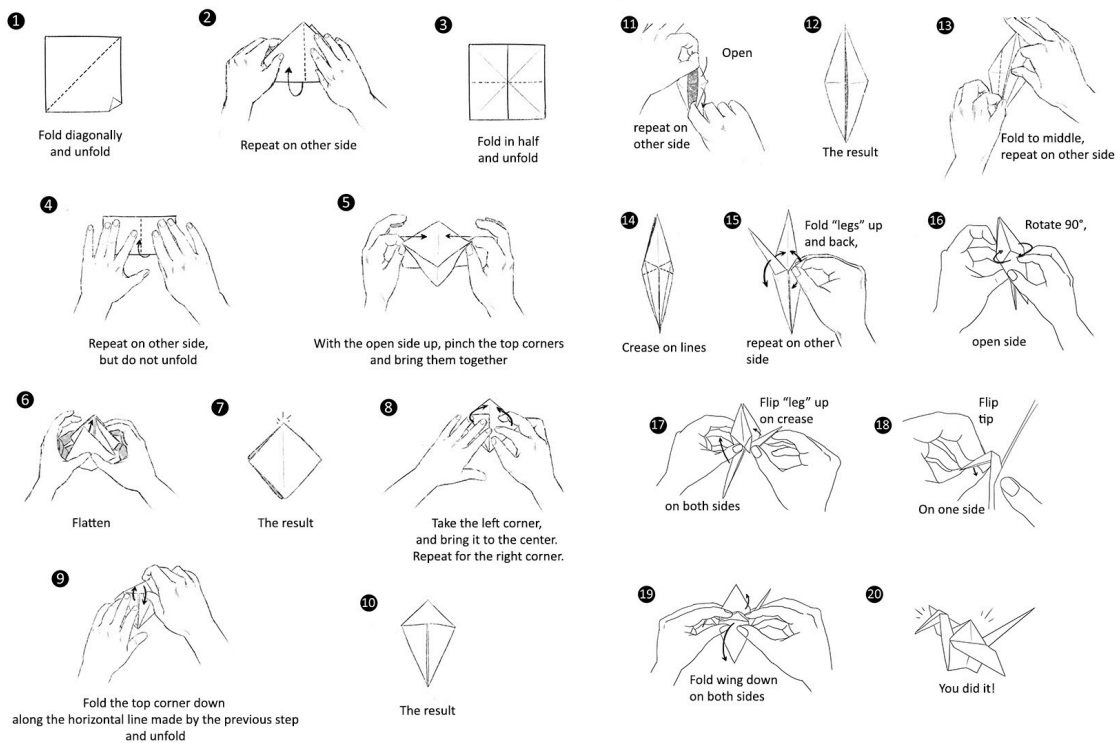
Read Rev. Jeremy Smith’s “Crane Church” of “Hacking Christianity” (or attached below).

<https://hackingchristianity.net/2024/04/the-crane-church-a-new-hope-for-united-methodism.html>

- What do you think of a “Crane Church?”

6. Fold a paper crane as a prayer and peace crane to lift up both our UMC and our world in your prayers life. OR you can fold paper cranes like Bishop Carlo Rapanut and leave them for other to find and leave your own trail of peace.

How To Fold a Paper Crane



Prayers & Concerns

Celebrations...

Yuki Lucia Matsumoto-Penton (granddaughter of Jane & Terry Matsumoto; parents: Kate & AJ born, 3/5/24)

Daniel Hiro Yuan (grandson of Diane & Brian Fujimori; parents Nicole & David born, 3/24/24)

Rev. Eric Iki, passed his Ordination interviews to be Ordained at AC in June (June 15 @1pm)!

Sally & Ken's 54th Anniversary (1/31/24)

Kainoa Kent Barajas born to Lauren & Carlos (2/4/24) - (Great-grandma is Jane Kiyohara!)

Prayers for healing and wholeness...

*Mutsuko Nishi (Henry's mom)

*Claretta Foster

Jack Hamada

The Sasaki Family; Jordan Sasaki, Sally, Ken, & Jason

Jerry Osaka

*Victoria Dela Torre

*Diane & Destiny Ueda-Banda

Audrey Goto

Tak and Irene Ryono

*Ralph Ichikawa's brother, Jim (Tio)

*Alice Kajiya

*Faye Toma

*Virginia Flood - Stage 4 Cancer

Jason's friend, Kaitlyn Sabedra

Glenn & Millie Shimizu

*Faith Tanaka

*Sam Kobayashi

*Nancy Matsushima

Dan Yamashita

*Sumi Maruya

*Chic Miyake

*Winnie Osaki

*Postal Worker, Dexter

*Alveena Fukuhara

* Harry Lum

* Kyle Ichikawa (Ralph's son)

*Maxine Butcher

*Florence Uchida

Deron Tokishi (brother of Sheri Tong)

Fred Endo (father of Sharon Ann Endo)

Ireland Bone (health)

****Faith Families, multiple illnesses within our group of young families—pray for healing and wholeness.**

Prayers for Grieving Families...

*Sumi Maruya, (passed on Wednesday morning, 4/17) - HER CELEBRATION OF LIFE WILL BE HELD ON FRIDAY, MAY 17 AT 11AM. A RECEPTION WILL FOLLOW; HER BURIAL AT GREEN HILLS WILL BE AT 2PM

*VIRGINIA FLOOD PASSED AWAY YESTERDAY MORNING, (4/27). PLEASE HOLD THE FLOOD FAMILY IN YOUR PRAYERS

*STAN KANJA, FRIEND OF BARBARA TAMURA PASSED AWAY THIS WEEK. PLEASE HOLD BARBARA AND THE KANJA FAMILY IN YOUR PRAYERS.

*Preston Akiyama (husband of Masako, passed on 4/15/24) A SERVICE FOR PRESTON WILL BE HELD THIS SUMMER WHEN HIS FAMILY IS TOGETHER

*Kyoko Nakahara, (Kelly DeGracia's mom)

*James Kawamoto

*Nelson Mark (husband of Alice, father of Darrell, passed on 3/10/24)

*Frances Yonemori (Florence Uchida's sister, passed on 3/12/24)

*Kurt Kuniyoshi (passed 3/xx/24)

*Bing Duck Pang (father of Stanley, passed 3/11/24)

*Bernice Kashiwai (mother of Kent/Nicole Morita-Kashiwai)

*Lori Takayesu (Georgine Morita sister)

*Pat Hiroshima (Harriet Tateyama's sister-in-law)

*Takako Takao (mother of Jerry, passed 2/22/24)

*Charles Kvitky (husband of Lily; passed week of 2/11/24)

Greg Kubo (passed away on 2/3/24)

Henry Uepi Isama'u (passed on 1/24/24)

* Elaine Suzuki (Ralph's sister)

Gene LeFebvre (Andy's mentor and friend)

Rev. Margaret Finney

Election year

For our hurting world...

Japan Earthquake / Volcanic Eruption in
Sakurajima (near Kagoshima)

People of the Holy Land

Families rebuilding after natural disasters

Covid (and for those who are sick, ailing, in need
of God's love and healing

The United Methodist Church (General
Conference)

And Know that He is God:

Commission & Benediction (based on John 15:1-8)

God of harvest,
gardener supreme,
you place us at the center,
feed us, equip us and,
having provided for us,
look to a different harvest—
a fruitfulness of lives
in service to you
and others.

God of harvest,
feed us
prune us
harvest us
that our lives
might bring glory to you.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Crane Church: A New Hope for United Methodism

Rev. Jeremy Smith's "Crane Church" of "Hacking Christianity":

<https://hackingchristianity.net/2024/04/the-crane-church-a-new-hope-for-united-methodism.html>

A tale from Japanese folklore holds a metaphor for the UMC of today and tomorrow.



The Crane Wife

One of the stories from Japanese folklore is *Tsuru Nyōbō* (鶴女房) translated as “The Crane Wife.” As with any folklore, there are many variants and versions—now there are anime versions and a popular band the Decemberists’ version of this folktale. But here is a retelling of the first version that I saw that had little details that I think were the Holy Spirit’s way of capturing my imagination, and I hope yours too.

The story goes that one winter, a man was heading toward the local village when he came across a crane that had been caught in a trap. He set the crane free and the crane flew away. *In Japanese culture, a crane is a symbol of good fortune, so that was a good act of kindness.* The next evening, a beautiful woman came to the man’s doorstep, and asked to stay the night. The man was very poor but offered her his home, and eventually his heart, and they were married that same week. His new wife said she would be able to provide beautiful silks and textiles, but only if he promised that every seven days, he would leave her completely alone for a whole day to get the fabric prepared. He did this and upon his return, he saw his wife very tired but holding a beautifully woven cloth of fabric and feathers.

This went on for many months. He would go away for one day every seven days, return for a new woven cloth that he would sell at the village market and lift them out of poverty. Things were going very well, but he began to notice his wife was looking more and more tired each time he would return from the day away. So finally one day he broke his promise and doubled back and crept up to the window to look inside. There, in their house, was a crane that was plucking out all of its feathers and was weaving the feathers into the fabric. And as he watched, after all the feathers had been plucked out, the crane turned into the woman, bloody and bruised.

The crane saw him and said “Yes, I am the crane you helped those months ago. I have returned the favor, but since you have seen who I really am, I know you can no longer love me. I must return home. Take this cloth and be happy.” She turned back into the crane and flew away in the night.

The Crane Church

The Crane Wife story makes me wonder if the United Methodist Church is a Crane Church in a dark echo of that story.

For too long LGBTQ+ United Methodists have plucked themselves out, offering their gifts without acknowledgement or acceptance of their true beautiful forms. My friend, the Rev. Sean Delmore, a trans pastor in New England, once said that queer community in the church is wrung out like lemons to make lemonade, and even then, the church cannot accept the community as they are; the church has to add sugar and dilute the community to accept them.

For too long, the church itself has contorted its natural form into something pleasing to a *particular* demographic and allowed that demographic to [erase 25% of the church](#) in the disaffiliations of 2022 and 2023.

For too long, women especially have given themselves in secret, the invisible work that women often do in households is no different in the church. Women take pieces of their selves and weave them into the very fabric of the Church's existence, and we don't dare look too closely at the blood, sweat, and tears mixed in with the fabric of our community.

For too long, we have forgotten who we are.

A Crane without the Magic

In some versions of the story, the woman loses her magical abilities when she plucks out her feathers; in the same way, the UMC has lost its magic from its origin story. There was a time when we poured ourselves out to expand the church to more and more people rather than forcing people to pluck themselves for our benefit.

- The ordination of women happened in 1956, over 30 years after women's suffrage in America. A shameful wait but one earlier than many other denominations.
- The inclusion of African Americans away from separate but equal jurisdictions came in 1968, 14 years after Brown versus Board of Education. We got a little better.
- These were *amazing* acts of inclusion. But since then, for 52 years, we've been fighting to expand the circle to gays and lesbians and now the entire queer community. We forgot how to be an inclusive church...or this is what blowback looks to those twin acts of inclusion. This June is the 9-year anniversary of same-gender marriage becoming the law of the land, and I hope we keep narrowing the gap between societal and church affirmation.

For too long, we have been a Crane Church, and have forgotten who were meant to be, and we keep on forcing minority segments of our church to pluck out their feathers, to give their gifts without regard for what they cost so that the Church to give grace and welcome to someone else, even as it hasn't given the same grace to its own members. *(You can learn more about how we got here in our 2024 updates part [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#))*

A New Hope

The 2024 General Conference has a chance to invite our Crane Church to be its authentic self, and no longer be twisted into a form that does harm to itself and to others.

- We can choose to support better polity that opens up the church to the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons—and add “gender” to our list of inclusive statements, which *bafflingly* is missing.
- We can choose better practices like divestment from fossil fuels and a more equitable church structure that gives the mission fields priority.
- We can choose to speak more clearly in our Social Principles in a world that would rather we keep silent.
- There’s a whole list of things that we as a church could do better—and also vote for our values to hold the line against those who would turn the UMC into a lesser version of itself.
- [You can view many of these hopes here.](#)

My hope is that we realize we are a Crane, and we have been generous, plucking ourselves over for decades to satisfy someone else. But we are born to soar and to transform *not* ourselves to satisfy the world, but to be our best selves so that we *can* transform the world through disciples of Jesus Christ.

I pray you join me in that hope.