

JULY 5, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON "A Full Gospel" John 14:5-14, Hebrews 7:26-28

This week we are back to fundamentals. The core of the gospel. What we need to remember is that there is a fullness of the gospel and then gospel light. There is the gospel that is in and of itself cheap and has little meaning. There is also the gospel that fills out a heart, a life, a community, and changes the world.

A, if not the, cornerstone of our faith is that Jesus went to the cross and secured our redemption through grace. It is something we are told to acknowledge and "believe". And that is what many do and where it ends for them. "Believe" Jesus died for your sins and you're good to go. That's all. That's it. Nothing more. Say that prayer and be able to form those words and you've got your entry ticket to heaven when you die. That's all well and good, but that's not what scripture would reflect as a redeeming faith.

A redeeming faith, a full faith isn't just a prayer, a confession, and then waiting around for the end so we can cash in a reward. In fact Jesus Himself doesn't agree with this idea at all. Nor does Paul. You've heard me say something before and today I'll say it again. Our works do not earn salvation. It is true that salvation is a free gift. Our works, though, are the evidence that demonstrate if we have received it.

James says "faith without works is dead", and Paul gives list after list of evidences that we have accepted Jesus. If the evidence isn't there, we should probably be asking if we've really given ourselves over to Jesus. Because Jesus didn't ask us to merely acknowledge Him. He asks us to be disciplined to Him.

This morning we are going to look at 3 markers of whether or not we are living into the fullness of a full gospel.

1. All means all is a full gospel of freedom

What is written in Hebrews is echoed in Romans and 1 Peter. Jesus died "once for all". Notice it says all, not some. And all means ALL.

As we noted two weeks ago, we have no right to build walls around who is allowed in and who is allowed out. Everyone is invited and welcome. The transformation God wants for all of us happens in communion with Christ, the Holy Spirit, and all through scripture always occurs in the context of community.

In other words we are freed from having to be gatekeepers. We are freed from all of the world's "isms" and responsibility to figure out who gets invited to the party. We are freed from the fear that comes from "what if I invite the wrong person?" "What will other people think?" Those fears are gone when we understand that the gospel is available to all. Our task is to simply welcome and invite people into the welcome of the community of faith and into a relationship with God through Christ.

This leads us to the second marker.

2. We're not supposed to wait for the Kingdom of God

This is one of the great lies of a gospel that's just a prayer, a statement, and waiting for the Kingdom of God when we pass. The whole idea is for us to experience the Kingdom here and now. How do we know this? Jesus is the one who says "the Kingdom is at hand", "the Kingdom is within you", and "The Kingdom is near". All of this is present language, not future. Of course we won't experience the Kingdom in its perfection. But we can experience it and our job is to work to build it in this world.

The Kingdom as we understand it is a place of peace, love, safety, and where this is no need, pain, or sorrow. What that tells us is that here in this world, if the Kingdom is at hand, anything that exists to the opposite of these things is not the way it's supposed to be.

So what am I doing to bring these things about? Am I contributing to the opposite of these things? Do I encourage those things that bring peace or do I make excuses for causing conflict? Do I open my arms with the unconditional love of Christ or do I make excuses to dismiss, disdain, or even hate? Do I work to make sure everyone feels safe and secure, or do I find excuses for why some people don't deserve safety and security? Do I make efforts to ensure that no one is in need or do I give reasons for why I think some people don't deserve a helping hand?

Pain and sorrow are trickier. That's inevitable. Yet again there are relevant questions. Do I step up to provide comfort and try to alleviate pain and sorrow or do I just wash my hands of other people's circumstances because it's uncomfortable or inconvenient?

And of course there's the matter of sin. If the Kingdom of God is perfect then there is not sin...and of course no temptation. Which means again we have questions. Am I more concerned with handling my own sin or am I more concerned with pointing out and condemning other peoples? Does my recognizing my own sin grow my compassion for others struggling differently or do I become more critical because criticizing someone else is

easier than dealing with my own problems and issues? Do I take ownership over my choices or do I play the victim and blame others?

None of this justifies sin. What it does is treat life and our journey honestly. We are drawn together by a common struggle against the temptations and choices in our lives rather than driven apart by easing our own conscience at another's expense.

In other words, are we building the Kingdom here and now? In our own hearts, our own lives, our own communities? Are we inviting others into faith to grow the citizenry of this Kingdom?

If we aren't, then we aren't living into a full and complete gospel. We are missing out on the fullness of life and peace of heart and mind that Jesus invites us into. Yes, we have the hope of salvation, but that hope for the future is also an absolute command to build it in the present. If we know what the Kingdom of God is supposed to be, why would we settle for less if we can create it here in this world?

3. I am the Way

This statement of Jesus is so often cherry picked and contributes to exactly what detracts from a full gospel. The statement is relegated to that prayer and statement of faith with little to no responsibility. It's used like a secret password you see someone utter in a movie at the door to a hideout or special club. The little slit opens at eye level and the man working the lock says "password please". If you have it you're in, if not you're out.

This ignores all of what is around this passage. This is Jesus final instructions to His disciples. Who are they supposed to be? What are they supposed to do? What is His gospel?

Yes, He says to believe in Him. But this is prior to His death. The statement of faith we are told to utter isn't part of this conversation. Do you know what is? Directions on how to tell if we ACTUALLY belong to Him. Jesus tells us what a follower looks like. This is the direction we need. Because it is the evidence of whether or not we've truly believed whatever statement of faith we make. It is the proof we are redeemed.

What are the central themes of all of this? He calls disciples to be servants first. He calls disciples to obey His command, which is centered on loving one another. He says to abide in HIM. Not the world, not a charismatic pastor or some box that man creates around God and tries to jam both God and the rest of us into it. He prays for them. He prays for us all to be united, not divided.

All of it is rooted in action. It's rooted in living out faith and following His example. This is the evidence that we are living into the fullness of the gospel. To paraphrase James "show me your faith with your words? I'll show you my faith by my life".

The fullness of the gospel is not just a belief statement. Because the statement is likely false if not backed up with discipleship. The Great Commission isn't to make converts. It's to make disciples. It isn't to "get mine" when I die. It's to live into the servant Lordship of Jesus Christ and build the Kingdom of God in my heart and the world around me.

That's why Jesus says the world will hate the disciples. The world pushes us to selfishness, greed, bitterness, being judgmental, leaving people behind if they are inconvenient or different. Calling the world away from all of this to selflessness, generosity, forgiveness, mercy, unity, grace, and lifting up those in need isn't popular. It makes people angry. It is convicting. And people don't like that feeling.

The beauty of a full and complete gospel is that it is defining. This gospel gives an anchor point for our entire lives. There is purpose and the standard set by Jesus to work towards living into.

There is no point of life that this kind of gospel doesn't touch. There is a clear calling and way of being. What's more it is both defining and freeing. It is accountable yet filled with grace. There is hope for tomorrow and at the same time hope in every present moment.

It's not earning a gift of redemption yet the life we live is the evidence of whether we have received the gift.

This gospel that is the center of our faith is indeed complete, encompassing all of who we are. The life this gives us is also fuller and more complete because we aren't shackled by the anxiety, fear, and anger of the world. We've let that go so that we can truly build the Kingdom of God here that we are seeking to experience completely one day.

Trouble won't vanish. But trouble will typically be around no matter what. What faith does is allow us to face trouble with peace, confidence, humility, grace and love. It draws us to the community of faith where we grow in our relationship with God, find places to serve, and perhaps most comfortingly and hopefully are assured we don't do this building and journey alone. We have one another even as we have Christ and Christ has us.

The world is busy and so are most of our lives. It's easy to get distracted. That's why it's important to take a moment to focus daily on who we are as people of faith so we allow the Spirit to guide us day to day. It's important to come together weekly to begin our week dialed in on God, Christ, and the Spirit. It keeps us in a place where the fullness of the gospel fills our heart. Because the fullness of the gospel is fullness of life.

Brent's Weekly Note:

Greetings!

Don't forget to put on your calendar July 12 for our annual summer breakfast and worship. This year should be especially interesting and fun as we come together for a unique experience!

Coming soon we also are hosting a community outdoor yard Bocce Ball evening. If you want something fun, easy, and a great way to chat while you play this is going to be it.

Keep in mind that the best way to build the congregation that we have is for each and every one of us to be plugging into the community and relationships around us, and inviting people to join us. YOU! are the greatest witness and "billboard" for our faith and our community of faith.

My family is on vacation following worship on July 5 through Saturday July 11. We appreciate being able to take a break through the summer months to recharge and refresh.

For 7/5-9 Karl Herman will be covering emergencies and Alison Grove will be covering 7/19 and 11. If you need anything prior to my leaving please reach out and let me know.

Especially with this heat wave stay cool and stay safe!

**Blessings,
Brent**