



# This is the Day...

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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My first senior pastor started every Sunday morning the same way. Harvey Gable had a big smile on his face as we unlocked doors, made sure

the AC was on and plugged in coffee pots. Before any details, before any updates on people in the hospital, before any instructions, he'd say, in a musical almost sing-song voice, "This is the day that the Lord has made." I answered, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." *Psalm 118*.

There is something very right about that!

I found out later that is the way the first Christians began their worship.

In the earliest days of the Christian movement, starting in Jerusalem, Christians began their worship saying, "This is the day the Lord has made."

A children's song I love puts it this way, "Every morning is Easter morning from now on. Every day's resurrection day, the past is over and gone!"

We human beings are great builders—towns and roads, schools and businesses; homes and churches; families and communities; organizations and structures.

We're also really good at building lots and lots of walls. We build walls to protect and shelter; to corral and contain; to mark boundaries and to defend turf.

We divide ourselves from each other by customs, by rules and by ideas.

The more important we become, the more we convince ourselves God lives inside the walls we build, and operates on our timetable.

The writer of Ephesians describes Christ's saving work by saying: Christ **has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.**

The Inclusive Language translation puts it

**Christ...broke down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart.**

Every time we sing "This is the Day," we are saying exactly that.

I found out months after I started serving with Harvey that lots of things divided us. We didn't vote the same. We had lots of different ideas about how God works. We had different ideas on what made worship work.

He kept on saying "This is the day" I grew to love that man. Walls came tumbling down.

Insiders and outsiders? The walls come down. ***This is the day.***

Citizens and foreigners? The walls come down. ***This is the day.***

Oppressors and victims? In Christ Jesus, the walls come down.

**In his flesh Christ has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.**

This is not just a theological concept. It happens every time we come together.

***This is the day*** . Every time we include someone who has been excluded.

***This is the day*** . Every time we value relationships with each other and all creation.

That's why I love the Bible stories our Bible School is based on this year.

**Noah** is a story about valuing relationships, with each other and creation.

God makes a promise that we follow every time we do anything that makes our environment better. Any time we focus on ecology, we are honoring the God who chooses to be in relationship with all creation.

The story we'll share on the second night is a personal favorite. A girl who is never named brings a way-too-proud general and a way-too-hard-headed prophet together to make a healing possible. **Namaan**, general of the Syrian army, has leprosy. A Jewish girl who works as one of his servants convinces him there is a prophet who can cure him.

Namaan goes unwillingly to the prophet **Elisha**'s house, with all his chariots and all his entourage, and the prophet refuses to come outside to meet him. Namaan refuses to go inside the Prophet's humble house. How walls do divide us!

On the third night, we'll share the story of the **baptism of Jesus**. Christ in his flesh breaks down the walls between Divinity and Humanity.

I am talking with three young adults right now who are trying to muster the courage to come to worship and want to be baptized. Christ is still breaking down the walls between us! This is the Day!

Events this past week remind us how fragile life is. I wish I could give you a great sermon that would make sense of what happened in Colorado.

I did hear a mental health worker who helped people deal with Columbine say some things in a radio interview that come right out of today's Gospel:

Dealing with this is a marathon because our grief is going to come in waves, emotionally. One of the things after Columbine that was really helpful to people was a lot of restaurants in the community donated food. There were places they could go, they could eat and be with friends and just have some basic comfort.<sup>1</sup>

In our Gospel Scripture today, crowds of people were hungry and hurting.

They wanted to come together, to be where Jesus was. He fed them. Then he tried to get away. The boat with Jesus and his disciples was blown off course. They couldn't get to a place where they could rest for a while.

So Jesus goes ashore where the people are. The sick and injured come to him with their faith and in all their weakness and vulnerability.

Jesus realizes they need to be healed – and that they to be seen and acknowledged. In that day, sickness or disability was a sentence of separation. Religious people would not let the infirm worship in the temple.

Jesus does not let even the religious law stop him—he heals on the Sabbath. Jesus is healing more than bodily illness. He is healing division and exclusion.

Every line of this Gospel passage lives out ***This is the day***. Jesus gathers crowds who are like sheep without a shepherd.

***This is the day***

Jesus brings together a new community. ***This is the day***.

The African Children's Choir held a time of prayer and devotions before their concert here a week ago. They sang *This is the day* and added verses:

These are our friends... that the Lord has made;  
we will rejoice and be glad with them.

These are our uncles that the Lord has made...  
These are our aunties that the Lord has made...

He wrote this song, but Les Garrett doesn't take much of it. The words come directly from Psalm 118. The tune is a folk song from Fiji. Says Rev. Garrett, "I have little musical ability and don't play a musical instrument. So I can only assume this song is a gift from God."

I am preaching for conversion here: Let this song reframe your life. ***This is the day***. Instead of focusing on what is not right, or the frailties of life, see life viewpoint of knowing that good has already won.

Good has won you, and won the whole world. We can sing authentically:

It is not only a children's song. ***This is the day...***

***This is the day*** telescopes time. Salvation did not happen a long time ago. Salvation is not a long time in the future: ***This is the day***. ***This is the day*** breaks down barriers. We are a part of God's "Eternal Now." ***This is the day***. We can rejoice with praise and rejoice by serving others. ***This is the day***. Good has already won.

**Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate.**

**Light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death...  
[Gentleness is stronger than forcefulness. Hope is stronger than despair.]**

**Victory is ours ... through him who loves us. *This is the day.***

## **EPISTLE EPHESIANS 2:14-22**

### *Inclusive Language Translation*

For Christ is our peace, who made both groups into one [both Jews and Foreigners]

and broke down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart.

<sup>15</sup>In his own flesh, Christ abolished the Law, with its commands and ordinances,

in order to make the two into one new person,

thus establishing order to make the two into one new person,

thus establishing peace <sup>16</sup>and reconciling us all to God in one body through the cross,

which put to death the enmity between us.

<sup>17</sup>Christ came and “announced the Good News of peace to you who were far away,

and to those who were near”;

<sup>18</sup>for through Christ, we all have access to one Spirit to our God.

<sup>19</sup>This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer.

No, you are included in God’s holy people and are members of the household of God,

<sup>20</sup>which is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus as the capstone.

<sup>21</sup>In Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in our God;

<sup>22</sup>in Christ you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

## **GOSPEL MARK 6:30-34, 53-56**

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>He said to them,

**“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”**

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

<sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

<sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns

and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd;

**and he had compassion for them**

**because they were like sheep without a shepherd;**

and he began to teach them many things.

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.

<sup>54</sup>When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,

<sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

<sup>56</sup>**And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.**

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<sup>1</sup> **“Interview with** Tom Olbrich, the disaster response coordinator at the Jefferson Center for Mental Health in Denver, Colorado, NPR’s Weekend Edition, July 21, 2012

Prayers for newly elected Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, Louisiana, newly elected Bishop Gary Mueller, Arkansas, and newly elected Bishop Mike McKee, North Texas our new bishop, Scott Jones, the people of the town of Norden and other communities affected by fires.

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