The Power of We

CORE VALUES TEACHING
with Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr.
"Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day. The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:41-47

The Common English Bible

The book of Acts is the second volume of a two-part work that we attribute to Luke, the writer of the gospel of the same name. This book is concerned with helping us transition from an earthly ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the Church empowered by the Holy Spirit. The ascension of Christ did not signal a loss of POWER but a transfer of POWER from a single person in Jesus to a body of believers empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Christ upon this earth. It is clear to the writer of Acts that the Church can do nothing without the Holy Spirit. The work Christ leaves us to do -- “…making disciples of all nations…” -- is impossible without the POWER of the Holy Spirit.
In Acts 2:41-47, we see the early Christian Church in Jerusalem experience the gifts that the Holy Spirit brings as the people are being shaped into the body of Christ. And oh what miracles, what great ministry happens, what great community is formed, what great worship, what great generosity is displayed, what great love is experienced and what great deeds of justice are seen as the people allow the POWER of the Holy Spirit to flow through them.

I’ve seen it, I’ve felt it, I’ve thought about in daydreams. It is a kind of Nirvana. Heaven on earth. A place where titles don’t matter, position doesn’t matter, skin color doesn’t matter, where someone was born doesn’t matter, what one has or doesn’t have materially doesn’t matter. It is a community that embodies what we see in this scripture. The Acts passage paints a picture of a people drawn together by the same ideas, (the apostles’ teachings), by common observances (sharing in the Lord’s meal), by spiritual practices (prayers, worship) and by a common allegiance to a common Leader (the Lord Jesus Christ). The question for us to ponder is: By what POWER did this happen? Especially, given the diverse make-up of this early church and the propensity we have to be somewhat disagreeable with each other. The picture of this early church is so compelling that even today, after over 2,000 years, we are still drawn to it as the picture of a vital and dynamic church, as a faithful and fruitful community of believers. There was no mistaking this early Christian community for any other community in that day and time. Their identity was solid. They were clear about who they were and what their values were. It is difficult to give allegiance to a community that has lost its identity or is in search of one.

One must revisit the beginning of Acts chapter 2 when the followers of Jesus were merely holding on and then something happened that can only be explained by the author Luke:

“Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”

A group that was somewhat divided even about waiting so long for this promise of Jesus now begins to speak as one, “…declaring the mighty works of God…” in a way that others even outside of their community could understand. So again the question comes. Where did this POWER come from? It is clear to me that Luke tells us that the Spirit is actively working out God’s plan in the minds and hearts of the people rather than the people trying to work on what they think God wants. The
emphasis here is on the POWER that we receive from our relationship with God that fuels ministry. Theologian Jason Vickers, writes in his book *Minding the Good Ground*:

“Prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the earliest followers of Jesus were limited to the work of tarrying together in prayer and remembering the resurrection among themselves... Yet, when the Spirit comes at Pentecost, the Spirit empowers and embodies the earliest followers of Jesus to repent, to baptize and to catechize new converts, to share their resources with one another, and to bear witness to Jesus with power and effectiveness across the face of the earth. Moreover, through the ongoing presence and work of the Holy Spirit, the church continued faithfully to worship the Holy Trinity and courageously to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus even as she struggled to overcome her many failings and sins and to be courageous in the face of martyrdom.”

The signs and wonders we see in Acts 2:41-47 are the fruits of people being emerged in the Spirit. We need to resist the temptation to create the same results through our own genius and strength. God is already blessing. The Spirit is already at work in our local communities. The Spirit is already at work in our hearts. The Spirit is already speaking of the wonderful works of God.

Let's yield to the POWER that is working on us to transform us into the disciples, the workers and the people that Jesus envisioned us to be even as He went to the cross. Do we not see ourselves being shaped into His image? The Holy Spirit moves through us and in some instances in spite of us. Being filled with the Spirit creates an experience of being transported outside of your own strength, outside of your own ability, outside of your own reach and outside of your own intellect to create what God wants to create. You see my friends, when the church only seeks to accomplish what we believe we can do, we have a religion devoid of God and one in which we take center stage. What we experience is a powerless entity that is posing as the Church. We flex our ecclesiastical muscles like a Samson that has lost his hair and discover we look the same but have no power.

The Church was born as a result of Pentecost not to carry out our desires but to usher in the will of God. Therefore in light of our Pentecostal birth I borrow this definition from Jason Vickers.

“From its inception, the church has been and is a charismatic community whose life depends entirely on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through whom and by whom the church does everything that she does, including proclaiming the good
news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; assisting persons in repentance for sin; catechizing and baptizing new converts; praying and worshipping together; freely sharing resources within and without the community; and breaking bread together.”

I can’t help but believe that what we are truly in need of is a Pentecost experience. One that signals to us that God is present and directing our actions. We so often affirm, “…The Church is of God…” if this is so, are we willing to trust God with God’s Church? Are you willing to trust God with your life and lifestyle?

**Take 5:**
**Take five minutes to discuss the questions before you**

1. Where did the POWER come from that enabled this community to become the first church? What is your source of POWER? What is the source of POWER in your church?

2. What are the values that formed our ancestors in the early church?

3. How are these identifying marks still relevant and present for us today?
LOVE:
THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

“He replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37-39
Common English Bible

John Wesley writes in his sermon The One Thing Needful,

“Now, that the recovery of the image of God, of this glorious liberty, of this perfect soundness, is the one thing needful upon earth, appears first from hence, that the enjoyment of them was the one end alone, even to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. But love is the very image of God: it is the brightness of God’s glory. Therefore, the renewal of our nature in this love being not only the one end of our creation and our redemption, but likewise of all the providences of God over us, and all the operations of the Holy Spirit in us, must be, as the eternal wisdom of God hath declared, the one thing needful.”

John Wesley believed that we needed to recover the image of God as our most pressing need. The key to recovering this image of God that we were created to display is to walk in love. Jesus calls us to love God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. However, loving ourselves is a tricky proposition. The world in which we live continues to send us signals each and every day that are intended to make us doubt whether or not we are loveable. Listen to the messages we receive:

- You’re overweight.
- You’re from the wrong side of town.
- You’re too short.
- You’re the wrong color.
- You’re a woman.
- You’re too tall.
The first epistle of John tells us “We love because Christ first loved us.” If God loves us do we dare to love ourselves? The only way that humanity can once again walk as we walked prior to Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden is to come to a place where we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to accept how much God loves us. This falling in love with God allows us to love ourselves and our neighbors and frees us to walk in the image and likeness of God. It is the vehicle by which we engage in honest and fruitful communication with the God of our salvation. It becomes the bridge by which we build community with one another and therefore begin to usher in the reign of God within our lives, our churches, our communities and our world.

They shall know that we are Christians by our love. The love of which Jesus speaks here is agape. It is a total giving of one's self to God and to love another with the same devotion that we love ourselves. This kind of love is not something with which we were born. This love is a gift that is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. This comes as we interact and are saturated with the presence and the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Jean Vanier in the book *Jesus, the Gift of Love* writes:

> “Jesus called his disciples to the impossible: 'Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; speak well of those who speak evil of you; pray for those who persecute you.'”


This task of loving friends and enemies is a tough assignment that Jesus still expects of us. It is difficult and demanding but is only possible through the surrender of oneself to the empowering presence of the One who came among us on Pentecost. The first and Greatest Commandment may be the most demanding of all. We might learn from Douglas V. Steere who writes in *Dimensions of Prayer*:

> “I belong to God. We do not project or generate grace. Nor do we initiate the redemptive order—process—which, when we let it, sweeps into its course our scarred lives, our prayers, and our concerns for others…the redemptive process is already going on. It springs out of the heart of the Creator of nature; it is a kind of second creation…the cross is the symbol of the costly caring of this second creation, of this redemptive love.”

In other words, our POWER to love God and to love others does not spring from us but comes to us as a result of us being born anew in Christ. This, my friend, is the
Holy Spirit at work within us transforming us into the image of God. It happened in the second chapter of Acts and it is happening each and every day that a person begins to surrender their life, their will and way into the hands of Christ. The old folks were fond of saying it this way: “Since Jesus came into my heart the people I once hated I now find myself loving!”

Love grows within us as we encounter the transforming POWER of the Holy Spirit. Works of Piety offer us opportunities to open ourselves to that POWER. Works of Piety include:

1. **Prayer**—communication with God on a consistent systematic basis. Jesus practiced praying to God as a regular discipline. John Wesley believed and taught that prayer was one of the most powerful means of grace.
2. **Reading the scripture**—as a daily regimen.
3. **Fasting**—giving up something that we enjoy in order to concentrate our energy and thoughts on God.
4. **Holy conversation**—talking with other Christian pilgrims that we may learn from them, be encouraged by them and corrected by them.
5. **Meditation**—listening and giving thoughtful consideration to the word of God or the action of God.

As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in practicing works of piety, our hearts become available to the converting POWER of the Holy Spirit. This is the only way we can recapture the image of God we were created to bear. It is you and me becoming more and more like Jesus.

“He replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind’. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’

Matthew 22:37-39
TAKE 5:
TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU

1. What prevents you from loving God with all your heart, mind and being?

2. What would be different about how you love yourself and your neighbors if you accepted the vast unconditional love God has for you?

3. Which works of piety do you need to increase in order to more fully experience the POWER of the Holy Spirit?
It is hard to be in love with God and withhold ourselves, our gifts, our prayers, our presence and yes, all that we have from God. It springs forth in sacrificial generosity. Let me see if I can illustrate this by relating a personal experience. As I sat in a lobby area in the Avenida Hotel in Maputo, Mozambique in Africa in November 2005, my mind ran back over my life and I recalled the countless number of times God has been good to me. I remembered a childhood illness that caused me to have hallucinations and God’s miraculous deliverance. The time we were without food and money and the Holy Spirit sent my mother walking and along a well-worn path where she found a twenty dollar bill. This occurred in either 1961 or 1962 when I was about 11-12 years old.

I was always blessed with the ability to understand and perform well in school and I realize today it was by God’s grace. I was the first in my family to receive a college degree. I was blessed with a mother that led me to Christ, relatives and family friends who pushed me to be my best. I remember teachers who gave me their time, attention, tutoring and shared their knowledge with me. Of course God gave me a loving and devoted wife and children who bless me every day. Even when we don’t know it or when we are in situations of pain and uncertainty—God blesses us even if we don’t recognize it as such.

So how should I respond to these and so many blessings? I hear the Psalmist reply, “I will bless the Lord at all times. God’s praises shall continually be in my mouth. My soul will make his boast in the Lord.” Yes I can tell God how thankful I am with my lips but my actions speak louder than my words. Maybe a verse from one of our hymns is appropriate here. “What shall I render to God for all God’s blessings?”
believe the Lord is calling me to respond by imitating the Christ that so freely gave to me by freely giving of myself in a liberating generous ways, in words and deeds.

I often wonder what would happen if everyone reflected on how good God has been to us. God has been so extravagant in the outpouring of generosity and love upon us. Maybe this thoughtful reflection will cause us to truly be imitators of God's saving Grace and redeeming justice.

Maybe we would tell our stories of God's redemption of our lives. Maybe we would see those children in our communities who need to experience us loving them, teaching them and giving to them like Jesus. Maybe we would visit the sick, feed the hungry, and care for abused women and children. Maybe we would truly open the doors of our churches other than on Sunday mornings. Maybe we would be willing to relocate our church where the people are. Maybe we'd consider demonstrating our gratitude by sacrificially giving the same way Jesus sacrificially gave His life for us.

When the POWER is working within us we willingly surrender all to God's calling in our lives and freely and without reservation give of our financial resources, our gifts and our time and all that God has given to us. We do this with glad and grateful hearts because we know ourselves to be debtors to the Christ that loves us.

There are always those who have come to know the joy of surrendering themselves to God in complete abandonment. They are the ones who with heart and mind have come to acknowledge that “All things come of thee O, Lord and of thine own have we given thee?” They know, yes we know that we are loved by The God of infinite grace and generosity. There is nothing materially, emotionally, socially, politically or physically that we claim or employ or enjoy as our own in our lives that does not find its genesis in God.

Hear Matthew again: “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.” So now in response and in gratitude for the already expressed generosity of God we give generously without reservation.

I sat and listened to a retired general from the United States Army I know who heads up the Leadership Institute for the U.S. Roman Catholic Church. He was facilitating a learning experience for our United Methodist Council of Bishops to help us grow in our ability to lead our church. He spoke to us about how we need to help our pastors and laity grow as leaders by providing opportunities to grow fully into the persons God has created them to be. He was obviously passionate about us being the leaders for the Church that God is calling us to be. One of the bish-
ops stood up and asked him about his passion around this. His reply was: “I am so passionate about this because someone was so passionately in love with me that he went to a cross and died for me.” He then broke down into tears. What impressed me the most was not so much what he said-- which was great--but his willingness to proclaim his love and devotion to Christ. With tears in his eyes and a catch in his throat he said, “I owe everything I have become to Christ and His Church.”

Our giving, our generosity should never be determined by a budget, by whether or not we like a program, by whether or not we like the preacher, or by whether or not we get our way on an issue but our generosity comes because we know, “without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.” We should not wait for the right moment to take a step towards generosity. The temperature of circumstance must not be at just the right degree, or if all is well before we step forward. As author Lynn A. Miller states: “Stewardship is the act of organizing your life so that God can spend you.”

When we allow the POWER to flow unleashed in and through us we naturally and gladly make generous sacrifices and give all that God demands of us not for show, but for Christ.

The newly converted Christians of Acts 2 “…shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity.”

Those with no personal Pentecost experience might wonder what motivated these persons to do this. It was the POWER they encountered in the Upper Room at the beginning of Acts 2. The Holy Spirit was transforming them into the generous image and likeness of Christ.
Take 5:
Take five minutes to discuss the questions before you

1. Who has most shaped your understanding of generosity?

2. What are you so indebted to Christ for that you are willing to passionately and sacrificially give of yourself?

3. How might you expand your gratitude so that giving of your self and your life would become intuitive and without reservation?
It is a dangerous thing to fall in love with Christ. This love pushes us to treat our enemies well and to share what we have in sacrificially generous ways. That POWER pushes us to engage the world. As a disciple of Jesus, when I find a world that is not in harmony with the Christ I am experiencing, I’m compelled to move in such a way that “…God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.” That, my friends, is justice!

It is the POWER seeking always to do the right thing, even if it isn’t the easy thing. And this POWER is not oppressive, haughty or arrogant, but humble. The book of Acts seeks to tell us how the early disciples begin to live out their experience with Christ after Jesus’ ascension. Our faith in Christ must be lived out in community and it is here that we encounter the hurts, pains, disappointments and trials that life presents. It is here that we discover that our newfound faith does not insulate us from the misfortunes of this world. It is not long after the coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter and John encounter a crippled man at the beautiful gate begging for alms—a handout. It is not long before the first church in Jerusalem has to deal with poor widows and their children living among them. It is as if the Holy Spirit is trying to let the early Christian know that salvation does not release us from caring for the least, the lost and the lonely. No, in fact the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to those we are called to serve, serve with and love.

An ancient Roman lawyer by the name of Marcus Tullious Cicero is quoted as saying “The foundation of justice is a good faith.” Marcus Cicero never defined what he meant by faith so I’m left to place words in his mouth. It is my contention that
the Christ we follow left an amazing example of justice built on a foundation of a “good faith.” Justice is righteousness and righteousness as understood theologically has nothing to do with moral living, but involves living in right relationship with someone. Being rightly related to God, rightly related to others and rightly related to ourselves. Are you in right relationship?

The question is paramount and one that we have to struggle with painfully. It is the question that South Africa encountered after the fall of Apartheid. I offer you this account from Peter Story. He said that instead of seeking revenge--the classical justice of an eye for an eye--the people of South Africa decided to establish what they named as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission decided that rather than punish persons for their crimes, they would be required to tell the truth about what they did before the family of the ones they had injured, killed or violated. Here is one such story:

A south Afrikaner police officer is called to the witness stand to tell of his murder of a young Black man. He tells the story including all the details of the heinous nature of the death he inflicted on this young man. The young man’s mother is sitting in the courtroom listening to this account. When the police officer finishes his testimony the judge turns to the mother to respond. She approaches the witness stand and addresses the police officer with these words. ‘Since you have taken my son from me now I am motherless. In order to compensate me for this loss you must now become my son.’ The police officer breaks down and begins to cry. The mother enters the witness booth and sits in the chair with the officer and cradles him in her arms; consoling him.

My friends I ask you, is this not the type of justice Jesus taught us? Is it tilted in the favor of goodness? Is it humble? Is it life-affirming and life-giving? Is it not the very picture of what loving our enemy might look like?

Are we in love with and grateful enough to Jesus that we would love and act on behalf of people whom Jesus died for and continues to love? I do not sell this softly. It is a hard journey because all the forces that stand to gain from our failure to live this out are arrayed to discourage us from being instruments of justice. But it is what The Lord requires.

The United Methodists are people caught between what might appear to be polar opposites: personal piety on the one hand and social holiness on the other. Sometimes we spend so much time debating which is paramount and often forget that our founding father, John Wesley did not see these two as competing factions but as complimentary parts. In order to experience true wholeness and salvation, we must engage both in our lives.
“United Methodists insist that faith and good works belong together. What we believe must be confirmed by what we do. Personal salvation must be expressed in ministry and mission in the world. We believe that Christian doctrine and Christian ethics are inseparable, that faith should inspire service. The integration of personal piety and social holiness has been a hallmark of our tradition.”

We affirm the biblical precept that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17).

This follows in line with Jesus’ declaration very early in His ministry as he went to the synagogue in Nazareth:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

Luke 4:18
New American Bible Revised Edition

I have chosen to call this The great requirement because I--like so many of us--am so often tempted to ignore Jesus’ call to justice to care for the oppressed, to lift the down trodden, to speak for those who can not speak for themselves, to care for those without power or influence and to walk for those who can not walk. It is amazing to me that many of us from a position of privilege often seek to justify our privilege and never hear the voice of Christ calling us to not only care but also to act to bring about justice.

**TAKE 5:**
TAKING FIVE MINUTES TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU

1. As you read this Great Requirement, what do you feel God is calling you to differently?

2. If the annual conference were living out this value of justice, what would be different in our communities, in our regions, in our state, in our nation and around the world?
Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20
New American Bible Revised Edition

The love we experience from Christ and the community of believers compels us to share what we have experienced with others outside this community and to continue on this journey toward perfection. If we adopted the “each one reach and teach one” mentality, the amount of transformed lives and communities in would increase dramatically.

The comedian Flip Wilson starred in his own variety show back in the day. One of my favorite segments he did was a parody of the Church. Flip referred to it as, “The Church of What’s Happening Now.” In one skit a television reporter was interviewing Flip. The reporter asked Flip, “What church are you a member of?” Flip responded, “I’m a member of the Jehovah’s Bystanders” The reporter with a puzzled look on her face retorted, “A Jehovah’s Bystander? What is that?” Flip responded, “Well, you see they asked me to be a Jehovah’s Witness but I didn’t want to get that involved so I became a Jehovah’s Bystander.” Upon hearing this, the audience exploded into laughter. And I joined them! While we may laugh at the humor and parody of the Church by Flip Wilson, when we do not live into the fine print of our membership vows we can easily become United Methodists Bystanders.

Our United Methodist membership vows have at their core a call to discipleship. Listen to what you have vowed: “I promise to uphold the church through my prayers, my presence, my gifts, my service and my witness.” My dear, dear leaders.
When will we as a collective body remember to help people to grow in discipleship not as members of an isolated church with a little “c,” but as apprentices of Jesus Christ empowered to create Church with a capital “C?” We are commissioned to create a communicable, contagious community that demonstrates our desire for all to hear Christ’s invitational message to come and experience what community with God can be like. It is an invitation to become involved in a personal and global transformative process that continues to unfold afresh and anew each and every day.

Disciples are scholars, learners, pupils and adherents and each name connotes a process: that we are on our way but we haven’t arrived yet. Think about it. We who give the invitation of discipleship on behalf of the Christ continue to receive the invitation ourselves. We are on a continual journey toward discipleship. As we move along the journey we continue to invite others to join us on the journey. Regardless of where we or others are on the journey, God meets us there. This is grace. John Wesley taught us that grace is seen in three stages.

- **prevenient grace**—God drawing us toward a loving relationship when we were unaware of God.
- **justifying grace**—Forgiveness of all past transgression.
- **sanctifying grace**—The ongoing process of cleansing of our lives.

Sanctification is where those who have already surrendered their lives to Christ can get lazy. It is here that we in the church often drop the ball and refuse sometimes to go any further with the discipling process. Our willingness to be cleansed through the Word will greatly influence the Church’s ability to draw new people to our community of Christ. Our participation with the power of sanctifying grace is necessary to keep us on the path as disciples.

Jesus recognized that an integral part of disciple making is teaching through word and deed. We do not come into this relationship already knowing what to do and how to act. We must be taught. We must learn by doing and understand that it is a never-ending process. And once we have been commissioned, this takes on extra responsibility.

In the great commissioning text, it is obvious that Jesus’ authority to call people into a loving relationship with God was transmitted to His followers. Allow me to paraphrase: “By the authority invested in me, Go!” You have at your fingertips all the POWER of heaven and earth to go. I commission you. So, Go! Disciples, people of the church, we were never given this POWER to remain inside the walls of our buildings, our communities, our institutions or our structures. Whatever hinders us from going out into the world is not of Jesus. Hear it again: go! Now, while you are
on the move, make disciples. In the lead scripture for these core values we read: “And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” -Acts 2:47b, New American Bible Revised Edition

It is as we go, the Jesus in us will add to our numbers. The action of disciple making follows the action of becoming disciples. At its core is practicing what Jesus taught. When we allow the Jesus in us to lead our action, our conversations and our plans the results will be more disciples added to the community of believers. The contagious community will spread without as much effort as we so often think.

**TAKE 5:**
**TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU**

1. What do you need to do to become a more active apprentice of Jesus?

2. How can your church better enable people to experience grace – prevenient, justifying and sanctifying?

3. How can the POWER of apprenticeship transform lives in your church and community?
The scriptural foundation for the value of apprenticeship is also the mission of the church: The scriptural foundation for the value of apprenticeship is Matthew 28:18-20, which is known as the great commission. Therefore, *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* is correct in affirming that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs. (¶120). A church that values apprenticeship drives opportunities for its disciples to experience spiritual growth and development through thought and deed. Those disciples will discover a deepening of their love relationship with Jesus Christ that will issue forth in acts of generosity and movements of justice.

These core values of love, generosity, justice and apprenticeship move the 1,083 churches closer to becoming the United Methodist Church in Mississippi that moves with POWER; transforming all that is the likeness of Christ. A place where the great commandment of love; the great sacrifice of generosity; the great requirement of justice and the great commission of apprenticeship are lived out as easily as we breathe the air that God so freely gives to us. These powerful four values were alive in the early church.

“Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day. The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.”

*Acts 2:41-47*
Are these values alive in your church? If not, are you prepared to build these?

“Dear Lord, let it be!”

**TAKE 5:**
TAKING FIVE MINUTES TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU

**Our Church in Your Location**
- How is the POWER moving in your congregation and what are your next steps to join God’s mission in the world?

**Our Church in the Mississippi Annual Conference**
- How do we better together fulfill Christ’s expectation that we GO and make disciples (the mission of the church)?
- How might systems within our churches, our districts and our conference better reflect these four values so that the POWER of WE is strengthened and fruit brought forth?

**How is the POWER moving in your congregation and what are your next steps to join God’s mission in the world?**