

[BLANK] [PRAYER] I am so grateful to be speaking to you today. I am humbled by the amazing service that members of this church provide in mission to God's world. [UHOUSE] With members of other United Methodist Churches, in just a few days this week, we prepared Unity House for a new mission: serving young adults and their families who need transitional housing and support. I am so glad to see Unity House serving not just refugee families from around the world, as it has for fifteen years, but, now, our own city's families, too. We are all together in God's family, Amen? [BLANK]

And I thank all of you who we are being honored today for your service to our Sunday school program. We have gone from no Sunday school a year ago to many children finding the love of God through learning, children who bring their lessons home to share with their parents in God bags. We are not just in God's family, but preparing new generations for faith in God's family.

In such a busy church, I am still looking for the mythical "day off" lately, but I do manage to sneak in a little "down time." Sometimes that means catching a discount matinee movie. It's cheap, it's quiet, and, yes, popcorn is not always such a bad lunch! My latest matinee film was "The Incredibles 2." [MOVIE] It's about a family of superheroes fighting super villains. I won't let out any spoilers here, but the main villain shares a very interesting idea. The villain says that people rely too much on superheroes, because, after all, in a world where most people choose convenience over values, waiting for a superhero to save you is very convenient. [BLANK]

I would guess that most of us don't think of liking convenience as something evil. But the problems that tear us down often start when we choose a convenient solution over the right solution; the easy way out instead of the right way in. Convenience helps us not to think about the consequences of our decisions, because our decisions have been made already, by someone else.

It's convenient for us not to think about a lot of things. [PROTEST] We were ready to send a mission team to Nicaragua next month, but then we had to cancel the trip, because it turned out that there were violent protests in that nation, which might have put our team in danger. Why didn't we hear about these protests earlier? Because it's more convenient for us not to hear about the conflicts behind them. Someone else made a decision for us to turn our attention elsewhere. It wasn't convenient for us to think about Nicaragua, until we had to.

[NAZIS] In the 1930s, it wasn't convenient for Americans to think about how Nazis were taking over Germany, even as many Germans found that it was not convenient to think about how the Nazis were destroying the morals of their nation, turning them into a people who loved to hate and kill other people. It wasn't convenient to think about the Nazis, until we all had to. [D-DAY] And now, it's not convenient to think of the millions of people who died to save the world from fascism. Did we hear anything this month about the anniversary of the D-Day invasion? Hardly. Inconvenient. [BLANK]

And in our own time, it's not convenient to be a United Methodist Christian. If you want convenient Christianity, you can find it online, on the radio, in book stores, and in

any number of megachurches. They'll make you feel good about how someone else has made all of your decisions about who God is, and how you should follow God. For many people, convenient faith, faith that doesn't make us ask the hard questions about how we live our own lives, is an easy way out of a relationship with God, instead of the right way into a relationship with God that will save not just us, but God's world, too.

Convenient Christianity is not really Christianity, because God's real love, God's saving love, God's healing love, is never about convenience. The cross is not about convenience. Christian faith is costly. Like our mission teams for Unity House and Nicaragua, like our Sunday school teachers, like so many of you who serve God in this church, Christian faith asks things of us. And, often, as modern people conditioned for convenience, Christian faith can disappoint us, because it doesn't give us what we want, when we want it, where we want it, how we want it. Christian faith is not a way out of making decisions. Christian faith is a way in to the one decision that can save our lives: to love God, and others, and even ourselves, as God already loves us.

We can see in today's reading from Mark's gospel that faith in the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ might not be convenient, but it is more powerful than we can imagine. In the evening of a long day, after teaching people from a boat on a lake, Jesus asks his disciples to get in the boat with him, to go to the other side of this huge lake, to a place where mostly foreigners lived.

It would have been convenient for Jesus to teach people some wisdom by the lake, and then send them home, feeling good about themselves. But following Jesus is not just about wisdom. Following Jesus is not just about feeling good. Following Jesus isn't the easy way out of our obligations to God. Following Jesus is about the right way in to a saving relationship with God. And so, Jesus challenged his disciples to get in the boat, a boat that they knew would go into a dangerous night journey across the lake, into the dangers of a foreign land.

Mark's gospel adds a very short and important detail that the other gospels don't tell us about this journey. Mark tells us, "Other boats were with him." You see, the people who heard Jesus teach them, the people who saw and experienced his healing, the people who had given up on an easy way out of their problems, who wanted to find that right way into a life lived with God, these people, who weren't even in the boat with Jesus, made the decision to get in their own boats, at great inconvenience, to follow Jesus, into the night, into the storms they knew were coming, to a foreign land, where they hoped that God would save them from death and destruction.

"Other boats were with him." The disciples of Jesus on the boat with him, in the middle of the storm, in a boat that was filling with water, were freaking out, because Jesus was not acting like a convenient superhero. Jesus was asleep! Didn't he care? Of course Jesus cared. But Jesus didn't just care about disciples who wanted a convenient God, a God who would save them when they wanted to be saved, where they wanted to be saved, how they wanted to be saved. Jesus wanted disciples who could learn to trust that the salvation of Jesus is not just for their boat, but for all of God's boats, through God's grace, and

God's grace alone.

So Jesus awoke, and said, "Peace! Be still!" And the winds and the storms disappeared immediately. Perhaps the storm was mostly in the minds of the disciples, who were afraid of this inconvenient way to find a saving relationship with Jesus. Losing our convenience can make us think some strange things, after all. Can't it? It can make us forget that, as much as we want to have Jesus save us when we see our boat fill with fear, and despair, and hopelessness, that other boats are with him. We are not the only ones who need salvation. And others are willing to give up far more, hoping for far less, to follow Jesus, to the hope of salvation from God. And, who knows: Those other boats may even have future disciples of Jesus, who will help God save us, and the world.

[REFUGEE BOAT] Other boats are with him, my dear family, in Christ. Other boats seek out Jesus from afar, and need to be drawn near to the God who loves us so much, that he died for us, and wants to save the world from death. There are more than 240 million people, all across our planet, displaced from their homes, who suffer in part because too many people have found a convenient Christianity to be more to their liking. As in the past, the inconvenient troubles that come from our neglect of a living Christian faith will be upon all of us, soon enough. And they won't be just troubles in our heads.

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We are good stewards in this church of many of these boats, from around the world, and right here, in Meriden. I rejoice for all that we have done to remember other boats. My hope, and my prayer, is that, one day, we will look around us in these pews, and see just one boat, a boat that includes everyone from all of God's boats, ready to show this city, and the whole world, that an inconvenient faith is the only faith worth living. Amen.