

increasing order of frequency in our scriptures; the concept from verse 23 being mentioned only once in our scripture while the concept in verse 4 is a major theme in our Bible. Theologian, speaker and author, Austen Hartke, believes the frequency of a Biblical concept determines its importance to our faith and community. Do you agree? What other criteria would you use to determine the significance of a Biblical concept? Meditate on these ideas and write your response here.

### Thursday, October 3

Read or at least scan Genesis 19:1-29; Deuteronomy 23:17-18; I Corinthians 6:9, I Timothy 1:10; Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13 and Romans 1:26-27. These are typically the seven passages that deal with the issue of same-gender sexual behavior or relationships. A concept that is mentioned seven times in the Bible may not automatically be considered a major theme of our scriptures. What do you think? Does the concept itself warrant more emphasis? Why or why not? What do you consider to be the absolute and necessary Biblical concepts for our lives as Christians? Ponder these scriptures, ponder these questions and write your thoughts here.

### Friday, October 4

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Reread slowly and deliberately verses 20 and 21. These two verses are a doxology that Paul offers as pure praise of our loving Creator. It begins with the words, "Now to him who by the power at work within us." As we've considered the inclusiveness of our church community, we need to appreciate that God is at work within us to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." If God is about reconciling the world to himself, then what is it that we are being empowered to do? Pray and write your thoughts here.

## Message Notes – September 29, 2024

### *The Bible as a Story of Inclusion\**

- I. Over many years, the issue of \_\_\_\_\_ vs. \_\_\_\_\_ has always been present.
  - A. Today, conversations about inclusion revolve around \_\_\_\_\_ persons and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - B. Dr. George Hunter III said, "In every \_\_\_\_\_ and in every \_\_\_\_\_, the very definition of a \_\_\_\_\_, in part, involves who is included and who is excluded."
- II. The challenge our church is to discern and discover the criteria by which we live our lives and determines whether or not we are an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ community.
  - A. That conversation – that process of discovery – begins with our \_\_\_\_\_.
  - B. The classic United Methodist process of theological \_\_\_\_\_.
    1. The four elements of the quadrilateral – \_\_\_\_\_, tradition, experience and \_\_\_\_\_ – inform our faith as Christian and specifically as United Methodists.
    2. Scripture is \_\_\_\_\_ to our faith.
  - C. There are portions of the Bible that bear more \_\_\_\_\_ than other parts.
- III. So how do we determine which parts of our beloved Bible are most \_\_\_\_\_ to us?
  - A. At a basic level, the \_\_\_\_\_ with which an issue is mentioned determines its importance.
  - B. Austen Hartke offers three examples as an illustration of understanding and \_\_\_\_\_ scripture.

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\*John 10:7-16 and Ephesians 3:14-21

1. Leviticus 19:23 is an example of a subject in the Bible that only occurs \_\_\_\_\_.
  2. Leviticus 19:9 is definitely a pattern of scripture; it's sort of a \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ theme.
  3. Leviticus 19:4 is definitely a theme \_\_\_\_\_ our scripture and it is very important! It's in the Ten Commandments!
- C. Austen Hartke selected these three examples of scripture because it is also in Leviticus that you will find two references about \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ sexual behavior along with five other scriptures.

IV. Friends, we have the choice of \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves in terms of inclusion or exclusion.

- A. I am making my decision based on scripture and the \_\_\_\_\_ times that same-gender sexual behavior is mentioned is far outweighed by the number of times that God's people are encouraged to be \_\_\_\_\_.
  - B. The gold standard for inclusion in our scriptures is \_\_\_\_\_ himself, who constantly accepted people who legitimately or not, were considered \_\_\_\_\_.
1. Jesus has made it clear that \_\_\_\_ are not the ones who get to decide whether we want those other sheep in our flock!
  2. It appears that the only criterion for these other sheep being accepted into Jesus' flock is that they will \_\_\_\_\_ to his voice.
  3. So, when it comes to the issue of inclusion and understanding the Bible as a continuing story of inclusion, the question I have to ask is, "Are we \_\_\_\_\_?"

## ***Daily Devotional Guide***

The following is a daily devotional and study guide meant to enhance your understanding of the message and grow as a Christian.

It is offered for your personal reflection or to share with others.

## **Monday, September 30**

The question for us to discuss this week involves how we define our church in terms of inclusion. Have you ever been excluded from a club, a civic organization, a church or even a group of friends? How did that feel? For what reason were you excluded? Perhaps you have been involved in a group that excluded others for some reason. What was that experience like for you?

How would you define our church or another church from your past? Do you immediately think of the member of the church as insiders? Does the church exclude people by making it difficult to join? Is the church better defined by who it includes or by who it excludes? Meditate on these ideas and write your thoughts here.

## **Tuesday, October 1**

Dr. George Hunter III said, "The very definition of a culture, in part, involves who is included and who is excluded." Author, Brian McLaren writes about the "rhetoric of exclusion." McLaren offers an alternative to that rhetoric by being "Missional Christians" who search for how God is expressing love in the world and join with God and other Christ-followers in inviting others to join in the mission of sharing in God's love for others – including "outsiders." Rather than feeling blessed to be an insider, we should be constantly expanding our mission to include others, especially when it involves doing the kingdom work of God! What do you think? Write your thoughts here.

## **Wednesday, October 2**

Read from Leviticus 19, verses 23, 9 and 4. If you have time, read around these verses to explore the incredible amount of rules and guidelines that are mentioned in the book of Leviticus. Which ones seem important to you and which ones lack relevancy in today's world? Verse 23, 9 and 4 from Leviticus 19 are in