

March 15, 2020

The Israelites in the Wilderness

Numbers 21:4-9

In the early hours of March 3, three United Methodist churches “were heavily damaged by tornadoes that swept parts of Tennessee,” tornadoes that took over two dozen lives and injured 150 more. That same day, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) approved “a \$10,000 sustainability grant” for the Tennessee Annual Conference. Bishop William T. McAlilly said, “This is a moment when the church is the church, and we will do the right thing, whatever we can. There will be people from all over the country and the world who will respond to our people here, all because we’re United Methodists and we’re connected and that’s what we do. . . . People have no idea what the power of the connection is until you have a disaster like this. Where would we be without it?”¹

One hundred percent of the monies given to UMCOR through the United States Disaster Response Advance go to serve those affected by disaster, such as the tornadoes in Tennessee.² UMCOR Sunday, traditionally the fourth Sunday of Lent, recognizes the “small but impactful UMCOR staff” and supports the administrative costs of UMCOR. This year, UMCOR Sunday is March 22, 2020.³

The biblical text for this lesson focuses on the Israelites’ response to God calling out their self-centeredness. The student book author writes, “[The story] reminds us to respond in gratitude for God’s forgiveness toward us.”⁴ We do nothing to earn God’s love and grace. In fact, we cannot do anything to deserve God’s love and grace. God forgives because God loves. Our God is merciful. Our response to God’s overwhelming mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness must include gratitude.

There are many ways to express our gratitude to God, including loving and serving our neighbors in need. We can express our gratitude to God by generously giving to charitable organizations that serve those in need, especially UMCOR. No other charitable organization can give 100 percent of donations to the need intended by the giver. UMCOR does that because United Methodist churches financially provide for administrative costs through special offerings such as UMCOR Sunday.

1. How has your congregation participated with and supported UMCOR?
2. Why is gratitude an appropriate response for God’s forgiveness?
3. How is loving and serving neighbors in need an expression of gratitude to God?

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¹From “Tennessee Tornadoes Take Lives, Damage Churches,” by Joey Butler, Linda Bloom, Vicki Brown, Sam, Hodges, and Jim Patterson, UM News (umnews.org/en/news/tennessee-tornadoes-take-lives-damage-churches).

²From UMCOR (<https://advance.umcor.org/p-620-umcor-us-disaster-response-and-recovery.aspx>).

³From “UMCOR Sunday,” United Methodist Church Giving (umcsgiving.org/ministry-articles/one-great-hour-of-sharing).

⁴From *Adult Bible Studies*, Spring 2020, by Randy Cross (Cokesbury, 2020); page 26.

