

A motto is a short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating the beliefs or ideals guiding an individual, family, or institution. One of the most famous mottos is the motto of the Boy Scouts – “Be Prepared.” Does anyone here know the motto of the state of Minnesota? “L'étoile du nord” which means “Star of the North.” One of my favorite mottos is spoken by Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back* – “Do or do not. There is no try.” Do any of you know the motto of the United Church of Christ? You might think it is “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” That would be a good guess but that’s really more of a slogan. The United Church of Christ chose it’s motto from our scripture this morning. John 17:21 “That they may all be one.”

This sentiment in Jesus’ prayer was a perfect call to unity for the newly formed denomination. In this denomination which values diversity of belief and opinion, the motto “that they may all be one” reminds us that though we may disagree at times, we are united by our love of God and our desire to follow Jesus. It is significant that this motto comes from a section of scripture in which Jesus is praying for his disciples and for us. The full sentence from which the motto was taken reads “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one.” But what was Jesus asking for exactly?

It is the night of the last supper and Jesus seems to know that he will soon be arrested and killed. Concerned for the disciples’ future without him, he prays to God. He says “While I was with them, I protected them in your name those whom you have given me... I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world.” The word protect is used three times in a span of 5 verses. Reading this, I get an image of a parent sending their child into the world beyond the reach of their protective arms. The world can be a scary place. For the early followers of Christ, the world was threatening. In many places during the first 300 years of the movement, followers of Jesus risked their lives by merely identifying as a follower of Jesus or speaking about their faith. Jesus knows that for the movement to survive, they will need to stick together.

The United Church of Christ's motto "that they may all be one" is not a call to uniformity or assimilation into one dominant way of thinking. But rather coming together in the midst of our differences and finding common ground to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. This is just as important now as it was 2000 years ago. Our society seems to be ever more divided and polarized. Political rhetoric is frequently aimed at demonizing one group of people in order to gain the support and votes of another group. I even read a story this week about a tow truck driver who after seeing a Bernie Sanders sticker on his client's vehicle, said that he "stood up for what he believed" by refusing to tow her and left her on the side of the road. Is there any hope for us?

Mother's day is actually a great day to be reminded of the power of coming together. Quite possibly the earliest precursor to the Mother's Day holiday in America took place in 1870. Abolitionist and suffragette Julia Ward Howe wrote the "Appeal to Womanhood throughout the World" which has more popularly become known as the "Mother's Day Proclamation." The proclamation was a call mothers to unite for world peace. I'd like to share that proclamation with you...

Again, in the sight of the Christian world, have the skill and power of two great nations exhausted themselves in mutual murder. Again have the sacred questions of international justice been committed to the fatal mediation of military weapons. In this day of progress, in this century of light, the ambition of rulers has been allowed to barter the dear interests of domestic life for the bloody exchanges of the battle field. Thus men have done. Thus men will do. But women need no longer be made a party to proceedings which fill the globe with grief and horror. Despite the assumptions of physical force, the mother has a sacred and commanding word to say to the sons who owe their life to her suffering. That word should now be heard, and answered to as never before.

Arise, then, Christian women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or of tears! Say firmly: We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We, women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country, to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the

bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says: Disarm, disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence vindicate possession. As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of council.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then solemnly take council with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, man as the brother of man, each bearing after his own kind the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women, without limit of nationality, may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient, and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace.

— Julia Ward Howe, 1870

This call upon mothers to come together in the face of violence and injustice continues today. This week in Chicago, a group of mothers who had lost children to gun violence came together asking for no more gun deaths in their city. In April alone, Chicago saw 311 shootings resulting in 36 deaths. These moms say they don't want flowers or candy for Mother's day. They want a weekend when no one loses their child to gun violence.

At the national level is the organization called "Moms Rising". Their website describes them as "a transformative on-the-ground and online multicultural organization of more than a million members and over a hundred aligned organizations working to increase family economic security, to end discrimination against women and mothers,

and to build a nation where both businesses and families can thrive.”¹ Moms Rising is fighting for equal pay for women, prison reform, paid sick time, immigration fairness, gun safety and more. They have come together across race, religion, and region to make a difference in the lives of parents and children.

If we as human beings of all religions, races, ages, genders, political affiliations... can come together to discover what unites us, work toward the eradication of violence in all its forms, then I believe that prayer that Jesus prayed for his disciples will have finally been fulfilled. For we will see God in each other, even in those with whom we hold deep disagreement. We will come to understand that we are all knit together with the same fabric and we are connected in deep ways that go beyond our imagining. In the words of Beverly Wildung Harrison, one time beloved teacher at Union Theological Seminary and native Minnesotan, “Our knowledge of God is in and through each other. Our knowledge of each other is in and through God. We act together and find our good in each other, and our power grows together, or we deny our relation and reproduce a violent world where no one experiences holy power.”²

I pray today as Jesus did, for the sake of the world’s children, for the sake of God’s love, may we all be one.

¹ <https://www.momsrising.org/page/moms/aboutmomsrising>

² Harrison, Beverly Wildung quoted in *Imaging the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource*. United Church Press. Cleveland, OH, 208