

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE: INCLUSIVE CHURCH, RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Ephesians 1:3-14
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶161: The Nurturing Community ¶162: The Social Community ¶163: The Economic Community ¶164: The Political Community ¶165: The World Community
OBJECTIVE:	Naming what an inclusive church looks like
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	pen, paper, index cards

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Good morning, everyone! I’m glad you’re here. Before we get into today’s lesson, let’s take a few minutes to check in with each other and with God.”

“On a scale of 1–5, how are you feeling today?

1 is ‘I’m struggling’

3 is ‘I’m doing okay’

5 is ‘I’m really good.’

You can just say your number or share a little more if you’d like.”

Pause for everyone to share.

Say: Now, let’s go around again and share one good thing from your week. It could be something big, like winning a game, or something small, like having a great snack or laughing with a friend.

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Have your own answers prepared!

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Pause for everyone to share.

Say: Can you recall a time that something good happened to you, but you didn't recognize it until later?

Pause for everyone to share.

Say: Thanks for sharing. Let's take a moment to pray.

Feel free to pray the prayer below or invite someone to pray.

Prayer: God, thank you for bringing us here today. Thank you for the good things in our week, and be with us in the hard things too. Open our hearts as we learn and share together. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Today, we are going to look at the letter to the Ephesians. The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul while he was in prison in Rome. Even though he was imprisoned, Paul kept encouraging the churches he had helped to start and grow. One of those churches was in Ephesus. Ephesus was a really important city for Paul's ministry- it was kind of a benchmark for all the work he did. Paul lived there for about three years. While in Ephesus, Paul wasn't just an apostle, but he was a pastor. He helped people figure out what it meant to follow Jesus. One of the hardest things was learning how to separate from the synagogue, where they had always worshipped, and creating a new community of worship centered on Jesus.

The Letter to the Ephesians has a special place among Paul's writings. Some scholars say it reads like a commentary on all of Paul's other letters. Others call it "the crown of Paulinism"- like the highest point of his teaching.

So, what's inside this letter to the Ephesians?

It's full of big themes about God's work in the church and the community of believers. It reminds us that it's through the gift of the Holy Spirit living among us that we can really see and feel how deep God's goodness, grace, and love are.

In a way, Ephesians is the fulfillment of Paul's teaching- it pulls together everything

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References:

Enduring Word Bible Commentary Ephesians Chapter 1." Enduring Word, July 8, 2025. (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-1/>)

Rachel Headden, "Theology and Doctrine" (essay, South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2024), 5-7.

The United Methodist Church, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 99.

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he's been saying about God's promises, and reveals the amazing things God has prepared for those who love God.

Ask: What does the ideal church look like to you?

Say: Now that we know the background about the letter to the Ephesians, let's read our passage for today.

Read: Ephesians 1:3-6 (Prevenient Grace)

Say: The blessings Paul is describing speaks of the certainty and assurance God is always with and among us, giving us resources. The "us" includes both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) in the church at Ephesus and beyond. In the first century of the church, there was a source of contention between the Jews and the Gentiles, as previously Jews were considered the Chosen Ones by God and were deemed to be God's favorite.

However, through Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection, God's blessing was extended to all people.

Ask: While Jews and Gentiles are not the biggest socio-economic divider of our modern-day churches, what groups of people do you think could take that place? (Examples: Black v. white, gay v. straight, young v. old, immigrant v. citizen; etc.,)

Say: Paul tells us that God has already blessed us – all of us, chosen us- all of us, and adopted us – all of us, into God's family through Jesus. That's pretty amazing- before we even knew God, God already loved us and had a plan for us.

One way we understand that in the church is through something called prevenient grace. That's another way of saying God's love and action are at work in our lives before we even notice. It's like a light that's already shining, guiding us, even when we don't realize it.

Sometimes people explain prevenient grace as the 'porch of a house.' Imagine you are walking toward a home. Before you step inside, the porch welcomes you and prepares you to enter. In the same way, prevenient grace gets our hearts ready for a deeper relationship with God.

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Micah 6:8 says we are called 'to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.' Prevenient grace is what nudges us toward that calling. It reminds us that God has been with us from the very beginning, calling us into love, justice, and relationship with the Triune God.

Hand out the worksheets to each student.

Say: Take a moment and look at the worksheet section that says, 'The Porch-Prevenient Grace.' Take a minute or two and draw people being welcomed in, or write examples of welcoming on the porch.

Pause for activity.

Read Ephesians 1:7-8 (Justifying Grace)

Say: What draws me to an even deeper appreciation of salvation is justification. Even when we do not make the right choices in God's eye, God does not pull our salvation away. We receive our God-given gift of justification, whether our human understanding and judgment believes the sin to be unforgivable.

Justification is the gift from Jesus Christ on the cross. It is through the power of justification our testimonies are born, allowing us to share our salvation through God with others.

Read Ephesians 1:9-12 (Justifying Grace)

Say: God's great plan and purpose, which was once hidden but is now revealed to us in Jesus.

Ask: How would you describe a mystery?

Say: Paul's explanation here is emphasizing the idea that in time, all things will make sense if they are coming from God and God's will. God's desire is to unify humanity and all things in our lives to honor and glorify the life we have been called (and blessed) to live. We cannot live this life alone; we must live in unity with one another and with God.

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Say: Paul says that through Jesus we have redemption and forgiveness, and that God's plan is to bring everything together in Christ. That's powerful- because it reminds us that God's love is not only for the world but also for each of us.

We call this justifying grace. If prevenient grace was like the porch of the house, justifying grace is the doorway. It's the moment we step inside and accept the gift of God's love. John Wesley taught that justifying grace is where our identity as Christians take root. It's where we realize that God's love is bigger than our sins, mistakes, or past. Christ died for all of us, so nothing can separate us from God's saving love.

Ask: Take a moment and on your worksheet you will find 'The doorway-Justifying Grace.' Take a few minutes to draw a moment of forgiveness or realization or write a time you felt justified.

Pause for activity.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14 (Sanctifying Grace)

Say: Paul says the Holy Spirit is like a 'down payment' or guarantee of what's to come. A down payment is when you give part of the cost up front to show you are serious about paying the rest later. The word down payment is used in the New Testament only when referencing the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a reminder that nothing else is needed to fulfill the coming glory promised to us through living the life of Jesus. How does the Spirit give us a 'preview' of the full life with God that's promised?

Say: One of the ways we see the work of the Holy Spirit is through something called Sanctifying Grace. Earlier we talked about prevenient grace – God at work before we even know it- and justifying grace- God's forgiveness that makes us right again. Sanctifying grace is the next step. It's about God's Spirit shaping us every day to become more whole, more loving, and more like the image of God we were created to be.

John Wesley believed that sanctifying grace is what moves us toward what he called Christian Perfection. Now, that doesn't mean being perfect at sports, grades, or never making a mistake. It means having a heart so full of God's love that it pours out in how we live, treat others, and care for the world.

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The Book of Discipline says God’s grace is like a journey. It comes before us, forgives us, and keeps transforming us our whole lives. One hymn describes it beautifully: “Love divine, all loves excelling... they new creation, pure and spotless let us be.”

Say: Look at your worksheet again and in the section “Heart of the Church- Sanctifying Grace” draw or write examples of kindness or worship.

Pause for the activity.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Group Breakout (5 minutes)

Divide the youth into five small groups (or pairs if your class is small).

Give each group one of the Social Principles (written on a card or paper):

- ¶161 The Nurturing Community- Supports diverse families and emotional/spiritual care.
- ¶162 The Social Community- Affirms the sacred worth of all persons.
- ¶163 The Economic Community- Calls for justice and equity in economics.
- ¶164 The Political Community-Advocates for justice, rights, and protection for all.
- ¶165 The World Community- Commits to global peace, justice, and human rights.

Ask each group to read the Community they were given.

Discuss: “How does this principle help the church be more inclusive?”

Ask each student to write one sentence on the handout about what an inclusive church looks like.

NOTES

**Before the lesson familiarize yourself with the Social Principles listed on top. Use this to help guide the youth to the answer of what an ideal church looks like. This will continue in the activity section of the lesson.*

References:

The United Methodist Church, The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Pub. House, 1989), 8

Rachel Headden, “Call and Disciplined Life” (essay, South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2024), 9-11

The United Methodist Church, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 240-241

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Listen to “Love Divine, All Love Excelling”

Link: <https://youtu.be/dPbD2G3i-7Y?si=pP1cvtXXWvOz5O9G>

Provide index cards.

Say: For our closing, we are going to listen to a hymn called “Love Divine, All Love Excelling.” On the index cards, write down your favorite verse to carry with you.

If time allows, have the students share their favorite verse.

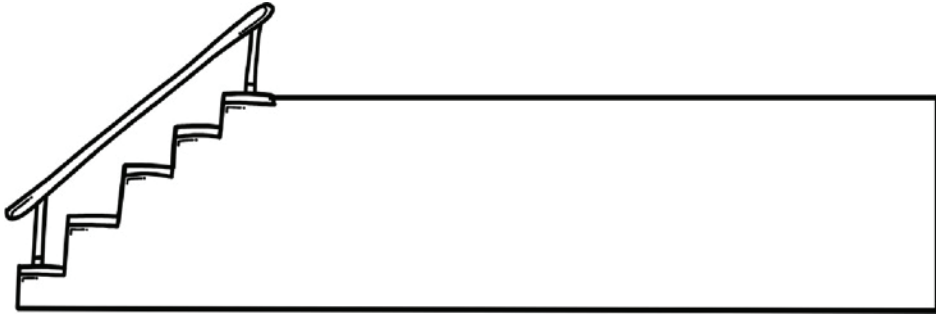
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Lyrics to “Love Divine, All Love Excelling” can be found here: <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/358>.

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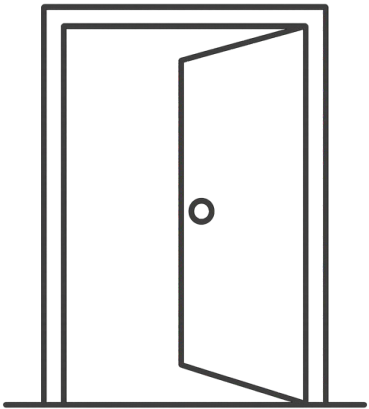
THE PORCH- PREVENIENT GRACE

The Grace that comes before: draw people being welcomed in or write examples of welcoming. “God chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless.” Ephesians 1:4



THE DOORWAY- JUSTIFYING GRACE

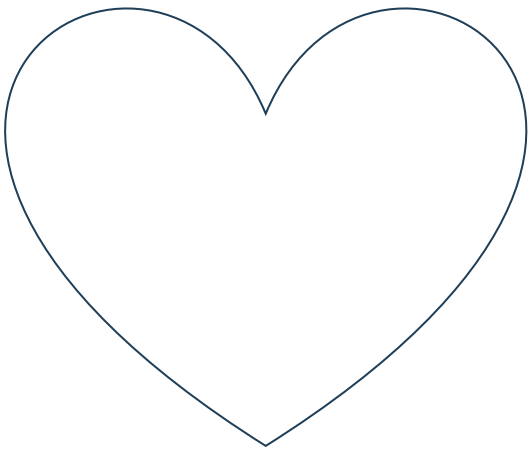
God makes us right again: draw a moment of forgiveness or realization or write a time you have felt justified “We have forgiveness for our failures,” Ephesians 1:7



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HEART OF THE CHURCH- SANCTIFYING GRACE

Becoming more like Christ: draw or write examples of kindness or worship. “You were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit” Ephesians 1:13



Write one sentence about what an inclusive church looks like:
