

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: REV. CAROLINE CAMP

JUSTICE ISSUE: GENDER EQUALITY, RIGHTS OF WOMEN, SEXISM, SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS, HUMAN SEXUALITY, GENDER IDENTITIES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 4:12–23 (with references to Isaiah 9:1–4, Psalm 27:1, 4–9, and 1 Corinthians 1:10–18)
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶162.The Social Community, Other Social Issues, E Gender Equality and Diversity; ¶163 The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, I; ¶162 The Social Community, The Nurturing Community, C; ¶163 The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, D
OBJECTIVE:	By the end of this session, youth will be able to: Identify how Jesus’ call to follow him includes people of all genders and backgrounds. Explore examples of gender bias in scripture, the church, and society Reflect on their own identity and gifts as part of God’s call to justice. Affirm the sacred worth of women, girls, and gender-diverse people, and consider actions they can take to promote gender equity in faith communities and beyond.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Bibles, Candles, Post-it notes or index cards, pens or markers, large mirror, picture frame or poster board for the post-its. Printouts or digital access to bios/scriptures of biblical women (Deborah, Phoebe, Junia, etc..) Blank cards with the prompt: “Jesus calls me to follow him because of who I am.” Tape or push pins or displaying cards. Optional: costume or props for skits, a whiteboard or poster for group notes.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Supplies: candles, post-it notes or index cards, markers

Light a candle to invite the Spirit to make her presence known and acknowledge that the youth are on holy ground. Lead the youth in a couple of deep breaths to calm the space and ready the youth to engage.

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Ask:

- Who are the kinds of people the world usually sees as leaders?
- What assumptions do people still make about women, men, and nonbinary people?

Invite each youth to write a word or phrase describing someone the world usually overlooks.

Stick the notes to a mirror or frame.

Say: God sees beyond the world's categories. Jesus called fishermen, but he also welcomed women, healed outsiders, and broke rules to include people. Today, we open our hearts to this call.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Matthew 4:12-23 aloud (options for creative reading: reader's Theater, popcorn, skit).

Discussion questions:

- Who does Jesus call in this story?
- What kind of work were they doing? Were they in power or overlooked?
- What might it mean for Jesus to call people today whose voices are ignored (like women and gender-diverse people)?

Read Isaiah 9:1-4.

Ask: What are some "yokes" of injustice placed on people because of gender?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-18.

Discussion Questions:

- Paul urges unity, not division, based on who baptized whom or who has more power.

NOTES

This activity is meant to challenge assumptions about leadership, worth, and visibility.

Encourage the youth to reflect honestly. Some may name traits like shy, queer, young, or female as often overlooked or undervalued.

Be mindful of group dynamics. Create a safe space for expression. Affirm all contributions.

If possible, frame the mirror or poster with words like beloved or chosen, gifted to reinforce the idea that God sees and calls everyone.

Print or project UMC Social Principle ¶162.F

NOTES

Learn more about reader's theater: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/readers-theater>

Emphasize Jesus' context. He begins his ministry in a region shaped by political upheaval and social marginalization. The people he calls are not the "elite."

Be prepared to guide discussion around how women and LGBTQ+ people have been excluded from leadership or ministry in some churches.

Acknowledge this pain and point to how Jesus disrupts these norms.

Uplift the story of Junia (Romans 16:7), often misgendered in translations, and Phoebe (Romans 16:1), a deacon, as examples of early church women in leadership.

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- What divisions do you see in the church around gender or leadership?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Option A | Scripture Remix Challenge: In small groups, invite youth to rewrite the Matthew passage as if Jesus were calling youth of today. Examples include:

- A group of girls working in a restaurant. A nonbinary student leading a protest.
- A group of LGBTQ+ teens creating art or working on a zine.
- A group of teen girls running a mutual aid pantry.
- A group of young women standing up to harassment in the workplace.

Optional followup discussion questions:

1. Whose stories did we center in our remixes? Who might usually be overlooked in Bible stories or church leadership?
2. How does imagining Jesus calling different kinds of people challenge the way we've been taught to see discipleship?
3. What does it say about Jesus that meets people in their everyday lives?
4. How might the world be different if more diverse people saw themselves in the story of Jesus' call? What changes in your understanding of who can lead or follow Jesus?
5. What barriers keep people from following Jesus or being seen as leaders in the church today?

Option B | Hidden Figures of the Bible: Present 5-6 lesser-known women or gender-diverse figures in scripture (Deborah, Phoebe, Junia, the Ethiopian eunuch, the daughters of Zelophehad, etc). Give the youth short bios or scripture clues and let them match names, roles, and verses. Discuss: Why do we rarely hear about these stories? How can we lift them up?

NOTES

Skit and Scripture Remix: Encourage creativity and care. Make sure all identities are portrayed respectfully. Be ready to redirect if anything becomes stereotypical or dismissive.

Hidden Figures: Prepare short bios or scripture clues ahead of time for each biblical figure. Focus on women and gender-diverse characters who are often overlooked in traditional teachings.

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Optional follow-up discussion questions:

1. Which figure surprised you the most?
2. How might the church or our society be different if these stories were told more often?
3. What does the erasure of women and gender-diverse people from scripture stories reveal about power and tradition?
4. Do you think today's youth have access to role models of faith who reflect their identities and experiences?
5. What's one way we can honor the contributions of women, LGBTQ+ people, and others left out in our church or in our daily lives?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Offer each youth a blank card that reads:

"Jesus calls me to follow him because of who I am."

Invite them to write their name and one gift they bring to the church or the world.

Read them aloud as a group or post on the wall.

Close with prayer:

God who sees and calls, you invited fishermen and tax collectors, women and prophets, to follow. You see our gender, our stories, our whole selves and call us good. Help us challenge injustice, celebrate each other, and lead with love. May we never doubt that you call us, just as we are. Amen.

NOTES

This final moment is about personal empowerment and affirmation. Remind the youth that their gender, gifts, and identity are not obstacles to following Jesus. They are sacred and essential.

Be sensitive to youth that may have experienced exclusion or gender-based harm in church settings. Offer one-on-one followup if needed.

Celebrate the responses they write and consider displaying them in the youth space as a witness to their calling.

Optional Resource: Use a worship song or mantra that reinforces identity and calling (ie. "You Say" by Lauren Diagle, or "Here I am, Lord").