

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMERISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:

Matthew 5:1-12

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/
BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:

¶161 The Economic Community, Economic Justice, A. Responsible Consumerism

OBJECTIVE:

The students will learn that God's kingdom turns the world's values upside down, and that practicing responsible consumerism is one way to counter society's focus on materialism.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

streaming an animated short (wifi, screen for students to see), copies of the Social Principles/ ¶161 The Economic Community, Economic Justice, A. Responsible Consumerism

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Remind the youth of the teaching from Jesus to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Do a check-in with each area:

- Heart – what are you feeling right now? What emotions are you carrying? What emoji reflects your feelings?
- Soul – how is your faith journey right now? What values do you have that you feel you are living (in alignment? Which are disconnected?
- Mind – what are you curious about right now? What questions do you have? What are you hoping to learn right now?
- Strength – pay attention to your body. Are there places that carry tension? Is something happening in your body?

NOTES

The four-quadrant check-in is a tool developed by *Race & Faith* (<https://www.raceandfaith.org/>)

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Often, one area is drawing more attention than the others.

Youth might not have an answer for each one, that's ok. Give 3 minutes to reflect; go around in a circle and let each person share one thing from one quadrant (they don't have to share all four). Remind them that sharing is voluntary and they can "pass" if they don't feel ready.

After everyone has shared, close with a short prayer thanking God for the joys, asking God's help with the lows, celebrating the God moments, and lifting prayer requests.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Today, we are going to start with a conversation about the word 'blessed' or 'blessings.' Sometimes we hear people say things like, 'I'm so blessed' or 'count your blessings'. Different cultures and families use this word in different ways. Some people say it a lot, others hardly use it all. So, what do you think it means to be blessed? Or what comes to mind when you hear the word 'blessings'?

Pause and let students respond.

Say: Being blessed can look really different for each person, and that's okay. Sometimes blessings are things we can see or touch, and something they are more like a feeling or a gift from God we can't see. Let's listen to a song together that talks about blessings. I'll play a song and as you listen, think about what the song says about blessings and how it connects to what we just shared.

Choose Bless Me by Maverick City or Blessed are the Ones by Rend Collective.

Say: So after hearing the song, how does it change or deepen what you think about blessings? Did anything surprise you?

Pause for discussion.

Read: Matthew 5:1-12

Say: Earlier we talked about what it means to be blessed. Did anyone notice how what Jesus says is similar or different from what we shared?

NOTES

Have a conversation about the language of "blessed" or "blessings." Different cultures are more or less comfortable with this language. Get the youth talking about what it means to be blessed or have blessings.

Jesus' culture was driven by honor and shame. Everyone's standing was determined by what was honorable, and the struggle (poor in spirit, meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness) do not separate material, cultural, and spiritual realms. Poor in spirit is about standing in society (which can be poverty or isolation, and most likely both).

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Pause for responses.

Say: Jesus is honoring people who are often pushed aside or ignored by society. Instead of saying the rich, the powerful, or the popular are blessed, he says the opposite.

Have you ever felt left out or excluded? Maybe at school, in a group of friends, or event at home? How do Jesus' words in this passage connect to those moments?

Pause for reflection/sharing.

Say: Let's go even wider: Who does our society say is blessed? Who gets lifted up as successful or important? Who gets ignored or left out?

Pause for discussion.

Say: And who benefits from those definitions? Who gains when we believe there are winners and losers? What systems- like school, media, government, even churches- sometimes reinforce the idea that only certain people are worthy?

Pause for discussion. Guide them toward realizing that Jesus flips that idea upside down.

Say: The amazing thing is that Jesus says that in God's kingdom, everyone has sacred worth, and those who are hurting, overlooked, or underestimated are actually the ones who are most deeply blessed. God's definition of blessed is way bigger and more inclusive than the world's.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: Take a couple of minutes and think about everything you've used or bought today. To make it easier, think backwards- from getting here to church all the way back to when you woke up.

- How did you get here? (car (gas), walk, bike, bus?)
- What did you eat?

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- What are you wearing?
- What did you use for hygiene?
- Did you use your phone, watch TV, or play games?

Take a few minutes and write a list. Try to be as specific as you can.

Pause for activity.

Say: Now, share your list with your partner/small group. See if you have any items in common.

Pause for sharing.

Say: Another way of thinking about all the things we use/things that we buy is the word consumerism, and our church has a statement about consumerism. We are going to read three paragraphs from the Responsible Consumerism section of the Social Principles.

Read the assigned section- it can be assigned or read by the teacher.

Say: To go deeper, let's watch a short video called The Story of Plastic that helps us see how the things we buy connect to the environment and justice.

Play the clip. "The Story of Plastic" (<https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-plastic-animation/>). (5 min)

Say: Now, let's look at two sides of consumption. Half of the class will pick one product from your list that you think is the most responsible- something made fairly, ethically, or sustainably. The other half pick something that might be least responsible- something that may hurt the environment, use unfair labor, or create waste.

Once you've picked, trace the story of that product. Consider the following questions in your group.

- Where do its materials come from (extraction)
- How is it made? (production)

NOTES

The goal of this activity is to get the youth engaged in the conversation, not to complete every detail. With a short time frame, you may need to move them to the next step before they are "done."

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- How does it get to stores? (distribution/transportation)
- How do people use it? (consumption)

Pause for group activity. The students might want to use their phones for research.

Say: Let's hear what you came up with. Share the story of your product.

Group presents.

Say: Jesus often talked about the 'great reversal,' how God's kingdom flips the world's values upside down. Where might we see that reversal in this product's story? How could we choose differently, in a way that lines up with God's justice?

Pause for sharing.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Revisit the 4-quadrant check-in (heart, soul, mind, strength). Have them reflect if things are different – invite one or two to share.

Close with prayer.