

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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JUSTICE ISSUE: STUDENTS CHOICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:

Matthew 5:13-20, Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12), Psalm 112, 1 Corinthians 2:1–12

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:

Students will read about an issue that they are concerned about.

OBJECTIVE:

Identify Social Injustices and ways in which Christians can alleviate the injustices

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Copies of the Social Principles, Bible, student handout, pens/pencils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Today, we are going to start with a practice of praying with Scripture called Lectio Divina, which means ‘divine reading.’ It helps us to slow down, listen to God’s voice, and hear how Scripture speaks to our lives today. We will use Isaiah 58:1-2.

Take a deep breath in... and out.

Pause

Let’s ask God to open our hearts to hear God’s word.

Pray: God, speak to us through this Scripture. Amen.

Slowly read Isaiah 58:1-2

Say: Listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you.

Slowly read Isaiah 58: 1-2 (second time)

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Say: Listen and reflect on why that word or phrase stands out. What might God be saying to you or to us as a group?

Pause.

Say: Turn to your neighbor on your right and share the word or phrase that stood out to you.

Pause for sharing.

Slowly read Isaiah 58:1-2 (third time)

Say: Now talk to God in your heart. Maybe it's a prayer, maybe it's asking for help, maybe it's thanks. What do you want to say back to God?

Pause for reflection.

Say: Let's take one last moment of silence to rest in God's love. God, thank you for your word. Help us live it out this week. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Today, we are diving into four powerful passages from the Bible that challenge us to think about how our faith shows up in real life. We'll look at Isaiah, Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Psalms. Each one gives us a different angle, but together they connect to what it means to live as people of God's kingdom.

Explain briefly the context of each of the books.

- Isaiah (written after exile, 6th century BCE): Isaiah calls people out for fake fasting and reminds them God cares about justice and compassion for the oppressed.
- Matthew (Sermon on the Mount, Jewish Christian audience): Jesus calls his followers to live as "salt" and "light," embodying God's kingdom values.
- 1 Corinthians (Paul writing to a divided church): He reminds them God's wisdom isn't the same as human wisdom; we need the Spirit's guidance.
- Psalm 112: A wisdom psalm celebrating those who delight in God's commands and live righteously.

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Say: We are going to divide into four groups, and each group will study the passage and report to the larger group. In your small groups, read the passage out loud- maybe even twice and discuss the questions together. Have a note-taker and a spokesperson to share with the larger group.

Group 1: Isaiah 58:1-9a

- What does God say the people are doing wrong—even though they fast and pray?
- Who is suffering in this passage?
- Who holds the power?
- What does true faith look like here?

Group 2: Matthew 5:13–20

- What does being the “salt” and the “light” mean?
- What happens when salt loses its flavor? How does that connect to us?
- Why does Jesus say these commandments are the most important?

Group 3: 1 Corinthians 2:1–12

- How is God’s wisdom different from the world’s wisdom?
- What does it mean to listen to the Spirit’s voice?
- How could that change the way we make decisions?

Group 4: Psalm 112

- What qualities are described in a person who is blessed?
- How do these connect to Isaiah’s and Matthew’s ideas about living faithfully?
- What picture of God’s kingdom do you see here?

Pause and allow for group work- approximately 10 minutes.

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Say: “Now let’s hear from each group. Share what stood out most from your discussion. Then we’ll see how they all connect.”

Pause for sharing/group presentations.

Large group discussion questions:

- What do these passages together teach us about living out faith?
- How do they challenge what the world says is important?
- Which passage spoke to you the most, and why?

(As groups present, the leader helps highlight overlap and differences: justice, being salt/light, Spirit’s wisdom, blessed life of righteousness.)

Say: All of these scriptures remind us that our faith isn’t just about words- it’s about actions. God calls us to live differently: to seek justice, to shine light, to listen to the Spirit, and to live righteously. That’s how we show the world God’s kingdom.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: With your partner (or small group) choose one current social justice issue- local or global that connects to Isaiah’s themes. Think about who is being marginalized and how. Examples: food insecurity, clean water, prison ministries, fair housing.) Search what the United Methodist Social Principles and the Book of Resolutions say about that issue.

Pause for time of research.

Say: Let’s have the groups share with the larger group what topic they picked and what the United Methodist church says on the issue.

Pause for sharing.

Say: In your groups, I want you to come up with two actions. One short-term action you could do this week (volunteering, letter writing to elected leaders, social media awareness, church fundraiser for an organization working on the issue), and one

NOTES

Resources for activity:

Index of Topics: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/567>

2020/2024 Social Principles: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>

Connect to The Social Principles or Book of Resolutions (e.g., Paragraph 160 on human rights, resolution 1211 water protection).

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long-term action (mentorship, advocacy, lifestyle change) you could see yourself committing to.

Pause for group activity.

Say: Let's go around and share our action items.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Invite the group to close their eyes and reflect on what they learned during class.

Offer a prayer/blessing:

“Spirit of Wisdom, empower us as salt and light. Help us live justly like those in Psalm 112, caring for the poor, guided by your Spirit, for the flourishing of all. Amen.”

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SCRIPTURE STUDY

Scripture Study

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Group Activity

Chosen social justice issue:

Information on the issue (who is being impacted/how/why?):

What does the Social Principles/ Book of Resolutions say about the topic?

Short-term action:

Long-term action: