

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 4; 1 – 11
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶162 Other Social Issues, C
OBJECTIVE:	To invite students to listen to communities of people impacted by injustices, instead of making assumptions.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Bible, blindfold, art supplies, construction paper circle (about 12 inches in diameter).

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Before we begin our session, I invite all of us into a time of meditation.

Say: Let’s start by taking a deep breath in... and exhaling slowly.

Say: We will hear our centering scripture verse four times. After each reading we will pause for reflection.

(The teacher or a student can read the centering scripture.)

Centering Scripture: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4b)

After Reading 1

Say: Is there a word or phrase that stands out to you?

(Pause)

After Reading 2

NOTES

*As with everything in this lesson, feel free to adjust this meditation to fit your group.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

Say: What thought or insight is emerging as you hear this Scripture?

(Pause)

After Reading 3

Say: What prayer would you like to offer to God in response to this verse?

After Reading 4

Say: Let us sit in silence and rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

(Pause for a time of quiet reflection.)

SCRIPTURE STUDY (30 MIN.)

Say: Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to begin a time of reflection and preparation for His ministry. During this time, Jesus fasts for a very long time.

Say: Fasting is a Christian practice in which people abstain from food or other things so they can focus on God and grow spiritually. Fasting is not for everyone, and it should only be done after talking with medical professionals and trusted adults. It is never about weight loss- fasting is about doing without so we can pay deeper attention to God.

Say: For Matthew's audience, primarily Jewish people, this scene would immediately remind them of the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years. Where the Israelites often struggled to trust and listen to God, Jesus remains faithful.

Say: At the end of His fasting, Jesus is tempted by Satan. In this lesson, we are going to learn about listening and discerning which voices deserve our attention, both in our spiritual lives and in our work for justice.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some other things that you have heard people fast from?
- Do you act differently when you are hungry?

NOTES

*The questions are here for you to choose from. Feel free to modify or skip questions if they are not right for your group.

*Jesus is taken into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. Scholars are not certain whether this was a literal time span. In scripture, "40 days" often functions as an expression meaning "a long time."

*Whether or not it was exactly 40 days, Jesus went without basic necessities for an extended period. When we think about our own bodies, going without enough food for a long time can make us irritable, tired, "hangry," or unable to think clearly. It is remarkable that Jesus remains so clear-headed and grounded when Satan comes to tempt Him.

*Satan often appears as a tempter, and in the Hebrew Scriptures sometimes as a prosecutor or accuser of God's people (see the book of Job). Satan's role in testing Jesus fits with the broader biblical understanding. The Scriptures say that God's Spirit leads Jesus into a period of fasting, and it is then, presumably when Jesus is at His weakest, that Satan approaches Him with temptation.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

- If you had to take a test, or answer tough questions how does being hungry impact your ability to do tough things?

Say: In today's story, we'll read about the temptations Jesus faces and what we can learn from His responses. We'll explore three main ideas:

- (1) God will prepare us for service in our world.
- (2) Whose voice we listen to deeply matters in our life.
- (3) Whose voice we listen to, and center, as we try to do justice work is so important.

READ Matthew 4: 1 – 11 (NRSV)

Say: Let's reflect on the first theme: God prepares us for service.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it means to be led by the Holy Spirit?
- Have you ever done something because you think God prompted you to do it?

Say: The Spirit prompts us in many ways. It might be a nudge, a person who suddenly comes to mind, or an urge to help someone in need. These may be moments when God is inviting us to participate in God's work of love and service in our communities.

Say: Now, let's talk about the importance of listening to the right voices.

Discussion Questions:

- What was wrong with Satan's temptations? Why do you think Jesus says no?
- Are there times in your life where someone said something and it was the wrong messenger or the wrong time?

Say: Sometimes we fail to listen to God's voice or to people who genuinely want our good. Instead, we may listen to people who manipulate, mislead, or don't have our best interests at heart. We all need people who love God, care for us, and offer wise counsel without pressuring us. And we can trust that God guides and speaks to us as well.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

Say: Listening well becomes even more important when we enter justice work.

Discussion Questions:

- Has anyone tried to 'help' you without listening to you? What was that experience like?
- Have you ever heard of colonialization? How would you define colonialization?
- Why is it important to listen to people we hope to serve or advocate for?
- What harm might we cause if we don't listen to the communities we want to help?
- How does ignoring or failing to center marginalized voices reinforce injustice?

Say: The Social Principles define colonialism as establishing control over other countries, tribes, or peoples through conquest and exploitation. Although empires look different today, forms of control and domination still exist.

Say: When we fail to listen to people who are oppressed or marginalized, we risk causing harm- even when we think we're helping. We may unintentionally act out a modern form of colonialism by assuming we know what others need. Listening deeply and centering voices of those most affected is essential in justice work.

GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MIN.)

Activity Setup:

- Clear a portion of the room to create a "path" for students to walk.
- Place the construction paper circle on the ground, but only after the student is blindfolded so they don't know its location.
- Choose one student to be the walker (blindfolded) and one student to be the guide.
- Everyone else will act as distractions- offering wrong directions, noise, or misleading instructions.
- If the group is small, play background music or noise to increase difficulty.

NOTES

*The Social Principles defines colonialism as the practice of establishing full or partial control over other countries, tribes, and peoples through conquest and exploitation. Neocolonialism continues this harmful legacy by maintaining economic, political, and social control over formerly colonized nations and peoples.

Even the well-intentioned habits and practices of "helping" can become extensions of colonialism. If we truly want to serve others, we must be willing to learn, to listen, and to understand what a community considers genuinely helpful- and what role they want aspiring allies to have. Aspiring allies must center the voices and leadership of oppressed people rather than taking over.

Our hope is that students, and all of us, will begin to think deeply about these dynamics as we serve, advocate, and work for justice alongside others.

NOTES

*Please feel free to change any aspect of this activity to accommodate students' needs.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

Say: We're going to do an activity that shows how challenging it can be to follow the right voice when there are many distractions around us. This relates to how we listen to God, how we listen to one another, and how we listen in justice and service work.

Say: I need two volunteers. One person who is willing to be blindfolded, and one who will serve as their guide.

(Blindfold the walker. Quietly place the construction paper circle somewhere on the floor.)

Say: Okay, the guide's job is to help the blindfolded person reach the construction paper circle. Everyone else, your job is to be distractions. You can give wrong directions, call out, try to confuse them, or just make noise. You can't touch them.

Say: Guide, remember that the walker should be following your voice. Blindfolded student, you must try to focus and listen carefully.

(Start the activity. Allow the student to try to navigate. Change the location of the circle if rotating volunteers. Let several students try both the guide and blindfolded roles.)

Say: Let's talk about the experience!

Discussion Questions:

- Was that harder or easier than you expected?
- What made it difficult to follow the right voice?
- How can we apply this to listening to the communities we hope to serve?
- How can we center leaders and voices of the impacted communities and why does that matter in the work of justice?

Say: In justice work, allies are people who come alongside marginalized groups to support them in their fight for justice.

When we fail to hear their voices, when we talk over them, assume we know better, or act without listening, we can cause harm, even if we meant well.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

Say: As we enter the season of Lent, we remember our sins. One of those sins can be when we've acted for a group of people in ways that actually pushed them aside instead of lifting them up. All of us should be aspiring allies, people who are always learning, always listening, always lifting others up. Aspiring allies center the voices of marginalized communities and use their abilities in ways that are actually helpful.

Say: Take a moment to think of a time when someone or some group acted on behalf of others without listening and it caused harm. It doesn't have to be something that happened to you personally; it could be something you've seen, read about, or heard about.

(Pause for discussion.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Let's take two or three minutes to reflect on a time when we wanted to help but ended up doing harm whether as individuals, or as part of the church, our denomination, or even our nation.

(Pause and hold silence.)

Say: Let's ask God to help us grow as aspiring allies, people who:

- Educate ourselves
- Listen to the communities we hope to serve
- And love more fully and faithfully.

Say: God, help us to be better listeners, better servants, and better neighbors. Amen.