

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Ezekiel 37:1-14
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	Various social principles
OBJECTIVE:	Youth will understand how Ezekiel’s vision and the social principles call us to be bearers of hope and beloved community as we join in God’s restoring work in the world.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Poster board, magazines, scissors, glue, and markers. Printed or summarized versions of The Social Principles. Bibles. Optional: Colorful printed words of hope and action

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Let’s take a moment to settle our bodies and minds. Wherever you are sitting, place your feet on the floor and let your hands rest comfortably in your lap. If you feel comfortable, you may close your eyes or soften your gaze.

(Pause)

Say: Begin by simply noticing your breath. Pay attention to the air moving in and moving out of your body.

(Pause for 10-20 seconds)

Say: Now we are going to breathe together, using a count to help us focus.

Say: Breathe in ... 1...2...3... (Brief Pause) Breathe out ...1...2...3...

(Repeat 3 times or as needed)

Say: Notice how your body feels now. If your eyes are closed, gently open them. Carry this calm and focus with you as we continue together.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Before we hear today's Scripture, let me share a little background to help us understand what's going on in the passage.

Say: Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet living during one of the hardest moments in Israel's history. Jerusalem was destroyed and many of the people were forced to live in exile, far from their homes, their land, and their sense of identity.

Say: In the book of Ezekiel, he describes four powerful visions from God. Our passage for today is the third vision, and it's one that speaks directly to people who feel worn down, defeated, or hopeless.

Say: Let's listen for what God is saying to Ezekiel, to Israel, and to us.

(Invite students to take turns reading the passage.)

(Read Ezekiel 37:1-14)

Discussion Questions:

- What stood out to you in this passage? Why?
- What do you think the valley of dry bones represents?
- What does God tell Ezekiel to do?
- What happens when Ezekiel obeys God?
- What brings the bones back to life?
- What is God promising Israel in this vision?

Say: Before we hear today's Scripture, let me share a little background to help us understand what's going on in the passage.

Say: Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet living during one of the hardest moments in Israel's history. Jerusalem was destroyed and many of the people were forced to live in exile, far from their homes, their land, and their sense of identity.

NOTES

This is one of many visions described in Ezekiel. This valley of the dry bones was symbolic of the Israelite people who were living in exile in Babylon after Jerusalem had been besieged and destroyed.

Additionally, this third vision of four in Ezekiel lacks a specific date and time, and I ask that we think of this lack of exact dating as an invitation to us to place ourselves in the vision. As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once said, "the vision of the valley of dried bones bears no date because every generation needs to hear in its own time that these bones can live again."

Each of us and everyone around us can feel "dead" at times. Hopeless, depressed, loss of dreams, bullied, oppressed, overcome by life circumstances...the list is endless.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT CONT'D

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- What brings the bones back to life?
- What is God promising Israel in this vision?

Say: Ezekiel's vision is a promise to a people who had suffered for a very long time. God is telling them that destruction, exile, and oppression are not the end of the story. Even when everything looks lifeless, God is still present. God is still working. And God is still bringing new life.

Say: In many ways, the dry bones coming back to life symbolize the restoration of community, people being put back together, not just physically, but spiritually and socially.

Say: The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a vision for restored community that he called the Beloved Community. The beloved community is a society where justice, peace, and equality prevail and where every person is treated with dignity and respect. That's a big vision but it's a hopeful one.

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: This season of Lent is a time for reflection recognizing the ways we, as individuals, as the church, and as a society, have not always loved God or loved our neighbors as ourselves. It's also a season of seeking new vision imagining how we can live differently and more faithfully together.

Say: The United Methodist Church's Social Principles help cast that vision. They point us toward justice, compassion, and hope, and they help bring life to places that sometimes feel like dry bones. Today, we are going to create vision boards. Ways to imagine how we can participate in bringing hope and life to situations that may feel too big or overwhelming.

Say: I want you to choose one issue where you see injustice, division, or dehumanization. This can be something personal or something happening in the world.

(Possible suggestions: Bullying, Food insecurity, Climate change, poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, mental health, immigration, the death penalty)

Say: Let's take a minute of silence to think and listen what issue is God placing on your heart?

(Pause for reflection)

Say: On your poster board/paper, write two things:

- The issue you are focusing on
- 'Can these bones live?'

Say: Using copies of the Social Principles or the Book of Resolutions, locate the paragraph that connects to your issue. Then using magazines, words from Scripture, phrases from the Social Principles, drawings, or your own words, create a vision of hope and restoration.

Say: Think about:

What new life could look like

NOTES

Depending on the size and personality of your group this activity can be done individually, in small groups, or as a whole group.

Social Principles Reference

- Bullying ¶162 B
- Food Injustice ¶160 C
- Climate change/Global Warming ¶160 B
- Creation Care ¶ 160 D
- Poverty/Economic Injustice ¶161
- Isms and/or phobias
 - o Racism ¶ 162 L
 - o Sexism ¶162 F
 - o Agism ¶ 163 C
 - o Homophobia ¶163 I
 - o Xenophobia ¶163
 - o Transphobia ¶163 I
- Death Penalty ¶163 D
- Mental health
- Human Trafficking and Slavery ¶161 C

If the student is having a difficult time finding their issue in the Social Principles, have them look in the Book of Resolutions. The Social Principles applies to the whole church and the Book of Resolutions focuses on issues that contextual.

Encourage the use of action words. Things people like them can do to help.

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How people could be treated with dignity

How you, our youth group, or your church could help bring hope

(Pause for activity)

Say: If you'd like, share your vision board with the group:

- Why did you choose this issue?
- What hope do you see?
- How can we help bring life to these dry bones together?

Say: Just like Ezekiel, we are invited to speak hope, even when it feels hard, and trust that God's Spirit is still breathing new life into the world.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Ezekiel could not bring the bones back to life on his own.

Ask: What brought the bones back to life? (Breath)

Ask: Who gives breath? (God)

Say: As we hold to our visions of hope for the places in our world where we see injustice, oppression, division, war, inequality, and dehumanization we are going to ask God to give these visions breath to bring them to life.

Pray: God, like the dry bones in the valley these issues can feel hopeless. They can make those experiencing them feel lifeless. Breathe your spirit into them and into us. Revive the beauty of your hope as we join in your work to bring forth the beloved community depicted in our vision boards that reflect your "kin"dom. Amen.

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