

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTORY WEEK:

Acts 1:6-14 (CEB)

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/
BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:

¶162 The Social Community, Preface; ¶162, Other Social Issues, L (*Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism*); Book of Resolutions, #3337, *Resolution Toward and Anti-Colonial Church*

OBJECTIVE:

As a result of this session, participants should be able to describe the importance of the ascension of Christ as a salvific act for all creation.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

pens/markers/crayons, paper (computer size or larger)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Abbreviated Body Scan Meditation

Say: We are going to begin with a short meditation practice called a body scan. This helps us slow down and notice what's happening in our bodies.

Say: God ahead and stand up with your feet flat on the floor or find a comfortable seated position.

(Pause)

Say: If you have space around you, take a moment to wiggle, stretch, or shake out your arms and legs. Let your body reset.

(Pause)

Say: When you are ready, let the movement settle. Take a deep breath in... and slowly breathe out. If you feel comfortable, gently close your eyes. Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit with us.

NOTES

Depending on the amount of time and size of the group, you can adjust this exercise to last beyond 5 minutes or abbreviate it further. Determine the amount of time for each pause based on how long you want the meditation to last.

Resources:

For more about this practice, Mindful has a great article: <https://www.mindful.org/beginners-body-scan-meditation/>

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER CONT'D

(Pause)

Say: When you are ready, move your attention to the top of your head. Notice what you feel there. Does anything feel tight, heavy or achy?

(Pause)

Say: Now slowly move your attention down your head. Soften your face. Unclench your jaw.

(Pause)

Say: Notice your shoulders. If they feel raised or tense, gently let them drop and relax.

(Pause)

Say: Let your attention travel down your arms all the way to your fingertips. If you'd like, gently wiggle your fingers.

(Pause)

Say: Now bring your attention to your chest. Notice your breathing. What do you feel there?

(Pause)

Say: Next, notice your hips, your knees, your legs, and all the way down to your feet and toes. If you can, give your toes a little wiggle.

(Pause)

Say: Take a deep breath in... and breathe out. One more time, breathe in... and breathe out. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to the group. Thank you for taking this moment to be present.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Today's scripture comes from the book of Acts, which tells the story of the early church. We're entering the story in chapter 1, and just before this passage, we learn

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER CONT'D

that the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days and teaching them about the kingdom of God (1:3).

Say: Listen to the passage closely and pay attention to anything that sticks out to you.

(Invite a participant to read the scripture slowly: *Acts: 1-6:14 CEB*)

Discussion Questions:

- How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus said, “It isn’t for you to know...”?
- What do you think they said to one another after watching Jesus rise into heaven on a cloud?

Say: Now we’ll hear the passage again. This time, imagine yourself in the story. Notice what you feel both physically and emotionally.

(Invite another participant to read the passage.)

Discussion Questions

- What was it like to imagine yourself in the story?
- What did you notice? What did you think, hear, or feel?
- Jesus says, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” What does it mean to be a witness?
- How can we bear witness to the story of Jesus Christ when he is no longer physically with us?

Say: In the church calendar, today is often called Ascension Sunday. It’s celebrated forty days after Easter, and ten days before Pentecost. The ascension of Jesus is named in both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed, two foundational Christian statements of faith.

Say: Though Jesus ascended into heaven, he has not forgotten us. We are promised that he will come again and that the Holy Spirit will be with us, empowering us to be Christ’s witnesses wherever we go.

NOTES

Resources:

For a helpful overview of the beginning of the book of Acts, see [The Bible Project, Book of Acts Summary \(Part 1\)](#).

The key message for participants about their identity as Christians on Ascension Sunday is: Even though Christ has ascended into heaven and is not physically present on earth with us, we know we belong to God. God calls us each beloved and offers all creation the promise of life abundant, the gift of God’s love and grace at all times in all places.

For a helpful overview of the Methodist/Wesleyan perspective on Ascension Day, see [“Why Ascension Day Matters to United Methodists.”](#)

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER CONT'D

Say: Christ's reign in the kingdom of heaven is for all creation. God calls us each beloved and offers all creation the promise of life abundant life, along with the gift of God's love and grace at all times and in all places.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Personal Compassion Mapping

Say: While we may not all be God's witnesses to the ends of the earth, we do bear witness to God's love and grace in what we do every day- through our words, our choices, and how we treat people.

Say: Today we are going to do an activity called compassion map. This helps us notice all the different people we interact with and reflect on where compassion comes easily and where we might practice offering more.

(Pass out supplies: Each person needs at least two writing utensils of different colors and one piece of paper.)

Say:

- In the center of your paper, write your name and draw a small circle around it.
- Now draw a larger circle around that one, and then another larger circle so your paper looks like a bullseye.
- In the first circle, closest to your name, write the names of people you see and interact with the most every day. This might include family members, close friends, teachers, coaches, or caregivers.

(Pause to allow writing)

- Next, in the outer ring, write the names of people you see often but don't always talk or interact with. This could be classmates, neighbors, extended family, a music teacher, or even someone like me.
- *(Pause)*

Say: Now let's create a map key somewhere on your paper. A solid line in one color

NOTES

Supplies: pens/markers/crayons, paper

The key message for participants about justice is:

The kingdom of God is for all creation, and all people are offered the gift of God's grace, regardless of their race, class, gender, sexuality, or other social location.

The key message for participants about action is: We can bear witness to the kingdom of God by noticing those around us, getting to know them, and practicing even the smallest acts of compassion.

Resources:

III. The Social Community, Preface (¶ 162, The Social Principles)

Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism (¶ 162, The Social Principles, "III. The Social Community," "Other Social Issues," L)

Resolution Toward an Anti-Colonial Church (¶ 3337, Book of Resolutions)

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER CONT'D

can represent a relationship that feels healthy, supportive, and compassionate. A dashed line in another color can represent a relationship that feels strained, distant, or stressful. You can add more symbols or colors if that helps you. Take a few minutes to look at your map and draw lines between you and the people on it.

(Pause for activity)

Say: Turn to someone near you and share:

- Did anything surprise you about your map?
- Was there a pattern you noticed?

(Gather in the large group)

Ask: Would anyone like to share something they noticed or how this activity felt?

(Affirm honesty and vulnerability.)

Say: Now we are going to connect this activity to our faith.

(Hand out copies of the Preface to ¶162 of the Social Community)

(Read the Preface together.)

Discussion Questions:

- What surprised you about this statement, and why?
- The statement reminds us of God's call to community and says: "We respond to God's call in the world by giving witness to the transformative power of the gospel, engaging in acts of mercy, and striving toward the attainment of justice and peace as hallmarks of God's coming reign." How can you or how could you be part of this communal response in your daily lives?

Say: As we close, I invite you to do one of the two things: Choose one person on your map whom you want to get to know better or extend more compassion to, or commit to a new practice of self-compassion, especially if you noticed strain in your relationship with yourself.

(Pause for reflection.)

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER CONT'D

Optional Short Prayer:

God of Love, help us grow in compassion, for others and for ourselves, as we learn to live more fully in your community. Amen.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Read the ecumenical version of the Apostles' Creed (below) together to close the session.

Apostles' Creed, Ecumenical Version

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy universal church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

NOTES

If your group has a traditional closing prayer or ritual, feel free to use that instead.