

CONNECTING FAITH & JUSTICE

YOUTH CURRICULUM

Lectionary Year B



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**



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WHY AND THE HOW

If you have a room full of youth pastors and directors, you will quickly realize that they have two things in common. One, they love working with youth, and two, the struggle to find a curriculum that intersects faith and justice is REAL. We hope that this curriculum will help to ease that struggle and provide a space for students to engage in scripture and their world creatively, actively, and critically.

WHY THE LECTIONARY?

We realize United Methodist churches come in all shapes and sizes. Some follow the lectionary while others may offer sermon series throughout the year. For churches that follow the lectionary, this curriculum follows the lectionary calendar and can be used to help the youth dig deeper from their Sunday Worship Service message. For churches that do not follow the lectionary, an issue and scripture index is provided at the back of the curriculum. All the lessons are standalone lessons and are not dependent on the previous lesson. It's flexible!

WHAT'S THE FORMAT?

Each one hour lesson highlights one (or more) lectionary reading(s) for that Sunday. All lessons start with a centering moment, scripture study, group activity, and a closing moment. Youth groups come in all shapes and sizes, and the group activity section can be done in pairs or larger groups. You will see reference to "Faith & Fact Cards" which can be found here: <http://www.umcjustice.org/resources> (pdf or print) or ordered here: <https://store.umcjustice.org/#!/Faith-&-Facts-Cards/c/12681533/offset=0&sort=normal>.

WHO WROTE THE CURRICULUM?

The curriculum lessons were written by a diverse group of educators, youth pastors, elders, deacons, deaconesses, practitioners, professors, emerging leaders, and missionaries from all over the globe who want to support youth in their faith development. Learn more about them in the contributor biography section.

HOW SHOULD I START?

We encourage you to begin the curriculum by starting with the bonus lesson plan created by Susan Greer Burton, former Director of Women and Children's Advocacy at the General Board of Church and Society, which introduces students to the concepts of mercy and justice.

LECTIONARY CALENDAR YEAR B

BONUS

MERCY AND JUSTICE

11

Matthew 23:23-24; Micah 6:8;
Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46
Susan Greer Burton

ADVENT

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

16

Mark 13:24-37
Rev. Julio C. Hernández

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

24

Mark 1:1-8
Aimee Hong

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

27

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Rev. Lisa Jo Bezner

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

29

Luke 1:46b-55
Rev. Lisa Jo Bezner

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

32

Luke 2:22-40
Mele Taumoepeau Aho

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

35

John 1:(1-9), 10-18
Rev. J.P. Hong

EPIPHANY

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY/ BAPTISM OF THE LORD

39

Mark 1:4-11
Christian Watkins

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

42

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
Rev. Courtney McHill

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

44

Mark 1:14-20
Rev. Julio C. Hernández

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

48

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Rev. Andy Oliver

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

53

Mark 1:29-39
Rev. Courtney McHill

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY/ LAST SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

56

Mark 9:2-9
Christian Watkins

LECTIONARY CALENDAR YEAR B

| LENT | | EASTER | |
|--------------------------------|----|---|-----|
| FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT | 59 | EASTER | 78 |
| 1 Peter 3:18-22 | | John 20:1-18 | |
| <i>Rev. Dan Dick</i> | | <i>Rev. Doris Dalton & Rev. Jenna Johnson</i> | |
| SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT | 62 | SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER | 84 |
| Romans 4:13-25 | | Psalms 133 | |
| <i>Rev. Anna Guillozet</i> | | <i>Rev. Anna Guillozet</i> | |
| THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT | 64 | THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER | 86 |
| John 2:13-22 | | Acts 3:12-19 | |
| <i>Pastor Eduardo Carrillo</i> | | <i>Chett Pritchett</i> | |
| FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT | 68 | FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER | 90 |
| Numbers 21:4-9 | | John 10:11-18 | |
| <i>Chett Pritchett</i> | | <i>Rev. Jason Stanley</i> | |
| FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT | 73 | FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER | 97 |
| Jeremiah 31:33-35 | | 1 John 4:7-21 | |
| <i>Rev. Andy Oliver</i> | | <i>Rev. Paige Boyer</i> | |
| PALM SUNDAY | 75 | SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER | 101 |
| Isaiah 50:4-9a | | Acts 10:44-48 | |
| <i>Simon Pak</i> | | <i>Rev. Grace Pak</i> | |
| | | SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER | 104 |
| | | John 17:6-19 | |
| | | <i>Deaconess Amanda Mountain</i> | |
| | | PENTECOST | 110 |
| | | Acts 2:1-21 | |
| | | <i>Rev. Dan Dick</i> | |

LECTIONARY CALENDAR YEAR B

ORDINARY TIME

| | |
|---|-----|
| FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 114 |
| Romans 8:12-17 <i>Pastor Eduardo Carrillo</i> | |
| SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 119 |
| Mark 3:20-35 <i>Emma Rankin</i> | |
| THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 122 |
| Mark 4:26-34, 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 <i>Rev. Rahel Lee-Yoo</i> | |
| FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 128 |
| 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 <i>Emma Rankin</i> | |
| FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 132 |
| Lamentations 3:22-33 <i>Rev. Rebekah Bled</i> | |
| SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 139 |
| Mark 6:1-13 <i>Tura Foster Gillespie</i> | |
| SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 142 |
| Psalm 24 <i>Rev. Dr. Emily Peck-McClain</i> | |
| EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 146 |
| Jeremiah 23:1-6/ Psalm 23 <i>Rev. Rebekah Bled</i> | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 151 |
| John 6:1-21, Psalm 145:1-18 <i>Aimee Hong</i> | |
| TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 156 |
| John 6:24-35 <i>Rev. Holly Bandel</i> | |
| ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 160 |
| John 6:35, 41-51 <i>Rev. Jason Stanley</i> | |
| TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 165 |
| 1 King 2:10-12, 3:3-14 <i>Aimee Hong</i> | |
| THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 169 |
| Ephesians 6:10-20 <i>Rev. Paige Boyer</i> | |
| FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 175 |
| Psalm 15 <i>Rev. J.P. Hong</i> | |
| FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 179 |
| James 2:1-10, 11-13, 14-17 <i>Aimee Hong</i> | |
| SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 182 |
| James 3:1-12 <i>Rev. J.P. Hong</i> | |
| SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | 185 |
| Mark 9:30-37 <i>Michelle Maldonado</i> | |

LECTIONARY CALENDAR YEAR B

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|---|-----|
| EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST James 5:13-20 <i>Rev. Dr. Emily Peck-McClain</i> | 188 |
| NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Psalm 8 <i>Rev. Jay Campbell</i> | 193 |
| TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Mark 10:17-31 <i>Rev. Jay Campbell</i> | 200 |
| TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Job 38:1-7 (34-41) <i>Rev. Rezolia Johnson</i> | 207 |
| TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Mark 10:46-52 <i>Rev. Lisa Jo Bezner</i> | 213 |
| TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Mark 12:28-34 <i>James Kang</i> | 216 |
| TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Mark 12: 38-44 <i>Rev. Lisa Jo Bezner</i> | 219 |
| TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Mark 13:1-8 <i>Michelle Maldonado</i> | 223 |
| TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST Psalm 93 <i>Tura Foster Gillespie</i> | 225 |

ADVENT — LECTIONARY YEAR C

| | |
|--|-----|
| FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25:1-10 <i>Minoka Guneseka</i> | 228 |
| SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT Luke 3:1-6 <i>Rev. Ivan Milosi</i> | 231 |
| THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT Luke 3:7-18 <i>Rev. Ivan Milosi</i> | 233 |
| FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT Luke 1:39-45 (46-55) <i>Rev. Dr. Emily Peck-McClain</i> | 236 |
| FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS Luke 2:41-52 <i>Aimee Hong</i> | 243 |

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

REV. HOLLY GASKILL BANDEL has served in local church ministry for 20 years, including positions as Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, and Associate Pastor. She grew up in Wylie, TX, and received a social work degree from the University of North Texas. She is most passionate about ministry that reaches out and meets the needs of people in the community. Holly received her seminary degree from Duke Divinity School. Her husband Phil is a TV engineer and they have two sons, Austin and Jason. Holly is a Duke basketball fan, enjoys reading and practices yoga.

REV. LISA JO BEZNER is the Intentional Faith Development Director at First UMC Los Alamos in New Mexico. She is a two-time graduate of Boston University School of Theology with an emphasis in Church and Society, then Emotional and Spiritual Care for Communities Affected by Trauma. Bezner served as the communications intern at GBCS in 2006.

REV. REBEKAH BLEED is an ordained minister and a Ph.D. Student in Contextual Theology at Oral Roberts University. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Intercultural Studies and Church Planting from Asbury Theological Seminary and has served in North and South America as a Youth, College, and Young Adult Minister, as well as in missions with Youth With A Mission in Central America and Western Europe. She currently serves on the pastoral team at Christ Church, Montevideo, and lives in Northwest Arkansas with her husband and son.

REV. PAIGE BOYER is the Lead Pastor at Andover First UMC in Andover, Ohio. Having previously served as a youth pastor, she is dedicated to helping youth think critically about matters of faith and life. She is also a contributing editor for *We Pray with Her: Encouragement for All Women Who Lead* and the forthcoming *Speaking Truth: Women Raising Their Voices in Prayer*.

REV. JAY CAMPBELL is a provisional elder in the Virginia Annual Conference serving at Mount Vernon United Methodist Church in Alexandria, VA. He received his M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC and has been in ministry for almost ten years. He lives with his wife Katie and his dog, Rue, in Northern Virginia.

PASTOR EDUARDO CARRILLO started ministry in 2010 and has been blessed to be in different settings and roles in almost all levels of the UMC. His life experience as an immigrant in the United States has awakened his awareness of injustices and inequalities that many suffer in the world. Pastor Eduardo seeks to inform people about the Good News so that transformations have distinct experiences in people's lives.

REV. DORIS K. DALTON is called to "extend the table of love so that all may eat and be full." She lives out her calling by helping all leaders fulfill their ministry purpose. She also loves to eat a good meal with friends and family.

REV. DAN DICK is a clergy person serving in the Wisconsin Conference as the Assistant to the Bishop. He served on the General Board of Church and Society's Board from 2012-2016 and has been a lifelong champion of equal rights and justice for all children of God, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and orientation.

TURA FOSTER GILLESPIE serves as the Chair for United Methodist Ecumenical & Interreligious Training-USA and Co-Chair at the National Workshop on Christian Unity. She received her Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary with a focus on Ecumenics.

REV. ANNA GUILLOZET serves as the Senior Pastor at Linworth United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio. She is married to Garrett, her spouse of 11 years, and is a parent of their 4-year old daughter. She is passionate about building relationships and communities that are focused on the life-changing love of Jesus. She also completed 3 marathons. She seeks to be the best partner, parent, and pastor she can be. A deep love for Jesus tops the list of her other loves: coffee, running, reading, family, and friends.

MINOKA GUNSEKERA was born and raised in Blacksburg, Virginia by two Sri Lankan parents. She grew up in the United Methodist Church and now works at Duke Divinity School where she received her M.Div. in 2017. She is also a 2011 Ethnic Young Adult Alum.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

REV. JULIO C. HERNÁNDEZ serves as the Family Ministries Director at Christ Crossman United Methodist Church in Falls Church, VA. He is ordained in the Baptist tradition and is currently a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Duke Divinity. His dream is to visit the Shire and share meals with a whole lot of crazy creatures.

AIMEE HONG serves as the Senior Executive Director of Education and Engagement at the General Board of Church and Society. She facilitates and designs seminars and other educational opportunities for diverse groups on issues of justice and peace. Aimee is deeply interested in the intersection of social justice and living out one's faith. She received her M.T.S. and M.Div. from Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Before Church and Society, she served as a local pastor and education director for large and small Korean immigrant congregations.

REV. J.P. (JUNG PYO) HONG is the lead pastor at Christ Crossman UMC in Falls Church, VA. He has been ordained since 2000 but took a break to teach elementary students in Baltimore, Maryland, and Southeast Washington, DC. He lives in Northern Virginia with his wife and two children.

REV. JENNA JOHNSON is a Deacon in the New York Annual Conference with a primary appointment as the Conference Youth Ministry Coordinator. She grew up in Jackson, MS where she was highly involved in her church and local camp and she is excited to help provide that experience for other young people. She's passionate about young leaders and empowering teenagers to take charge of their faith and act out their beliefs in the world.

REV. REZOLIA JOHNSON is the first Black female full-time Elder as Senior Pastor at one of the oldest Black churches in Texas, Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. She is fully engaged in being an advocate for justice and has compassion for people and a passion for Christ. Pastor Johnson believes in the Ubuntu philosophy, "I am because you are." We are definitely stronger as human beings, together.

JAMES J. KANG is the Director of Communications and Innovation of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church. He is currently the President of the National Organization for 2nd and 3rd generation Korean American Methodists called, "NEXUS." And he is proudly an alum of Claremont School of Theology as well as the child and grandchild of Methodist clergypersons.

REV. RAHEL LEE-YOO is an ordained Deacon in the Texas Annual Conference. She works to make a difference in her community by lifting those in sub-standard housing through the work of Mosaic in Action, and she strives to make a difference in the lives of those who seek healing through Houston Methodist Hospital as a chaplain resident. She is married to Joseph, and together they are proud parents to 9-year-old Nathanael.

MICHELLE MALDONADO is the Director of Seeker Advertisement and Communications, or better known as Rethink Church, at the United Methodist Communications in Nashville, TN. Michelle is originally from rural Central Florida. As the daughter of a UMC pastor, she has worked with the UMC from a young age and as a young adult, she has been working at UMCOM for 5 years.

REV. COURTNEY MCHILL has served in four appointments in Oregon from larger congregations to starting a church with houseless neighbors. After 13 years of appointed ministry, she is writing and traveling in Berlin, Germany after a transformative pilgrimage along the Camino De Santiago. She is learning about how theology changes in the places we are as well as learning about the world from a different perspective.

REV. IVAN MILOSI is an ordained elder in the UMC from the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the South Congo Annual Conference. He is currently serving at Lankin UMC in Kansas. He is a double degree graduate from Africa University in Zimbabwe with a Bachelor of Divinity and an M.A. in Peace, Leadership, and Governance and received his M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary.

AMANDA MOUNTAIN is a Deaconess in the United Methodist Church serving as the director at Motown Mission in Detroit, MI. Prior to Motown Mission she served with the General Board of Global Ministries, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, and on staff at McCurdy Ministries Community Center. She holds a Master of Divinity degree from Candler School of Theology at Emory University and a BA in Dance from Mercyhurst University.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

REV. ANDY OLIVER is the pastor at Allendale UMC in St. Petersburg, Florida. Since his arrival in January 2016, the church has opened doors for free to community groups doing social justice work. These partnerships along with a Community Organizing model of congregational life has led to the church growing for the first time in several decades. Andy graduated from the University of Florida and went to seminary at Duke Divinity School. Andy is married to his partner Rachel and has two boys, Liam, and Evan, ages 11 and 9.

REV. GRACE PAK is an ordained elder in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. She is passionate about the work of “God’s Kin-Dom come on Earth as it is in Heaven” and helping the church in intercultural competency and be at the forefront of anti-racism work.

SIMON PAK is a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary. He has spent over a decade in youth, college, and family ministries. He no longer works in ministry but is an active member at Dumbarton United Methodist Church. He lives and works in Washington, DC with his wife Jeehye, son Lev, and daughter Noa.

REV. DR. EMILY PECK-MCCLAIN is the Visiting Professor of Christian Formation and Young Adult Ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. She is the author of *Arm and Arm with Adolescent Girls: Educating into the New Creation*, and one of the contributing editors of *We Pray With Her and Speaking Truth*. She lives in Maryland with her spouse, three kids, one dog, and a house full of chaos.

CHETT PRITCHETT (he/they) is seminary trained, but not ordained. A graduate of West Virginia Wesleyan College and Wesley Theological Seminary, Chett currently lives in Athens, Ohio, but retains local church membership at Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, DC. He has served as the executive director with Methodist Federation for Social Action, managed seminary bookstores for Cokesbury, and in higher education fundraising and alumni engagement.

EMMA RANKIN is currently an M. Div. student at Duke Divinity. She has a heart for missions and is the 2020 summer intern at the General Board of Church and Society working with the EYA interns as the chaplain.

REV. JASON STANLEY was raised in the UMC, ordained as a deacon in 2013, and for over 20 years has been in ministry with children, youth, and their families. He has been a contributor to children and youth ministry curriculum. He currently serves as the Coordinator for Church Revitalization for the Elizabeth River District in Virginia.

MELE TAUMOEPEAU 'AHO is currently an M.Div. student at Wesley Theological Seminary and is a Certified Candidate for Ordained Ministry for the Pacific Northwest Conference. She is a member of Seattle First Tongan UMC where she served as the youth director from 2009-2012. She is currently serving as the student pastor at National UMC, Wesley Campus in DC.

CHRISTIAN WATKINS is the 2019-2020 Wendland Fellow for Faith and Justice of the General Board of Church and Society. He is currently the Justice Advocacy & Outreach Manager at the National Council of Churches in Washington, DC. He received his M.Div. from Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology with a concentration in Urban Ministry focused on Social Justice.

MERCY & JUSTICE

CONTRIBUTOR NAME SUSAN GREER BURTON

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JUSTICE ISSUE: LIVING THE FULLNESS OF MICAH 6:8, ADVOCACY, POVERTY

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|---|--|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Matthew 23:23-26, Micah 6:8, Matthew 26:36-46, Luke 22:39-46 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | None |
| OBJECTIVE | To help participants understand the terminology and concepts of mercy and justice more clearly. To serve as a self-reflective tool that helps participants draw their own conclusions about the work that they and others in their community are doing to change structures of injustice. To raise the consciousness of engagement without diminishing service while strengthening the call for justice. |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | 2 sheets of butcher paper, easel, markers, Bible, Limits of Charity article – which can be found here: http://www.davidhilfiker.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13:limits-of-charity&catid=8:justice-essays&Itemid=17 . |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Welcome the group.

Opening Prayer.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Ask a few questions to develop a context for understanding the scripture passage (Matthew 23: 23-26). The goal of asking the questions is to have the participants begin to think about the meaning of “you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

Ask:

- Who here knows what a gnat is? How many of you grew up with gnats around? What are gnats like? How big are they? (typical responses, small, fly around, annoying)
- Are gnats dangerous? What would happen to you if you crossed through a field with a whole bunch of gnats? (typical responses, annoying but not dangerous)
- Now, what is a camel like? How big are they? Has anyone seen a camel in the flesh? What would happen to you if you crossed through a herd of camels? (typical responses, big, would be trampled if crossed through herd)

NOTES

Express from the beginning your interest in learning from the group.

Note: If participants have a hard time coming up with words to define mercy and justice, ask for a volunteer to read the beginning of David Hilfiker’s “The Limits of Charity” and respond with words that stand out to them regarding these two words. You may want to do this even if they are not having a hard time, as the definitions David uses may have aspects that they do not come up with.

MERCY & JUSTICE

JUSTICE ISSUE LIVING THE FULLNESS OF MICAH 6:8, ADVOCACY, POVERTY

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Say:

So the impact of a camel would be much larger than that of a gnat, right?" (Establish a difference in significance.)

Read Matthew 23: 23-26. (Ask for a volunteer.)

Ask:

What do you think this passage means?

Defining terms – Mercy and Justice

Ask:

- "How would you define 'Mercy'? Not examples...what words would you use to describe what it is? [write down responses]
- "How would you define 'Justice'? When you think of justice, what words come to mind? [write down responses]

Be prepared to differentiate between Jesus'/restorative definition of justice and societal/punitive definition of justice.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Instructions:

Write "Poverty" at the top center of the paper. Most people have had some kind of experience responding to poverty and will be able to participate in the following exercise.

Write "Responses" on the left-hand side of the flipchart paper.

NOTES

1 & 2

| | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Poverty | |
| <u>Responses</u> | <u>Causes of Poverty</u> |
| | |

Ask:

When you see someone experiencing poverty or suffering in some way, how is it that you respond? How does your church or school respond?" (Record responses.)

Make sure that you have some examples of common direct service/donation activities in mind to offer to the group, e.g., angel tree, meal programs, food drives, in case they are having a difficult time identifying things they have done.

Once you have a list, write "Causes of Poverty" on the right-hand side of the same piece of paper.

Ask:

What are the causes of poverty?" (Record responses in a list as with the responses.)

Prepare to hear and unpack stereotypes.

- e.g., addiction – what combination of issues causes poverty because there are plenty of people in recovery who are not living in poverty.
- Make sure racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. are named and be prepared with concrete examples.
- If not included, suggest war as a cause of poverty. In addition to people experiencing poverty in their homelands because of war, people in our own country who have fought in war may experience poverty as a result of physical or psychological damage incurred while fighting.
- Suggest natural disasters (tsunami, earthquakes) and man-made disasters (oil spill, mining accidents) that destroy lives and livelihoods.

Ask:

How many of these "Responses" on the left address the "Causes of Poverty" on the right? [Circle ones they mention]

NOTES

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| Poverty | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>Responses</u> | <u>Causes of Poverty</u> |
| | |

MERCY & JUSTICE

JUSTICE ISSUE LIVING THE FULLNESS OF MICAH 6:8, ADVOCACY, POVERTY

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Draw a line to the right of the “Responses” column and the left of the “Causes” column creating a 3rd column in the center of the page.

Ask:

Why do you think it is that we spend so much time doing things on the left-hand side that don’t address the things on the right?” (Frequent responses include: overwhelming; long haul; don’t have tools to change/don’t know how; risky – financially & socially; mercy is short-term; easier to schedule.)

Affirm the responses of the group by telling the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46 or Luke 22:39-46.)

Ask:

- What did Jesus ask the disciples to do when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane anticipating the soldiers would carry him to his death? (Stay awake. Keep watch. Pray.)
- How many times did they fall asleep?
- Did this mean that they were “bad” or “lazy”? They had given up their livelihoods to follow Jesus.

Say:

Just as the disciples fell asleep. So too do we. It is likely that the disciples felt the same way you did when I asked why we spend time on responses that respond to immediate needs rather than the causes: overwhelmed, afraid of the risk, depressed, unsure what to do...

(Refer back to the scripture and ask “What is the conjunction that Micah and Jesus used? Is it mercy or justice or faith?” [Typical response, no, it is and].

Affirm the importance of mercy, justice, and faith and that they are all interrelated and necessary.

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MERCY & JUSTICE

JUSTICE ISSUE LIVING THE FULLNESS OF MICAH 6:8, ADVOCACY, POVERTY

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Through experiences working directly with people experiencing poverty, we can (we don't always – so don't want to assume) build relationships that make us committed to working for justice to change the causes of poverty.

Say:

To address the causes of poverty, we must be grounded in a relationship with God that sustains us and motivates us to persist through the depression, fear, and exhaustion.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

3-2-1

Ask the group to write down:

- Three people with whom they will talk about what they learned.
- Two causes that they want to learn more about.
- One way that they will connect – mercy, justice, and faith in their own lives.

E.g., initiate a letter-writing offering in their youth group or church on one of the causes of poverty.

Wrap up with a closing prayer.

NOTES

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JULIO HERNÁNDEZ

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CREATION JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 13:24-27

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160

OBJECTIVE

To help students be aware of the wonder of the earth – God's creation.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Handout of the Mary Oliver Poem. Dependent on Group Activity.
- Decoration Ideas: Good soil in a pile in the center of the room.
- Art Activity: Blank Paper and supplies to illustrate any variety available (coloring pencils, paints, charcoal, scrap paper for mosaics).
- Option 1 Group Activity: Trowels or shovel, a container to place soil samples, a Ziplock bag, plastic container or small bucket to mix soil samples (approximately 5 cups of soil), mailing envelope, and payment for testing soil.
- Option 2 Group Activity: Old paper (worksheets, newspaper, junk mail, etc.), Seeds, Bucket or plastic bin for soaking paper, Blender or food processor, Strainer or colander, Optional: Paper shredder, Cookie cutters.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Taste of the Earth

Instructions: Choose four volunteers. Blindfold each volunteer. Each student will taste the fruit or vegetable and describe what they taste. Once they have given different adjectives for the food item, they can guess what they are eating. If you have a larger group, you can have a competition among different groups and keep score who can guess the most fruits or vegetables.

After the game ends, discuss where the fruits/vegetables come from.

Say:

We are people of the earth. All of our nourishment comes from our relationship from the land. You have just tasted something that grew from this land. In Genesis, we get a picture of creation. In Genesis 1, the Hebrew words for Adam and earth are very similar, it is similar to saying earth and earthling. At the heart of the biblical narrative, there is a close relationship between the earth and humans and God. We will be exploring this today.

NOTES

Preparation: I encourage you to read both the scripture and the article "Reconnecting With the Soil, We Heal the Planet and Ourselves" by Leah Penniman (included in handouts).

Note on the Fruits/Vegetables: Whenever possible try to use homegrown produce. The objective is to return to the earth created by God. By using locally grown produce we are trying to get as close to the earth as possible.

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Pray the Great Spirit Prayer:

Oh, Great Spirit,
Whose voice I hear in the winds
and whose breath gives life to all the world.
Hear me! I need your strength and wisdom.
Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes
ever hold the red and purple sunset.
Make my hands respect the things you have made
and my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise so that I may understand
the things you have taught my people.
Let me learn the lessons you have hidden
in every leaf and rock.

Help me remain calm and strong in the
face of all that comes towards me.
Help me find compassion without
empathy overwhelming me.
I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother,
but to fight my greatest enemy: myself.
Make me always ready to come to you
with clean hands and straight eyes.
So when life fades, as the fading sunset,
my spirit may come to you without shame.
(Translated by Lakota Sioux Chief Yellow Lark in 1887.)

Read Mark 13:24-31 together.

Provide supplies for students to draw.

NOTES

Supplies:
Blank paper and coloring utensils (color
pencils, watercolors, paint, and markers).

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Ask:

In verses, 24 to 27, use art to describe the emotion in this passage. What are images that stick out to you? What colors or textures do you see?

Pause for students to draw

Ask:

These are intense words. Would someone like to share their artwork and how it captures the emotions of these verses?

Say:

We have spent some time reflecting on these verses. Now let us think about the relationship of this verse with the earth. In Mark, we see this wide expansiveness of the Kingdom of God. The passage starts off from the Sun to the moon, sky, heavenly bodies, to a particular tree, a fig tree. We are drawn from this universal to a very specific tree. And we are called to observe the tree's growth. It is almost as if the health of this tree is a sign of God's kingdom. Let's now reflect on the last part of our passage.

Read Mark 13:32-37 together.

Reflection through art (7 minutes)

Say:

Illustrate verses 32 to 37. You have heard people talk about being "woke," Jesus gives us the same imperative. Reflect what it means to stay awake. Draw or write about what it means to stay awake/aware.

Ask:

Jesus reminds us to stay awake and aware. What do you think Jesus is asking us to be aware of in these verses?

NOTES

Mark 13:24-27

This is the first Sunday of Advent. The Lectionary brings us to a passage that is calling the church to a double awareness of Jesus in the manger and Jesus glorified and upon the throne (Philippians 2).

This passage is calling us forth into a new epoch under Jesus the crucified one. There is a cataclysmic language that we can skip over easily. Take time to pray for God to help you enter into the emotion of this passage.

Mark is using cosmic language that harkens back to Genesis 1, the creation of the world. A cosmos that starts in a garden.

The gathering of the people from all over the world is imagery of the vast dominion of God's people.

Mark 13:32-37

Jesus' words center around the *Parousia*, a Greek word with lots of theological meaning. It refers to Jesus' second coming. At the same time, we are called to remember Christ in the manger – a helpless baby. In a world that at times can seem like there is no hope we live in anticipation for Jesus' return. We are celebrating the coming Jesus Emmanuel, "God with us" and we are celebrating the coming Kingdom of God.

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Read ¶ 160 in the 2016-2020 Social Principles on *The Natural World*
“All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it.”

Ask:

One thing that Jesus is asking of us is to be aware that we live in God’s good earth. What does this mean for our stewardship of creation? Take a few suggestions.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Read Romans 9:19-23

Option 1:

Say:

In this passage, creation groans for redemption and renewal. We are part of that in-breaking of Kingdom of God on earth. Did you know there is a type of justice worker named: safe-soils activist. These are people that work for soil to be free of toxins and harmful metals that can affect peoples’ health. Leah Penniman is one of these activists. She began her justice work when she discovered her 18-month old daughter had elevated levels of lead from the soil she played in the community garden in Worcester, Massachusetts. Now Leah works on an urban farm helping restore the land back to health. Now we are going to test our own soil on our church grounds.

NOTES

This Kingdom is here but not yet.

The cosmic language reminds us that there is a realm that we cannot control, but then we are brought to a very real parable of a tree. This tree is for us a sign of God’s coming kingdom. Here is the king Jesus that came to earth as a particular person. The earth is the place where we operate as agents of this Kingdom. We embody the Kingdom here and now in a particular place.

The fig tree is a harkening back to the fig tree in Mark 11 that is fruitless. Here the tree is budding. There is a redemptive element in the in-breaking kingdom. God is restoring the earth.

There are two options. The first option is to test the soil of your church grounds. Second option is to make seed balls.

Resources

By Reconnecting with the Soil, We Heal the Planet and Ourselves by Leah Penniman
National Farm Workers Ministry

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Soil Testing: Instructions

Take small samples from your soil. If you are gardening for food consumption, then dig 6 to 8 inches deep. Get a container large enough to hold all the earth collected. Remove any debris, like pebbles, leaves, or roots. Next, mix soil and put 1 cup of soil into a plastic bag. Make sure soil is dry, but do not use anything to dry the soil.

Mail the bag to a soil testing lab.

When you get your results you can watch this University of Delaware video to interpret your report. You can invite a master gardener from your community to help you understand your results.

After collecting samples and preparing to mail:

Ask students to predict the health of the church's soil.

Do you think we could grow edible plants or fruits on our soil?

Option 2:

Say:

Part of taking care of God's good creation is to be caretakers of the earth. We sow seeds for all kinds of reasons. What do you think are some reasons we sow seeds?

Write these out for everyone.

Say:

Today we are going to make some seed balls or shapes. Let's see how we can use these seeds for good.

Making Seed balls – instructions in the handout.

NOTES

*Many universities test soil for a low cost, usually between \$10 to \$20. Google to find the best site to test your soil.

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

This Advent season let us celebrate Jesus with us, Emmanuel, who walked the earth. God inspires us to live as bearers of the Kingdom on this earth. May this Advent season open us more to God’s world.

Read Poem (Handout)

“Making the House Ready for the Lord”

by Mary Oliver. See the handout below for the poem.

NOTES

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HANDOUT

“Making the House Ready for the Lord”

By Mary Oliver

September 25, 2006

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice it is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

HANDOUT

How to Make Seed Balls from Recycled Paper

Materials for Making Seed Balls:

Repurposed paper (worksheets, newspaper, junk mail etc.)

Seeds (It is best if you plant seeds native to your area or seeds beneficial to your surroundings. For example, milkweed is beneficial for monarch butterflies, but some people see this plant as a nuisance, so consider your neighbors.)

Bucket or plastic bin for soaking paper

Blender or food processor

A few bowls or containers

Strainer or colander

Drying Rack or Racks depending on how many you make.

Optional: Paper shredder

Optional: Cookie cutters if you want to make your seed balls into shapes. (You could use cookie cutters that are relevant to Advent for your community. You could use stars, Christmas trees, or candle cookie cutters.)

Tip: ask a local nursery or a hardware store if they have any seeds to donate.

Directions for Making Seed Balls

Collect paper to make the seed balls. Newspaper, worksheets from school (which kids would really like to destroy old homework), junk mail, paper towels, and any paper product on-hand.

Next you want to make paper into small shreds. A paper shredder is also a good tool for this job.

Place paper into a bin and cover with water.

Put paper pulp into blender about a third of the container and same amount of water as pulp. Then blend. WARNING: make sure to use the blender or food processor safely.

Blend until you have a mushy consistency of oatmeal, the more fine the pulp the better.

Place a colander into a bowl. Then place pulp into the colander. Blend all the soaked paper and then squeeze out water until it is damp enough to hold together into ball. If it falls apart add some of the water from the container of the soaked paper back to the mix.

Next, you will mix seeds by hand into the pulp.

Now you can shape into whatever works. You can roll some out flat and use cookie cutters. Squeeze out any water and then place seed ball on a drying rack. Keep shapes and balls as thin or small as possible. It can take up to three days to dry out. If you place in hot sun it will dry out faster.

Once dried they are ready to plant. You can place them in a burlap bag as a nice gift.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME AIMEE HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ADVOCACY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 1:1-8

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 *Social Principles ¶166* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/our-social-creed-166>)

OBJECTIVE

To help students realize that the coming of Jesus is a promise to break the chains of oppression.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Copies of *Our Social Creed* (2016-2020 *Social Principles ¶166*) for each student. Copies of *Letter to Birmingham Jail* for each student. Abridged version https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1963_MLK_Letter_Abridged.pdf

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Gather

Share a “thumbs-up” or “thumbs-down” moment from the week.

Pray:

Lord, we thank you for gathering us here today. We thank you for (list all of the names of the students) and how you were with us through all of our “thumbs-up” and “thumbs-down” moments of the week. We ask that you open our hearts, our minds, and our ears so that we can more clearly hear your voice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Mark 1:1

Say:

The writer of Mark is very strategic from the first verse. It might seem harmless to us but from the first verse Mark is calling out Caesar. Caesar at the time of his reign referred to himself as the Son of God. Mark from the first verse delegitimizes Caesar’s claim.

Read Mark 1:2-8

Feel free to ask the students to dramatize the reading.

NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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NOTES

Ask:

Can someone summarize what we just read?

Say:

The passage tells us about John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Isaiah 40:3 says “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

Ask:

Does this sound familiar? (sounds like verse 3)

Say:

The writer of Mark is referring to a verse from the Old Testament because Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Old Testament. Jesus is the one promised to break the chains of oppression.

Ask:

- In many ways, Jesus brought upon a movement – a change. Do you think the people of Jesus’s time were ready for Jesus?
- Do you think we, our communities, the world would be ready for Jesus today?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

In April of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested for his involvement in a massive direct action campaign in Birmingham to attack the city’s segregation system. The day that he was arrested, eight Birmingham clergy members wrote a criticism of the campaign in the *Birmingham News*, saying that the campaign was “unwise and untimely” and appealing “to both our white and Negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense” (*A Call for Unity*).

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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The “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was King’s response to *A Call for Unity*.

The letter is long but a very powerful piece. If time allows, take turns reading the whole letter. There is also an abridged version as well.

Ask:

- King wrote, “For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This “wait” has almost always meant “never.” Why do you think the 8 clergymen that wrote the criticism and to wait; wrote what they did?
- King also wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” Do you think King is right?
- How do you think the clergymen who wrote *A Call to Unity* felt reading King’s response?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Gather the students together.

Pass out *Our Social Creed (2016-2020 Social Principles ¶166)*.

Close the lesson by praying the Social Creed together.

NOTES

You can find the letter here:

http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf

Abridged Version:

https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1963_MLK_Letter_Abridged.pdf

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. LISA JO BEZNER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: MENTAL HEALTH CARE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 and Luke 4:16-21

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.X (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-mental-health-162-x>)

OBJECTIVE

To bring awareness to mental health and our response as the church.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Copies of *Faith We Sing* 2217, UMH 512, and Scripture passages, pencils/colored pencils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Sing or read *Faith We Sing* #2217 "By the Babylonian Rivers." Alternately you may find a recorded version on YouTube.

Ask people to share their concerns about current events.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Read Luke 4:16-21 silently while marking any phrases that stick out to you.

Ask for volunteers to read the passage and ask youth to underline any new phrases they notice. Let them share what they notice.

Ask:

- Why do you think the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus?
- What do you think he is preaching about?

Say:

Now turn to Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 and repeat the reading and marking process.

Give them time to imagine between prompts:

- Imagine how you would feel if you watched the city you lived in destroyed by enemies.

NOTES

"If you're going to read it, you may want to provide in the form of poetry without the musical setting.

Provide copies of Luke 4:16-21 with Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 on the opposite side.

The "year of the Lord" is the year of Jubilee in Lev. 25:8-12 or debt relief when the land was returned to the original owner every 50 years.

The book of Isaiah contains the destruction of Jerusalem and the Northern Kingdom in 596 BCE, their captivity or exile in Babylon and the return to Jerusalem around 539 BCE. This section is attributed to Deutero-Isaiah or a third author of the book.

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JUSTICE ISSUE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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- Imagine how you would feel if those enemies forced you to move to their city and work for them.
- Imagine how you would feel if after 50-70 years you were allowed to return home.

Say:

In the NRSV, Isaiah 61:1 includes the phrase “to bind up the brokenhearted,” which is translated as “To bind up the wounded of heart” in the Jewish Study Bible.

Ask:

What do you think the difference is?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

In the 2016-2020 *Social Principles* ¶162.X it states “The World Health Organization defines mental health as ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.’ ”

Have them look at the passages they marked in their initial reading.

Ask:

- How many of you relate to physical relief and how many to mental or emotional relief?
- What do you think of when you hear the term “mental illness”? Why do you think there is such a stigma around mental illness?
- What can you do to remove the stigma in your community?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Sing or read UMH 512 *Stand By Me*.

NOTES

If you know of any mental illnesses in your group, find out more about it through the National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov) or Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (<http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/>)

Youth Mental Health First Aid courses may be offered in your community: <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/about/mental-health-first-aid/>

It can be done as a call and response.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. LISA JO BEZNER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: SEXISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Luke 1:46b-55

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES *2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.F.F* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-women-162-f>)

OBJECTIVE Identification of subtle sex-role stereotypes in texts we normally don't question.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Copies of *United Methodist Hymnal* 198-200 for the students to write on, pencils/pens

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Either sing UMH 198 *My Soul Gives Glory to My God* or responsively read UMH 199 *Canticle of Mary*

Ask:

- Luke 1:46b-55 is often called the “Magnificat” and is read as the Psalm reading or Gospel reading every year during Advent. What message do you hear?
- How do you think Mary felt?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Luke 1:46b-55 is thought to draw on Hannah's plea and prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Read Hannah's prayer and compare it to Mary's prayer.

Break into pairs and highlight verses that are the same.

Ask:

- What do you notice about the verses that are different?
- What does that tell you about the difference between Mary and Hannah?

Say:

Luke 1:48 is thought to be drawn from 1 Samuel 1:11. Compare these two verses.

NOTES

Make copies of UMH 198 through UMH 200 for the youth to write on.

One of the verses that should stick out is Luke 1:48 “for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” In 1 Samuel 2:1, Hannah doesn't claim to be a servant but rejoices in her victory.

The biggest difference is Hannah is asking to be looked upon so she can become pregnant, whereas Mary is already pregnant.

UMH 200 does not appear to have that verse in it.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE SEXISM

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Ask:

- What is different?
- What does it tell you about Mary and Hannah?
- With that verse in mind, look at UMH 200 *Tell Out, My Soul* by Timothy Dudley-Smith. Where do you see that verse reflected in the hymn?
- With that verse in mind, look at UMH 198 *My Soul Gives Glory to My God* by Miriam Therese Winter. Where do you see that verse reflected in the hymn?

Say:

We've been paying particular attention to that verse because of the way it has traditionally been ignored or explained.

Bede in *Homilies on the Gospels* wrote: "In the following words she teaches us how worthless she felt of herself and that she received by the heavenly grace that was lavished on her every sort of good merit that she had."

John Wesley in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* wrote the Magnificat was said: "Under a prophetic impulse, several things, which perhaps she did not then fully understand." In connection with v. 48, Wesley wrote: "In like manner has He regarded our low estate; and vouchsafed to come and save her and us, when we were reduced to the lowest state of sin and misery."

Raniero Cantalamessa in *The Mystery of Christmas: A Commentary on the Magnificat, Gloris, Nunc Dimitis* writes " ... that God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong ..."

Ask:

Can you think of times in history when women had to appear less knowledgeable or weaker in order to be heard?

NOTES

Luke 1:48 appears in the second half of the first verse.

Quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

Bede (672/673-735), Benedictine monk raised in the Northumbrian monastery from age 7.

However, Mary utters the phrase not from a lowly state like when Hannah pleads, but from a blessed state of pregnancy.

Quoted by Justo L. Gonzalez in *Belief commentary on Luke*.

Many female mystics say they are unlearned even though their words show their education.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE SEXISM

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

- Reflect back over the recent election. Were there times you saw female candidates being treated harsher than male candidates?
- Can you think of words that are applied to females that are harsher than the word used to describe the same male behavior?

Randomly distribute index cards with one word from the list on them. Youth can work singly or in pairs to define the words and answer the following questions:

Ask:

- Do you associate this term with males or females?
- What is the equivalent term for other genders?
- Do you use this term yourself?
- Would you use it as a friendly or affectionate term for a friend?

Discussion depending on time:

Robin Lakoff (University of California, Berkeley, linguist) in 1973 wrote:

1. "In appropriate women's speech, strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favored, and means of expression in regard to subject-matter deemed 'trivial' to the 'real' world are elaborated."
2. "If the little girl learns her lesson well, she is not rewarded with unquestioned acceptance on the part of society; rather, the acquisition of this special style of speech will later be an excuse others use to keep her in a demeaning position, to refuse to take her seriously as a human being."

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Read UMH 199 responsively leaving "a lowly servant" out.

NOTES

Wordlist (compiled from 1998 study by Deborah James at the University of Toronto)

1. Airhead
2. Bitch
3. Loser
4. Geek
5. Hag
6. Dog
7. Pip-squeak
8. Asshole
9. Slut
10. Jerk
11. Douchebag
12. Wuss
13. Idiot

Questions:

1. Do you still see this today?
2. Provide examples.
3. Do you see this in the comments on Luke 1:48?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

CONTRIBUTOR NAME MELE TAUMOEPEAU AHO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RACIAL JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Luke 2:22-40

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶ 162.A (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-racial-and-ethnic-persons-162-a>),
2016 Book of Resolutions #3378 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/racism-and-economic-injustice-against-people-of-color-in-the-us-3378>),
2016 Book of Resolutions #3376 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/white-privilege-in-the-united-states-3376>)

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn to understand what it means to review the laws to fit the life and health of all humankind.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Copies of "Writing to Decision Makers", pen, notepad, Bible, Internet access, flip chart, sticky pads

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Opening Prayer:

Holy and Gracious God, we thank you for your son Jesus Christ. Who was lifted up by Simeon and praised by Anna. We thank you for reminding us to look at the laws that support the health of the community, especially racial disparities. Give us the heart to care, eyes to see, and ears to listen to where God calls us to help those in need in our society. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Ask two students to read Luke 2:22-40 passage. One student will read the body of the passage, while the other will read the quotes from Simeon.

Ask:

- Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple?
- Who is Simeon and why was he at the Temple?
- What did Simeon say about Jesus, the child?
- Who else was present at the Temple? What did she share about the child?
- What does Jesus represent to Simeon and Anna? How do you think they felt waiting for Jesus? What hopes and expectations does Jesus bring to Simeon and Anna? (convey to the students that Jesus represented justice and redemption.)

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE RACIAL JUSTICE

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Gather the pairs into small groups.

Say:

When we think about the year 2020, what are some words that pop into our minds? (COVID-19, social-distancing, remote learning, remote-working, not seeing family and friends, perhaps a friend or family member passing from COVID-19, police-brutality, Black Lives Matter, the election.)

Say:

A lot happened in 2020, COVID-19 was something that I don't think many of us were expecting but it disrupted our lives. Something else happened in 2020, something that has been with us all along – the deadly force of racism. Black Lives Matter were painted on streets all over the country and even globally. Black Lives Matter began in 2016 as a way to address the on-going violence and anti-Black racism. It began in 2016 but the work for civil rights has been with us for a long time-centuries. And like Simeon and Anna, justice and reconciliation have been waiting to become a reality and to arrive. Racism and COVID-19 revealed the layers of systemic racism and institutionalized racism in this country.

Show:

Church and Society's Webinar Series: "COVID-19: Pre-existing Disparities Exposed" Webinar 1: Systemic Racism and Discrimination

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om48LerW11A>

(This webinar is an hour and 18 minutes long. The panelists are very knowledgeable and engaging. If possible, consider showing the whole thing or break it up into sections. At a minimum, show Dr. Camara Jones' allegory on race and racism. Starts at 9:58.)

(Depending on how much of the webinar is shown to the students – provide a time to debrief from the webinar.)

A few questions to consider:

- What about Dr. Jones' allegory on race and racism was surprising to you?
- How are communities of color disproportionately impacted by COVID-19?

NOTES

Tape the flip chart to the wall close to each group.

Additional Resources:

Systemic Inequality:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472910/system-atic-inequality-economic-opportunity/>

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/3-discrimination-and-racial-inequality/>

*This webinar is 1:18 minutes long. Watch this webinar before class and consider showing the whole thing (if time allows) or break it up into sections.

Church and Society's Webinar Series: "COVID-19: Pre-existing Disparities Exposed" Webinar 1: Systemic Racism and Discrimination

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om48LerW11A>

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JUSTICE ISSUE RACIAL JUSTICE

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All of the presenters in the webinar spoke about ways to be an advocate. One way that we can be an advocate is to write to our member of congress. Read “Writing to Decision Makers” <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/115> and in pairs consider writing a letter to your member of Congress.

For more information on civic engagement, please look at “Creating Change Together: A toolkit for faith civic engagement” <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/119>

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Invite a student to say the closing prayer.

NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. J.P. (JUNG PYO) HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: DIGNITY & WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 1:(1-9) 10-18

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161>)

OBJECTIVE

To affirm our identity as beloved children of God, affirming both similarities and differences as reflections of our imaging after God and our belonging to God's household.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Name tags, markers, printouts of the scripture passage, others as needed (see below)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ice-Breaker: The Story of My Name

- Students are given name tags (blank), and instructed to write their name or preferred nickname on it (don't stick it on until it's your turn to share!)
- By turns, have each student share her/his name or preferred nickname and what he/she knows about why it was chosen (e.g. a specific meaning? named after someone? picked for a particular reason? etc.)
- After each person shares, group responds, "Hi, [NAME]. We're glad you're here!"

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Read John 1: (1-9) 10-18

* decide between the longer or shorter reading

Say:

As you listen to the reading, what word or phrase stands out? What image comes to mind? Or what emotion does the reading evoke in you?

Option 1: Pre-invite students who are comfortable with reading in public to share the reading aloud (recommend 3-4 diverse voices, e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, etc.).

NOTES

Be mindful not everyone may be enthusiastic about sharing; give permission for students to stick on their name tag and leave it at that (everyone still responds with words of welcome).

OKAY, engaging young people in bible study can be DIFFICULT – so try and have fun with it

Notice John's first chapter is very poetic in its use of imagery and cadence (not unlike spoken word or rap)

When working with diverse groups, "mutual invitation" is a helpful technique developed by Eric Law of the Kaleidoscope Institute: in brief, one person begins sharing, and once done, calls on

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE DIGNITY & WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

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Option 2: Give printouts of the reading, and invite students to take 5-minutes getting to know the reading. Encourage students to jot down observations and questions, circle words and phrases, and draw images that come to mind.

Invite students to share their initial observations (and questions) using “mutual invitation”. You may want to record what is shared on a poster/black/white board for all to share and recall.

Say:

We’re now going to pay particular attention to verses 11-14. Take a moment to reread this section. And as you do, think about this question: How is belonging to God’s family different or similar to belonging to your own family?

After a couple minutes, invite students to share their ideas in groups of 3-4 (option: assign someone in each group to be a “recorder” and a “reporter”).

After 5 minutes, if applicable, have groups report back to the whole what was observed. Again, consider recording what is shared on a poster/black/white board.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

As United Methodist, we have something called The Social Principles that articulates our position on issues impacting all persons, societies, and the environment. Here’s what it says about our identity as children of God:

We believe that our primary identity is as children of God...that no identity or culture has more legitimacy than any other...Through relationships within and among cultures we are called to and have the responsibility for learning from each other, showing mutual respect for our differences and similarities as we experience the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints. (2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161)

NOTES

another to share, until everyone has had the chance to speak (one can also choose to not share, and simply call someone else to go next)

Some observations to highlight from the Second Impression time:

- We have no choice about the families we’re born into
- Joining the family of God is a choice; you don’t have to be of the same/right “blood”
- Our belonging to God has to do with our own openness to Jesus/God; EVERY-ONE can be (and is) a child of God
- Sadly, people have a way of rejecting one another (even their “own”) – and that sucks

Highlight these affirmations:

- we all share our identity with God
- we all share our identity with each other
- we all can choose to learn and grow from our differences

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE DIGNITY & WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

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Ask:

As you listen to this, what does it say to you?

Activity: Same and Different

- This is a variation on the game where you call out a number, and students have to quickly get into groups of that size
- Instead of a number, shout out a group preference with multiple answers (e.g. my favorite ice cream flavor is ____); students then quickly move around trying to find others with the same response
- Once movement has ceased, each group shouts out their preference (this includes groups of 1)
- Do enough rounds to ensure everyone has experienced belonging to a group and possibly being all alone
- End by processing what folks observed and what the activity says about differences and similarities
- Do one final shout out: Find everyone who belongs to the family of God! (and of course, make sure everyone is included in this final grouping)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Closing Ritual: Waters of Baptism

Say:

Even though Jesus experienced rejection, Jesus taught again and again that God's love is expansive enough to include all kinds of people, in fact ALL PEOPLE, into the household of God. And to show this belonging, the Church has a long tradition of using water as a symbol of our rebirth into the family of God.

Invite students to think about ways in which their differences have been celebrated or used to make them feel less than fully included.

Whether baptized or not, invite students to come to the center and be reminded that in the household of God, they are fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

NOTES

Examples of groupings:

- Favorite ice cream flavor
- Best national holiday
- Birthing order
- How many children you want to have
- Pet of choice
- Superhero you'd want to be
- Least favorite vegetable
- Number of bones you've broken in your lifetime

Set up: have students sit in a circle, and place in the middle a basin or bowl either already filled with water, or with a pitcher of water alongside (have a towel ready in case of spills)

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE DIGNITY & WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

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Whoever goes up receives the mark of the cross on their palm, with the words, “You are a beloved child of God.” They in turn mark the next student coming up with the same words. Until all who wish have come. Permission is given for those choosing not to come up to do so.

Conclude with a prayer that takes all persons into account, whether ready or not, as being children of God.

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY/ BAPTISM OF THE LORD

CONTRIBUTOR NAME CHRISTIAN S. WATKINS

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JUSTICE ISSUE: BAPTISMAL VOWS

| | |
|--|--|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Mark 1:4-11 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | 2016 Book of Discipline ¶217 (https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-217-membership-vows) |
| OBJECTIVE | Help students to reflect and learn about baptism and what it requires of us. |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | None |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Prayer:

O God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we thank You for every condition, concerning every condition, and in every condition, for You have covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us unto You, spared us, supported us, and brought us to this hour. Amen

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Who all here has been baptized? Do you remember it? Was the water cold? Do you remember why you needed to be baptized? Who participated in your baptism? These are questions I would like for you all to keep in mind while our scripture is read today.

Ask:

- Can someone read our scripture for today, Mark 1:4-11?
- So, why did John the Baptist say people needed to be baptized?
- According to the Bible, what is sin? Do any scriptures come to mind? (Sin is purposely disobeying the rules of God: Genesis 4:4-7, 1 John 3:4, Romans 1:18-22, Romans 3:23, Romans 7:12-14, Galatians 5:19-21, James 4:17.)
- What is evil? Scriptures?

NOTES

Gather the students/participants in a circle, let them know this is a time of candid conversation and deep reflection. Establish this time as sacred, a time of bonding, and a safe space for sharing. Personal stories are to stay among the group and not to leave the room.

Keep in mind that it should not be assumed that all youth in your group have been baptized, nor do they have the same reference of baptism. For example, some youth may know baptism as a ritual for newborn babies, while others may associate it with adults being fully immersed in a pool of water. There are many expressions of the commitment – it is not too late to make it, or renew it.

The meaning or purpose of baptism: Baptism is related to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12-13), the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39; Galatians 3:26-27 with 4:6), the washing away of sin (Acts 22:16), entering Christ Jesus and His death (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27), spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12), and salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21)

The subjects of baptism: Baptism was only given to those who wished to become disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). It was given to those who were willing to repent of their sins or die to their former life (Acts 2:38-41; Romans 6:1-5) and were willing to place their faith or belief in Christ Jesus as the Son of God and the Lord of life (Acts 8:12, 35-39; 16:14-16, 31-34; 18:8; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:12). In baptism one “calls” on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 22:16). This shows that only responsible people can be Scripturally baptized. Babies and young children are not qualified to be baptized (cf. Acts 8:12).

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY/ BAPTISM OF THE LORD

JUSTICE ISSUE BAPTISMAL VOWS

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- How do we demonstrate love to God and others? (Deuteronomy 30:15-16, Matthew 22:35-40, 1 John 5:3)
- What is repentance, forgiveness, redemption? Scriptures? (Mark 3:20-30, John 5:24, Luke 19:10)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

“Do you remember your Baptism?”

Ask the group again if anyone remembers the day that they were baptized. Do you remember what caused you to be baptized? Was it your parents' decision, or part of the Confirmation process they had to complete? Or, was there a conscious decision you made, acknowledging sin and the need to accept Jesus as Savior, to pursue peace and justice for a purpose greater than just yourselves, in His name?

Have each participant read through the UMC Baptismal Liturgy, reflecting on the vows. Ask the group why are each of the vows important for the whole Church? And ask participants to offer examples of how each vow can be exercised, in church and the world.

On behalf of the whole Church...

- *Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?*
- *Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*
- *Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?*
- *According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?*

Since there are communal responsibilities we all bear as being part of God's Creation and Christ's Holy Church, have your parents fulfilled their covenant responsibilities? Why or why not, and how?

- *Will you nurture these children (persons) in Christ's holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?*

NOTES

UMC Baptismal Covenant 1 Liturgy can be found in its entirety here: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship/the-baptismal-covenant-i>

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY/ BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Has your local church/our global denomination fulfilled their covenant responsibilities? Ask for examples of how it has and has not, and examples of how the church can do better, relative to the communal vows we all recite, especially the bolded statements.

- Do you, as Christ's body, the Church, reaffirm both your rejection of sin and your commitment to Christ?
- Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?
 - *With God's help, we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.*

Now, after discussing all of this, what will you do better? What will you ask others in our community to do better?

CLOSING MOMENT (25 MINUTES)

A Franciscan blessing/benediction...

May God bless us with *discomfort* at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with *anger* at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with *tears* to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough *foolishness* to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

"He has told you, O mortal person, what is good; and what the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Amen.

NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. COURTNEY MCHILL

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JUSTICE ISSUE: WHO GETS TO BE CALLED?

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES N/A

OBJECTIVE There is no limit to who might be called by name to do God's work in the world.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Lots of room to roam around

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Welcome everyone. Have everyone say their name and one gift that God has given them.

Take a moment to just hold those gifts and names.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Lectio Divina – After each reading take a moment to reflect and then have discussion around the question provided.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10 NRSV the first time;
What words stand out to you?

Read it a second time but using someone else's voice:
Have you heard God speak before? How?

Read these few verses a third time:
What keeps you from hearing your name called in our world?

Now read 1 Samuel 3:11-20:
What would you do if you knew that God was always with you no matter what as God promises to be? What would you do if you knew that whatever you did was part of what God wants to say?

NOTES

Naming is one of the most important things that God does. After each person says their name, make sure to say it back to them with intention.

The idea here is to really immerse into the text right away. Most of us have heard this story before but have we inserted ourselves into this story, why or why not?

After the second question you may tell the group that Samuel was young (not ideal for the time and would not have been listened to), and not white (he came from a land that was not a land with white people in it). Samuel had been left to Eli, the priest as an offering to God. He was on the margins and still God used him to do magnificent things with God's people. God never chooses the one we think God might choose.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE WHO GETS TO BE CALLED?

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

This is a game called. “Yes! Let’s!” It is an improv game. In this game we all start to walk around, when one person has an idea for an activity they say it loud enough for everyone to hear in the form of, “Let’s....” For example:

“Let’s skip!”

Once someone has said that activity everyone responds, “Yes! Let’s!” and everyone must begin that activity until the next activity is suggested. You cannot say no to an activity. To suggest an activity it must also be appropriate. If one person yells, “Let’s high five!” All people respond “yes! Let’s!” and immediately begin high fiving.

In Improv, the rule is that we must always respond with yes. In order for Improv theater to work it cannot be blocked. Even when something seems ridiculous those working with each other say yes. So often we get stuck in no and sometimes we even block crazy ideas from God about what we are called to do. Samuel is coached by Eli to say yes and we have to practice listening and saying yes.

After playing for a bit, discuss how that was for you. Was it weird? Was it fun? What got in the way?

What might tell us no in the world that we can respond with yes? How might you see beyond the barriers of patriarchy, white supremacy and homophobia to see that all are called to join in?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Close as you began, by calling each other by name. You can either have each person say their own name or come up with a way that all names are called. This time after each name, all respond, “Here I am.”

End with prayer.

NOTES

So often we hold barriers for our own call that we aren’t ready, fit enough, young enough, rich enough, etc etc when really the only barrier God sees is when we don’t hear God. This activity doesn’t put anyone in charge and all are equal. All have a chance to speak. In what ways can we be more open?

In what ways does society put barriers on us? God calls on those beyond the barriers.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JULIO C. HERNÁNDEZ

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ADVOCACY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 1:14-20; Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

N/A

OBJECTIVE

God's love, grace, and compassion are greater than we could ever imagine.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Bible, Large piece of paper, Markers, copies of Vincent Harding & Phyllis Tickle's "Racial Identity in the Emerging Church and the World" (<https://onbeing.org/programs/vincent-harding-phyllis-tickle-racial-identity-in-the-emerging-church-and-the-world/>)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (10 MINUTES)

Ask the students to write one-word descriptions of an "enemy" they see in their midst or an "enemy" of the country they live in on a large piece of paper.

Read: Matthew 5:44

Pray:

Take time to pray for your enemies. Ask God to see them with new eyes and grow compassion towards them.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Read: Jonah 1:1-3

Ask:

- What did God call Jonah to do?
- Why did Jonah run away?

Say:

Let's continue to think about Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh.

Read: Nahum 3:1-4

NOTES

A large piece of paper

Markers

Bible

Often Jonah is described as a person running away from his call to be a prophet because he did not want to "be" a prophet. What if Jonah's biases or prejudice against the Ninevites were what motivated him to run away? The book itself points to that and oftentimes it gets missed.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

Page: 2 of 4

On the same paper that was used for naming enemies. Have students draw or write descriptions for the Ninevites. What images of Nahum stood out to them the most?

Ask:

- Why did Jonah run away?

Read: Jonah 3:1-5

- What happened when Jonah obeyed God and spoke the message God had for the Ninevites?

Say:

Here is a major plot twist. Jonah's message was very simple. Probably the best sermon preached. It was less than a minute and the whole city repented from their wrongdoing in a very dramatic fashion. Jonah 3:5 says, "A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth." These evil Ninevites showed great remorse for their evil ways and repented. Who would have guessed this outcome?

Ask:

- If you were a prophet or prophetess, what would be your reaction to seeing a whole city change their ways after hearing your spoken words?

Read: Jonah 4:1-5

Ask:

- Why did Jonah run away?
- What was his reaction to God's compassion?
- What did you think Jonah was waiting to see by sitting outside Nineveh?

NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MINUTES)

Ask:

- I would like for you to say Jonah's words in a tone of voice that would express the emotion in which it was spoken: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." Jonah 4:2
- Discuss the emotion. Was it a happy and celebratory expression? Was it full of resentment and regret? What might Jonah be feeling?

Read Vincent Harding & Phyllis Tickle's words.

- And I think it is important to keep saying to ours – it is important to keep saying to ourselves, "We have work to do." And, I think, for the church that emerges in that kind of spirit, with that kind of consciousness, with that kind of agenda, will have a different future than the church, which does not. . . . I'd like to encourage us to recognize that we can't move to new ways unless we're willing to experiment and try out things that we haven't experienced before.

Ask:

- In our church community are there enemies?
- How might God be calling us to reach out to our enemies in love and compassion?
- Do you have an enemy?
- How is God calling you to make peace with your enemy?
- Vincent Harding asks us to consider we are a church with work to do. What is that work that God is calling us to do in light of Jonah 4:2 and Matthew 5:44?

Brainstorm:

- Return to your enemies' page you worked on throughout the session.
- With a new imagination write how God sees these enemies?
- Are they worthy of change, compassion, and/or love?
- On the same paper write a practical way you could love them either collectively as a church or as an individual?

NOTES

If time allows or you can assign as home-work watch

[I grew up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here's why I left](#) by Megan Phelps-Roper

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Pray:

Disturb us, O Lord
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord
when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life
when, having fallen in love with time,
we have ceased to dream of eternity
and in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas
where storms show Thy mastery,
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow.

Amen

By Desmond Tutu

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. ANDY OLIVER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: SPEAKING PROPHETICALLY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 *Social Principles* ¶162.A (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-racial-and-ethnic-persons-162-a>); 2016 *Book of Resolutions* #3065 (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-martin-luther-king-jr-day>)

OBJECTIVE

To learn what a prophet is and practice speaking prophetically.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Bibles, paper, pencils, a student handout

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

To get started I want you to think of one specific thing that you see that isn't right to the level of injustice. It could be a friend who isn't treated fairly or a larger issue that impacts a lot of people. What is that thing that makes you so upset that you may even lose sleep over it? I'll share first and then invite the next person to go.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

Today we are reading from one of the books in the Bible called Deuteronomy. It is from the Hebrew scriptures and is part of the Torah, the first 5 books of the Bible.

Deuteronomy contains the stories of how God would order the life of God's people to help them live in community with one another. The people asked God for a mediator – someone to speak God's truth to them to keep them on the right path. God gave them Moses and continues to call prophets like Moses to speak truth to God's people.

Ask:

- As you listen to this part of God's story, I want you to underline one word or phrase that jumps out at you. Who would like to read?

NOTES

Write down the responses on a board or slips of paper as you will be using them later in the lesson. You will want to be specific about yours to help them think specifically.

Keep tabs on time and skip questions if you run low.

The goal is to help them be able to understand what a prophet is, see it in MLK as an example, and be able to identify local, everyday people (maybe some in the room) as prophetic.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE SPEAKING PROPHETICALLY

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Read: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Ask:

- Share what word or phrase jumped out at you and why? (10 min)
- What do you think of when you hear the word prophet?
(allow for some answers)

(The meaning of the word prophet is “one who is called” or “one who calls.” A prophet calls out what is wrong, calls people to repentance (to apologize, to do better), and calls people to repair.)

Say:

On your handout is an example of a famous prophet that we recently celebrated this month, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In our United Methodist Book of Resolutions, we have a statement about his life as a prophet. Who would like to read the quote from Dr. King?

“Was not Jesus an extremist for love – ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.’... So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice – or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?” – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ask:

- In what ways was Dr. King a prophet?
- Who are other prophets today?
- Who are everyday prophets... people who may not be known beyond their local communities?
- Is there anyone in this room you see as having the gift of prophetic speech or action?
- What are the costs or risks of being prophetic?

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE SPEAKING PROPHETICALLY

Page: 3 of 5

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

You are now going to break into groups of two or three. Each group is going to pick one of the things you listed from our check-in. Something that isn't right; something that is an injustice. You may also choose to think of a new injustice.

You are going to come up with a way to speak out or take action to proclaim God's truth. Remember, a prophet calls out what is wrong, calls people to repentance (to apologize, to do better), and calls people to make repairs. Think about ways you might do this that will invite people into a new way of acting rather than a way that might shame someone. One of the cool things about this is when God's love is at the center, both those who are harmed and those doing the harm have the opportunity for healing and liberation!

You only have 10 minutes. Be creative in how you might be prophetic about this situation.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

To close, each person is going to say one word or phrase to describe our time together today. My word is _____. (Invite the next person)

Let's close in prayer and lift up the situations of injustice, that we might be prophetic healers, sharing God's love.

NOTES

Visit with each group to answer questions and make sure they are on the right track.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE SPEAKING PROPHETICALLY

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HANDOUT

Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 15 to 20:

- 15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.
- 16 This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die."
- 17 Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said.
- 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.
- 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.
- 20 But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak – that prophet shall die."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King quote

(from MLK's Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

<https://tinyurl.com/ovcktqb>)

"Was not Jesus an extremist for love – 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.'... So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice – or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?"

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE SPEAKING PROPHETICALLY

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HANDOUT

Further Readings:

Social Principles 162.A

A) Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons

Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism includes both personal and institutional racism. Personal racism is manifested through the individual expressions, attitudes, and/or behaviors that accept the assumptions of a racist value system and that maintain the benefits of this system. Institutional racism is the established social pattern that supports implicitly or explicitly the racist value system. Racism, manifested as sin, plagues and hinders our relationship with Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. In many cultures white persons are granted unearned privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. We oppose the creation of a racial hierarchy in any culture. Racism breeds racial discrimination. We define racial discrimination as the disparate treatment and lack of full access and equity in resources, opportunities, and participation in the Church and in society based on race or ethnicity.

Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access.

We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society. We assert the obligation of society and people within the society to implement compensatory programs that redress long-standing, systemic social deprivation of racial and ethnic persons. We further assert the right of members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic persons to equal and equitable opportunities in employment and promotion; to education and training of the highest quality; to nondiscrimination in voting, access to public accommodations, and housing purchase or rental; to credit, financial loans, venture capital, and insurance policies; to positions of leadership and power in all elements of our life together; and to full participation in the Church and society. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within the Church and society.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. COURTNEY MCHILL

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JUSTICE ISSUE: FREEDOM AND RESTORATION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Mark 1:29-39

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES N/A

OBJECTIVE Jesus offers us freedom from what ails us and freedom for restoration and vocation. How can we aid Jesus in this freedom for everyone?

SUPPLIES NEEDED Either popsicle sticks and tape or newspapers, eggs, and string

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Close your eyes and think about a skill you possess.

What would it feel like if it was taken away?

How would it feel if it came back to you after being lost?

Take note of how that feels and how you would rejoice when it returns.

Take a moment to think about what it would feel like to do that thing and know it was adding to the community.

Open your eyes.

NOTES

The goal of this lesson is to realize that God restores us in ways we need to fulfill our vocation. God also equips us to help restore others and free others to do what they are called to do.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE FREEDOM AND RESTORATION

Page: 2 of 3

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Act out Mark 1:29-39.

You will need a narrator to read the scripture while other characters act out the story in front of the rest of the group.

Characters in this story include:

- Jesus
- Simon's mother-in-law
- Disciples: Simon, Andrew, James, and John
- Many who come to Jesus sick

Ask:

- Who is healed in this story?
(Jesus tends to find ways to free people to do the thing they were created to do. Simon's mother-in-law had not been able to host and offer hospitality due to her sickness and now she is restored to the community. Jesus continues to restore each person to offer their call to the community.)
- Discuss what this might mean for each person in the community.
(Jesus also calls us to help restore others, free others to do the work that they were created to do.)
- What hinders that work?
- How can we walk alongside others that have traditionally been kept from freedom?
- What can we do to help restore others who have been hurt so that they may be fully in the community?

NOTES

The writer of Mark makes it clear that Jesus is here to heal from the very beginning. We have to be careful not to say that people are not whole when they are different. Our goal in discussing this scripture is to offer up how we can aid in restoration to our call, whoever we are.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JUSTICE ISSUE FREEDOM AND RESTORATION

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Time to play Team Architect!

Divide the group into equal teams, not too big.

Each group receives a roll of tape, popsicle sticks, and string.

The goal of this game is to build a structure together that will hold at least one of each of your shoes.

Another variation on this game is to give each group an egg, newspapers, and string. The goal of this variation is to create a structure that will support the egg. The egg must not break when dropped from a certain height.

Give each team 10-15 minutes to complete the build and observe what happens.

Test your structures.

- How did you highlight everyone's gifts in the group?
- What did you learn? What did you take note of?
- How could your gifts and skills be highlighted more?
- How could you coach your team into utilizing your skills more in the community?
- Did you feel free to use your gifts in this activity?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

In our last moments, take a silent minute to think about what you can offer to this community and how we can make space for that.

As we close in prayer, offer one word that might represent your call to our group.

NOTES

The goal of Team Architect is to highlight that we can use everyone's gifts and if they aren't being used we need to make sure to see them in community. How will the group make space for all vocations? How can we as a community see each other's call, restore that call and make space for that call and healing to happen? How does that create freedom for all people?

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY/ LAST SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME CHRISTIAN S. WATKINS

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JUSTICE ISSUE: TRANSFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Mark 9:2-9 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | N/A |
| OBJECTIVE | Help students understand Transfiguration. |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | Wax paper, mod-podge, tissue paper (various colors), popsicle sticks, string, newspaper |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Prayer:

O God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we thank You for every condition, concerning every condition, and in every condition, for You have covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us unto You, spared us, supported us, and brought us to this hour. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

Our Gospel passage for today gives the account of Jesus' Transfiguration before Peter, James, and John high up on a mountain. At that moment, the three disciples are confronted by the glory of Jesus. They see Elijah and Moses, and they are at first bewildered. After hearing the voice of God they are terrified. The Transfiguration of Jesus is a moment at which the divinity and glory of Jesus are put on display, and Transfiguration Sunday seeks to capture this moment, while at the same time preparing worshipers for the journey they are about to embark upon during the season of Lent.

Ask:

- Can someone read our scripture for today, Mark 9:2-9?

Say:

Jesus told his disciples that they may face difficult things in their lives. He tells them to take up their cross and follow him. I bet that was difficult for them to understand. They were already experiencing challenging times. Many of them left their jobs and their families to follow Jesus. But Jesus promised them that they will

NOTES

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY/ LAST SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE TRANSFORMATION

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soon see His glory. I can imagine that what Jesus was saying was confusing to them, as it would be and is for us today.

Being transfigured means to change in appearance or shape. But, what's amazing about the Transfiguration of Jesus is that when his glory was made known to the disciples, he wasn't changing who he was. We believe that Jesus was both a real person, and also fully God, but the people around him didn't see that. They just saw him as a man.

When Jesus was transfigured, He was shown with two other figures, Moses and Elijah. Moses is the man who led the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt. That was over 1,000 years before Jesus was on earth. And that's not all; Elijah was a prophet who helped to get rid of false gods and idols, so people would know who the one true God was. And that was 800 years before Jesus. This was done for God to prove once and for all that Jesus was indeed real. Additionally, His clothes became bright white. His face was so bright it was shining like the sun, and the disciples were confused. But, then God spoke and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" And they were afraid. Jesus said to them, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, Jesus was alone and looked like a normal person again.

Ask:

- How do you think you would have felt if you had been on that mountain with Jesus?
- How do you think the disciples felt after seeing Jesus transfigured, two men from centuries before, and God speaking to them through a cloud?
- If you were the Son of God, and men treated you like any other man, how would you feel?
- In other passages, God says he was "pleased" with Jesus. Why was he pleased?
- Give an example of how some people revere other people more than Jesus and tell us why.
- How can we show that we honor Jesus above all others?

NOTES

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY/ LAST SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE TRANSFORMATION

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

This simple activity is for celebrating the Transfiguration of Jesus. This “sun-catcher” is meant to resemble the gleaming light of Jesus on the mountain during His transfiguration.

Provide wax paper for each student (size depends on the size of sun-catcher they want to make), tissue paper (different colors), mod-podge, popsicle sticks, glue, and string. (All items except the wax paper can be shared with others.)

Instructions:

1. Apply a thin layer of mod-podge on the wax paper.
2. Cut tissue paper into various shapes and sizes and stick it on to the wax paper. Encourage students to be creative in their interpretation of the transfiguration.
3. Let the tissue paper dry.
4. Glue popsicle sticks around the wax paper like a frame – use the string to create a loop for hanging.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

When the three disciples on the mountain saw Jesus’ glory, God told them to listen to Jesus. And, even though we weren’t up on that mountain top, sometimes we see Jesus too. When we are afraid or alone, sometimes we feel him with us. When we experience happy or exciting things, sometimes it makes us want to praise God. It’s almost like God is saying to us, “This is my Son. Listen to him!” Once we’ve listened and learned about Jesus, it’s our turn to tell others about him.

Let’s pray together.

Dear God, when we read about Jesus’ Transfiguration, sometimes it is hard for us to understand. Help us to see your amazing power and glory so that we may know you, and so that we may tell others about Jesus. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

NOTES

You might want to place newspapers on the tables before the activity.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DAN DICK

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CRIMINAL JUSTICE & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

1 Peter 3:18-21

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 *Social Principles ¶164.H* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-criminal-and-restorative-justice-164-h>), 2016-2020 *Social Principles ¶164.G* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-the-death-penalty-164-g>); 2016 *Book of Resolution #5031* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/humanizing-criminal-justice-5031>)

OBJECTIVE

Reflecting on what we mean by “justice” as Christian believers

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Post-It Notes and Pens; NRSV Bible; United Methodist Hymnal (for each participant, if possible); Book of Discipline or copy of Social Principles; (optional – stickers/dots)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Read the “Litany for Christian Unity” (UMH #556) together

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

Before we read the passage for today, I want us to take a moment and think about how we as individuals and as a collective think about wrongdoing/sin, punishment, forgiveness, and redemption? What are the “prisons” – literal and metaphorical – that we have in our culture? How does our Christian theology align with/differ from our cultural understanding of “justice?”

Have a participant read 1 Peter 3:18-21

NOTES

Before the reading, ask participants to listen for words, concepts, or images that grab their attention. Have them quickly share these with the group.

Helpful notes on the passage:

1. The author speaks to “spirits in prison” because the idea of imprisonment was widespread, but very different from our understanding today. Paul spent much time in prison for the things he did and said because he was a stranger when he traveled and did not have a residence of his own. He would have been in prison with people who couldn’t pay tribute to Caesar, who got in fights, who drank too much wine, as well as assassins, bandits, murderers, the mentally ill, and the criminally insane. They might all sit together in one room. Some might be in prison for a day, others for a year, a few for a lifetime. Many would-be executed. (Remind participants that Jesus was taken into custody after cleansing the temple and upsetting Roman rule – Roman justice could accuse, try, sentence, and execute in a matter of hours.)
2. “Laws” could change at the whims of whoever was in charge. Something that the Hebrew scriptures prohibited was “lawful” according to Rome; many freedoms from scripture were “illegal” by Roman decree. What “laws” should faithful Jews follow?
3. Roman soldiers could “legally” take food, clothing, shelter, currency, property, and even children (conscription for military service/slavery) of anyone under Roman rule at any time. Anyone who objected could be imprisoned. Anyone who spoke an insult against a Roman citizen could be imprisoned.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE CRIMINAL JUSTICE & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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Ask:

What aspects of these things make sense to you? What do you think is “unfair?” How are these things “just” or “unjust?” Who gets to decide what is “fair” or what is “justice?”

(Read notes in the facilitator section to help discuss the question. It might be helpful to have copies of the *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions* for the students to read.)

Say:

The author of 1 Peter is speaking to a culture where people lived in fear and oppression, so even if they were not in a physical prison, they were prisoners in their hearts, minds, and spirits. God’s gift of Jesus was the ultimate act of justice in an unjust world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ “pardoned all sentences,” and proved that forgiveness and restoration was/is available to all people.

Too often we think of people in terms of “good or bad,” “holy or sinful,” “acceptable or unacceptable.” In God’s realm, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23) therefore all require forgiveness, redemption, and a new beginning – restorative justice.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Begin by reminding participants that we are all created in the image of God, we are all beloved children of God – regardless of the things we do. God’s love and grace extend to all people.

Place the five category post-it notes on the open surface and offer a brief explanation of each:

- A literal prison is being put in jail for doing something wrong
- A personal physical prison is an attitude – “I’m too thin, I’m too fat, I’m too short, I’m ugly, etc.”
- A personal mental prison says – “I’m not good enough, I’m stupid, I can’t do anything right, etc.”
- A personal emotional prison says – “people don’t like me, everyone hates me, I am sad all the time, nobody cares about me, etc.”
- A personal spiritual prison says – “God couldn’t possibly love someone like me, I have more doubts than I have faith, I’m probably going to hell, I’m not really a good person, etc.”

NOTES

Read Discipline ¶164.H (& G); Resolution 5031 in our *Book of Resolutions* in preparation for this session. Make note of those issues that you find most striking and relevant.

Some quotes you might want to use (from 2016 *Resolutions*):

“A justice system that reflects God’s desires for the world is one that is healing and restorative.” (p. 490)

“A justice system must be first and foremost about humanization since God’s justice always works to bring reconciliation.” (p. 491)

Emphasize the issues of race and class that impact justice in our society.

Make sure there is an open space – a wall, an easel, newsprint, etc. – where post-it notes can be placed.

In advance of the session, prepare five Post-it notes, one word on each:

- Literal
- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual

Note: do not force anyone to participate in the exercise, especially those who may have been in youth detention facilities or jails. The incarceration of minors is growing

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Have each participant reflect on the five categories.

Invite participants to identify ways they have been imprisoned in any or all of the five categories. For those who feel safe doing so, have them write their “prison” on their post-it note, and place it under the appropriate category.

Have everyone look at the display that emerges, then move into a brief discussion time.

Invite participants to discuss what it feels like to be in their unique “prisons.” Acknowledge those who feel they are not imprisoned in any way, but offer focus on the ways we feel imprisoned.

Ask:

- What do these prisons have in common?
- What would release you from your prison?
- What role can our faith and our Christian community play in our release?

Many people in literal concrete and bars prisons despair of forgiveness, redemption, acceptance, or hope. Our Social Principles acknowledge what we have a system that is often not fair, equitable, just, or redemptive. It is essential that Christian people who have received God’s unconditional love and redemptive grace call and work for restorative justice and the opportunity for redemption and freedom deserved by all of God’s children.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Read or sing together UMH #579 Lord God, Your Love Has Called Us Here

Offer a short closing prayer

NOTES

in the U.S., especially among black and brown communities. This can be extremely painful to share. If no one selects literal prison, don’t worry about it – these conversations are often best held one-on-one or in a very small, high-trust, group.

Some reflections:

- Judgment comes internally as well as externally; for many, external judgment is most destructive
- Imprisonment = loss of power, freedom, self-esteem
- Parole/release often feels conditional and partial
- Total pardon and forgiveness is possible with God

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. ANNA GUILLOZET

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ADVOCACY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Romans 4:13-25

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶164.B Political Responsibility (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-political-responsibility-164-b>)

OBJECTIVE

Understand the difference between God's Law and the laws of a governing body. Understand the relationship between grace and law.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Green & Brown Construction Paper or Green and Brown Markers, pens, white paper, envelopes, stamps

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (10 MINUTES)

Using either the green and brown construction paper or markers, have students make a simple "faith family tree" with themselves as the trunk.

Explain to students that unlike a traditional family tree, a faith family tree can have multiple branches!

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Read through the scripture lesson and encourage students to find what this text tells us faith is not.

Faith is not simply trying to obey a law or set of rules (vv. 13-15).

Ask students to reflect on some religious "rules" they have either been told to follow or that they might have more questions about.

Ask:

What is the relationship between law and grace?

Help the students to define grace (v. 16). This will be a challenge, but encourage them to rely on the conversation they just had about the law.

In light of the above conversation, pair the students up and ask them to write a definition of faith. Come back together as a group, and each of the partner groups to share their definition. If possible, then ask the whole group to combine their definitions into one!

NOTES

It would be best for the facilitator to prepare theirs in advance as an example.

In this portion of the discussion, the facilitator needs to be ready/comfortable in saying something like, "I am not sure why we think that" or "I am not sure why you were told that."

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

Page: 2 of 2

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Begin with a trivia game of wacky laws. Ask students to “buzz in” and guess in which state the law exists.

Share with students the section of the UM Social Principles about Political Responsibility and facilitate a discussion about what we do when we disagree with laws. You might even look at the section on Civil Obedience/Disobedience and have a conversation about protesting.

Ask:

- Is any place for grace in the system of law of their own country/state/locale? Should there be?

If safe internet access is available, ask the students to search for their local/state lawmakers, and encourage them to write a letter either in support of a decision or to ask for a policy decision to be made. *If students are not comfortable doing this on their own, even with help, be prepared to write a letter together and have each student sign the letter for sending.*

CLOSING MOMENT (25 MINUTES)

If you are meeting in a church building, take the letter/letters written together and move the group to a place with an altar (sanctuary, worship center, etc.) and ask if any students are comfortable praying a commissioning type prayer before sending it.

If possible, think about traveling to a post office or mailbox together to send the letter(s) as a group. In the best-case scenario, you can take the students to the office of a lawmaker to hand-deliver the letter, though we know this may not always be an option.

NOTES

Use a trusted source (<https://www.businessinsider.com/weird-state-laws-across-america-2018>) and make sure to filter for any inappropriate content before the trivia game!

Prepare in advance!

- <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/advocacy/take-action>
- <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/members-leaders/action/contact-congress>

- Do not assume that students know how to address an envelope! Be prepared to help them properly address an envelope.

Be prepared to pray if no student volunteers.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME PASTOR EDUARDO CARRILLO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: MEDIA/INFLUENCE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 2:13-22

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.S Media Violence and Christian Values (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-media-violence-and-christian-values-162-s>)

OBJECTIVE

A look at how social media influences personal lives and sometimes the church.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper, pencils, cellphones

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Gather the students.

Read John 2:13-22 three times. Share with the students that the passage will be read three times and after each reading, there will be three questions. Answer the question quietly or write the answer down on a piece of paper.

Allow one minute of silence after each question. Use a bell, a knock, a non-disruptive sound, or a word/phrase “amen,” “so be it,” “in the name of the Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer” to close the guided meditation and prompt the following reader.

Questions for guided meditation:

- What stuck with you?
- Why is Jesus so upset?
- A marketplace is not such a bad place, why is it important to be reverent in church?

NOTES

Pick a reader that the group looks up to, respects, and gravitates towards.

There are different learners, some might need to write it down, doodle, or do something else while the scripture is being read.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MEDIA/INFLUENCE

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

Before we continue, I want to share with you a little context about the passage that we just read. During the time that John is describing, trades and business happened in the temple. Many were pilgrims that came from out of town for festivals. The festival that they were preparing for was Passover. Festivals were a busy time. People were stocking up on all the necessities to celebrate. Often time festivals bring a wave of income to the city as well as to the temple! Think about how the Super Bowl often brings a lot of income for the city but also to all of the businesses around the stadium. People came to the city/town and offered sacrifices at the temple. The money changers selling sacrifices at the temple was a necessity – it didn't start bad! – for many but it had now become a source of money laundering, stealing, and deceiving.

Ask:

- How many of you ever hear the phrase “being short-changed? Who is being short-changed in the passage we read?”

Say:

People were short-changing not only others but most importantly God. People were taking advantage of those who were practicing their beliefs. So, Jesus is cleaning the house, he is saying this will not do, this is not what is supposed to be. And we should not be motionless when we are in the presence of people being taken advantage of. People saw the temple as a place to do their agenda; Jesus saw the temple as God's house, a welcoming space not a place of extortion. When was the last time you saw your pastor whipping moneychangers out of the church? Why is that? Well, most churches have learned the lesson. Most, not all, grasp that the church is not ground for profit; it is ground for worship, mercy, grace, love, and understanding AND so are our bodies, minds, and hearts!

As Christians, we must be aware that our body is the temple of Christ. And I want you to understand that the temple is more than the walls that keep it standing, it is the experience of the Divine inside of it. The church is not only the building but also what is inside of it! What is inside you? What are your deeper thoughts, convictions, what is your heartbeat saying? As a follower of Christ, we are invited to make our thoughts a holy space that seeks to clean house, to rise above the occasion, too, figuratively, flip tables, to not short-change God and be lukewarm believers, but be believers on fire that see injustice and say “this will not do”.

NOTES

Remember, Passover is one of the seven feasts for the LORD in the Jewish tradition.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MEDIA/INFLUENCE

Page: 3 of 4

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MINUTES)

Say:

List your favorite 5 movies. Now, make a list of your 5 favorite scripture passages.

List the most played songs on your phone. Now, make a list of your favorite hymns or contemporary spiritual songs.

Don't feel bad if it is hard to make the 2nd and 4th list. But this is just to show you that we need to pay attention to what we allow to be in our bodies, in the temple of Christ.

This simple exercise is to help us realize that we need to be aware of what we put in our bodies, in our hearts and our minds.

Now read the portion of Media Violence and Christian Values under the section of The Social Community and ponder the following questions.

Ask:

- Media Violence can desensitize us, how can we be more aware of the world's injustice and oppression?
- Can you think of any examples/people in music/video-games/Instagram that profits out of likes/views/shares yet it does nothing to benefit you?
- How do you think the church engages with media? When is it appropriate and when is it not appropriate?
- Can social media be harmful? How?
- Imagine for a moment you have all the resources at your disposal, how would you be a Christian influencer through YouTube/IG/FB/Snapchat? Be creative, make a clip, make a beat, make a song, make a difference! (Do this if time allows, if not, encourage students to work on it during the week and share it with others!)

NOTES

Maybe they won't remember the scripture, encourage them, help them.

Again, maybe hum a hymn or a song well known in your congregation. Help them, this exercise is not to induce tension.

Be ready to dig deeper and hear them, what is the message they are receiving – it might be a time to help understand.

The Social Principles can be of great influence for our church.

Try to bring to light that some influencers are not good to follow.

This can be a great opportunity to do a TikTok, Snapchat, clip, or whatever you feel most comfortable and give them the chance to be the influencer instead of the influenced.

Read the room, maybe there's a need to remember that we own the cellphone not the other way around.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MEDIA/INFLUENCE

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You have a responsibility to keep the temple clean, not just personally but communally. Not just within the believers, but also in society and in media. You are a child of God created to be a peacemaker. The Trinity invites you to help those suffering injustices, suffering oppression, in simpler words, help those who are being short-changed from experiencing God and become a Christ-influencer.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Almighty God, here we are remembering whose we are and what we are called to do. Equip us to see with Your eyes in Your church, in Your world, and within ourselves. Help us to hear the Holy Spirit and be aware that others need our help and that we also open ourselves to be helped. Perhaps in a big way flipping tables and maybe in small ways by standing, kneeling, embracing, marching, cleaning up what others have made a mess of Your creation. Help us give Your presence fully to others and not shortchange anyone of Your Holy Presence. Sanctify our lives and our witness in the world, with our friends and even in media. In the name of our Creator, our Redeemer and in the one who Sustains us till you come back again, Amen.

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FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME CHETT PRITCHETT

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JUSTICE ISSUE: AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Numbers 21:4-9

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.V (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-right-to-health-care-162-v>)

OBJECTIVE

To help students visualize and think ethically about how we care for one another.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Bibles, Dry Erase Board, Dry erase markers; (Optional: colored pencils, paper, tape), picture of a bronze serpent on a pole, Caduceus – or a computer to show the picture [links provided in the study]

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask:

Ask participants if anyone has ever been to a hospital or doctor's office – either as a patient or as a visitor.

- What are some things you saw there?
- How did those things make you feel?
- Why were you there? (Hopefully, this elicits “to feel healthier”.)

Say:

And so today, we're going to talk about creating healthy communities.

Pray:

Holy One,
we ask you to guide our conversation today,
about ways we can encourage healthy living for each other,
for our families, for our church, our community, and our world.
Amen.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE

Page: 2 of 5

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Numbers 21:4-9

Have everyone read the passage again silently and have participants write down (or if you're brave have them highlight in their bibles – everyone loves to color!) words or concepts they don't understand.

Have a student read Numbers 21:4-9 aloud.

Ask:

- So what's happening here?
(The Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness and there had been murmuring and threatening rebellion against their leader, Moses, and God.)
- So what does God do to get the Israelites to follow Moses again?
(Sends poisonous snakes. But God never does something focused on the law (following rules) without providing a way that engages human free will. God commands Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole so that if the Israelite people get a poisonous snake bite, they can look at the bronze snake on the pole and their life would be spared.)

Show participants a [photo of a bronze serpent on a pole](#).

Say:

For the ancient Israelites this was a sign of hope that God was present in their midst and sought not to harm them, but to bring them healing.

NOTES

It's good to have participants hear the passage aloud again for those who learn aurally. Also, try to encourage a reader with a different voice than yours (gender, pitch, etc).

I find it best to allow participants to "Popcorn" answers and keep a list of answers on a dry erase board. And then go back and retell the highlights of the story. This allows the participants to feel confident in their comprehension skills, but also allows the leader to make sure all the important items are covered.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

What are some signs of healing and health today?

- Show participants a photo of a **Caduceus**
- Where have you seen this symbol before?

Have participants pair up in groups of two or three.

Give participants 3 minutes to create a list of signs and symbols that are reminders of healing and health. For those who are creative, draw these signs and symbols.

Regroup and have pairs share their list of signs and symbols.

Ask:

- Who has access to these signs and symbols?
 - Does everyone have the ability to call an ambulance or pay for a doctor's visit or emergency surgery?
 - How do you pay for medication?
 - Do you have health insurance? If not, what do you do?
 - Is insurance provided by an employer? What do you do when you're unemployed?
 - Not everyone has equal access to health insurance, and thus, not everyone has equal access to health and medical care.
- What happens when you go to the doctor or the hospital?
 - Is the doctor or hospital accessible to you? How far do you have to go for treatment or check-up?
 - What is the process once you arrive? Can you utilize the technology that is provided to you? Is the wait time and space comfortable/comforting?

NOTES

Facilitator: Write these on the dry erase board or hang creative expressions so everyone can see.

Note: This part of the discussion is very US-centric. Please feel free to adapt questions for your specific context.

Allow time for participants to consider this question. There will be likely very different and strongly-held opinions. That's okay. But end the discussion with the Social Principles and the follow-up question, "Why should people of faith care?"

LECTIONARY

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- What if you don't have health insurance or the ability to pay?
- What happens if seeking medical care puts you into financial debt?
- Should it be the responsibility of the government to provide health care to all people?
 - (The United Methodist Social Principles – which are biblically-based and formed through prayer and the Wesleyan quadrilateral – state that it should be the responsibility of governments to provide healthcare to all people and encourages hospitals, physicians, and medical clinics to provide access to primary health care to all people regardless of their health-care coverage or ability to pay for treatment.)
- Why should people of faith care about health care?
 - From today's Scripture, we learn that God wants God's people to live.
 - Throughout the Gospels, we know that Jesus heals the sick.
 - John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, shared a rule for living that is very similar to part of the oath doctors take: Do No Harm.
 - Loving our neighbors means providing them every opportunity to live happy and healthy lives.

Say:

So what can we do?

One consideration is to raise money to help relieve medical debt. There is an organization called **RIP Medical Debt** – and for every dollar you donate, the organization will buy back the debts and forgive \$100 in medical debt.

(Perhaps this is through a Lenten discipline – or maybe an event in the Easter season – or a Pentecost Party?)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:
Healing God, who seeks the best for each one of us,
give us the strength to lead like Moses,
the heart to heal like Jesus,
and the power of the Holy Spirit to love our neighbors. Amen.

NOTES

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. ANDY OLIVER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: KEEPING COVENANT—MAKING SURE GOD’S PROMISES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Jeremiah 31:31-35

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES *2016-2020 Social Principles ¶164.A* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-basic-freedoms-and-human-rights-164-a>)

OBJECTIVE Learning about covenant and practice keeping covenant in our care for one another

SUPPLIES Bibles, paper, pencils, phone/tablet/computer to play a youtube video, paper or writing board

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Today we are going to talk about covenant. A covenant is a two-way promise between God and God’s people, and God’s people and each other. In society, we live life together by making promises to each other to live in community. By doing so, we keep our covenant to God. Jesus said it this way: This is how they will know you are my disciples, that you love one another (John 13:35).

Action:

Check-in by naming something that people need to survive or thrive that is a basic need and is promised to them by our social covenant.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Today we are reading from Jeremiah! Jeremiah is one of God’s prophets. Before we read the scripture, let’s watch this video about the writing of Jeremiah:

Watch: <https://tinyurl.com/y4k8rt3m>

Ask:

- What is something new you learned about Jeremiah?
- Who would like to read this part of God’s story from Jeremiah 31:31-35

NOTES

Write down the responses on a board or slips of paper as you will be using them later in the lesson. You will want to be specific about yours to help them think specifically.

Keep tabs on time and skip questions if you run low.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE KEEPING COVENANT—MAKING SURE GOD’S PROMISES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL PEOPLE

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Read: Jeremiah 31:31-35

Ask:

- Share what word or phrase jumped out at you and why?
- What do you think of when you hear the word covenant?
- Do you think covenants are primarily a private/personal thing or a public/communal thing? What is the difference?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

You are now going to break into groups of two or three. Each group is going to pick one of the things you listed from our check-in. Each of you listed a basic right; something people are promised as part of being in community with one another. You can also pick something not listed.

You are going to pretend you are speechwriters for Jeremiah. Write words and create an action for Jeremiah to call people to do justice by keeping promises to each other about helping people have basic human rights like housing, clean water, health care, or not having to fear gun violence.

You only have 10 minutes. Be creative!

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

To close, each person is going to say one word or phrase to describe our time together today. My word is _____. (Invite the next person)

Let’s close in prayer and lift basic human rights, that we might be covenant keepers, sharing God’s love.

NOTES

Visit with each group to answer questions and make sure they are on the right track.

PALM SUNDAY/SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME SIMON PAK

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RIGHTS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC PERSONS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Isaiah 50:4-9

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162>)

OBJECTIVE For students to ponder and answer the question, "Who belongs to God?"

SUPPLIES NEEDED None

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

2020 has been a pivotal year for many. 2020 has yielded a global pandemic that has upended the global economy, put millions out of work, and has killed hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. In 2020 murder hornets are a thing. But, the most important thing that 2020 has yielded was a call from the people to recognize and make accountable those who perpetrate horrible acts against people of different races, notably black and brown people in America. Racial injustice is real and must be talked about and thought about and prayed about for any change to occur.

Please take a few moments to reflect on how much our governments, our religious institutions, our economy, and our education systems have stated that black lives don't matter in this country.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Isaiah 50:4-9

Ask:

- Are there any key phrases that jumped out to you while reading that passage? Any themes?

Say:

What I noticed is that the person writing the passage is oppressed. They're being stuck, spat on, and insulted. But the writer knows that vindication will come from God.

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PALM SUNDAY/SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE RIGHTS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC PERSONS

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This makes me ask, if God is the God of the oppressed, what about those who don't experience oppression? Is God the God of the rich? Is God the God of the powerful as well?

We read a lot in the Bible that God works for all people. Yes, God refers specifically to Israelites every once in a while, but usually, when God does something big, he refers to the recipients of God's work as all peoples, all nations, or all of the earth.

When people understand and react to God's work, they see it as an act that God did for them, for their people. So, who are they?

When the Bible refers to us, in context, it is Israel. But since the Bible has become a book for more than just Israel, since more and more people that claim Christianity are people outside of Israel, who is us?

Who belongs to God if God claims all?

If God vindicates the oppressed, what becomes of the powerful? When God favors the rich, do the poor suffer?

Questions to consider:

Ask:

- Seriously, who belongs to God?
- Who does God belong to?
- Can anyone ethnic group claim God for themselves?
- Can anything that differentiates us as people determine whether God will work for us or against us?

PALM SUNDAY/SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JUSTICE ISSUE RIGHTS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC PERSONS

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Diversity is all around us, even if we all look alike.

Take a look around the group and see what it is that differentiates you from each other: Are there people of different races present? Who's represented?

(If the group is ethnically homogenous, take a moment and determine where everyone is from. Go a step further and try to determine where peoples' ancestors are from.)

Take a moment to see how interests differ among the group.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

The differences among us merely make us human. Especially in the United States, we are a collection of all of the best and sometimes the worst of what the world has to offer.

Share/Ask:

- Share an event in life that made it very clear that you were different from others.
- Share a moment in life where you were the **ONLY** one that was different.
- Share a moment in life when you made others feel different.

Say:

Regardless of our differences, regardless of if we are an outcast or are casting out others, there needs to be a recognition that God embraces all of God's creation as God's own. If we are, we are God's. Regardless of anything that makes us visibly or invisibly different, it is God that claims us and brings humanity together in that claim.

Perhaps we can begin seeing each other as God sees us: God's good creation.

NOTES

EASTER SUNDAY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JENNA JOHNSON AND REV. DORIS K. DALTON

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RACISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 20:1-18

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES 2016-2020 Book of Discipline-General – ¶5. Article V. Racial Justice (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-division-1-general>)

OBJECTIVE

To have students see and uphold the value of each person as a unique child of God and commit themselves to the healing and wholeness of all persons.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Copies of the handout for each student

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask:

- Think of a time when you felt really bad and someone told you something that cheered you up or some good news – what did they say? How did it change the way you felt?

Say:

The Easter resurrection story is the culmination of good news for Christians; in fact, that's where we get the word "gospel." In the original Greek, euangelion (pronounce: "you-an-ghel-ee-on") means "good news" which later gets translated to "gospel" and used lots of different ways. So when we're sharing the gospel with people, we're sharing good news! The good news that life overcomes death, that there is hope for the kin-dom of God to come to earth, and that God is on our side helping us to love people and creation.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

A little historical context to our passage for today. The Jewish community was a minority population in Jerusalem, oppressed by the Roman government and heavily taxed. Jesus and his disciples were seen as a group of "rabble-rousers" and "insurrectionists" who challenged the religious leaders, the local economic system that kept most people poor, and the unjust community rules that kept the vulnerable on the edges of society. His teachings and parables invited the listener to think about God's intention for the Kin-dom of God by offering a different point of view. Jesus often called for the inclusion of women, children, the elderly, the

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poor, the differently-abled, and the sick because they were prevented from fully participating in community. It was the combination of Jesus' bold and challenging "good news" and his claims that he was the Son of God that led him to be charged with blasphemy and treason, and then crucified. This text is set in the garden where many tombs were located outside the city, in the early morning of the third day after Jesus' crucifixion.

Read: John 20:1-18

Say:

This is the Easter Story, one of the most well-known stories of Christianity. When we hear this story, we usually think about Jesus's resurrection, and how Jesus defeated death and proved he is the Son of God. Today, let's try to think about the Easter story from another perspective. Put yourself in the shoes of Mary Magdalene and the disciples. Try to imagine their pain and the confusion they felt as they encountered an empty tomb.

Ask:

- What do you know about the role of women during this time? Why was Mary Magdalene the first one to the tomb? Do you think the other disciples believed Mary Magdalene's story about an empty tomb and a resurrected Christ? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Mary doesn't recognize Jesus? She only realizes it's him when he calls her name, reminding us how much names matter and that Jesus calls each of us.
- Usually, when we think of Jesus' ministry, we think of the disciples, specifically the twelve men, but that ignores the important contributions and the presence of women among Jesus' disciples. In this text, Mary is the first to bring the good news to the male disciples. What is the importance of having a woman be the first messenger of the good news?
- Historically, people believed that if you were in the tomb for two days you could just be sleeping but after three days, you were truly dead and nothing could be done. Why are the three days in the tomb significant? How does this impact the way the disciples might receive Mary's story about a resurrected Jesus?

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EASTER SUNDAY

JUSTICE ISSUE RACISM

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- Think about how Jesus' resurrection changed history, how women became preachers of the good news, and how our story as followers of Christ no longer has to end in death. How does Mary Magdalene "flip the script" of the story of Jesus and Christianity?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Today is Easter Sunday, a day when we recall Mary Magdalene's encounter with a resurrected Jesus in the garden. Today is also the 53rd anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both Jesus and Rev. King were murdered because they had a bigger vision for people than some wanted – they both believed in God's love for the oppressed and chose to stand on the side of the hurting. They offer us hope for ways the world could look, whether it's a vision of the kin-dom of God or equitable treatment of all people through the dismantling of racism. We're going to look at case studies of racism today to practice ways we can interrupt racism. Some of the stories might be more relatable to you than others. If you can't understand the person's situation, try to practice empathy: believe that their experience was real and painful and that we need to work to make sure those things don't continue to happen to our siblings in Christ. Spend some time thinking about how you could be a Mary Magdalene that "flips the script" in situations like these that might happen in your school or community.

Instructions:

Divide the group into teams of 2-4 people each, and give each group a case study to read and discuss (10-15 minutes). The discussion questions for each group are "What is the good news that is needed in this case study? How can you offer good news to the hurting and call attention to a different way of life that reflects the Kin-dom of God?"

After the teams discuss, have them present the three most important points of their discussion to the rest of the group.

After all groups share, share with the class the UMC stance on racism.

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EASTER SUNDAY

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Say:

The 2016 Book of Discipline General ¶5. Article V. on Racial Justice (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-division-1-general>) states:

- The United Methodist Church proclaims the value of each person as a unique child of God and commits itself to the healing and wholeness of all persons.
- The United Methodist Church recognizes that the sin of racism has been destructive to its unity throughout its history. Racism continues to cause painful division and marginalization.
- The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate racism, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large.
- The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten the cause of racial justice at all times and in all places.

Say:

The story of Jesus' resurrection transformed the world, but we would not have heard it if it had not been for Mary Magdalene, an unlikely messenger of that good news. Racism does not have to be part of our lives. When you encounter racism in your school or community, how can you be a messenger of the transforming good news of Jesus Christ?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:

Loving God who defies expectations and gives us hope in the midst of death, help us to comfort the hurting, stand up for your kin-dom, and be the messengers of your good news when we encounter racism that divides and oppresses us. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

HANDOUT

Case Study #1: I am Mexican American, and I was adopted by an all-white family. I don't speak any Spanish and nobody would know I was Mexican unless they looked carefully. They may have just assumed I was a very tan person. My adoptive family helps me feel connected to my heritage, and I like learning about Mexican culture. My best friend knows about my heritage and we talk about it sometimes. I didn't think being Mexican was a big deal, until one day at school, everything turned upside-down. My best friend told other people I am Mexican, so when I went to join my study group during study hall, I got a lot of funny looks when I sat down. I said, "What's the matter?" And one girl said, "I never knew you are a Mexican. I don't think you should study with us anymore. Go find another group." I am so angry and hurt. What changed about me that made them think I didn't belong anymore? No one spoke up for me, not even my best friend.

Case Study #2: I used to invite my friends to the youth group events at my church. My church is like any other church, friendly, and welcoming to new visitors. My family and I have attended this church for as long as I can remember, and I have always felt accepted here. This is why I am so upset when I heard about what happened a long time ago at my church. Before 1965, my all-white church did not allow Black people to worship here. One Sunday morning, a Black man walked up the church steps to attend the worship service. The greeter at the door opened his coat to show the visitor he was wearing a gun and advised the visitor to go away. At the time, everyone thought this was the right thing to do. Eventually, the pastor and the congregation relaxed their stance on segregated worship, and they no longer posted armed guards at the door. It's not that they started welcoming Black people to church, they just stopped preventing Black people from coming to church. They now say they welcome everyone at church, but everyone in the congregation is still white. I don't see how my friends who are not white would feel comfortable coming to events at my church. How will I know my church is accepting them now when they used to threaten Black people who wanted to visit?

HANDOUT

Case Study #3: My experience as a Chinese-American at my school is that I am treated like a second-class citizen from a strange, other world. It was worse in elementary school. My classmates would pull my hair, make fun of my last name, and tease me about the shape of my eyes. They would pretend to speak in Chinese to me, making up “ching chong” words. A few kids would bully me and call me derogatory slurs instead of my name, like “Hey, ch*nk!” It made me feel like an outsider, and that I did not belong, no matter what I did or said. Over the years, I grew more confident, started showing my personality and I made friends. The bullying ceased, the teasing stopped. One day, in sixth grade, a few girls stopped me to share a funny story with me. “I was pulling my hair into a ponytail this morning, and I pulled so tight, it made my eyes go like this!” She pulled her eyes into tight slits. “I looked just like you!” The girls laughed and waited for me to laugh with them. They thought their sharing this story with me was their way of showing me they liked me and wanted me to be their friend. I did not laugh, instead I wanted to cry. I walked away, feeling hurt, and like a stranger from another world, all over again.

Case Study #4: I am a Black man who has grown up in the United States. My parents have always taught me what I should do if I am ever stopped by the police. It was almost like a training, practicing what to say, where to keep my hands, listening to my tone, and making sure I sounded respectful and nonviolent, even though I might be angry inside. They told me that these lessons were important because they could save my life. Once, I was serving as a youth group leader for my church. I was standing at the back of my parked car with the trunk open in front of the church. We were getting ministry supplies out of the trunk when one of the youth helping me asked for money so they could buy sodas when we were done. I was giving him some cash when the police car appeared and stopped beside me. The next thing I knew, the police officer had me leaning against my car with my hands cuffed, and his hand pushing my head against the roof of my car. My youth group came running outside. The church pastor came outside and tried talking to the officer. The police officer kept yelling at everyone who tried to talk to him. Everyone was tense and upset. I stayed calm. Twenty minutes later, the police officer uncuffed me, yelled at me again, and drove away. The youth, my pastor, and my parents were all angry. I was also angry, but also thankful that I went home that night.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. ANNA GUILLOZET

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JUSTICE ISSUE: UNITY/SOLIDARITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalms 133

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/>)

OBJECTIVE

social-principles-preface-and-preamble
What does it mean to truly *live* in unity?

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Small width chalk in various colors, either black construction paper or chalkboard space for each student, magazines, scissors, glue sticks

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Creative Hearing:

For 5 minutes, a leader or volunteer will read Psalm 133 once through each minute.

Students will use chalk on either chalkboard or black construction paper to draw either picture or creatively write/color words that stand out to them.

Ask any students who would care to share to explain what they created.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Since the students are now familiar with the words in the Psalm, spend a few minutes allowing them to ask any questions or articulate what they do not understand about the Psalm.

If students are not yet talkative, you might say something like:

“Around the time this Psalm was written, people poured oil on the head of someone chosen for a special task. When this Psalm says that oil is running down Aaron’s beard onto the collar of his robe, it is the robe of a high priest. There’s a thing called an “ephod” on the front of the robe which has the names of all of the tribes of Israel on it. So this Psalm is trying to show the blessing flowing down onto all of God’s people.

NOTES

Try to ensure that the space is quiet and, if possible, encourage students to arrange themselves in ways that they cannot see what other students are creating.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE UNITY/SOLIDARITY

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Ask:

- Since we don't often pour oil on people, what do you do in your family to show that people are given a special task? In your family's culture? In our shared cultures? (new assignments of chores, allowances, ordaining pastors, inaugurating a president, etc.)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Spend 10-15 minutes asking the students to make a collage with magazine words/pictures that share what makes them special/unique.

Ask students to share what they've made, noticing what is alike, and what is different in each of their collages.

Read through the preamble of the Social Principles and ask if, given what is written/stated, the students feel like there is anything they would like to add to their collage?

Ask the students to think about or even list people who they feel strongly about supporting. Think of this like the list of the tribes on Aaron's ephod. Or ask them on who's ephod do they think they (as an individual or as a part of a group) are listed?

Psalm 133 is a Psalm of Ascent, meant to be a song or poem that people would recite/sing as they traveled upward to Jerusalem. Talk about what solidarity means for us as we travel together in life even in the midst of our differences. Think about times that you have traveled together in life either as a person who was doing the supporting or the person who was being supported.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Use the Psalm as your closing prayer! Ask the students to arrange themselves in a circle, each with either their own Bible or a copy of Psalm 133. Go around the circle one by one, each student saying one word of the Psalm until the whole Psalm is read. If time allows, do this more than once to encourage the students to have a more "conversational" tone in their group reading.

NOTES

In the sharing, be sure to point out to students that unity does not mean uniformity. We are blessed with differences that make us special and can serve differently within the world.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME CHETT PRITCHETT

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JUSTICE ISSUE: INTERFAITH AND INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT

| | |
|---|--|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 3:12-19 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.B (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-religious-minorities-162-b) |
| OBJECTIVE | Create awareness of the concept of religious freedom and religious expression |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | Bell, highlighters (optional), paper for each student, markers, copies of the Social Principles or ¶162.B, bibles |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Lightly ring a bell and begin with these words

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad
Hear, O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord in One

Keep silence.
Lightly ring the bell.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Today's Scripture comes from the Book of Acts in the New Testament. It's an odd book because it's not one of the Gospels, but it's not one of the Letters. It's wedged between the Gospel of John and Paul's letter to the Romans, but it's thought to be authored by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. Instead of being a story about Jesus, it's a narrative about the first disciples of Jesus after Jesus' resurrection.

The passage we're going to hear happens after the disciples, Peter and John, healed a man who couldn't walk as he begged for money outside the Temple in Jerusalem.

Read Acts 3:12-19

NOTES

It's good to have participants hear the passage aloud again for those who learn aurally. Also, try to encourage a reader with a different voice than yours (gender, pitch, etc).

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JUSTICE ISSUE INTERFAITH AND INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT

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Have everyone read silently and have participants write down or highlight words or concepts they don't understand.

Have a participant read Acts 3:12-19 aloud.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Ask:

- So, what's happening here?

Peter and John have healed someone at the Temple and a crowd gathers around them. Members of the crowd would have been faithful adherents to the Jewish faith, but not followers of Christ-while Peter and John were Jewish AND followers of Christ.

Peter says to the crowd in verse 13:

"The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and the God of our ancestors..." reminding the people that they all worship the same God.

But then Peter gets angry and says in verses 14 and 15, "you rejected the Holy and Righteous One"... you killed the Author of life".

This passage gets a little tricky if you don't remember that both the Roman and Jewish authorities had a role in the death of Jesus and that Peter himself is Jewish.

Christian tradition has, for centuries, interpreted Luke/Acts as a basis for anti-Semitism. In cultures influenced by American Evangelicalism, this has oft led to forms of Christian Exceptionalism. Too often we forget that regardless of what one believes or doesn't believe, we are created by the same God.

NOTES

Clarity is important here, so make sure you ask participants if they understand that immediately following Jesus' death you could be Jewish AND Christian.

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JUSTICE ISSUE INTERFAITH AND INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT

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NOTES

In the New Interpreter's Study Bible, Barbara Reid reminds us:

"When Jewish Christians spoke of Jews who put Jesus to death, the intra-Jewish nature of the conflict was clear. But when Christians who are no longer Jews speak of 'the Jews' as being responsible for the death of Jesus, there is a whole other nuance that fuels anti-Judaism. Luke's narratives must be understood in both their historical and theological contexts; at the same time they must not be used to foment ant-Semitism." (NISB, p. 1959)

Just as it's easy for us to slip into anti-Semitism without understanding context, we also must not cast Peter as an anti-Semite, as he was Jewish.

Leave a couple of minutes for Q&A.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Take one minute and think about the question "What is your religious identity?"

Write it in big letters (so one, maybe two words) with the paper and marker provided, but don't show anyone. Hold it up to your midsection and on the count of three, turn it around.

Go around the room, and with no explanations, say what's on your paper.

Participants might have variations of "Christian," "Methodist," "United Methodist" or maybe even "Unsure".

Ask participants if they think it's okay to identify with multiple faith identities.

What happens when identities clash?

- Maybe someone identifies as LGBTQ and Christian?
- Or as Christian and Buddhist?
- Or American and Muslim?

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE INTERFAITH AND INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT

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Split participants into pairs to discuss this question:

Should one religion be a country's primary faith and control the values and laws of that country?

Bring pairs back together to share responses.

Say:

Across the world, individuals and groups are persecuted because one religious group sees its values and beliefs primary to those of other religious adherents (or those of no religious preference at all). The United Methodist Social Principles "urge policies and practices that ensure the right of every religious group to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions. We condemn all overt and covert forms of religious intolerance, being especially sensitive to their expression in media stereotyping. We assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic, and social discrimination."

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Lightly ring the bell.

You call us to prayer in many different ways. From minarets at mosques, with the sound of the shofar, with heads bowed or hands extended. In the city streets, in the rural fields, in the deep forest, or at the water's edge. Help us see the humanity in each person, no matter how they express that Divine spark within them. So be it.

Lightly ring the bell.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JASON STANLEY

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JUSTICE ISSUE: IMMIGRATION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 10:11-18

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles 162.H (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-immigrants-162-h>), 2016 Book of Resolutions #3284 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/faithfulness-in-response-to-critical-needs-3284>)

OBJECTIVE

All, including immigrants, are welcome to Jesus' fold.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Snack-sized candies for Check Your Seat, YouTube access, Bibles, Strips of paper with sentences, Handouts with statements, colored sheets of paper, pencils/markers, tape

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Play Check Your Seat

1. Prior to the group meeting, tape snack size candies (or some equivalent) to the bottoms of the chairs. If you have different kinds of furniture, get creative! Do not tape candy to every chair. Leave a handful without it. But, have extra candy on hand.
2. Tell the youth that there are surprises under their seats.
3. Once they look, some will have candy and some will not.
4. Talk about it: What did it feel like to find candy? What did it feel like to not find one?
5. Give out the extra candy.

Pray:

God of love and grace, thank you for this day and this opportunity to gather together. Open our eyes that we may see as you see, hear as you hear, and love as you love. Amen.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE IMMIGRATION

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Watch this YouTube video of a shepherd calling sheep: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Holr54eF4LY> (about 3 minutes).

Before you start, ask the youth to look for what they notice about the relationships between the shepherd (who is holding the camera) and the sheep.

After you watch the video, ask:

- What did you notice about the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep?
- Imagine if one of us were present and tried to call the sheep in a different direction. What do you think would happen? Why? What's the difference between the shepherd in the video and one of us?

Read John 10:11-18.

Say:

Jesus uses the image of the shepherd to describe the relationship between him and the people. It's an image the people would recognize because shepherding was a common occupation at the time.

Ask:

- How would you describe the relationship between Jesus and the people?
- What makes Jesus the Good Shepherd?

(You could talk about the intimate relationship between shepherd and sheep, the sheep know the shepherd's voice, they trust the shepherd. This could also be a good opportunity for the youth to share their own experiences of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.)

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE IMMIGRATION

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Hand four slips of paper (numbered 1-4) with sentences from key verses of the text printed on it to individuals or pairs:

1. "I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:15b)
 2. "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold." (John 10:16a)
 3. "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." (John 10:16b)
 4. "So, there will be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16c)
- Ask the first group to read their sentence.
Then ask:
What does Jesus say he will do?
Explain that the readers/listeners of John's gospel would already know about Jesus' death on the cross.
They were already aware that Jesus had died on the cross for them.
 - Ask the second group to read their sentence.
Then ask: Who do you think the "other sheep" that Jesus is talking about? (Most likely Jesus is referring to the Gentiles, or non-Jews, who were becoming Jesus followers). Who in our community would be considered the "other sheep"? Who in our church would be considered the "other sheep"?
 - Ask the third group to read their sentence. Then ask: What is Jesus' desire? What would it look like to bring the "other sheep"?
 - Ask the fourth group to read their sentence. Then ask: What is the ultimate goal? Is this an easy goal to accomplish? Why or why not?

Say:

The United Methodist Church believes that all people, no matter what "fold" they belong to, are welcome in God's kin-dom. Because all people are valued and loved by God, the Church values and loves all people.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE IMMIGRATION

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NOTES

Give each group one of the four prepared handouts with statements from different United Methodist sources:

1. From the Service of Word and Table II in the UM Hymnal: "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another."
2. Paragraph 162.H – Rights of Immigrant – from the UM Book of Discipline
3. From UM Book of Resolutions, Resolution #3284: "The United Methodist Church is an open-door church, where every person is invited to come in, get closer to God, and become a part of a community of faith. That community is committed to attaining the good for all people through social and spiritual transformation. Any policies and laws attempting to limit or restrain the church's work of responding to the needs of others is contrary to its most fundamental beliefs as stated in the Gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him [regardless of color of skin or legal immigrant status] will have eternal life" (John 3:16). Similarly, the parable of the good Samaritan invites us, as Christians, to do good to all people irrespective of their place of origin."
4. From Faith Leaders' Statement on Family Separation, signed by Bishop Ken Carter on behalf of the Council of Bishops: "We affirm the family as a foundational societal structure to support human community and understand the household as an estate blessed by God. The security of the family provides critical mental, physical, and emotional support to the development and wellbeing of children. Our congregations and agencies serve many migrant families that have recently arrived in the United States. Leaving their communities is often the only option they have to provide safety for their children and protect them from harm. Tearing children away from parents who have made a dangerous journey to provide a safe and sufficient life for them is unnecessarily cruel and detrimental to the well-being of parents and children."

Ask groups to read the statement and discuss how it relates to John 10:11-18.

- What do these statements say about the "other sheep"? What does the statement suggest our response should be?
- Ask groups to share their thoughts with the larger group.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE IMMIGRATION

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Hand out colored sheets of paper to each group, along with markers, and ask the groups to brainstorm ideas for how to respond so that the church is inclusive of the “other sheep”.

As they finish their brainstorms, invite them to tape their sheet to a wall so that everyone can see the different ideas. Offer suggestions about how they can accomplish these ideas.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:

God, you have called us to love as you love. Open our eyes to see those who are not included in our community and in our church. Give us the courage and the wisdom to make room at the table for all people. Amen.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE IMMIGRATION

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HANDOUT

Cut the following verses into four strips for individuals or pairs.



1. "I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:15b)



2. "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold." (John 10:16a)



3. "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." (John 10:16b)



4. "So, there will be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16c)



FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

HANDOUT

Pass out the below to students:



1. From the Service of Word and Table II in the UM Hymnal: “Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.”
2. We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families. Paragraph 162.H – Rights of Immigrant – from the UM Book of Discipline
3. From UM Book of Resolutions, Resolution #3284: “The United Methodist Church is an open-door church, where every person is invited to come in, get closer to God, and become a part of a community of faith. That community is committed to attaining the good for all people through social and spiritual transformation. Any policies and laws attempting to limit or restrain the church’s work of responding to the needs of others is contrary to its most fundamental beliefs as stated in the Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him [regardless of color of skin or legal immigrant status] will have eternal life” (John 3:16). Similarly, the parable of the good Samaritan invites us, as Christians, to do good to all people irrespective of their place of origin.”
4. From Faith Leaders’ Statement on Family Separation, signed by Bishop Ken Carter on behalf of the Council of Bishops: “We affirm the family as a foundational societal structure to support human community and understand the household as an estate blessed by God. The security of the family provides critical mental, physical, and emotional support to the development and wellbeing of children. Our congregations and agencies serve many migrant families that have recently arrived in the United States. Leaving their communities is often the only option they have to provide safety for their children and protect them from harm. Tearing children away from parents who have made a dangerous journey to provide a safe and sufficient life for them is unnecessarily cruel and detrimental to the well-being of parents and children.”

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. J. PAIGE BOYER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE 1 John 4:7-21

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES *2016-2020 Social Principles 161.G* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-human-sexuality-161-g>) and *2016 Book of Resolutions "Eradicating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence"* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/eradicating-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-3427>)

OBJECTIVE God models Love, but we often see and experience love that is nothing like God's love. This lesson helps kids understand what love does and does not look like.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Bible, post-it notes, a way to watch a video online

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Engage in a meditative reading of the scripture passage through a process called Lectio Divina. You'll read the scripture three times, while participants consider a question.

First Reading: Listen for a specific word or phrase that catches your attention.

Second Reading: Actively think about your word or phrase. Why is it important? How does it make me feel?

Third Reading: Ask, "God, why did you give me this word? Why do I feel this way about this phrase?"

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

"God is Love." This passage is often quoted as a way to understand God. This it implies that we understand what love means. What does love mean to you?

While Greek has several words for love, there are three words for love that are commonly used:

Eros – passionate love;

Philia – Love of friends, deep friendship;

Agape – Agape is a love built on deep appreciation and high regard.

NOTES

If you feel that this passage is too long for your kids to engage, consider using 1 John 4: 16b-21

You can have different readers read each time through if you'd like.

Have kids write down their answers (maybe on heart-shaped post-it notes?)

For more on the Greek language in this passage, you can visit: https://biblehub.com/text/1_john/4-7.htm

For more, visit: The King Institute at Stanford University.

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Ask:

- Can you name an example of each of these kinds of love? (discuss with a partner)
- Which word for love do you think is used in this passage from 1 John? (Agape)

Say:

One of the greatest descriptions of Agape love comes from Martin Luther King Jr, who described it as: “purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is the love of God operating in the human heart.”

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Now, that we have begun to uncover what love is, it’s important to know that love is active and is a verb. We act out our love and make choices about how we do that.

Ask:

- How do you think we should behave in our relationships? How should we treat one another?

Invite kids to brainstorm how they should treat people they love. Consider how we treat our family, our friends, our boyfriends/girlfriends/significant others. If you have a chalkboard or a place to write – consider writing down everyone’s ideas.

Ask:

- Do you know of any relationships where love doesn’t look like what we’ve described?

Offer a warning that the video is about domestic violence and can be hard to watch, share “The Mirror” with the youth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5JiqCLh6ps>

NOTES

Trigger Warning: You know your kids. If there are youth in your program who you know have been in domestic violence situations, you may want to have a co-teacher or other adult with them during this discussion. If they have been removed from DV situations, and are willing and able, this might be a good opportunity for older youth to share his/her story.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Say:

The UMC Book of Discipline describes domestic violence as having many forms, naming specifically verbal, psychological, physical, and sexual. The video linked above shows several examples of abusive behavior besides physical violence.

Have kids identify where they see these things:

- escalation (it starts small),
- isolation (when he takes her phone and her keys),
- control (many places, but especially when he says he can't imagine her with someone else); and
- financial abuse (when she finds her wallet empty).

Say:

Sometimes, we think of Domestic Violence as a grown-up problem but the reality is, partner violence happens to teenagers too. In fact, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year. One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence. One in 10 high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Here are some signs of violence among teens (from Love is Respect)

- Check your phone or email without permission
- Making false accusations
- Constantly putting you down
- Mood swings
- Extreme jealousy or insecurity
- Physically hurting you in any way
- Explosive temper
- Possessiveness
- Isolating you from family or friends
- Telling you what to do.

NOTES

Source: Love is Respect (<https://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/dating-violence-statistics/>)

This list is included a “palm card” from Love is Respect – Downloadable materials (<https://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/download-materials/>)

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JUSTICE ISSUE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

So, looking at the list we've created about what love is and what love isn't, I'd like to invite you to reflect on how you want to be loved.

Get a piece of paper and fold it in thirds:

In the top section, write: How to love NAME

Then list (at least) 5 things you need from someone who loves you.

Then in the middle of the section, write: How NOT to love NAME.

Here, list 5 things you won't put up within a relationship.

At the end of this list, write these words: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

Then, at the bottom of the paper write:

I, NAME, I am worthy of love, and God loves me. I will love others as God has loved me and will ask others to love me in ways that honor me and God's love for me. God is love and God loves NAME.

Once everyone is done, invite them to keep their paper. You may offer to make them a few copies if they'd like so that they can share it with others (parents, friends, significant others). They should keep a copy for themselves as a reminder that they deserve to be loved in all their relationships.

Close in prayer:

Loving God, help us to know your love in all our relationships. Help us to love one another as you have loved us and to love ourselves as you have loved us. May we be agents of your love in all that we do. Amen.

NOTES

Examples include: give me hugs, bring me my favorite candy, tell me what you like about me, come to see me do my thing (sports, plays, performances, etc.), celebrate my achievements.

Examples include: Name-calling, physical violence, not respecting boundaries, keeping me away from my friends/family.

You can use this prayer or write your own.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DR. GRACE PAK

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JUSTICE ISSUE: INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Acts 10:44-48

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Book of Resolutions #6024 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/global-racism-and-xenophobia-impact-on-women-children-and-youth-6024>)

OBJECTIVE

God loves ALL people and God shows no partiality.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Newsprint, markers, tape (for newsprint)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Welcome everyone and check-in briefly by sharing the following.

- Share an intercultural experience from this past week.
- What did you learn from this experience?

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for this gathering! Thank you that you are here with us, loving us and helping us to learn and grow in our faith. Today, help us to learn that you love all people regardless of race, skin color, language, culture, social and economic status. May we love others the way you love us with no preference nor partiality. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Acts 10:44-48 is the conclusion of the story of Cornelius and Peter which begins from verse 1 of the chapter. To get the whole story, we will read from verse 1.

Divide the class into three groups. Each group will answer questions and report back to the larger group. Give each group newsprint/paper and markers to draw/write answers to the questions. After 10 minutes, each group will present to the larger group. Finish with the concluding questions.

NOTES

Be free to adapt this material to your youth group context.

Intercultural experience can include watching a movie about other cultures, eating food from other cultures, meeting someone new from other cultures, reading books, etc.

- If the youth group is more than 5, then do the check-in sharing in pairs or small groups of 3-4.

If the group is small, everyone can work together section by section, creating a newsprint summary for each section. Spend 6-7 mins on each section. Bring to close with conclusion questions. (5 mins)

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

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NOTES

Group 1 Questions:

Cornelius visited by an angel (vs. 1-8)

- What happened?
- Who is Cornelius? Who is Cornelius politically, racially, culturally, and socially?
- What is Cornelius commanded to do and how does he respond?
- What may be at risk for Cornelius to obey the command?

Group 2 Questions:

Peter's vision (vs. 9-22)

- What happened?
- Who is Peter? Who is Peter politically, racially, culturally, and socially?
- What is Peter commanded to do in the vision? Why is Peter refusing to listen to God?
- What is God trying to convey to him through the visions? Why?

Group 3 Questions:

Peter at Cornelius' house (vs. 23-48)

- What happened when Cornelius and Peter met? What is peculiar about their meeting?
- What are the learnings for Cornelius? For Peter and believers who came with Peter?

Conclusion questions for the large group.

- What is your learning from this story?
- How does this story apply to you and your church?

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

- Who is missing in our church and ministry?

On newsprint or a chalk/whiteboard, draw three concentric circles (large enough to fill the space).

Say:

As a group, we are going to fill in the circles. The innermost circle will be filled with people in the youth group. In the middle circle, our congregation. In the outer circle, those who are in our community. (Be sure to include those who live in all the parts/sections of your town/neighborhood, those who work in your town, who are in your school, etc.)

Once all the circles are filled in, look at who is in each of the circles.

Ask:

- Who are in the community and not in our church? Who is missing in our youth group and our church?
- If we believe God shows no partiality but loves everyone, how should our youth group and church look like?
- What can be done to include everyone in the community?
- What is one thing we can do individually and/or as a youth group to ensure that everyone is included in ministry? Be specific as to include when, who, what, and how as much as possible.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Stand together in a circle, share one thing you take away from the session today.

Once everyone has shared, the facilitator can close with a prayer or go around the circle once with each person offering one sentence as a prayer. The last person will close the prayer by saying "In Jesus' name we pray. Amen"

NOTES

Encourage youth to be creative in drawing or writing in descriptions.

If this exercise is uncomfortable for some, discuss why and connect to Cornelius and Peter's story that they obeyed despite their cultural norms.

Write/make a list of what each youth is committing to do and what they are going to do as a group to follow up next time the group is together.

Sharing and praying around the circle is invitational and not compulsory. Before sharing or praying begins, let everyone know that they can pass if not ready or willing and that's okay.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CONTRIBUTOR NAME AMANDA MOUNTAIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RACIAL JUSTICE AND BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS HAPPENING AS AN EXAMPLE OF PRAYER IN ACTION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE John 17:6-19

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.A (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-racial-and-ethnic-persons-162-a>)

OBJECTIVE For youth to learn that prayer is an act of love, they can pray with their feet and actions in the world against issues of injustice, and they embody this through the mindfulness practice of walking meditation.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Bible, markers, pens or pencils, construction paper or other colorful sheets of paper, scissors, tape

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Walking meditation prayer:

Tell the youth that today you are going to be studying John 17:6-19

Tell the group that you will be leading them in a mindfulness meditation practice called “a walking meditation.” Let them know that “a walking meditation” is a meditative practice used to connect our heads and hearts with our bodies. They should walk quietly and pay attention to each motion they take – how their foot feels as it lifts off the floor, how it feels when it meets the ground again, how far they move forward in space, and to feel and then let go of any frustrations they feel at the slowness of their pace during this practice. The idea is not to move far but to move with intention, paying attention to connecting your body with your mind and your surroundings.

Instruct the group to stand up and form a circle. Invite them to quiet their minds and to focus on you as you read the scripture passage John 17:6-19 aloud one sentence at a time. Before you begin reading, instruct the youth that they are to take two small steps forward in a clockwise direction after each sentence you read. As they walk forward, allow a moment of silence for them to reflect on the sentence you just read.

After the entire passage is read aloud, invite the youth to sit back down in a circle to reflect on the walking mediation exercise.

NOTES

You may want to use this resource about walking meditations and mindfulness from Thich Nhat Hanh
<https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-meditate-thich-nhat-hanh-on-walking-meditation/>

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE RACIAL JUSTICE AND BLACK LIVES MATTER...

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Use the following reflection questions to guide your discussion on the exercise:

- What were your thoughts as you took your first step? How were they different from your thoughts when you took your final step?
- What words from the scripture passage remain with you? What stuck out to you? How so?
- Do you feel more connected to the ground after having paid attention to your steps?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Instruct the youth that you are now moving into a time of Bible study and invite them to turn in their Bibles (you can either provide Bibles, ask the youth to bring a Bible with them before the gathering, or use a Bible app on their phones).

Ask someone to read aloud John 16:25-27. Use the following questions to guide a brief (5-10 minutes) discussion:

- Who is speaking in this passage?
- Who are they talking to? What are they saying to them? *

Now repeat the same thing with John 17:6-19 and use the following questions to guide the discussion.

Invite the group to look at the placement of this passage in the overall story of Jesus. Ask the group:

- What is Jesus doing in this passage? **
- What is his prayer asking of God? ***

NOTES

*Reading the passage immediately preceding John 17 allows the readers to place John 17 in the context of the overall story of Jesus's life and death. In John 16, Jesus is telling his disciples that he will be leaving them. This is important in that it sets the frame for what Jesus is doing in John 17-praying for his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion.

**Jesus is praying for his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion.

***He is praying to God asking for their protection even though he knows his followers will betray him. Jesus says "I gave them a mission in the world" and asks God "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you guard them from the Evil One."

- I'm no longer in the world, but they are. Please protect them. They are faithful (except for that one guy) ;).

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JUSTICE ISSUE RACIAL JUSTICE AND BLACK LIVES MATTER...

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- Jesus says “I gave them a mission in the world” and asks God “I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you guard them from the Evil One.”
- Why is the act of Jesus praying important for us? What can we learn from the act of Jesus praying? * * * *

Ask the group:

- Where or when they have prayed for someone else? What did they pray about?
- What did they ask of God?
- How did they pray? In silence? Aloud?
- Is prayer only something to be done alone? Sitting down?

Say:

* * * * * Thoughts and prayers are often empty promises. How many times have you said you were sending your thoughts and prayers to someone experiencing tragedy or hardship? Did you really stop and mean every word you said? Were you mindful that you were speaking to God through prayer? Did you name names and circumstances and trust that those you were praying for are just as important to God as you are?

Did you know that there are many postures of prayer including praying with our bodies and through our actions against the injustices in the world that Jesus preached against? Our walking meditation could be considered a prayer.

Read the following quotes from Frederick Douglass and Rabbi Abraham Heschel

- “Praying for freedom never did me any good ‘til I started praying with my feet.” – Frederick Douglass
- Rabbi Heschel, when asked if he took time to pray when he was in Selma marching with Martin Luther King, Jr., responded, “I prayed with my feet.”

NOTES

****Prayer can be an act of love.

- Jesus is showing how much he loves his followers and those who believe his message that comes from God by asking God to protect them as they try to live out what Jesus taught them, even though it most certainly means his death on the cross.
- Jesus knows his followers are just as important to God as he is.

*****You may want to read this resource on Rabbi Heschel and praying with our feet: <https://www.centralsynagogue.org/news/detail/pray-with-your-feet>

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Say:

Sometimes praying can be done with our feet and in our actions that work for justice. Actions can be advocating for policy changes like GBCS does on Capitol Hill, or participating in the Black Lives Matter protests and pressing the systems of police brutality and excessive force by using our bodies in protests.

Ask the youth:

- What are other social justice issues in the world?
- What types of actions can you take?
- What have you done in the past?
- What are some actions you have witnessed in the press, in the news, on social media?
- What actions has your church community taken? Examples may include participating in a Black Lives Matter protest, volunteering at a soup kitchen or running a food pantry out of the church's basement, going on a mission trip, etc.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Activity:

Pray with your feet

Materials Needed:

- Paper (construction paper or other colored paper in light enough colors where you can see the writing on them)
- Pencils or Pens
- Markers
- Scissors
- Tape

NOTES

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Have youth work in pairs to trace each other's foot (one person traces their right foot and one traces their left foot) using a pencil or pen (5 minutes).

Now have the youth cut out the outlines of their feet (5 minutes).

Ask the youth to write one way they can pray with their feet/actions in the world on the feet (5 minutes).

Invite each pair or small group to stand and read aloud their action item to the larger group.

After each youth reads their action item, invite the youth to tape their foot onto the wall to make a path of feet (right foot followed by left foot followed by right, etc).

After each group has shared and taped their feet to the wall you should have a path of feet leading to somewhere. Invite the group to look at the path they just created out of various action items. Remind the group that if we all work together on these action items and social justice issues, we can all move further toward justice.

Say:

No matter what you do, do something.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Walking meditation prayer:

Invite the group to stand in a circle again and instruct them that you will once again be doing a walking meditation only this time you will be reading a prayer. After each line of the prayer, the group is to take two steps forward, again paying attention to how their bodies feel moving through space.

NOTES

*<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/peace-prayer-of-saint-francis/>

This site also offers a link to read the prayer in Spanish, to take 3 minutes to pray for peace and to learn more about St Francis of Assisi.

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Prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O God, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Peace Prayer of St Francis*

NOTES

If you are running short on time, you can just read the prayer aloud and skip the walking meditation activity.

PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DAN DICK

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JUSTICE ISSUE: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ALONG WITH FAITH FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD

| | |
|---|--|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Act 2:1-21 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160.F (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-science-and-technology-160-f), ¶160.E (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-space-160-e), ¶160.D (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-global-climate-stewardship-160-d), ¶162.N (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-medical-experimentation-162-n), ¶162.O (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-genetic-technology-162-o), ¶162.I (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-162-i), ¶162.V (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-right-to-health-care-162-v), ¶162.W (https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-organ-transplantation-and-donation-162-w) |
| OBJECTIVE | To challenge the false dichotomy of science or religion so often raised in the church |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | NRSV Bible; The Faith We Sing (for each participant, if possible); Book of Discipline or copy of Social Principles, newsprint and markers (Smartboard, etc. where available) |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Read or Sing #2004 The Faith We Sing – Praise the Source of Faith and Learning

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Frame the Focus

Say:

We live in a world where we put incredible faith in science, medicine, and technology to solve all our problems, to keep us safe, and to make our lives easier and more productive. However, we live in a global community where these things are not available equally. In addition, many people of the Christian faith view modern science and the constant pursuit of knowledge and scientific advancement to be at odds with the life of faith in God. Should we put our faith in God or science? What should we do when scientific advancement contradicts or challenges our Biblical teachings?

NOTES

Before the reading/singing, ask participants to listen for words, concepts, or images that grab their attention. Have them quickly share these with the group.

Read paragraphs from Discipline ¶160 and 162 in preparation for this session. Make note of those issues that you find most striking and relevant. Reference these Social Principles where you find most appropriate.

Say:

On the surface, Acts 2:1-21 might seem a strange passage of scripture to use to reflect on the relationship of science and faith, but see what connections you can find as you hear the passage (and follow along):

Have a participant read Acts 2:1-21; invite participants to follow along:

- The audience gathered from a wide variety of cultures, worldviews, belief systems, economic and educational backgrounds, and languages.
- The Holy Spirit “impassioned and inspired” the disciples to speak – with courage, conviction, and in the languages of those gathered.
- Some were amazed by the miracle of a new message delivered in the language that made sense to each; others dismissed the spectacle to drunkenness and nonsense.
- Peter quotes the prophet Joel and speaks of prophecy, vision, portents, and reminds the crowd that God is continually speaking through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Say:

Our modern culture often thinks in “either/or” terms instead of “both/and.” Worldly knowledge and thinking has often been placed in an inferior position by the church through the centuries. Human thinking has been framed as a challenge to “real faith.”

Ask:

- What changes in your thinking when scientific knowledge and technological progress are not seen in competition with Christian faith, but as a gift from God as an expansion and support for our faith?

NOTES

Some connections you might want to offer if these things are not noted by participants:

- The Holy Spirit communicates what people need to hear.
- The communication transcends our differences and limitations.
- What we hear is something very new and different.
- What we hear changes us.
- What we hear calls us to act in new ways.

Key points:

- God’s Holy Spirit expands and extends knowledge and learning.
- Ability to use our minds and knowledge are gifts from God.
- We dishonor God’s gift of knowledge and thinking when we make faith and science into a competition.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Divide the group into two teams and give each team two pieces of newsprint and a couple of markers. Allow each team to work for five minutes. Have each team select a scribe to write down the list generated by their team.

Have team one work together to generate a list of all the advances in human learning they can think of since the time of Jesus and Paul.

Have team two work together to generate a list of all the advances in our understanding of God and the Christian faith since the time of Jesus and Paul.

At the end of five minutes, post the pieces of newsprint side by side. Simply ask the participants to share any thoughts, reactions, questions, or observations they make of the two lists.

Highlight any relationships discovered during this discussion.

Ask:

- Where do we find harmony between advances in science and technology with our Christian faith?
- What advances – many that we take for granted – have been adopted by the church?
- Where do we find competition between science and the Christian faith?
- Where do we find deep disagreement between science and our Christian faith?
- Has our Biblical scholarship and theological study kept pace with advances in science, medicine, and technology? Why or why not?

Say:

Some in the church community state that a person of Christian faith cannot enter fields of scientific, medical, or technological research and practice. Some in the scientific communities state the true scientists cannot engage in religious belief and practice.

NOTES

Observations you might offer if they don't come up in the group's conversation.

- Most Christians have no problem accepting automobiles, air travel, television, phones, or computers, even though there is nothing in the Bible about them. However, there are some groups, like the Amish, who greatly limit or deny their use.
- Some Christians refuse medical attention and immunizations based on faith considerations.
- Historically, astronomy, geography, biology, and physics have been rejected by the church, debated within the church, then accepted to some degree by the church. The age of the universe/earth, evolution through natural selection, and even the shape and location of the planet earth are still debated by some Christians.
- There is still great debate that says just because we CAN do something doesn't mean we SHOULD do it (cloning is a good example). Even among people who do not profess a belief in God, there are still questions about the ethics of doing something. Often our scientific learning progresses faster than our scientific understanding.

PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ALONG WITH FAITH

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The challenge to faithful Christians is to work to move us through “either/or” thinking, to an inclusive and integrated “both/and,” that honors the precious and sacred gift of knowledge and learning that God offers us all.

The Holy Spirit of God did not stop working or communicating when the canon of New Testament scripture was closed. God is still speaking today in the vast variety of languages of the sciences. Our modern Pentecost opens our hearts and minds with fiery passion and transformative inspiration.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Read or sing together The Faith We Sing #2008 Let All Things Now Living

Offer a short closing prayer

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ TRINITY SUNDAY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME PASTOR EDUARDO CARRILLO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RACISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Romans 8:12-17

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161.A (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-culture-and-identity-161-a>)

OBJECTIVE

Through Christ, we are all brothers and sisters.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper, Pencil, Handout or copies of the Social Principles, Bible

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Guided Lectio Divina, read Romans 8:12-17.

Share with the group that the passage will be read three times. Each time there will be a question and a minute of silent reflection.

Ask:

- Are you living by the flesh or by the Spirit?
- How does it feel to be part of the family?
- Would you rather be an heir or a slave?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Before we jump into our passage for today, here is a little background on our passage. Romans is a letter written by Paul to Jews and Gentiles alike. The letter to the Romans is written in a way that both the Jewish audience and the Gentile audience can understand the letter. Paul knows his audience, knows how to persuade both the Jews and the Gentiles. One of the main points Paul wants to get across in his letter is that in Christ, there is new life and therefore, you must live differently.

Read: Romans 8:12-17

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ TRINITY SUNDAY

JUSTICE ISSUE RACISM

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Ask:

- Can someone summarize the passage we just read?

Say:

Here is where Paul shows his persuasion skills and rhetoric. Paul argues that we are no longer slaves but heirs. We are made children by adoption through Jesus Christ. We are made part of the family because of Jesus. Being part of a family is amazing but not all families are perfect. Paul is bringing to the table two sides of the family that are at odds. In one corner we have the family members that have been born to the chosen ones (Jews) and in the other corner, we have the ones that have come to be family by adoption. Paul does not make distinctions between the two, but he identifies them as they truly are “brothers and sisters”. This is huge because Jews and Gentiles are at odds, they are not seeing eye to eye, but Paul brings them to the conversation as equals.

Ask:

- What happens when people don’t see others as brothers and sisters? (We run the risk of division, oppression, indifference...)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Provide copies of the handout to the group.

Ask for a volunteer to read ¶161. *A 2016-2020 Social Principles-The Nurturing Community: Culture and Identity*

Ask:

- In Paul’s time, there was division between the Jews and the Gentiles. What are some divisions that happen today?
- Have you ever had a courageous conversation that helped you understand better an experience that may not be your own? How did it feel?

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ TRINITY SUNDAY

JUSTICE ISSUE RACISM

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Pass paper and pencil to the students.

Ask them to draw a circle and inside the circle to write down the names of their family. Draw another circle and write the names of their friends. Draw a third circle and write the names of people that they don't associate with. (These circles can be next to each other.) Lastly, draw a large circle that captures all three of the circles.

Say:

The biggest circle is the family of God. How does it feel to know that you are part of a bigger family and that there may be people in your family that are strangers, that may not look like you, that might speak a different language and a culture that you may not be familiar with?

Ask:

- What are some ways to better understand the diversity of our family? What are some ways that we can better be brothers and sisters?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Have the students stand in a circle and look at each other and to imagine all those that are part of our bigger circle that are physically not with them in the circle.

Close with the *Social Creed* ¶166

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ TRINITY SUNDAY

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NOTES

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to the improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ TRINITY SUNDAY

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HANDOUT:

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161.A

Culture and Identity

We believe that our primary identity is as children of God. With that identity comes societal and cultural constructions that have both positive and negative impacts on humanity and the Church. Cultural identity evolves through our history, traditions, and experiences. The Church seeks to fully embrace and nurture cultural formation and competency as a means to be fully one body, expressed in multiple ways. Each of us has multiple identities of equal value that intersect

to form our complete self. We affirm that no identity or culture has more legitimacy than any other. We call the Church to challenge any hierarchy of cultures or identities. Through relationships within and among cultures we are called to and have the responsibility for learning from each other, showing mutual respect for our differences and similarities as we experience the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME EMMA RANKIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: PEACE-MAKING/ TRUST IN OUR COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Mark 3:20-35

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162>)

OBJECTIVE To understand the importance of standing with each other and being a loving community.

SUPPLIES NEEDED None

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Welcome the Group

Prayer:

Almighty and ever-living God,
empower your one human family to join hands
on our journey of faith.
Let us be a united community in you.
That we are a house connected and not a house divided.
Send us your spirit of hope,
so that we may work
to alleviate human suffering
and foster charity and justice
in our world.
Amen

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Mark 3: 20-35 twice allowing a moment of pause between each reading

Ask the youth what word or phrase in the passage stuck out to them/what seemed significant.

NOTES

The prayer came from this website (<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prayer-for-solidarity.cfm>)

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PEACE-MAKING/ TRUST IN OUR COMMUNITY

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Ask:

- What does it mean to have a kingdom divided?
- Are there people in your lives who are not related to you but you would consider a part of your family?
- For Christians what would it mean to be kingdom united?
- How do we move from division to unity?

Say:

To be a kingdom united is to love one another no matter our differences. One way we can love one another is to be patient and kind. Jesus says that we are all one body with many gifts meaning that we are all brothers and sisters. This means that no matter how different we may seem from others our gifts are valuable and needed.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

This exercise works well with “knots” of between five and eight people. If the group is larger than eight, break into smaller groups.

Have each group stand in a circle.

Have people cross their arms in front of their bodies and join hands with two other people. People who join hands should not be standing next to each other, and everyone should be connected to two different people (that is, not holding both of one person’s hands).

The group has now formed a “human knot,” and their job is to get out of it without letting go of each other’s hands. In most cases, with a lot of twisting and turning and stepping over and under each other’s arms, this can be done in a few minutes. It is all right if people end up facing outside the circle.

NOTES

Time: 10-15 minutes (not including processing time)

The activity comes from this website:
<http://www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org/includes/activity.php?video=humanKnot>

Note: This exercise and all of its variations are high-risk due to the level of physical contact involved. Observe to ensure that people are respectful of each other’s bodies.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PEACE-MAKING/ TRUST IN OUR COMMUNITY

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Ask:

- What was it like doing this exercise together?
- How does this exercise remind us that everyone has a unique gift and it is needed?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Sit in silence and allow God's presence to be felt in the room.

End with a short prayer of thanksgiving.

NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. RAHEL LEE-YOO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, Mark 4:26-34

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161>)

OBJECTIVE

To identify where we have seen discrimination and actively work to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Index cards, pens/pencils, a smartphone to access a song, and a bible

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Opening Activity

Ask:

- In whose face did you see God this week? How so?

(If students are slow to share, start and share where you saw God this week. Example: I saw God this week in the face of a peaceful protestor marching against racial injustice.)

Open up this time with a prayer of your own, invite a volunteer to pray, or feel free to use the prayer provided.

Opening prayer

God,

Thank you for this time to study your Word.

We pray that you will make our hearts like fertile soil where your words will be sown and grow and multiply.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Make sure everyone has a Bible or an app so they can follow along. We will be using the NRSV.

Read 1Sam 15:34-16:13 out loud together by asking each student to read a verse. If you have a group of more than 15 students, then get volunteers.

Ask:

- What words/phrases/or images stick out to you?
- What does anointed mean?
- In 1 Samuel 16:12, the Bible passage states that David was handsome, so what do you think can be the meaning behind 1 Samuel 16:7 that states “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him (Eliab); for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’”
- How would you define “stereotype”, “prejudice”, and “discriminate”?
- What makes us pre-judge others?
- When (if at all) can this be helpful? How can this be harmful?

(Optional if you have remaining time.....)

Then switch gears and read Mark 4:26-34.

Ask:

- Why did Jesus speak in parables?

Say:

There are several interpretations of this parable, such as, “Great things have small beginnings” or, “If you have the faith of even a mustard seed, it will grow exponentially.” Even if those statements may be true, perhaps there is a deeper meaning just beneath the surface.

NOTES

1 Samuel and much of the Bible is action-packed. If students say they don't read the Bible because it is boring, they are not reading the Bible. Encourage students to go home and read the passage/chapters before and after the assigned passage for context to better understand what is going on in the passage.

To anoint, put simply, means to set apart. If something or someone is anointed, it means to be set apart for God's work.

If time permits, please take the time to study the gospel passage for this Sunday.

The main points were taken from David Lose's blog, “In the Meantime”.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

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NOTES

Ask:

- What words, phrases, or images stick out to you?
- How would you describe the “Kingdom of God?”
- Elsewhere in the gospel, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is near, within you, and that it is here in your midst. (Luke 17:21) What do you think Jesus meant by this?
- The mustard plant was a dreaded plant, much like weeds in the garden, if left unchecked it can take over an entire garden. No farmer would sow it in a field because it is so invasive. Why would Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to the mustard seed?
- Birds are often seen as pests, an unwanted invader that often takes your fruit as soon as it ripens. Yet, it is seen perched resting on a branch of a grown mustard plant. Why would Jesus include something unwanted in his picture of the Kingdom?

Say:

The Kingdom of God that Jesus describes here seems to be a generous, all-inclusive Kingdom. In the gospel reading, the seeds are scattered (not carefully sown into plotted spaces like any good farmer/gardener would as they take into account limited space.) They are not just any seeds, they are mustard seeds when grown, they spread like weeds and take over fields. Later in the passage, we see in the image of birds building a home in the branches of the grown mustard shrub. Birds were, and are to this day, largely unwanted especially in edible gardens because they always peck into the fruit.

So when Jesus speaks a parable about the Kingdom of God here, we see an alternate universe where everyone, especially the unwanted have a place. What’s more, is that Jesus describes a Kingdom that spreads like weeds.

Ask:

- What might it be like if we treated others indiscriminately, inviting everyone in so that everyone felt that they belonged?

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Resources needed: index cards and pens (something to write with)

Instructions

Say:

In your non-writing hand, write on your index card, “I know how you feel.”

Give students a couple of minutes to write this sentence.

Say:

- If you have ever been to the funeral of somebody that you love, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone else that is holding up a card.
- If you or someone you love has ever been affected by cancer, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone new that is also holding up a card.
- If you or a loved one has been affected by addiction, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone else holding up their card that you haven’t traded cards with yet.
- If you have ever felt left out, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone else holding up their card that you haven’t traded cards with yet.
- If you have ever felt unfairly judged or stereotyped, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone else holding up their card that you haven’t traded cards with yet.
- If you have ever been betrayed, hold up your card. If you are holding up a card, exchange cards with someone else holding up their card that you haven’t traded cards with yet.

Say:

Most, if not all of us, have been betrayed at some point in time, even from a very early age. With this question, we will conclude the activity and move on to discussion questions.

NOTES

Credit to Rob Bell for this activity. I first heard of this activity from his video/“concert”, “Drops like Stars”.

This activity will take about ten minutes.

The point of this exercise is to hopefully make everyone feel that they are not alone – to remind the students that they are not alone in their most painful or embarrassing moments of suffering. It is in suffering we can find common ground, humanity in each other and ourselves, and authentic relationship with one another where victories or triumphs may not.

After the activity, the leader should reserve about 15 minutes for discussion.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

Page: 5 of 6

(There will inevitably have been at least a few students who felt unfairly judged and/or felt left-out at one point or another.)

Say:

Most of us, if not all of us have at some point felt unfairly judged and/or left out.....

Ask:

- How did it make you feel in those moments?
- You don't have to raise your hand or answer this question out loud, but has there ever been a time you unfairly pre-judged someone?
- Most of us, if not all of us have experienced deep loss. A loss of a loved one, a loss of a friendship, loss of a home, etc. What do you feel knowing that someone else here has also experienced a deep loss and shares that feeling of suffering?
- Discrimination is something many of us have experienced. There is discrimination against race, age, (dis)ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, to name some. In light of current social justice issues, racial discrimination is a societal evil that has been named and come to the forefront recently. What other social justice issues are you curious about?
- What can you do to root out discrimination in all forms?
- What can you do to root out other injustices?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Meditation with the song, "All is not lost" by The Brilliance and Closing Prayer.

Invite the students in a time of meditation/closing prayer.

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JUSTICE ISSUE INCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION

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Say:

We know things can be better. We know we can all do better. A famous quote by Gandhi is, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” If you see a problem and you wish to see change, it has to begin with yourself. If you witness discrimination and stay silent, the world will never change. With that in mind, we will close this time with a time of meditation and prayer as we listen to a song together. As the song plays, think about one thing you can do this week to begin to sow the seeds of change. If nothing comes to mind, that’s ok. Take this time to repent for how you may have practiced discrimination either directly or indirectly. Then take some time this week to listen for how God is inviting you to partner with God in the Kingdom-building work as you meditate and pray. Then start! Seed by seed, one by one, start planting, start building.

Play the song by clicking on the link below. (Or you can access the song/video with any smartphone by google-searching “All is not lost by The Brilliance”)

<https://youtu.be/KjtMOPcOzAk>

Closing prayer. (Feel free to call on a volunteer, pray the students out yourself, or use this prayer.)

Savior God,

Thank you for your indiscriminate love and your boundless grace. You made us all, and in your eyes, we are all significant. We are sorry for the ways we have discriminated against our neighbor and pray for your forgiveness for the ways we have intentionally or unintentionally made others feel small. We pray for your Spirit to guide us in the coming days to lead us to be agents of change for a world that needs your healing. We pray for courage to follow your Spirit that we may be co-architects in your work of building your Kingdom here on earth. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME EMMA RANKIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ADVOCACY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶164.B (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-political-responsibility-164-b>)

OBJECTIVE

Help students understand what it means to live faithfully as a church and as individuals.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Laptop with internet access to show a webinar. If the internet is not available at church, the website has a link to download the service. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/dismantling-racism-service-of-lament>. Youtube link to the service: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y0SDae5_z4

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Welcome everyone to the group.

Prayer:

God of our life we ask that you would pour onto us your strength. We ask that we would be strengthened and encouraged by each other's faith. Grant that we will not be restrained by the ways of this world. We ask that we will not restrain ourselves from doing your work. Give us complete obedience to you and others. That we would love your people well, that we would care for them.

Amen

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Here is a little background on the passage for today. 2 Corinthians was Paul's attempt to address the people who claimed to be Christian teachers but only promoted legalistic teachings and challenging Paul's leadership. The letter starts like a letter would – a greeting and a message of comfort, an explanation of why his planned visit to Corinth is being delayed and that he is still committed to the ministry at Corinth. Then he shares about the characteristics of the Christian ministry. Which brings us to our passage for today.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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Read 2 Corinthians 6: 1-13 twice allowing a moment of pause between each reading.

Ask the youth what in the passage stuck out to them/what seemed significant.

Ask:

- How does Paul describe the ministry of the church?
- Paul shares his struggles in verse 8, what is he struggling with?
- What does it mean, “do not receive the grace of God in vain?”
- The church in Corinth is struggling to know how to live faithfully. What does a church look like when the church lives faithfully? Are churches today living faithfully? What would it look like if the church lived into her truth? (These questions can also be applied to individual lives.)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Read ¶164.B The Political Community: Political Responsibility

Read the sentence, “The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.”

Ask:

- What does this sentence mean to you?
- Can you think of any examples of when the church made a statement about an unjust policy or program?

Say:

2020 was an unprecedented year, the world came to a halt as the pandemic reached every corner of the world. In the US, the streets were filled with people wanting an end to the systemic and institutional racism of this country. The United Methodist Church decided that as a Church, we needed to live faithfully into

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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our ministry and speak to the truth the evils of racism. One way was “The United Methodist Church’s Dismantling Racism: Pressing on to freedom initiative” made up of townhalls, worship service, and other virtual offerings.

We are going to watch a clip of the service of lament which is a time to repentance, communion, and commitment as the church examines racial justice. The service is over an hour long.

Show the first 7 minutes of the service.

1 minute of silent reflection.

Ask:

- It was a powerful 7 minutes. How do you all feel?
- Valerie shares in the service that she loves her church but she is afraid of her church. Why does she feel this way? Do you ever feel this way?

Say:

When the church does not stand up and speak against evils and wrongs, the church is not living fully into its identity.

Ask:

- What are some ways that the church can speak boldly and prophetically against racism?

Brainstorm ways that the church is already doing some work and how to build on them or if the church has not started the conversation about how the work can start in the youth group.

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Close with the benediction by Bishop Woodie White given at the 1996 General Conference.

And now,

May the Lord torment you.

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected, and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and righteousness.

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion to make ours a better world, to make your community a better community, to make your church and better church.

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you peace.

Amen.

NOTES

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REBEKAH BLED

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JUSTICE ISSUE: MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Lamentations 3:22-33

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161>

OBJECTIVE

Introduce students to the concept of different voices in understanding scripture.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Handout, pens, and paper

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

We are all arriving in this room today with different stories, distractions, and stresses. Each person in this room can probably think of at least one thing that is weighing heavy on their mind and heart. So today, we are going to start with two minutes of silence to help us place those things aside for one hour. Wherever you have been, wherever you are going, right now we are here.

Tell students you are going to set a timer for two minutes. Instruct them to get comfortable and close their eyes.

Set your phone for two minutes, and then enter into the silence with your students.

When your phone tells you time is up, stop the alarm and pray a blessing over your time together today.

NOTES

Students may feel uncomfortable during this silence. Alternatively, they may fall asleep. Give some space immediately after the moment of silence for them to talk about what the experience was like for them before moving to the next section.

If you have a quiet group who does not want to talk about the experience of silence, that is ok too. In this case, simply move on to the scripture study.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Go around the room, taking turns reading a section of Lamentations 3:22-33 out loud.

Begin with the NRSV:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,^[a]

his mercies never come to an end;

²³ they are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,

“Therefore I will hope in him.”

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,

to the soul that seeks him.

²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly

for the salvation of the LORD.

²⁷ It is good for one to bear

the yoke in youth,

²⁸ to sit alone in silence

when the Lord has imposed it,

²⁹ to put one’s mouth to the dust

(there may yet be hope),

³⁰ to give one’s cheek to the smiter,

and be filled with insults.

³¹ For the Lord will not

reject forever.

³² Although he causes grief, he will have compassion

according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

³³ for he does not willingly afflict

or grieve anyone.”

NOTES

Read the NRSV together in a group, and then split into pairs to read the Message and the Good News translations of the scripture.

Ask students what words jumped out to them in the readings, and notice what version of scripture that comes from.

You may want to ask if there are any words they have never heard before (e.g., “smiter”) and have them look it up on their phones and share with the group what they find.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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Now have students split into pairs and read the scripture out loud again, this time reading from The Message:

²²⁻²⁴ God's loyal love couldn't have run out,
his merciful love couldn't have dried up.

They're created new every morning.

How great your faithfulness!

I'm sticking with God (I say it over and over).

He's all I've got left.

²⁵⁻²⁷ God proves to be good to the man who passionately waits,
to the woman who diligently seeks.

It's a good thing to quietly hope,
quietly hope for help from God.

It's a good thing when you're young
to stick it out through the hard times.

²⁸⁻³⁰ When life is heavy and hard to take,
go off by yourself. Enter the silence.

Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:

Wait for hope to appear.

Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face.

The "worst" is never the worst.

³¹⁻³³ Why? Because the Master won't ever
walkout and fail to return.

If he works severely, he also works tenderly.

His stockpiles of loyal love are immense.

He takes no pleasure in making life hard,
in throwing roadblocks in the way."

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FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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NOTES

Ask:

- What was the same between the two versions? What was different?

If students are getting restless, have them switch partners to read the scripture together a final time, this time from the Amplified Bible translation:

- "It is because of the Lord's loving kindnesses that we are not consumed,
Because His [tender] compassions never fail.
²³ They are new every morning;
Great *and* beyond measure is Your faithfulness.
²⁴ "The Lord is my portion *and* my inheritance," says my soul;
"Therefore I have hope in Him *and* wait expectantly for Him."
²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait [confidently] for Him,
To those who seek Him [on the authority of God's word].
²⁶ It is good that one waits quietly
For the salvation of the Lord.
²⁷ It is good for a man that he should bear
The yoke [of godly discipline] in his youth.
²⁸ Let him sit alone [in hope] and keep quiet,
Because God has laid it on him [for his benefit].
²⁹ Let him put his mouth in the dust [in recognition of his unworthiness];
There may yet be hope.
³⁰ Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him;
Let him be filled with reproach.
³¹ For the Lord will not reject forever,
³² For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant loving kindness *and* tender mercy.
³³ For He does not afflict willingly *and* from His heart
Or grieve the children of men."

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Just like we took turns reading this scripture, with each of our voices bringing its unique rhythm and sound, reading from different versions of the Bible can be like hearing different “voices” or descriptions of the same thing.

Ask:

- What did you notice about the different “voices” of scripture we just read (both the readers and the translations)? What was different between the voices? What was similar?

Say:

The United Methodist Book of Social Principles says, “We believe that our primary identity is as children of God.” God gives each of God’s children a voice to use to bring God glory and to help those who are suffering.

Ask:

- What does this scripture passage have to do with being children of God?
- In what ways is God like a parent?
- In what ways does God give us a voice?
- How does God ask us to use our voice?
- Does silence have a role in using our voices for God’s glory? How or why do you think this is?

Divide students into pairs or groups.

Say:

Now we are going to work together to use our voices and words to paraphrase this scripture.

Tell each team to choose one or two scriptures to re-write in their own words, highlighting what stood out the most to them. After about five minutes, ask those who are comfortable to share what they have written.

NOTES

After reading the scripture together three times, students should be feeling pretty familiar with this passage. That is great, because for the group activity, after answering questions in the main group, students are going to paraphrase the passage in their own words.

Students can work alone or as partners to paraphrase either the whole passage or a portion of the passage that was encouraging or interesting to them.

Encourage them that they *can* do this! Scripture was divinely inspired, and written down by people just like you and me.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Gather students back together.

Say:

We have had a great day diving into scripture together. Now we are going to close with a moment of quiet, following the example of verse 26.

Say:

Silence can feel strange, and we can wonder if it's ever going to end, so I will set the alarm on my phone for one minute, and when it goes off, I'll say "amen."

NOTES

Silence can feel un-ending and students can worry that the leader has lost track of time or forgotten to break the silence. To alleviate this discomfort, let students watch you set the timer on your phone. This way they can relax into the moment of silence, knowing that it has a clear endpoint.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE MULTITUDE OF VOICES, INCLUSION

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HANDOUT

Lamentations 3:22-33 (NRSV)

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,^[a]
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I will hope in him.”
²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
²⁷ It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
²⁸ to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
²⁹ to put one’s mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),
³⁰ to give one’s cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.
³¹ For the Lord will not
reject forever.
³² Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³ for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.”

Lamentations 3:22-33 (The Message)

²²⁻²⁴ God’s loyal love couldn’t have run out,
his merciful love couldn’t have dried up.
They’re created new every morning.
How great your faithfulness!
I’m sticking with God (I say it over and over).
He’s all I’ve got left.
²⁵⁻²⁷ God proves to be good to the man who
passionately waits,
to the woman who diligently seeks.
It’s a good thing to quietly hope,
quietly hope for help from God.
It’s a good thing when you’re young
to stick it out through the hard times.
²⁸⁻³⁰ When life is heavy and hard to take,
go off by yourself. Enter the silence.
Bow in prayer. Don’t ask questions:
Wait for hope to appear.
Don’t run from trouble. Take it full-face.
The “worst” is never the worst.
³¹⁻³³ Why? Because the Master won’t ever
walkout and fail to return.
If he works severely, he also works tenderly.
His stockpiles of loyal love are immense.
He takes no pleasure in making life hard,
in throwing roadblocks in the way.”

Lamentations 3:22-33 (Amplified Bible translation)

“It is because of the Lord’s loving kindnesses that we are not
consumed,
Because His [tender] compassions never fail.
²³ They are new every morning;
Great *and* beyond measure is Your faithfulness.
²⁴ “The Lord is my portion *and* my inheritance,” says my soul;
“Therefore I have hope in Him *and* wait expectantly for Him.”
²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait [confidently] for Him,
To those who seek Him [on the authority of God’s word].
²⁶ It is good that one waits quietly
For the salvation of the Lord.
²⁷ It is good for a man that he should bear
The yoke [of godly discipline] in his youth.
²⁸ Let him sit alone [in hope] and keep quiet,
Because God has laid it on him [for his benefit].
²⁹ Let him put his mouth in the dust [in recognition of his
unworthiness];
There may yet be hope.
³⁰ Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him;
Let him be filled with reproach.
³¹ For the Lord will not reject forever,
³² For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant loving kindness *and* tender
mercy.
³³ For He does not afflict willingly *and* from His heart
Or grieve the children of men.”

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME TURA FOSTER GILLESPIE

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 6:1-13

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶164.F <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-civil-obedience-and-civil-disobedience-164-f>

OBJECTIVE

Remind youth to use their voice, even when it seems others are not listening.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Sign supplies – could be pizza boxes, poster board, butcher paper, or yard signs; markers, any other craft supplies your group enjoys, candle, matches

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Settle the group with 10 calming breaths.

Light a candle together.

Opening Prayer:

God who came to earth, help us hear the stories of our faith ancestors and know that You are with us in the same ways today. We light this candle as a reminder that You are here with us and that You always listen to us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

- Do you always feel heard?

(You can give them prompts like: Sometimes even the people closest to us are the ones who don't listen. We know that our family and church family love us, but sometimes they're the ones who are stuck assuming that we're still little kids. Or if we have older siblings, people might know us as just "so and so's younger sibling" and make assumptions about us. *Make space for their stories.*)

NOTES

Supplies needed: candle and a match (note that the activity might involve a lot of moving around/sharing resources, so be sure the candle is in a safe, out of the way place).

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Page: 2 of 3

Say:

That's what Jesus was up against in the passage we're going to read. The people in his hometown, at the place of worship where he grew up, assume they know everything there is to know about him because they watched him grow up. They didn't give him a chance. Then, he gives his disciples instructions about what to do if they're not well received.

Read Mark 6:1-13 together.

Ask:

- Can you relate to Jesus or the disciples?
- Have you ever had a time when you knew a certain person or group wouldn't listen so you just told someone else?
- Have you noticed some people get heard more easily than others?
- Who does our society say isn't worth listening to? Why?
- Are there assumptions that make some voices louder than others?
- Have you ever been a dismissive voice? These people knew Jesus or didn't believe the things he could do. Have you ever been that person?

Say:

Sometimes it's not our voice that needs to be heard, sometimes it's our job to help other voices be heard.

Ask:

- What things do we need to say to our community?
- What voices can we amplify?
- What does equality of being heard have to do with justice?

NOTES

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Sign Creation:

Create signs that make bold statements about issues on the minds of the youth. These signs can be used for a march/rally or put in windows or lawns. See what statements your students care most about by posing questions like:

What things do you want to tell your community? Black Lives Matter? We stand with our Muslim Neighbors?

If you're in the US, remind them that one of the most patriotic things we can do for Independence Day is to speak truth to the community and let them know that what we care about matters! Speaking up might be a step toward civil disobedience but it is also speaking truth to power, making sure voices are heard.

Help them decide if they want to do one particular issue altogether or if they want to cover many topics.

Your resources might decide how permanent your signs might be or how they might be used, but discuss with them how a lawn sign or a protest sign or a sign in a window might need to be different sizes or materials; help them think more deeply about what they are doing and that this is more than just an arts and crafts project.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Gather around the candle again. Ask for prayer concerns from the group – whether they have to do with the topics discussed or are more specific.

Pray:

God, thank You for hearing our voices and the voices of people who are often ignored. We ask that You hear the prayers that we have offered and the ones that are on our hearts. Be near to us when we use our voices to speak truth to power. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to bring the time to a close.

NOTES

This can be as creative and messy or as simple and easy as you would like. If there is an action coming up in your community that you know your youth want to get behind, this is a great opportunity to create something that leads to action. If not, this might be a good time to discuss what passive or active movements can look like – this could be planning your own rally or as simple as making lawn signs for anyone at the church to take home.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DR. EMILY A. PECK-MCCLAIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CREATION CARE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalms 24

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural->

OBJECTIVE

When we understand that the earth belongs to God, our interactions and relationship to it (and those who live in it) might be different.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart paper. Copies of scripture or Bibles. Copies of Social Principles or Book of Discipline (2016). Pens or pencils. Resources for biblical research: Bible Dictionary, computer/device with internet, Bible commentary (that includes the Psalms).

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Invite youth to listen to Psalm 24:1-2 several times in a row.

Invite them to pray with you as you say:

O God, bless our time together as we seek to
bless you through our being in your world.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Youth should read through Psalm 24 together –
in partners or small groups. Each pair/small
group should read the text and identify questions
and their answers and praises to God.

NOTES

This reading can be done by the Sunday school teacher or by a youth. Plan to have it read at least 5 times in a row in a slow, contemplative way.

For this part, you can either print out Psalm 24 or have them use Bibles, depending on what they have available to them. Students can underline the questions/answer and circle the praises if working from paper and can make a list on a separate piece of paper if working from a Bible.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE

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Come back to the whole group and have the pairs/small groups share anything they noticed about their two lists.

Ask:

- What questions do you have after reading through Psalm 24?

Make a list on a whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart.

Spend time working through the answers to these questions. Ask the youth to consider ways to answer them. Do they want to Google something? Look together in a Bible dictionary or biblical commentary book?

Conclude this time by letting youth know that there are many more questions we can ask this Psalm or any part of Scripture and that these resources are available to them when their

NOTES

If your youth need some guidance, these are some possible responses that you can offer:

- 1) The first two questions come in a pair and the answer to both is humans, with certain characteristics (and without others).
- 2) The third and fourth questions are the same.
- 3) The answers to the third and fourth questions differ from one another.
- 4) The answers to the questions come quickly after the question is asked.
- 5) Verses 7 & 9 set up the questions in verses 8 & 9.
- 6) Verses 7 & 9 are the same followed by the same question in verses 8 & 9.

Because many youth are not used to reading the Bible critically, they may need some help coming up with questions. Here are a few to get them started:

- 1) What does “vindication” mean?
- 2) What does “selah” mean?
- 3) What does it mean to have clean hands and pure hearts?
- 4) How are gates and doors lifting up?
- 5) What does “glory” mean?
- 6) What does this scripture have to say to us today? (For example, “clean hands” in the aftermath of a pandemic might seem very specific; to consider a city or nation praising God instead of celebrities or politicians might be a very different way to frame who we look up to.)

These questions might seem simple, but we often take scripture as a given without really examining what the words mean or what they might mean to us.

You can provide several resources for them to look through together or suggest websites for them to visit from their phones or a computer.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE

Page: 3 of 4

curiosity is piqued. Remind them there's always more to ask and learn from scripture than we have time to cover in a Sunday school class.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Give the youth copies of the Social Principles, the Natural World.

Invite the youth to read through it. As they read, have them look for echoes from Psalm 24, in particular from verses 1-2.

If dividing into pairs/small groups, come back together after 7 minutes to report back to the whole group about findings.

Say:

Sometimes we think about the earth as ours to use. This often comes from one particular interpretation of Genesis 1:28, which says, "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

NOTES

You can offer this as a print out from <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-natural-world> or you can project it up on a wall/screen or youth can access it from their devices or you can locate it in the Book of Discipline (2016).

If you have enough youth to put into pairs or small groups for each of the 8 sections, you can have each pair or small group responsible for reading one section and present it back to the whole group. If you are choosing this option, then before the youth split up into 8 pairs/small groups, you may want to read the introduction out loud.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Ask:

- How might we relate to the earth differently as we look at our Social Principles and Psalm 24?
- How can we help the earth and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it in a way that reflects that we know they (and we) are God's?
- Can we think of a different way to think about "subdue" and "dominion"? What if it is "caretakers" and "leaders"? If we are caretakers of the earth, leaders in it how can we lead the world to reflect God as an act of praise of God?

Lead the youth through looking at the list and choosing one thing to focus on for the next week, one thing to work on for the next month, and one thing to work on for the next year.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Invite youth to pray with you as you say:

O God of this world and all of us who are in it, thank You for our time together to remember who You are and that we are Yours. We pray that You continue to inspire us to take care of the world and be leaders in remembering that our world reflects your glory. Help us be better caretakers of Your creation. In Your name, we pray, Amen.

NOTES

Make a list on a whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart of ideas the youth have. Encourage them to come up with ideas that are small and big – ideas they can do on their own, their families can do, the church can do, the school, their neighborhood, etc.

This helps youth find something they can accomplish quickly (and maybe in their own life or their family) while also thinking about the bigger change that will take longer in their school, church, neighborhood, or town. Be sure to revisit this with them along the way to check in about progress and how the group and church can help them with their action items.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REBEKAH BLED

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CARING FOR OTHERS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Jeremiah 23:1-6/Psalm 23

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles The Nurturing Community <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>

OBJECTIVE

Learning to care for others like the Good Shepherd cares for us.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Handout, whiteboard, markers

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Take a moment to center your hearts and minds as a group by doing a responsive reading of today's scripture passage, Psalm 23.

Handout (Bold: Leader/Student Volunteer; Regular Font: Class)

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd, **I shall not want.**
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;^[a]
- ³ **he restores my soul.**^[b]
He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff –
they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

NOTES

Instruct students to take several deep breaths in and out at the beginning of this session. Tell students “We are breathing out distractions, and breathing in the presence of God.”

After students have taken 3-5 deep breaths, lead them in reading the scripture together. Choose a leader from among the group, or you yourself read the bold lines, while the rest of the group responds by reading the lines not in bold.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CARING FOR OTHERS

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Today's scripture passages contrast two types of shepherds or leaders. In our responsive reading of Psalm 23 just now we were introduced to one kind of shepherd. We are going to read Jeremiah 23:1-6 now. As we read, listen for the type of shepherd, or leader described. Pay attention especially to the contrasts you hear between this passage and Psalm 23.

Have student volunteer read the passage from Jeremiah:

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³ Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Ask:

- What did you notice from this passage?
- How does this passage describe shepherds?
- How does this contrast/what are the differences between the shepherds described in Jeremiah, and the shepherd described in Psalm 23?

NOTES

Ask for a student volunteer to read Jeremiah 23:1-6 aloud.

When asked what they noticed from this passage, students may immediately jump to describing the contrasts between the shepherds described in Psalm 23 and here. Alternatively, they may have insights about other things in the passage that stuck out to them. If this is the case, be patient, listen, and after they have shared, move on to the next question.

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JUSTICE ISSUE CARING FOR OTHERS

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Say:

Both of the scripture passages for today describe a type of leader –specifically a leader who is responsible for the spiritual care of people as well as leading. In biblical times, the image of a shepherd was often used to describe a king. The way that the shepherd acts, then, is the way the king treats his people.

Ask:

- Who do you think the shepherd-king described in Psalm 23 is?
- Who might the shepherd-kings described in Jeremiah 23:1-2 be?
- What is God’s response to the shepherd-kings? (Hint: look at Jeremiah 23:3-6.)
- Who do you think the sheep in these scriptures are?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

The Book of Social Principles says, “Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important – because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ and not because they have merited significance.”

Ask:

- How do you think this relates to the scripture passages?
- Which verses speak to the care of the sheep (people)?

Have students look at the handout of Psalm 23 from the beginning of class. Go through the Psalm verse by verse, looking for the action words to answer the question: what does the shepherd do to care for the sheep?

NOTES

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JUSTICE ISSUE CARING FOR OTHERS

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Write down students' answers on a whiteboard.

Say:

Now that we know how the good shepherd-king cares for the sheep (that's us!) we can use this as a guide for caring for others.

Ask:

- Looking at this list, how would you translate or rephrase what these actions may be for us today? For example, leading me beside still waters could be giving someone a water bottle, or helping a friend calm down when they are feeling anxious.

Write the ideas that the students have next to the action words from each verse.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Have students look at the board with all of the action words and ideas written.

Say:

There are lots of really good ideas and inspiration here about practical ways to care for others. As we close, I want each of you to pick one thing from the board to focus on, and then we will have a quiet moment for you to ask for God's help in practicing this idea. When the moment is finished, I will say "amen" to close.

NOTES

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JUSTICE ISSUE CARING FOR OTHERS

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HANDOUT

Bold: Leader/Student Volunteer

Regular Font: Class

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd, **I shall not want.**
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters,^[a]
- ³ **he restores my soul.**^[b]
He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff –
they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME AIMEE HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 6:1-21, Psalm 145:1-18

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016 Book of Resolutions #4051 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-united-methodist-church-food-justice-and-world-hunger-4051>, 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160.H <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-food-justice-160-h>

OBJECTIVE

Help students learn about food insecurity in their communities by reflecting on Jesus feeding the 5,000.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Large paper/ butcher paper, markers, crayons, blue tape (paint-safe tape), laptop with internet access if not, print a few pages from the website listed in the group activity before class.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Supplies: Butcher paper (or any large paper), markers, crayons

Say:

It's good having you all with us today. Let's go around and share a thumbs up or thumbs down of how your week was.

(Ask students to expand on their week. Take time to acknowledge how the students are doing with celebrations or a moment of prayer/concern.)

Say:

We are going to start our time together today by reflecting on Psalm 145:10-18. I will read the passage twice. The first time I invite you to listen with your eyes closed and visualize what you hear. The second time I read it, I invite you to draw what you saw on the paper in front of you.

(Read the passage slowly both times. The second reading provide pauses between verses so that the students can draw. When the students are finished, tape the paper on the wall and ask the students what they see.)

Ask the students to look at the images as you read the passage one more time. After you are done with the passage close with "Amen."

NOTES

Place the large paper at the center of a desk or floor for the students to gather around and draw their reflections on Psalm 145. Write "Psalm 145:10-18" in the center of the paper.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER

Page: 2 of 5

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

A little background about the gospel of John. It's one of four (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John). Scholars believe that it was written by the apostle John around A.D. 89-95. Our passage is a familiar one and it appears in the middle of Jesus' ministry. Our passage is also unique because it is the only story that appears in all four of the gospels.

Read: John 6:1-21

Ask:

- Who can give us a summary of the passage that we just read?

Say:

- Let's look at the feeding of the 5,000. Matthew says 5,000 men but we also know that there were women and children in the crowd. Some scholars say that a more accurate number for the crowd is between 10,000-20,000.

Ask:

- We find in verse 9 that the disciples found a boy (that was most likely not counted in the 5,000) that had food to share. What did he have?
- Jesus told the disciples to have everyone sit down. Blessed the food and distributed the elements. How much did they have leftover? (12 baskets is symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel)
- Any thoughts on how 10,000-20,000 people shared 2 small fish and 5 small barley loaves?

Say:

- The feeding of the 5,000 is a story that reminds us that Jesus is aware of our physical needs. He knew that people were hungry, and he responded to alleviate their hunger.
- Right after the feeding of the thousands, Jesus retreats and we read about another miracle. Can someone summarize the second miracle for us? (In this miracle, Jesus addresses the emotional and spiritual needs of the disciples.)

NOTES

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER

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Say:

Many churches focus just on proselytizing or just on providing physical needs. Jesus calls us to both, Jesus knows that we have physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs. If people's basic needs are unmet, the pursuit of other things fails. Have you ever tried to focus in class when you are hungry? It's hard to focus when hungry!

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

*If you do not have a laptop/internet access visit the website and print out the information for the location of the church.

Say:

Many in our country are food insecure. Food insecurity means not having access to quality affordable and nutritious food. The pandemic (COVID-19) exacerbated food insecurity across this nation. Let's have a look at food insecurity a little closer.

Say:

Feeding America is the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization. Through a network of food banks, pantries and meal programs serve 40 million people. According to *Feeding America*, before the pandemic, 14.3 million American households were food insecure. In 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, more than 54 million people experienced food insecurity. While some households may receive government assistance like SNAP (food stamps) many households that experience food insecurity do not qualify for government assistance and rely on their local food banks.

Food insecurity impacts everyone – seniors, children, rural communities, urban communities, across racial and ethnic lines. And it has long-lasting effects. Many people that are food insecure also face health illnesses as well.

Ask:

- How many people do you think are food insecure in our county?

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JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER

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Go to this website <https://map.feedingamerica.org/> and enter your county. (Feel free to search other areas as well.)

FRAC (Food Research Action Center) also has helpful tools to get more information about food insecurity in your community. <https://frac.org/research/mapping-tools>

This website will provide data by State. <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/state-of-the-states-profiles>

(National Geographic has a great article on “New Faces of Hunger” which is a helpful article on food insecurity told by narratives (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/hunger/>).

Ask:

- Are you surprised by the number of food-insecure people in our county?
- The United Methodist Church has a statement in the 2016 Book of Resolutions #4051, “It is especially important to note that the causes of hunger are intricately related to the problems of poverty and greed. Hunger cannot be dissociated from people and systems that keep people in poverty.” What are some issues that you see that are intricately tied to hunger in our our community/county?
- What are some ways that you, your family, church, and school responded to the need? (community garden, writing to congressional representatives, talking to local representatives, partnering with community organizations)

Choose one or two ideas to work on as a project for the class/youth group/church.

NOTES

Write the responses on paper/whiteboard for everyone to see.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Closing Prayer:

Most gracious God,
Who gives the fruits of the earth
For the benefit of all your creatures,
We give thanks to you for abundant harvests
And plentiful production on this earth.
We pray for those in our land who are denied these gifts,
And seek your forgiveness for our complicity in their want.
We pray for those whose voices are not heard and for those who do not hear.
Forgive us when our choices are selfish ones,
And forgive us especially when we do not choose
To raise our own voice against the pain of our brothers and sisters.
Most of all, O God, we give you thanks for the revelation of your love in Jesus Christ, who came that
everyone might have abundant life. Amen.

(Prayer from *Pax Christi, USA*)

NOTES

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. HOLLY G. BANDEL

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JUSTICE ISSUE: FOOD SECURITY AND JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 6:24-35

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016 Book of Resolutions #4051 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-united-methodist-church-food-justice-and-world-hunger-4051>, 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.E <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-poverty-163-e>, ¶163.H <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-family-farms-163-h>, ¶164.A <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-political-community-164/the-political-community-basic-freedoms-and-human-rights-164-a>

OBJECTIVE

Understanding God's vision for provision of the world through the lens of food security and justice.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Communion elements (consecrated by clergy person if no clergy is present), cup and chalice, local statistics of COVID-19 on non-profit food distributions, copies of Social Principles, and 2016 Resolutions paragraphs, student handout included.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Meditation on the Lord's Prayer

Pray:

"Give us today our daily bread"

"O Father, for we claim nothing of right; only of Your free mercy;

For we take no [worry] for tomorrow.

[We trust you for] all things needful for our souls and bodies,

Not only the meat that perishes but the sacramental bread,

And Your grace, the food which endures to everlasting life."-John Wesley

Have 2 minutes of silent prayer repeating "Give us this day our daily bread" when the mind wanders.

Close prayer time by saying the entire Lord's prayer together.

NOTES

Some notes found here about John Wesley and the Lord's prayer:

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/john-wesleys-meditations-lords-prayer/>

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD SECURITY AND JUSTICE

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read John 6:24-35.

Say:

This scripture comes before Jesus begins talking about his body as a sacrifice and after the feeding of the crowd with loaves and fish and the calming of the storm. After the miracles of Jesus, he begins to teach his disciples and ask questions about what he has done. He makes a distinction between the bread that feeds them physically and the bread that feeds people spiritually.

Ask:

- What does this scripture say about God? People? God in relationship with people?
- What is important about Jesus physically feeding people?
- How does this relate to the manna God gives to the Israelites (Exodus 16)?
- What does feeding the people have to do with the spiritual understanding of Jesus being the bread of life?

Look at and review these paragraphs from the *UMC Social Principles* and *Book of Resolutions: 2016 Book of Resolutions* #4051, *Social Principles* ¶163 E, H, and ¶ 164 A.

Ask:

- How do these paragraphs from the United Methodist Church relate to what Jesus is teaching the disciples?
- How do you understand the need of serving with those who are hungry and being a part of what God is doing to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of people?
- What is ours to do as United Methodist Christian people?

NOTES

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD SECURITY AND JUSTICE

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Study of community resources that distribute food.

Ask:

- Identify 2 food distribution non-profits or ministries in your town.
- What is the community's need for food?
- How many people do they serve?

Study the impact of COVID-19 on food security in your local area.

- What has changed for the non-profits since March 2020?
- How have the needs changed in your community when it comes to food?
- How many people are now being served by these ministries or non-profits?

Learn what SNAP benefits are and what advocacy might be needed during COVID-19.

Look at the SNAP brief (<https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CDF-SNAP-Brief-May-2020.pdf>).

Ask:

- What does this teach us about what is needed for families to have food security during this time of pandemic?
- How can you and your church advocate for adequate food for families in your community?

Participate in the short Holy Communion service as a group. (Handout provided.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Finish with Holy Communion Prayer after Communion and Blessing from the leader.

NOTES

I looked up information about two non-profits that distribute food in the city of Dallas, TX. Crossroads Community Services has emails that go out monthly about how many people they are serving. Since the beginning of the pandemic they have had a 700% increase in the number of clients served. 70% of the clients are new families that had not been in contact with the agency prior to March 2020.

Some volunteers in our faith community also serve at Dallas Bethlehem Center which has seen a 450% increase of people served since March 2020.

The leader will want to gather some information such as this prior to beginning the lesson about 2 non-profits or ministries in their local area or divide the group up into partners to do this research online during the session.

Advocacy opportunities may also be available at www.bread.org.

For SNAP Advocacy brief in COVID-19: <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CDF-SNAP-Brief-May-2020.pdf>

If a clergy is not present, have a clergy person bless the elements prior to the group study meeting time.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD SECURITY AND JUSTICE

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COMMUNION HANDOUT:

Greeting (Group leader)

Opening Prayer (A member of the group)

John 6:1-14

Invitation to Communion (Group leader)

Prayer of Confession (A group member)

God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us as individuals and as the body of Christ, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Jesus your name may be glorified in all the earth. Amen.

Pardon

The Great Thanksgiving (Clergy person or group members if already consecrated)

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Please join in the following responses as directed:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Please be seated.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

(Words of the Great Thanksgiving)

Receiving the Bread and Cup (All)

Prayer After Communion (A group member)

Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that as we go into the world, we do so in the strength of your Spirit to love and serve others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JASON STANLEY

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JUSTICE ISSUE: FOOD JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

John 6:35, 41-51

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160.H <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-food-justice-160-h>

OBJECTIVE

Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual hunger.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Salted pretzels, a wilted plant, water, bibles, copies of the handout with ¶160.H

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Give the youth salted pretzels to snack on while you discuss hunger and thirst.

Ask:

- When have you felt thirsty/hungry?
- What does it feel like to be thirsty/hungry?
(Talk about the effects of being thirsty, for example, you end up with a dry mouth.)

Show the youth a wilted plant. Explain that the plant looks like this because it is thirsty. What should we do? Water it. Ask a student to water the plant. Because some plants respond quickly to be watered, it may show a difference by the end of the session.

By now, the youth themselves might be thirsty. Offer them some water, too.

Pray:

Lord, You are the Living Water and the Bread of Life. Sustain us this day as we have a conversation about Your word and how to care for Your people. Amen.

NOTES

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD JUSTICE

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Ask a student to read John 6:35, 41-51.

Ask:

- What parts of this passage might the first readers have found strange/weird?

Say:

Earlier in this passage, Jesus responded to the crowd's physical hunger by feeding them bread and fish. Jesus provided for their physical hunger. Now, Jesus is talking about providing for their spiritual hunger. Jesus is saying that just as food and water are essential for the physical self, Jesus is essential for the spiritual self.

Ask:

- What are the ways that Jesus provides for our spiritual hunger?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

- When faced with a crowd who was physically and spiritually hungry, which did Jesus provide for first? Why do you think he did that?

Say:

There are many people in our country who are hungry and/or do not have clean, drinkable water. There are communities where there are "food deserts," which means that there are no local means for people to get groceries. They either have to drive far out of their neighborhood or they use fast food or gas station food, which is not the healthiest.

Ask the students to gather in the middle of the room. Explain that one side of the room is "TRUE", and the other side of the room is "FALSE." As you read a statement, they should choose a side of the room based on whether they think the statement is true or false. After each statement, ask the students to share their thoughts after you announce if the statement is true or false.

NOTES

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD JUSTICE

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NOTES

1. There isn't enough food in the world for everyone. (FALSE, there is enough food being produced in the world for everyone to have enough.)
2. There isn't enough suitable land for farming. (FALSE, there is enough land, however, it may not be used for agricultural production.)
3. Some land in the world is being damaged by erosion and overgrazing. (TRUE)
4. Starvation is common in many parts of the world where no natural disasters have occurred. (TRUE, while some parts of the world are affected by natural disasters, these disasters do not produce hunger.)
5. Growing more food will mean less hunger in poor countries. (FALSE, remember there is enough food being produced, the system for distributing food needs to be created.)

Hand out copies of Social Principle ¶160.H titled *Food Justice*. Ask the youth to get into pairs as you read the Social Principle:

"We support policies that increase access to quality food, particularly for those with the fewest resources. We affirm local, sustainable, and small-scale agriculture opportunities that allow communities to feed themselves. We decry policies that make food inaccessible to the communities where it is grown, and the farmworkers involved in its growth."

Ask the youth to discuss what this principle means to them. After a few moments, ask the pairs to share with the larger group of their thoughts.

Ask:

- Based on this Social Principle, what are some things that we can do to meet the physical hunger of those in our community? Are any of these things we can do this week?

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD JUSTICE

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Before you close, check the plant you watered at the beginning of the session.

Ask:

- What was the effect of providing for its physical thirst? What would be the results of providing for another's physical hunger?

Use the following blessing written by Rev. Beth A. Richardson (*Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me*):

For the seed and the soil,
The rain and the sun,
For the hands who touched, nurtured, harvested,
I give you thanks.

For the families that gather,
The ones who hunger,
The lonely people who eat by themselves,
I ask your blessing.

For this food and drink,
This plate and bowl,
These walls that protect me,
I bow in humble gratitude.

All that I have,
All that I am,
All that I will be,
Creator of the universe,
Creator of me.

NOTES

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD JUSTICE

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HANDOUT

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160.H (Food Justice)

We support policies that increase access to quality food, particularly for those with the fewest resources. We affirm local, sustainable, and small-scale agriculture opportunities that allow communities to feed themselves. We decry policies that make food inaccessible to the communities where it is grown and the farmworkers involved in its growth.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME AIMEE HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: DISCERNMENT, SPIRITUAL GIFTS, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE 1 King 2:10-12, 3:3-14

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES N/A

OBJECTIVE Help students discover their spiritual gifts and how to use them for a just world.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Copies of the Spiritual Gifts Inventory per student, paper, pencils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

It's good having you all with us today. Let's go around and share a thumbs up or thumbs down of your week.

(Ask students to expand on their week. Take time to acknowledge how the students are doing with celebrations or a moment of prayer/concern.)

Say:

Today we are going to talk about gifts. Let's say that you discovered a lamp. A special lamp – like a lamp with a genie inside and you have one wish. What wish would you wish for? What's the one thing that your heart desires?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

A little background on 1 Kings. 1 Kings and 2 Kings were originally one book. Unfortunately, we don't know who the author is but scholars believe that 1 Kings was probably written between 560-550 B.C. during the Babylonian exile of the Jews. It is believed that 1 Kings and 2 Kings were written for the Jews living in exile in Babylon to preserve the history of Judah and Israel.

Read: 1 King 2:10-12, 3:3-14.

NOTES

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE DISCERNMENT, SPIRITUAL GIFTS, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

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Say:

We start our passage with the passing of King David and Solomon firmly established as king. In chapter 3 we see Solomon offering sacrifices in Gibeon and God appears to him in a dream and said, “ask for whatever you want me to give you” (3:5).

Ask:

- What did Solomon ask for and what did he receive?
- What is wisdom? (Wisdom is more than knowledge or intelligence.)
- Why is wisdom important?

Say:

Solomon as a leader had the people’s well being in mind. He asked for wisdom so that he could rule with justice. And he was able to use his wisdom and discernment when he returned to Jerusalem and he had to discern and decide regarding two women claiming one baby.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

We might not have had the encounter that Solomon had with God, but God gave all of us gifts. How many of you are familiar with spiritual gifts?

Youth Spiritual Gifts Inventory (https://www.fumcr.com/June_8_-_Youth_Spiritual_GiftsTest.pdf)

Say:

We are going to spend some time discovering our spiritual gifts. Feel free to stay where you are or find a quiet, comfortable corner or place in our room and fill out the inventory. I’ll call everyone back in about 10 minutes.

(Pass out the Spiritual Gifts Inventory and a pencil to each student.)

NOTES

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE DISCERNMENT, SPIRITUAL GIFTS, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

Page: 3 of 4

Say:

If you need more time, raise your hand.

(When everyone is done, call them back to the larger group.)

Ask:

- What was it like filling out this inventory? Were you surprised by your spiritual gifts?

Say:

I'm going to read each of the gifts and its description. If it's one of your top three spiritual gifts, raise your hand.

(Read through the gifts/descriptions.)

Say:

These gifts were given to us not just for us but to make a difference, to be God's hands and feet. I want you to take a moment and think about your gifts and consider ways that you can use your gifts to do God's work. Think about the inequalities that you see around you. What are some ways that you can use your gifts to address that injustice?

Pass out paper and pencil to each student.

Say:

I want you to take a few minutes and brainstorm ways that you hope to use your gifts.

(2-3 minute wait.)

Say:

Turn to your neighbor and share your thoughts.

NOTES

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE DISCERNMENT, SPIRITUAL GIFTS, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

Page: 4 of 4

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Closing Prayer:

Thank you God, for this time. Thank You for these gifts that You have given us. May we not neglect them but use them to make a change for a just world. Amen.

| NOTES |
|-----------------------|
| Empty space for notes |

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. J. PAIGE BOYER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Ephesians 6:10-20

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶165.C <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-world-community-165/the-world-community-war-and-peace-165-c>, *2016 Book of Resolutions #6129* <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-united-methodist-church-and-peace-6129>

OBJECTIVE

The Bible was written into a very specific context and through a specific cultural lens, using references and metaphors that would have made sense to readers in that context.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Bible, Index Cards, Newsprint/White Board, Paper, map of the Roman Empire (link below)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Sometimes we come into our youth space weighed down by the things that happened since we last met. We carry with us the things that happened not just in the last week (or 2 weeks, or month...depending on your schedule), but the things that have happened over our lifetimes.

For this centering moment focus on the things that happened in the last week.

Take a couple of index cards and write down on one at least 3 good things that happened in the last week. On the second write down at least three hard things.

Take a moment to reflect on those.

Now, looking at the good and the bad, on a third card, write down one thing you learned about yourself, about others, and/or about the world.

(Invite youth to share what they learned – the stuff on the third card. Ask them to share their lesson without sharing what is on the other two cards.)

Read: Ephesians 6:18

NOTES

You'll need 3 index cards for youth. If you like using colored index cards (or that is what you have available) consider using one color for each portion.

Depending on your group dynamics, you could have kids share with one person, in a small group or with the whole group.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Page: 2 of 6

Pray:

The Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. (NRSV)

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Today we are going to talk about the context in which Paul writes. When I say “context” what does that mean to you?

According to dictionary.com, context is: “the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.”

Context makes it clear that things do not happen in a vacuum – what we experience and what happens in the world is impacted by what else is happening.

Think about our above exercise – was it hard to share what you learned, without sharing what happened?

As you shared your lesson, did you have to explain the things happening in our world? Things we take for granted like the internet or cell phones or social media? Probably not – those are part of the culture we live in.

Just like you live in a specific context, so did the writers of the bible – and their world was very different from our own.

Ask:

- How many of you have learned about the Roman empire during school?
- What do you remember about it?

NOTES

Write down their understanding of context.

You might want to ask specific questions here like:

- What kind of houses did people live in?
- What do you know about family life?
- Do you know what kind of jobs people had?
- Was it safe?

There's a decent map of the Roman Empire here: <https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/roman-empire.html>

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Page: 3 of 6

Say:

During the first century, the Roman Empire spanned most of the area in and around the Mediterranean. Like most empires, the lands that were part of Rome were not brought into the empire “peacefully,” despite their slogan “Pax Romana” – or the Peace of Rome.

Peace in the Roman world meant compliance, it meant following the rules, it meant going along to get along. How do you think they “kept the peace”? Soldiers. Most lands in the Roman Empire were “occupied,” meaning there was a military presence designed to “keep people in line.” With that context in mind, let’s read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Ask:

- As you hear this text, how do you feel about the imagery?
- Do you like it?
- Do you dislike it?
- Does it make sense?
- Do you feel uncomfortable?

Say:

Paul uses relevant imagery to help the people to whom he writes understand how to be followers of Jesus, particularly when faced with difficulties – “not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Paul uses military/war language because this is what the people of his day are familiar with.

Ask:

- Does anyone where know what it’s like to live in a warzone? Is this an image that makes sense to us?

NOTES

Consider having students read this silently before reading it together.

Try to be non-judgmental as you hear the answers to these questions. Your youth will have varied experiences with the military and with soldiers.

You may have youth who say “yes” to this question. If they are willing to share, invite them to do so.

Source: United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016. The United Methodist Publishing House. Kindle Edition (P. 165 C)

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Page: 4 of 6

Say:

For many of us, it may not make sense.

Some military imagery in scripture leads some people to think that God condones the violent ways people tend to respond to problems.

However, the United Methodist Church has a clear stance on war: “We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We, therefore, reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy. We oppose unilateral first/preemptive strike actions and strategies on the part of any government.”

This section of the Social Principles goes on to say: “We believe that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession, or use of nuclear weapons be condemned. Consequently, we endorse general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

Take a moment to sit with this.

Ask:

- Are there any words or phrases above you need to have defined or explained?
- How do you feel about this stance of the church?

Say:

Here, the church is saying they believe there should be fewer weapons, particularly nuclear weapons.

Consider, with this context, the passage we read above, Ephesians 6:10-20.

NOTES

Consider re-reading the two sections above for reflection and feedback.

Sword of the spirit, flaming arrows of the evil one.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

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Ask:

- Can you identify all the weapons in the text?
- What about defensive clothing (things to keep the wearer safe from violence)?
- What else is part of the armor of God?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

If the military language of this text doesn't make sense in today's context, then, perhaps we can be creative and come up with our own "Armor of God" that makes more sense today.

Think of some roles/jobs that might make sense to put in place of a soldier here?

Have each youth pick a role they'd like to re-write this text around.

Then, have them re-write the passage focusing on their chosen role.

Have them consider what would take the place of each of the 8 parts of the above list.

In place of armor, use uniform – put on the whole uniform of God.

Belt of truth = _____

Breastplate of righteousness = _____

Shoes for your feet (makes you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace) = _____

NOTES

Armor, the breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, belt of truth, shoes of proclamation.

Some examples: Nurse, Doctor, Chef, Artist, Teacher, student
This might make the most sense with jobs that require a uniform.
I'd encourage them to stay with "non-violent" imagery, so a police officer, for example, may not be a helpful example. (Also, that's too easy.)

If a lot of youth want to do the same role, have them work in pairs or groups.

Here is an example for a Pastor:

Collar of truth

Robe of righteousness

Mic for your hand

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

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Shield of faith = _____

Arrows of the evil one = _____

Helmet of Salvation = _____

Sword of the Spirit = _____

Have the youth share their example.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

This passage can be used as an example of a tactile way to pray. As a person dresses or prepares for their day, they can go step by step through their routine and use it as a way to pray.

Are there things you do every day? (Brush your teeth? Put on shoes? Charge your phone?)

As we close, think about how one part of your daily routine could become an act of prayer. For example, while brushing your teeth, ask God to help keep the words you say kind and not harmful.

(Take a few minutes to think about this and encourage the kids to write down their task and their prayer so they can use it as a reference. Challenge them to do their routine prayer every day, seeing who can do it the most between now and your next meeting.)

Pray:

“God, may we serve with our whole lives and all that we do. Amen.”

NOTES

Friends of faith

False criticism of the evil one

Stole of Salvation

Sermon of the Spirit

You might consider sharing your task/prayer with your youth as you do it each day.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. J.P. (JUNG PYO) HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: PREDATORY LENDING, USURY, FINANCE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalms 15

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.J <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-finance-163-j>

OBJECTIVE

To see biblical ethics as addressing both personal and social holiness.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Handouts of the scripture reading and writing utensils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Icebreaker: Can I borrow your...

- Assign or invite students into pairs
- Ask each pair to exchange something that is of some value to the other (e.g., a cell phone, student ID, shoe)
- Do so by asking, "Can I borrow your...?" (e.g., "Can I borrow your phone?")
- If there's time, once back in the large group, have each person quickly share what they are borrowing from their partner.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Psalm 15

Distribute the scripture reading printouts.

Say:

Psalm 15 describes the kind of person the writer thinks God would approve of and find favor in. As you listen to the reading, what word or phrase stands out? What questions come to mind? What does it make you feel?

Round 1

Have students actively listen as Psalm 15 is read aloud (either by yourself or a pre-designated reader).

NOTES

Explain what is being borrowed will be returned following the bible study portion of the lesson.

What is borrowed needs to be reasonable (e.g., DO NOT ask for someone's glasses) and kept safe and unused (e.g., no opening someone's smartphone).

This is a SHORT Psalm! Hallelujah!

When working with diverse groups, "mutual invitation" is a helpful technique developed by Eric Law of the Kaleidoscope Institute: in brief, one person begins sharing, and once done, calls on another to share, until everyone has had the chance to speak (one can also choose to not share, and simply call someone else to go next).

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PREDATORY LENDING, USURY, FINANCE

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Invite students to share an initial observation, question, or feeling using “mutual invitation”. You may want to record what is shared on a poster/blackboard/whiteboard for others to see and add to.

Round 2

Say:

Verse one is basically the psalmist asking: *Who’s in with God?* With your partner, take 5 minutes to reread and discuss Psalm 15. What do you notice this time? What stands out?

After 5 minutes, back in the whole group, share the following question.

Ask:

- *What kind of person does God like?*

If it doesn’t come up, point out verse 5 and ask: *What do you think about this command not to lend money at interest? Why do you think this verse is in here?*

Say:

Sometimes scripture needs to be practiced to be truly heard. So here’s what we’re doing next as we get ready for our Group Activity.

Get back into pairs. And get ready to ask for what was borrowed back.

NOTES

Some observations:

- Much of what’s described falls into what we might call “personal holiness” codes of conduct (matters of individual piety and personal character).
- But verse 6 stands out for its operational specificity and its moral imperative against predatory lending to the vulnerable.
- Psalm 15 demonstrates what is obvious throughout the Old Testament (and New), that personal and social holiness are intimately entwined (i.e., how we conduct ourselves and how we organize society are mutually informed and informing).

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PREDATORY LENDING, USURY, FINANCE

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

As United Methodists, we have something called The Social Principles that articulates our position on issues impacting all persons, societies, and our environment. Here's what it says about our financial institutions and specifically lending:

Financial institutions serve a vital role in society. They must guard, however, against abusive and deceptive lending practices that take advantage of the neediest among us for the gain of the richest. Banking regulations must prevent the collection of usurious interest that keeps people in cycles of debt. Personal-credit-issuing institutions must operate with responsibility and clarity that allows all parties to understand the full terms of agreements. (2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.I)

Ask:

- Okay, what did you hear in our Social Principles that connects with our scripture reading?

Activity: Can I have it back?

- In your pairing, have one student ask that they mutually return what was borrowed.
- The other student is tasked with adding a “fee” (interest) before agreeing to the exchange .
- E.g., “Okay, I’ll give back your shoe, but I want a dollar in addition to the phone you borrowed from me.”
- Ask them to role-play this situation out, with the goal of one student to get back what is theirs, and the goal of the other to get back what is theirs PLUS something additional.
- Get back in the large group after and discuss how students felt, and if they managed to work out their differences.
- ASK: Why is adding interest not a loving thing to do? Or is it? (Remember, the goal is not to RESOLVE the question of interest, whether in personal or larger financial settings, but to explore how faith speaks to both personal and societal contexts.)

NOTES

Take time to:

- Help students see how personal values and actions influence and are influenced by societal values and social contracts.
- E.g., our parents taught us not to lie and not to steal; our society has laws against perjury and fraud.
- Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors just as we love ourselves; how we treat self is interwoven with how we treat others.

Notes on the activity:

- Feel free to add nuance to the role-play discussion.
- Actual lending is conditioned on an agreement to pay added interest
- Is lending with interest ALWAYS bad?
- What actually is usury? predatory lending? Etc.?
- You can incorporate recent news or examples of ethical/unethical behavior by financial institutions.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PREDATORY LENDING, USURY, FINANCE

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Closing Consideration: What does God ask?

Say:

As we get ready to close, think for a moment on this question: *When God gives us something, what does God expect in return? Is there interest added? Is it given freely?*

[Pause for consideration]

SAY:

And last consideration – *Is faith just about me and God, or is it also about me and God and those around me? Both personal AND social? Individual AND shared?*

Close in prayer (or The Lord's Prayer together).

NOTES

If you have older youth, you may wish to engage with them further to better understand usury, predatory lending, and the interplay of financial institutions, racism, poverty, and faith.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME AIMEE HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS; HOSPITALITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

James 2:1-10, 11-13, 14-17

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016 Book of Resolutions #4051 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-united-methodist-church-food-justice-and-world-hunger-4051>; 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.E <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-poverty-163-e>; ¶162 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162>

OBJECTIVE

Help students to understand hospitality and welcoming the marginalized.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Poster board, markers

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

It's good having you all with us today. Let's go around and share a thumbs up or thumbs down of your week.

(Ask students to expand on their week. Take the time to acknowledge how the students are doing with celebrations or a moment of prayer/concern.)

Ask:

- Have you ever walked into a room and it was your first time there? How did you feel? Did something/ someone help you feel better or welcome? Did you feel unwelcomed?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Here is a little background information on the letter of James. It's believed to have been written between A.D. 40 and 50 to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" referring to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. There are guesses as to who the author might be. Some believe that it was James, the half brother of Jesus. The letter is a reminder to put faith into action.

Read James 2:1-10, 11-13, 14-17.

NOTES

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS; HOSPITALITY

Page: 2 of 3

Ask:

- James refers to favoritism (2:1). What example does he give and why is it a sin (2:9)?

Say:

James is warning people about favoring outward symbols of success while neglecting the poor, the orphans, and the widows.

Ask:

- Do you think our community, society, maybe even the church favors the rich and the powerful?

Say:

Vs 17 says “faith by itself, if it’s not accompanied by action, is dead.” Some people say that James is disagreeing with Paul (Ephesians 2:8) but James isn’t disagreeing with Paul. James is arguing that true faith always shows in deeds, in actions. It’s not empty words but words backed up with action.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

In 2013, Rev. Willie Lyle (a United Methodist Pastor) did something that not a lot of people consider doing. Before he was appointed to a new church, Rev. Lyle felt a calling from God to live on the streets of Clarksville, TN as an unhoused person to fully experience it and to share the experience with the church. He lived on the streets for five days and during that time he learned how uncomfortable and difficult it is to live on the streets. He also learned that people are not kind to the unhoused. They are ignored and people don’t care about them. On the first day at his new church, he rested under a tree covered by a big overcoat. During service, he went to the altar and transformed into his Sunday attire and shared with them his experience. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/07/24/pastor-homeless-experience/2583241/>)

Unfortunately, it’s quick to make a judgment about someone based on how they look. We learned from our scripture passage that favoritism towards the rich is incompatible with the gospel.

NOTES

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS; HOSPITALITY

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Ask:

- Do you think our church warmly welcomes people from all backgrounds and all walks of life?
- Let's imagine what it's like for a new person to walk into our church for the first time. What do you think their experience might be? (Imagine what it might be like from the parking lot entering the church before service to when they leave – and what happens after they leave?)
- What if someone came to Sunday service that looked disheveled and unkempt, perhaps their style stands out compared to what everyone else is wearing at church, speaks a different language, etc. How do you think the church might respond?

Say:

As our passage states, we need both faith and action. Let's brainstorm ways that we can do better in welcoming people from all walks of life. (This can be within the youth group or it can be ideas to be shared with the larger church.)

(Before class is over, pick one or two of the ideas to implement the following Sunday.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Gather the group in a circle for the closing prayer.

Pray:

For this time together we give You thanks.

For those that are standing in this circle and for those that are not with us today, we give You thanks.

May our time together today help us to grow and become closer to You and others. May we be Your hands and feet.

We pray all this in Your son's name. Amen.

NOTES

Write the responses on the poster board.

If your church has a ministry with the unhoused community, a possible discussion can be around how to include those that participate in the ministry more into the life of the church.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. J.P. (JUNG PYO) HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: BULLYING

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

James 3:1-12

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161.R <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-bullying-161-r>

OBJECTIVE

To take responsibility for our words and resist the harm done by bullying.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Markers, index cards, blue tape, handouts of the scripture reading, writing utensils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Icebreaker: Mean Girls & Boys

- State from the outset the lesson is on bullying, and that an extra measure of sensitivity will be required.
- Hand out index cards (2-3) to each student, with instructions to write down names they've heard used to belittle or bully others (one name per card).
- Provide guidelines if you want certain words not be included because of your audience (e.g. profanity).
- Have students tape their cards on a designated wall, and give time for cards to be reviewed quietly. (Students can walk around and read them.)

Say:

As we get ready to discuss the topic of bullying and the power of words, consider how emotionally heavy it can feel to be on the receiving end of these words.

Conclude with an invitation for God to transform these negative words into words of encouragement and upliftment.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Reading James 3:1-12

Hand out copies of the reading.

NOTES

Be mindful not everyone may be open to sharing, and that each group may include both perpetrators and recipients of bullying.

For those who love metaphors, how apt are the ones the writer of James comes up with for the tongue? Do you agree?

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE BULLYING

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Say:

As you listen to the reading, what word or phrase stands out? What image comes to mind? Or what emotion does the reading evoke in you?

OPTION 1: Pre-invite students who are comfortable with reading in public to share the reading aloud (recommend 3-4 diverse voices, e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, etc.).

OPTION 2: Invite students to take 5-minutes reading the passage on their own. Encourage students to jot down observations and questions, circle words and phrases, and draw images that come to mind.

First Reading

Invite students to share their initial observations (and questions) using “mutual invitation”. You may want to record what is shared on a poster/blackboard/whiteboard for all to share and recall.

Second Reading

Say:

We’re now going to pay particular attention to verses 9-10. Take a moment to reread the entire passage with those verses in mind. And as you do, think about this question: *How do we use words to bless and to curse? How have you experienced this in your own life?*

Invite students to get in groups of 3-4 and share their reflections.

After 5-7 minutes, if applicable, have groups report back to the whole with highlights from their group discussion. Again, consider recording what is shared on a poster/blackboard/whiteboard.

NOTES

Try challenging your students to come up with a better metaphor.

James’ argument is one of consistency and integrity (i.e., a duck quacks, a chicken clucks, a child of God acts and speaks accordingly); and yet the tongue is portrayed as being in conflict with our desired good.

Like faith and works, James both highlights and seeks to reconcile seemingly contradictory and opposing ideas.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE BULLYING

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

As United Methodists, we have something called The Social Principles that articulate our position on issues impacting all persons, societies, and the environment. Here's what it says about bullying:

Bullying is a growing problem in parts of the connection. It is a contributing factor in suicide and in the violence we see in some cultures today. We affirm the right of all people, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, race, religion, disability, age, physical appearance, sexual orientation and gender identity, to be free of unwanted aggressive behavior and harmful control tactics...We encourage churches to adopt a policy of zero tolerance for bullying, including cyberbullying, within their spheres of influence; stand with persons being bullied; and take a leadership role in working with the schools and community to prevent bullying. (§161 The Book of Discipline 2016, p.119))

Activity: Anti-Bullying Brainstorm PSA

- Invite students to get into teams of 4-5.
- Groups have 15 minutes to brainstorm ideas for an anti-bullying PSA (public service announcement).
- Each team will share their idea with the whole group.
- Together, decide whether you want to make an actual PSA to post online and share with the congregation and local community.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Closing Ritual: Curses to Blessings

- Have students take all the negative index cards on the wall and write words of encouragement and blessing on the opposite side, then retape them blessing-side showing (e.g., beloved; beautiful; child of God; etc.)
- Gather near the wall of blessings, and share a closing prayer together.

NOTES

How far you take this activity, whether just as a learning exercise or as an actual project to bring to completion is up to you and your group.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME MICHELLE MALDONADO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: IDENTITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Proverbs 31: 10-31

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161.A <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-culture-and-identity-161-a>, *¶161.C* <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-marriage-161-c>, *¶161.E* <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-nurturing-community-161/the-nurturing-community-single-persons-161-e>

OBJECTIVE

Redefining gender roles.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper, writing utensils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Quiet meditation and prayer.

During this centering moment, have students quietly think and privately write down qualities they would want in a partner (on paper or on their cell phones as these will not be collected), as well as the qualities they want in themselves. Guide them to think about who they want to be in the future as they grow up. Conclude by praying aloud over those lists for the students.

NOTES

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE IDENTITY

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Proverbs 31:10-31

Ask:

- What would this story look like today?
- What themes did you notice?
- What surprised you about the story?
- Who holds the power in the story?
- What makes her powerful?
- What gender role structure is being challenged?

NOTES

Read through scripture together. If there is a large enough group, alternate readers with the students.

Notes to keep the conversation going as students answer questions:

Women at the time did not have the same rights as men because they were a husband's property. The woman in this story was quite independent and very confident.

The scripture says, "she brings food from far away" so she often got to travel. She was not confined to only being at home.

"She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard" meaning she can buy land on her own, invests in planting a vineyard, and makes a business out of it.

"She sees that her trading is profitable," she runs and operates more than one business, and it is going well.

She mentions, "And her lamp does not go out at night." Back then, they used oil lamps. The oil was quite expensive so for her to be able to have enough oil in her lamp all night meant she was able to afford it.

"She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy." The woman is not selfish with what she has earned and is willing to help others.

"She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple." The woman knew how to make clothes as well. Also, she was able to afford quality fabric, specifically purple, which was a color not everyone could afford.

"She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes." She was such a good seamstress and businesswoman that she supplied the local merchants.

She was financially independent.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE IDENTITY

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Separate the students into pairs and have them answer all the questions on a piece of paper.

- What do you think makes a good partner in 2021?
- What gender roles did you identify in this passage?
- How do you feel about your gender role and what people expect out of you?
- Do these roles, tasks or jobs only apply to just men or women?
- How do your answers compare this story?

After everyone is ready, have each pair present the answers they came up with. Note any common answers and themes.

Ask the students what common answers and themes they noticed.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Ask:

- Why is this important to begin with?

Close in prayer.

(Focus prayer on our yearning to be more like the woman in the story, Godly, generous, strong, independent, perseverant, and successful.)

NOTES

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DR. EMILY A. PECK-MCCLAIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: HEALTH CARE, SICKNESS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

James 5:13-20

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.A <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-racial-and-ethnic-persons-162-a>, ¶162.V <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-right-to-health-care-162-v>

OBJECTIVE

Youth will learn that responsibility toward taking care of one another is our call as Christians in community.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart paper. Access to the Scripture passage for today – projected, on paper handouts, or in Bibles. Access to the Social Community of the Social Principles (available online or in the 2016 Book of Discipline).

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Please settle in and we will begin in silence and then I will ask a few questions. After I ask each question, pray silently for yourself or any you know of who would answer “yes” to the questions.

Ask:

- Are any among you suffering?
- Are any cheerful?
- Are any among you sick?

Pray:

God of all of us, we carry the people named in the silence, those in this room and those who are not in this room, to you in this prayer. Make your presence know to them all, to us, and through us. Amen.

NOTES

A minute can feel like a long time in silence for those who are not used to it. Begin with a minute if your group is used to silence, or just 30 seconds if they are not. In between each question again stay in silence for a minute, but if your group is not comfortable with silence, you will want to only leave 30 seconds.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HEALTH CARE, SICKNESS

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Ask:

- What do you already know about the book of James?

Split the youth into pairs or small groups. It would be great to have about 3 different pairs/small groups. Have each group read through today's text. Have them think together about what is most important in these verses and why. Encourage them to consider if it is most important to their practicing of the Christian faith, their faith journey, for the church community, for the community at large, etc.

Bring the whole group back together to share their insights.

Wrap up this part of Sunday school by sharing with the youth what you noticed about their responses. Were all the pairs/groups similar? Different? What do you observe about what they found important and why?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

What we can see in this part of James is concern about sickness and sin, and belief in the power of prayer. When we look at our Social Principles, we find something interesting when we look at The Social Community, which is where we find our beliefs about human rights.

NOTES

James is a lesser-known book of the Bible so your youth may or may not know anything about it. You can make a list of what they know on a whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart paper.

Before you begin class today, spend a few minutes with a biblical commentary that includes James or a Study Bible so you can add to their list things you think are important for them to know about James. Some of those things might be:

- 1) The writer of the letter is James, it's not a letter to James.
- 2) We don't know which James is writing it – there are several mentioned in the New Testament. Since we don't know which James wrote it, it's hard to know when it was written. If it was written by James brother of John, it could have been very soon after Jesus died, since he died pretty soon after Jesus. If it was written by James brother of Jesus, it could have been a little later since he didn't die until about 30 years after Jesus did. But it could have even been written by another James who was alive later in the first century.
- 3) We're also not sure who the letter is being sent to – it could be to all Christians spread around the world as James knew it.
- 4) Letters in the ancient world were often written to be read aloud to a whole community, so this one might have been read aloud in several different places over a period of time.
- 5) James includes some very well-known verses even though the letter as a whole isn't read in churches very often. "Faith without works is dead" from James 2 and warnings about how hard (& important) it is to watch what we say from James 3.
- 6) Because of the famous "faith without works is dead" idea, James has often been thought of as a works-focused letter, but there's a lot about faith in it too.

The youth will need access to the scripture. You can project it, give them print outs, or they can read it from the Bible. Whatever works best for your group.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HEALTH CARE, SICKNESS

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Split your youth into two groups – one group will look at *The Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons* and one group will look at *The Right to Healthcare*. Have each group read through their assigned section and see what connection they can find to the James text.

Invite the youth to come back together and share what connections they found.

Ask:

- How is racism a sin? How do you see the sin of racism at work?

Say:

James connects prayer to healing in our verses for today. He says in verses 15 & 16 that when the faithful pray, those who are sick will find healing, and those who have sinned will find healing. Verse 16 ends with “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” We want to be faithful and righteous people whose prayers are powerful and effective. We want to help those who are sick and those who sin find healing. Often prayer is thought to be passive, but James shows us it’s active. This is because God is active. When we pray, when we connect with God, we find God calling us to action. If our social principles point out racism as sin and talk about health care as a basic human right, then we know that when we pray about those who are sick and those who sin, we will be called to action that upholds our Social Principles.

NOTES

Youth will need access to their assigned part of the Social Principles, which can be easily found online through a device or in the 2016 Book of Discipline.

The most important connection you want them to find is that in *The Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons*, our church calls racism a sin: “Racism, manifested as sin, plagues and hinders our relationship with Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself.” This is the only place in The Social Community that the word “sin” is used, powerfully calling out racism as showing up as sin in our world. In *The Right to Health Care*, we say, “Providing the care needed to maintain health, prevent disease, and restore health after injury or illness is a responsibility each person owes others and government owes to all, a responsibility government ignores at its peril.” We also say “Health care is a basic human right.” When people are sick, they have the right to be cared for. They also have the right to healthcare that can prevent them from being sick. If your youth need help making these connections, help them by pointing out these key quotations as they are working in groups or pointing it out as an addition to whatever they report back with.

Depending on your group, you may get different answers here. Help guide the youth to see that racism is not only intentional actions or slurs, but it is a systemic issue connected to white power and privilege. There are amazing resources for understanding these systems. Make sure you as a leader do some homework to understand better what is going on with racism and anti-racism work. As a basic starting point, Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” is a good and accessible place to start. Her list is something you could use with your youth to help them understand as well. You will want to guide this conversation so youth can begin to see larger, systemic issues at work here.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HEALTH CARE, SICKNESS

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Ask:

- What are some ways that we can pray?

After coming up with a list of ways to pray, have the youth vote to try one together. Lead the youth in a prayer practice around those who are sick (including those in the room and their families) and those who perpetuate and participate in the sin of racism (including those in the room and their families). End the prayer by asking God to direct our action on behalf of pursuing health care as a human right and calling out racism as a sin.

Ask:

- What action might God be leading us to from our prayer?

Give the youth an assignment for the week to spend time in prayer (in whatever prayer practice they want to try or are already comfortable doing) around sickness and healthcare and sin and racism. It would be good to also give them a list of their action ideas to take home, but you can mail it during the week or get it out to them electronically. Tell them when you gather back together next week, they will decide on an action item to do together, inspired by their week of prayer.

NOTES

Youth may need help here. They may already know about some kinds of prayer, but this is a great time to introduce them to new ways to pray: centering prayer, breath prayer, journaling, walking a labyrinth, prayer partners, and prayer beads are all a few you can add to a list if they don't know them already.

Make a list of the answers the youth come up with, on a whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart paper. Be sure to add to the list things you know about that the youth might not. For example: Is there a vote coming up about health care reform that you all can write emails or make calls about? Has there been a report about families not able to pay their medical bills in your local area that your youth could fundraise for? Is there a Black Lives Matter protest they can join? Are they being led to write an article for their school paper about racism? Teach their church about racism as a sin? Do a book study about anti-racism together?

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HEALTH CARE, SICKNESS

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Invite the youth to pray with you as you say:

God of hope and healing, be with us as we pray this week and seek to help bring healing of sickness and sin in the ways You call us to. Inspire our prayers this week to show us a step we can take together so that our prayers are powerful and effective. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

NOTES

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JAY CAMPBELL

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalms 8

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160 <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160>

OBJECTIVE

To help youth see their relationship with creation and responsibility to be its caretakers.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Printed out photos, computer to stream internet video (if possible), handout

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Begin your time together with this responsive Call to Worship from Creation Justice Ministries (handout):

One: Let us worship God together. How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. You call your creation “very good.”

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

One: Come Leviathan who frolics, beasts that prowl, and every creeping thing that creeps! When you send your Spirit, LORD, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Every creature gives you praise.

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

One: Let us celebrate the harmony of all God’s creatures that sing in the choir of our watershed. Let us embrace our roles as caretakers of God’s majestic creation.

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

NOTES

This call to worship is from their
Endangered Species Day Bulletin Insert

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Begin by asking youth to name all aspects of creation they can think of (i.e., space, trees, water, animals, plants, etc.).

Ask:

- What is your relationship with creation? (How does creation sustain your life, how does it give you rest or freedom to explore and enjoy.)
- What places in creation have you been to and why do you enjoy going there? (i.e., beach, camping/hiking in the mountains, the lake, etc.).
- Is it easy to see God's presence in these places?
- How well do you think we as humanity have done at caring for these aspects of creation? Do we do better for some parts more than others?
- Do you think how we interact with creation matters to God?

Read Psalm 8

Ask:

- What jumps out to you in this Psalm about our relationship to God and creation?
- What aspects of creation does the Psalmist name?

Reflections from Psalm 8:

Verse 1

God's name is celebrated as glorious throughout all of creation. All the earth reflects and points to God's glory and power. Creation points to God.

NOTES

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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Verses 3-4

Creation is established and proclaimed as the work of God – it is so large that we cannot even begin to comprehend its fullness. The Psalmist wonders with the vastness of creation, why would this God bother to pay attention to us, who are such small creatures tucked away on one small planet in the vast cosmos? Yet even though we are so insignificant, God sees us all as significant and important.

What does the Psalmist say seeing all that God has created stirs within this writer? When we see the power, the creativity, and the beauty of all that God has created, we find ourselves in awe – what truly are human beings that God is mindful of us? Being lost in the beauty and overwhelmingness of creation can stir reverence, awe, and peace within us.

Verse 5-8

These verses, echoing Genesis 1, are often used to justify humanity's exploitation of the environment because of the word dominion. What do you think having dominion over creation means? Read the quote to the right by Brueggeman and Bellinger: Does this help explain how dominion means responsible stewardship and not exploitation?

Ask:

- Why do you think God wants us to be responsible stewards and not to exploit the Earth's resources?
- What does it mean to you to be God's representative in caring for creation?

NOTES

"Humans are God's likeness, God's representatives in having dominion over the work of the divine fingers. Dominion here does not indicate permission to exhaust the creation's resources but suggests that God grants humans the honor of representing God in caring for all of creation. Humans receive the gift of caring for the creation as the shepherd king cares for the kingdom." Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger – Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary

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JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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Verse 9

The final verse brings us full circle and back to praise. We praise the powerful, creative, and loving God, whose majesty is displayed and seen throughout all of creation. And we praise God, that God has invited us to enjoy creation, to protect and care for it in God's name as God's representatives.

Our UMC Social Principles say: "All creation is the Lord's and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings." (Social Principles ¶160)

Ask:

- What do you think about this statement from our denomination? How does it connect to Psalm 8?
- Have you seen our church and/or our denomination make creation care a priority? If so, what have you seen? If not, what are some ways you can help them take the first step?
- Does seeing all of creation as belonging to God change/shape how you view your relationship to it?
- What does it mean to be responsible stewards of all creation?
- How can you take steps to represent God by caring for creation?
- If you wrote a Psalm about our relationship to God in connection to creation, what would you include?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

For the group activity time, youth will be invited into a time of praying through images.

NOTES

One place to begin is that you can help youth see that caring for our pets is an act of caring for God's creation, seeing God's created world in our own house and that we are already in close relationship with God's creation. How we care for our pets is an expression of our relationship with God and creation.

If you can stream videos in your youth room, then consider going to the YouTube channel – Quiet Quest: Study Music. They have videos with instrumental, meditative, and prayerful music with beautiful videos of a variety of nature scenes. You can play this in the background during this time of reflective prayer.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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Print out photos of creation and place them around the room, creating different prayer stations. For each photo you can invite students to write down what emotions stir within them when seeing the photo, to write down a verse from the Psalms that speak to the photo, their prayer for this part of creation, or a prayer of commitment to action to preserve creation. The hope is to invite students to see the beauty of God's world and reflect on what creation says about God and to see ourselves as responsible for its continual well-being. God has placed us in a relationship with the created world and the first step for us being faithful caretakers is to see that we are in a close relationship, both dependent upon the other.

Use a variety of pictures to represent multiple aspects of creation: (forest, jungles, freshwater, oceans, mountains, deserts, animals on the endangered species list, etc.), and make sure that the pictures show the beauty, joy, and wonder of all that God has created and entrusted to our care.

After some time, invite students to share their reflections.

Ask:

- What photo(s) impacted you the most? Why?
- How did you see God's presence in the images?
- What happens when we see creation as a gift from God?
- What can we each do, and as a church do, to care for creation?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

For your closing time together invite the youth to prayerfully consider your group symbolically sponsoring/adopting an animal. Many environmental organizations that devote themselves to protecting and preserving wildlife offer options for symbolic adoptions of wildlife animals with most beginning with a one-time donation of \$25.

NOTES

Make sure the photos are spread out so youth can move around the room. Make sure there is enough room at each station for several youth at a time.

You can place multiple pictures of each aspect of creation at each prayer station so that the youth can see multiple photos and examples of the world God has created in each place.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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This can be a great action step and a way to learn about animals that are endangered or close to being endangered. Use this closing time to see if your group might be interested and if so, the next time you'll meet you can bring a few options for the group to consider and invite youth to each give an offering of a few dollars. Many organizations will give you a certificate of adoption for the animal you choose, you can place this certificate in the youth room as a continual reminder of the church's responsibility to care for all of God's creation, including animals. God has placed us as caretakers and stewards who are responsible for the wellbeing of creation and this is one act that the group can do.

After seeing if the youth are interested in taking this next step, close your time together in prayer giving God thanks for the beauty and gift of creation that sustains our lives, and asking for wisdom to know how to be faithful caretakers of God's world.

NOTES

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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HANDOUT:

Call to Worship (Creation Justice Ministries)

One: Let us worship God together. How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. You call your creation “very good.”

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

One: Come Leviathan who frolics, beasts that prowl, and every creeping thing that creeps! When you send your Spirit, LORD, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Every creature gives you praise.

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

One: Let us celebrate the harmony of all God’s creatures that sing in the choir of our watershed. Let us embrace our roles as caretakers of God’s majestic creation.

Many: It is good, and we rejoice!

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. JAY CAMPBELL

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JUSTICE ISSUE: INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 10:17-22

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.E <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-poverty-163-e>

OBJECTIVE

For youth to critically reflect on what the story of the rich young ruler means for us today.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Pens, paper and/or butcher paper and markers, handout

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

As you begin, invite youth to center themselves, to be still, quiet, and listen for a moment. Begin prayer with 15 seconds of silence. You can use this prayer or your own.

Pray:

Jesus, at times you call us to difficult things. Tonight as we explore the story of the rich ruler who couldn't say yes to your calling, give us the grace to hear what you ask of us, the wisdom to know what you ask of us, and the courage to say yes, even when it is difficult. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

This scripture study invites youth to explore each verse and to engage in conversation and reflection as the narrative progresses.

Verse 17a

"As Jesus set out on a journey he was interrupted by a man with many riches and much wealth."

Ask:

- Have you ever been interrupted by someone unexpectedly on a trip or journey?
- Why do you think this man sought Jesus out?

NOTES

There are a lot of questions in this section, please don't feel you have to go through each one. Focus on what you feel your group needs.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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- What does it mean that sometimes we seek Jesus and perhaps interrupt his journey, as opposed to when Jesus seeks us out and interrupts our journey?

Verse 17b

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.”

Ask:

- In the church we give Jesus many names and titles, yet seldom do we hear Jesus referred to as “good teacher.” Why do you think that is? Is that a title that should be given more attention in our worship and church life?
- What answers have you heard in the church about how to receive/inherit eternal life? In many churches, we hear: receive Jesus into your heart, admit your sin and confess Jesus as Lord, respond to an altar call, commit to not doing bad things, etc. even though Jesus here gives none of these answers.
- Because he was rich, do you think that he assumed/thought it was something he could buy? That having power and wealth meant he would have no problem getting what we wanted?

Verse 18-19

Why do you call me good, no one is good but God alone, you know the commandments...

Ask:

- How do the answers you have heard from the Church about how to receive salvation differ from how Jesus answered?

NOTES

Often in the church, we speak of salvation about believing the right things, but here Jesus connects it directly to our actions and how we live.

“A faith-based solely on individual belief and disconnected from public responsibilities and actions allows the rich young rulers of our times to claim to be flowers and disciples of Christ, but Jesus determines salvation by how the rich interact with the poor.” Miguel A. De La Torre (Preaching God’s Transformative Justice: A Lectionary Commentary, Year B).

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JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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- Jesus lists some of the 10 Commandments. Notice that of the commandments Jesus named, he mentions the ones that directly relate to how we are in a relationship with our neighbors. He mentions only the 6 that speak to our neighbors and not the 4 that speak to our relationship with God. Why do you think that is? What significance does this have? What might this tell us about this rich person? Did he have a good relationship with God but not his neighbors? How are these two relationships connected?

Verse 20

He said to Jesus, “Teacher, I have done all these since my youth.”

Ask:

- What do you make of this statement? Is this something you think is possible to do?

Verse 21a

Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Ask:

- Why do you think this statement was put in the text? Why does this matter to the story?

Verse 21b – You lack one thing...

Ask:

- Why wasn't it enough for Jesus that this man had kept the commandments since his youth?

NOTES

This is a text we are often quick to spiritualize. We often hear or say, Jesus wasn't speaking to everyone or all disciples, but this particular one person. Jesus does not call all of us to sell our possessions, or we have to be willing to do so but most of us won't be called to do it. Jesus knows for each of us what has power over us to take priority over Jesus in our lives. For this rich man, it was money, for us it may be something else. This is what is often said about this story: Is this fair? Why are we so quick to do this to this passage? We say other passages are meant for everyone, but not this one. Invite students to reflect and wrestle with why we are quick to be dismissive of this story being meant for all of us.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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NOTES

- Since Jesus didn't mention the four commandments that related to the person's relationship with God, do you think maybe this rich young person had not been faithful to them? Do you think money and wealth became an idol?
- Why do you think Jesus called him to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and then follow him?
- What gets in our way of following Jesus today?
- Why do you think he was shocked and went away grieving?
- Why do you think we are so quick to spiritualize or be dismissive about this text being applied to all of us?
- Do you think Jesus is calling all disciples to this action and way of life, or this one particular person?

Connect the Scripture to Our Social Principles:

The UMC believes that "In order to provide basic needs such as food, shelter, education, health care, and other necessities, ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the world". (Social Principles Paragraph 163.E)

Ask:

- How does this story of the rich man connect to this belief of the UMC?
- What are some examples of resources not being distributed equally in our country? Why do you think this is?
- How can we share and use resources more equally to make sure all have access to life's necessities?
- What role does the church have living in a culture that values riches, wealth, and consumerism?
- How does change begin within each of us?

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

For this activity, each person will be invited to do an inventory of their possessions.

Invite each person, adults included, to make several lists:

- 1) Give everyone 5 minutes to write down what items they own. Writing this list can help us see that we own more than we often believe we do.
- 2) From that write down your top 5 favorite/most meaningful things you own.
 - a) Invite students to share their list and why these are items are their favorite/most meaningful
- 3) List your top three things that would be easiest for you to sell/give away.
 - a) Invite students to share why it is easy for them to give away these things
- 4) List your top three things that would be most difficult for you to sell/give away.
 - a) Invite each person to share why certain possessions they listed are difficult to part from

After writing these lists invite students to take a few minutes to pray and seriously reflect on giving/selling one thing away and use the money to support a ministry.

It could be to a ministry of the church or a ministry in the community that the youth group decides to support. You could collect everyone's offering and give to a ministry/organization that the group wants to support

If time allows, you can also invite the group to do this in terms of what your church possesses. What possessions/items does your church have? What could be sold/given away to support ministries? What possessions that the church has are necessary and essential to make current ministries happen?

This invites all of us to take one step to detach ourselves from possessions and to give to ministries that care for the common good in our communities.

NOTES

Supplies Needed:

Pens and journal/paper for everyone, and/or butcher paper and markers

For #1 you could ask everyone to do this individually or do this as a group

Depending on your group size, feel free to break up into small groups so everyone can have a chance to share

Be mindful that because they are youth they might need to ask approval from their parents before selling or giving away certain possessions. You may need to consider writing an email to parents before this lesson to share with them your lesson plans and reason for doing so.

You might need to give a deadline and agree as a group that in one or two weeks everyone brings their offering to youth group.

If this is meaningful for your group, ask your pastor and/or leadership team at your church if this story can be shared in worship to the whole church. Invite a few youth to share their experience

This is not necessarily an easy task or an easy ask of everyone, but the aim is to place ourselves in this story and continue to take one step at a time into a deeper life of discipleship. If some material things are impossible for us to let go of then that tells us that they have a hold on us.

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JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

For your closing prayer join together in the responsive liturgy of the Litany to the Social Creed (handout):

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

**Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.**

NOTES

Invite different youth to be the leaders of each section.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE INEQUALITY OF RESOURCES/SHARING OF RESOURCES

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HANDOUT

Litany to the Social Creed:

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
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God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

**Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.**

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. REZOLIA JOHNSON

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ADVOCACY, RACISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Job 38:1-7, 34-41

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES *2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.A* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-racial-and-ethnic-persons-162-a>)

OBJECTIVE To help students know that God is present in our lives and that we are called to be present for others.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Handout for each student, laptop/computer with internet to show a video

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Provide handout for each student. The facilitator can be the “One” or have one of the students volunteer to read “One.”

Handout:

One: Gracious, Loving and Mighty God, we come to You praising You for who You are

Many: God, You are good

One: Good and evil surrounds us

Many: God, You are good

One: Good things happen to bad people

Many: God, You are good

One: Bad things happen to good people

Many: God, You are good

One: You laid the earth’s foundations; You placed its cornerstone

Many: God, You are good

NOTES

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY, RACISM

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NOTES

One: While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy, you set limits for the sea and said, "This far and no further!"

Many: God, You are good

One: You gave orders to the morning and showed the dawn its place; you molded the earth until it took shape.

Many: God, You are good

One: You alone know the springs of the sea; You alone comprehend the vastness of the universe; You alone know the laws of heaven.

Many: God, You are good

One: Loving God, let us ever be mindful of Your grace, power and love. Give wisdom to our hearts and understanding to our minds.

All: God, You are good. You are always present with us, and Your mercy endures forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Play "The Book of Job" video by the Bible Project

<https://youtu.be/GswSg2ohqmA> (Stop video at 6:19)

Say:

One correction to the video. It says that Job lost everyone. He lost his children, but he did not lose his wife. In fact, because Job continued to pray after they lost everything, she even told him to curse God and die. Even his friends all wondered and bullied him by asking him what he did wrong. In the utter loss, Job cried out to God for an answer to his pain.

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY, RACISM

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NOTES

Ask:

- Describe a time when you felt like God didn't hear you.

Say:

Job felt like he was alone too. He felt God wasn't present with him.

Ask:

- Describe a time when God answered your prayer, even if it wasn't the answer you expected.

Read: Job 38:1-7, 34-41

Say:

Our passage for today is God's response to Job.

Ask:

- How does God respond to Job?
- How do you trust God even when life isn't fair and you suffer for no good reason? (Job's story invites us to consider what it means that God runs the world by wisdom, and this truth can bring peace in dark times.)
- Why is it important to understand that God's ways are not our ways, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

It's a question that I think we ask when we are going through a difficult time. If God is a good God, then why do bad things happen? We see this happening all around us. We see it through natural disasters and in other ways. The example that we will consider today is what is happening in the wake of the disproportionate amount of police brutality, misconduct, and racial discrimination against Black people, that our country has

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY, RACISM

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been and is facing, with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, and George Floyd. Many people are left wondering where God is. Since God is good and just, how could these bad things happen? Let's take a look at what happened to Atatiana Jefferson in Fort Worth, Texas.

Show video*: News report on the shooting of Atatiana Jefferson (Stop the video at 1:50) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wXCxsHs7qk>

Say:

Atatiana Jefferson was in her home playing video games with her nephew when her life was taken. A question that we could be asking is why do bad things happen to good people? She wasn't doing anything that was harming anyone.

Ask:

- The reporters shared that Atatiana was thriving in life. Describe a time when you felt like you were "on top of your game," and doing everything right and your world fell apart. Ever feel like God couldn't hear you or that God wasn't there? How did that make you feel? What made that feeling change (if at all)?

Say:

God is a just God even when we don't understand. When God responded to Job, God's response did not provide Job with a reason for his suffering. Instead, God provided him with rhetorical questions that reminded Job that God is in control. There may be no answer that can explain the hard times that we might encounter but one thing that we can trust is that first, God is with us in the midst of it; and second, that to ease the burden we are to be present with others.

Ask:

- If the death of Atatiana Jefferson happened in our community, how would you respond? How should the church respond?

NOTES

*Watch the video before class to see if it is appropriate for your age level class (actual footage of the apartment is shared in the video clip).

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY, RACISM

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

Take a moment. Close your eyes. Focus on your breathing.

Imagine the air gently moving across your arm, perhaps your hair.

There may be moments in our lives when God feels far away. Remember that God is always with us, with you. That God loves us and is ever-present like the air that is moving around us. No matter how difficult life may be. One way that we know that God is with us is how we can show up for others – being present, being an advocate.

As we wrap up our time together today let's remember that God is ever-present with us and that we are called to be present for others.

NOTES

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JUSTICE ISSUE ADVOCACY, RACISM

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HANDOUT

One: Gracious, Loving and Mighty God, we come to You praising You for who You are

Many: God, You are good

One: Good and evil surrounds us

Many: God, You are good

One: Good things happen to bad people

Many: God, You are good

One: Bad things happen to good people

Many: God, You are good

One: You laid the earth's foundations; You placed its cornerstone

Many: God, You are good

One: While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy, you set limits for the sea and said, "This far and no further!"

Many: God, You are good

One: You gave orders to the morning and showed the dawn its place; you molded the earth until it took shape.

Many: God, You are good

One: You alone know the springs of the sea; You alone comprehend the vastness of the universe; You alone know the laws of heaven.

Many: God, You are good

One: Loving God, let us ever be mindful of Your grace, power and love. Give wisdom to our hearts and understanding to our minds.

All: God, You are good. You are always present with us, and Your mercy endures forever. Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. LISA JO BEZNER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 10:46-52

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.I (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-162-i>) and ¶162.V (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-right-to-health-care-162-v>)

OBJECTIVE

To make youth aware of how persons with disabilities may react to healing stories.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Copies of Mark 10:46-52, pens or pencils, copies of UMH 454 and UMH 378

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Handout copies of UMH 454 “Open My Eyes, That I May See” and UMH 378 “Amazing Grace” and pens/pencils

Sing/Read poetically: “Open My Eyes, That I May See” (UMH 454)

Activity: Have youth mark all the physical and sensory words* in UMH 454. Have them do the same with UMH 378.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read: Mark 10:46-52 and mark the physical and sensory words in the text.

Ask:

- How do you think you would feel hearing the story of Blind Bartimaeus if you were blind?
- How would you feel if you prayed for mercy and to be healed, but weren't? Why?
- Note v.52 when Jesus says “Go; your faith has made you well.” If you haven't been healed, what does that say about your faith? Why?

NOTES

*“Eyes,” “see,” “hands,” etc.

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JUSTICE ISSUE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Say:

Nancy L. Eiesland in “The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability” writes there are three themes that “illustrate the theological obstacles encountered by people with disabilities who seek inclusion and justice within the Christian community.”

Those themes are:

1. Sin and disability conflation.

Physical disability is a travesty of the divine image and desecration of all things holy. Therefore, if someone is disabled they (or their parents) must have sinned. To continue to be disabled means harboring a hidden sin.

(Check Luke 5:18-26; John 5:14, 9:1-3)

2. Virtuous suffering.

Righteous submission to divine testing is upheld as praiseworthy. Disability is represented as a temporary affliction that must be endured to gain heavenly rewards.

3. Segregationist charity.

Charitable giving shapes the pattern of interaction between able-bodied and persons with disabilities as those in need (like Bartimaeus) are left at the city gates, which denies dignity and adequate provisions.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Read: “It is unjust to construct or perpetuate barriers to physical or mental wholeness or full participation in the community.” ([Social Principles](#), ¶162.V)

Ask:

- How welcoming do you think your church is to someone who has a physical disability?

NOTES

Slips of paper for each person with a disability on it. Suggestions:

1. Blind.
2. In a wheelchair.
3. Prosthetic leg.

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JUSTICE ISSUE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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- As a group, walk out to the parking lot or church entrance. Based on the paper, imagine you have that disability and pay attention to what obstacles you encounter:
 - as you enter the sanctuary and find seating;
 - as you enter the choir loft;
 - as you light the candles or read from the lectern;
 - as you go to classrooms;
 - as you go to the fellowship hall.
- After touring the church, how welcoming do you think your church is to someone who has a physical disability?
- What changes would you recommend to the Trustees?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we.

**Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.**

Sing/Read poetically: Amazing Grace (v.1)

NOTES

(Companion Litany to the Social Creed)

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

CONTRIBUTOR NAME JAMES J. KANG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: DIALOGUE, OPENNESS TO COMMUNICATION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Mark 12:28-34

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶164 <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-political-community>

OBJECTIVE To know we all have something to learn and something to offer.

SUPPLIES NEEDED None

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say:

Let's take a few deep breaths and close our eyes.

Think about a time when you learned about a new subject or a new skill. It could be from school or home, anywhere.

(wait)

Now, I want you to imagine teaching someone what you learned. How would you teach someone that new skill?

(wait)

Okay, let's come back now.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read: Mark 12:28-34

Say:

We find Jesus during a very engaging conversation. He is learning from others and others are learning from him. Right before our passage for today, the bible says that he was having a conversation with the Pharisees,

NOTES

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

JUSTICE ISSUE DIALOGUE, OPENNESS TO COMMUNICATION

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Herodians, and the Sadducees (Jewish leaders that were trying to challenge his authority). Our passage says that it was one of the teachers of the law that came and asked him a question. This was not a friendly question; it was more of a test to see if Jesus can give the right answer.

Ask:

- How do you think Jesus felt being challenged by one of the teachers of the law?
- What was Jesus' answer?
- What does it mean to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength?"
- Do you think the teacher was satisfied with the answer?
- How did Jesus respond to the teacher of the law? (vs. 34) How do you think they felt about each other after their conversation?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

For our activity today, I want you to think back on our centering moment. I asked you all to think of a time when you learned something new – a new skill, a new subject. I'm going to give you five minutes to quickly think of a way to teach that new skill, new subject to someone. After the five minutes, you are going to teach it to a partner. Try to think of a 3-minute lesson.

- Depending on the size of the group, feel free to break up the class into pairs, groups of 3-4, or to the entire group.
- After 5 minutes, provide 3 minutes per person to share their lesson.

NOTES

*You may want to provide some supplies (paper, pen/pencil) for the students to brainstorm.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

JUSTICE ISSUE DIALOGUE, OPENNESS TO COMMUNICATION

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

As we close, let's take a quick moment to remind ourselves that we all have something to share with others and that we should approach others with a mind of openness to learn and also to share. We can be surprised!

NOTES

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. LISA JO BEZNER

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JUSTICE ISSUE: HUNGER, POVERTY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Mark 12:38-44

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶163.E <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-poverty-163-e>

OBJECTIVE

To make youth aware of economic inequality in their community.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Faith & Facts Card: Hunger & Poverty in the United States, copies of Mark 12:38-44, pens or pencils, information from Census Bureau, calculator, UMH and FWS, or copies of hymns

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Sing/Read as poetry: "What Does the Lord Require of You?" (UMH 441)

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Mark 12:38-44 aloud.

Then have the youth read silently and underline any phrases that stick out to them.

Ask:

- Have you heard this passage before?
- How have you heard the passage interpreted?
- Who do you think is the intended audience of the passage?

Say:

We're going to look at the passage from the perspectives of the people Jesus is watching.

Ask:

- First, imagine you are a rich person who overhears Jesus comparing you to the widow.
 - What would your first reaction be? (angry, offended, etc.)

NOTES

You'll need hymnals or copies of UMH 441 and FWS 2153.

Provide copies of Mark 12:38-44 and pens or pencils.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HUNGER, POVERTY

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NOTES

- Would this make you give more money? Why or why not?
- This passage is often used during stewardship campaigns to get people to donate more money. Did your church use it?
- Second, imagine you are the widow who overhears Jesus comparing you to the rich people.
 - What would your first reaction be? (proud, appreciated, etc.)
 - Why did you think she gave “everything she had, all she had to live on”? (Let them invent a backstory for the widow.)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Theologian Emilie M. Townes writes “Indeed, sacrifice is a dangerous notion. It is dangerous because we often ask those who are the most vulnerable to give the most.”

Ask:

Now, imagine you are the widow in your town today after you have given everything you had to live on.

- How will you feed yourself?
- How will you pay the rent?
- What will you do if there is an emergency?
- Do you still feel the same way about the passage?

Say:

We often assume the rest of the people in our community live the same way we do. Compare the range of incomes from the Census Bureau*.

Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4:
Season after Pentecost 2 (Proper 17-Reign
of Christ), ©2009 Westminster John Knox
Press

*Go to data.census.gov.
Under topics select “Income and Poverty,”
under Geography find your county.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HUNGER, POVERTY

Page: 3 of 4

NOTES

Divide the median income by 12 to get a monthly income. Subtract the average rental price.

That is the monthly budget for the average person in your community.

Estimate how much they will pay for utilities, car and health insurance, phone, Internet, car payment, etc.

Subtract that estimate from their monthly budget. How much is left?

Now divided that by 30 to get their daily budget. How much does that leave for food, gas, etc.?

If that was all the money you had, how would you feel about hearing the story of the widow, who gave “everything she had, all she had to live on”? How do you think you would feel when the offering plate was passed around? (guilty, ashamed)

Read:

“In order to provide basic needs such as food, shelter, education, health care, and other necessities, ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the world.” ¶163.E

- What kinds of things does your church do to help those who are hungry in your community?
- Which are charitable (short-term assistance)?
- Which are justice-oriented (long-term change)?
- What more do you think the church could be doing?

Provide Faith & Facts Card – Hunger & Poverty in the United States. <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/22>

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE HUNGER, POVERTY

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:

Today is the day God cries with the masses of starving people, despises growing disparity between rich and poor, demands justice for workers in the marketplace.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.

Sing: I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (FWS 2153)

NOTES

(Companion Litany to the Social Creed)

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME MICHELLE MALDONADO

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JUSTICE ISSUE: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE Psalm 16

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES N/A

OBJECTIVE To realize the beauty of trusting in God and the things that can damage our relationship with God.

SUPPLIES NEEDED Post-it notes and writing utensil

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Opening prayer.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Psalm 16

(Establish that David is talking. Read through scripture together. If there is a large enough group, alternate readers with the students.)

Ask:

- Why is David so confident in God?
- What does it mean for you to seek refuge in the Lord?
- Have you had a time in your life where you have turned to God for refuge?
- What do you think about David saying he has nothing good other than God?
- What are some good things you have in your life?
- Are there any words you do not understand in the passage?

NOTES

Focused on strength given by God in the face of difficulty.

Focus the conversation around the quote "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."

I.e., "I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods"

Libations mean to pour out a drink as an offering to a deity. For example, in a movie or tv show, they pour out a drink in honor of someone.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

Page: 2 of 2

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Reread the passage, “Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.”

Have students write down each answer on a separate post-it note.

Choose a wall or board where they can place their post-it notes.

Ask:

- What would you consider to be other gods?
(Read aloud all the answers and work with the students to find common answers and themes.
Reorganize the post-its by theme – group together post-its that mention money.)
- What are the things that lead us away from God?
(The previous question focuses more on material things, while this follow-up question is more on emotion and behavior. Once all the answers have been placed on the wall/board, again work together to find common themes, i.e., greed, jealousy.)
- What are the things you can do to strengthen your relationship with God?
(Repeat the activity one last time answering the third question. Before finding the themes, ask the students what they think the common answers will be and see if they were correct.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

This Psalm highlights gratefulness. David knows that nothing compares to a relationship with God and he does not want to risk damaging it.

Closing prayer (offer up a prayer of thanksgiving for all the good things God has granted us and for wanting a relationship with us).

NOTES

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME TURA FOSTER GILLESPIE

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CREATION CARE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalms 93

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016 Book of Resolutions #1033 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/caring-for-creation-a-call-to-stewardship-and-justice-1033>), *2016-2020 Social Principles ¶160.D* (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-global-climate-stewardship-160-d>)

OBJECTIVE

To remind students how life-giving and how dangerous water can be and that we need to care for it.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Large bowls, water, towels

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Get the students to sit in a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle with the ability to turn so that each youth can see you as you turn. Tell the youth to do as you do when you look them in the eyes, but not before, and to keep doing that action until you come to them again. Remind them that they must be quiet other than the action for the effect to work!

Show them the following actions in this order:

Silence

Rub hands (Wind)

Pat thighs (Light rain)

Snap fingers (Rain showers)

Clap hands (Heavy rain)

Stomp feet and clap hands (Thunder)

Clap hands (Heavy rain)

Snap fingers (Rain showers)

Pat thighs (Light rain)

Rub hands (Wind)

Silence

Prayer:

God of wind and rain, be near to us tonight as we study your word. Help us to better understand you and our world. Amen.

NOTES

If the instructions are not clear, there are many videos on the internet – just search “human rainstorm” to get the idea down.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE

Page: 2 of 3

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Psalm 93 together.

Ask:

- There are a lot of stories about water in the Bible. What can you name?
(Suggestions might include: Creation, Noah and the flood, the Exodus from Egypt and the parting of the sea, Moses drawing water from a rock, laws about washing, Jesus' baptism, Jesus calming the storm, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, and/or many Psalms that talk about water.)
- So, is water positive or negative?
(A discussion about baptism as good and destruction as bad and anything in between might unfold.)
- Why would the Psalmist discuss God's power like the power of water? What power does water have?
(If their focus is too much on floods or oceans, remind them that water also has the power of giving life – that plants and animals and humans need water to live. Remind them of the power of dirty water vs clean water, that one creates danger and the other gives life.)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Hand Washing:

Say:

Jesus led his disciples in foot washing, showing that part of God's power is being humble and serving others.

Instructions:

- With a large group, split the group into smaller groups of 2-4. With a small group, just create a circle, like the beginning.
- Have each student take a turn washing the hands of one of the other youth.*
- While they are washing the other's hands, have them name how they see God's power or strength manifest in that partner.

NOTES

*Make sure the bowl(s)/tub(s) used to hold the water is/are not too full to avoid splashing and spilling!

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUSTICE ISSUE CREATION CARE

Page: 3 of 3

This can be a very moving ritual for youth. It could be as simple as how that youth's smile or talent for singing can move people, or if they know each other well, might be much deeper than that.

When they have all been washed and have all served as washer, discuss with them how important clean water is for washing using questions like the following:

Ask:

- Baptism claims us as God's own, with the use of water. Jesus washing the feet of the disciples reminds us what servant leadership looks like. Can you imagine if we were baptized or tried to wash one another's feet with dirty water?
- What if we didn't have enough clean water to wash our hands?
- What unique talents does this group have that would be stifled if there wasn't enough clean water to drink, wash, brush our teeth?

Say:

Look to the Social Principles to see all the ways that the Church suggests we be better stewards of our natural resources.**

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Closing prayer:

Loving God,

Thank you for the water. Remind us to be grateful for the clean water we have and to be good stewards. Be near to us as we learn and grow in our stewardship and remember those around the world who do not have the same access we have. Amen.

NOTES

**Visit [UMCOR.org](https://umcor.org) for ideas of water stewardship ministries in your area or somewhere else in the world that the youth might be able to serve either financially or physically.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME MINOKA GUNSEKERA

Page: 1 of 3

JUSTICE ISSUE: FOOD INSECURITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK

Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Psalm 25:1-10

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 *Social Principles* ¶163.D (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-consumption-163-d>), ¶163.E (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-economic-community-163/the-economic-community-poverty-163-e>), ¶160.H (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-natural-world-160/the-natural-world-food-justice-160-h>), 2016-2020 *Book of Resolutions* #4051 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-united-methodist-church-food-justice-and-world-hunger-4051>)

OBJECTIVE

To help students understand that food insecurity is not only about what is in front of them, but also how others in our community treat food.

SUPPLIES

Copies of 160.H, 163.D, 163.E, 2016-2020 *Book of Resolutions* 163.E (Optional *Faith and Fact Cards on Food Justice; Hunger and Poverty in the US; Hunger and Poverty*), 2016-2020 *Social Principles*

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Create two groups and assign them a passage to read:

- Group 1: Jeremiah 33:14-16
- Group 2: Psalm 25:1-10

Come back together as a large group and name three words from their passage that stood out to them.

Repeat those six words together twice as a centering prayer to focus the mind on the text at hand.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Option: Work in pairs/groups and report answers back to the larger group *or* work as a large group.

Before beginning, give everyone five minutes to read the text that they had not read.

Share with the students that the lesson will be centered on food insecurity.

NOTES

Whenever possible have a youth volunteer to read.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY

Page: 2 of 3

Read Psalm 25:1-10

Ask:

- Read verses 3-5. What does the word “wait” mean in this passage? When was the last time you had to wait for something? Where do people wait?
- Verse 4 includes the word “teach.” What do you think God is trying to teach us in this Psalm? What might God be teaching us when it comes to *how we think about our food*?
- Verse 5 is about being led and guided by God.
- How does God lead us? If so, name some ways.

Read Jeremiah 33: 14-16

Ask:

- Verse 16 is about safety. What does it mean to feel safe? How do you know when you are safe? How do you know when you are not safe?
- What do we learn about God in Jeremiah that we didn’t in the Psalm passage?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

In the Advent season, we learn about waiting. Waiting for the King (Jesus) to be born but also waiting for God’s promise of restoration. Sometimes waiting can be unfair, like in food insecurity. There are many hurdles that those that are food insecure must face receiving the aid that they need. Some neighborhoods and communities lack fresh food in their neighborhoods. Some wait for their “Meals on Wheels” program to bring them food, and there are those that wait at soup kitchens for a meal.

NOTES

1. Wait here means the wait that a waiter does, more like service than merely sitting still. Help the students think about those who “wait” in their community (particularly those associated with food.)
2. We can help lead others to God by the ways to think about food insecurity and food waste.

Jeremiah:

1. To feel safe is to have your boundaries respected, to be known and loved.
2. We learn about restoration and safety. We see that God is always trying to bring goodness to God’s people. These promises of restoration – fulfilled in part under Ezra and Nehemiah, fulfilled in whole with the completion of the new covenant – these promises were a remarkable contrast to the present state of destruction in Judah and Jerusalem.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE FOOD INSECURITY

Page: 3 of 3

Give a copy of the ¶160.D, ¶163.D, and ¶163.E to all of the students. If possible, give copies of the Faith and Fact Card “Food Justice: Hunger and Poverty in the US”.

Break up the group into small groups or in pairs. Ask them to read the handouts. In a large group answer the following questions.

1. What does the *Social Principles* say about food justice, consumption, and poverty?
2. How can we help people in our community have more access to healthy food?
3. How can our church (or conference) reduce food waste?
4. There are people that are waiting for food in our community. What are some ways that the church can help people receive the food that they need?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray:

God of steadfast love and faithfulness. You gave Jerusalem safety and the promise of restoration. Lead us in Your truth so that we can help those around us into abundant life through Christ Jesus. May Your Holy Spirit dwell in us, so that we may not waste the precious gifts You have given to us. Amen.

NOTES

Discussion on Social Principle

In the last 10 minutes talk about food insecurity and how many children have to wait (or are stopped/prevented) from getting vital, nutritious food due to things like war, famine, etc.) but also things like no healthy options in their homes or local food pantries.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. IVAN MILOSI

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JUSTICE ISSUE: CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Luke 3:1-6

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162>)

OBJECTIVE

To help students prepare for Jesus by identifying the “crooked” and “rough” roads in our world.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Envelopes, Paper, Pen/Pencil, Bibles, *Social Principles*, *Faith and Fact Cards* (full set)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask:

- Share a moment when you were able to witness God this week.
- As 2022 is quickly approaching, what is one thing that you are excited about?

Wrap up this time with a prayer.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Luke 3:1-6

Ask:

- Who was the emperor? (Tiberius Caesar – provide a summary of the character of Tiberius found in the notes)
- Who was the governor of Judea? (Herod tetrarch of Galilee)
- Who are the high priests? (Annas and Caiaphas)
- Who is John the Baptist’s father & mother? (Zechariah & Elizabeth)
- Why do you think the word of God came to John and not to the high priests?

NOTES

Background:

The author of Luke was a physician by profession, an evangelist by call, and a close friend and companion of the apostle Paul.

Chapter 3 begins when Israel was under the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius was considered one of the worst Caesars. He was a bad leader, given to greediness, drunkenness, and cruelty.

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah who was a priest, and his mother was Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Pages: 2 of 2

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Read ¶ 162 Introduction Paragraph of the *Social Principles*.

(If you have *Faith and Fact Cards* – let the students look at them to help come up with the list.)

As a group, make a list of some of these “crooked” and “rough” roads in our world.

Hand each student an envelope, pen/pencil, and paper.

Give each student/pair of students an opportunity to write down how they can help make straight the “crooked” and “rough” paths in their lives and their community.

Tell the students that the envelopes will be kept at church and will be given to them later to remind them of the list that they created and to check how they are progressing.*

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Those who want to share what they wrote, they can share their list.

With envelopes in hand, close with a prayer for strength and courage to work on what they wrote in their envelope.

NOTES

Students may bring up issues like immigration, Black Lives Matter, Flint water crisis, natural disasters, wars, refugees, etc. Help the students to name the issues that hit closer to home.

*Return the envelopes in 2-3 months.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. IVAN MILOSI

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JUSTICE ISSUE: VARIETY (DEPENDING ON THE STUDENT'S PREFERENCE)

| | |
|--|--|
| SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Luke 3:7-18 |
| SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES | Variety (depending on student's preference) |
| OBJECTIVE | To help students understand that in the midst of hopelessness there is a path of hope. |
| SUPPLIES NEEDED | Handout, Paper, Pencil, Full collection of the <i>Faith and Fact Cards</i> |

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask the students to sit with their backs against the back of the chair and to close their eyes.

Read Isaiah 12:2-6

Ask the students to share one word from the reading.

Read Isaiah 12:2-6 again

Ask the students to share a phrase from the reading.

Close with a prayer for God's presence.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Luke 3:7-18

Ask:

- What is the tone of John's message? How can you tell?*
- How does John respond to the crowd's "What should we do then?" (vs 10, vs 14) What is the tone of the crowd's response?

NOTES

*The tone of John the Baptist changed from the previous verses (Luke 3:1-6) from an invitational proclamation of the good news to a harsh message of wrought and punishment.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE VARIETY (DEPENDING ON THE STUDENT'S PREFERENCE)

Pages: 2 of 3

- What does repentance mean and what does it require? **
- John the Baptist felt the hopelessness of the crowd and introduced the one that is to come. Who is it? ***

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

The world we are living in today is not that different from the world of John the Baptist. Turn on the TV on any given night or read the headlines of the newspaper (print and online!) and there are heartbreaking headlines. Many painful things are happening in our schools, community, neighborhood, nation, and the world. Most of the time we look at all these things, and we feel very small, powerless, hopeless, and scared.

Have each student pick up one card/issue from the *Faith and Facts* collection that speaks to their heart.

Give each student paper and pencil/pen. Ask each student to read the card that they picked and to brainstorm what they can do to bring change to that issue.

After a few minutes, have the students find a partner and share with their partner about the issue that they picked and why they are passionate about that issue.

Reconvene the larger group and in a circle have everyone share the issue that they picked.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Close with the reading of the "Companion Litany to Our Social Creed" which can be found on page 60 of the *Social Principles* handbook and also on the Handout.

NOTES

**True repentance requires accepting the sin against God and neighbors and not to continue on the road of complacency – of seeing our community/neighbors suffer and not responding to their need.

***Feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness is not a sin. Instead, it is a sign that reminds us of our limitations as human beings.

The activity is similar to the one from last week. If the students already did this exercise, have them share what they came up with and brainstorm actions for the coming week: for themselves, the youth group, for the larger church.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE HUNGER AND POVERTY, FOOD JUSTICE

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HANDOUT

A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
*to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.*

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

*Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.*

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CONTRIBUTOR NAME REV. DR. EMILY A. PECK-MCCLAIN

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JUSTICE ISSUE: MATERNAL HEALTH

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Luke 1:39-55

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶161.V (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-right-to-health-care-162-v>), 2016-2020 Book of Resolutions #3203 (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/maternal-health-the-church-s-role-3203>)

OBJECTIVE

Help students understand the lack of and need for maternal health.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Printouts of handout (Luke 1:39-45 and Luke 1:46-55), colored pencils/pencils/pens for each youth to have one, a Study Bible or commentary like *New Interpreter's Bible* for Luke or *The People's New Testament Commentary* (a pastor, church library, or town library might have these resources you can borrow). 2016-2020 Social Principles and 2016-2020 Book of Resolutions. Paper.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Invite your youth into a time of silence.*

Say**:

- Think of a time when you got the best news ever.
- What was the news?
- You got the part you really wanted in a school play?
- You got onto the travel sports team?
- You found out your aunt was having a baby and you were going to have a little cousin?
- Who told you this best news ever? What did you do when you heard the news?

After a final moment in silence, invite the youth to open their eyes, and share how it felt to receive this good news in a word or two to the whole group.***

NOTES

*It may be helpful to turn down the lights and ask your youth to close their eyes to help the room be as quiet as possible.

**As you voice each prompt, leave some silence before voicing the next prompt/question.

***If you notice anything about them during this centering movement, share it with them – could you see them smile when they thought of their best news ever? Could you see the joy even though their eyes were closed? Did their bodies take a different shape as they thought of good news?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

Page: 2 of 7

Say:

As we do our Bible study today, I hope we can remember these joyful feelings and words because we are learning about Mary's deep joy at learning she was pregnant with Jesus. Imagine Mary feeling feelings like yours when you got the best news ever.

Pray:

O God our Savior, we thank you for the times in our lives when we have been joyful at hearing some really good news. As we discover more about Mary's joy today at hearing what really was the best news ever in the history of the world, teach us ways we can contribute to the joy of others. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Give each youth a print out of one section of the scripture passage and a colored pencil/pencil/pen. Ask the youth to read their section to themselves and use their colored pencil to mark it up.

NOTES

This is a long Scripture passage! If you attempt to read it all out loud, you may lose the attention of your youth. If your group doesn't have strong readers in it, however, this may be your best option.

There are two stories, both wonderful and certainly connected, in these verses. The first is Mary and Elizabeth, both implausibly pregnant (Mary because she was not married and Elizabeth because of her age), greeting each other. The second is Mary's Song, her response to Elizabeth's blessing of her and the baby Jesus growing inside of her. It is important to note that this well-known part of scripture, Mary's Song, comes as a response to Elizabeth. Her praise of God, her soul rejoicing, comes from a connection with someone else, a sisterhood with Elizabeth. It is also important to note that Mary's Song is an echo of Hannah's Song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, another woman with an unlikely pregnancy following years of infertility. Read this passage ahead of time, and familiarize yourself with her story.

Come prepared to help the youth find answers to the questions they have about the scripture passages. A Study Bible or commentary like the *New Interpreter's Bible* or *The People's New Testament Commentary* can help.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

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Say:

- Underline words that are confusing or don't make sense.
- Circle any names.
- Put a square around anything that sounds joyful.
- Put a checkmark next to anything surprising.

If you have more than two youth, this next part can be done in two groups. If you have two youth, then do this part together. Have the youth share what they noticed about their section. Help translate any words they underlined, turning to the commentary or Study Bible when you need help. Encourage the youth to look it up with you so they can learn how to use these resources.

Ask:

- What emotions are in your section? Why do you think these are the emotions the speakers – Elizabeth or Mary – express?

Share some information about this passage with the youth. Having read in a commentary or Study Bible ahead of time, share insights you found particularly interesting or confusing.

Be sure to tell the youth that Elizabeth and Mary were both pregnant and neither one “should” have been. Be sure to also tell the youth that someone they met a couple of weeks ago, John the Baptist, was the baby growing inside Elizabeth.

If there is time, read Hannah's Song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and briefly tell them her story. If there is not enough time, then tell them that Mary's Song echoes Hannah's, another woman from the Old Testament who had wanted to be pregnant for a long time and found out that she was.

NOTES

Before class, do the exercise you ask the youth to do – noting the different things in the passage for yourself. Then read through the pages in the Study Bible or commentary on these verses.

Bring your resource(s) to Bible study so that your youth can look up answers to their questions in these books with your help.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say:

Pregnancy is an amazing gift from God – it is how God has designed humanity to continue. Pregnancy can also be complicated. Today we have learned about three women, Elizabeth, Mary, and Hannah, with pretty amazing pregnancy stories. Elizabeth and Hannah wanted to be pregnant for a long time before they were. Mary was pregnant through a miraculous encounter with God when she said yes to the invitation to carry God's Son in her belly. Many women grieve over not being able to get pregnant. Some, like Elizabeth and Hannah, do become pregnant after a long time of waiting, but some never do. Times like Advent and Sundays like this one can be painful reminders to these women. We want to be sure to keep women in prayer during this season of the church who may be feeling particularly sad when the church is particularly happy. Many women do get pregnant when they want to. Many women are surprised by pregnancy – either happily or not. While some choose not to get pregnant. The other truth is that not all women can receive the health care they need for themselves and their babies when they are pregnant. See? It can be really complicated!

Ask the youth to split up into pairs or groups of three. Invite them to write down some reasons they can think of why women might not be able to get the health care they need while pregnant. Invite them to consider the whole world, not only their communities when they think of reasons.

(10 minutes)

Come back together as a group and share what reasons each pair/group came up with.

NOTES

Bear in mind that you may have youth in your youth group whose lives have been touched by maternal health complications or maternal or fetal or infant death. Be prepared to talk about these topics with sensitivity and make adjustments to the lesson plan based on your knowledge of the experience of your youth. Be ready to provide pastoral care and/or connect youth with someone else who can provide pastoral care if these topics are especially difficult for some to discuss.

Familiarize yourself with paragraph 162.V in the *Social Principles* and #3203 in the *Book of Resolutions* (this is also available online at <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/maternal-health-the-churchs-role>). As noted in the Resolution, maternal health in developing countries is more of a risk; however, maternal mortality is also on the rise in developed countries like the United States. In the United States, Black women are at much higher risk than white women. This article from April of 2018 in the New York Times is one place you can read about this: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html>

You may also want to look at paragraph 161 of the *Social Principles*, depending on how the conversation with your youth goes, there might be a number of items in that may be helpful to know what the church says.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

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Share with the youth what you learned from Resolution #3203 about why maternal health suffers, especially in the developing world, and about maternal or fetal, or infant death.

Say:

The United Methodist Church advocates for comprehensive family planning, that is, information provided to men and women, girls and boys, so that they can know and have access to different ways to prevent unwanted pregnancies. The church also says that maternal health is important and maternal death is a tragedy.

Our church calls on us to:

- Support United Methodist projects around the world working on maternal health and family planning;
- Advocate with policymakers at all levels to increase access to maternal health and family planning services; and
- Support local health initiatives that expand access to information and services for women's health. (BOR #3203)

(5 minutes) Invite the youth back into their pairs or groups of three.

Ask:

- What is one thing our youth group can do to respond to one of those things the church calls on us to do? (Each pair or group of three should come up with one thing they think their youth group can do.)

(3 minutes)

Come back together and share each group's idea of one thing they can do.

Invite them to pray about this list of ideas over the next week and come back together next week ready to vote on which one they think they should do first.

NOTES

If your group is having a hard time coming up with ideas, you can prompt them. Some ideas might be: write letters to legislators at the state or national level. Research what local organizations are committed to supporting women's health and find out how they can get involved.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Invite the youth to recall the best news ever that they began today's Bible study remembering. Pause for a moment for them to recall.

Invite the youth into a time of prayer.

Say:

God of women, men, children, and babies, we know that you want for all of us to live abundant lives. We remember with joy when we have felt abundance in our lives. We are saddened by the fact that so many women around the world suffer from poor healthcare during their pregnancies and even die in childbirth. We know this is not what you want for your beloved children. We pray that you inspire us during this week as we try to find a way to help. We especially think of Mary, who endured great hardship while pregnant and giving birth to Jesus. We thank you that Jesus was born healthy and Mary survived. We hope for a time when this is true for all women around your world. In the name of Christ, we pray, Amen.

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE MATERNAL HEALTH

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HANDOUT

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever.'

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CONTRIBUTOR NAME AIMEE HONG

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Luke 2:41-52

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES

2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.D (<https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/the-social-community-162/the-social-community-rights-of-young-people-162-d>)

OBJECTIVE

To help students know that the voices of young people are powerful and can change the world.

SUPPLIES

Copies of 2016-2020 Social Principles ¶162.D, paper, pen/pencil, Handout (cut into slips)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask the students if they ever had an experience when they felt like their voice wasn't valued.

After each student shares their story, say "I hear you and I value your voice."

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Luke 2:41-52

Ask:

- How old is Jesus in this story?
- Why were they in Jerusalem?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when they couldn't find him? Did this ever happen to you? Ever get "lost"?
- Mary and Joseph, are for good reason upset and relieved to have found Jesus. Does this passage make Jesus more relatable?
- What is Jesus' response to his parents? (This is a hint to his mission as the Son of God.)

Read "Rights of Young People" ¶162.D

- What is the issue that this statement is trying to address?
- Do you feel like your voice is included at your school? Your church? A sports team?

NOTES

Be prepared to share a story of your own.

Luke is the only gospel that provides a story of Jesus' childhood.

The Old Testament required three pilgrimages a year (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles; Ex 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deut. 16:16). At Jesus' time, because of the dangers, many made just one pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Passover was a major feast celebrated at the beginning of the Jewish year (around March/April.)

Only men were required to make the journey, so Mary's presence shows her commitment to her faith.

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Handout

Give each participant a bio of a young person that has/is changing the world.

Say:

Each of you has a story of a young person that is currently or has changed the world in some way. Their age didn't stop them from contributing and making a difference. They each faced a struggle or witnessed injustice and tried to do something about it. Take a minute and read the short bio.

(Give a minute or two to read.)

Say:

Turn to the person sitting next to you (the person on your right) and take turns sharing about this person. What adversity did they go through or witness? What did they do to address the issue? What is the impact of their action?

(5-7 minutes)

Say:

Find a new person and share it with your person. Answer the same questions. What adversity did they go through or witness? What did they do to address the issue? What is the impact of their action?

Optional Activity:

Invite the pastor(s) and the leadership team of the church to come to the youth bible study time. Have everyone sit in a circle and share one thing they like about the church/ministry.

Have just the students share what they would like the church to do/grow. With the adults, pick one activity/issue to work on as a church with the youth taking leadership and the adults providing support.

NOTES

There are 14 bios in the handout.
More can be found in the link provided on the handout.

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say:

Close your eyes and take a moment. Think about your personal life, your school, church, neighborhood, community, country, the world. Is there an issue that you feel called to address?

(Take a moment in silence.)

Invite the students to share (it's ok if students are not ready to share).

Close in prayer.

NOTES

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HANDOUT (<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/inspirational-stories/g5188/kids-who-changed-the-world/?slide=1>)

(Cut into strips)



Malala Yousafzai

At 17, Yousafzai became the youngest Nobel Prize laureate for her humanitarian efforts. She captured the world's attention after being shot by the Taliban in Pakistan on her way to school because she was an advocate for women pursuing education. She is currently working towards her bachelor's degree at Oxford's Lady Margaret Hall while continuing her charity work through her organization, The Malala Fund.



Sophie Cruz

Cruz made a name for herself at five years old when she visited Washington, DC with her family. As representatives of an L.A.-based immigration advocacy group, they were there to deliver a letter to Pope Francis urging him to speak out on behalf of undocumented workers and support the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans Act. The Pope discussed the issue in a meeting with Congress the following day. Cruz's activism earned her an invitation to meet President Obama in 2016 even though her parents couldn't accompany her because of their undocumented status. She took part in the Women's March in D.C. where, as the featured speaker, she spoke in both Spanish and English saying, "We are here together making a chain of love to protect our families. Let us fight with love, faith, and courage so that our families will not be destroyed."



Iqbal Masih

Masih was a Pakistani boy who escaped child slavery at 10 years old and became a leader in the movement to put an end to it once and for all. He helped over 3,000 children escape bondage and traveled the globe speaking out against the issue. Masih was assassinated when he was 12 and roughly 800 people attended his funeral service. However, his legacy lives on well beyond his death. In 2009, Congress started an annual award in his name given to activists fighting to end child labor.



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Claudette Colvin

Colvin was 15 when she became a major player in the Civil Rights Movement by refusing to give up her bus seat to a caucasian rider. This was nine months before Rosa Parks was arrested for the same thing. She was one of the four plaintiffs involved in the Supreme Court case that ultimately outlawed segregation on Alabama buses. Colvin has said about her experience, “I feel very, very proud of what I did. I do feel like what I did was a spark and it caught on.”



Jazz Jennings

At five years old, Jennings made headlines as one of the youngest publicly documented people to identify as transgender. She has used her platform to advocate for LGBTQIA issues, specifically regarding trans rights. With the assistance of her parents, she founded the TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation to help transgender youth. Jennings also wrote a children’s book and a memoir about her experience in addition to starring in a TLC reality show documenting her journey. She has been honored by GLAAD, Out magazine, Advocate, Logo TV, and the Human Rights Campaign.



Xiuhtezcatl Martinez

Martinez is an environmental activist who spoke at the U.N. three times by the age of 15 urging leaders to take action against climate change. He and 21 other people around his age are the plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the federal government arguing that ignoring climate change means they are denying the constitutional right to life, liberty, and property. Martinez has even turned his message into music with a hip-hop song called “Speak for the Trees,” which was chosen as the theme song for the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference.



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Anne Frank

The teenage diarist passed away in 1945, but the words she put down in her notebook while her family was in hiding during World War II have proven to be timeless. It's a literary reminder of the horrors of war and hate through the eyes of a young girl. Anne's diary has been translated into more than 60 languages since its original publication in 1947.



Katie Stagliano

Katie Stagliano was in third grade when she came up with her plan to help feed the homeless after growing a 40-pound cabbage in her yard. That single crop fed 275 people at her local soup kitchen. It also inspired her non-profit, Katie's Krops, which builds vegetable gardens for the sole purpose of donating the food to the homeless. Now, there are more than 100 gardens in over 30 states being operated by young people like Katie.



Boyan Slat

At 16, during a fishing trip in Greece, Slat discovered massive amounts of plastic in the water. Two years later, the Dutch inventor launched his non-profit, Ocean Cleanup, to research using circulating currents to address the pollution issue. The group has raised over \$31.5 million in donations to help achieve Boyan's goal.



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Gitanjali Rao

Rao was awarded \$25,000 at 11 years old for inventing a device that can detect lead in drinking water. She was motivated by the Flint, Michigan water crisis and built her prototype (called Tethys) for a little more than \$20. Rao believes that her invention is more accurate than current test options and would also be the more affordable option. The invention earned her the title of “America’s Top Young Scientist”.



Yash Gupta

Gupta was inspired to collect eyeglasses for children in need at 14 years old after breaking his own corrective lenses and having to wait a week for a replacement pair. He read a statistic that 12 million children around the world are living without the glasses they need to see clearly, which prompted him to launch his Sight Learning organization. The group collects used glasses and delivers them to children who need them. They have given out over \$1.5 million worth of eyewear in places like Mexico, Honduras, Haiti, and India.



Jack Andraka

As a high school student, Andraka made a major contribution to the health community by inventing a type of sensor that could detect early signs of pancreatic and other forms of cancer. The prototype won him a \$75,000 prize in Intel’s science fair. He’s been called “The Teen Prodigy of Pancreatic Cancer” by the Smithsonian.



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Louis Braille

Braille was only 12 when he learned of a communication system used by the French army, which laid the groundwork for his own system of reading and writing used by the blind. He completed his alphabet of raised dots by the time he was 15. It was first adopted by France's Royal Institute for Blind Youth until two years after his death at the age of 43. It has since spread throughout the world and is still in use today



Julia Bluhm

Bluhm is on a quest to promote body positivity one magazine cover at a time. At 14, she successfully convinced the editor-in-chief of Seventeen to feature images of real girls and healthy models without photoshopping. She continues to address feminist issues as a blogger for TheLaLa.com and for Spark Movement.



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