



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

1 December 2019 — 22 November 2020

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

Lifelong Disciple Formation in Community of Christ is the shaping of persons in the likeness of Christ at all stages of life. It begins with our response to the grace of God in loving community and continues as we help others learn, grow, and serve in the mission of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is expressed as one lives the Mission Initiatives of the church through service, generosity, witness, and invitation.

We invite you to use these lessons for your class, group, or congregation.

Lectionary-based: The weekly lessons connect the *Revised Common Lectionary* for worship with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Quick, easy: The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament* (with focus on the gospel according to Matthew) and *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament* (semi-continuous readings).

Lessons are available for three age groups. Recognizing each age group represents multiple stages of development, the instructor is encouraged to adapt lessons to best meet the needs of the class or group. When possible, optional activities are provided to help adapt lessons for diverse settings.

Children (multiage, 6–11): Help children engage in the Bible and introduce mission and beliefs with stories, crafts, and activities.

Youth (ages 12–18): Engage teens in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, and beliefs.

Adult (ages 19 and older): Deepen faith and understanding with reflective questions, theological understanding, and discussion ideas.

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LESSON 1

1 December 2019

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (HOPE)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 24:36–44

Lesson Focus: Disciples live in hope and prepare for God’s peaceful reign.

Objectives

The learners will...

- find messages of hope in Isaiah’s prophecy.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and its invitation to disciples today.
- explore opportunities for living in hope.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Flip chart or large erasable writing surface and marker (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 24:36–44 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp.18–19, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday of Advent (which means coming) and marks the beginning of the liturgical year. A different theme is upheld on each Sunday in Advent, and today’s theme is hope. This lesson will guide exploration of the disciple’s call to live in hope.

Read Isaiah 2:1–5.

Isaiah’s prophecy delivers a message of hope through the coming Messiah.

- What messages of hope do you find in this passage that relate to current circumstances in your congregation, community, or in the world?

The promise of hope, justice, and peace to the people of Israel remains the promise to us today.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's focus scripture passage in Matthew's Gospel is taken from Jesus' speech about the end times. It follows warnings of the temple's destruction and the coming of the Son of Man and precedes Jesus' passion narrative. The passage feels out of harmony with the season that prepares us to receive the Christ child.

Read Matthew 24:36–44 and discuss the following:

- Do you feel fearful or hopeful after reading or hearing this passage? Explain.
- In what ways do you find this passage represented in cultural or religious trends?
- How does this passage compare and contrast with the passage from Isaiah?

It is common to fear the unknown. Examples from this passage speak to our fear of loss and destruction of what we hold dear. Some have used this passage to promote fear of being “left behind.” But Jesus proclaims a message of hope for the here and now through actions that prepare for God's kingdom made real. The example of Noah shows how preparation allowed Noah's family to be part of the new creation. Being “left behind” is not punishment for sin; it is an opportunity to be part of what God makes new in the world. In this passage, Jesus calls us to active preparation for the coming reign of God.

“Son of Man” can be understood as a self-reference by Jesus or as a general reference to Jesus' humanity and solidarity with all humankind. First-century hearers may have understood it as a reference to the coming judge at the end of time—the Messiah.

- Where do you see examples of people living in fear of presumed destruction?
- Where do you see examples of people preparing for God's peaceful reign?
- What activities, attitudes, and behaviors steal from us the time and energy that might otherwise be devoted to bringing forth the reign of God?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read or sing the first verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

If a large writing surface is available, make a list of circumstances present in your local or global community, which represent a grieving world (such as violation of human rights, poverty, war, or environmental degradation).

- How do these examples represent people living in fear?

Pause and offer silent prayers for circumstances which promote fear and rob people of hope. You may choose to have one person offer a prayer aloud.

Form groups of two or three and assign each group a circumstance from the list created.

Read or sing the second verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

- What daily actions of love, generosity, justice, and forgiveness create hope for the circumstance you are considering?

Share insights from small groups with the larger group.

Read or sing the third verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

- What congregational ministries match the present circumstance with the promise of hope in Christ?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Our call as disciples is to live in active hope, to create communities of hope, and to prepare for Christ to be made known in our daily living. Record responses to the following questions and share in groups of two or three.

- How will you approach this Advent season with greater attention and intent?
- What practices will help you live in hope?
- How will you prepare for Christ’s hope made real in your life? In the lives of others?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Invite each person to share one phrase from a scripture passage or hymn, a new insight, or message of hope that will bring blessing to them throughout the coming week.

LESSON 2
8 December 2019

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 11:1–10

Lesson Focus: How does our understanding of the peace of Isaiah, the peace of Christ, and the peace envisioned by the church build on each other?

Objectives

The learners will...

- learn about Isaiah’s vision of peace.
- discover Jesus’ vision of peace
- understand how both influence the church’s vision of peace.

Supplies

- Bible or copy of Isaiah 11:1–10 and Matthew 25:31–46 for each participant
- Paper, pen or pencil for each participant
- Daily Prayer for Peace reading (today’s or one for this week) found at <https://www.CofChrist.org/events?tags=Prayer%20for%20Peace#/>
- Picture of the church seal for each participant
- A copy of the church’s Basic Belief on Peace, Enduring Principle Pursuit of Peace, and the Mission Initiative Pursue Peace for each participant
- Candle and matches for Prayer for Peace
- Community of Christ Sings (CCS)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 11:1–10 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 20–21, available through Herald House.

This lesson focuses our attention on a traditional Advent scripture, Isaiah 11:1–10. There are several layers of meaning here. The lesson builds on this scripture by looking at a parable of Jesus addressing judgment, followed by looking at how the church has incorporated peace into our Basic Beliefs, Enduring Principles, and Mission Initiatives. By the end of the class, participants should have a better understanding of why the church is so concerned about peace issues and encourages its membership to prophetically address those issues in their lives and communities.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)



Have the class reflect on the image of the church seal as someone reads Isaiah 11:1–10.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

This lesson centers around a scripture from Isaiah comprised of Hebrew poetry. Most poetry can be classified as rhyming or non-rhyming. While Hebrew poetry at first appears to have no rhyme scheme, it contains a rhyme pattern known as “thought rhyme.” That is, each line is followed by the same line stated differently. For instance, in today’s scripture, the first couplet is a thought rhyme: “A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” The second line, “a branch shall grow out of his roots,” “rhymes” with the thought in the first line, “a shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse.”

This is important in understanding the message in Hebrew poetry. If you don't understand the first line, the second line may make it clearer.

Note: Verse 10 returns to prose.

Isaiah 11:1–10 addresses peace on two levels: for people and for the natural world. This passage is called by several names: the peaceful kingdom, the kingdom of God, and description of Zion.

Have someone read Isaiah 11:1–5.

Discuss the following in small groups or in the larger group:

- Who is Jesse?
- Who is the “he” in this verse? To whom would the people of the time think this passage referred?
- Read Isaiah 11:1–5 again. What are the main points describing peace?

Read Isaiah 11:6–10.

- What are the main words or phrases describing peace in these five verses?
- How does the phrase “for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” affect your understanding of the verses that come before it?
- What does the last prose line, “On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious,” mean to you considering the verses that come before?

In a passage called “The Judgment of the Nations” in Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus shares the judgment he sees coming for all people. It is a pronouncement about end times and a scripture for this Sunday of Advent for peace.

- What are the crimes being judged in this scripture?
- How do these judgments relate to the passage we just studied in Isaiah? How do they relate to the Advent of peace?
- Sit quietly for a moment and reflect on the judgment of the nations. How does this judgment affect the way you look at your life? The life of your congregation? The life of your community?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read and discuss together the Basic Belief on Peace, the Enduring Principle Pursue Peace on Earth, and the Mission Initiative Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) found below. These are the church's stance regarding issues.

Peace

Peace is God's shalom: justice, righteousness, wholeness, and the well-being of the entire creation. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came to preach the kingdom and to be our peace through the cross. The Holy Spirit empowers us for the costly pursuit of peace and justice for all people.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 38

Pursue Peace on Earth

We are poised to restore Christ's covenant of peace, even the Zion of our hopes. The hope of Zion will become reality when we live Christ's peace and generously share his peace with others.

We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...

- Establish the Temple as a Center to Promote Peacemaking throughout the World
- Engage Children in Peacemaking around the World
- Seek Justice, Create Peacemakers around the World
- Unite with Others to Make Peace around the World

—<https://www.CofChrist.org/mission-initiatives>

Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation.
- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.
- The vision of Zion is to promote God's reign on earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God's peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

—Sharing in Community of Christ, 4th Edition, p. 30

Discuss:

- How is the church's stance on peace reflected in the passage from Isaiah?
- How is the church's stance on peace reflected in the judgment issues in Matthew?
- Reflect on the statements above. Write down ways in which you, your congregation, and your community can live these ideals.

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Share together in the Daily Prayer for Peace found at

<https://www.CofChrist.org/events?tags=Prayer%20for%20Peace#/>

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read together Isaiah 11:1–2. As a closing prayer, read together or sing “Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming” CCS 437.

LESSON 3

15 December 2019

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 35:1–10

Lesson Focus: See through the words of Isaiah 35 the hope and joy the Gospel writers found in Jesus, the Way.

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand the joy the early exiles found in this scripture.
- relate Isaiah 35 to the joy the Gospel writers found in Jesus.
- discover how this traditional Advent scripture invites us to joy today.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copy of Isaiah 35 for each participant
- Paper, pens or pencils
- Blackboard, white board, or paper to write notes

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 35:1–10 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 22–23, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Reflect on how the emphases of the first two Sundays of Advent, hope and peace, lead to the joy of the third Sunday of Advent.

Have someone offer a prayer for the class.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Isaiah 35 prophecies concerning Israel’s return from Babylon. As someone reads Isaiah 35, pausing after each verse, have each participant share or jot down words or phrases that reflect hope, peace, and joy in the passage.

The Christmas story includes a lot of traveling. While the Roman Empire had made roads and traveling a little safer, it was still dangerous. Beginning with Mary going to see Elizabeth to the Holy Family’s return

from Egypt, have the class list all of the people who were traveling in this story and why they made the journey.

- What does Isaiah 35 say to the ancient Israelites about their return from Babylonian captivity? Where is the “joy” in this journey?
- Is there joy in each of the trips in the Christmas story? Why or why not?
- Have each class member pick one of the journeys discussed this morning. Respond to the following questions:
- What if I was called to make this trip?
- How would I respond? Share with the class if you wish.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ Sings (CCS) contains several hymns about pilgrimage. Refer to the Topical Index under Pilgrimage for a listing (p. 849). Share with the class which hymn is your favorite and why.

- Why do you think the church included a section in the hymnal on pilgrimage? Is pilgrimage a theme in church history?
- Have you ever been on a pilgrimage? Where did you go and why? What happened?
- Would you like to plan or participate in a pilgrimage? Why? Why not?
- One name for Jesus is “The Way.” Why do you think that is?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Share together about journeys the class may be on in their lives. Compare these to the Christmas story. How does knowing you do not travel alone give you hope, peace, and joy?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Join hands in a circle. Beginning with the teacher and moving to the right, have each person offer a one-line prayer for everyone’s journeys. When each person finishes, ask them to gently squeeze the hand of their neighbor to the right. If someone does not wish to pray or wants to offer their prayer silently, have them pause, then squeeze the hand of their neighbor to the right when they are done. End with the instructor saying, “Amen.”

Sing together the first verse of “Joy to the World” CCS 408.

LESSON 4
22 December 2019

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 7:10–16

Lesson Focus: This lesson examines the power of each follower of Christ to transform the world for the better. Emphasize that power is resident in each person in the class.

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand how scripture signs are used in more than one place.
- see the transforming power of one disciple in the flow of history.
- become such disciples.

Supplies

- Copies of Isaiah 7:10–16 and Mathew 1:18–25 for each participant
- Copy of Basic Belief—Discipleship and Mission Initiative Developing Disciples to Serve for each participant
- Paper, pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings* for each participant

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 7:10–16 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 24–25, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Sing or read together “Joseph, Kind Joseph” CCS 414.

Have someone offer a prayer for the class.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's scripture passage is again from Isaiah. This is the setting: the borders of Judah are threatened by Damascus, Ephraim, and Samaria. Isaiah has been told to prophesy to Ahaz, King of Judah, telling him and the people not to fear this threesome for God supports Judah and the others will soon be gone.

The young woman mentioned in this scripture passage could also be translated as virgin. There is much speculation about who Ahaz would think this woman was. Some say it is Ahaz's wife, some say Isaiah's wife, some say a servant in Ahaz's house.

Read Isaiah 7:10–16.

- Remembering that this prophecy was made many hundreds of years before Christ's birth, who do you think this woman was? Is it important to us in today's context?
- What did the Lord want Ahaz to do? What was his reason for not obeying?
- What was the purpose of the sign Isaiah offered?

This scripture in Isaiah is another important scripture read during the Advent season. It is cited by Matthew 1:18–25 as a prophecy concerning the Messiah. A frequent tendency among Jewish scholars is to reinterpret ancient texts for modern times.

Read Matthew 1:18–25.

- Why is this scripture in Matthew used on the Advent Sunday of Love?
- Who was called to serve God in this scripture passage, and how did each person respond?
- Why do you think Matthew uses this passage as a sign for the Messiah, which was originally a victory sign for Ahaz?
- What does it mean to be a disciple? Taking these two scripture passages together, who are the disciples?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read the Basic Belief on Discipleship, and the Mission Initiative Develop Disciples to Serve.

Discipleship

Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life. God's boundless love sets us free for lives of responsible stewardship in which we generously offer our lives in service to God's reign. Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey. Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 37

Develop Disciples to Serve

We are poised to equip men, women, and children to be true and living expressions of the life, ministry, and continuing presence of Christ in the world.

We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...

- Help All Ages Deepen Their Discipleship
- Empower Priesthood for Mission
- Grow Pastors and Leaders for Mission
- Train and Send Ministers for Mission throughout the World

— <https://www.cofchrist.org/mission-initiatives>

- After reading the Basic Belief and Mission Initiative on discipleship, what are some characteristics of a disciple?
- Using the church's understanding of a disciple, who are the disciples in these two passages from Isaiah and Matthew?
- Share the names of people you consider to be disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Take a few minutes to jot down ways you could be a better disciple. Share with the class if you wish.

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

When have you been called by God to do something? Have one or two share briefly the call and context if they want.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing or read together "Blessed Be the God of Israel" CCS 396. Have someone offer a prayer to close the class.

LESSON 5
29 December 2019

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 2:13–23

Lesson Focus: Disciples seek God’s voice and respond in servant ministry.

Objectives

The learners will...

- consider the significance of the Epiphany.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and its invitation to disciples today.
- explore opportunities for individuals and congregations to promote and protect the well-being of all children.

Supplies

- Bible (NSRV)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 2:13–23 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 26–27, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas. We have welcomed baby Jesus. Traditionally, on 6 January, the church observes Epiphany. Epiphany means “manifestation” or “appearance” and relates specifically to God revealed in Christ. The day of Epiphany commemorates the visit of the magi (wise men) to Jesus as divine manifestation to the Gentiles (Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, p. 104).

Read Matthew 2:1–12 and respond to the following questions in writing, discuss in groups of two or three, or share with the larger group.

- What does it mean for you to seek Jesus today?
- In what new ways can you invite others to Christ? Read or sing “Not in Grand Estate” CCS 444.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's focus scripture passage follows the story of the wise men in Matthew's Gospel. Read Matthew 2:13–23 and discuss the following questions.

The author of Matthew's Gospel proclaims Christ Jesus as the Messiah and fulfillment of the Old Testament. The author does this through connections of Jesus to Israel, particularly to Moses, and through prophecies quoted from the Old Testament.

Form three small groups or pairs and assign each group or pair one of the following paragraphs from today's passage: verses 13–15, verses 16–18, verses 19–23. Discuss the following in small groups or pairs and share insights with the larger group.

- What connection do you find between Jesus and Moses, or Jesus and Israel, in these verses?
- What prophecy is quoted and how is it fulfilled?

Dreams are used five times in Matthew's birth story to communicate divine will. The wise men and Joseph promote God's purposes through their responses to the divine will.

- What is the invitation to disciples today about discerning God's will?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

There are moral and theological challenges in today's text. Why is only one family warned in a dream and only one child saved? Could not an all-powerful God have stopped Herod's designs in the first place? These are questions which naturally surface if the text is taken as historical and literal fact. While Herod was a cruel and paranoid ruler, it should be noted there is no historical evidence of children in Bethlehem being slaughtered. Matthew's intent is to communicate God's purposes fulfilled in Christ, despite human evil.

- What represents present-day "slaughter of the innocents" in the world and your community? (handguns, land mines, domestic abuse, preventable poverty-related diseases, child slavery and soldiering)
- What is the role of the church in response to these circumstances?
- What awareness or education would help your congregation or community respond to these circumstances?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

The imagery of Rachel weeping for the children of Israel originated during the Babylonian captivity. In Matthew's passage, it is used to show further fulfilling of the Old Testament in Christ Jesus the Messiah. It can be understood as the maternal nature of God who weeps for all children who suffer. Disciples are called to protect and promote the well-being of all children.

Prayerfully consider your response to the following question, and make it part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week.

- What is the light of hope you are called to bring to all children in your community?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Offer a closing prayer of blessing, or read the following as a prayer of blessing.

Show us the way, Christ Jesus, to offer the light of hope for all your precious children.

Come, shine through us today. Amen.

LESSON 6
5 January 2019

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Focus Scripture Passage: John 1:1–18

Lesson Focus: Jesus is the Light of the World, the Word of God; he became flesh to dwell among us.

Objectives

The learners will...

- untangle the scriptures about light to make clear what this passage is saying about Jesus.
- explore Jesus as the Word of God and how that relates to Jesus as the Light.
- Discover what this Word and Light being made flesh means to us, to you.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens or pencils

Notes to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 1:1–18 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 28, available through Herald House.

Look up secular definitions of “word” and “light.”

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Sing together or have someone read “Be Thou My Vision” CCS 167 as an opening prayer.

Discuss the definitions of “word” and “light” as you use them today.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read John 1:1–18, highlighting the words “light” and “word”.

Divide into two groups. One group will discuss the usage of the word “Word” in the passage. The other group will discuss the usage of the word “Light.” Come back together and share your insights.

- Share together what these two words say about Jesus' calling.
- What do these two words mean when they come together?
- Discuss together what this passage says about the importance of these two qualities of Jesus becoming "Flesh."

Look at the church's Basic Beliefs regarding Jesus Christ and Humanity found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 34. This is available through Herald House or at www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-4thEd-WEB.pdf

Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace. See the Christology statement "We Proclaim Jesus Christ" on page 58 and at www.CofChrist.org/we-proclaim-jesus-christ.

Humanity

Every human being is created in the image of God. In Jesus Christ, God took on the limits of human flesh and culture, and is known through them. We therefore affirm without exception the worth of every human being. We also affirm that God has blessed humankind with the gift of agency: the ability to choose whom or what we will serve within the circumstances of our lives.

Applying the discussion above, how does this affect your understanding of the Basic Beliefs of the church concerning Jesus Christ as the "Light" and "Word" of God made flesh? How does this relate to the Basic Belief of Humanity?

Read the church's Enduring Principle: Grace and Generosity.

Grace and Generosity

- God's grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.
- Having received God's generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.
- We offer all we are and have to God's purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 28

How would Jesus as the Word made Flesh be important to your understanding of this Enduring Principle?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Prepare for Dwelling in the Word by taking up paper and pen and getting into a comfortable position.

Begin with a short prayer for insight.

Using John 1:1–18, have someone read the passage through slowly three times.

- When a passage, word, or phrase catches your attention, separate yourself a little distance from the group (if possible) and think about that passage, word, or phrase and why it would have gotten your attention.

- Pray about that passage, word, or phrase, asking the Holy Spirit for further understanding.
- If there is time, share with a neighbor or the class any insights you received.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Read John 1:18.

How has your time spent thinking about “Word,” “Light,” and “the Word became flesh” affected your understanding of your relationship to God and Jesus? Call out a single word or phrase sharing this understanding.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

End your time together with this responsive reading adapted from “Be Thou My Vision” CCS 167. Follow the reading with a moment of silence.

Class:	Be Thou my Light!
Leader:	O Lord of our heart, our best thought, your presence, our Light.
Class:	O, Thou my true Word!
Leader:	O Lord be our Wisdom, always with us, first in our hearts.
Class:	High King of Heaven!
Leader:	O Bright Heaven’s Sun! Heart of our hearts, we reach for Heaven’s Joys.
All:	Be Thou my Vision!

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY/BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 3:13–17

Lesson Focus: Jesus fulfills all righteousness through his baptism, and God is pleased.

Objectives

The learners will...

- find that baptism is not the end of the journey, but the beginning.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and reflect on the meaning of baptism and confirmation.
- explore opportunities to live the meaning and covenant commitment of baptism.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 3:13–17 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 31–32, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday after the Epiphany (January 6). Epiphany is “the manifestation of Christ to the world, a Christian observance originally commemorating Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:10) and his changing water into wine at Cana (John 2:1–11). Later, the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1–12) from Christmas was added” (*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Revised Edition, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 301). The theme for today is “Jesus, the Beloved.”

- Sing or read “Jesus, Promise of an Angel” *CCS* 32, giving particular attention to verse two.
- Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus’ example of covenant, and blessing on the class.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read and discuss Matthew 3:13–17.

This passage is Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism. It reveals Jesus’ commitment to God’s purposes. Verse 13 indicates that Jesus intentionally came to John. He made the decision ahead of time, as opposed to being caught up in the emotion of the moment (*Preaching Through the Christian Year: Year A*, Fred B. Craddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, Gene M. Tucker, Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 82).

- What additional examples from Jesus’ life and ministry reveal his commitment to God’s purposes (for instance, going to Jerusalem when he knew it would result in his death, healing on the Sabbath, allowing himself to be captured after praying in the Garden of Gethsemane)?
- How did these examples challenge the religious community? How do they challenge disciples today?

In previous verses John is preaching confession of sins and repentance saying, “I baptize you with water for repentance...” (Matthew 3:11). Verses 14–15 indicate that John feels unworthy to baptize Jesus. He knows that Jesus is without sin and has no need of repentance. Jesus helps us understand that righteousness is not about the quality of our lives, but about what God can do in our lives when we commit to living as disciples. In Matthew, Jesus begins his journey of ministry with the act of baptism, entering into covenant with God and receiving God’s assurance.

- What do these verses reveal about righteousness and worth of persons?
- How does this passage affirm or challenge your understanding of righteousness, obedience, and grace?

Verses 16–17 reveal to the crowd gathered—and to readers today—God’s announcement that Jesus is the Son of God and that God is pleased with his commitment. The Holy Spirit descends “like a dove” and those gathered hear God’s voice. Matthew wants to emphasize the message is not hidden. It is for all to know and hear. Jesus is the Son of God, the one we must follow into all righteousness. We join with others in community for the welfare of all human life. In baptism we enter into covenant with God, and confirmation affirms the Holy Spirit’s presence in each life.

- How is baptism the beginning rather than the end of a disciple’s journey? Does this change if the decision to be baptized comes after a long period of study and prayer?
- In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life and ministry? Share one example in groups of two or three, or with the larger group.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read and discuss the following in groups of two or three, or as a larger group.

Baptism is how we initially express our commitment to lifelong discipleship. As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of

salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God’s grace has no bounds, and God’s love is greater than we can know.”

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 35.

All church members are urged to examine the depth of your baptismal commitment. Having been baptized and confirmed, become fully immersed in the servant life of Christ. Live the meaning of your baptism daily as you grow in the skills and qualities of discipleship. Actively and generously support the ministries of the church, which was divinely established to restore Christ’s covenant of peace, even the Zion of your hopes.

— Doctrine and Covenants 164:3a–b

- What does it mean to “become fully immersed in the servant life of Christ” or to “live the meaning of your baptism daily as you grow in the skills and qualities of discipleship”?
- In what ways are you challenged by this counsel?
- What examples do you see in your congregation or community of disciples “actively and generously supporting the ministries of the church”?
- Where do you see opportunities for new expressions of disciples being “fully immersed in the servant life of Christ”? Disciples and congregations “actively and generously supporting the ministries of the church”?
- What is the invitation to your congregation or community through these passages?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Select a phrase or passage from Doctrine and Covenants 164:3a–b as a daily devotion throughout the coming week(s). What is God’s invitation to you as you prayerfully consider this text?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “Come as a Child” CCS 503 as a prayer of blessing and commitment.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 49:1–7

Lesson Focus: God names and calls the Servant from the womb to bring light to all nations.

Objectives

The learners will...

- remember the origins of one's name.
- explore the Second Servant Song including God's naming and calling from the womb.
- discern how Doctrine and Covenants 163:1–3 calls Community of Christ to mission.
- identify specific actions for personal restoration of healthy or righteous relationships.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 49:1–7 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 36–37, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Greet class members. Ask participants to share briefly in groups of two or three how each one was named.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Share this background with the class as a basis for further discussions:

Today's scripture is a Second Servant Song (first Servant Song: Isaiah 42:1–4; others 50:4–11 and 52:13–53:12). In this dialogue God and God's Servant are talking. The song begins in Isaiah 49:1 with the servant nation Israel calling to other nations to hear a message. “Listen to me... The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother's womb he named me.” A brief history of naming may help.

Genesis 25:26 tells that the twins Jacob and Esau were born with Jacob grasping Esau's heel. Jacob's name means one who supplants or grasps by the heel. In Genesis 32:28 we learn of Jacob wrestling all night. After this encounter his name is changed to "Israel, for you have striven with God" Jacob, now Israel, becomes the father of the twelve patriarchs of the twelve Tribes of Israel. The people of the tribes take their names from these patriarch ancestors.

Jacob is named from the womb. The nation of Israel is also named from its beginning or "from the womb" as God's covenant people. The calling of Israel's people began in history by God's action long before the nation of Israel was established and recognized. In today's scripture God proclaims: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (v. 3).

It is not always easy to serve faithfully. The Servant reflects "I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (v. 4). Yet, with faithful and obedient response "... I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength" (v. 5).

In small groups (as your class size allows) consider the following scripture and discuss the questions:

Doctrine and Covenants 163:1

"Community of Christ," your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

- What is the "divine blessing" in and of our name Community of Christ?
- How does our name declare our identity? Our calling? Our future?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The original Servant's purpose was to find and return Israelites who strayed. In addition, the Servant was to restore the nation and gather people together. But God's greater purpose for the Servant was to bring "light to the nations, that my (God's) salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (v. 6).

Jesus came as a servant to bring God's light and message of peace to the world. As followers of Jesus we carry that same mission priority.

In small groups (as your class size allows) consider the following scripture and discuss the questions:

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2-3

2 a. Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

3a. You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

b. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

- What do peace pathways that are relationally and culturally incarnate look like?
- Describe a community that embodies generosity, justice, and peacefulness. How do we create such a community in our congregation?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

Identify one or two specific actions you will take this week to restore healthy or righteous relationship(s) with yourself, God, another, or the earth.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Close by singing “I Have Called You by Your Name” CCS 636.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 9:1–4

Lesson Focus: God promises to overcome darkness and oppression by restoring light to and on the people.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the context of the focus scripture.
- share experiences of oppression or darkness and how these affected one's life.
- describe how joy or light came into and affected one's life.
- explore how some New Testament scriptures affirm the Isaiah 9:1–4 text.
- answer the missional questions from Doctrine and Covenants 164:9e.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of scripture texts (end of lesson)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 9:1–4 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 38–39, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

After greeting the class members, ask each person to consider silently a time when he or she experienced joy or light after a period of oppression or darkness. What factor(s) brought light or joy?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read or share a summary of the following as background for small group discussions.

The writer of Isaiah uses poetic language to bring assurance to the oppressed when Israel and Judah were conquered by Assyria. It refers to two tribes of Israel—Zebulun and Naphtali. It also describes the caravan route from Galilee to Damascus used by the Assyrians during their conquest. The defeated people suffered in darkness from oppression, cruelty, desolation, and internal strife. Verse 1 declares the end of this darkness, despair, gloom, and anguish.

The prophet predicts God's (Yahweh's) restoring light to the land and on the people in verse 2. Then interesting imagery of rejoicing at a successful harvest and dividing of war plunder is used in verse 3. It is likely the Assyrians imposed taxes and other restrictive rules. Verse 4 vividly describes relieving the yoke of the people's burden, the bar across their shoulders, and the rod of their oppressor. The day of Midian refers to an unexpected defeat by Gideon over the cruel Midianites (Judges 6:2–6) that resulted in years of faithful peace.

Share in groups of two or three for about 8–10 minutes responding to the following questions.

- When or where have you experienced (or seen someone experience) oppression or darkness in your (his or her) personal, family, work, or social situations? How has this affected your (his or her) ability to function in daily life?
- When or where have you experienced (or have seen someone experience) the return of joy, happiness, and light in your (his or her) personal, family, work, or social situations? How has this affected your (his or her) ability to function in daily life?
- How did the transition from darkness to light change your (his or her) life?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read or share a summary of the following as background for small group discussions.

The original context likely referred to the coronation of a king, the birth of Hezekiah or the Messiah. Hezekiah succeeded his father, Ahab, an ineffective ruler. Verses 6–7 tell of the birth of a boy-child with authority. He is named "Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This powerful imagery has influenced writers of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. For example, Isaiah 9:1–2 is quoted in Matthew 4:15–16. Jesus is proclaimed as the light that fulfills this Isaiah prophecy. Additional New Testament scriptures that proclaim Jesus as the light shining on those dwelling in darkness follow.

In small groups, read the following scriptures (found at the end of the lesson). Allow 8–10 minutes.

- Matthew 4:14–16
- John 1:5
- John 3:19
- John 8:12
- 2 Corinthians 4:6

Discuss: How do these New Testament scriptures affirm (or not) the Isaiah 9:1–4 message?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Read through Doctrine and Covenants 164:9 at the end of this lesson.

Discuss in small groups and share KEY answers to the two questions in verse “9e” with entire class, about 5–7 minutes, as time allows.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read the Sending Forth:

Wake each day assured of God’s gracious presence even in your darkest moments.

Move forward sensing the Holy Spirit’s healing presence soothing wounds and drying tears.

Go assured that Jesus’ justice and peace will prevail.

Go now sharing Christ’s light and mission with others! Amen.

Matthew 4:14–16

¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:
¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.”

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 3:19

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

2 Corinthians 4:6

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Doctrine and Covenants 164:9

a. Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God’s ultimate vision for the church.

b. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ’s new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God’s covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

c. This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God’s presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church’s restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

d. If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.

e. The challenges and opportunities are momentous. **Will you remain hesitant in the shadows of your fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties? Or will you move forward in the light of your divinely instilled call and vision?**

f. The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Focus Scripture Passage: Micah 6:1–8

Lesson Focus: We are first required to do justice and to love kindness, and then to walk humbly with our God.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review Micah 6:1–8.
- consider the three requirements spoken by the prophet.
- apply the three requirements to mission.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Paper or poster

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Micah 6:1–8 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 40–41, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Welcome the group. Then ask the class to discuss briefly this question: What memories do you have of the phrase “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Write the question on a board or posted paper, or project if possible.)

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read the following as an introduction to the class:

The poetic setting of Micah 6:1–8 is a courtroom where God contends with the people of Israel in a covenant lawsuit. The mountains and hills are offered as symbolic mediators (vv. 1–2). Heaven and earth witnessed God’s covenant with the Israelites (Exodus 2:24). They also witnessed Israel’s sinful actions

and God's repeated saving grace (vv. 4–5). God is frustrated, "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!" (v. 3). God offers a defense with several good acts done for the people. These include the exodus escape from slavery (v. 4, see Exodus 19:5), and the Balak-Balaam encounters (v. 5). Balaam stayed faithful to God's guidance and blessed Israel just before the people entered the Promised Land (see Numbers 22–24). God reminds them of leaders he brought for them: I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (v. 4). Note that both men and a woman leader are recognized. The essential covenant between God and the people is one-sided (Genesis 6:8; 9:9; 15:18; 17:4; Exodus 2:24; 6:5, 7–8). God remains committed while the people forget to faithfully focus on God. God pleads for the people to remember their covenant relationship with God.

In small groups of 3–4 (as your class allows) share your responses to these questions:

- What would it feel like to have God prosecute us for our modern-day sins?
- What blessings would God present as God's argument toward you? How has God blessed you?

Continue by reading the following:

Then the people respond asking, "What does God want from us?" They run through a range of possibilities. These start with bowing before God and coming before God with burnt offerings such as a year-old calf. The people offer more extreme options, asking if thousands of rams or "ten thousands of rivers of oil" will please the Lord (v. 7). They finally ask if a sacrifice of a first born would atone for the peoples' sins.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Continue by reading the following:

The prophet Micah responds that it is not what people "do" or "what they bring." Rather, what is important is "who they are" and "how they treat one another."

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

God asks for three ways of living, each with a social dimension. First is "to do justice." Amos 5:24 compares justice to a flowing, churning stream. Micah provides examples of unjust behaviors (2:1, 8–9; 3:1–3, 9–10, 11). Second, is "to love kindness." The word "love" is rich with meaning. Hosea 2:19 describes love between spouses as "steadfast love." The words of 1 Samuel 20:14 share the concept of love between friends as "loyal love" or "loyalty." The challenge Micah offers is loving kindness. Third, is "to walk humbly with your God." The word "humbly" (meaning carefully or wisely) is often emphasized. The text is actually calling us to "walk" with God.

Today God calls us to walk with Christ. The Community of Christ mission statement calls us to these same actions. *We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.*

In small groups discuss and answer the following (or assign each topic to separate groups to allow more time for discussion):

- Identify what "to do justice" means. Give specific examples relevant for your community. Where is justice-focused mission needed around your congregation? What can members do to make a difference?
- Describe how "to love kindness" is a unique way of being. How can members express this love in ways that align with Christ's mission?
- Offer specific ways to "walk" humbly with God. Apply your ideas to mission.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Have each group share one or two key ideas from their discussion.

Together identify at least one specific way to link congregational mission with the three ways of living.

- How will the congregation “do justice” aligned with your mission and community needs?
- Define how “to love kindness” can be more fully expressed in the mission life of the congregation.
- Identify a way(s) to “walk humbly with God” with meaningful mission focus.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Close by singing or reading “When the Church of Jesus” CCS 358. This hymn calls us to live the three actions fully in Christ-focused mission.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Focus Scripture Passage: Isaiah 58:1–12

Lesson Focus: Faith and true worship are more than traditional practices. God calls for active repairers of justice who model peacemaking.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review their personal meaning of fasting.
- explore three parts of Isaiah scripture: 1) faithlessness and unrighteousness; 2) faithful fasting; and 3) “If...Then” statements.
- identify how current scripture calls the congregation to respond faithfully in mission.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles or printed copies of Isaiah 12:1–12 (NRSV) for small group activity (at least one per small group)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Isaiah 58:1–12 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 42–43, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Greet class members and welcome them to greet one another.

Offer a prayer of gratefulness for God’s abiding presence with each one today.

- If the group size allows, divide into small groups of three or four. Otherwise, share with another person. Allow about two minutes for each person’s response to the following: “Describe what the term “fasting” means to you.”
- Ask each group to prepare one brief sentence to share with the larger group in response to the phrase. Give about two minutes for the group to determine their one-sentence statement.
- Thank each group for their contribution.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Because of the length of today's text, ask for two or three volunteers to share in the reading of the scripture. One suggestion for dividing the reading:

Reader 1: verses 1–5

Reader 2: verses 6–9

Reader 3: verses 10–12

Preface the reading of the scripture with this background:

Today's text begins the final section of the book of Isaiah (chapters 56–66). This section is generally known as Third Isaiah. The Israelites have returned from Babylonian captivity to a land devastated by war. The temple is destroyed along with many sacred places. There is a sense of people wanting to return to their former ways. They are using pious forms of worship and fasting to show their faithfulness. However, God is not pleased with their behaviors and has definite directions for the future.

As the scripture passage is read, listen carefully for the way the prophet Isaiah tells the people God actually wants them to establish right relationships with God and others.

After the reading, divide the group (if feasible) into three discussion groups. Have at least one copy of the scripture section assigned for each group along with the following directions:

- Select a leader and a person to take notes.
- Appoint someone to read your assignment and report two or three significant insights back to the whole group.

Group 1 (verses 1–5):

- How does the text describe the people as faithless and unrighteous in their fasting?
- Are there aspects of our congregational life that are becoming too comfortable or routine (faithless or unrighteous)?

Group 2 (verses 6–9a):

- Identify what Isaiah describes as “faithful fasting.”
- How is, or how could, our congregation engage in faithful fasting according to Isaiah's direction?

Group 3 (verses 9b–12):

- Describe the divine promise declared in the “If...Then” statement.
- How does the statement feel considering the circumstances we face in our congregation and the community we serve?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Recent Doctrine and Covenants scripture texts highlight the need to look anew at how we approach worship and our concern for upholding justice for the needy.

Assign one scripture passage to each group.

- Ask the group to report one or two significant points back to larger group.
- Ask the participants to identify how the scripture passage calls the congregation to respond faithfully.
- Give specific examples of ways the congregation can model mission based on the scripture.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. *For in their welfare resides your welfare.*

Doctrine and Covenants 163:10b

Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the One who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your Eternal Creator with open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. *Be vulnerable to divine grace.*

Doctrine and Covenants 165:3e

Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean Unity in Diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one's own. They also mean full opportunity for people to experience human worth and related rights, including expressing God-given giftedness in the church and society.

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:10 a.

Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened.

Consider and declare in affirmation statements, as a group: How has God gifted and prepared you as a congregation, to fulfill the mission challenges you identified in your small groups?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Close by singing or reading "To Be Your Presence" CCS 351.

Send Forth with these words:

May God's Spirit inspire you to see injustice and to repair the breach as peacemakers for Christ's mission. Amen.

Isaiah 58:1–12

- ¹ Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
- ² Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.
- ³ “Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.
- ⁴ Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
- ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
- ⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
- ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
- ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
- ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
- If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
- ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
- ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,

whose waters never fail.
¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Focus Scripture Passage: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Lesson Focus: Consider whether to choose life and faithfulness to God or to choose death.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share a time they faced a critical decision that changed their life.
- compare what happens when choosing to follow God faithfully or not.
- explore how the Enduring Principle of Responsible Choices affects them, their personal family, congregation, mission center, and World Church.
- discover how they show love for God.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of the scripture Deuteronomy 30:15-20 NRSV for group work
- Copies of the assignment or project the assigned questions for each group
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Deuteronomy 30:15–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 44–45, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Ask class participants to share in pairs a brief answer to the following question. (Allow two minutes per person. Tell the group when it is time to change so the other person shares.)

- When have you faced a critical decision and the decision changed your life?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Share the following with the class:

This text is thought to be part of Moses' final speech to the Israelites before they are to enter into Canaan. His message is clear. There are two choices; two pathways. One way involves following God—life; the other not following God—death. The people are reminded of God's covenant and urged to remain faithful. However, there are consequences if their choice is to turn toward other gods, thus forsaking a faithful relationship with the one, true God.

Ask one or two people to read the scripture passage aloud.

Reader 1: verses 15–17

Reader 2: verses 18–20

Have the class participants count off as “number 1” or “number 2.” Divide the group into two groups or multiple groups of each number. Give them the following directions:

1. Select a leader and a person to take notes.
2. Appoint someone to report back two or three significant insights to the whole group.
3. Read through the entire scripture and respond to your assigned task or questions.

Group 1

- Identify what behaviors are required if the people choose a life faithful to God.
- What blessings will they receive?

Group 2

- How do people behave when they are unfaithful to God?
- What happens to them?
- What are they choosing?

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God[a] that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Our Enduring Principle of Responsible Choices states:

- God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve.
- Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices.
- Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 30

Discuss as a whole class:

- How do our choices affect our 1) personal lives; 2) families or friends; 3) congregation; 4) community?
- What choices are we making as a congregation to affect mission?
 - In this calendar year?
 - For our mission center?
 - For the World Church?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Ask for brief responses to this question:

- How are we showing that we love our God?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Close by singing or reading “Bless Now, O God, the Journey” CCS 559.

Offer this sending forth statement:

Choose life...live, love, and rejoice in God’s abundant grace expressed through Jesus’ life and the Holy Spirit’s enduring presence. Amen.

LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 17:1–9

Lesson Focus: Transformation is challenging, but we are strengthened through Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- consider the implications of Jesus' transfiguration.
- explore ways transformation takes us to the heart of the mission of Jesus Christ.
- examine their responses to personal transformation experiences.

Supplies

- Bibles
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 17:1–9 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 43, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Ask several class members to share a short “mountain-top” experience with God.

Discuss how these experiences influenced the ways they lived as disciples.

Offer a prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance as the class explores today's scripture passage.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is found, with some variation, in all of the Gospels. The experience is mystical and parallels the Biblical accounts of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 14:12–18) and Elijah's

encounters with God (1 Kings 19:9–18). Moses and Elijah came away from their experiences transformed in ways that created a shift in the direction of their life and ministry.

Read the cited scriptures in Exodus and 1 Kings and Matthew 17:1–9 aloud.

- Identify the characters in Matthew's account.
- What is the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus?
- What are the challenges presented to them?

Peter, James, and John climbed the mountain with Jesus after hearing of his pending death. Peter's response to the holy encounter was an offer to build three dwellings, one for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. In this moment Peter acknowledged the divinity of Jesus. His intent was to build a dwelling where Jesus could be kept safe, away from impending danger. The voice from the cloud interrupted this plan and the disciples became fearful.

- Why is Peter's initial response to build dwellings?
- What prompted the disciples' fear?
- Why was it important for the disciples to acknowledge the suffering that would occur?

When Jesus noticed the disciples' fear, he touched them and commanded them not to be afraid.

- Share examples of Jesus' ministry when his touch brought healing.
- In what ways have you experienced healing touch?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Abolish Poverty, End Suffering is one of the Mission Initiatives of Community of Christ. We engage in this mission as we share the compassion of Jesus Christ in the world. Jesus understood that suffering is inherent in life and is inescapable. However, through the transfiguration experience, the disciples understood they would never be left alone.

Change is disruptive. The disciples' lives were going to change dramatically when Jesus left the Earth. Their initial response was avoidance, to find a way to protect Jesus so maybe the worst would not happen. When they realized the inevitable, they were overcome with fear.

- How has change created disruption and fear in your life? In your congregation? In the church? In the world?
- Discuss initial responses to fear of these changes.
- How can we address fear that accompanies disruption or suffering?

Mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual anguish accompany poverty, illness, and other forms of abuse. The challenge to abolish needless suffering is overwhelming. Like the disciples, our first impulse might be to respond by meeting immediate needs but not effectively addressing the underlying causes of suffering.

- How does your community respond to needs such as hunger, homelessness, or mental illness?
- How can disciples in Community of Christ address the root causes of these situations and find ways to sustain long-term change?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Consider the following quote:

The moment of transfiguration is that point at which God says to the world and to each of us that there is nothing we can do to prepare for or stand in the way of joy or sorrow. We cannot build God a monument, and we cannot keep God safe. We also cannot escape the light that God will shed on our path. We cannot escape God, Immanuel among us. God will find us in our homes and in our workplaces. God will find us when our hearts are broken and when we discover joy. God will find us when we run away from God and when we are sitting in the middle of what seems like hell. So “get up and do not be afraid.

—*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1*, Maryetta Madeleine Anschutz, p. 456

- How can you be the touch of Jesus in someone’s life this week?
- Expressions such as “It must be God’s will” or “It’s God’s plan” are not helpful to those suffering. What words or actions might bring comfort, reduce fear, and give assurance of God’s presence and compassion to someone who is suffering?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “Transform Us” CCS 569.

Bless one another with a gentle touch on the shoulder or hand as a closing prayer is offered.

LESSON 14
1 March 2020

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 4:1–11

Lesson Focus: Jesus is the Son of God. Who will we choose to be in God?

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the spiritual practice Dwelling in the Word.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- make connections between the focus scripture passage and Community of Christ basic belief statements.
- consider the significance of Lent in preparing disciples for Christ’s mission of justice and peace.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 4:1–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 45–46, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. We fast for 40 days remembering Christ’s own fast in the wilderness. Our journey through Lent gives us a chance to reorder priorities and to make space in our lives for being in the presence of God with greater awareness and intentionality. As we practice self-examination and conversion through prayer, fasting, self-denial, and generosity, we open ourselves to God’s creative purposes in our lives and in our world.

Each lesson during the season of Lent will begin with the practice of Dwelling in the Word using Isaiah 58:6–12. Read the passage (see Response Sheet) adapted from the NRSV and The Message. Spend a few moments in silent reflection with the following questions, record your thoughts on the Response Sheet, or share in groups of two or three.

Where are you in your journey as a disciple? What is the invitation through this text as you enter the season of Lent?

Read or sing “Lead Me, Lord” CCS 450

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 4:1–11 and discuss the following.

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ time in the wilderness following his baptism parallels that of Luke (see Luke 4:1–13). Matthew and Luke draw from the sources of Mark (see Mark 1:12) and Q (from the word *quelle*, meaning source; written collection of Jesus’ sayings). Jesus’ time in the wilderness is not by accident. It represents his submission to God’s will and understanding of who he is as the Son of God in preparation for his ministry. In this passage, Matthew’s depiction of Jesus as Messiah does not defy the limits of Jesus’ humanity. Instead of an abundance of food, miraculous feats, and political power attributed to worldly kingdoms (such as the Roman empire of first-century Palestine), Jesus presents an alternative vision of the kingdom of God. This vision is grounded in covenant relationship to God that does not test God or ask for miraculous exceptions to an authentic human life.

Consider these key phrases and statements from the scripture passage. You may discuss as a large group or assign each one to a group of two or three; then share insights with the larger group. How does this phrase or statement relate to the children of Israel in the Old Testament? How does each phrase or statement relate to your understanding of discipleship today, particularly during the season of Lent?

- “...led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted...”
- “He fasted forty days and forty nights...”
- “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (see Deuteronomy 8:3)
- “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (see Deut. 6:16)
- “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” (see Deut. 6:13)

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing

(35% of lesson time)

Read the following statements from “We Share Basic Beliefs,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 33–38 (see Response Sheet).

God
Jesus Christ
The Holy Spirit
Humanity
Discipleship

You may discuss the following as a large group, or form small groups of two or three and assign each group one (or more) of the basic belief statements to discuss. Share insights with the larger group.

- How is the basic belief statement revealed in the focus scripture passage?
- What new understanding do you have about discipleship and mission as you consider each basic belief statement and the focus scripture passage?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived

(10% of lesson time)

Jesus' wilderness experience demonstrated his radical obedience to God's purposes. In our Lenten journey, we are invited to prayerfully consider who we will be in God, and how we will live Christ's mission. What is God's invitation to you this season of Lent? What will be your invitation to another?

For further study, select one of the additional lectionary texts to read each day in the coming week. Write in a journal what the passage reveals about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Humanity, or Discipleship.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing "When We Are Tested" CCS 453 as a closing prayer of commitment.

LESSON 14 RESPONSE SHEET

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

1 March 2020

Dwelling in the Word: Isaiah 58:6–12 (adapted from NRSV and The Message)

Reader 1: Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Reader 2: Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families?

Reader 1: Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly;

Reader 2: Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage.

Reader 1: Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say Here I am.

Reader 2: If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people's sins,

If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

Reader 1: The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in the emptiest of places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Reader 2: You will use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past.

You will be known as those who can repair, restore, rebuild, and renovate, and make communities thrive.

Where are you in your journey as a disciple? What is the invitation through this text as you enter the season of Lent?

Matthew 4:1–11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

“We Share Basic Beliefs”

God: We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus Christ: We believe in Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus’ life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace.

The Holy Spirit: We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.

Humanity: Every human being is created in the image of God. In Jesus Christ, God took on the limits of human flesh and culture, and is known through them. We therefore affirm without exception the worth of every human being. We also affirm that God has blessed humankind with the gift of agency: the ability to choose whom or what we will serve within the circumstances of our lives.

Discipleship: Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life. God’s boundless love sets us free for lives of responsible stewardship in which we generously offer our lives in service to God’s reign. Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey. Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 33–38

- How is the basic belief statement revealed in the focus scripture passage?
- What new understanding do you have about discipleship and mission as you consider each basic belief statement and the focus scripture passage?

Jesus' wilderness experience demonstrated his radical obedience to God's purposes. In our Lenten journey, we are invited to prayerfully consider who we will be in God, and how we will live Christ's mission. What is God's invitation to you this season of Lent? What will be your invitation to another?

For further study, select one of the additional lectionary texts to read each day in the coming week. Write in a journal what the passage reveals about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Humanity, or Discipleship.

LESSON 15
8 March 2020

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Focus Scripture Passage: John 3:1–17

Lesson Focus: God calls disciples out of darkness into new light and life in Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- continue the Lenten journey with Dwelling in the Word.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- explore the importance of various lenses in understanding God's will.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 3:1–17 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 47, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. We fast for 40 days remembering Christ's own fast in the wilderness. Our journey through Lent gives us a chance to reorder priorities and to make space in our lives for being in the presence of God with greater awareness and intentionality. As we practice self-examination and conversion through prayer, fasting, self-denial, and generosity, we open ourselves to God's creative purposes in our lives and in our world.

Each lesson during the season of Lent will begin with the practice of Dwelling in the Word using Isaiah 58:6–12. Read the passage (see Response Sheet) adapted from the NRSV and The Message. Spend a few moments in silent reflection with the following questions, record your thoughts on the Response Sheet, or share in groups of two or three.

What is the fast you choose? What new awareness is emerging about your discipleship as you consider this text?

Read or sing “Lead Me, Lord” CCS 450

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's focus passage from John's Gospel contains one of the most familiar verses of scripture, John 3:16. The Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation challenges us to hear the familiar words with new understanding.

Read John 3:1–17 and discuss the following.

Nicodemus is a respected Jewish religious leader whose faith is based on the Law. He “believes” in Jesus because of what he has seen. The symbolism of darkness represents his hesitancy, as well as his longing for greater truth and light. The exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus represents Nicodemus' limited and literal understanding of what Jesus teaches about new life in God. John's audience, and disciples today, hear these words from a post-Easter perspective. In this passage, John's author switches from a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus to Jesus speaking as “we” (3:11) representing the Christian community. The message in this passage is not directed to one person or to a particular group of believers. It is directed to all.

- In what ways do you relate to Nicodemus in this passage?
- How do you hear the familiar verses of 3:16–17 in a new way as you consider the whole passage?
- How would you describe being “born from above” to a seeker or new disciple?
- How have you experienced new life in Christ?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Just as Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking greater understanding, disciples today are challenged to continually seek greater understanding of God's will. A holistic approach to discovering God's will includes six lenses: scripture study, tradition, continuing revelation, knowledge and reason, personal and community experience, and common consent. (Find more information at www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Ways-of-Discovering-Gods-Will-Listening-Guide.pdf.)

- Share in groups of two or three, or as a larger group, how you have experienced a greater understanding of God's will through one or more of the six lenses.
- How are these lenses experienced in your congregation as you develop disciples to serve?

Continuing Revelation is described as follows:

- Scripture is an inspired and indispensable witness of human response to God's revelation of divine nature.
- God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past.
- The Holy Spirit inspires and provides witness to divine truth.

- In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God’s will for our lives, the church, and creation more completely.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 29

- How would you describe continuing revelation to a seeker or new disciple?
- The imagery of moving from darkness to new life in John’s passage relates to life as a disciple and life in community. What movement from darkness to new life is needed in your congregation?
- What movement from darkness to new life have you experienced in community?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Continuing Revelation means more than having an open canon of scripture. Living this Enduring Principle requires awareness of how God is being revealed through disciples and through Christ-like communities. Use the following questions as a practice of Examen (learn more about this practice at www.CofChrist.org/spiritual-formation) in the coming week(s).

- How did my life reveal God’s will today?
- How am I being called from darkness to new life in Christ?
- Who is waiting in darkness for an invitation to the peace of Jesus Christ? How will I respond?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read the refrain of “Come and Bring Light” CCS 287 as a prayer of blessing.

Come and bring light to a people in darkness.

Come, set us free from the chains we have made.

We are your people, the flock that you tend.

Lord, open our eyes once again.

—“Come and Bring Light” by Kevin Keil, ©1998, Lorenz Publishing Company

LESSON 15 RESPONSE SHEET

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

8 March 2020

Dwelling in the Word: Isaiah 58:6–12 (adapted from NRSV and The Message)

Reader 1: Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Reader 2: Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families?

Reader 1: Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly;

Reader 2: Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage.

Reader 1: Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say Here I am.

Reader 2: If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people's sins,

If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

Reader 1: The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in the emptiest of places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Reader 2: You will use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past.

You will be known as those who can repair, restore, rebuild, and renovate, and make communities thrive.

What is the fast you choose? What new awareness is emerging about your discipleship as you consider this text?

John 3:1–17 (NRSV)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and

what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Continuing Revelation means more than having an open canon of scripture. Living this Enduring Principle requires awareness of how God is being revealed through disciples and through Christ-like communities. Use the following questions as a practice of Examen. (Learn more about this practice at www.CofChrist.org/spiritual-formation in the coming week[s].)

- How did my life reveal God’s will today?
- How am I being called from darkness to new life in Christ?
- Who is waiting in darkness for an invitation to the peace of Jesus Christ? How will I respond?

LESSON 16
15 March 2020

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 17:1–7

Lesson Focus: Finding God in life’s desert places.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore human reactions to difficult life circumstances.
- understand God’s encompassing grace.
- undergo a challenge of self-examine and change negative attitudes and self-centered complaints.

Supplies

- Bible
- Pens and paper

Notes to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 17:1–7 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 60–61, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Have passage read by narrator and three others: Moses, the people, and God.

“From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

—Exodus 17:1–7 NRSV

- What words or images stand out as this passage is read?
- What dilemmas are faced by the people? By Moses?
- Offer a prayer for understanding this ancient passage in light of our discipleship journey today.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Exodus can be likened to a three-act drama. In the first act oppressed Israelites leave Egyptian rule as God provides the ways and means for escape.

Act Two recounts the difficulties and frustrations during their years of travel.

The Law is revealed in Act Three and a new covenant with God is established.

Exodus 16 illuminates the continuing struggles encountered in chapter 17. They have journeyed for about two months. Food is running short; the people are discouraged at the pace. They are weary of travel. The spiritual glow of God's hand in their delivery from slavery is fading. They are hungry. Moses is blamed for their dilemma; would it not have been better for them to remain in slavery and have full tummies rather than be free and starve to death?

Moses approaches God with the situation. God replies by supplying manna and quail, with specific instructions on how much to gather and how to prepare the provisions. As is typical of human greed, some try to hoard manna, but it rots. Nevertheless God continues to provide manna for the next 40 years until they reach their destination.

The trek continues in chapter 17. There is plenty of manna, but no water. Once again complaints erupt, and Moses is blamed for their thirst. And again the people question the wisdom of having left Egypt where water was plentiful. Their focus turns inward on the immediate plight and the vision of the promised future is forgotten. They question whether or not God is still traveling with them.

Again Moses pleads with God for answers. God directs Moses to the rock at Horeb, which contains natural spring waters beneath. Moses strikes the rock with his staff as commanded and water pours forth.

- When have you experienced dark, difficult circumstances and cried out, "Where are you God?"
- How do we know if God is with us or not? What tempts us to think God isn't?
- How do I think "God with me" should look and feel? Where might I need to adjust those expectations?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Material and spiritual well-being are closely linked. Terence Fretheim writes:

How common it is among the people of God that a crisis, whether of daily need or physical suffering, occasions a crisis of faith. Material and spiritual well-being are more closely linked than we often care to admit (see [Exodus] 6:9). The discernment of the people of God has often been so clouded by physical difficulties that they cannot see that God is much involved in providential ways in their everyday lives. Israel's situation is not unlike a community of faith whose understanding of "act of God" has been largely determined by their insurance policies. The connection of God with daily affairs has, for all practical purposes, disappeared. The resolution is not to stress the extraordinary acts of God one more time but to keep God linked with everyday blessings. And, as with Israel in this text, it will be in discerning the presence of God in connection with daily needs that God is concerned about all the little things that go to make up their daily

rounds. God is a factor to be reckoned with everywhere, in everything, even in the natural processes of the created order.”

— *Exodus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 183, 184. Kindle Edition.

- Why might a crisis shake one’s faith?
- How do you experience God in the “ordinary” of everyday life?

Throughout the whining and complaining of the Israelites, God’s care never faltered. God did not smite the people for complaining or make life more miserable. Instead, God used physical and spiritual means to provide for their needs. God’s compassion never failed.

- How might we recognize God’s grace when going through “desert” places?
- How does our congregation respond when faced with controversial decisions?
- How might the lessons learned from Exodus help us help others going through difficult life issues?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Spend time this week reflecting on your own journey. Where do you thirst in your life? What would your request to God for “water” sound like right now? Write it down. Remember God is big enough to hear our fear, our panic, our whining, and our anger.

What difference does it make to know that God is standing in front of your next destination in life?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Oh, God, forgive us when we complain and question your presence while living in desert places. Help us see you in the ordinary of every day, through creation and in those we encounter. May our faith not falter when we feel so far from you. May we continue to be faithful as we seek your presence by spending time with you. And help us have compassion and be good listeners as others seek you during their life struggles.

God, you are so faithful. We love you. Amen.

LESSON 17
22 March 2020

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Focus Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 16:1–13

Lesson Focus: We are reminded to see as God sees, not the outward appearance but the heart.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the difference between human vision and God’s vision.
- examine similarities between David and Jesus.
- deepen their faith when God’s way is not our way.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bible (NRSV recommended)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for 1 Samuel 16:1–13 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 62–63, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read or sing together “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore” CCS 582.

Offer a prayer of gratitude for God who knows us intimately and calls us by name.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read aloud 1 Samuel 16:1-13, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and

come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is now before the LORD.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Saul was the first king chosen to lead Israel under their insistence that their leader be named King. The prophet Samuel was counselor to King Saul. But Saul was an ineffective king; God rejected his leadership and instructed Samuel to anoint a new king. Samuel grieved Saul’s fall from grace, but God commanded him to move forward, travel to Bethlehem, and anoint with oil one of the sons of Jesse as the next king. Samuel arrived and, one by one, eleven sons of Jesse passed before him. He thought the eldest son, who was handsome and strong, would be the anointed one, but God said “no.” This continued through seven sons until the youngest, David, who was in the field watching the sheep, was brought before Samuel and anointed.

There are parallels between David and Jesus, both chosen by God as “king” of the Israelites.

- David and Jesus both came from Bethlehem.
- Hostile kings Saul and Herod reigned; they were both jealous and fearful of an uprising.
- David and Jesus came from humble means; neither one was among the elite or ruling class.
- They were both considered poor, marginalized, and overlooked.
- They were both shepherds—David over real sheep, Jesus over the people of God.
- Both received “anointing”—David with oil, Jesus as the Spirit anointed him at his baptism.

God choosing David changed the course of history forever. God promised in 2 Samuel that a king from the lineage of David would always rule Israel. When the Israelites were conquered, they held to this promise and looked forward to the Messiah or “Anointed One.”

- Consider Samuel’s position. How hard might it have been for him to carry out God’s command to anoint a new king?
- How does God’s choice of David reflect a different vision than we often have or expect?
- What other similarities are there between David and Jesus?
- What is the significance of the similarities?
- How does Jesus surpass David?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

God counseled Samuel to "... not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Leadership is tough. Saul was a fallen king; God had to intervene on behalf of the people. God consistently chooses leaders the world would overlook. While we might choose the most educated or most charismatic or well-spoken person to lead, God chooses the outlier, the marginalized, the overlooked. Even Jesus chose the unlikeliest of men as disciples.

Outer appearance has little value in God's eyes as God looks at the heart or inner character of a person. What compassion is there? How is faith and trust nurtured and expressed in our living?

David was not always faithful during his reign. He had many wives, and yet took another man's wife and had her husband killed. He suffered for his actions, and God forgave and continued to bless him.

- It is humbling to be called by God in our worthiness and unworthiness. As we continue self-examination during the season of Lent, how has God's hand in your life changed you?
- How has God called you to serve?
- When have you fallen short and experienced God's forgiveness?
- How do you think God sees you?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

From Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 we read:

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

Spend time this week in self-examination:

- How do you take on the "life and mind of Christ"?
- What has God called you to do or be?

Write in your journal a response to the instruction to "increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective." Pray for guidance and "new" eyes to see.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Re-read or sing “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore” CCS 582. Offer a statement of praise for God who knows your heart and soul.

LESSON 18
29 March 2020

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Focus Scripture Passage: Ezekiel 37:1–14

Lesson Focus: God’s breath brings life.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore God’s promise of the Breath of Life.
- identify situations or places where darkness permeates life.
- understand how God’s Spirit resurrects life.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Equipment to watch a YouTube video (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Ezekiel 37:1–14 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 64–65, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

If visual projection is available, open class by watching “Ezekiel’s Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones” at <https://youtu.be/j7vb1Fv097M>.

If projection is not available, close your eyes and visualize this scripture coming to life as Ezekiel 37:1–14 is read aloud.

Offer a prayer for insight as the class studies the scripture.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The Israelites lived in captivity under Babylonian rule after the destruction of Jerusalem. Their temple was destroyed, their national identity gone, and God’s promise of owning their land for all time seemed empty. Far from their homeland, they lived in the desolate valleys between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was dusty, dirty, and barren. They had lost a sense of hope; God seemed distant. But God had not left them or forgotten them. As a visual he instructed the prophet Ezekiel to prophecy to the valley filled with dry bones.

The visual narrative is much like science fiction: dead, dry bones knitting back together; muscles, tendons, organs and all body parts forming a living being. Even though there is a body, there is no life until God's breath from the four corners of the Earth is breathed into them.

Dry bones represent the house of Israel. Through the prophecy God recognized their lifelessness, hopelessness, and despair. God did not plan to leave them in their desolate state. By reconnecting with God, the Spirit of life would pour into them and they would find renewal and wholeness and regain hope for the future.

Certainly darkness and "dry" periods of life come to each of us causing a sense of disconnectedness with God.

- Share a time when you experienced spiritual "dry bones."
- What factors contributed to the dryness?
- What does this tell us about the richness of our spiritual practices?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Most of us identify with periods of doubt, depression, fear, or anxiety that draw us into darkness or despair. We do not sense God's presence or light. The good news in today's scripture passage is of renewal, resurrection, restoration, and hope! As we near Easter, the hope of resurrection is strong. We celebrate Christ's rising from the dead and the joy that event promises.

The world resonates with "graveyards" where hope is diminished. News of wars, poverty, oppression, slavery, immigration issues, hunger, and disease cross our news feeds daily. The growing distance between the "haves" and the "have nots" increases yearly. Public rhetoric is more hostile and accusatory and political.

It is into this world we are called as disciples to share the good news of the gospel! We can hold fast to God's promises. In 1988 the following counsel was given to the church by President Wallace B. Smith:

In the many places where you are called to labor, the forces of darkness and destruction are active indeed, and seem to hold sway. Your hearts are burdened by the magnitude of the tasks that are yours in bringing the light of my gospel into such darkness.

Nevertheless, I have heard your prayers when you have cried out to me, and I have been with you in the places where you occupy. I am aware of your desires to serve me and my assurance is that as you go forth, your offerings of faith and service are acceptable to me.

In all your efforts, therefore, continue to trust in my grace and respond in love to the leadings of my Spirit. If you will come before me in unity and love I will bless you with a great outpouring of compassion, both for one another and for the world into which you are sent.

— Doctrine and Covenants 157:16–17

- What can we learn about ourselves and our relationship with the world from difficult paths we are called to walk?
- How do we open ourselves to the living breath of the Spirit?
- What would resurrection, life breathed into dry bones, look like in your life, in your congregation, in your community?

- How can we be disciples in the world who share hope and the promise of resurrection?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

As Easter approaches, spend time in reflection. How healthy are your “spiritual bones”? Choose a spiritual practice to engage in daily from now until Easter. Seek resurrection!

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing or read “Now the Green Blade Rises” *CCS 482*.

May wintry hearts come back to life through God’s blessing of the risen Lord. Amen.

LESSON 19
5 April 2020

PALM SUNDAY

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 21:1–11

Lesson Focus: Jesus enters Jerusalem as an expression of humility and peace.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences from their Lenten journey.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and the events of Passion Week.
- consider the call to embody Christ's mission of peace.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 21:1–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 53–54, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the final Sunday in Lent. We fast for 40 days remembering Christ's own fast in the wilderness. Our journey through Lent gives us a chance to reorder priorities and to make space in our lives for being in the presence of God with greater awareness and intentionality. As we practice self-examination and conversion through prayer, fasting, self-denial, and generosity, we open ourselves to God's creative purposes in our lives and in our world.

Share experiences from your Lenten journey in groups of two or three, or as a larger group. What has been most meaningful? Where have you been resistant? What have you learned about yourself as a disciple?

Read or sing “Lead Me, Lord” CCS 450.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 21:1–11. Discuss the following themes from the passage and compare to circumstances today. You may choose to form three groups and assign each group one of the following themes to discuss; then share insights with the larger group.

1. Humble entry—Matthew’s quotation of Zechariah 9:9 fulfills the prophecy of the humble king riding on a donkey. This reflects Matthew’s rabbinic background and emphasis on interpretation of scripture.
 - Where do you see examples today of humble, servant leadership?
 - How does this kind of leadership promote peace?
2. Son of David—Matthew’s crowd shouts hosannas (save us) to the Son of David, which indicates the kind of warrior-king (like King David) the crowd wanted in order to gain military and political power over the Romans.
 - Where do you see examples today of leadership through political or military power?
 - How does this kind of leadership promote peace?
3. A city in turmoil—The closing verse indicates the city of Jerusalem is in turmoil over Jesus’ arrival.
 - What causes Jerusalem to be in turmoil over Jesus’ arrival?
 - Where do you see examples today of communities in turmoil?
 - What is needed to promote peace in these circumstances of turmoil?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a and 163:3b.

- What connections do you find between these verses and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem?
- How do these verses speak to the circumstances discussed above?
- In what ways did Jesus challenge cultural, political, and religious trends?
- What does it mean for Community of Christ to be a peace church in the world today?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Throughout Holy Week, make the story of Christ’s passion part of your daily spiritual practice. Spend time with Matthew’s narrative of the events leading to Christ’s crucifixion, death, and resurrection, and practice silence (see Response Sheet) as you prepare to experience new life in Christ.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Close this time of learning and sharing by reading together Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29.

LESSON 19 RESPONSE SHEET

PALM SUNDAY

5 April 2020

Matthew 21:1–11 (NRSV)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵“Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a

Become a people of the Temple—those who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation, who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b

Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ’s vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

Practicing Silence

Throughout Holy Week, make the story of Christ’s passion part of your daily spiritual practice. Spend time with Matthew’s narrative of the events leading to Christ’s crucifixion, death, and resurrection, and practice silence as you prepare to experience new life in Christ.

Practicing silence reminds us that relationship with God is a reciprocal act. Intentional time in silence allows us to be fully present with God without confines of language. As we enter Holy Week, the full implication of life as a disciple brings with it a weighted hush. There are moments when words are inadequate and our most faithful response is to stand humbly before the mystery.

- Find a place free from noise and distractions.
- Practicing silence may be difficult at first. The mind may run wild, and centering in God’s

presence could take some spiritual effort! Allow yourself grace in this practice and the ability to slowly ease into longer periods of silent reflection. Perhaps you begin in silence for five to 10 minutes and then write in a journal or pray about your experience.

- Breathe deeply. Focusing on each breath in and out can help quiet the mind and center you in God's presence.
- Become aware of your surroundings. Notice how the air feels on your skin; trust that you are in the presence of the Holy—fully surrounding you and embracing you.
- Don't expect God will speak to you in a certain way. Just open yourself to what is. Allow your inner conversations to stop for a while, being fully present with the One who is fully present with you.
- After being silent for a while, offer a prayer of gratitude for God's constant presence, whether you are fully aware of it or not. Pray that you may continue to draw closer to God and discover what God is saying and doing within you.

Day 1: Read Matthew 26:1–5.

Find a quiet space and allow yourself at least five minutes alone in silence.

Day 2: Read Matthew 26:6–13.

Before you begin your day of work or activity, silently offer this prayer:

Be still and know that I am God Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know. Be still.

Be.

Day 3: Read Matthew 26:14–19.

Repeat this prayer phrase as you enter into the practice of silence:

Holy Mystery, I am speechless in your presence.

Day 4: Read Matthew 26:20–75.

Incorporate times of silence into your daily routine.

Day 5: Read Matthew 27:1–54.

As you practice silence, allow yourself to be filled with awe before the mystery of God.

Day 6: Read Matthew 27:55–66.

Preparing to experience new life in Christ, what is it that leaves you speechless?

LESSON 20
12 April 2020

EASTER DAY RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Focus Scripture Passage: John 20:1–18; Matthew 28:1–10

Lesson Focus: Encountering the Risen Christ is a transforming experience that leads us into Christ's mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- Reflect on the meaning of the Resurrection.
- compare accounts of the Resurrection from John and Matthew.
- discuss points of Community of Christ Christology and invitation to Christ's mission

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 20:1–18; Matthew 28:1–10 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 60–63, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is Easter Sunday/Resurrection of the Lord. Respond to one or more of the following questions as a large group or in smaller groups of two or three.

- What does the Resurrection mean to you?
- How have you experienced new life in Christ?
- What experience(s) during Lent or Holy Week has made Easter Sunday more meaningful to you? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The resurrection of Jesus is at the core of Christian faith. The actual Resurrection is not described in any of the Gospel accounts, but left as divine mystery. The empty tomb alone does not produce faith; it is personal experience of resurrection through the Living Christ that transforms lives. While Matthew and

Luke draw from Mark's account as source material, the Gospels differ according to the following: 1) who went to the tomb and when; 2) the nature of the resurrected body of Jesus; 3) location and chronology of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. In all accounts, the Resurrection affirms that God acts for those who are dead. Christian hope is in the Resurrection (God) and not ourselves (immortality).

Compare the Resurrection accounts from John and Matthew. Read each passage and make a list of the key points, characters, and occurrences.

- What are the similarities and differences between the two accounts?
- What do you understand about the Resurrection through each account?

Each Gospel account reflects the theology of the author. Read the following points reflected in each account and discuss the questions which follow.

John

- The Resurrection is the final proof of Jesus' identity.
- Resurrection is not resuscitation; Jesus is raised to a new way of being beyond this life.
- Mary's recognition and confession reflects John's love for personal encounter with Jesus.
- There is a kind of "seeing" that does not result in faith. People come to Christian faith not by judging evidence by their own criteria, but as a response to the voice of the Living Christ.

Matthew

- Matthew adapts Mark's account of the women coming to the tomb. They are met by an angel, whose appearance is similar to the young man described in Mark.
- "He is not here...He has been raised from the dead..." Jesus did not die, but was killed; Jesus did not rise (resuscitate), but was raised (by God).
- Matthew's additions to Mark's account portray the women running with joy to tell the disciples. They do not keep silent.
- Galilee is important to Matthew's Gospel. As a Jewish writer to a Jewish audience, the message to "Go to Galilee" is a call to take the message of Christ to the Gentiles...to all the nations.
- The two Marys are the first witnesses of the Risen Christ. He greets them and accompanies them to Galilee. The significance is the assurance of Christ's presence as disciples engage in mission

Questions for Discussion

- Which of these points resonates with your understanding of the Resurrection? Which one challenges your understanding of the Resurrection?
- With which account do you most closely relate? Explain.
- What new awareness do you have after comparing the two accounts?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ Christology (understanding of who Jesus Christ is) affirms the following:

- On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his life and ministry, and triumphing over all injustice, even death itself. He ascended into heaven, having entrusted his followers with

authority to minister in his name to the ends of the earth. He sent the Holy Spirit to be with them in their witness of the good news of the Resurrection.

- Christ...promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all creation.
- As disciples of Christ, we are called to conform our lives to his by living in loving community with others, seeing Jesus in the faces of the least of God's children, and serving those whom the world has forgotten.
- The promises of God in Jesus Christ are sure—that by the Holy Spirit we will be given grace to do the things we have been asked: courage in the struggle for justice, passion for peace in the midst of violence, forgiveness of our sin, stewardship in place of materialism, healing of body and spirit where there is hurt, and eternal life in the face of death.

Discuss the following questions based on previous discussion of the passages from John and Matthew and from the above statements taken from Community of Christ Christology. (For full statements, see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th edition, pp. 58–62.)

- Which of the above statements best describes your understanding of who Jesus Christ is? Explain.
- What does it mean to live the hope of the Resurrection as a disciple of Jesus Christ? As a community of Christ?
- How does resurrection encounter lead to mission?
- Where do you see evidence of resurrection hope in your congregation? In your community? In the world?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

“Resurrection is not a one-time event that came and went. It is a daily event as people receive God’s grace, love, and new life through Jesus Christ” (*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 60–61). We are called to live the resurrection hope by experiencing and creating a new present.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection and complete the following challenge statement:

I will live resurrection hope and create a new present by...

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read verse four of “The Risen Christ” CCS 477 as a closing commitment.

May we, Christ’s body, walk and serve and stand with those oppressed in this and every land,
Till all are blessed and can a blessing be, restored in Christ to true humanity.

—“The Risen Christ” by Nigel Weaver, ©1993 Nigel Weaver

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Focus Scripture Passage: John 20:19–31

Lesson Focus: Faith is a journey of doubt and trust which transforms belief into kingdom-building action.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on experiences of resurrection.
- explore how the focus scripture passage relates to personal faith journeys.
- consider what it means to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Poster paper or large writing surface and markers

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 20:19–31 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 64–65, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Spend a few moments at the beginning of this session reflecting on the experiences of Easter Week. Respond to one of the following questions as a large group or in small sharing groups.

- How have you witnessed or experienced resurrection hope in the past week?
- Who is someone in your life who most embodies resurrection hope? Explain.

Read or sing verses one and two of “The Risen Christ” *CCS* 477.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Even though John’s Gospel was written many years after Jesus’ resurrection, it remains a powerful witness to all that transpired. It clarifies many of the author’s concerns for the early struggling church. Today’s passage provides an example of individuals coming to belief in the midst of fear and doubt.

Read John 20:19–31. On large poster paper, flip chart, or erasable writing surface, make two columns. At the top of one column write “Particular,” and at the top of the other column write “Universal.” In the “Particular” column, make a list of important elements from the passage and discuss the significance at the time of the occurrence. Then, in the “Universal” column, discuss the broader, universal understanding of the particular element, and how it applies to circumstances today. You may choose to assign small groups of two or three a “Particular,” have them discuss the “Universal,” then share with the larger group.

Example:

Particular

Jesus came and stood among the disciples who were hiding behind locked doors. They had not seen the Risen Christ and were in fear of what might happen to them.

Universal

We can experience divine peace amid our fears and uncertainties. Sometimes this happens in unexpected ways.

For further reflection, read and discuss the following scriptures and questions.

John 20:19–23

- “Peace be with you” was a typical Jewish greeting, but here it represents fulfillment of Jesus’ promise.
- “So I send you.” The Resurrection was not just an individual and private religious experience. It was a reality that involved a mission to the world. It represents a continuation of God’s mission in sending Jesus and of Christ’s mission.
- “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The breath of Jesus, in this passage, is like the Pentecost experience recorded in Acts. Jesus speaks words which comfort, encourage, and strengthen the disciples.
 - What examples do you see today of disciples “hiding” as a result of fear, doubt, or uncertainty?
 - What are the “locked doors” we sometimes hide behind?

John 20:24–31

- John’s Gospel is the most graphic in its account of the Crucifixion. It is the only one with nails, blood, and a spear. In this passage, Thomas cannot believe in the Resurrection without personal witness of Jesus’ wounded body.
- “My Lord and my God.” The original Gospel account ended with this climactic note suggesting to the reader that it is God who has become incarnate in Christ. (Most scholars consider chapter 21 was added after the original composition of the main body.)
- “[T]hat you may come to believe...” directly addresses the reader and signals a shift from an account to a summary of the intent through the Gospel’s witness “...that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”
 - In what ways can doubt increase one’s faith?
 - How have you (or someone you know) struggled with doubts and uncertainty on your journey of faith, but then come to a place of trust and belief?
 - How did this transformation take place?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Early in its history, the church, often referred to as the Restoration movement, perceived the call to share the fullness of the gospel throughout the world (Doctrine and Covenants 1:4) and to "seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 6:3). Today, we understand this as the call to share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions.

Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconcile and restore people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God's will. This approach is the fullest meaning of restoration.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 14

- How does your concept of Zion compare with sharing the peace of Jesus Christ as reflected above? In what ways are they the same or different?
- What does it mean to "share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions"?
- How is sharing the peace of Jesus Christ reflected in specific congregational ministries?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

We proclaim Jesus Christ, yet we can also doubt, just like Thomas. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." For John, to believe in the promises of God through Christ is to trust the healing, saving action of God in the world and live as if it were true. Belief leads to action.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a and prayerfully consider how you would complete the statements which follow.

- I long for divine peace in the midst of...
- I will share the peace of Jesus Christ with...
- by...

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing verse four of "The Risen Christ" CCS 477

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:13–35

Lesson Focus: God reveals God’s self to ordinary people.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences of invitation and hospitality.
- discuss sections of the focus scripture passage.
- explore connections between themes from Luke’s passage and Community of Christ understanding of discipleship, scripture, sacrament, and mission.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 24:13–35 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 66, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Share responses to the following question in groups of two or three, or with the larger group.

- When have you experienced the Risen Christ through simple acts of invitation and hospitality? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Luke 24:13–35. Form three small discussion groups, and give each group one of the following passages. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. Luke 24:13–25
 2. Luke 24:25–27
 3. Luke 24:28–35
- What happened in this part of the story?

- How does this part of the story influence the lives of believers?
- What do you understand in a new way this Easter?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The story of Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke's Gospel. This story of the Risen Christ's revelation to disciples contains important themes for disciples today. With the same three discussion groups, assign one of the following themes. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem is filled with lessons about being a disciple. It represents following Jesus as The Way. In today's passage, Jesus meets the two disciples on a road going away from Jerusalem.

- What is significant about this journey compared to Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem?
- What is significant about this journey moving away from Jerusalem?

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d reads: "Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple."

- What connections can be made between this counsel and the above theme from Luke?
- How does this passage and Luke's passage challenge disciples in Christ's mission?

2. Luke makes a point that Jesus interprets the meaning of scripture revealed through him. It is the beginning of disciples understanding scripture through the lens of the Risen Christ.

- How does the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus change the way we interpret scripture?

Affirmation One of "Scripture in Community of Christ" (see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 63) reads: "We declare that Jesus Christ— who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7)."

- How does this statement affirm what Jesus reveals to the disciples on the road to Emmaus?
- How does this statement and Luke's passage uphold the importance of responsibly interpreting and faithfully applying scripture?
- How does this statement, as well as Luke's passage, shape an understanding of the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation?

3. Only when Jesus breaks bread with the disciples do they recognize him, which points to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

- What blocks our ability to recognize the Risen Christ?
- How have you experienced the Risen Christ through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

Community of Christ has received the following counsel: "You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body" (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d).

"Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b).

- How does this counsel connect with the theme from Luke?
- In what ways do this counsel and Luke's theme connect sacraments with mission?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Prayerfully consider how you would complete the following prayer statements. Make this part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Living God, thank you for the ways you are revealed in...
Help me to know your Living Word as I...
As a blessing of your love and peace, I will share... Amen.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing verses three and four of "The Risen Christ" CCS 477.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Focus Scripture Passage: Psalm 23

Lesson Focus: We experience God and Jesus as shepherds or pastoral caretakers individually and communally.

Objectives

The learners will...

- examine the visual images the psalm relates.
- identify characteristics of shepherding.
- determine ways to enhance pastoral skills as disciples.

Supplies

- Projector or computer with sound
- Internet access
- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Psalm 23 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 78, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Watch the YouTube video “Kids Recite the 23rd Psalm” at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgBusCOBN7c>

Or engage in Dwelling in the Word. Read each line slowly. Pause and contemplate the images that pass through your mind. When finished, share your thoughts. Offer a prayer of praise for God’s continuing presence.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

—Psalm 23

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Psalm 23 is one of the most quoted and used passage of scripture. It is particularly comforting during funerals, at the bedsides of those who are ill, or in other times of distress.

The word “pastor” is derived from the Latin word for “shepherd.” Thus, “shepherd” is the core description of a pastoral leader. It is used widely in scripture, beginning in Genesis where Jacob blesses his sons who have acted as good shepherds for the people. Shepherding was a familiar vocation in ancient times. Sheep provided food and clothing, shelter from their skins, and financial security. Because sheep grazed the countryside freely, they needed protection from predators or poachers. Sometimes sheep needed protection from their own folly:

1. Sheep will not lie down unless they feel safe.
2. They will not drink water unless the source is calm.
3. They tend to wander. If they stray too far from the Shepherd’s voice, they get lost.

The psalm describes God as the good shepherd of people, one who provides for every need. Verses 1–4 describe the pastoral care of God.

- What are characteristics of a good shepherd according to the psalmist?
- How do people emulate “sheep” behavior at times?
- The rod and staff were tools used to protect the sheep. What tools does God use to protect us?

Verses 5 and 6 focus on protection and total dependence on God. When needs are met and hearts fill with gratefulness, we experience peace.

- What is the significance of “anointing the head with oil”?
- How does this relate to the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick?
- How might we “dwell in the house of the Lord” during our lives?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

This psalm is one that brings great comfort. Believers and non-believers find solace in the poem. It is the source for many hymns, poems, and stories. Many hymns in *Community of Christ Sings* are based on this psalm. Look at “Come Away from Rush and Hurry” CCS 83.

Come away from rush and hurry
to the stillness of God’s peace;
from our vain ambition’s worry,
come to Christ to find release.

Come away from noise and clamor,
life's demands and frenzied pace;
come to join the people gathered
here to seek and find God's face.

In the pastures of God's goodness
we lie down to rest our soul.
From the waters of God's mercy
we drink deeply, are made whole.
At the table of God's presence
all the saints are richly fed.
With the oil of God's anointing
into service we are led.

Come, then, children, with your burdens—
life's confusions, fears and pain.
Leave them at the cross of Jesus;
take instead his kingdom's reign.
Bring your thirsts, for he will quench them—
he alone will satisfy.
All our longings find attainment
when to self we gladly die.

The hymn moves the psalm from an individual experience to a communal one. We acknowledge Jesus shepherding us as we gather to worship and minister in his name.

- How does the hymn make this ancient psalm relevant today?
- What do Psalm 23 and the hymn call us to do or be or experience?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Who in your life might be comforted by hearing Psalm 23 this week? How does this psalm inspire you to serve as shepherd to someone who needs attention?

Write a psalm this week as a spiritual practice.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Sing “Come Away from Rush and Hurry” CCS 83. End with Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Focus Scripture Passage: Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16

Lesson Focus: Security is found in God’s steadfast love.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore human situations that transcend time.
- reflect on responses to suffering of self and others.
- share God’s peace in the world.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bible (NRSV recommended)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 79, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read Psalm 31 aloud in three parts.

Verses 1–5: What emotions surfaced?

Verses 6–14: How do you relate to the psalmist’s reflections?

Verses 15–24: How has God provided for you? For this community?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Psalm 31 covers a range of emotions of the psalmist. The first five verses speak to powerlessness of self and the need to seek God’s protection. Verses 6–14 are omitted in today’s lectionary text but detail the woes and troubles the psalmist is experiencing. The final verses acknowledge God’s constant love and goodness as people turn their lives over to fully trust God.

Bad things happen to everyone. No one is immune from hardship, despair, or tough situations that may cause one to question God’s whereabouts or existence. In our humanness, we want easy answers, miracle solutions, and instant resolutions. The psalmist recognizes that even the most faithful disciple

does not escape life's challenges. Yet it is in moments of darkest despair that we find God waiting patiently for us to turn toward God.

Verse 5 may sound familiar, as Jesus recited the words "into your hands I commend my spirit" as he was dying on the cross. At this point he was totally dependent on God.

When we have no control over life circumstances and totally entrust our lives, our future, and the unknowns to God, we find strength to endure. There is a flicker of hope.

- When have you experienced total brokenness and relinquished your life to God?
- What was God's response?
- How did the experience change you?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Suffering is often due to our response to the actions or inactions of others. We also must recognize we might be the cause of suffering for others. Self-reflection may bring us to our knees in repentance seeking forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters suffering from oppression, hunger, addiction, anger, depression, poverty, or any number of unnecessary circumstances are in desperate need of understanding God as refuge.

- How do we, by omission or commission, contribute to the distress of others?

Doctrine and Covenants 163: 2a, b–4a implores us:

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

- What is the relationship of Psalm 31 to the Doctrine and Covenants scripture?
- How can we encourage others to trust God during tough times?
- What is our responsibility to God's people?
- Even as we and the psalmist cry out to God, God weeps, too. How can we bring peace to the world?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Repeat the Mission Prayer each morning this week. Be open to whom and to where God leads. Be ready to share your testimony!

God, where will your Spirit lead today?

Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.

Grant me courage to risk something new

And become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Offer a closing prayer that includes the three sections from the Psalm:

1. Humbling of self and need for God
2. Repentance
3. Relinquishing control of life to God, giving praise

Sing "Hear Our Prayer, O Lord" CCS 196.

LESSON 25
17 May 2020

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Focus Scripture Passage: John 14:15–21

Lesson Focus: Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to continue in loving relationship with the community of believers.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences of the Holy Spirit.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- discover new ways of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in community.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 14:15–21 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 71, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Share in groups of two or three, or with the larger group, responses to one of the following questions.

- How have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- How have you witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of others? In your congregation or community? In the church?

Read or sing “Wa Wa Wa Emimimo” *CCS* 157 or “Come, Holy Spirit, Come” *CCS* 154 as a centering prayer for this time of learning and dialogue. Encourage the use of different languages affirming connection to the wider community through the Holy Spirit.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read John 14:15–21 and discuss the following as a large group or in smaller groups of two or three.

The first followers of Jesus struggled with their identity and community moving from the synagogue (place) to Jesus (mission). In his farewell speech, which begins in John 14, Jesus is preparing the

community of believers to continue Christ's mission of God's divine purposes through the power of the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus offers three promises:

1. His followers will not be abandoned but will have the presence of the Holy Spirit (in Greek, Paraclete, from *parakletos* which means advocate or counselor) to comfort, encourage, and guide.
2. Jesus will return, which reconnects disciples with appearances of the resurrected Jesus.
3. Jesus promises divine peace. Rather than an absence of conflict (the peace the world gives), followers of Jesus live in mutual love and promote wholeness, justice, and right relationships in the midst of the struggles of life.

Form three small groups and assign one of the above promises to each group. Discuss the following questions as they relate to the promise, and share insights with the larger group.

- What does this promise reveal about the nature of the Triune God?
- What does this promise reveal about personal relationships to God?
- What does this promise reveal about relationships in community?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

John's Gospel teaches disciples about being in relationship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, but the relationship is realized and lived in community. It is personal, but it is not individualistic. This is affirmed through Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Read the following statements and discuss the questions that follow in groups of two or three.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 34

- With which description of the Holy Spirit do you most identify? Explain.
- What connections can be made between this statement and John 14:15–21?
- Can the Holy Spirit be at work with individuals apart from community? Explain.

The Church

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and with other disciples in service to the world. The church of Jesus Christ is made of all those who respond to Jesus' call. Community of Christ is part of the whole body of Christ. We are called to be a prophetic people, proclaiming the peace of Jesus Christ and creating communities where all will be welcomed and brought into renewed relationship with God, and where there will be no poor.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 35–36

- With which statement about the church do you most identify? Explain.
- What connections can be made between this statement and John 14:15–21?

- Can a person experience the church apart from community? Explain.

Share insights with the larger group and respond to the following questions.

- Drawing from John 14:15–21 and the statements above, how would you respond to persons who claim they do not need to worship in a church to have a relationship with God?
- How can the church best respond to the growing number of people who identify as spiritual but not religious? What new expressions of ministry in your congregation have made, or can make, this possible?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Think about your ministry as a disciple or priesthood member. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions in quiet meditation, by writing, or by sharing in groups of two or three.

- How does your ministry find expression within the church?
- How does your ministry find expression outside the church?
- How is the Holy Spirit leading you to new expressions of ministry?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Invite four individuals to each read a verse of “Holy Spirit, Come, Confirm Us” CCS 505 as a closing prayer.

LESSON 26
24 May 2020

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ACCENTION OF THE LORD

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:44–53

Lesson Focus: Christ is proclaimed through the sacred story of scripture and the church.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on past, present, and future experiences with the Risen Christ.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- explore Community of Christ affirmations of scripture and connections to the focus passage.
- discover Christ’s call through the sacred story of individuals and community.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition
www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-4thEd-WEB.pdf (optional)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 24:44–53 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 72–73, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

In the weeks of Easter, we have focused on passages from John’s Gospel. Today’s passage is the final passage of Luke’s Gospel, which culminates with the ascension of the Lord. Spend a few moments reflecting on your journey as a disciple and respond to one of the following as a large group or in small groups of two or three.

- How has the risen Christ been revealed to you in the past?
- How is the risen Christ revealed to you in the present?
- How will the risen Christ be revealed in the future?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Luke 24:44–53.

The closing passage of Luke’s Gospel affirms the message found throughout the entire book: Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel. The Gospel closes with the Risen Christ commissioning his disciples to bear the good news to the world of what God has done in Christ. The community of Jesus’ disciples is called to be more than a support group for personal salvation and spirituality. It is called to continue the story of God’s mission to the world. The closing passage connects the past (Israel), the present (Jesus), and the future (the church), which is a foundational message for the author of Luke and Acts.

The disciples’ response to Jesus’ death included fear, loss, and uncertainty. In this passage, after the resurrected Jesus blessed and commissioned the disciples, and after the Ascension, the disciples respond in joy and blessing. The Greek word for “bless” literally means “to speak well of.” Jesus speaks well of his disciples, who in turn speak well of God. We are called to “speak well of” God by the way we live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Respond to the following questions as a large group or in small groups of two or three.

- What traditions (congregation, church, or broader Christian tradition) “speak well of” the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ?
- In what ways have you seen the Christian message represented in ways that did not “speak well of” God?
- Luke’s author records that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures. How has your mind been opened to the scriptures?
- What was Jesus revealing to the disciples about scripture in this passage?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s passage reveals an important understanding of scripture. It is reflected in Community of Christ affirmations about scripture. These affirmations are found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-4thEd-WEB.pdf. They reflect and expand our understanding of the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation.

Note to instructor: If possible, provide copies of “Scripture in Community of Christ” from pp. 63–67 of *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition. If time permits, read each affirmation and consider how it connects with today’s passage.

Read and discuss the preamble and following affirmations of scripture in Community of Christ.

Preamble

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

Affirmation One

We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).

Affirmation Two

We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

- How does each affirmation reflect “Jesus opening minds of disciples” to understand scripture?
- How is the author of Luke’s message that Jesus is the fulfillment of scripture reflected in each affirmation?
- What is important for us to understand about responsibly interpreting and faithfully applying scripture?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

We Share a Sacred Story

The sacred story is the unfolding drama of God’s reconciling work in the world. This story reveals God as the One who calls humanity into relationship and who seeks the well-being of all creation. This revelation, first made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, continues in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. This library of books called the Bible roots the church in the sacred story and nurtures and informs Community of Christ’s faith, identity, and mission to the world.

The story of God’s transforming work in the world did not end with the testimony of the biblical writers. It continued in the life and witness of the whole Christian church, as well as in other places. The sacred story is the all-encompassing saga of God’s redeeming action in the world. Generations of Christian followers have written new chapters to this continuing story. The sacred story, as found in scripture and in the larger Christian tradition, anchors and nurtures our understanding of ourselves and our call. Our unique identity includes claiming our place within the wide circle of those who in every time and place have called on the Lord Jesus Christ. With them, we continue to write new chapters to the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition pp. 16–19

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Reflect on these questions as part of your daily spiritual practice in the coming week.

- How have you been shaped by the sacred story of Jesus and his love?
- How are you being called to continue the sacred story in your life as a disciple? In your congregation? In your community?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “God, Whose Grace Redeems Our Story” CCS 570 to close this time of learning and sharing.

LESSON 27
31 May 2020

DAY OF PENTECOST

Focus Scripture Passage: Acts 2:1–21

Lesson Focus: The Holy Spirit strengthens the church for mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- express personal understanding of the Holy Spirit through hymns.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and connections between Jesus Christ and the church through the Holy Spirit.
- explore Community of Christ understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Acts 2:1–21 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 74–75, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Passover. In the Christian tradition, Endowment Sunday is celebrated fifty days after Easter. It signifies the Holy Spirit’s endowment of the church.

Form three small groups and assign each one of the following hymns. Read the verses and discuss the following questions. Share with the larger group.

“Breath of the Living God” *CCS* 43

“Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart” *CCS* 48

“Wind upon the Waters” *CCS* 49

- How does this hymn describe the Holy Spirit?
- What images or phrases in this hymn best express your understanding of the Holy Spirit? Explain.
- What images or phrases, if any, challenge your understanding of the Holy Spirit? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

For the author of Luke and Acts, the Holy Spirit is present in the life and work of Jesus in Luke and the church in Acts. “The promise of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 that people would be baptized by the Holy Spirit and by fire is fulfilled in today’s text. The Spirit that descended on Jesus (Luke 3:22) now descends on the disciples giving power to the church. Just as Jesus began his ministry filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples are beginning their ministry filled with the Spirit.”

— *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 74

Read Acts 2:1–21 and discuss the following questions as a large group or in small groups of two or three.

- The Holy Spirit is described as a rush of wind (from the same word as spirit and breath) and tongues of fire (representing divine energy). How have you experienced the Holy Spirit as “breath” or “divine energy”? How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
- Describe a personal or community experience when you were filled with the Holy Spirit.
- In this passage, all who were present could understand the experience of the Holy Spirit in their own way. Some who were skeptical thought those speaking in different languages were drunk. When has the Holy Spirit disrupted your life? Your congregation or community? The church? What change, if any, occurred as a result of this disruption?
- Peter’s proclamation to the crowd in this passage was the first public Christian witness. When have you witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of another?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

In the same three small groups formed in the Gather section of this lesson, have each group discuss one of the following passages. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. “Community of Christ believes in the Holy Spirit. We experience the Spirit’s revealing, redeeming, restoring, renewing presence in our midst. The Spirit, who through the prophets called Israel to walk justly, is calling us to the same path today. The Spirit poured onto Jesus is calling us in his name to make real today the vision of life Jesus came to proclaim.”

—Anthony J. Chvala-Smith, *A Way of Life: Understanding Our Christian Faith*, pp. 61–62

2. Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

—Doctrine and Covenants 10:6

3. Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe. That Spirit is even now touching alive the souls of those who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within. Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e, 3b

- How is the Holy Spirit described in this passage?
- What does the passage reveal about Community of Christ identity and beliefs?
- What is the call to disciples and to the church in this passage?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

The Holy Spirit fulfills Jesus' promise to his disciples that he will return and they will not be abandoned. We are to hear the same promise of comfort and challenge today. Prayerfully consider your response to the following statements. Make these prayer statements part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Like a rushing wind, the Holy Spirit is challenging me to live Christ's mission by...

The Holy Spirit is breathing new life in me by...

I see the Holy Spirit at work in my congregation or community when...

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Select a phrase or verse from the hymn discussed previously in this lesson that best expresses your understanding of the Holy Spirit. Close by inviting each person to share their selected phrase or verse.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

TRINITY SUNDAY

Focus Scripture Passage: Genesis 1:1—2:4a

Lesson Focus: Beginning to understand and develop a relationship with the Trinity

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand the concept of the Trinity.
- see the Trinity in scripture.
- see the Trinity at work in the church.

Supplies

- Copies of the following scriptures for each participant: Genesis 1:1—2:4a, Matthew 28:16–20, and John 1:1–5
- Paper, pens or pencils
- Copies of the Basic Beliefs—God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Notes to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Genesis 1:1—2:4a in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 84–85, available through Herald House.

This is a complex subject for a class that generally meets for an hour or less on Sunday. However, you could use it to help develop a basic understanding of what the word Trinity means and why it is important. You may want to identify the three prayers ahead of time so the participants have a chance to prepare. You may also want to leave a little extra time for the three-fold meditation near the end to give the students an experiential moment to understand the uniqueness and oneness of each member of the Trinity.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read or sing together “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” CCS 52.

Have three people offer prayers for the class.

2

ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Review the prayers of the three people who prayed for the class.

- What did the people pray about?
- How were the prayers similar?
- How were they different?
- Was each prayer important?

Share the Basic Beliefs on God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit with the class.

God

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 33–34

- What are the attributes of each?
- How do they work together?
- Are there any attributes held by only one of the three?

Form three small groups and give one of the scriptures to each. (For smaller groups, consider the scriptures as a whole.) Have them select a spokesperson to present their results. Discuss the following questions:

- Based on the statements from our Basic Beliefs, how is each member of the Trinity present in this scripture?
- If one or more member of the Trinity is missing or represented by attribute, why would that be?

Bring the group together to share their discussions. Considering all the scriptures together, answer the following questions:

- How does considering these scriptures together change your search for the Trinity's presence in your understanding of each scripture?
- How does evaluating the scriptures together deepen their meaning?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Three-fold Meditation

Sit quietly and listen as someone reads the Basic Beliefs statement about God.

Imagine God sitting with you. God may be silent or communicate with you in some way. Pay close attention to what you are experiencing with God. Make some notes about this experience. Pause for a minute or two before going on to the next Basic Belief.

Sit quietly and listen as someone reads the Basic Beliefs statement about Jesus.

Imagine Jesus sitting with you. Jesus may be silent or communicate with you in some way. Pay close attention to what you are experiencing with Jesus. Make some notes about this experience. Pause for a minute or two before going on to the next Basic Belief.

Sit quietly and listen as someone reads the Basic Beliefs statement about the Holy Spirit.

Imagine the Holy Spirit sitting with you. The Holy Spirit may be silent or communicate with you in some way. Pay close attention to what you are experiencing with the Holy Spirit. Make some notes about this experience. Pause for a minute or two.

The instructor ends the meditation with Amen.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Share how experiencing each part of the Trinity affected you. Was it the same? Different? Were some easier to imagine than others?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sit for a minute in silent prayer; then allow a few minutes for each student to randomly call out a word or phrase that came to them during their meditation if they wish.

Read or sing together "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" CCS 53.

LESSON 29
14 June 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 6)

Focus Scripture Passage: Genesis 18:1–15; 21:1–7

Lesson Focus: Grace and Generosity of God as manifested in the world.

Objectives

The learners will...

- see the birth of Isaac as an act of God’s generosity.
- understand God’s grace and love as a source of generosity.
- explore how should we respond to God’s grace and generosity.

Supplies

- Copy of Genesis 18:1–15; 21:1–7 for each participant
- Paper, pens or pencils
- Copy of the definition of grace, the Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity, and Basic Beliefs—Discipleship and God for each participant

Notes to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Genesis 18:1–15; 21:1–7 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 89, available through Herald House.

This lesson is to help the students understand another complex theological concept: Grace. It also shares the idea of generosity being a proper response to God’s grace.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Begin the class using a breath prayer. Sit quietly, breathing naturally for a minute or so; then begin to deepen your breaths. As you breathe in, say silently to yourself, “Breathing in God’s Grace.” As you breathe out, say silently to yourself, “Breathing out Generosity.” Repeat for a couple of minutes.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Share the following definitions of grace: a noun—unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification; a virtue coming from God; a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance

—<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grace>

- How is this definition of grace reflected in your understanding of God?
- Have you seen God's grace active in your life? How?

Enduring Principles are qualities the church sees as always true in the past, present, and future. Read together the Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity.

Grace and Generosity

- God's grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.
- Having received God's generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.
- We offer all we are and have to God's purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 28

- Using the definition for grace above, what is this Enduring Principle saying?
- What is the relationship between grace and generosity? Can you have one without the other?
- Reflect on your life. How has God's grace affected your generosity?

Keeping in mind the definition of grace and the Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity, read today's focus scripture from Genesis 18:1–15; 21:1–7.

- How is grace presented in this story? How is generosity presented in this story?
- How did grace and generosity bring joy?
- When you've experienced God's grace, did you also experience joy? What effect do grace and joy together have on generosity?
- Can generosity be joyous?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Review the Basic Beliefs of Discipleship and God.

Discipleship

Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life. God's boundless love sets us free for lives of responsible stewardship in which we generously offer our lives in service to God's reign. Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey. Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 37

God

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community

of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 33–34

- How do these come together to bring Grace and Generosity?
- What influence do these have in your daily life?
- Do you see these two Basic Beliefs as necessary parts of Grace and Generosity?
- How do you respond to God’s Grace and Generosity in your life?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Spend a moment in silent prayer, making notes on how you will respond to God’s Grace and Generosity.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing together “O, Day of Peace” CCS 300 for the closing prayer.

LESSON 30
21 June 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 7)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 10:24–39

Lesson Focus: Choosing to follow Jesus can be costly, but God’s love will sustain us.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discuss Matthew 10:24–39 and become familiar with its message of costly discipleship and God’s loving grace.
- reflect upon their own call to discipleship and gracious generosity.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 10:24–39 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 86–87, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is considered Ordinary Time, Proper 7 in the Revised Common Lectionary. Invite all who would like to share their response to these questions:

- What have you given up or lost because of your commitment to take up the cross and follow Jesus?
- What have you gained from this commitment?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s passage is part of the “Missionary Discourse,” which is presented as instructions Jesus gives his disciples as he sends them out into mission. We must keep in mind the author of Matthew is writing well after the Resurrection in a time when persecution has occurred more often and intensely than the first disciples experienced. (David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 3* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011], 165). He warns them of the dangers that exist, but also comforts them with the knowledge that since God knows and cares for each one, even if they “lose their life for my sake [they] will find it.”

Verses 24–25 emphasize how the disciples’ lives parallel Jesus’, including sharing his fate and rejection, giving the example of being called Beelzebul or “ruler of the demons” (David L. Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000], 160). They must be like Jesus and in so doing, will receive the same responses. Since the original readers of Matthew had experienced persecution firsthand and already knew what Jesus had suffered, how were they to have the courage to live such a life? In groups of two or three

- share a time you showed courage when remaining faithful to Jesus.
- discuss what conditions cause people to suffer in order to remain faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Verses 26–33 show God’s love and care for all of creation. Twice, he says not to fear even the threat of death, and then assures them “even the hairs of your head are all counted.” As God knows when even a sparrow falls, he knows of the disciples’ suffering. The author also says Jesus will speak for his disciples who have been faithful with God in heaven. Ask class members to respond to one or both of the following:

- What would it take to rid you of fear of taking up the cross of Jesus?
- How does this passage speak to our Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity?

The remaining verses, 34–39, have been a stumbling block for many. They have even been used to prove Jesus supports violence. However, we must look at it as part of the whole and not take it out of context. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus definitely teaches peace and justice to the oppressed. In this passage, Jesus is trying to let his disciples know that speaking out for the marginalized and sharing the message of the gospel will not always be popular. People will get angry; they will not want to change from popular cultural beliefs. Even family members will argue with them, but they must remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus, loving no one more than him. “It is about loving more, rather than instead of, or in place of, whatever relationship we have” (*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 86). “...[I]ndividual lives, family structures, and the whole of society will thrive when the gospel’s good news is heard and embraced....Jesus is asking the faithful to keep on because of our love for him and because, in the end, it will be real and everlasting life that we find” (Bartlett and Taylor 166). Discuss the following questions in small groups of two or three and report back to the larger group.

- What were the divisive issues in Jesus’ time?
- What are some divisive issues today?
- Compare these and note how progress has occurred and what progress is still needed.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

At first glance, today’s passage seems frightening and negative. Upon closer inspection, we understand that it gives the disciples the clear facts, with no illusions of an easy path. It is clear that discipleship will be costly, and that God’s love and grace will sustain those who remain faithful. Discuss the following in small groups of two or three, or as a larger group.

- When we invite people to Christ, especially if it leads to baptism, how much of the “costly” discipleship should we share?
- What is the difference, if any, between costly discipleship and whole-life stewardship? Do expectations change when accepting a call to serve as priesthood?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

This scripture passage is comforting because many have experienced, or will experience, hardships, persecution, or alienation because of sharing the message of Jesus. It affirms God cares about each person individually and assures us of loving support and eternal life. Write or share your response to the following question.

- What is God calling me to risk at this time in my life so others might hear my testimony of the peace of Christ?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “I Have Called You by Your Name” CCS 636 as a prayer of blessing and reassurance. Close by reading the description of the Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity.

Grace and Generosity

- God’s grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.
- Having received God’s generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.
- We offer all we are and have to God’s purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 28

LESSON 31
28 June 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 8)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 10:40–42

Lesson Focus: Hospitality is at the heart of life as a disciple.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- understand that disciples represent Jesus, who represents God.
- realize the call to invitation and hospitality is for all disciples.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 10:40–42 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 88, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today’s scripture passage concludes the mission discourse as Jesus sends his disciples out to share the good news. It is a message of radical hospitality teaching that when we give and receive hospitality, we are giving and receiving Christ and God who sent him.

Sing or read together “God, We Gather as Your People” *CCS* 274.

Offer a prayer that as we gather this day, we will open our hearts, minds, and doors to everyone around us, sharing as one in God’s love.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 10:40–42 aloud.

This passage affirms the disciples are the representatives of Christ, and Christ represents God. The perspective has shifted from the Twelve, who were first sent out, to later disciples who were traveling missionaries and those settled Christians who should receive them.

“There is some question as to who is referred to by ‘prophets,’ ‘righteous,’ and ‘little ones.’ Matthew’s church included Christian prophets as a distinct class, whose ministry Matthew affirms as legitimate spokespersons for the risen Lord (here and 23:34), but whom he also regards with some hesitation (7:21–23). ‘Little ones’ does not refer literally to children, but is Matthew’s term for ‘ordinary’ Christians, equivalent here to disciples.... In Zechariah 13:7, ‘little ones’ is used as a synonym for the people of God” (Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 8* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994], 263).

It is clear that those who welcome and give nourishment to all people of God will be rewarded.

Discuss the following questions in groups of two or three or as a large group.

- Who are the people of God?
- How are you being called to represent Christ as his disciple? (For example, as one being sent, or one offering hospitality. Explain.)

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The Mission Initiative of Invite People to Christ is directly related to this scripture since it speaks of sharing the good news of Jesus. Our Enduring Principles of Blessings of Community, Grace and Generosity, and All Are Called also call us to the kind of hospitality spoken of in today’s passage. (See text below)

Form four small groups or pairs. Assign one of the following to each group or pair.

- Invite People to Christ
- Grace and Generosity
- All Are Called
- Blessings of Community

Discuss how your selected Enduring Principle or Mission Initiative can be lived in a way that is represented in the focus scripture passage. Ask one person from each group or pair to share with the class a summary of what was discussed.

- How might you live your calling of invitation and hospitality this week?
- In what ways does your congregation embody invitation in hospitality?
- What changes would allow your congregation to embody more fully invitation and hospitality as a way of being?

Matthew 10:40–42

⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ

Christ’s mission of Evangelism—sent to proclaim good news and invite others to join him in mission. The Kingdom was present in Jesus’ ministry and his disciples’ actions as described in Acts. Those first believers continued Christ’s mission by proclaiming the Living Christ, inviting all people into community,

valuing the worth of each person, generously and compassionately meeting their needs, and pursuing justice and peace for everyone.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 21–22

Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity

- God’s grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.
- Having received God’s generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.
- We offer all we are and have to God’s purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 28

Enduring Principle All Are Called

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God’s purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God’s call.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 29–30

Enduring Principle Blessings of Community

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God’s grace and each other.
- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.
- We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belonging with one another – even if we never have met.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We are called to create communities of Christ’s peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, pp. 31–32

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions, and make this part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

- To which of the above initiatives or principles do you feel especially called?
- How might you live your calling of invitation and hospitality? Be specific.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing the chorus of “God, We Gather as Your People” CCS 274 as a prayer that God will help us develop the kind of hospitality needed for the Kin-dom.

LESSON 32
5 July 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 9)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

Lesson Focus: Cultural trends often prevent disciples from understanding the message Jesus brings. The good news is that through his grace and mercy, Jesus invites us to learn from him, cast all our cares and concerns on him, and find rest.

Objectives

The learners will...

- confess times they have misunderstood the message of Jesus.
- reflect on what the message and ministry of Christ is.
- explore opportunities to yoke with Christ in ways that bring peace to others, as well as ourselves.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 89, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today’s passage speaks of being able to understand Christ’s message and finding, as well as offering, the peace it brings. Sing or read “Come Now, You Hungry” *CCS* 227. In small groups or as a larger group share your response to these questions.

- What part of this song speaks directly to you and why?
- What is the invitation for you today through the words of this song?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30.

In today’s passage Jesus is talking to the crowd. The disciples disappeared in verse one and do not reappear until chapter 12. The verses preceding today’s passage reveal John the Baptist has been imprisoned and sends messengers to ask if Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus responds they are to report what they see and hear— many people are healed, the dead raised, and the poor experience good news. He

goes on to speak good things about John and ends with “Let anyone with ears listen!” (v. 15) According to verses 16–19, it appears no one in “this generation” has ears to listen. The generation to which Jesus refers is his own; Matthew writes as though it is his [Matthew’s]; and as we read it today, it is ours.

It seems that people were criticizing both John and Jesus for opposite offenses. The verses in between the ones for today continue Jesus’ frustration with those who have rejected him and his message.

Discuss in small groups the following questions.

- What is the message of Jesus according to his response to John’s messengers?
- In what ways are disciples today listening to and living this message?

Jesus suddenly turns from the negative to the positive in verses 25–30. This section of this passage contains a prayer, a statement, and moral instruction. In the prayer, Jesus mentions the “infants,” people new in the faith. He is recognizing that there are a few people who have listened and are listening, trying to understand and follow his call. The “wise and intelligent” are the educated leaders of Israel, those who believe they have all the answers and have rejected Jesus as Messiah (Eugene Eung-Chun Park, *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 3*, eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 215–216).

Jesus remembers to give thanks to God who has revealed God’s nature and will through Christ. He closes by offering rest to those who are weary and burdened. He goes on to share that if we share his yoke, learning from him, we will find peace for our souls.

In pairs or small groups consider the following:

- Who are the “infants” in our generation, those who have listened and understood?
- Jesus offers us peace and rest for our souls. Share ways you have received, embodied, and shared the peace of Christ.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

As we cast our cares upon God, we receive rest for our souls. This brings peace to our lives, the kind of peace only God can give. Community of Christ upholds Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) as one of its Enduring Principles.

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all creation.
- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God’s peace in all aspects of life.
- The vision of Zion is to promote God’s reign on Earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God’s peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

— *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 30

Discuss:

- Which parts of today’s scripture echo this Enduring Principle?
- With whom are you or your congregation working to restore peace?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Respond to the following questions in small groups or as an entire class. Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- Do I have ears to hear? Am I listening?
- What is the meaning of God's peace in my life?
- How and with whom can I share peace and invitation this week?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Offer a closing prayer of gratitude for God's generous love and grace; and for each one to receive, embody, and share the peace of Jesus Christ.

LESSON 33
12 July 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 10)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

Lesson Focus: As disciples of Jesus we are called to share the good news as often, as widely, and as boldly as we can. We do not need to worry about how it is received, but only continue sharing the message of God’s peaceable kingdom.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on how the message of Jesus was shared with them.
- identify blessings that come from sharing and opportunities to share more.
- connect the message of this parable with Community of Christ Mission Initiatives.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 90–91, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today’s passage is the Parable of the Sower. As we prepare for our discussion, please think of those who have shared the message of Jesus with you and how they shared it. Tell your story to at least one person near you.

After everyone has shared, have someone offer a prayer that the message which came to us has fallen on good soil, bears good fruit, and will be multiplied!

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s passage is the first of eight parables, and comes directly after Jesus has been rejected by the Pharisees and his own family “culminating in the announcement of a new community of those who do God’s will and are thus Jesus’ ‘family’ (12:22–50). Immediately following the parables discourse, Jesus is rejected with hostility in his own home town (13:53–58)” (Eugene M. Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The*

People's New Testament Commentary [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 60). Craddock and others believe Matthew's purpose for placing the parables here is to separate the disciples from "the crowds" as those who have listened and heard the message of the kingdom of God.

Read Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 aloud.

This parable is called the Parable of the Sower. It could also be called the Parable of the Four Soils or the Parable of the Miraculous Yield. First let's look at the sower. Who is the sower? It could be a preacher, teacher, missionary, Jesus, or God. No matter who it is, this is the one who spreads the good news, and he or she spreads it on uncultivated soil! Even if we try, we do not really know the condition of the person (soil) with whom we are sharing. Discuss the following questions with a partner or small group and share insights with the larger group:

- Imagine you are the sower. How does it feel to scatter seeds of good news to those about whom you are unsure?
- When have you seen the good news received in "good soil" and new growth occurs? Describe this experience to others.

In verse 19, the author of Matthew refers to the seed as the good news, but in the rest of the parable, the seed refers to the "germinated disciples" who have started to grow. Considering the four soils—hardened, shallow, thorny, and good—reminds us that for developing discipleship, we must have understanding, be together in community, and persevere through hardship. We cannot control the type of soil, but we do have a responsibility to help the budding fruit. "Disciples must be prepared for persecution (troubles without), but also temptation (troubles within), especially in the form of anxious cares (see Matt. 6:25–32) and 'the lure of wealth' (v. 22)" (Gary Peluso-Verdend, *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 3*, eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 240).

Each person who responds to the good news will undergo trials, questioning, and temptations. Not everyone will persevere, but with the help of the community who has prepared a wholesome place to grow, more will be successful.

In small groups of two or three:

- share a time you spread the seed of the gospel on uncultivated ground. What was the response of the one with whom you shared?
- discuss ways your congregation helps fertilize the soil of new disciples.

The third title of this parable could be "Miraculous Yields." In first-century farming, a sevenfold yield would have been very good. In this example, three-fourths of the seeds are destroyed before they begin to sprout. Opposition in many forms may hinder our efforts as well, but the harvest comes from God. It is a hundredfold! We have little control over whether someone continues faithfully, even with our best efforts. It is God who brings in the harvest and God we must trust. It is our responsibility to spread indiscriminately, do what we can to mentor, then leave it to God to provide the growth.

Consider these questions in groups of two or three.

- When has God blessed your efforts to share the good news?
- Tell about a time you planted a seed, not knowing whether it would sprout, and much later, you were blessed by seeing positive results.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ is devoted to living Christ's mission through five Mission Initiatives. Three of them are pertinent to this scripture.

Invite People to Christ—Christ's mission of evangelism

Develop Disciples to Serve—Equip individuals for Christ's mission.

Experience Congregations in Mission—Equip congregations for Christ's mission

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 23

- How does today's scripture encourage us to engage in these initiatives?
- In what ways does your congregation engage in ministries of invitation, growing disciples, and outreach?
- Where do you see opportunities for new expressions of ministry and mission?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Respond to the following questions in groups of two or three or as a large group. Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- In what kind of soil am I planted? How am I allowing God to cultivate my discipleship?
- Taking courage and faith offered in this passage, consider opportunities this week to spread new seed or to cultivate new growth.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing or read together "In My Life, Lord" CCS 602 as a closing prayer.

LESSON 34
19 July 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 11)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Lesson Focus: Similar to wheat and tares, we live side by side with those who do not believe and uphold the same beliefs or principles. We are to live the gospel in this diversity.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discover a message of love and acceptance.
- discuss how each person is tasked with making Responsible Choices and that we all decide differently.
- understand that a loving God will make the final judgment, not us.

Supplies

- Bible
- Pens or pencils
- Breakfast muffins containing nuts, raisins, or other fruit (optional)
- Forks for each student (optional)
- *Community of Christ Sings* (if you choose not to use the muffins)

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 92, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Pass out muffins containing fruit or nuts and a fork to each person. Challenge them to remove all the fruit or nuts without crumbling the muffin. Just as this is not possible, our parable for today challenges the idea of eliminating people we have judged unworthy without destroying the kingdom.

Or read or sing “For Everyone Born” CCS 285, stanzas four and five.

Offer a prayer for loving patience as we give space for growing in God’s love.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43.

Today's scripture passage echoes the theme of the seed, but this time there are two different kinds of seeds planted and two different sowers. It takes into account that there are forces for both good and evil in the world. People have the ability to choose for themselves what they believe and how they will behave. We find good and evil in our communities, our homes, our churches, and even within ourselves. We are anxious many times to root out the evil and throw it away. Jesus' parable counsels us to be patient. Sometimes we want to decide who is worthy of God's love, but God's love is patient and inclusive. God's love frees us to love and live in peaceful community with each other. When we give time and space for diversity, we may even find that we are the ones who are mistaken. We grow in our understanding and may be reborn with Christ over and over.

Discuss in groups of two or three:

- When have you made a judgment between good and evil, right and wrong?
- Share a time when you judged another person incorrectly.

"Meanwhile, this realm is thriving in us, around us, and even, miraculously, sometimes through us, and God is pleased to let all of it 'grow together until the harvest' (v. 30)....It is toward this very God that we are forever moving—individually, collectively, and as a cosmos. On such a journey as this, it is not our job to determine who is within and who is beyond this God's attention. It is rather our job to imagine everyone as belonging to this God, and therefore, with all that we can muster, to endeavor to embrace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, God's holy and purposeful [uncertainty]" (Theodore J. Wardlaw, *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 3* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 263, 265).

In your small groups discuss the following:

- Consider those around you who have decided to follow a different path. How do you maintain a relationship of love and care with them?
- Discuss the difficulty of living in God's uncertainty, having patience and leaving judgment to God.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ upholds Responsible Choices as one of its Enduring Principles.

- God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve. Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices.
- Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.
- Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.
- We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 30

Realizing the diversity of circumstances in our lives, it is sometimes easier to understand why some people have made what we consider poor choices and have patience with them.

- How is this principle reflected in the today's scripture passage?
- How does this principle guide your whole-life response as a disciple?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

In today's scripture passage is the admonition, "Let anyone with ears listen!" (v. 43). Record responses to the following questions or share in groups of two or three.

- How can I practice active listening to God?
- What Responsible Choices do I make, or need to make, in my life as a disciple?
- How can I let go and let God when it comes to judgment?

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Turn once again to "For Everyone Born" CCS 285. Invite each person to share a phrase from stanza four or five that has special meaning.

LESSON 35
26 July 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 12)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Lesson Focus: Seeds of God’s kingdom hide in the ordinary parts of our lives, springing up and surprising us at opportune times. We must be awake and aware to be challenged by God’s nudging and bountiful inclusion. We must be willing to give up our own preconceived notions and anything else that stands in the way of the kingdom of God.

Objectives

The learners will...

- become familiar with the focus scripture passage in a new way.
- understand that God’s kingdom is worth all our earthly treasures, but is made up of common people.
- connect this scripture with Community of Christ concepts of discipleship and mission.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- (Optional) Clean 14–16 oz. cans or oat boxes and craft items such as fabric scraps, construction paper, old newspaper, glue, tape, fabric trim, etc.

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 93, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today’s passage includes parables which use ordinary things considered of little worth to teach a lesson about the value of all things. Pass out the craft supplies and spend a few minutes, individually or in groups of two or three, turning cans and oat boxes into useful items such as flower pots or holders for pencils, scissors, or mail. Then offer a prayer that we will recognize the value of all of God’s creation and how it can contribute to the kingdom.

If it is not possible to create crafts, show the class an example of something useful made from ordinary items or have the class brainstorm ideas how simple items could be used for other purposes.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Five of the six parables in today's passage begin "The kingdom is like" followed by a short description using common elements. Verses 31–33 compare the kingdom to a mustard seed and yeast.

Contrary to today, the mustard plant was not valued in first-century Palestine; it was a weed which most would pull out of their gardens. Likewise, yeast was not desirable. It was made by letting bread spoil. Not spoiled enough, it was worthless; spoiled too long, it was poisonous. "In the culture of scripture, leaven is almost universally understood as something evil or unclean" (J. David Waugh, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press], p. 287). Jesus emphasizes that something that seems small and worthless can be more valuable than we ever thought possible. What we consider junk, God considers of ultimate value. In groups of two or three discuss the following:

- Share about a time you or someone you know felt less than valued.
- Discuss the importance of recognizing worth and giftedness in yourself and others.

The next two parables (vv. 44–45) speak of the great worth of the kingdom. We may find it almost by accident, as did the farmer, or we may search high and low over a long time as the merchant. But either way, once found, it is priceless; we should be willing to give up everything else to be part of it.

- How did you learn about the kingdom? Was it by accident or did you spend years searching for it?
- What are you willing to give or give up to be part of it?

Verses 47–50 reiterate the lesson learned in previous parables. Both good and bad will be caught in the net, but it is not for us to judge the sincerity and faithfulness of others.

The last section of this passage asks about understanding. Jesus wants to be sure the disciples know there is value in both the old and the new. The wise disciple will honor the truth in both.

- What new wisdom did you find in today's passage?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ has engaged in five Mission Initiatives based on the idea that Christ's mission is our mission. Living into the kingdom as described in this scripture means we must all become disciples who, even in our limitations, can be transformed into what God has called us to be.

- Invite People to Christ—Christ's mission of evangelism
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering—Christ's mission of compassion
- Pursue Peace on Earth—Christ's mission of justice and peace
- Develop Disciples to Serve—Equip individuals for Christ's mission
- Experience Congregations in Mission—Equip congregations for Christ's mission
 - Which of these Mission Initiatives have meaning for you as they relate to today's scripture passage?

- How does the holistic nature of the Mission Initiatives represent God’s kingdom or God’s shalom?
- When have you engaged in the Mission Initiatives as a radical response to God’s call to live your faith and calling as a disciple?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Respond to the following questions in small groups of two or three or as a large group. Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- When have you realized your faith has grown in a new and unexpected way?
- In what practices can you engage that will grow the kingdom in your life?
- In what practices can your congregation engage that will grow the kingdom in your community?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing “Spirit of the Living God” CCS 567 as your closing prayer for the class. Trying to sing in different languages shows solidarity with our brothers and sisters across the globe who are striving to bring forth God’s shalom.

LESSON 36
2 August 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 13)

Focus Scripture Passage: Genesis 32:22–31

Lesson Focus: Following where God leads can be a blessing and a challenge.

Objectives

The learners will...

- identify feelings of hurt and betrayal in the scripture narrative.
- describe how God can lead us in spite of our weaknesses.
- discuss how Spirit-led experiences can change us.

Suggested Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful.

- Von Rad, Gerhard, *Genesis*, Louisville, KY; John Knox Westminster Press, 1973
- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019–2020

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or handouts of the scripture passage: Genesis 32:22–31
- Copies of *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Genesis 32:22–31 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 99–100, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Picture a time when someone you know and love did or said something to hurt you. What were your feelings? What action might have seemed reasonable and justified? Now picture yourself in the mind of the one who hurt you. What might they have been feeling at the time? What might they be feeling now, after the fact?

In today’s lectionary scripture we enter the story of Jacob and Esau, twin sons of Isaac. When Esau, the older, returned from hunting for the family and was near starvation from his time spent in the wild, he asked Jacob for food. Jacob only agreed if Esau gave him his birthright as the eldest son. That meant that Jacob would become heir to their father’s herds and wealth. To add insult to injury, their mother Rebekah favored Jacob and later on conspired with him to trick Isaac into giving him a fatherly blessing, which should have been Esau’s. This double betrayal would have severely damaged the relationship of the twin brothers.

Put yourself in Esau's place. Think about what he might have felt regarding what Jacob had done. Picture Jacob's feelings many years later when he was on a journey to meet up with his brother. What might each have done when meeting face to face after being separated from each other by distance and time?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The theory that Moses was the sole author of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Torah or Pentateuch) has largely been questioned due to what appears to be a merging of diverse strands of similar stories: some feature genealogical family trees attributed to a Priestly source (P); and some feature a mixture of what have been labeled J (Yahwist) and E (Elohist) sources based on their reference to God (Yahweh—the Y in German is a J) and Elohim. Whatever the source, the stories of ancient ancestors recorded in Genesis are a composite of legends, myths, and remembered traditions to help the Hebrews better understand God's invisible, guiding hand throughout their history. In the story of Jacob preparing to meet up with Esau after many years apart, we see how the blessing Jacob stole became legitimate as he tried to follow divine directive to return to the land of his ancestors.

Ask for three volunteers to read Genesis 32:22–31: one as the narrator, one to read Jacob's words, and one to read the part of the being with whom Jacob wrestled.

- In ancient times it was believed your name revealed who you were. What does that tell us about Jacob's new name and why it was changed? What does it reveal about the divine being refusing to be named?
- How might the wrestling incident have been a type of purification of Jacob for what was to come?
- What do you think was the effect of Jacob receiving a new name?
- What did his new name, Israel, mean throughout Hebrew history?

To learn the rest of the story, invite the class to skim through chapter 33:1–11. After two or three minutes ask for a volunteer to summarize what happened when the brothers met.

Esau was not a killer. He did not seek revenge. According to biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann, Esau broke the cycle of vengeance and offered his brother, Jacob, a covenant of peace. God was at work in both their lives (*Gift and Task*, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017], p. 74).

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Sometimes we sense God leading us to uncomfortable situations as we try to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Jacob was led to return to the land of his ancestors even though it meant he would encounter his estranged brother, Esau. In doing so he had to wrestle with an experience that helped him deepen his relationship with God. In our time, we might call it being developed as disciples to serve, one of Community of Christ's Enduring Principles.

In groups of three or four, or as a class discuss...

- a time when you felt led by the Holy Spirit in a direction that would not have been your first choice or which made you uncomfortable. What was the outcome?

- an experience you have had when you felt you were given a fresh start, much as Jacob’s new name did for him.
- a time when you struggled with what seemed to be obstacles to following where you sensed the Holy Spirit calling you.
- a time when you were on the receiving end of reconciliation.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

In this scripture passage where we have encountered Jacob’s challenges in following where God led him, we have been reminded of our own times of struggle on our discipleship journeys. This week, open yourself to trying to see the broader picture of God’s work in your life and where it might lead you in the days ahead. During the week, write down your insights as a benchmark on which to reflect in the weeks ahead.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing together “Standing on the Promises” CCS 257.

LESSON 37
9 August 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 14)

Focus Scripture Passage: Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Lesson Focus: Many times God’s guiding hand is difficult to discern.

Objectives

The learners will...

- analyze the scripture text for inter-textual discrepancies.
- identify the source(s) of interpersonal conflict in the text.
- seek for underlying nuances in the Joseph saga.
- identify connections between the scripture and their own personal and congregational experiences.

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or handouts of the scripture passage: Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 101–102, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

This week’s focus scripture is set a generation after the one we explored last week. Jacob, who was now named Israel, had settled back in the land that his father, Isaac, had inhabited and fathered a large family there. The youngest son, Joseph, became Israel’s favorite, much to the frustration of Joseph’s older brothers.

Briefly discuss an incident you remember with a sibling or other family member where it seemed one of you was favored over the other. What were your feelings?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The saga of the history of the Hebrews becoming God’s people continues in this narrative. There are points in the narrative that set Israel’s sons at odds with each other.

Some scholars have seen evidence of different writers in this text. In vv. 1–4 a conflict is told that stems from Israel showing his favor for Joseph through the gift of a coat with long sleeves (or sometimes

translated as a variegated coat, which is how it morphed into a coat of many colors). The coat style indicated it was not something Joseph would have worn working in the fields. Rather, it was a garment worn by a person of privilege. But in vv. 12–28, there is reference to a different source of conflict where Joseph was viewed as a “dreamer,” which infuriated his brothers (vv. 5–11).

Ask for a volunteer to read Genesis 37:1–4. Listen for the family dynamics that occurred.

Briefly summarize these key points in vv. 5–11 to lay the groundwork for the next section in the text.

- Joseph had dreams he interpreted, elevating him above his brothers.
- Instead of just pondering them, he told them about what he dreamed and what he thought the dreams meant. This sparked jealousy among his brothers.

Discuss:

Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Only when it [a dream] is expressed, only when it is told, does the prophecy contained in the dream become potent” (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973], 353).

As you read vv. 12–28, listen again for the family dynamics. These verses might show natural and logical consequences of Joseph’s behavior. Ask class members to listen for clues to what happened next in light of that concept. Also suggest they listen for anything that seems inconsistent in the narrative.

Have class members read vv. 12–28, one verse each, round-robin style.

- In what way were ripples from the Jacob/Israel story still being felt?
- What seems inconsistent in these verses? (Was Joseph given or sold to the Ishmalites or the Gideonites?)
- What might account for this potential discrepancy? (different sources from the oral tradition)
- In this section what was the basis for Joseph’s older brothers’ animosity?
- The older brothers did something to deceive their father. In what way is that a continuation of the consequences of the unjust actions of Jacob?
- What generalities can you draw from human behavior in this narrative?
- Where was God in the larger story?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The Joseph saga is told in scripture in such a way that the story itself seems to dominate, not the underlying journey of a people who struggled in their understanding of the ways of God.

- Tell why you agree or disagree with the statement above.
- What do you see in your own journey as a people in Community of Christ that perhaps parallels Joseph and his brothers’ blindness concerning God’s direction?
- What could we do as individuals and as a faith community to open ourselves to discerning the Holy Spirit as it leads us?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

While it is true that God can use anything for good, as ultimately happened in the rest of the saga of Joseph, be alert for situations this week where a kind word, a compassionate response, or perhaps a gentle intervention might defuse a hurtful or hateful situation. Also be mindful of being intentional about engaging in a spiritual practice to open your heart and mind to what God is doing in your life.

Ask class members to share briefly one spiritual practice that they find most helpful.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Ask class members to repeat each phrase after you.

God is good.

God draws us closer if we allow it.

God helps us turn away anger.

God leads us into a hopeful future.

LESSON 38
16 August 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 15)

Focus Scripture Passage: Genesis 45:1–15

Lesson Focus: God desires that all humankind be reconciled to each other and to divinity.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the Joseph saga.
- discuss key theological points.
- devise a strategy to foster reconciliation.
- make a commitment to become people of the Temple.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful.

- *International Bible Commentary*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998)
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or handouts of the scripture passage: Genesis 45:1–15
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Pre-made bookmarks, one for each class member, with Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a printed on them.
- 3 x 5 note cards, one for each class member
- Pencils or pens
- Bell or chime

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Genesis 45:1–15 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 103, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Last week we explored how and why Joseph ended up being forcibly removed from his family by his older brothers. As it turned out, he was transported to Egypt and eventually became a trusted official for the Egyptian king. His ability to dream and interpret the dreams, which landed him in so much trouble with his brothers earlier, was an asset that benefited the Egyptian people and led to their preparedness to thrive during years of famine.

Today we'll explore the second act of this saga.

- Without looking at the scripture, what do you recall was the next part of the story?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The last part of the scripture story in Genesis contains a narrative about a lack of rainfall that had caused a famine in many of the lands of the Middle East. Joseph had been estranged from his family for several years, but during the famine his father heard that grain was available in Egypt and sent Joseph's brothers there to seek help, not knowing that Joseph was there. They were led to the man serving as a King-appointed governor in charge of storehouses of food for people and animals. They did not recognize that he was their brother Joseph.

When Joseph saw his brothers, whom he recognized, he treated them like strangers. Joseph accused them of being spies from Canaan and ordered them jailed. He ordered several other things to happen, some of which were cruel to his brothers, such as planting one of his possessions in the bags of grain he sold them, and then accusing them of theft.

Joseph had a change of heart when his brother Judah made a plea that Benjamin, Joseph's full brother by the same mother, be allowed to return home to their father Isaac who was still grieving Joseph's disappearance and presumed death. This is where we begin today's part of the saga.

Have volunteers read Genesis 45:1–15 allowing each person to read a verse.

- Which verses do you think carry the primary theological message? (vv. 4–8)
- What do you think is that message? (think of the great overarching story of God's action in forming a people)
- Describe what you think led to Joseph and his brothers achieving reconciliation.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

We have seen the hurt on both sides of Joseph's relationship with his brothers. It led to decisions that damaged all of them; yet reconciliation occurred, and relationships were healed.

Think about situations you have experienced or observed when families or friends suffered broken relationships.

- Tell how you have experienced reconciliation.
- Explore the challenges congregations face when people hurt each other. What are concrete ways of offering the ministry of reconciliation?

Distribute 3 x 5 note cards and pencils or pens and ask class members to write down one action idea that they could do to foster reconciliation within relationships in the congregation or with family.

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Distribute the bookmarks printed with Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a.

Become a people of the Temple—those who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation, who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing.

Ask class members to reflect silently on the text printed on the bookmark for a minute, and at the sound of the chime or bell, be ready to share one phrase telling of their commitment to become that kind of person. (For example: I will try to see with new eyes, or I will try to be more forgiving.)

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing or read together “O May Your Church Build Bridges” *CCS 224*.

LESSON 39
23 August 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 16)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 1:8—2:10

Lesson Focus: Small acts of courageous people can have a big impact.

Objectives

The learners will...

- identify a new insight to a familiar scripture story.
- discuss parallels in contemporary times.
- discuss the impact people who work for the greater good can have.
- strategize something they or the congregation could do to address the Mission Initiative Abolish Poverty, End Suffering.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful:

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles (NRSV) or handouts of Exodus 1:8—2:10
- Flip chart, chalkboard, or dry erase board
- 3 x 5 cards, one for each class member
- Pencils or pens

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 1:8—2:10 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 104, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

The book of Genesis (meaning origin) lays out two main themes: the primeval saga of creation and the dramatic story of God’s dealings with the world. It particularly follows God working with one familial line who would develop a relationship with God that would benefit other people.

Today we will begin exploring the book of Exodus, which picks up the overarching story. Descendants of Joseph had settled in Egypt and become prolific, which resulted in imperial Egyptian dynasties becoming fearful of them, forcing them into harsh labor and trying to control their population growth.

Read or sing stanza 1 of “A Mother Lined a Basket” CCS 239.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s scripture passage tells a story most of us have heard many times. Sometimes it is difficult to see or hear something new in what is familiar. As the scripture is read, listen carefully for a word or phrase that affects you and be ready to tell about it.

Ask for volunteers to read the scripture (Exodus 1:8—2:10) in the following manner.

- King of Egypt
- Midwife
- Daughter of Pharaoh
- Sister of the baby
- Two narrators (one reads all verses not in quotes in chapter 1 beginning with verse 8; the other reads the same in chapter 2, vv. 1–10)

Discuss:

- What word or phrase stood out to you?
- What new insight did you gain?

Rapid population growth of the alien Hebrews caused the Egyptian ruler to become fearful of their numbers and the possible consequences of having more Hebrews than Egyptians in the country. In the midst of the plan to make life harsh for the Hebrews and to forcibly limit their population growth, one segment of the population resisted.

Discuss:

- Who resisted? Why?
- Ask for a volunteer to reread stanza 1 of CCS 239 again.
- What were the consequences of their actions?
- How do you see God at work?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

In our contemporary world there are echoes of some of the same fears felt by the Egyptian king.

Discuss:

- Name a situation in today’s world that reflects fear of others, particularly aliens.
- Identify injustices observed in those situations.
- List actions people have taken to restore justice.
- Which Mission Initiative(s) speak(s) to this issue?

- Invite People to Christ
 - Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
 - Pursue Peace on Earth
 - Develop Disciples to Serve
 - Experience Congregations in Mission
- What do you think you as individuals or your congregation can do to practice the Mission Initiatives?
 - Use a chalkboard, dry erase board, or flip chart to record comments and brainstorm practical ideas that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Distribute 3 x 5 note cards and pencils or pens and ask class members to write one of the action ideas with which they connect.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Allow a minute or two for class members to reflect silently on the idea they have written on the card. Invite them to jot down notes about action steps they could personally do to make that idea happen.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer for guidance and courage to be about the mission of Jesus Christ.

LESSON 40
30 August 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 17)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 3:1–15

Lesson Focus: All are called; God chooses some for a divine commission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the narrative of Moses as an adult that led to his first experience on the mountain.
- describe theophany.
- compare Moses' calling to our personal experiences of being called.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful:

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles (NRSV) or handouts of Exodus 3:1–15

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 3:1–15 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 105, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Last week we began our exploration of the book of Exodus. We reviewed events surrounding the birth of Moses and discussed who the people were who protected him. The compilers of the book of Exodus used bits and pieces of stories of ancestors and history to trace a pattern that revealed God's divine presence in choosing people to assist in God's work of liberating, preserving and molding a people of God, as God had promised.

Today we will remember the call of the unlikely hero, Moses, to be an agent of liberation.

Sing the swing version of “When Israel Was in Egypt's Land” *CCS* 294, or sing or read stanza 1 of *CCS* 293.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Briefly review the narrative (summarized below) that leads up to today's scripture in Exodus 1:8—2:10.

Moses grew up as a privileged member of the Egyptian ruler's family but also had been brought up to know his own people, the Hebrews. One day he saw firsthand how terrible was their oppression, and he committed murder to protect some of his people. That made his own people afraid of him. But he also ended up in trouble with Pharaoh (that is what the J source called him; see lesson 36 for background information) and fled to the land of Midian. He continued to act to intervene where he saw injustice, and the result was an invitation to dwell with a priest and his daughters, one of whom was given to him in marriage. He lived in Midian with his family for many years.

Finally, the King of Egypt (the title used by the E source) who had sought to have Moses killed died. But the Hebrews continued to be severely oppressed and cried out to God for help. It was at this point that Moses reentered the story.

Ask class members to briefly tell what they remember about Moses' experience as a shepherd for his father-in-law when he took the flock beyond the wilderness to a mountain.

After hearing a few responses, invite class members to compare what they remember to the scripture itself as it is read.

Recruit three volunteers to read Exodus 3:1–15.

Narrator (all the verses not in quotes)

Moses

The Lord, God

Discuss:

- What is the first thing that stood out to you when hearing this text today? Why?
- The burning bush was a theophany (a manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses). Why would Moses have reacted with fear?
- What was the divine commission that Moses was given?
- This is the first time God's name "I Am" is used. In a world where multiple gods were worshiped, discuss the significance of "I Am."
- What is the primary theme of this text? How was it a continuation of the compiled story affirming God's covenant with the Hebrew ancestors to be a people with a purpose and to be a people of the land of promise?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Being called by God to mission, in whatever form that might be, may stir up emotional reactions, both positive and negative. In the next chapters of Exodus, which you might want to read this week, we learn that Moses was reluctant to tackle the job and offered many excuses for not accepting it.

Discuss:

- Tell about an experience you had when you were asked to take on a task that you felt was too hard or too far outside your comfort zone.
- If you have received a priesthood call, tell about your initial reaction to that call.
- Moses was summoned into divine presence unexpectedly. How might we better prepare for such encounters with the Triune God?
- The authors of Exodus tell a story to shape a people in faith and commitment. How do you see that happening in Community of Christ today?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

One of Community of Christ's Enduring Principles is All Are Called. As you think about today's scripture text, put yourself in Moses' sandals. If you were called as he was, what would be your answer? Briefly explore that question with one other person.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing or read "The Summons" CCS 586.

LESSON 41

6 September 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 18)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 12:1–14

Lesson Focus: We respond to God’s generous grace to humankind by keeping such experiences alive in our collective memory.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the account in Exodus of the Passover experience as told by compilers of the narrative.
- compare rituals, rites, and liturgies of creating conditions of remembrance that seem similar in contemporary times to that of the first Passover.
- create a meaningful ordinance of remembrance for the congregation.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful:

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 421
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles (NRSV) or printouts of Exodus 12:1–14
- Paper
- Pencils or pens

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 12:1–14 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 106–107, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

The term passover can bring to mind several things. Perhaps when you were a child, being passed over usually meant that you didn’t get picked for some team or group. That is a negative connotation for the term.

Today’s focus scripture is often hard to get a handle on because it seems to portray God as a vengeful being rather than the source of love and mercy that we’ve come to identify. However, when the text is viewed from the perspective of the people it was forming into God’s people chosen for the greater good of humankind, the term passover meant something positive and also sheds a different light on God.

Briefly discuss what class members recall about the Exodus account of the Passover.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Invite several class members to read the focus scripture passage aloud, using Bibles or handouts of the scripture.

You have most likely learned at some point that the first five books in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) were a compilation of stories and myths from an ancient oral tradition. Many scholars feel that certain strands can be traced to people who put the stories together and that they did it for a purpose.

One strand has been labeled P for the Priestly tradition, which tended to relate genealogical and cultic information. The J (Yahwistic) strand often referred to God as Yahweh, and the E (Elohistic) strand, tended to refer to God as Elohim. Today's focus scripture is thought to be from the P or Priestly strand because it takes what was a nomadic feast or cultic tradition and reinterpreted it.

The ancient semi-nomadic tribes celebrated a feast in the spring when sheep and goats gave birth. The food mentioned in Exodus 12:8–9 suggests what shepherds would have had: unleavened bread, just a cooking fire without pots, and desert plants for spices. In addition, they had a tradition of smearing blood on their tent posts from animals they killed for food. They believed this would prevent the destroyer from striking down the tribe and the herd animals about to be born.

In the context of the focus scripture, the feast was reinterpreted to tie into the tenth plague in Egypt, the plague of death to firstborn humans and animals. To the priestly compilers of the story, the meaning of Passover that they wished to convey was that God would spare them as a chosen people. If the Hebrews took blood of the young lamb they were instructed to kill for their feast and smeared it on specific parts of their dwellings, they would be protected when the destroyer came. They understood it to be God who would pass over their households, sparing them and their flocks from death.

Discuss:

- Name rituals or superstitions and what they are supposed to do to provide safety or prevent calamity.
- The compilers of this part of the exodus story used a known cultic feast as a means to convey a truth about God's watch care. How might the contemporary examples named earlier be seen in a similar positive light?
- Share a time when you felt God's watch care on your behalf.

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The last verse of today's focus scripture sets up a perpetual observance of this festival as a day of remembrance. It was to be a festival to the Lord to be celebrated throughout the Hebrew generations to come, a reminder that God had and would continue to watch over and protect them.

Discuss:

- What in our faith tradition might be similar to the feast/festival of Passover? Why?
- What might be the value of having an ordinance of remembrance for future generations of some special event?

Hand out paper and pencils or pens. In groups of 3–4, or as a class, create a new ordinance of remembrance, perhaps commemorating something significant in the life of your congregation, mission center, or the World Church. Write down the ideas. Be prepared to share: 1) the reason you chose your idea, 2) the type of remembrance ritual or action that you chose and why you created it, and 3) how you envision it will help participants acknowledge God’s grace and generosity.

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

As a class strategize a way to implement at least one of the ordinances of remembrance that was created. Determine steps needed to refine the idea, whom to consult about implementing it, and whom to recruit to facilitate it. Keep in mind that the objective would be to acknowledge God’s grace and generosity.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “I Know Not What the Future Hath” CCS 246.

LESSON 42

13 September 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 19)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 14:19–31

Lesson Focus: God alone offers salvation and desires for all to be free.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the Exodus story of crossing the Red or Reed Sea.
- identify aspects of historical fiction in the narrative.
- discuss how God is represented in the text.
- explore the correlation of the text with Christian baptism and God’s saving grace.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful:

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 425
- *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 328–333
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Exodus 14:19–31
- Flip chart, chalkboard, or dry erase board and markers or chalk
- 3 x 5 note cards, one per class member
- Pencils or pens

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 14:19–31 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, p. 108, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

In the 1956 Technicolor movie *The Ten Commandments*, viewers saw a literal interpretation of many parts of the exodus story of the Israelites escaping from Egypt. For any who saw the film, the scene of Moses raising his staff to part the waters of the sea to allow passage to the other side for the terrified Israelites was unforgettable.

Ask for a volunteer to recount what they remember about how the scripture portrays the parting of the sea and this part of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Using Bibles or scripture handouts, read the focus scripture aloud together in unison.

There is some conjecture that the sea that was referenced was a reed sea, a place of fairly shallow water. A windstorm could have dispersed the shallow water, which would have allowed passage on foot for humans and herds across the boggy area. However, heavier chariots would have become mired.

Discuss:

- How does this interpretation impact your view of this text?
- Tell why you agree or disagree that this text could be read as historical fiction; that is, the authors conveyed truth through a story.

Ask class members to think about what they feel are the main points the authors of the text were making. Using a chalkboard, dry erase board, or flip chart, write the ideas as they are shared.

Ask class members to think about what parts of the text seem problematic to our view of God. Write brief summarizing statements of their comments.

Discuss:

- How can you explain the manner in which God is represented?
- What are the positives in this narrative?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

When viewed through the lens of Christianity, the crossing of the reed sea has been likened to baptism. Also, it can be said that the Israelites experienced salvation when they crossed. But all was not smooth sailing afterward. They would encounter periods of doubt and fear as they journeyed on.

Discuss:

- How is the experience of Christian baptism similar to crossing the sea?
- In what way are the struggles Christians experience following baptism similar to what the Israelites experienced in the wilderness?
- Ultimately, what or who saved the Israelites?
- What does that tell us about our belief that we can be self-made people?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

At the heart of this story is the liberation of an oppressed people. Briefly discuss signs you see that God is still at work liberating the oppressed.

Hand out 3 x 5 note cards and pencils or pens. Write something you could do this week to assist God in God's work of freeing the oppressed. Think of something specific and realistic.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer that class members will be blessed with courage this week in acting on their idea on behalf of God's love for those who are oppressed.

LESSON 43

20 September 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 20)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 16:2–15

Lesson Focus: God is benevolent in feeding us physically and spiritually.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the narrative of manna in the desert.
- discuss Jesus as the bread of life.
- discern God’s benevolence and generosity in our time.
- explore the contemporary call to be a covenant people.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful:

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 426
- *Feasting on the Word, Year B*, Volume 3, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 290–295.
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019-2020.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Exodus 16:2–15

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 16:2–15 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 109–110, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Think of a time when you experienced receiving the gift of generosity in any form. Think about how and why that occurred. Briefly share with one other person what you recall about that experience.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's focus scripture passage is one of those familiar texts about which we may have preconceived ideas. When we read it or hear it, it may bring to mind images of fearful people wandering in a wilderness, worried about the next meal, regretting having left the familiar life, even if was a life of servitude. In this text the Israelites were discouraged and upset and needed help. God responded.

Ask for a few volunteers to read Exodus 16:2–15 aloud while others follow along in Bibles or the printed handout.

Discuss:

- We may judge those wandering Israelites rather harshly for what seems to be their doubt about the future the farther they traveled from Egypt. What might be a different interpretation of what they were experiencing?
- According to the scripture, what was the test God gave to the people? Why?
- In what way was God's plan of salvation at work among the Israelites?
- Why does it seem we need constant reminders of the goodness of God?
- In Christianity, Jesus has been called the bread of life. How does that relate back to what is conveyed in this narrative?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

The testing part of the narrative (when God instructed how and when to gather quail and manna and to take only what they needed) was a type of loose covenant. It foreshadowed what would become the covenant at Mt. Sinai.

In our contemporary lives we may not think much about covenant, other than the one we make at baptism. Consider the following selected verses from modern-day counsel found in Doctrine and Covenants 164:9 (emphasis added).

Beloved children of the Restoration...by the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church.

When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to **God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.**

This **covenant entails sacramental living** that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

Discuss:

- The Doctrine and Covenant text names a covenant of peace in Jesus Christ. What do you think that means?

- How might God generously bless us when we wholeheartedly respond to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God’s covenant of peace in Jesus Christ?
- How has God already blessed you in your attempts to respond?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Susan E. Vande Kappelle has written that “God’s benevolence never ends. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to provide the power for people to believe and the impetus to share the knowledge they have received...the Spirit informs the believers, nourishes and sustains them with the bread of life, and sends them into the world with the knowledge of the bounty of God’s goodness that can be shared with others” (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 3*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 294).

God sent quail and manna to feed the Israelites on their journey. The Holy Spirit has been sent to spiritually feed us on our journey of discipleship.

Invite class members to take one minute to silently think about how they have experienced God’s benevolence when open to being fed by the Holy Spirit. Ask them to talk with one other person about how they can share that knowledge so that others might in turn become aware of God’s blessings in their own lives.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

The Communion hymn “In These Moments We Remember” CCS 515 captures the essence of being fed by spiritual manna. Invite the class to read or sing it together.

LESSON 44

27 September 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 21)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 17:1–7

Lesson Focus: It is likely that each person likely encounter spiritual dry spells in his or her life that can be quenched by seeking the living water of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the focus scripture passage.
- compare the experience of the Israelites needing helpful intervention with their own experiences in difficult times.
- create a plan to actively seek to draw closer to the source of living water.

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful.

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 426–427
- *Feasting on the Word, Year A*, Volume 3, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 73–79
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019–2020

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Exodus 17:1–7 for each class member
- Chalkboard, flip chart, or dry erase board; chalk or markers
- Bookmarks, one for each class member (Print the following verse of scripture on one side of the bookmark: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink” John 7:37b, 38a.)
- Pencils or pens
- Small paper cups (4-ounce work well)
- Covered pitcher(s) of clean drinking water

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 17:1–7 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 111–112, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Toward the top of the worshiper’s path in the Temple in Independence, Missouri, just before passing the fountain of living water, is a sculpture called *Dark Night of the Soul*. The focus of the sculpture is a person

shown in agonizing suffering. Is it from grief? Is it from a crisis of belief? Is it from feeling abandoned by God? Each person who passes the sculpture is able to interpret it in light of their own personal experience.



In today's focus scripture passage, the wilderness-wandering Israelites have come to the end of the line emotionally and physically, in what for them was a dark night of the soul. The place they've stopped to rest had no source of water or food for them or their herds, and they complained bitterly to Moses about it. They wondered once again if God was truly with them on the arduous journey toward the land promised to them. Hardship and apparent deprivation fostered doubt.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Before exploring the scripture, it would help to learn about a few of the terms used. The “wilderness of sin” is thought to mean an area near Mt. Sinai and not a reference to a place where people fell into sinful behavior. Moses called the place where he was instructed to strike a rock for water Massah, which meant place of testing, and Meribah, place of quarreling. As we read the scripture, listen for the words Massah and Meribah to figure out the context of those terms.

Distribute Bibles or scripture handouts.

Ask for volunteers to read Exodus 17:1–7 as drama.

The people (all class members)

Moses

The Lord

Narrator (read everything not in quotes)

Discuss:

- Whom did the people complain about? With whom were they really upset?
- What was Moses' response?
- What was the significance of naming the place Massah and Meribah?
- Where was God in the narrative?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Sometimes each of us has probably felt like the Israelites, wondering where God is when we encounter roadblocks as we journey through life. Sometimes we probably feel like Moses, particularly if we serve in a leadership capacity in the congregation.

Discuss:

- Explore why you think it seems to be human nature to doubt that God is present when difficulties are encountered. Why do we tend to blame others?
- What might be a strategy to strengthen the spiritual connection between us and our creator, a connection to sustain us through the inevitable hardships we will face?
- Using the flip chart, dry erase board, or chalkboard, list ways class members suggest they might be able to quench their thirst for a closer relationship with God. Remind them that spiritual disciplines would be a good place to start.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Distribute bookmarks and pens or pencils. Ask class members to use the blank side to write an idea or a spiritual discipline they will commit to implementing in the next week as a means of “drinking living water.”

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Place a small paper cup in front of each class member. Pour drinking water into the paper cups.

Explain that the clean water you have provided them to drink is a reminder that God is always present and can quench our thirst when we become parched from the daily challenges we each face. Christians refer to Jesus as the living water. Invite class members to take and drink, accepting the symbolic presence of God through Jesus Christ as living water in their lives.

LESSON 45
4 October 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 22)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20

Lesson Focus: God desires right relationships with human beings and among humans, and has graced humankind with a pattern for living to enable that to happen.

Objectives

The learners will...

- compare what they remember to be the Ten Commandments with the words recorded in the focus scripture passage.
- explore the concept of two types of teachings split between a focus on God and a focus on neighbor and family.
- discuss the concepts in the focus scripture in correlation to the Enduring Principle Responsible Choices.
- create a personal affirmation for each of the ten teachings (commandments).

Resources

For background into Old Testament scripture the following resources may be helpful.

- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 429–430
- *Feasting on the Word, Year B*, Volume 2, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 74–79
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019–2020

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20.
- Chalkboard, flip chart, or dry erase board; markers or chalk
- Handouts with the Ten Commandments in one column and space to write in a parallel column; alternatively, use blank paper
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 113–114, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today's focus scripture from Exodus narrates God's instructions to the Israelites during the time they camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. This narrative tells about Moses receiving a set of instructions or teachings (which is what Torah means).

Ask class members to name what they remember among the instructions Moses received on Mt. Sinai to relay to the Israelites. List them on a flip chart, chalkboard, or dry erase board.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Distribute Bibles or copies of Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20. Ask for a few volunteers to read the scripture aloud.

Scholars have suggested there were two tablets: one dealt with theological issues, the other with ethical issues. Both were deemed important and interrelated. Both presupposed a history of a covenantal life before God.

Discuss:

- What has the focus of this scripture usually been named? (The Ten Commandments)
- Compare the list created earlier with the scripture text. What are the differences between the two?
- Which teachings can be thought of as theological? Which ones are ethical in nature?
- What short phrase can summarize each set of teachings? (One example: how to live before God; how to live with one another)
- When Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment, how did he unite the teachings on the two tablets?
- Why would it be wrong to consider the teachings as simply a moral code?
- In what way are the teachings a protection for the community?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing

(35% of lesson time)

These teachings describe a way of life. They are not a means to earn God's love or a ticket to salvation. They are a gift from God to help us pattern our lives to honor God and respect each other.

Sometimes, those simple but profound truths are lost in the thunder of cultural arguments about keeping the Ten Commandments visible in public settings.

Discuss:

- What might be an issue when folks display placards advocating postings of the Ten Commandments in county courthouses or public schools?

- What principle of the teachings or commandments might that violate?
- How is posting them different from practicing them?
- Explore this quote: "...Christians recite the Commandments and teach them to their children in order to know how to live as God's people. This way of understanding the Ten Commandments suggests they are not so much a list of moral imperatives as they are ways of living or forms of life" (George W. Stroup as found in *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 78).
 - What do you think that means for you today?
 - How might this interpretation assist in living by the Enduring Principle Responsible Choices?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Distribute pens or pencils and handouts printed in two columns: one column with a list of the 10 teachings/commandments and opposite it in a second column space for writing personal responses; or alternatively, use blank paper for personal responses, using as a reference the focus scripture handout that lists the 10 teaching/commandments.

Invite class members to rewrite each of the teachings/commandments as an affirmation of their response. For example: I will let God alone influence my life (not other gods such as electronics, golf, security, etc.). If time is limited, suggest they complete the task at home and encourage them to do so.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Invite class members to join in a "popcorn" prayer with their eyes closed. Explain that you will begin and end the prayer and in between they are encouraged to say a short phrase in random order to add to the prayer. Focus the prayer on thanksgiving and praise for a God who provides directions for living.

LESSON 46

11 October 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 23)

Focus Scripture Passage: Exodus 32:1–14

Lesson Focus: Humans struggle at times to remain faithful to God.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore different interpretations of the scripture passage.
- discuss what might be seen as taking us away from God.
- reflect on how to become right with God.

Resources

- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament III—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 139–142
- *International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 438–439
- Any lectionary commentary series for Year A, 2019–2020

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Exodus 32:1–14
- Chalkboard, flip chart, or dry erase board; chalk or markers
- 3 x 5 note cards or pieces of paper
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Exodus 32:1–14 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: Old Testament*, pp. 115–116, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Picture the Israelites camped at the base of Mt. Sinai, where they were still being fed manna each morning and quail each evening, where they were resting after an arduous and at times frightening journey toward a destination as yet unknown. What might they have been feeling? Exhaustion? Uncertainty? Impatience?

Now picture them with those feelings just biding their time waiting for Moses, the leader who has gotten them this far, missing in action. He is somewhere up on the mountain. But he’s been gone several days. Anything could have happened to him. Is he even alive? Has he abandoned them? Should they seek a new leader?

Consider the focus scripture passage with those questions in mind. Try to imagine yourself among the Israelites. What would you be thinking?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Distribute Bibles or copies of the focus scripture passage.

Ask for volunteers to read Exodus 32:1–14 as noted below.

People (all class members)

Aaron

The Lord

Moses

Narrator (everything not in quotes)

Some scholars believe that this narrative points to the people’s deep-seated assimilation into the Egyptian culture, which included the worship of gods. All along their wilderness journey the Lord God had been working with them to lead them into becoming a people of covenant with the one true God. But when times got tough and doubt and impatience set in, they reverted back to the paganism they had left behind.

Write the following five points on a chalkboard, flip chart, or dry erase board as you introduce them.

Ancient Christian commentary on scripture offers these ideas about this text:

- Self-indulgence leads to idolatry.
- God allows us the chance to intercede.
- Persistence in prayer is a good thing.
- The spirit must be added to the letter of the law.
- Idolaters can be converted and become part of Christ’s body.

Discuss:

- Explore each of the statements above in relation to this scripture. What strikes you as a new way of interpreting the text? Why?
- Which of the statements from ancient Christian commentary connects with you personally? Why?
- What might be some of the “golden calves” in our current cultural climate?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Sometimes people in our faith community may feel a bit like the Israelites when it seems the church isn’t moving quickly enough to follow the counsel to pursue peace, justice, and reconciliation in the broader cultural context. Others feel the opposite: the church is moving too fast.

Discuss:

- Explore ways to discern where God is leading faithful followers.
- What are ways to deal positively with doubts, fears, and uncertainties that we as a faith community are moving too fast or too slow?
- When we fall prey to distancing ourselves from God, for whatever reason, how might we renew our covenant to be disciples?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

This scripture is often a focus during the Lenten season. It helps direct our thinking about how we have made choices that take us away from the God who yearns for a covenant relationship with each of us and leads us to repent (turn toward God).

Even now, in this lectionary season of Ordinary Time, this scripture can help us reorient to the Triune God and God's ways and help us turn away from those things, such as self-made idols that consume our time and attention, that lead us away; in other words, to put into practice the Enduring Principle Making Responsible Choices.

Distribute 3 x 5 note cards or sheets of paper along with pens/pencils. Invite class members to write down one thing that may be like an idol in their lives, consuming time and attention that could be redirected toward strengthening their covenant relationship with God. Then encourage them to write down what they plan to do to change.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Invite class members to repeat the following phrases as you read stanza two of the hymn, "Lord, Lead Me by Your Spirit" CCS 209.

You're ever true and faithful (*pause for class to repeat it*)

in meeting all my need. (*pause*)

I barely comprehend you; (*pause*)

I often am afraid. (*pause*)

Enable me to seek you (*pause*)

with all my heart and mind,

and to find the reassurance (*pause*)

in the mystery you are. (*pause*)

—Eric L. Selden, ©1980 Community of Christ

LESSON 47
18 October 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 24)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:15–22

Lesson Focus: Respond to God’s grace and generosity.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discuss Jesus’ teaching of giving to “Caesar” versus giving to God.
- examine the implications of God’s Grace and Generosity.
- consider individual and collective response of time, talent, treasure, and testimony.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bible
- Doctrine and Covenants

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 22:15–22 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 107–108, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Consider the images of God as Isaiah 45:5–7 (*The Message, paraphrased*) is read aloud:

I, GOD, the God of Israel, call you by your name.

I’ve singled you out, called you by name,

and given you this privileged work. And you don’t even know me!

I am GOD, the only God there is.

Besides me there are no real gods.

I’m the one who armed you for this work,

though you don’t even know me,

So that everyone, from east to west, will know

that I have no god-rivals.

I am GOD, the only God there is.

I form light and create darkness,

I make harmonies and create discords.

I, GOD, do all these things.

- What images speak to you?
- Share a statement of praise to God.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 22:15–22 (NRSV).

Jews in first-century Palestine paid many different taxes. The tax referred to in this lesson was an imperial tax paid to support the Roman occupation of Israel. The political faction that followed Herod were known as Herodians. This group of Herod supporters included some Jews who opposed Jesus and believed the tax was necessary to support the governance over Israel. The Pharisees, political foes of Herod and leaders in the Jewish community, found the tax offensive and a constant reminder of their humiliation. From their point of view, the tax paid for their oppression by the Romans. Paying the required tax with a coin engraved with a picture of Caesar of Tiberias caused them to break the commandment of loyalty to God alone.

The question posed was intended to trap Jesus. Agreeing to pay taxes to the emperor would put him in danger with the Jewish religious community while advocating against the tax would put him in jeopardy with the Roman government.

Jesus' response to the question caused hearers to think more deeply. Following the law of the land while also following God's law is a universal concern today. In small groups or in a larger group, respond to the following questions.

- What belongs to governments?
- What belongs to God?
- Identify challenges in the world today in which the actions of a government conflict with the teachings of Christ.
- To whom do you belong?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

God is the center of life. All that we are, all that we have, belong to God. God's unconditional grace and generosity call us to respond by giving and receiving generously. Doctrine and Covenants 163:9 counsels:

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint. Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests. Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return. Could it be otherwise in the domain of God, who eternally gives all for the sake of creation?

Giving is often easier than receiving. Discuss how generosity can flow both to and from disciples. What barriers prevent generous giving? What barriers prevent generous receiving?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Consider the following questions.

- What are some examples of God's abundant generosity in your life?
- What is a new way you might respond to God's generosity?

Be assured of God's abundant and unconditional love for you. Share of God's love for someone this week.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing "Can We Calculate Our Giving?" CCS 617, stanza one.

Offer a closing prayer for courage to live in God's love.

LESSON 48
25 October 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 25)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:34–46

Lesson Focus: Love as God loves.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Jesus' identification of the greatest commandments.
- understand the principles of worthiness and All Are Called.
- deepen their commitment to love as God loves.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bible

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 22:34–46 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 109, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read aloud Doctrine and Covenants 163:10 a, b.

Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened.

Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the One who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your Eternal Creator with open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. Be vulnerable to divine grace.

Spend a few minutes of quiet meditation on this message of God's love. How does it speak to you? Share your thoughts with one other person in the class.

Have a class member offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's love.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 22:34–46 (NRSV).

The Sadducees and Pharisees continually questioned Jesus in an effort to trap him. The Sadducees were aristocrats, the ruling elite who focused more on politics than religion. They were religiously conservative and literalists of the written word. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were middle class business men and more connected with the common man. They gave equal authority to oral tradition and the written word and expected strict adherence to laws as tradition demanded.

Following an encounter where Jesus confounded the Sadducees, the Pharisees approached him. In response to their query as to which was the greatest commandment, Jesus silenced their attempted entrapment by reciting passages from the Torah, the Jewish sacred text. The commandments are summed up, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5) and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

To love God means to love God’s people. The biblical definition of love (agape) is mercy and loving kindness shown by patience and generosity. It is active response to God’s unconditional love. Even as God chooses to love us, we choose to love our neighbor. It is not always easy to love a neighbor who is a friend and harder still to love an enemy.

In small groups or with the entire class, consider the following questions.

- Is it possible to look into the eyes of an enemy or one who has wronged you and love unconditionally?
- How can we love enough to treat a stranger the same as we treat one close to us?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing

(35% of lesson time)

To love as God loves requires selflessness, humility, kindness, and discipline. Martin Luther writes,

Now one may wish to ask: How can you harmonize this statement, that all things are to be comprehended in these two commandments... To answer this, let us see in the first place how Christ explains the law, namely, that it must be kept in the heart. In other words, the law must be spiritually comprehended; for he who does not lay hold of the law with the heart and with the Spirit, will certainly not fulfil it.

—Martin Luther’s *Complete Church Postil*,
www.lutherdansk.dk/1%20Web-AM%20-%20Introduction/Kirkepos.htm

Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 states,

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

Taking on the life and mind of Christ arises from spiritual comprehension that directs our hearts. In small groups or with the entire class, consider these questions.

- What does it look like to “take on the life and mind of Christ”?
- How does one “spiritually” comprehend the commandments to love God and love neighbor?
- List potential barriers that prevent fulfilling these commandments.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

This week as you listen to the news, read social media, or see other news sources, filter the content through “Jesus” lenses. Is love expressed? How? Would the situation be different by employing “love” lenses?

Listen carefully to the world around you. Be “Jesus” in someone’s life this week.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “God Weeps” CCS 212.

Close with a prayer of commitment.

LESSON 49

1 November 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 26)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 23:1–12

Lesson Focus: Humbleness in servant ministry

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Jesus' expectations of disciples.
- discover the importance of humbleness in discipleship.
- identify a positive action step to enhance personal discipleship.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 23:1–12 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 114–115, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Sing “Make Me a Servant” *CCS* 597. Offer Doctrine and Covenants 11:4–5 as an opening prayer.

Behold, I speak unto all those who have desires to bring forth and establish this work; and no one can assist in this work, except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care. Behold, I am the light and the life of the world, that speak these words; therefore, give heed with your might, and then you are called. Amen.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 23:1–12.

The author of Matthew is writing to a Jewish congregation following the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Without the temple to set them apart as God's chosen ones, external appearances became important. Confrontation arose between traditional Jewish worshippers and the followers of Jesus. The

young church was struggling with identity. What traditions fit with Jesus' teachings? What needed to change? What was Jesus' way?

Jesus expressed respect for the Jewish sacred scripture when he stated, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you." He then discouraged hearers from following the way leaders in the synagogue behaved because they "talked the talk," but did not "walk the walk." They abused the authority of the position afforded them to exploit others.

The desire for honor and prestige was evidenced by donning showy prayer shawls with long fringes. Pride created the need to be in the most visible places, hold titles in exalted positions, and impose heavy burdens on those who could not possibly measure up. This marginalized the weak and impoverished. Their actions did not live the law of mercy, justice, loving kindness, or equality as written in the Torah.

According to the author of Matthew, legitimate leaders exhibited qualities of humility and servanthood and treated all as equals. They recognized the worth of all persons—one not exalted above another. God does not focus on how well one follows the rules, but on actions.

Loving relationship to God and others is at the heart of discipleship. In small groups or as an entire class, consider these questions:

- What qualities make an effective leader? What are characteristics of an ineffective leader?
- The desire to stand out or be acknowledged is universal. How does one remain humble while receiving accolades or praise?
- What does Jesus expect from disciples?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Humbleness is not found in words spoken or doctrines of belief. Humbleness is found in the heart and visible through actions.

St. Augustine wrote, "Pride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a fellowship of equality under God, and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in the place of God's rule."

— *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 868–69

His words suggest that orienting one's whole self to God is an equalizing factor. While people are unequal in intelligence, physical attributes, capability, or wealth, they remain of equal worth before God. As we deepen our relationship with God, we acknowledge this equality. On the other hand, those who hold back or withdraw from God and neighbor out of fear of inadequacy or perceived lack of skills exhibit false humility by virtue of complacency. Failure to take responsibility for self-development deprives God of living through their lives. Everyone has a role to play in building God's kingdom.

Take a moment to reflect on your life and servanthood. What changes might strengthen your discipleship?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Spend time dwelling in the word with Matthew this week. What images does it call forth? How might the disciples have understood the message? How do Jesus' words resonate today?

Identify a goal to work on one positive change this week. Choose an accountability partner and share your experience next week.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Sing together as a prayer “Make Me a Servant” CCS 597. Sing twice and end with “Amen.”

LESSON 50

8 November 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 27)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:1–13

Lesson Focus: Be prepared.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the symbolism in the parable.
- identify ways to prepare and fully live out the identity, message, and mission of Jesus.
- reach beyond the comfort zone to where God is calling.

Supplies

- Pens or pencils
- Bibles

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 25:1–13 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 116–117, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read aloud this scripture passage from Amos 5:18, 20–24.

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.

²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

- What images captured your imagination? Read a second time.
- What is the primary message you hear?

Offer a prayer for deeper understanding of today's gospel passage from Matthew.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Just as in our day, weddings were special events in Jesus' culture. In order to grasp the meaning of the scripture in Matthew, it's helpful to understand wedding customs of that day. Parents of the bride entertained guests gathered at the bride's home while awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. As the bridegroom approached, bridesmaids and other guests lit torches and hurried outside to meet him. The entire party journeyed through the streets to the groom's home. The ceremony and feast that followed continued for several days.

In this parable, for whatever reason, the groom does not show up when expected. As hours pass the bridesmaids fall asleep. A shout of "He is coming" awakens them at midnight. Ten bridesmaids jump up to light their lamps to meet him. Five are prepared with sufficient oil. With the delay in the arrival of the groom, five bridesmaids have run out of oil and have no reserves. By the time they rush about in the middle of the night to find oil, they miss the festivities at the groom's home.

Previous chapters in Matthew taught principles of living as a follower of Christ. Now, Jesus begins speaking of preparing for end times. In this parable, Jesus is the bridegroom. Early disciples anticipated Jesus' return to earth in their lifetime, but it did not happen. Even today Jesus has not physically returned. However, deeper insights help us relate this parable to our day and age.

The bridesmaids represent the church or followers of Christ. The oil that makes the lamps operational includes responsible acts of love, mercy, and justice required of all disciples. Remaining awake and alert requires constant preparation through study, prayer, and service. These are not things that can be "borrowed" by another who is less prepared. It takes whole-life discipline and discipleship.

In small groups or as an entire class, consider these questions.

- How does this parable disrupt our comfort zone?
- What does the parable say about waiting for Jesus' return?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Community of Christ Basic Belief statement about the End Time states:

We press forward together in service to God, knowing that our labor is not in vain. The future of the creation belongs to the Prince of Peace, not to those who oppress, dominate, or destroy. As we anticipate that future, we devote ourselves to seek Christ's peace and pursue it. We do not know the day or hour of Christ's coming but know only that God is faithful. With faith in God,

Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we face the future in hopeful longing, and with the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 38

Each time we bear each other’s burdens, work for justice, advocate for the poor or oppressed, reach out to the friendless, and extend mercy or work in any way to make the world a better place, we experience the living Christ.

It’s easy to become weary of well doing, frustrated by lack of visible change, disheartened by cruelties in the world around us, or distracted by the busyness of life. Always being prepared, having lamps filled with “oil and reserves” on hand can be daunting. At times, we all become a “foolish bridesmaid.” But in community, we lift each other up, provide encouragement, and gain renewed hope and strength to continue the journey.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “We have learned a bit too late in the day that action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility” (*Letters and Papers from Prison* [New York: Touchstone, 1953]).

- Share a time when you were unprepared for service. What/who helped you?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Examine ways you and your congregation have oil ready and lamps prepared for service. Discuss in small groups or as an entire class.

- Who is someone who would benefit from your help this week? Make an effort to provide ministry to this person.
- Name ideas that are ready for action in your congregation. How can your lamp light the way for others to follow?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Offer this prayer:

You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand (Romans 13:11–12).

Lord, help us use our time wisely, recognizing today is the day we must make a difference in your world. Amen.

LESSON 51

15 November 2020

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 28)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:14–30

Lesson Focus: Overcoming fear to be in mission

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand how caring for all of God’s creation is crippled by fear.
- gain a deeper appreciation for God’s grace and generosity.
- grasp the depth of the call to mission and be ready to risk.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Bibles
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Pens or pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 25:14–30 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 118–119, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Ask class members to take turns reading stanzas of “Bring Many Names” CCS 5.

- What images of God are expressed? Add other images to the list.

Offer a prayer of praise to honor God.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The parable of the talents is often related to stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. Matthew’s account lends a second lesson worthy of consideration.

In the story, three servants are given talents, or money, to handle for the owner. The amount of money is staggering. A talent was a unit of money equal to fifteen years of pay for the common laborer! They are not given instruction on how to use the money, but somehow understand they are accountable for what

they received. The first two servants diligently went to work and doubled the interest on the monies entrusted to them. The third, who had received the least amount, simply buried his talent.

Upon the master's return, the two who had doubled the accounts received praise and reward. The third, who buried his talent, was rebuked. His excuse was, "Master, I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; **so I was afraid**, and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours" (bold type added).

Fear. The third servant perceived the master as a harsh, cruel judge and fear led to inaction. He chose the path of least resistance and took no risk to improve the master's holdings. According to the parable, however, the master was extremely generous. He trusted his servants enough to give them huge amounts of money to manage while he was away.

A lesson from the parable is that what we do, or what we fail to do, with what God has graciously entrusted to us, shapes our lives and the world. Active faith risks for the sake of the gospel.

Our perception or understanding of God is important.

In small groups or as an entire class, discuss the effects of seeing God as

- a. a primary enforcer of rules.
- b. a God of grace and generosity.

How does your personal perception of God affect your actions?

How does your congregation's perception of God affect mission?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from
hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Jesus shares this parable a few days before he dies on the cross. His death witnesses of God's unconditional and abundant love for all of creation. Because God loves so much, Jesus is raised from the dead so we might know life is stronger than death. But just as we learned from Jesus' life, discipleship comes with risk and challenge. Consider this scripture from Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a–c.

- a. Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church.
- b. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.
- c. This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

Discuss the following questions.

- How is God asking us to use the "talents" graciously and abundantly given to us?
- What risks are inherent in discipleship?
- What are the blessings of risking for God?

4

SEND

Explores how the lesson
might be lived

(10% of lesson time)

This week, contemplate your giftedness and that of the congregation. Are gifts being used to the fullest? During a time of meditation offer “Lord, here am I; use me” and “Lord, here are we; use us.” Listen intently and journal the ideas that come to your mind. Seek deeper insight on how you or your congregation might risk in mission. Share with your congregation.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope

(5% of lesson time)

Offer the following prayer.

Loving God, creator of all that was, is, and is to be, forgive us. Forgive us for not knowing, not understanding. Forgive us for fearing to risk, for failing to multiply the time, talent, treasure, and testimony you have entrusted to us on behalf of building the peaceable kingdom.

You alone are worthy of praise! You have blessed us with enough and to spare. May we be found worthy. Amen.

LESSON 52

22 November 2020

REIGN OF CHRIST ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 29)

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:31–46

Lesson Focus: Uncalculated Discipleship

Objectives

The learners will...

- recognize God’s love and concern for the weak and vulnerable.
- identify ways to live authentic discipleship.
- consider ways to be of one heart and mind with God.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles
- Doctrine and Covenants

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 25:31–46 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 120, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,
prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Use “I Am Standing Waiting” *CCS* 298 as a guided mediation. Ask class members to close their eyes and visualize the scenes as the stanzas are read slowly.

Allow for a moment of silence; ask a few people to share their experience. Close with a prayer.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Matthew 25:31–46 is the final lesson in a series of parables and teachings about Jesus’ expectations of responsible disciples. The twelve understood Jesus’ analogy of sheep and goats as they were part of the economy. Palestinian flocks often contained both sheep and goats. At the end of each day, the animals were divided into separate pens. Sheep enjoyed the open pasture while goats were enclosed to protect

them from the cold. To the businessman sheep had greater commercial value than goats. They offered more saleable, usable products such as wool, milk, meat, bones, horns, and dung.

Providing food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, clothes for the naked, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick, and tending to those in prison were familiar acts of mercy required by Jewish law. In Jesus' allegory, persons identified as "sheep" and "goats" seem surprised at the king's observations. When did we see you and do these things for you? When did we see you and not do these things for you? They are clueless! They did not remember the king ever coming into their presence. Perhaps they are even questioning whether they are sheep or goats.

According to Jesus, the answer is simple. When you have compassion for a fellow human being, especially the weak or vulnerable, you serve Jesus. The "sheep" simply shared who they were without calculation or expectation. The "goats" calculated acts of mercy to reflect a certain image rather than serving in an outpouring of love and compassion.

We expect and prepare for Jesus' presence in church on Sunday mornings, but Jesus is always found with "the least of these"—in the midst of street people, a soup kitchen, or a fox hole. This is where we, too, will find him.

As Jesus has repeatedly taught, discipleship is a whole-life commitment. Those who live the heart and mind of Christ act compassionately—always. A response to those in need does not include a check-off list or reward system. It is the result of living love that bears good fruit.

- Where have you discovered Jesus in the "least"?
- Discuss ways we can create a new world by modeling the values of Jesus.
- How does this lesson relate to Responsible Choices?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

We all can identify as a "sheep" or a "goat" at points in our lives. "Goats" are not evil and have good intentions. But committed disciples must strive to go deeper in relationship with God until God's heart and mind become their heart and mind, and their actions reflect God's love without thought.

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a reminds us to "open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all."

Discuss the following questions in small groups or as an entire class.

- What acts of compassion are lived out in your congregation?
- How do you and your congregation deepen your relationship to God?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Consider those in your circle of influence—family, friends, co-workers, extended community. Consider those who remain nameless to you across the globe. Reflect on God's love for them. Reflect on your love for them.

Name one thing you will do for someone in need this week without counting the cost.

5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of lesson time)

Close with this Benedictine Blessing.

May God bless you with **discontent** with easy answers, half truths, superficial relationships, so that you will live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with **anger** at injustice, oppression, abuse, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equality, and peace.

May God bless you with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and to change their pain to joy.

May God bless you with the **foolishness** to think you can make a difference in this world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

—Benedictine Sister Ruth Fox of Sacred Heart Monastery, 1985
<http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/CC/C-20120102.html>