



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

30 JULY 2017–4 SEPTEMBER 2017

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*, available through Herald House.

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, spiritual practices, and discussion ideas.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Bible scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 12)

LESSON 36
30 July 2017

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

- (Optional) Copies of Response Sheet
- Pens and pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- (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 instructor: 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
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
- Pursue Peace on Earth
- Develop Disciples to Serve
- Experience Congregations in 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 out
(10% of lesson time)

Respond to the following questions on Response Sheets, 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 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 12)

30 July 2017

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

³¹He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵²And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Mission Initiatives

- 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?

- 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 you engage that will grow the kingdom in your congregation and community?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 13)

LESSON 37
6 August 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 14:13–21

Lesson Focus: The heart of the gospel is love. Jesus had compassion for all. Even in his own suffering and desire to be alone, he healed the sick and fed the hungry.

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand that God’s love for every person means God’s grace is generously shared for the sake of all.
- realize that even in our desert times, compassion for others will bring blessings and renewal.
- know that God calls us to be generous disciples—being God’s hands and feet—doing God’s work in the world.

Supplies

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

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 14:13–21 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 94, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Today’s passage speaks of Christ’s great compassion for the crowd. Sing or read together “Beauty for Brokenness” CCS 302 and share responses to these questions in small groups of two or three.

- What part of the song speaks directly to you and why?
- What is the invitation to you today?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

This is the only miracle story found in all four gospels, which implies that it must have been very important to the early church. (Clifton Kirkpatrick, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], p. 308). It occurs just after Jesus and the disciples heard of the death of John the Baptist. Understandably, Jesus wanted to be alone to mourn and commune with God. The

crowds, too, were confused and suffering, so they followed him. Because of his great compassion, he healed them. (Mark says he taught them; Luke includes both verbs.) We learn from this that Jesus cares deeply about our most basic needs. Discuss in small groups of two or three the following questions.

- When have you withdrawn from others needing to be alone?
- When have you received blessings when your compassion for others outweighed your own grief?

When it became late and was time to eat, the disciples, being practical, wanted to send the crowds away to find their own food. Jesus, understanding that God provides with great abundance and generosity, told the disciples to feed the people.

The disciples reminded Jesus that there was no way everyone would be fed with the two fish and five loaves they had. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus took the food, blessed it, and God gave the abundance. Then Jesus handed the food to the disciples to share with the people. All ate, were filled, and had basketsful left over.

God entrusts us with the gospel and calls us to share generously with all. "To follow Jesus is to express our faith in concrete acts of love, justice, and compassion toward others" (Kirkpatrick, p. 310).

Share in small groups your responses to these questions.

- What are some of the problems in the world today we may consider too large to handle and dismiss because we are being "practical"?
- What does it look like to "express our faith in concrete acts of love, justice, and compassion toward others"?

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

Community of Christ upholds Grace and Generosity as one of its Enduring Principles and the idea that discipleship "is a whole-life commitment we willingly make in response to God's wonderful generosity" (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 32).

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*, 3rd Edition, p. 12

Generosity—A Spiritual Discipline

Principle 1—A disciple practices generosity as a spiritual discipline in response to God's grace and love.

- Receive first God's boundless grace and unending love.
- Share because of what we have received.
- Share with a sense of gratitude rather than indebtedness.
- Extend our lives in service to others; receive even as we give.
- Generosity becomes our nature.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 33

- Where do you see examples of these principles in the focus scripture passage? In your community today?
- How has your life been transformed through the generosity of another? Whose life might be transformed through your witness, invitation, and generosity?

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

Respond to the following questions on the Response Sheets, 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.

- How can I overcome my "practicality" and "scarcity" mentality and find the faith and courage to be a generous disciple?
- How can I practice generosity as a spiritual discipline this week?

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

End the session by singing "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" CCS 53.

LESSON 37 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 13)

6 August 2017

Matthew 14:13–21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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.

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- Where do you see examples of these principles in the focus scripture passage? In your community today?

- How has your life been transformed through the generosity of another? Whose life might be transformed through your witness, invitation, and generosity?

- How can I overcome my “practicality” and “scarcity” mentality and find the faith and courage to be a generous disciple?

- How can I practice generosity as a spiritual discipline this week?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 14)

LESSON 38
13 August 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 14:22–33

Lesson Focus: The peace of Christ is present amid the storms of life, even when our faith falters.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore ancient beliefs concerning the power of nature.
- examine the significance of the mountain where Jesus prayed and the storm at sea.
- discover personal experiences of Christ's peace.

Supplies

- (Optional) Copies of Response Sheet
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Bible

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 14:22–33 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 95–96, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Sing or read "How Long, O Lord" CCS 201.

Take a few moments to recall a time when you experienced the peace of Christ amid the storms of life. Share in groups of two or three, or with the larger group. Offer a prayer of gratitude for the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

While reading Matthew 14:22–33, imagine the scenery and the sounds described.

In ancient Mediterranean culture, the mountains were considered the touch-point between heaven and earth. The scriptures contain many examples of divine encounter on mountains. The author of Matthew's Gospel indicates

Jesus retreating to the mountain, or speaking to crowds from the mountain.

- List examples of divine encounter recorded throughout the scriptures.
- What is significant about each encounter listed?
- What kind of place signifies divine encounter for you? Explain.

The sea played a prominent role in the Hebrew Scriptures through the creation stories, the story of the Great Flood, and the parting the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross. These events are often interpreted as God's dominion over the sea. The ancients also believed that earth events were controlled by unseen forces. Earthquakes, storms, floods, and droughts were the results of these unseen forces. There existed a hierarchy with God as the ultimate controller and other less powerful unseen entities below. These included archangels, angels, demons, spirits, followed by humans and subhumans. These personified forces controlled all of nature and there was a constant struggle among them.

In today's passage, the disciples are terrified when they see Jesus because they assume it is a ghost. They were far from shore, and Jesus was not with them. They did not know how to control the forces causing the storm. They must have been exhausted from a sleepless night

trying to stabilize their boat. For those who first heard this story, calming the sea was another proof of Jesus' divinity, demonstrating his authority over all the other forces. They would understand this story in terms of Jesus walking atop Tiamot or Tehom, the unseen forces that ruled the waves and the storms. They would have seen this act as a declaration that Jesus was the Messiah, a comfort to the early followers of Jesus as they struggled in a storm of Roman rule, ostracism by the Pharisees, and persecution in general.

- How is the storm a metaphor for conditions of human life in your community or in the world?
- In what ways does Peter's interaction with Jesus represent the life of a disciple?
- What "boats" or barriers keep you, or your congregation, from receiving, embodying, and sharing Christ's peace?

3 RESPOND

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

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a.

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.

- What connections can be drawn between this passage and the passage from Matthew?
- What relational, cultural, political, or religious "storms" are present in your community?
- In what ways have you witnessed individuals or groups responding to these storms through generosity, justice, and peacefulness?
- How are you, or your congregation, being called to create pathways for Christ's peace in your community?
- What would allow your congregation to more fully embody generosity, justice, and peacefulness?

4 SEND

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

Jesus spent his ministry generously inviting people to experience God's love, grace, and peace. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Record responses on the Response Sheet, share in groups of two or three, or share with the larger group.

- What are you facing in your life right now that would be eased if you could hear Jesus say, "Do not be afraid"?
- As a disciple of Jesus, how could you bring assurance to someone who was struggling with their faith?
- How are you being called to more fully receive, embody, and share Christ's peace?

5 BLESS

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

Read together the following statement from William H. Willemon.

"If Peter had not ventured forth, had not obeyed the call to walk on the water, then Peter would never have had this great opportunity for recognition of Jesus and rescue by Jesus.

"I wonder if too many of us are merely splashing about in the safe shallows and therefore have too few opportunities to test and deepen our faith. The story today implies if you want to be close to Jesus, you have to venture forth out on the sea, you have to prove his promises through trusting his promises, through risk and venture."

—"How Will You Know if It's Jesus?", day1.org /950-how_you_will_know_if_its_jesus

"You have not been promised an easy path, but you have been assured that the Spirit that calls you will also accompany you" (Doctrine and Covenants 162:3a). May we all have the faith to step out of the boat, the courage to face Jesus, and the humility to accept Jesus as Messiah. Amen.

LESSON 38 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 14)

13 August 2017

Matthew 14:22–33

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a.

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.

- What connections can be drawn between this passage and the passage from Matthew?

- What relational, cultural, political, or religious "storms" are present in your community?

- In what ways have you witnessed individuals or groups responding to these storms through generosity, justice, and peacefulness?

- How are you, or your congregation, being called to create pathways for Christ's peace in your community?

- What would allow your congregation to more fully embody generosity, justice, and peacefulness?

Jesus spent his ministry generously inviting people to experience God's love, grace, and peace. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions.

- What are you facing in your life right now that would be eased if you could hear Jesus say, "Do not be afraid"?

- As a disciple of Jesus, how could you bring assurance to someone who was struggling with their faith?

- How are you being called to more fully receive, embody, and share Christ's peace?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 15)

LESSON 39
20 August 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 15:10–28

Lesson Focus: Jesus crosses cultural lines to minister to others.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew and discover how God’s love extends to everyone.
- determine what “lines in the sand” we have drawn in our ministry.

Supplies

- (Optional) Copies of Response Sheet
- Bible
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Easel and paper or white board, markers

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 15:10–28 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 97, available through Herald House. Review Joseph’s story in Genesis, especially Genesis 37:12–36.

1 GATHER

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

Read together “Friend of the Streetwalker” CCS 289. Identify barriers to ministry described in these words. List these for the class to consider. This list will grow as class proceeds.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read together Matthew 15:21–28.

Jesus was exhausted by the harassment he had experienced from the Pharisees and scribes and had crossed into Canaan, a non-Jewish country. He had just

tried to explain that spoken words come from the heart and have great power to harm or help. As he seeks rest, the Canaanite woman approaches to ask a blessing for her daughter. At first Jesus denies that request.

- What reasons might Jesus have had to refuse the woman? (add to the list)
- What lines have you been asked to cross in order to share in ministry and mission?

After the woman persists, Jesus heals her daughter.

- What is the underlying theme or message of this story?

Discuss as a group or in small groups of two or three. Share insights with the larger group.

- Think of a time when you were confronted by an “outsider.” How did you feel? How did you respond? Looking back on the experience, is there a way you would respond differently?
- Who does the Canaanite woman represent in your life or in your community?

- What barriers keep you or your congregation from responding to the needs of the “Canaanite woman” in your community?
- What do the “crumbs from the table” represent in ministry and mission?
- How are you invited to generously share (beyond “crumbs”) the invitation of Christ’s peace in your community?

3 RESPOND

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

Read Doctrine and Covenants 165:3a and e, and discuss the following questions with the full group, or in small groups of two or three. Share insights with the larger group.

- More fully embody your oneness and equality in Jesus Christ. Oneness and equality in Christ are realized through the waters of baptism, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and sustained through the sacrament of Communion. Embrace the full meaning of these sacraments and be spiritually joined in Christ as never before.
 - 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.
- What connections can be made between this passage and the story of the Canaanite woman?
 - How are you challenged by these passages? What is the invitation to you in these passages?

- How can you, or your congregation, more fully embody your oneness and equality in Jesus Christ?
- From the list you have created, select at least one condition to which you feel called to respond. How will you respond in the coming week(s)?

4 SEND

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

Examine the Mission Prayer.

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.

- How can this prayer help you bring ministry to “others” in your life and in your community?
- What blessings of love and peace have you experienced as you have responded in Christ’s mission?
- How vulnerable are you willing to be to where the Holy Spirit is leading you?

5 BLESS

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

Read “Come and Bring Light” CCS 287 noting those who might be outside our experience or ministry.

Offer a prayer that we might not be bound by barriers that keep us from bringing ministry to others. Pray that all might receive a blessing of God’s love and peace.

LESSON 39 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 15)

20 August 2017

Matthew 15:10–28

¹⁰Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?" ¹³He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:3a and e.

a. More fully embody your oneness and equality in Jesus Christ. Oneness and equality in Christ are realized through the waters of baptism, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and sustained through the sacrament of Communion. Embrace the full meaning of these sacraments and be spiritually joined in Christ as never before.

e. 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.

- What connections can be made between this passage and the story of the Canaanite woman?

- How are you challenged by these passages? What is the invitation to you in these passages?

- How can you, or your congregation, more fully embody your oneness and equality in Jesus Christ?

- From the list you have created, select at least one condition to which you feel called to respond. How will you respond in the coming week(s)?

Examine the Mission Prayer.

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.

- How can this prayer help you bring ministry to "others" in your life and in your community?

- What blessings of love and peace have you experienced as you have responded in Christ's mission?

- How vulnerable are you willing to be to where the Holy Spirit is leading you?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 16)

LESSON 40
27 August 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 16:13–20

Lesson Focus: Peter declares the messiahship of Jesus and is blessed with a mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discover why Jesus asked two key questions.
- explore his/her personal testimony of the divinity of Jesus.
- compare Peter's commission to that of disciples today.

Supplies

- (Optional) Copies of Response Sheet
- Bible
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson read, "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 16:13–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 98–99, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read or sing together "Who Is This Jesus" CCS 38 and discuss the qualities of Jesus described in the song.

- What verse, phrase, or image best describes your understanding of Jesus Christ?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

In Jesus' time society valued group identity over individualism. Each member of the group or family was intertwined with all the others. Jesus is clarifying his status first among those not in the group, and then with those within the group. Peter, who has often been portrayed in Matthew as a leader, responds with his declaration

that Jesus is Messiah. Peter has witnessed many of the healings, teachings, and miracles performed by Jesus and, through the power of Holy Spirit, knows who Jesus is.

Read together Matthew 16:13–20.

- Why does Matthew include the names of the prophets John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah in his story? What was their part in proclaiming the Messiah?
- What experiences have you had when the spirit revealed something about Jesus to you?

Messiah means "anointed one." Peter recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, the one sent to restore the kingdom of Israel; but Jesus is not the Messiah that Peter, the disciples, and others expected. Jesus gives Peter a new name and tells Peter he is the rock on which the church will be built. Jesus is challenging Peter, the disciples, and the church to live the concerns and passions of Christ.

- How was Jesus an "unexpected" Messiah?
- How does your congregation live the concerns and passions of Christ?
- What impact does this have on your community?

3 RESPOND

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

Assign individuals or pairs one of the statements from “We Proclaim Jesus Christ” (See Response Sheet). Discuss the following and share insights with the larger group.

- According to this statement, who does Community of Christ say Jesus is?
- How does this statement inform what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

4 SEND

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

Select a statement about Jesus Christ that is meaningful to you and one that challenges you. Share these in groups of two or three or with the larger group.

5 BLESS

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

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus’ presence in your life and in the life of the church.

LESSON 40 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 16)

27 August 2017

Matthew 16:13–20

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

How are you challenged to live the concerns and passion of Christ?

Who do you say Jesus is? How do you know? How are you sharing this with others?

WE PROCLAIM JESUS CHRIST

Preamble

Throughout history, Christians have sought to describe their faith in Jesus Christ. Traditionally, churches have used statements of belief and confessions of faith to articulate their understanding of Jesus Christ's person and work. Such statements provide important foundations for educating disciples and for addressing theological questions that arise from time to time. While words are never ultimately adequate, the statement that follows describes what is at the core of our beliefs as the Community of Christ. We do not expect that there will be universal assent to this statement and reject any prescriptive use of it. Yet it is our prayer that the church will find this to be a compelling summary of our faith, and that it will be helpful to the mission of the church as it proclaims Jesus Christ and promotes communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

1. As members of Community of Christ, we are bound together with Christians in every place and in every time by our confession of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, author of our salvation, and head of the church.

2. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, both fully human and fully divine. In him we see ourselves and we see God, whom he tenderly called Abba, the compassionate One, who gave birth to all of creation and declared it to be "very good." Together with the Holy Spirit, they are one.

3. By the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus, born of Mary, came into the world to live and dwell among us to reveal God's nature and will. He prophetically condemned injustice in the temple and proclaimed the good news of the coming reign of God on earth, preaching liberation to the oppressed and repentance to oppressors. He taught his followers to love God, to love their neighbors, and to love their enemies. By eating with sinners, serving the poor, healing the unclean, blessing children, and welcoming women and men as equals among his disciples, Jesus declared that all persons are of worth in the sight of God.

4. Jesus was betrayed by his own friends, accused of blasphemy and treason, and sentenced by Pontius Pilate to die on a cross between two common criminals. By forgiving his murderers and choosing to take on the sin, pain, and suffering of the whole world, he reconciled all of humanity to God.

5. 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.

6. Christ is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us. He promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation.

7. The church, the body of Christ, is called to proclaim the gospel until Christ comes again. It is he who forgives us in baptism, and feeds us at his table. As disciples of Christ, we are all 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. It is to Christ and to his gospel that we declare our loyalty and by which we will be judged.

8. 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.

9. We live and serve in hope that God's kingdom of justice and peace will indeed come, bringing healing to the whole, groaning creation. Putting our trust in the Risen Christ, present among us by the Holy Spirit, we press on together, giving blessing, honor, and glory to God, now and forevermore. Amen.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 22–23

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 17)

LESSON 41
4 September 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 16:21–28

Lesson Focus: Disciples are called to follow Christ by living Christ's mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- examine Peter's rebuke of Jesus and Jesus' reply.
- compare Peter's view of Christ with our lives.
- consider Jesus' description of discipleship.

Supplies

- (Optional) Copies of Response Sheet
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- (Optional) Audio recording of "Caught in the Middle" by Casting Crowns from the album *The Altar and the Door*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 16:21–28 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 100–101, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Sing or read "As the Deer" CCS 148.

St. Augustine of Hippo, an early theologian, wrote, "O, Lord, you have created us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

- Consider your yearnings for God's presence this day.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Immediately following Jesus' declaration of Peter as the leader of the church, he begins to explain to his disciples that he will die soon. This was not part of Peter's understanding, so he exerts his new authority to interpret

Jesus' teachings and rebukes Jesus. Jesus' reply, "Get behind me, Satan," refers to the story in Matthew 4 about Jesus in the desert. Satan is used here as a metaphor for a tester of loyalty. Peter doesn't get it. The disciples don't understand. Even after Jesus' death, resurrection, and reappearance to the disciples, they still struggle to understand the calling of Jesus to discipleship.

Read together Matthew 16:21–28.

- Peter moves from being a building block in Matthew 16:17–19 to being a stumbling block. How does this happen in our lives?
- How does the church need to keep redefining itself, as Peter did, in order to be a building block?

Part of the disciples' confusion was their expectation that Jesus would challenge the ruling Empire and assume an earthly throne. Instead Jesus describes what they must be willing to do as disciples. It would be a frightening decision to give up all that Jesus describes. He wants them to think as God thinks. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 99). In the present-oriented reality of the ancient disciples, this missional call asked them to relinquish status, honor, and worldly relationships.

- How does this scripture call us today to rearrange our priorities? Give some specific examples.
- When you compare your life as a disciple with Jesus' call, how do you feel? How has the Holy Spirit helped you on your journey to understand the nature of God and live like Jesus?

3 RESPOND

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

Jesus was preparing his disciples for the difficult work of carrying out his mission. In Community of Christ, we proclaim Christ's mission as our mission. "The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:9f).

Read and discuss the following:

"The kingdom was present in Jesus' ministry, as described in the Gospels, 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" ("We Share a Mission," *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 9).

- Where do you see examples of individuals or groups proclaiming the Living Christ through whole-life engagement in Christ's mission?

Five Mission Initiatives—They're All Essential!

Our call is to reclaim that same vision and passion for the whole mission of Jesus Christ today through five life-changing, church-changing, and world-changing Mission Initiatives:

- Invite People to Christ—Christ's mission of evangelism. Jesus was sent to proclaim good news and invite others to join him in mission.
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering—Christ's mission of compassion. Jesus reached out to the

brokenhearted, the suffering, and those who need hope and Christ's peace.

- Pursue Peace on Earth—Christ's mission of justice and peace. Jesus provided release to those held captive by unjust systems and the circumstances of life that devalue the worth of any person.
- Develop Disciples to Serve—Equip individuals for Christ's mission
- Experience Congregations in Mission—Equip congregations for Christ's mission
- In what ways are the Mission Initiatives diminished if they are approached individually, or as a "check list"?
- How can a holistic approach to living the Mission Initiatives transform individual lives and congregational life?
- What gets in the way of living *what matters most* in your life or in your congregation?

4 SEND

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

Living Christ's mission calls us out of our comfort zones and challenges us to find ways to bring the healing and reconciling ministry of Jesus into the lives of others.

- What can you give or give up to holistically pursue Christ's mission?

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing together "There's a Church within Us" CCS 278.

Offer a prayer of gratitude for the potential we have to be disciples in Christ's mission.

LESSON 41 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 17)

4 September 2017

Matthew 16:21–28

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

²⁷"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

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- Pursue Peace on Earth—Christ's mission of justice and peace. *Jesus provided release to those held captive by unjust systems and the circumstances of life that devalue the worth of any person.*

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- In what ways are the Mission Initiatives diminished if they are approached individually, or as a "check list"?

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- What gets in the way of living what matters most in your life or in your congregation?

- Living Christ's mission calls us out of our comfort zones and challenges us to find ways to bring the healing and reconciling ministry of Jesus into the lives of others.

- What can you give or give up to holistically pursue Christ's mission?
