



Community of Christ

# COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

8 JANUARY 2017–26 February 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 and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament* (with focus on the gospel according to Matthew).

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 youth in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

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

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY/BAPTISM OF THE LORD

LESSON 7  
8 January 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 3:13–17/ 3:41–46 IV

**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*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 3:13–17 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 31, 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 total 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 total lesson time)

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

Community of Christ affirms, “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*, 3rd Edition, p. 15

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 total 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 total lesson time)

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

\*Additional lectionary texts: Isaiah 42:1–9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34–43, Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a, d



# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 8  
15 January 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 1:29–42

**Lesson Focus:** All are called to know and follow Jesus.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- recognize that Jesus is identified as the Son of God.
- read how John pointed his disciples toward Jesus, which we should do also.
- understand “come and see” as a powerful invitation.
- discuss the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 1:29–42 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 33, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

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

Today is the second Sunday after the Epiphany, and our theme is “Behold the Lamb of God.” Just as Jesus’ true identity was made known to John the Baptist, God continues to reveal Christ’s love and mission through the Holy Spirit.

Read or sing “In My Life, Lord” CCS 602 as an opening prayer.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read and discuss John 1:29–42.

This scripture passage makes three points:

1. Jesus is revealed as the Son of God.
2. John points his disciples to Jesus instead of himself.
3. The invitation to “come and see” is extended, and the disciples respond.

Verses 29–34 relate John the Baptist’s testimony that he previously was unaware that Jesus was the Messiah, but now the Spirit has made it clear to him. He saw the “Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” John had been preparing the way, but did not know for whom. Through divine encounter, God revealed Jesus’ identity.

- Share a time when divine encounter revealed God’s purposes through Jesus Christ.
- What does it mean that the Spirit “remained on him”?

In verses 35–37, John again testifies that Jesus is “the Lamb of God.” This time he says it to two of his disciples and encourages them to follow Jesus. John gave up his power and authority so others would follow Christ.

- When have you seen someone give up power and authority so others could know Christ?
- What do you need to give up, or add to your living, so others can recognize Jesus?
- How would you describe Continuing Revelation to a friend or seeker?
- What personal experiences affirm Continuing Revelation in your life and ministry?

The remaining verses include the interaction between Jesus and the disciples. He asks them what they are looking for. Jesus not only wants to know “if they wish to follow, but *what* and *whom* are they looking for” (*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 265). Instead of answering the question, they ask where Jesus is staying. Jesus replies, “Come and see.” Perhaps they did not know what they were looking for but only wanted to learn what Jesus had to offer. They believed John’s message and wanted to see for themselves. Andrew invites his brother, Simon Peter, to come along, saying, “We have found the Messiah.”

- In groups of two or three, describe the encounter between Andrew, the other disciple, Simon Peter, and Jesus. How did they understand Jesus to be the Messiah? How did they respond?
- What connections can be made between this passage and the Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ?
- What would you invite another to “come and see”?

### 3 RESPOND

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

One of Community of Christ’s Enduring Principles is Continuing Revelation.

We affirm the Living God is ever self-revealing. God is revealed to the world in the testimony of Israel, and above all in Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit we continue to hear God speaking today. The church is called to listen together for what the Spirit is saying and then faithfully respond.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd edition, p. 15

- What are some ways we can “listen together for what the Spirit is saying” in personal relationships? In congregations?

### 4 SEND

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

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions and record on a response sheet or share in groups of two or three.

- With which person in the scripture do you identify most: John the Baptist (as the one who receives and proclaims God’s revelation), Andrew and the other disciple who turn from one teacher to follow another, Jesus who invites them to “come and see,” or Simon Peter who also comes to Jesus and is given a new name (calling)? Explain.
- Whom can you invite to “come and see” and share the invitation of Christ’s peace?

### 5 BLESS

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

Return to the hymn used at the beginning of the lesson, “In My Life, Lord” CCS 602. Read or sing it as a prayer of blessing, challenge, and commitment.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Isaiah 49:1–7, Psalm 40:1–11, 1 Corinthians 1:1–9, Doctrine and Covenants 164:5



# THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 9  
22 January 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 4:12–23/ 4:11–22 IV

**Lesson Focus:** All are called to follow Jesus in bringing forth the kingdom of heaven on earth.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- understand that Christ's message is for all people.
- discuss how Jesus reveals the kingdom of heaven on earth.
- consider Jesus' radical call to turn from self and follow him.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 4:12–23 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 34, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

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

Today is the third Sunday after the Epiphany. The focus scripture passage tells of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the calling of the first disciples, and a summary of his message.

Observe a few moments of silence and consider your response to God's call as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Read or sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" CCS 499. Offer a prayer for courage to boldly follow Jesus.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read and discuss Matthew 4:12–23.

Matthew's author shares from a Jewish perspective to a Jewish audience. In verses 12–16 Jesus responds to the news of John's arrest by withdrawing to Galilee. He leaves Nazareth, a Jewish community, and goes to Galilee, a Gentile community. The beginning of Jesus' ministry fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1–2—that Jesus and his message would be the "great light" for everyone who would listen. Matthew's author is telling his audience to pay attention and recognize that Jesus did not come only for the Jews, but for all.

- How does this passage affirm Community of Christ's Enduring Principles Worth of All Persons and All Are Called?
- How are you challenged to share the invitation of Christ beyond your congregation or community?

Verse 17 makes clear Jesus' message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Repentance is defined as "a reorientation of one's life based on the approaching kingdom of God [heaven], already manifest in Jesus' ministry...The word does not picture sorrow or

remorse, but a change in direction of one's life" (*The People's New Testament Commentary*, M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, pp. 23–24). We must change our view from the current culture's perspective to what Jesus proclaims, act on it, and live the kingdom of heaven on earth. This is Community of Christ's vision of Zion, and for pursuing peace on earth.

- How do you understand Jesus' message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"?
- How does the above understanding of repentance challenge or affirm your understanding?
- How are you challenged to reorient your perspective or practices so that the kingdom of heaven can come near?

In verses 18–22, Jesus calls the first disciples. Each Gospel varies in the telling of this story. In Matthew and Mark, the account is brief, and the disciples follow without hesitation. They leave both job and family, with no promise of security. The demand of discipleship is radical obedience. It is not something for which one "qualifies"; it is a call to participate in God's purposes of justice and peace.

- Make a list of ways discipleship is demanding. For each item listed, discuss how it reveals God's purposes. How is responding to the demand also rewarding?

### 3 RESPOND

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

The New Revised Standard Version Bible uses the word *withdrew* instead of departed, went, or returned, which are used in other biblical translations. Boring and Craddock prefer this choice as a better way to translate the Greek verb, since it is used in Matthew ten times as Jesus' response to threat. These authors share, "It is not cowardice, self-preservation, or strategy, but represents Jesus' alternate vision of kingship, which is nonviolent and nonretaliatory" (p. 24).

#### Enduring Principles

- Grace and Generosity
- Sacredness of Creation
- Continuing Revelation
- Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)
- Unity in Diversity
- Worth of All Persons
- All Are Called

- Responsible Choices
- Blessings of Community

Form three small groups or pairs. Assign one of the following passages to each group or pair.

- Matthew 12:14–21
- Matthew 14:13
- Matthew 26:51–56

Discuss the questions which follow, and share insights with the larger group.

- What happened in the passage, and how did Jesus respond?
- How does Jesus' response affirm one of Community of Christ's Enduring Principles? Explain.
- How does Jesus' response reveal the kingdom of heaven coming near?
- Which Enduring Principle best describes your understanding of the kingdom of heaven on earth? Explain.

### 4 SEND

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

Community of Christ affirms All Are Called to journey with Christ in pursuing peace on and for the Earth. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions, and make this part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

- In what specific ways are you called to pursue peace on and for the Earth?
- To whom are you called to share the invitation of Christ's peace?

### 5 BLESS

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

Close by inviting each person to share a phrase from "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" CCS 499 as a personal commitment.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Isaiah 9:1–4; Psalm 27:1, 4–9; 1 Corinthians 1:10–18; Doctrine and Covenants 162:1, 7a

# LESSON 9 RESPONSE SHEET

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

22 January 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:  
Isaiah 9:1–4; Psalm 27:1, 4–9;  
1 Corinthians 1:10–18;  
Doctrine and Covenants 162:1, 7a

### Matthew 4:12–23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

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.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Community of Christ affirms All Are Called to journey with Christ in pursuing peace on and for the Earth. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions, and make this part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

- In what specific ways are you called to pursue peace on and for the Earth?

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- To whom are you called to share the invitation of Christ's peace?

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# FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 10  
29 January 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 5:1–12

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus teaches countercultural characteristics that bring blessings from God.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- examine the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.
- relate these characteristics to Community of Christ's mission.
- explore Doctrine and Covenants guidance for being "blessed" today.

## Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Bibles
- Doctrine and Covenants

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 5:1–12 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 35, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

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

The religious tradition of the Hebrew nation has long called for justice for the downtrodden, giving hope to those whose lives otherwise had little. Read Micah 6:3–8 to hear God instructing his people about what God wants them to be like. Reference CCS 288, "Let Justice Roll like a River." The ideas in Jesus' sermon were counter to those of the prevailing culture. Jesus continued to show a new way of being throughout Matthew's Gospel, bringing hope for those who had lost it. This hope was for the coming reign of God.

- What parallels do you see in this scripture, the song, and the Mission Initiatives?
- How are these selections calling for change in the practices of society?

God's call is for a people of simplicity, compassion, and generosity. This remains our challenge.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Today's scripture introduces Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount, which will continue in the coming weeks. Like the story of Moses delivering instructions to the Israelites after his encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Jesus goes up a mountain to bring instruction to a people now in bondage to the Romans. This ancient civilization understood time as "ages" that began and ended with cataclysmic events. Jesus was the event between the age of Roman rule and the age of God's rule. Anticipating that new age, Jesus affirms their blessings. God's way brings hope.

The Jews also believed in a system that had limited "goods." In order to advance one's self, another would lose what he had—wealth, property, status, or honor.

Read Matthew 5:1–12. Jesus describes eight qualities of discipleship. None of these have to do with wealth, status, power, beauty, or political influence.

Form small groups or pairs. Have each group or pair describe one or more qualities identified in the scripture passage (poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure of heart, peacemakers, persecuted).

- Who represented this description in the time of Jesus' teaching? Who represents the description today?
- What relationship do you see between each human quality and the divine blessing promised?

## 3 RESPOND

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

The Beatitudes call us not just to develop these qualities, but also to act; to build relationships with those who are the "blessed."

- Think of someone you know who exhibits one or more of the qualities described. How are these qualities lived? How can we exemplify these qualities in our own lives?
- How does the way of life described in the Beatitudes bring people together?
- What harm is being done by living in opposition to the Beatitudes?
- How does God call us away from our cultural focus on economic or political power?
- How well do these characteristics describe your congregation?

Read together Doctrine and Covenants 161:2–3, 162:7, 163:3, and 165:6.

- How do these words call us to live today? What parallels are there with the Beatitudes?

## 4 SEND

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

Respond to one of the following challenge questions in writing or quiet reflection. Share your responses in groups of two or three or with the larger group.

- Consider the qualities described in Matthew and defined in class. Which one do you live best? Where do you need to make some changes? How will you do this?
- Rewrite one or more of the Beatitudes for a 21st-century hearer. With whom would you like to share this message? Explain.

## 5 BLESS

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

Close with the following prayer of commitment.

We are grateful for a God of grace who patiently works with us to be countercultural and live into God's reign. We are grateful for the blessings we have already received. We look forward to a world in which God's peaceable kingdom is real and present. We strive to do our part, and with God's presence in our lives, we know that can happen. Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Micah 6:1–8, Psalm 15, 1 Corinthians 1:18–31, 3 Nephi 6:1b–2

# LESSON 10 RESPONSE SHEET

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

29 January 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:

Micah 6:1–8, Psalm 15,

1 Corinthians 1:18–31, 3

Nephi 6:1b–2

### Matthew 5:1–12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

### Doctrine and Covenants 161:2–3

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.

b. Fulfill the purposes of the Temple by making its ministries manifest in your hearts. It was built from your sacrifices and searching over many generations. Let it stand as a towering symbol of a people who knew injustice and strife on the frontier and who now seek the peace of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

3a. 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.

b. Do not be fearful of one another. Respect each life journey, even in its brokenness and uncertainty, for each person has walked alone at times. Be ready to listen and slow to criticize, lest judgments be unrighteous and unredemptive.

c. Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called. Be courageous and visionary, believing in the power of just a few vibrant witnesses to transform the world. Be assured that love will overcome the voices of fear, division, and deceit.

d. Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple.

### Doctrine and Covenants 162:7

7a. There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous response of disciples who share from their own bounty that others may know the joys of the kingdom.

b. Many are fearful and believe their security is to be found in the accumulation of possessions. The answers you seek are not inherent in the things of this world but in a faith that places its trust in the promises given to all who would follow Jesus Christ.

c. You have been given the principles of generosity, rightly interpreted for a new time. These principles call every disciple to tithe faithfully in accordance with means and capacity. Those values, deeply rooted in the Restoration faith, affirm that stewardship and discipleship cannot be divided and are dependent upon each other.

d. The call to respond is urgent. Look to the needs of your own congregations, but look also beyond your walls to the far-flung places

# LESSON 10 RESPONSE SHEET CONTINUED

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

29 January 2017

where the church must go. Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls also yearning for a spiritual resting place.

### Doctrine and Covenants 163:3

3 a. 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.

c. There are subtle, yet powerful, influences in the world, some even claiming to represent Christ, that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God. Be especially alert to these influences, lest they divide you or divert you from the mission to which you are called.

### Doctrine and Covenants 165:6

6 a. Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.

b. As Christ's body, lovingly and patiently bear the weight of criticism from those who hesitate to respond to the divine vision of human worth and equality in Christ. This burden and blessing is yours for divine purposes.

c. And, always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ's eternal community of oneness and peace. Trust in this promise.

- Rate yourself on each of the qualities described in Matthew and defined in class. Where do you do the best? Where do you need to make some changes? How will you do this?

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- Rewrite the Beatitudes in for a 21st-century hearer. With what concepts did you struggle?

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# FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 11  
5 February 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 5:13–20

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount, focusing on the meaning of righteousness.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- explore the meaning of righteousness.
- discover the meaning of “salt” and “light” for the first hearers of this scripture passage.
- apply Jesus’ teachings to living as disciples.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 5:13–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 36–37, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

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

Read Matthew 5:13–16. How do the words to the song “This Little Light of Mine” compare with your understanding of this passage from the Sermon on the Mount?

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...  
Hide it under a bushel, No! I’m gonna let it shine...  
Won’t let the world blow it out, I’m gonna let it shine...

Read or sing “Come and Bring Light” CCS 287. How does the text of this hymn compare with your understanding of Matthew 5:13–16? How does it challenge your understanding of the passage or the song “This Little Light of Mine”?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

In today’s passage, Jesus continues his interpretation of the Law and teaching about righteousness.

In this passage, “Earth” is used to describe the oven in the courtyard outside the homes in a family compound. It was at the heart of the home. Salt was used to help the fuel (animal dung) burn so the family could bake in the “earth”. Salt was also a medicine, a seasoning, and a preservative. Salt is also a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel (see Leviticus 2:13, 2 Chronicles 13:5). Matthew uses this metaphor to remind Israel they were a covenant people.

- What does it mean when salt has lost its taste? How does this relate to discipleship?
- How is this metaphor illustrated in living the Beatitudes?

Light and dark were important concepts in ancient wisdom. Darkness was not just the absence of light; it had power to overcome light. Likewise, light had the power to overcome darkness.

- How is this understanding reflected in the phrase “No one...puts [their lamp] under a bushel basket... and it gives light to all in the house” (v. 14)?
- What does this passage reveal about living as disciples?
- How does this understanding support congregations as signal communities?

## 3 RESPOND

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

Read together Matthew 5:16–20.

In first-century Palestine, Israel lived under Roman rule. There was tension between groups and leaders within the Jewish community. Some felt that carefully observing the Law would bring them out from under Roman oppression; others wanted to make war against Rome.

In this passage, Jesus challenges the Jewish understanding of the Law and those who misrepresent the Law. His teaching further expands on the blessings of the Beatitudes. These blessings are for all disciples. They are at the heart of living in right relationship with God and others. Jesus’ example makes it possible for us to understand and claim them.

- How does living in right relationship with God and others bring light to the world?
- What ministries in your congregation or community promote right relationships with God and others?
- How are the Mission Initiatives tangible expressions of this scripture passage?

Read Doctrine and Covenants 165:1.

1 a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

c. Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

e. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation’s restoration.

f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

- In what ways does this passage further expand or challenge your understanding of Matthew 5:13–20?

## 4 SEND

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

Read the words of “Spirit, Open My Heart” CCS 564.

- How do the words of this hymn encourage you, just as Jesus encouraged his disciples in today’s scripture passage?
- Select one of the Mission Initiatives and identify one thing you will do in the upcoming week(s) to be a “light to the world” and a “city [that] cannot be hidden.”

## 5 BLESS

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

Read or sing “Spirit, Open My Heart” CCS 564. If possible, invite an evangelist to pray for the class to understand and live what Jesus describes in this part of the Sermon on the Mount.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Isaiah 58:1–12, Psalm 112: 1–10, 1 Corinthians 2:1–16, Doctrine and Covenants 157:16a

# LESSON 11 RESPONSE SHEET

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

5 February 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:  
Isaiah 58:1–12, Psalm 112: 1–10,  
1 Corinthians 2:1–16,  
Doctrine and Covenants 157:16a

### Matthew 5:13–20 NRSV

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

### Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–f

1 a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

c. Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

e. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation’s restoration.

f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

- As members of Community of Christ, how can we be “salt of the earth” and a “light of the world”?

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- In what ways does Doctrine and Covenants 165:1 further expand or challenge your understanding of Matthew 5:13–20?

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- Select one of the Mission Initiatives and identify one thing you will do in the upcoming week(s) to be a “light to the world” and a “city [that] cannot be hidden.”

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# SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 12  
12 February 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 5:21–37

**Lesson Focus:** The Sermon on the Mount helped shape the early church and continues to shape disciples in sacred community.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- explore the context of the focus scripture passage.
- determine how the principles of the passage apply to the church today.

## Supplies

- Doctrine and Covenants
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 5:21–37 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 38, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Jesus’ teachings in Matthew helped shape the early church. Taken literally, some challenge our understanding of a loving and forgiving God. When we look at the socio-economic situation for the first-century church, it is easier to understand and apply the principles Jesus was teaching.

In these verses Jesus is taking elements of the law to a higher level of obedience and asking his followers to act in the *spirit* of the Law, not just obey the *letter* of the Law. His interpretation was not well received by the religious authorities. Jesus challenged his disciples to reconcile differences rather than feud over them.

- How is living the *spirit* of the law more peacemaking than obeying the *letter* of the law? How does it challenge communities?

- Tell of a time when you participated in an experience of reconciliation. How did the parties involved feel afterward?
- How does reconciliation produce more positive results than a “winner-take-all” attitude?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read together Matthew 5:21–37.

There was debate at the time of the Sermon on the Mount between religious factions about how to deal with Roman rule. These debates included how to interpret the Law (Torah). The honor of the Jews was being challenged, and that usually called for a feud. Honor (public acknowledgment of one’s place in society) was among the highest values. People were known and honored by their kinship ties. Males protected the

honor of the family. If someone challenged the family's status, that was cause for conflict.

Jesus understood that through a deeper interpretation of the Law, kinship groups could find reconciliation rather than risking death or injury. Jesus was redefining what honorable behaviors were. This was important to help grow the early church.

For today's lesson, divide the verses by common themes.

Verses 21–26 teach how to appropriately respond to anger. "Brother" in Matthew's Gospel describes a follower of Jesus. A brother is to settle disagreements by reconciliation, particularly before coming to worship. It was important that the families be unified and learn to settle differences among themselves rather than take their disputes before religious or political courts where they could be arrested and put in prison.

- What new standard of behavior is Jesus teaching in these verses?
- How has reconciliation been effective in the life of your congregation?

Verses 27–32 relate to sexual behavior. Jesus' teaching goes beyond the physical act of adultery, which would bring dishonor to a woman's husband, and says even the desire to commit adultery brings division. Jesus teaches that self-discipline and respect are important. Some biblical scholars describe verses 29–30 as exaggerations that Jesus uses to make his point, indicating the damage such immoral behaviors can have on marital relationships.

- How does this counsel challenge or affirm your understanding about right relationships?

Verse 31 addresses divorce. Marriage in first-century Judaism was not a romantic decision between a man and woman, but an economic decision between two families. When a divorce occurred, it had serious economic implications for the woman's family. If a divorce was necessary (see Matthew 19:3–12), the woman needed a certificate to allow her to marry again. All this would help stabilize life for both the families and the community. Jesus again called his followers to transcend the Mosaic Law. "But I say unto you..."

- Compare this passage to Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a. Describe how recent counsel provides deeper understanding of what Jesus upholds in Matthew 5:31–32.

Verses 33–37 discuss proper behavior in the marketplace. To swear means to use God's name as a guarantee to the truthfulness of your statement. Rather than swear, be truthful, Jesus says. Say what you mean and mean what you say, thus avoiding conflict with your

brothers over lying and upholding the honor of your group.

The penalty for many violations of Jewish law was death. Jesus provided his followers another way of defending honor through reconciliation and respect.

- How does this context help you understand Jesus' teachings?
- How does this fit with the overall message of the Sermon on the Mount?

## 3 RESPOND

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

Jesus taught his followers how life would be lived in God's kingdom and to strive to live those behaviors and attitudes. The first-century culture was more community based than individualistic. Jesus' teachings promote wholeness in personal and community relationships. Righteousness, love, and reconciliation are principles of kingdom building and kingdom living.

- What do these principles say to us today?
- How do we apply them in cultures where individualism is promoted?

## 4 SEND

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

Form small groups of two or three and give each group or pair one of the eight sacraments of Community of Christ. Describe how each sacrament symbolizes blessing of healing and reconciliation for individuals, families, congregations, and communities. Share insights with the larger group.

## 5 BLESS

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

Read "Gentle God, When We Are Driven" CCS 222, verse four.

Reconciliation and peacemaking are part of Christian discipleship. It is also the specific ministry of the Aaronic teacher. If possible, invite a teacher to offer a prayer of reconciliation for individual relationships, the congregation, and the world.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Deuteronomy 30:15–20, Psalm 119:1–8, 1 Corinthians 3:1–9, Doctrine and Covenants 162:7

# LESSON 12 RESPONSE SHEET

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

12 February 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:  
Deuteronomy 30:15–20, Psalm 119:1–8,  
1 Corinthians 3:1–9,  
Doctrine and Covenants 162:7

### Matthew 5:21–37 NRSV

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Jesus taught his followers how life would be lived in God’s kingdom and to strive to live those behaviors and attitudes. The first-century culture was more community based than individualistic. Jesus’ teachings promote wholeness in personal and community relationships. Righteousness, love, and reconciliation are principles of kingdom building and kingdom living.

- What do these principles say to us today?

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- How do we apply them in cultures where individualism is promoted?

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Describe how each sacrament symbolizes blessing of healing and reconciliation for individuals, families, congregations, and communities. Share insights with the larger group.

Blessing of Children

Laying on of Hands for the Sick

Baptism

Marriage

Confirmation

Ordination

Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

Evangelist Blessing

# SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 13  
19 February 2017

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 5:38–48

**Lesson Focus:** Loving all people includes finding nonviolent methods to address injustices.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- explore Jesus' teachings of nonviolent responses to injustices.
- discuss methods of pursuing peace through Jesus' lens.
- gain deeper understanding of Jesus' statement regarding perfection.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 5:38–48 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 39, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

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

Dwelling in the Word with Psalm 119:33–40

Ask three readers to read the scripture passage. Pause between readings to consider the questions which follow. Share your insights with one or two others.

Take several deep, cleansing breaths. Close your eyes for the first reading of the Psalm:

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,  
and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your  
law and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments,  
for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish  
gain.

Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me  
life in your ways.

Confirm to your servant your promise, which is  
for those who fear you.

Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your  
ordinances are good.

See, I have longed for your precepts; in your  
righteousness give me life.

After the first reading, ask, "What words or images come to mind?"

After the second reading, ask, "What is God saying to you in this passage?"

After the third reading, ask, "How does this text inform us about what it means to follow Jesus?"

Offer a prayer or ask someone in the class to offer a prayer for today's lesson time.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read Matthew 5:38–48.

These verses are part of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus describes a way of life for disciples that reflects God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus begins by acknowledging what is already understood: “You have heard that it was said...” He goes on to state, “But I say to you...” indicating a countercultural shift of thought.

Verses 38–42 teach nonviolent means as effective protests to injustices. Striking a Jew with the back of the right hand was an act of dominance or power. Turning the other cheek would be challenging the aggressor to slap with an open hand, an act reserved for those of equal status, thus demanding equality. To take one’s coat left the person with the cloak or outer garment. By giving the cloak as well, the person would be naked. This could bring shame to all involved. Romans could force anyone to carry their baggage for one mile as a public sign of authority over their subjects. Going two miles turned this forced service from an act of humiliation to a voluntary action essentially rejecting the insult.

- Give examples where Jesus responded to injustice, not with retaliation, but with nonviolent words or actions.
- How have persons used nonviolence as a means of protest in your community or nation?

Verses 43–48 command disciples to love everyone, including enemies. He further exhorts listeners to “be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48). Loving one’s neighbors is central to Jesus’ teachings. It is counterintuitive to love those who shame or harm us. This kind of love requires prayer. This commandment requires forgiveness of those who have wronged us. To forgive others requires us to receive God’s forgiveness for our own shortcomings.

- In what ways do you see love of all people, including enemies, expressed in your community? In the world?
- What different actions are required to love our enemies as opposed to loving those who love us?

The Greek word used for perfect is *telos*. The word describes something that has grown up or matured and reached its full potential. For example, a fruit tree reaches its *telos* when it matures and bears healthy fruit.

- What perfection is Jesus asking of disciples?
- Is it impossible for us to attain perfection? If so, why would Jesus have commanded it?

## 3 RESPOND

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

The Enduring Principle Pursuit of Peace tells us in part that

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.

—*Sharing In Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13

- How are Jesus’ teachings in Matthew reflected in these statements?

## 4 SEND

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

Consider the following statement:

Peacemaking doesn’t mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.

—*Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*,  
Shane Claiborne & Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove,  
Zondervan, 2010, p. 382

Think of an injustice in your life, congregation, or community.

- How is the injustice currently addressed?
- What acts of peacemaking could be used to address this injustice?

Prayerfully consider what action of peacemaking you will take in the coming week(s) to address this injustice.

## 5 BLESS

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

Reread Psalm 119:33–40 as a closing prayer.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18; Psalm 119:33–40; 1 Corinthians 3:10–11, 16–23; Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

# LESSON 13 RESPONSE SHEET

## SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

19 February 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:  
Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18; Psalm 119:33–40;  
1 Corinthians 3:10–11, 16–23;  
Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

### Matthew 5:38–48 NRSV

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

### The Enduring Principle Pursuit of Peace tells us in part that

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.

—*Sharing In Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13

- How are Jesus’ teachings in Matthew reflected in these statements?

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### Consider the following statement:

Peacemaking doesn’t mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.

—*Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*,  
Shane Claiborne & Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove,  
Zondervan, 2010, p. 382

### Think of an injustice in your life, congregation, or community.

- How is the injustice currently addressed?

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- What acts of peacemaking could be used to address this injustice?

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Prayerfully consider what action of peacemaking you will take in the coming week(s) to address this injustice.

# LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 14  
26 February 2017

## TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

ORDINARY TIME

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Matthew 17:1–9/17:1–8 IV

**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*
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** 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 total 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 17:1–9/17:1–8 IV 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 total 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 total 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 total 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.

\*Additional lectionary scriptures: Exodus 24:12–18, Psalm 2, 2 Peter 1:16–21, Doctrine and Covenants 162:1a–b

# LESSON 14 RESPONSE SHEET

## TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

26 February 2017

\*Additional lectionary scriptures:  
Exodus 24:12–18, Psalm 2,  
2 Peter 1:16–21,  
Doctrine and Covenants 162:1a–b

### Matthew 17:1–9 NRSV

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

### 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?

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- 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?

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