



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

22 OCTOBER 2017–26 NOVEMBER 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 24)

LESSON 48
22 October 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:15–22

Lesson Focus: Respond to God's grace and generosity.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discuss Jesus' teaching of giving to "Caesar" versus giving to God.
- examine the implications of God's Grace and Generosity.
- consider individual and collective response of time, talent, treasure, and testimony.

Supplies

- Bible
- 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 22:15–22 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 107–108, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Consider the images of God as Isaiah 45:5–7 (*The Message, paraphrased*) is read aloud:

I, GOD, the God of Israel, call you by your name.
I've singled you out, called you by name,
and given you this privileged work.
And you don't even know me!
I am GOD, the only God there is.
Besides me there are no real gods.
I'm the one who armed you for this work,
though you don't even know me,
So that everyone, from east to west, will know
that I have no god-rivals.
I am GOD, the only God there is.
I form light and create darkness,
I make harmonies and create discords.
I, GOD, do all these things.

- What images speak to you?
- Share a statement of praise to God.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 22:15–22 (NRSV).

Jews in first-century Palestine paid many different taxes. The tax referred to in this lesson was an imperial tax paid to support the Roman occupation of Israel. The political faction that followed Herod were known as Herodians. This group of Herod supporters included some Jews who opposed Jesus and believed the tax was necessary to support the governance over Israel. The Pharisees, political foes of Herod and leaders in the Jewish community, found the tax offensive and a constant reminder of their humiliation. From their point of view, the tax paid for their oppression by the Romans. Paying the required tax with a coin engraved with a picture of Caesar of Tiberias caused them to break the commandment of loyalty to God alone.

The question posed was intended to trap Jesus. Agreeing to pay taxes to the emperor would put him in danger with the Jewish religious community while advocating against the tax would put him in jeopardy with the Roman government.

Jesus' response to the question caused hearers to think more deeply. Following the law of the land while also following God's law is a universal concern today. In small groups, in a larger group, or on your Response Sheet, respond to the following questions.

- What belongs to governments?
- What belongs to God?
- Identify challenges in the world today in which the actions of a government conflict with the teachings of Christ.
- To whom do you belong?

3 RESPOND

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

God is the center of life. All that we are, all that we have, belong to God. God's unconditional grace and generosity call us to respond by giving and receiving generously. Doctrine and Covenants 163:9 counsels:

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint. Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests. Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts

without thought of return. Could it be otherwise in the domain of God, who eternally gives all for the sake of creation?

Giving is often easier than receiving. Discuss how generosity can flow both to and from disciples. What barriers prevent generous giving? What barriers prevent generous receiving?

4 SEND

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

On your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- What are some examples of God's abundant generosity in your life?
- What is a new way you might respond to God's generosity?

Be assured of God's abundant and unconditional love for you. Share of God's love for someone this week.

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing "Can We Calculate Our Giving?" CCS 617, stanza one.

Offer a closing prayer for courage to live in God's love.

LESSON 48 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 22)

22 October 2017

Isaiah 45:1-7 (*The Message*, paraphrased)

I, GOD, the God of Israel, call you by your name. I've singled you out, called you by name, and given you this privileged work. And you don't even know me!

I am GOD, the only God there is. Besides me there are no real gods.

I'm the one who armed you for this work, though you don't even know me,

So that everyone, from east to west, will know that I have no god-rivals.

I am GOD, the only God there is. I form light and create darkness, I make harmonies and create discords. I, GOD, do all these things.

- What images of God are presented?
- List other characteristics of God according to your understanding.

Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV)

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.

¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.

²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?"

²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things

that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

- What things are "Caesar's"?
- What things are God's?
- What challenges exist in determining loyalties to God or "the other"?

Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint. Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests. Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return. Could it be otherwise in the domain of God, who eternally gives all for the sake of creation?

- What are some examples of God's abundant generosity in your life?
- What is a new way you might respond to God's generosity?

Be assured of God's abundant and unconditional love for you. Share of God's love for someone this week.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 25)

LESSON 49
29 October 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:34–46

Lesson Focus: Love as God loves.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Jesus' identification of the greatest commandments.
- understand the principles of worthiness and All Are Called.
- deepen their commitment to love as God loves.

Supplies

- Bible
- 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 22:34–46 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 109, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read aloud Doctrine and Covenants 163:10 a, b.

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

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

Spend a few minutes of quiet meditation on this message of God's love. How does it speak to you? Share your thoughts with one other person in the class.

Have a class member offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's love.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 22:34–46 (NRSV).

The Sadducees and Pharisees continually questioned Jesus in an effort to trap him. The Sadducees were aristocrats, the ruling elite who focused more on politics than religion. They were religiously conservative and literalists of the written word. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were middle class businessmen and more connected with the common man. They gave equal authority to oral tradition and the written word and expected strict adherence to laws as tradition demanded.

Following an encounter where Jesus confounded the Sadducees, the Pharisees approached him. In response to their query as to which was the greatest commandment, Jesus silenced their attempted entrapment by reciting passages from the Torah, the Jewish sacred text. The commandments are summed up, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and

with all your mind” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5) and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

To love God means to love God’s people. The biblical definition of love (agape) is mercy and loving kindness shown by patience and generosity. It is active response to God’s unconditional love. Even as God chooses to love us, we choose to love our neighbor. It is not always easy to love a neighbor who is a friend and harder still to love an enemy.

In small groups, the larger group, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- Is it possible to look into the eyes of an enemy or one who has wronged you and love unconditionally?
- How can we love enough to treat a stranger the same as we treat one close to us?

3 RESPOND

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

To love as God loves requires selflessness, humility, kindness, and discipline. Martin Luther writes,

Now one may wish to ask: How can you harmonize this statement, that all things are to be comprehended in these two commandments... To answer this, let us see in the first place how Christ explains the law, namely, that it must be kept in the heart. In other words, the law must be spiritually comprehended; for he who does not lay hold of the law with the heart and with the Spirit, will certainly not fulfil it.

—Martin Luther’s Complete Church Postil,
www.lutherdansk.dk/1%20Web-AM%20-%20Introduction/Kirkepos.htm

Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 states,

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new

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

Taking on the life and mind of Christ arises from spiritual comprehension that directs our hearts. In small groups, the larger group, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- What does it look like to “take on the life and mind of Christ”?
- How does one “spiritually” comprehend the commandments to love God and love neighbor?
- List potential barriers that prevent fulfilling these commandments.

4 SEND

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

This week as you listen to the news, read social media, or see other news sources, filter the content through “Jesus” lenses. Is love expressed? How? Would the situation be different by employing “love” lenses?

Listen carefully to the world around you. Be “Jesus” in someone’s life this week.

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing “God Weeps” CCS 212.

Close with a prayer of commitment.

LESSON 49 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 23)

29 October 2017

Doctrine and Covenants 163:10 a, b

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

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

- How does this message of God's love speak to you?

Matthew 22:34–46

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?³⁷He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

⁴¹Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴²"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." ⁴³He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"?"

⁴⁵If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

- Is it possible to look into the eyes of an enemy or one who has wronged you and love unconditionally?

- How can we love enough to treat a stranger the same as we treat one close to us?

Martin Luther:

Now one may wish to ask: How can you harmonize this statement, that all things are to be comprehended in these two commandments... To answer this, let us see in the first place how Christ explains the law, namely, that it must be kept in the heart. In other words, the law must be spiritually comprehended; for he who does not lay hold of the law with the heart and with the Spirit, will certainly not fulfil it.

—Martin Luther's Complete Church Postil,
www.lutherdansk.dk/1%20Web-AM%20-%20Introduction/Kirkepos.htm

Doctrine and Covenants 164:5

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

- What does it look like to "take on the life and mind of Christ"?
- How does one "spiritually" comprehend the commandments to love God and love neighbor?
- List potential barriers that prevent fulfilling these commandments.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 26)

LESSON 50
5 November 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 23:1–12

Lesson Focus: Humbleness in servant ministry

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Jesus' expectations of disciples.
- discover the importance of humbleness in discipleship.
- identify a positive action step to enhance personal discipleship.

Supplies

- Bibles
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 23:1–12 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 114–115, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Sing "Make Me a Servant" CCS 597. Offer Doctrine and Covenants 11:4–5 as an opening prayer.

Behold, I speak unto all those who have desires to bring forth and establish this work; and no one can assist in this work, except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care. Behold, I am the light and the life of the world, that speak these words; therefore, give heed with your might, and then you are called. Amen.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 23:1–12.

The author of Matthew is writing to a Jewish congregation following the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Without

the temple to set them apart as God's chosen ones, external appearances became important. Confrontation arose between traditional Jewish worshippers and the followers of Jesus. The young church was struggling with identity. What traditions fit with Jesus' teachings? What needed to change? What was Jesus' way?

Jesus expressed respect for the Jewish sacred scripture when he stated, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you." He then discouraged hearers from following the way leaders in the synagogue behaved because they "talked the talk," but did not "walk the walk." They abused the authority of the position afforded them to exploit others.

The desire for honor and prestige was evidenced by donning showy prayer shawls with long fringes. Pride created the need to be in the most visible places, hold titles in exalted positions, and impose heavy burdens on those who could not possibly measure up. This marginalized the weak and impoverished. Their actions did not live the law of mercy, justice, loving kindness, or equality as written in the Torah.

According to the author of Matthew, legitimate leaders exhibited qualities of humility and servanthood and treated all as equals. They recognized the worth of all persons—one not exalted above another. God does not focus on how well one follows the rules, but on actions.

Loving relationship to God and others is at the heart of discipleship. In small groups, as a larger group, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions:

- What qualities make an effective leader? What are characteristics of an ineffective leader?
- The desire to stand out or be acknowledged is universal. How does one remain humble while receiving accolades or praise?
- What does Jesus expect from disciples?

3 RESPOND

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

Humbleness is not found in words spoken or doctrines of belief. Humbleness is found in the heart and visible through actions.

St. Augustine wrote, "Pride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a fellowship of equality under God, and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in the place of God's rule."

—*City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 868–69

His words suggest that orienting one's whole self to God is an equalizing factor. While people are unequal in intelligence, physical attributes, capability, or wealth, they remain of equal worth before God. As we deepen our relationship with God, we acknowledge this equality.

On the other hand, those who hold back or withdraw from God and neighbor out of fear of inadequacy or perceived lack of skills exhibit false humility by virtue of complacency. Failure to take responsibility for self-development deprives God of living through their lives. Everyone has a role to play in building God's kingdom.

Take a moment to reflect on your life and servanthood. What changes might strengthen your discipleship?

4 SEND

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

Spend time dwelling in the word with Matthew this week. What images does it call forth? How might the disciples have understood the message? How do Jesus' words resonate today?

Identify a goal to work on one positive change this week. Choose an accountability partner and share your experience next week.

5 BLESS

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

Sing together as a prayer "Make Me a Servant" CCS 597. Sing twice and end with "Amen."

LESSON 50 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 26)

5 November 2017

Matthew 23:1–12

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,
²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;
³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it;
but do not do as they do, for they do not practice
what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard
to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others;
but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger
to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen
by others; for they make their phylacteries broad
and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place
of honor at banquets and the best seats in the
synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in
the marketplaces, and to have people call them
rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you
have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And
call no one your father on earth, for you have one
Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be
called instructors, for you have one instructor,
the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be
your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be
humbled, and all who humble themselves will be
exalted."

- What qualities make an effective leader? What are characteristics of an ineffective leader?
 - The desire to stand out or be acknowledged is universal. How does one remain humble while receiving accolades or praise?
 - What does Jesus expect from disciples?
- St. Augustine wrote, "Pride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a fellowship of equality under God, and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in the place of God's rule."
—*City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 868–69
- Take a moment to reflect on your life and servanthood. What changes might you make?
 - Identify a goal to work on one positive change this week. Choose an accountability partner and share your experience next week.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 27)

LESSON 51
12 November 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:1–13

Lesson Focus: Be prepared.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the symbolism in the parable.
- identify ways to prepare and fully live out the identity, message, and mission of Jesus.
- reach beyond the comfort zone to where God is calling.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 25:1–13 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 116–117, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read aloud this scripture passage from Amos 5:18, 20–24.

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

- What images captured your imagination?

Read a second time.

- What is the primary message you hear?

Offer a prayer for deeper understanding of today’s gospel passage from Matthew.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Just as in our day, weddings were special events in Jesus’ culture. In order to grasp the meaning of the scripture in Matthew, it’s helpful to understand wedding customs of that day. Parents of the bride entertained guests gathered at the bride’s home while awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. As the bridegroom approached, bridesmaids and other guests lit torches and hurried outside to meet him. The entire party journeyed through the streets to

the groom's home. The ceremony and feast that followed continued for several days.

In this parable, for whatever reason, the groom does not show up when expected. As hours pass the bridesmaids fall asleep. A shout of "He is coming" awakens them at midnight. Ten bridesmaids jump up to light their lamps to meet him. Five are prepared with sufficient oil. With the delay in the arrival of the groom, five bridesmaids have run out of oil and have no reserves. By the time they rush about in the middle of the night to find oil, they miss the festivities at the groom's home.

Previous chapters in Matthew taught principles of living as a follower of Christ. Now, Jesus begins speaking of preparing for end times. In this parable, Jesus is the bridegroom. Early disciples anticipated Jesus' return to earth in their lifetime, but it did not happen. Even today Jesus has not physically returned. However, deeper insights help us relate this parable to our day and age.

The bridesmaids represent the church or followers of Christ. The oil that makes the lamps operational includes responsible acts of love, mercy, and justice required of all disciples. Remaining awake and alert requires constant preparation through study, prayer, and service. These are not things that can be "borrowed" by another who is less prepared. It takes whole-life discipline and discipleship.

In small groups, as a larger group, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- How does this parable disrupt our comfort zone?
- What does the parable say about waiting for Jesus' return?

3 RESPOND

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

Community of Christ Basic Belief statement about the end time states:

We press forward together in service to God, knowing that our labor is not in vain. The future of the creation belongs to the Prince of Peace, not to those who oppress, dominate, or destroy. As we anticipate that future, we devote ourselves to seek Christ's peace and pursue it. We do not know the day or hour of Christ's coming but know only that God is faithful. With faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we face the future in hopeful longing, and with the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 16

Each time we bear each other's burdens, work for justice, advocate for the poor or oppressed, reach out to the friendless, and extend mercy or work in any way to make the world a better place, we experience the living Christ.

It's easy to become weary of well doing, frustrated by lack of visible change, disheartened by cruelties in the world around us, or distracted by the busyness of life. Always being prepared, having lamps filled with "oil and reserves" on hand can be daunting. At times, we all become a "foolish bridesmaid." But in community, we lift each other up, provide encouragement, and gain renewed hope and strength to continue the journey.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "We have learned a bit too late in the day that action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility" (*Letters and Papers from Prison* [New York: Touchstone, 1953]).

- Share a time when you were unprepared for service. What/who helped you?

4 SEND

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

Examine ways you and your congregation have oil ready and lamps prepared for service. Discuss in small groups, the larger group, or make notes on your Response Sheet.

- Who is someone who would benefit from your help this week? Make an effort to provide ministry to this person.
- Name ideas that are ready for action in your congregation. How can your lamp light the way for others to follow?

5 BLESS

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

Offer this prayer:

You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand (Romans 13:11–12).

Lord, help us use our time wisely, recognizing today is the day we must make a difference in your world. Amen.

LESSON 51 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 27)

12 November 2017

Matthew 25:1–13

¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

- How does this parable disrupt our comfort zone?
- What does the parable say about waiting for Jesus’ return?

Community of Christ Basic Belief statement about the end time states:

We press forward together in service to God, knowing that our labor is not in vain. The future of the creation belongs to the Prince of Peace, not to those who oppress, dominate, or destroy. As we anticipate that future, we devote ourselves to seek Christ’s peace and pursue it. We do not know the day or hour of Christ’s coming but know only that God is faithful. With faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we face the future in hopeful longing, and with the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 16

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “We have learned a bit too late in the day that action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility” (*Letters and Papers from Prison* [New York: Touchstone, 1953]).

- Share a time when you were unprepared for service. What/who helped you?
- Who is someone who would benefit from your help this week? Make an effort to provide ministry to this person.
- Name ideas that are ready for action in your congregation. How can your lamp light the way for others to follow?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 28)

LESSON 52
19 November 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:14–30

Lesson Focus: Overcoming fear to be in mission

Objectives

The learners will...

- understand how caring for all of God’s creation is crippled by fear.
- gain a deeper appreciation for God’s grace and generosity.
- grasp the depth of the call to mission and be ready to risk.

Supplies

- Bibles
- 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 25:14–30 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 118–119, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Ask class members to take turns reading stanzas of “Bring Many Names” CCS 5.

- What images of God are expressed? Add other images to the list.

Offer a prayer of praise to honor God.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

The parable of the talents is often related to stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. Matthew’s account lends a second lesson worthy of consideration.

In the story, three servants are given talents, or money, to handle for the owner. The amount of money is staggering. A talent was a unit of money equal to fifteen years of pay

for the common laborer! They are not given instruction on how to use the money, but somehow understand they are accountable for what they received. The first two servants diligently went to work and doubled the interest on the monies entrusted to them. The third, who had received the least amount, simply buried his talent.

Upon the master’s return, the two who had doubled the accounts received praise and reward. The third, who buried his talent, was rebuked. His excuse was, “Master, I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; **so I was afraid**, and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours” (bold type added).

Fear. The third servant perceived the master as a harsh, cruel judge and fear led to inaction. He chose the path of least resistance and took no risk to improve the master’s holdings. According to the parable, however, the master was extremely generous. He trusted his servants enough to give them huge amounts of money to manage while he was away.

A lesson from the parable is that what we do, or what we fail to do, with what God has graciously entrusted to us, shapes our lives and the world. Active faith risks for the sake of the gospel.

Our perception or understanding of God is important.

In small groups, the larger group, or on your Response Sheet, discuss the effects of seeing God as

- a. a primary enforcer of rules.
- b. a God of grace and generosity.

How does your personal perception of God affect your actions?

How does your congregation's perception of God affect mission?

3 RESPOND

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

Jesus shares this parable a few days before he dies on the cross. His death witnesses of God's unconditional and abundant love for all of creation. Because God loves so much, Jesus is raised from the dead so we might know life is stronger than death. But just as we learned from Jesus' life, discipleship comes with risk and challenge. Consider this scripture from Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a–c.

- a. Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church.
- b. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.
- c. This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life

stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

Discuss the following questions.

- How is God asking us to use the "talents" graciously and abundantly given to us?
- What risks are inherent in discipleship?
- What are the blessings of risking for God?

4 SEND

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

This week, contemplate your giftedness and that of the congregation. Are gifts being used to the fullest? During a time of meditation offer "Lord, here am I; use me" and "Lord, here are we; use us." Listen intently and journal the ideas that come to your mind. Seek deeper insight on how you or your congregation might risk in mission. Share with your congregation.

5 BLESS

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

Offer the following prayer.

Loving God, creator of all that was, is, and is to be, forgive us. Forgive us for not knowing, not understanding. Forgive us for fearing to risk, for failing to multiply the time, talent, treasure, and testimony you have entrusted to us on behalf of building the peaceable kingdom.

You alone are worthy of praise! You have blessed us with enough and to spare. May we be found worthy. Amen.

LESSON 52 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 28)

19 November 2017

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Talk about the effects of seeing God as

- a. a primary enforcer of rules.
- b. a God of grace and generosity.
- How does your personal perception of God affect your actions?
- How does your congregation’s perception of God affect mission?

Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a–c

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

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

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

- How is God asking us to use the “talents” graciously and abundantly given to us?
- What risks are inherent in discipleship?
- What are the blessings of risking for God?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 29)

LESSON 53
26 November 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:31–46

Lesson Focus: Uncalculated Discipleship

Objectives

The learners will...

- recognize God's love and concern for the weak and vulnerable.
- identify ways to live authentic discipleship.
- consider ways to be of one heart and mind with God.

Supplies

- Bibles
- 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 25:31–46 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 120, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Use "I Am Standing Waiting" CCS 298 as a guided meditation. Ask class members to close their eyes and visualize the scenes as the stanzas are read slowly.

Allow for a moment of silence; ask a few people to share their experience. Close with a prayer.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Matthew 25:31–46 is the final lesson in a series of parables and teachings about Jesus' expectations of responsible disciples. The twelve understood Jesus' analogy of sheep and goats as they were part of the economy. Palestinian flocks often contained both sheep and goats. At the end of each day, the animals were divided into separate pens. Sheep enjoyed the open pasture while goats were enclosed

to protect them from the cold. To the businessman sheep had greater commercial value than goats. They offered more saleable, usable products such as wool, milk, meat, bones, horns, and dung.

Providing food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, clothes for the naked, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick, and tending to those in prison were familiar acts of mercy required by Jewish law. In Jesus' allegory, persons identified as "sheep" and "goats" seem surprised at the king's observations. When did we see you and do these things for you? When did we see you and not do these things for you? They are clueless! They did not remember the king ever coming into their presence. Perhaps they are even questioning whether they are sheep or goats.

According to Jesus, the answer is simple. When you have compassion for a fellow human being, especially the weak or vulnerable, you serve Jesus. The "sheep" simply shared who they were without calculation or expectation. The "goats" calculated acts of mercy to reflect a certain image rather than serving in an outpouring of love and compassion.

We expect and prepare for Jesus' presence in church on Sunday mornings, but Jesus is always found with "the least of these"—in the midst of street people, a soup kitchen, or a fox hole. This is where we, too, will find him.

As Jesus has repeatedly taught, discipleship is a whole-life commitment. Those who live the heart and mind of Christ act compassionately—always. A response to those in need does not include a check-off list or reward system. It is the result of living love that bears good fruit.

- Where have you discovered Jesus in the “least”?
- Discuss ways we can create a new world by modeling the values of Jesus.
- How does this lesson relate to Responsible Choices?

3 RESPOND

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

We all can identify as a “sheep” or a “goat” at points in our lives. “Goats” are not evil and have good intentions. But committed disciples must strive to go deeper in relationship with God until God’s heart and mind become their heart and mind, and their actions reflect God’s love without thought.

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a reminds us to “open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.”

Discuss the following questions in small groups, as a larger group, or on your Response Sheet.

- What acts of compassion are lived out in your congregation?
- How do you and your congregation deepen your relationship to God?

4 SEND

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

Consider those in your circle of influence—family, friends, co-workers, extended community. Consider those who remain nameless to you across the globe. Reflect on God’s love for them. Reflect on your love for them.

Name one thing you will do for someone in need this week without counting the cost.

5 BLESS

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

Close with this Benedictine Blessing.

May God bless you with **discontent** with easy answers, half truths, superficial relationships, so that you will live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with **anger** at injustice, oppression, abuse, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equality, and peace.

May God bless you with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and to change their pain to joy.

May God bless you with the **foolishness** to think you can make a difference in this world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

—Benedictine Sister Ruth Fox of Sacred Heart Monastery, 1985 <http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/CC/C-20120102.html>

LESSON 53 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 29)

26 November 2017

Matthew 25:31–46

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

⁴⁴Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of

you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- Where have you discovered Jesus in the “least”?
- Discuss ways we can create a new world by modeling the values of Jesus.
- How does this lesson relate to Responsible Choices?

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a

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.

- What acts of compassion are lived out in your congregation?
- How do you and your congregation deepen your relationship to God?
- Name one thing you will do for someone in need this week without counting the cost.