



Community of Christ



COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

18 FEBRUARY 2018 — 27 MAY 2018

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 B: New Testament* (with focus on the gospel according to Mark).

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

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

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

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

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 OF LENT

LESSON 12
18 February 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: Mark 1:9–15

Lesson Focus: Covenant Relationship

Objectives

The learners will...

- begin the Lenten journey.
- explore Mark's account of the beginnings of Jesus' ministry.
- discuss how the peaceful reign of Christ can become a reality.

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV)
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 1:9–15 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 48–49, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. We journey with Christ in a 40-day fast to refocus and re-center our lives in God. It is a time to rethink life priorities and open ourselves to spiritual awakening.

Sing or read "The Glory of These Forty Days" CCS 451. Share a "desert" moment experienced by ancestors in the faith or in your own life. How did God's presence make a difference?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

The world was in turmoil in 70 CE. The Jewish people were caught between Roman oppressors and Jewish terrorists. These tensions caused rising prices, fewer securities, and unsettledness. People were ready for good news, and God was about to do something radical!

Mark relates the beginning of Jesus' ministry in a few concise, straightforward verses. Scene one is Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The Spirit descends as a dove declaring Jesus as the beloved Son of God. This is good news! God who once seemed so far away has drawn near. God's heart has opened to love, becoming vulnerable to pain and loss in a visible way.

Immediately, the same Spirit that fell as a gentle dove drives Jesus into the wilderness with a different force. It is in the struggle of temptations that Jesus is prepared for the ministry before him. Forty days of hunger, pain, and personal desire versus the call of God mold him. Rather than rely on his own personal strength, he relies on God's promises.

As the third scene unfolds, John has been imprisoned. His ministry is diminishing as Jesus' ministry begins. Jesus proclaims, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." This proclamation invites the hearers to repent or turn around and see with new eyes God's grace and love. It is time for the peaceful reign on earth to become a reality in the hearts and minds of believers.

- How is the faithfulness of Jesus in submitting to baptism and enduring temptations also a call to follow Jesus?

- Where are our wilderness places and how do we rely on God in those times?
- What might we desire in the next 40 days of our personal Lenten journey? What might we expect in the congregational Lenten journey?

3 RESPOND

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

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

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

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 7

God calls us into relationship with the world. Mark's Gospel theme is "Proclaiming the Good News."

- How is God continuing to be present and restorative in the world today?
- What good news should we declare?

4 SEND

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

Doctrine and Covenants 157:11, 12, 16–17

11. Hear, O my people of the church, I am Jesus Christ of whom you have sung and testified and

in whose name you pray. I am the spirit of love and peace which is in the world and yet not known by the world.

12. I have heard your prayers which have been raised to me without ceasing, and I have sent my healing ministry as a dove to be in your midst. Therefore, lift up your hearts and rejoice in the promises which have been given for your assurance. Have I not said it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom?

16a. In the many places where you are called to labor, the forces of darkness and destruction are active indeed, and seem to hold sway. Your hearts are burdened by the magnitude of the tasks that are yours in bringing the light of my gospel into such darkness.

16b. Nevertheless, I have heard your prayers when you have cried out to me, and I have been with you in the places where you occupy. I am aware of your desires to serve me and my assurance is that as you go forth, your offerings of faith and service are acceptable to me.

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

- Who is waiting in a wilderness in need of the peace of Jesus Christ?
- How will you respond?
- Consider beginning a Lenten journal to capture your experiences and insights.

5 BLESS

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

Read Ephesians 2:14, 17.

For he [Jesus Christ] is our peace, in his flesh he made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility... So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...

Offer a closing prayer of enlightenment for opportunities to live or declare peace in your world.

LESSON 12 RESPONSE SHEET

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

18 February 2018

Mark 1:9–15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

- How is the faithfulness of Jesus in submitting to baptism and enduring the temptations also a call to follow Jesus?

- Where are our wilderness places, and how do we rely on God in those times?

- What might we desire in the next 40 days of our personal Lenten journey? What might we expect in the congregational Lenten journey?

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

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

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—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 7

- How is God continuing to be present and restorative in the world today?

- What good news should we declare?

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

LESSON 13
25 February 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: Mark 8:31–38

Lesson Focus: The Cost of Discipleship

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Peter's declaration of the Christ.
- assess the meaning of discipleship.
- give examples of ways one responds to the call of discipleship.

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV)
- Doctrine and Covenants
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 8:31–38 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 50–51, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Sing together "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" CCS 499.

- Has this familiar camp song given direction to your life? Share with another person in class. Offer a prayer of petition for the Holy Spirit to enlarge participants' understanding during class.

2 ENGAGE

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

After inquiring of his disciples who people think he is, Jesus asked the question of his disciples, "But who do YOU say that I am?" His constant companions had seen miracles, heard Jesus' teachings, and were amazed as he

confounded religious leaders of the day. It is in this context Peter answers, "You are the Messiah!" He understood Jesus as the one chosen of God to deliver Israel from oppression.

But as Jesus begins to teach of the sufferings that will come—rejections, imprisonment, death—Peter rebukes him. Surely, all this will not happen to God's chosen one. Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (v. 33).

The phrase "Get behind me, Satan" was a way of saying, "Go away!" Calling Peter "Satan" recognizes the temptation to deny and avoid the way of suffering. Peter rightly claims Jesus as Messiah but does not fully comprehend what the title means. He makes assumptions based on his own desires and expectations of a messiah.

Jesus proceeds to teach the disciples and the crowds what it means to follow a messiah who is to suffer. For Jesus, there were only two choices, God's way or the human way. Sacrificial suffering was a different concept of a messiah who traditionally was thought to be one to

arrive, conquer, and rule. Any who choose to follow must be willing to suffer and to lose themselves in service for the sake of the gospel.

- How did Peter's expectations of the Messiah differ from Jesus' explanation?
- How has your understanding of the Messiah been challenged or changed?
- Share an experience when there has been a conflict between what you wanted to do and where you believe God was calling you to go.

3 RESPOND

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

Discipleship is costly. Jesus made it clear that following him would involve sacrifice, suffering, and denial.

Mark causes us to question our own assumptions about Jesus. Do we see God as one who heals illnesses, provides prosperity, and leads our sports teams and military to victory—a God who keeps us “healthy, wealthy, and wise”? Or do we understand God as a God who meets us in life when we are most vulnerable, lost, and hopeless? God exists in the trenches of society amongst those on the margins, the oppressed, and the hungry. God shows up where least expected and most needed. This is grace. Life with God can't be purchased, earned, or inherited. It is love offered freely. We choose to follow as disciples, or not.

The Community of Christ Basic Belief about discipleship states:

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

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

- God gives us the gift of choice. Why did you choose to a disciple of Jesus?
- How are you being called to deepen your journey as a disciple?
- What risks are you willing or not willing to endure?

4 SEND

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

Every day Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?” Every day we make a decision to join Jesus on his journey to the cross. As we embark on the second week of Lent, meditate on this question as if Jesus were asking you directly. How can you share who Jesus is with those described in Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a–d?

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.

- With whom will you share the good news this week?

5 BLESS

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

Open your hearts...

Reach out....

Do not be fearful...

Be courageous and visionary...

Understand the road to transformation...is the path of the disciple.

Read or sing “Take the Path of the Disciple” CCS 558.

LESSON 13 RESPONSE SHEET

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

25 February 2018

Mark 8:27–38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

- How did Peter’s expectations of the Messiah differ from Jesus’ explanation?

- How has your understanding of the Messiah been challenged or changed?

- Share an experience when there has been a conflict between what you wanted to do and where you believe God was calling you to go.

The Community of Christ Basic Belief about discipleship states

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

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

- God gives us the gift of choice. Why did you choose to become a disciple of Jesus?

- How are you being called to deepen your journey as a disciple?

- What risks are you willing or not willing to endure?

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

LESSON 14
4 March 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 2:13–22

Lesson Focus: Sacred Spaces

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the context of Jesus' actions.
- discuss personal and congregational focus.
- envision mission outside the walls of a physical space.

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV)
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- 3x5 cards
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 2:13–22 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 52, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Sing "Lord, Prepare Me" CCS 280 one time. Share an experience of being "sanctuary" this past week.

Sing "Lord, Prepare Me" CCS 280 twice.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

All four Gospels record the story of Jesus' anger in the temple. John places the story of cleansing the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as he emphasizes Jesus' prophetic voice and action.

The marketplace was essential during the Passover festival. Travelers needed a place to purchase pure, spotless animals and exchange local coins for Roman coins for the temple tax. These were needed to access the temple. While the other Gospels imply that price gouging was an injustice Jesus railed against, it is not mentioned in John's Gospel.

The temple, the dwelling place of God, was magnificent. In an effort to appease his subjects, Herod the Great began restoration of the temple in 20 BCE, and it was still in process. But over the years, it had strayed from its original purpose and mission as a sacred place. Business ventures became the focus.

Jesus' actions were twofold. First, he ushered in the idea that animal sacrifices were no longer needed for access to God. And second, the temple of Jesus' body is where the Spirit and truth of God dwells. Worship is no longer restricted to a physical place. God is found and experienced through faith in Jesus Christ.

This scripture challenges us to examine our own focus. Do we spend time, talent, and treasure on a church building or campground or other physical space? Is the time spent proportional to time spent in mission? We must not lose the sacred purpose of gathering.

- How would you define “sacred space”?
- Identify a physical sacred place that would be difficult to give up. Why is it important to you? How would you respond if asked to leave it behind?
- How does your congregational budget and program support mission inside and outside your place of worship?
- What would Jesus see if he walked into your place of worship on Sunday?

3 RESPOND

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

Community of Christ has two temples: the Kirtland Temple in Ohio and the Independence Temple in Missouri.

The Independence Temple was “dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation and healing of the spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5).

Doctrine and Covenants 163:8c states, “...the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ’s peace, where people from all nations, ethnicities, and life circumstances can be gathered into a spiritual home without dividing walls, as a fulfilment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life.”

- How does your discipleship reflect this Temple dedication?
- How does your congregation function as a sanctuary of Christ’s peace?

The Temple Strategy Team’s focus statement says in part

The Christian journey is a pilgrimage toward shalom; a movement toward wholeness revealed to us in the way of Christ. Jesus’ life, ministry, death,

and resurrection take us into the intimate center of God and impel us outward into mission; to embody wholeness and grace in a suffering world.

As we journey, we covenant to become a “dwelling place for God” (Ephesians 2:22). We seek to become personally “a sanctuary of Christ’s peace” for the sake of family, friends, congregation, community, denomination, the world, and God’s reign.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 21

President Stephen Veazey shared the following in a sermon on June 10, 2007.

Both temples—in Kirtland and Independence—remind us that, above all else, Jesus Christ seeks to restore us to life as we were created to experience it; life as God intends it to be; life characterized by love, generosity, relationships of mutuality, sharing, and peacefulness.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 19

- In what ways do we become a “sanctuary of Christ’s peace”?
- How do we take personal experiences with God into our everyday world?

4 SEND

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

On a 3x5 card write the name of a specific place you will be this week. Post the card on the refrigerator or another visible place. Offer a prayer that you will look for, see, and partner with God in this ordinary but sacred place this week.

5 BLESS

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

Sing or read as a closing prayer “Can Steel and Stone and Swirling Spire” CCS 281.

LESSON 14 RESPONSE SHEET

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

4 March 2018

John 2:13–22

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

- How would you define "sacred space"?
- Identify a physical sacred place that would be difficult to give up. Why is it important to you? How would you respond if asked to leave it behind?
- How does your congregational budget and program support mission inside and outside your place of worship?
- What would Jesus see if he walked into your place of worship on Sunday?

Doctrine and Covenants 163:8c states, "the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace, where people from all nations, ethnicities, and life circumstances can be gathered into a spiritual home without dividing walls, as a fulfilment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life."

- How does your discipleship reflect this temple dedication?
- How does your congregation function as a sanctuary of Christ's peace?

The Christian journey is a pilgrimage toward shalom; a movement toward wholeness revealed to us in the way of Christ. Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection take us into the intimate center of God and impel us outward into mission; to embody wholeness and grace in a suffering world.

As we journey, we covenant to become a "dwelling place for God" (Ephesians 2:22). We seek to become personally "a sanctuary of Christ's peace" for the sake of family, friends, congregation, community, denomination, the world, and God's reign.

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—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 19

- In what ways do we become a "sanctuary of Christ's peace"?
- How do we take personal experiences with God into our everyday world?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LESSON 15
11 March 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 3:14–21

Lesson Focus: God's Gift of Salvation

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore God's love for the world.
- examine the dimensions of salvation.
- commit to share God's unconditional love.

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 3:14–21 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 53–54, available through Herald House.

Supplies

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

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Read John 3:14–21. What images come to mind?

Read the passage a second time. Describe a major challenge from the scripture in one sentence.

Offer a prayer for openness during class.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Jesus' late-night conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:14–21 leads to one of the most quoted biblical texts, John 3:16. Verses 14 and 15 refer to an incident in the Hebrew scripture (Numbers 21:6–9) when the Israelites fleeing to the Promised Land complained about the lack of water, decent food, and snakes that were causing many deaths. As the people realized the sinfulness of their complaints,

they approached Moses to plead with God to take them away. God tells Moses to place a poisonous snake on a pole, lift it high on a pole, and whenever persons who were bitten looked at it, they would live.

This story is set against the physical lifting of Jesus on the cross, a moment of true humiliation and defeat. Indeed, Moses' snake-on-pole provided temporary extension of life. But Jesus' cross experience was eternal. He rose from the dead, still lives, and all who believe in him "shall not perish but have everlasting life."

The oft-quoted John 3:16 declared God's unconditional love, and verse 17 declares it not just for some, but for the entire world. God did not send Jesus to condemn or judge the world, but to offer light, love, and salvation. Those who believe security comes from power and might rather than vulnerability and sacrifice may not experience the great light that Jesus brought to the world.

This passage is not about judgment or punishment. Instead, it teaches of God's grace and unconditional love. In the face of God's unconditional love, we are powerless. When we relinquish the illusion that we are in control, we experience life and freedom from sinfulness and brokenness.

- When have you experienced a crisis or dilemma when someone used scripture to justify judgment?
- Share an experience in which you have seen God's love overcome darkness.

"Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a).

—Christ's Mission, Our Mission: Exploring Our Faith, September 2012 Leadership Gathering

3 RESPOND

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

Salvation is defined as "preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss" or in theological terms "deliverance from sin and its consequences, believed by Christians to be brought about by faith in Christ" (*Dictionary.com*).

Below is the Community of Christ Basic Beliefs statement regarding salvation:

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is the loving gift of God's grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance. 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

Community of Christ teaching about salvation is not confined to individual salvation alone. We believe the qualities of salvation begin to be experienced in this life as we are reconciled with God and others through faithful response to the gospel.

The "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) evidences this unfolding direction in our lives. We also believe that salvation has personal, societal, and environmental dimensions.

Counsel to the church offers an invitation to the fullness of salvation that includes peace in this life and in the eternal realms of God's universe:

- What are examples of personal, societal, and environmental dimensions of salvation?
- How does your congregation express the various dimensions of salvation?

4 SEND

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

God is a God of love. God's grace has no bounds. Jesus offers salvation. By definition salvation preserves from harm, ruin, or loss and delivers from sin and its consequences. Salvation extends to all dimensions of this life.

- How are you being called to express God's love to the world?
- How do you extend the gift of salvation through Christ to others?

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing "The Love of God" CCS 210. Pause between stanzas to reflect and share.

Stanza 1: How has God given you room to answer "yes" or "no"?

Stanza 2: Where do you long for freedom?

Stanza 3: What walls keep us divided?

Stanza 4: Where is God's love leading?

Close with a short prayer of thanksgiving for God's unwavering love.

LESSON 15 RESPONSE SHEET

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

11 March 2018

John 3:14–21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

- When have you experienced a crisis or dilemma when someone used scripture to justify judgment?
- Share an experience in which you have seen God's love overcome darkness.

Below is the Community of Christ Basic Belief statement regarding salvation:

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is the loving gift of God's grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance. 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

Community of Christ teaching about salvation is not confined to individual salvation alone. We believe the qualities of salvation begin to be experienced in this life as we are reconciled with God and others through faith response to the gospel.

The "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) evidences this unfolding direction in our lives. We also believe that salvation has social, relational, or communal dimensions.

Counsel to the church offers an invitation to the fullness of salvation that includes peace in this life and in the eternal realms of God's universe: "Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a).

—*Christ's Mission, Our Mission: Exploring Our Faith*,
September 2012 Leadership Gathering

- What are examples of social, relational, or communal dimensions of salvation?
- How does your congregation express the various dimensions of salvation?

God is a God of love. God's grace has no bounds. Jesus offers salvation. By definition, salvation preserves from harm, ruin, or loss, and delivers from sin and its consequences. Salvation extends to all dimensions of this life.

- How are you being called to express God's love to the world?
- How do you extend the gift of salvation through Christ to others?

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LESSON 16
18 March 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 12:20–33

Lesson Focus: Suffering Love

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the concept of suffering love.
- discuss what is expected of disciples.
- discover personal and collective responses to God's love.

Supplies

- Bibles (NRSV)
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Pens, pencils, paper

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 12:20–33 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 55–56, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Read aloud John 12:24–26:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (v. 24).

- What images stand out to you? What associations do you have with grain, wheat, earth, and fruit?

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (v. 25).

- How does this speak to your life?

Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also (v. 26).

- What does the Lord require of you?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

As the Lenten journey nears an end, the challenges of discipleship intensify. Earlier chapters in John tell of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Mary anointing Jesus' feet with expensive oil, and Jesus' processional into Jerusalem. Set in the context of the Passover, Jesus directly focuses on death and life.

The passage begins with the arrival of Greeks seeking Jesus. While it is unclear whether or not they actually speak with Jesus, it is symbolic that Jesus' message will reach far beyond the Jewish nation now and in future generations. It is timeless, and it is for everyone. The discourse gives a glimpse of what seekers will need to understand if they wish to “see” Jesus.

Grains of wheat must die if they are to become fruitful. Jesus foretells his death and expresses that his very soul is troubled. Even so he will not ask to be spared, as this is

his purpose for coming to Earth. Jesus is willing to empty himself out in order to reveal the ultimate mercy and love of God. Through the Resurrection humankind can be reconciled to God whose love is boundless.

The challenge before disciples is to follow Jesus' example. The twelve would be tested and maligned by forces intending to destroy their faith and witness. They, too, must remain faithful to the call in their lives. This challenge continues today as we die to selfish desires of security, power, and wealth. We are called more deeply into kingdom building through love for, service to, and sacrifice on behalf of those in our world who suffer needlessly.

- How might the hearers of this passage have understood it in Jesus' time?
- How might it be heard today?
- What must "die" in order to be fruitful? In our life? In our congregation?

3 RESPOND

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

In "From a Trinitarian Approach to World Religions," Anthony Chvala-Smith writes:

"God" as Christians use it is given its unique shape and texture, its meaning, from the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth; his birth, his Jewishness, his message about God's kingdom, his mighty works, his befriending of sinners, his suffering under Pontius Pilate, his death for us, his risen and exalted life. When I say "God" I mean none other than the One revealed through Jesus Christ.

Jesus' person and work [is] not a "back then" but a "here and now." This same power is slowly, invisibly, transforming those who believe into creatures who can truly live for others and who can love God with the totality of our being, which is the purpose of human existence.

To say that "God is love" means that God is not a lonely, solitary self. Rather, it is to say that there is giving and receiving within the very life of God: in order for there to be true giving and receiving—the essences of love—there must be true others. Let me quote Milglore: "[The doctrine of the Trinity wants to state that] God is self-expanding, other-affirming, community building love."

—*Restoration Studies VIII*, 2000

To know Jesus is to know the heart of God. We are invited to mirror the heart of God understanding the cost.

Community of Christ proclaims:

He [Jesus] taught his followers to love God, to love their neighbors, and to love their enemies. By eating with sinners, serving the poor, healing the unclean, blessing children, and welcoming women and men as equals among his disciples, Jesus declared that all persons are of worth in the sight of God.

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

- What does Jesus' life inform you about the essence of God?
- How is Jesus at work "here" and "now"?
- How have you or your congregation experienced suffering love, dying to self, transformation, and new life?

4 SEND

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

Doctrine and Covenants 165:1b, d, 2f

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.

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

Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion.

- In response to this counsel, identify specific actions God may be calling you or your congregation to address.
- What might you or the congregation need to "die" to in order to be signals of suffering love that bear fruit?
- Spend time between now and Easter reflecting on the challenge of loving others as God loves us.

5 BLESS

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

Sing or read the words of "Make Us, O God, a Church That Shares" CCS 657. Amen.

LESSON 16 RESPONSE SHEET

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

18 March 2018

John 12:20–36

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

- How might the hearers of this passage have understood it in Jesus’ time?

- How might it be heard today?

- What must “die” in order to be fruitful? In our life? In our congregation?

Community of Christ proclaims:

He [Jesus] taught his followers to love God, to love their neighbors, and to love their enemies. By eating with sinners, serving the poor, healing the unclean, blessing children, and welcoming women and men as equals among his disciples, Jesus declared that all persons are of worth in the sight of God.

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

- What does Jesus’ life inform you about the essence of God?
- How is Jesus at work “here” and “now”?
- How have you or your congregation experienced suffering love, dying to self, transformation and new life?

Doctrine and Covenants 165:1b, d, 2f

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.

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

Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion.

- In response to this counsel, identify specific actions God may be calling you or your congregation to address.
- What might you or the congregation need to "die" to in order to be signals of suffering love that bear fruit?
- Spend time between now and Easter reflecting on the challenge of loving others as God loves us.

PALM SUNDAY

LESSON 17
25 March 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: Mark 11:1–11

Lesson Focus: Beyond Hosanna

Objectives

The learners will...

- discover deeper meaning of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- explore pathways of peace.
- take action to pursue peace

Supplies

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

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 11:1–11 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 57–58, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read or sing "O Christ Who by a Cross" CCS 315. Spend several minutes meditating on the words.

Open class with a prayer.

2 ENGAGE

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

It was parade day. The end was nearing and Jesus had yet to become the Messiah people had expected or wanted. In fact, up until this point, according to Mark, Jesus continually cautioned disciples and others not to share publicly about the miracles they had seen and experienced.

Now, in full public view, Jesus prepared to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a young, never-before-ridden

colt procured by the disciples as Jesus ordered. The donkey was the animal of choice for princes when they wished to signify peaceful intentions. Pilgrims traveling to the Passover walked. Jesus entering on the back of donkey symbolized a person of honor.

As Jesus entered, the gathered crowds spread cloaks and leafy branches on the roadway to reduce the dust as a sign of honor. They shouted:

"Hosanna!

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The hope that Jesus would deliver them from Roman rule was evident.

As Jesus' humble, peaceful procession entered from the east, a Roman procession entered from the west. Fully outfitted with horses and weapons, their position of control and oppression was clear. It was quite a contrast of parades: one proclaiming domination, the other simply but profoundly proclaiming the peaceful reign of God.

Jesus came not to conquer by rule or force, but to teach the ways of peace. In doing so, his very life was in jeopardy. His disciples and followers, excited this day, did not understand. By the end of the week, they would become discouraged and broken.

The shouts of “Hosanna” would recede into doubt and agony until God’s plan in Christ was fully revealed.

- What do we learn from the disciples or crowds who were part of Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem?
- Name an experience in which you have been disappointed in God’s answer.
- How do your current understandings limit your expectations of God?

3 RESPOND

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

Jesus’ purposely and carefully planned entrance into Jerusalem ushered in a new, radical understanding of God’s kingdom. This kingdom on earth would not be established by violent means, but would be characterized by sacrificial, unconditional love. Jesus’ way is the way of peace.

Community of Christ Basic Beliefs state:

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

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

- How is pursuit of peace and justice costly?
- For whom is it costly?

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a and 3a–b

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

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

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

- How do we create pathways for peace?
- How can they be “culturally and relationally incarnate”?
- How do you identify “cultural, political, and religious trends” that are contrary to God’s purposes?
- How do you or your congregation challenge these trends?

4 SEND

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

As you walk with Jesus this Holy Week, reflect on the Enduring Principle Pursuit of Peace (Shalom).

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

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

Identify one step you will take this week to build peace.

5 BLESS

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

Pray together:

We will trust in the Holy Spirit that leads us to do good; to do justly, to walk humbly, and to judge righteously. Amen (Doctrine and Covenants 10:6).

LESSON 17 RESPONSE SHEET

PALM SUNDAY

25 March 2018

Mark 11:1–11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

- What do we learn from the disciples and crowds who were part of Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem?

- Name an experience in which you have been disappointed in God’s answer.

- How do your current understandings limit your expectations of God?

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

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

- How is pursuit of peace and justice costly?

- For whom is it costly?

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a and 3a–b

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

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

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

- How do we create pathways for peace?

- How do you identify "cultural, political, and religious trends" that are contrary to God's purposes?

- How can they be "culturally and relationally incarnate"?

- How do you or your congregation challenge these trends?

EASTER SUNDAY

LESSON 18
1 April 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 20:1–18

Lesson Focus: Witness of Christ

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the tomb experiences of three disciples.
- examine varied responses to events.
- resolve to share the good news.

Supplies

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

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 20:1–18 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 64–65, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Have class members share the name of their favorite Easter hymn. (See CCS 471-482.) What is the message that resonates with you?

Sing one of the favorites mentioned.

2 ENGAGE

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

John gives a very detailed account of those finding the tomb empty. He first mentions “it was still dark.” John continually contrasts the darkness in the world and the light God sends into the world through Jesus. So it is not odd that he speaks of Mary Magdalene arriving at the tomb in the dark.

There were three followers that discover the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene arrived first. When she saw the stone rolled away, she ran to Peter and the unnamed disciple

“whom Jesus loved” and told them of the empty tomb. They had a footrace back to the tomb. What is interesting to note here is how differently each responded to what they found.

The unnamed disciple entered the tomb, saw it empty with the grave clothes lying folded, and believed. Exactly what he believed is not stated and somewhat difficult to discern, but his faith was intact.

Peter saw the empty tomb with the shrouds but left without understanding or faith. It was a puzzle yet to be explained.

Mary Magdalene experienced the empty tomb, knew the body was gone, but her eyes were opened when Jesus called her name. John 10:27–28 reads, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Three disciples—same morning, same tomb, but different comprehension of the experience. One’s faith is immediate, one needs time to contemplate, and one hears Jesus’ voice and knows with certainty.

Today there are those who believe and have faith without “seeing.” There are those who need time to study and learn and grow into faith. There are those who are spiritually attuned and hear God’s voice.

- To which disciple do you relate?
- What prompted you to believe in Christ?

While transformation looked different for each of the disciples, the instruction to go and witness of what they had seen and heard was the same. Jesus' death was not the end. The story of God's movement in the world had only just begun through the Resurrection.

- How has your transformation in Christ led you to mission?
- How has your congregation experienced a resurrection?

3 RESPOND

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

Beloved pastor and author Henri Nouwen wrote,

The church is called to announce the Good News of Jesus to all people and all nations. Besides the many works of mercy by which the Church must make Jesus' love visible, it must also joyfully announce the great mystery of God's salvation through the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The story of Jesus is to be proclaimed and celebrated. Some will hear and rejoice, some will remain indifferent, some will become hostile. The story of Jesus will not always be accepted, but it must be told.

We who know the story and try to live it out, have the joyful task of telling it to others. When our words rise from hearts full of love and gratitude they will bear fruit, whether we can see this or not.

—*Bread for the Journey*, New York: Harper One, 1997, p. 332

Those who walked closest to Jesus often failed to share about Jesus. The disciples heard Jesus predict his death three times; Peter confessed Jesus as Messiah but totally misunderstood what that really meant and even rebuked Jesus. Because they didn't understand what was going on, they did not share the good news.

Fortunately, we are blessed with hindsight and scriptures that tell us the story. We recount the story over and over again. We experience the story. God continues to speak and reveal more of God's nature and desires for the world. We must share the story, the good news that God is alive and loves the world.

- How do you share the good news?
- In what ways is your congregation reaching beyond the walls of the church to share the good news?
- What fears impede your witness?

4 SEND

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

Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a

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.

Doctrine and Covenants 162:8

You are a good and faithful people, but sometimes you fail to see the power that is resident in your own story and fellowship. Look carefully, listen attentively, and sense the Spirit among you. Be fervent in your witness, passionate in your discipleship, and vigorous in your labor on behalf of peace and justice. Where two or three such disciples form community, there will the Spirit be. Many will come to see. Continue your journey, O people of the Restoration. You have been blessed thus far but there is so much yet to see, so much yet to do. Go forth with confidence and live prophetically as a people who have been loved, and who now courageously choose to love others in the name of the One you serve. Amen.

- The challenge is to go and tell. With whom will you share the good news this week?

5 BLESS

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

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:7 as a closing prayer.

The Spirit of the One you follow is the spirit of love and peace. That Spirit seeks to abide in the hearts of those who would embrace its call and live its message. The path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear, but the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and those who live the truth will know the hope and the joy of discipleship in the community of Christ. Amen.

LESSON 18 RESPONSE SHEET

EASTER SUNDAY

1 April 2018

John 20:1–18

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

- To which disciple do you relate?
- What prompted you to believe in Christ?
- How has your transformation in Christ led you to mission?
- How do you experience resurrection in your life? In the life of your congregation?

Henri Nouwen wrote:

The church is called to announce the Good News of Jesus to all people and all nations. Besides the many works of mercy by which the Church must make Jesus’ love visible, it must also joyfully announce the great mystery of God’s salvation through the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The story of Jesus is to be proclaimed and celebrated. Some will hear and rejoice, some will remain indifferent, some will become hostile. The story of Jesus will not always be accepted, but it must be told.

We who know the story and try to live it out, have the joyful task of telling it to others. When our words rise from hearts full of love and gratitude they will bear fruit, whether we can see this or not.

—*Bread for the Journey*, New York: Harper One, 1997, p. 332

- How do you share the good news?

Doctrine and Covenants 162:7

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.

You are a good and faithful people, but sometimes you fail to see the power that is resident in your own story and fellowship. Look carefully, listen attentively, and sense the Spirit among you. Be fervent in your witness, passionate in your discipleship, and vigorous in your labor on behalf of peace and justice. Where two or three such disciples form community, there will the Spirit be. Many will come to see. Continue your journey, O people of the Restoration. You have been blessed thus far but there is so much yet to see, so much yet to do. Go forth with confidence and live prophetically as a people who have been loved, and who now courageously choose to love others in the name of the One you serve. Amen.

- In what ways is your congregation reaching beyond the walls of the church to share the good news?

- What fears impede your witness?

- The challenge is to go and tell. With whom will you share the good news this week?

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 19
8 April 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 20:19–31

Lesson Focus: We are imperfect. We have fears and doubts. Jesus loves us and offers his peace and love to us. He sends us out to share it with others.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage with the scripture text.
- make a connection of this passage to the Enduring Principles All Are Called and Pursuit of Peace (Shalom).
- explore the question of whether we remain behind locked doors or be Easter people, taking the peace of Jesus Christ to the world around us.

Supplies

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

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 20:19–31 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 68–69, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Read aloud or sing stanzas one, two, and four of “The Risen Christ” CCS 477. Invite learners in groups of two or three to share times they experienced grief, despair, and fear, and how the peace of Jesus Christ helped them gain new grace, new strength, and new purpose.

Ask someone to offer a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for the class.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

The Gospel according to John was most likely written about 90 CE, 60 years after Jesus’ resurrection. This was

a time when persecution from the Roman authorities was frequent, making the theme of fear and doubt especially meaningful to his first audience (Jerome H. Neyrey, introduction to “The Gospel According to John” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha, Fully Revised Fourth Edition*, [Oxford University Press, 2010], p. 1879).

Read John 20:19–31.

We need to understand that “that day” in verse 19 refers to Easter Sunday. Even though Mary Magdalene had testified of Jesus’ resurrection just that day, these disciples are locked away in fear. They are hiding and doubting Mary’s story. In this setting, Jesus appears to them through a locked door offering them peace, sending them out as he had been sent, and breathing into them the Holy Spirit. In John, we don’t wait 50 days for Pentecost; he connects the promised Spirit with the breath of Jesus himself.

- Share in groups of two or three a time when you have been sent as Jesus was sent and how the Holy Spirit helped you.

Verse 23 is potentially problematic since it seems to put judgment in human hands. In the Johannine community, forgiveness of sins was primarily intracommunity. Just as being sent into the world and receiving the Spirit applied to all the disciples and all believers as a group, so also, the internal life of the church requires forgiveness. As Christians share in the mission of Jesus Christ, they also “share in God’s act in Christ that announces, mediates, and models forgiveness” (Eugene M. Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], p. 358).

Share in groups of two or three:

- a time you witnessed or were part of communal forgiveness either for yourself or someone else.
- the importance of forgiveness for both parties.

Time jumps forward one week and the disciples are still behind closed doors with the addition of Thomas who has stated he will not believe in the Resurrection until he sees and touches Jesus for himself. Jesus comes through the closed doors once again, not scolding Thomas, but simply offering himself to him. Thomas immediately believed, announcing Jesus as “My Lord and my God.”

Share in groups of two or three a time you recognized God in your life. How has this affected your faith and discipleship?

The passage goes on to say we are blessed if we have or have not actually seen Jesus, yet believe. The author of John concludes this chapter with the statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, summarizing the content of the Christian faith, and the blessing comes in having life in his name.

Share in groups of two or three your testimony in response to this question.

- How has living a life in Christ been a blessing for you?

3 RESPOND

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

Notice the disciples are still shut up in a room by themselves the next week, behind closed doors, even after Jesus has sent them on mission. We find ourselves in similar circumstances. Worshiping behind closed doors is comfortable, safe, and easy to be with one another in a close, loving community. However, Jesus’ peace is not one of complacency. In the same breath, he sends us, gifts us with the Holy Spirit, and expects us to go beyond the doors and out into the world—“whether in the midst of family

illness and distress or in the turmoil of economic injustice. The missionary people empowered by this peace and this inbreathed Holy Spirit bear the forgiving, transforming love of God into every sphere of human experience” (D. Cameron Murchison in *Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], p. 404).

Community of Christ upholds the Enduring Principles Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) and All Are Called, along with the Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ. This is Christ’s mission of evangelism. Jesus greeted the frightened, confused disciples with God’s peace and offered assurance that all are called to be loved and to share love with others, even though we are flawed.

All Are Called

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God’s purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God’s call.

Pursuit of Peace

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 9, 13

Discuss in small groups or as a whole:

- Which of the above statements embrace the message of today’s scripture? Explain why.
- To whom beyond the door am I being sent?

4 SEND

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

Respond to the following questions on the Response Sheet, in small groups of two or three, or as a large group. Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- What are some ways I hide behind closed doors?
- What needs to happen so I will find the courage to respond to God's call of being sent? Whom can I ask for help?

or

- How has the peace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit helped me breach the closed door?
- Whom can I take along to mentor?

5 BLESS

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

Share again stanza four of "The Risen Christ" CCS 477 as a benediction for the class.

LESSON 19 RESPONSE SHEET

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

8 April 2018

John 20:19–31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

All Are Called

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God's call.

Pursuit of Peace

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 9, 13

- What are some ways I hide behind closed doors?
- What needs to happen so I will find the courage to respond to God's call of being sent? Whom can I ask for help?
- Or how has the peace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit helped me breach the closed door?

- Whom can I take along to mentor?

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 20
15 April 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:36b–48

Lesson Focus: Jesus is alive and well, helping us understand God’s will in our lives. As witnesses, we are to share this with others.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- understand the peaceful and loving nature of God through Jesus Christ who lived, was crucified, and rose from the dead.
- contemplate and discuss how they are witnesses and what this challenges them to do and be especially in light of our Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ.

Supplies

- Video: *Invite* found at www.missionalleaders.org/videos-az/
- Computer
- Projector and screen or blank wall
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke: 36b–48 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 70, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today is considered the Third Sunday of Easter in the Revised Common Lectionary. Last week we considered John’s version of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples in the upper room. Today we listen to Luke’s telling of the event. In verse 48, Jesus shares that they “are witnesses of these things.”

Depending on resources available, choose one of the activities below and discuss the following questions in small groups or as a whole.

If technology is available, show the video *Invite*, found at www.missionalleaders.org/videos-az/.

If technology is not available, have volunteers read the stanzas of “The Risen Christ” *CCS 477* taking turns.

- Of what about Jesus have you been a witness?
- How has it made a difference in your life?
- With whom would you share your witness?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read Luke 24:36b–48. Discuss the ideas and questions below in small groups or as a whole.

This scripture has four parts: (1) fright and alarm, (2) joy mixed with disbelief, (3) open and understanding minds and hearts, and (4) commission. As we review the Resurrection stories in this chapter, we see that prior to this there have been several witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection, but the disciples are still afraid and cannot wrap their minds around this possibility. Jesus understands this and is patient with them, asking them to use their senses of sight and touch, and then finally eating food with them to prove that he has a fully human body. He’s alive once again, not a ghost or spirit. Only after he allays their fears does he share with them about the scriptures.

- How does this challenge or affirm your understanding of resurrection?
- When have you been afraid or what are you afraid of today?

- What about Jesus' life and resurrection helps calm your fears?

Once the disciples realized it was really Jesus, alive and well, he was able to share with them and open their minds to the scriptures. "Minds cannot be opened when trapped by fear...Jesus lives in accord with Scripture, and both the words and the man truly reveal God's plan...which includes the extension of God's blessing, forgiveness of sin, to all nations" (Sarah S. Henrich in *Exegetical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 429).

Share times you have witnessed God's blessing and forgiveness of sin.

The last two verses of this passage help us understand new life in Christ—that repentance and forgiveness are to be proclaimed to everyone, and we are the witnesses who must tell and live what we know.

Wherever there is inhumanity, exploitation, discrimination, and hopelessness, Jesus shows up offering comfort, [and] assurance...He invites us to be witnesses that it is all about God—God's intention to bring peace, unity, harmony, love, compassion, grace, justice, and mercy to a world that is broken and sinful...God is alive and working on behalf of wholeness and community.

—Barbara Essex in *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 429

- Tell about a time you experienced God "alive and working on behalf of wholeness and community."
- When has Jesus shown up offering comfort and assurance?

3 RESPOND

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

Community of Christ's Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ emphasizes Christ's mission of evangelism. Jesus was sent to proclaim good news and invite others to join him in mission. Our Basic Belief about Jesus states, "Through Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace" (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 8, 14).

Today's scripture passage helps us see that closed minds can be opened.

The power of the resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation...The word of God calls us to peace rather than security...hiding behind locked doors may help us feel more secure, but we are still left with our fears and mistrust...How are we to be released from those fears to be a proper witness?

—Nancy Blakely in *Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 426

A woman who grew up in Nazi Germany realized that her heritage of Protestant liberalism had failed to stop the war and atrocities. She notes in her essay "Peace, Not Security" that "change happens at the level of action that contains risk...because you are strong in Christ you can put the neurotic need for security behind you. You do not need to defend your life like a lunatic. For the love of the poor, Jesus says, you can give your life away and spread it around" (Dorothee Soelle, *Essential Writings* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006], pp. 80, 127).

- What does it look like for me to be able to let go of my desire to be secure for the love of others?
- Explain how the promise of resurrection and the love of God give me the peace I need to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized and oppressed.

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. Make these questions part of your personal spiritual formation throughout the coming week. Pay attention to ways you are being called to witness of the Living Christ in your community.

- Give examples of things that are broken in your community.
- Brainstorm ways we can be witnesses of God's courageous love in our community, addressing this brokenness and inviting others to Christ.

5 BLESS

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

Invite someone to read the last stanza of CCS 477 as a benediction for this time spent together.

LESSON 20 RESPONSE SHEET

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

15 April 2018

Luke 24:36b–48

^{36b}Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰And when he did this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things."

Community of Christ Mission Initiative Invite People to Christ emphasizes Christ's mission of evangelism. Jesus was sent to proclaim good news and invite others to join him in mission. Our Basic Belief about Jesus states, "Through Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace" (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 8, 14).

Today's scripture passage helps us see that closed minds can be opened. "The power of the resurrection is the power to plant the seeds of transformation...The word of God calls us to peace rather than security...hiding behind locked doors may help us feel more secure, but we are still left with our fears and mistrust...How are we to be released from those fears to be a proper witness?" (Nancy Blakely in *Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 426).

A woman who grew up in Nazi Germany realized that her heritage of Protestant liberalism had failed to stop the war and atrocities. She notes in her essay "Peace, Not Security" that "change happens at the level of action that contains risk...because you are strong in Christ you can put the neurotic need for security behind you. You do not need to defend your life like a lunatic. For the love of the poor, Jesus says, you can give your life away and spread it around" (Dorothee Soelle, *Essential Writings* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006], pp. 80, 127).

- What does it look like for me to be able to let go of my desire to be secure for the love of others?
- Explain how the promise of resurrection and the love of God give me the peace I need to stand in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed?

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Make these questions part of your personal spiritual formation throughout the coming week. Pay attention to ways you are being called to witness of the Living Christ in your community.

- What are examples of things that are broken in your community?
- How can we be witnesses of God's courageous love in our community, addressing this brokenness and inviting others to Christ?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 21
22 April 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 10:11–18

Lesson Focus: Since Jesus willingly gave his whole life for us, we must listen for his direction and follow where he leads, understanding that the blessings of community are for all.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- ponder the intentional, voluntary act of Jesus giving his life as our shepherd.
- consider how best to listen for Jesus' voice and what our response will be.

Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- *Sharing In Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- Pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 10:11–18 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 71–72, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter in the Revised Common Lectionary and often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. Choose one of the images below and share in small groups or as a class what it means in your life and why (taken from ClipArt on Microsoft Word).



2 ENGAGE

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

Read the following and discuss the questions in small groups or as a whole.

The image of Jesus shepherding the sheep has become so familiar and endearing to us, we sometimes fail to think what it meant at the time Jesus first spoke the words. Shepherds were in a low class of people. They spent time alone with animals, probably living a rough and dirty life. For Jesus to compare those leading the church with shepherds might have been an insult to those who considered themselves of higher social status. Another interesting idea about sheep is they cannot be pushed from behind; they must be led. They will not go anywhere

their trusted shepherd does not go first (Nancy Blakely in *Pastoral Perspective Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 450). Jesus was that kind of leader. He led by example, not expecting his disciples, then or now, to go where he had not gone before.

- When have you been part of or have witnessed leadership pushing from behind?
- When have you been part of or have witnessed leadership leading by example?
- Compare the two. What were the outcomes of each? Which worked better?

This scripture also speaks of the “hired hand” and how he will run away when danger comes, leaving the sheep helpless. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives his life to protect the sheep. When the book of John was written, there were already divisions and false teachers cropping up. The Good Shepherd will stick it out and help lead the flock to understand God’s love, defending them against false teachings, and standing up against those who would divide and discourage.

- Tell about pastors and leaders who have stayed with the flock even in the midst of turbulence and trial, leading with love and courage.
- Name and discuss scriptural characters besides Jesus who protected their flock from false teachers.

Verse 16 speaks of “other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” Jesus’ listeners would have been thinking of Gentiles. During Jesus’ time the Jews were all one group; there was no group called Christians. Jesus was letting the disciples know that all people are to be invited into the flock and that many will hear his voice and follow.

- Give examples of disciples in the scriptures that went beyond their own “flock” and invited others.

The last part of this passage emphasizes the fact that Jesus gives his life freely and by his own choice. God has commanded, but he could have refused. Jesus knew he would be able to take his life up again once this time was over. He was willing to lead, teach, and suffer persecution and death in order to be the shepherd who would love and care for his sheep, setting an example for us to follow.

3 RESPOND

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

In this passage, God is revealed through Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. Our Basic Belief statement proclaims, “We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus’ life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace” (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14).

- As we listen for Christ’s voice, what walls of division are we called to break down in our homes, church, community, and world?
- How can we lead to encourage others to follow without pushing them away or turning them aside?

Our Enduring Principles speak of the Worth of All Persons, Responsible Choices, and Blessings of Community. See *Sharing In Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13.

- How does this scripture call us to uphold these principles?
- What choices do we need to consider as we lead and follow?
- How do we make sure it is Christ’s voice we hear?

4 SEND

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

This scripture assures us that God is the Good Shepherd who loves us unconditionally and will never leave us in times of struggle. We must learn to know the Shepherd’s voice and follow where it calls.

- Spend some time in prayer and contemplation this week, listening intentionally to hear God’s voice and where it is calling you.

5 BLESS

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

Close this time together by singing or reading “The Lord’s My Shepherd” CCS 259.

LESSON 21 RESPONSE SHEET

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

22 April 2018

John 10:11–18

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. ¹⁵Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Basic Beliefs of Community of Christ

Jesus Christ—We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus’ life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14).

Enduring Principles

Worth of All Persons

- God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.
- God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
- We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.
- We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

Responsible Choices

- God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve. Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices.
- Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.
- Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.
- We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

Blessings of Community

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God’s grace and each other.
- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.
- We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belonging with one another—even if we never have met.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We are called to create communities of Christ’s peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

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

In this passage, God is revealed through Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. Our Basic Belief statement proclaims,

"We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace" (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14).

- As we listen for Christ's voice, what walls of division are we called to break down in our homes, church, community, and world?

- How can we lead to encourage others to follow without pushing them away or turning them aside?

Our Enduring Principles speak of the Worth of All Persons, Responsible Choices, and Blessings of Community. See *Sharing In Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13.

- How does this scripture call us to uphold these principles?

- What choices do we need to consider as we lead and follow?

- How do we make sure it is Christ's voice we hear?

This scripture assures us that God is the Good Shepherd who loves us unconditionally and will never leave us in times of struggle. We must learn to know the Shepherd's voice and follow where it calls.

- Spend some time in prayer and contemplation this week, listening intentionally to hear God's voice and where it is calling you.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 22
29 April 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 15:1–8

Lesson Focus: We are interconnected with one another and with God. This connection helps us leave behind things that are harmful to ourselves and others while at the same time growing stronger in love, compassion, and community.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- examine their connection to God and others.
- discuss how their actions affect others.

Supplies

- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a and 164:3a,b
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 15:1–8 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 73–74, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Use Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a as a Dwelling in the Word spiritual practice. Share in small groups the answers to the following questions:

- Is there a place I feel drawn to dwell or explore?
- What words, images, or phrases are speaking to me in this text?
- What is God’s invitation to me in this passage?
- What is God’s invitation to my congregation in this passage?

2 ENGAGE

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

Read the following and discuss the questions in small groups or as a whole.

Today’s text is Jesus’ final “I am” saying and is part of his farewell discourses, meant to give his followers strength for the days after his death. All these sayings point to relationships—with God, with Jesus, and with each other. Modern culture lifts up individualism in such a way that the church seems to be something we join, removed from the rest of our daily lives. Jesus, in this imagery, emphasizes the importance of abiding, living, remaining in God and Christ and that God abides in us as well.

- How do we sometimes separate our lives into categories?
- How can we remove these lines of separation, making sure that abiding in Christ is part of all we do?

The branches cannot live if they are separated from the vine (Jesus,) and the vinegrower (God) is steadfast and reliable, caring for the community of branches (us).

God's care is constant, and whatever pain or suffering results from God's pruning and cleansing is redemptive rather than arbitrary...When God is doing the maintenance, we are assured that new life and new growth will result...its connection to the vine renders it [the plant] alive and not dead.

—Barbara J. Essex in *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 475

- When has God helped you prune distractions or harmful things from your life?
- What needs pruning today?
- How do you remain connected to the vine so that you can survive the pruning?

Verse 8 speaks of God being glorified by the joint effort of abiding in one another, bearing fruit, and becoming disciples. God has gifted us with the vine and rejoices when we respond in love.

The branches that do not yield fruit are the ones in the community who profess faith but do not engage in acts of love. This does not mean that one can earn salvation; rather, those who see and hear Jesus are moved to respond to the gift of salvation through their own acts of love. In other words, a sign of discipleship is doing good works for the right reasons. Thus, Jesus takes the common everyday image of the vine and transforms it into a symbol of community, mission, and love. This community is characterized by interdependence, mutual respect, and the ongoing presence of Christ.

—Essex, p. 477

- In what ways is my community connected to or disconnected from the true vine?
- Is my community fruitful or not? What fruit does it produce?
- Since this imagery is about "abiding" over the long haul, what needs to happen for our church community to produce a bountiful harvest?

3 RESPOND

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

Today's scripture passage brings to mind covenant relationship and discipleship. Doctrine and Covenants 164:3a, b reminds us,

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.

- How does this recent revelation compare to Jesus' admonition to abide in him?

One of our Enduring Principles is Blessings of Community. The vine and branches imagery helps us picture how we are all connected and that we must stay connected to survive. By staying connected we realize that "in their welfare resides your welfare" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a). Being in community, the family of God, we take turns giving and receiving. It is all about what it means to live the Christian life. We must go beyond the surface of the basic truths of the faith. Many times in history, Christians have challenged the status quo. Paul shocked some in the church by baptizing Gentiles without circumcision. St. Francis challenged materialism in the church by living a propertyless way of life. Martin Luther dared to suggest changes that were needed. Christians formed abolitionist groups to rid the world of slavery. Joseph Smith dared to announce that God still speaks today, challenging us to live a life comparable to the New Testament church in Acts (Stephen A. Cooper in *Theological Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 476).

- What paradigms need to be changed today if we are to live the Christian life fully?
- Whose welfare are we called to pay attention to and do something about?
- How can our Mission Initiative Abolish Poverty, End Suffering give us vision for the way ahead?

4 SEND

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

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, abiding in community, yet reaching out to others that they might also be grafted in, receiving and giving love and life.

- Spend time in prayer, perhaps journaling steps you can take to care for others in the community who may be barely hanging on to the vine.

5 BLESS

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

Close this time together by reading or singing “Draw the Circle Wide” CCS 273.

LESSON 22 RESPONSE SHEET

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

29 April 2018

John 15:1–8

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

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

Enduring Principle Blessings of Community

The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.

- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.
- We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belonging with one another—even if we never have met.

- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 13–14

Today's scripture passage brings to mind covenant relationship and discipleship. Doctrine and Covenants 164:3a, b reminds us,

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.

- How does this recent revelation compare to Jesus' admonition to abide in him?

One of our Enduring Principles is Blessings of Community. The vine and branches imagery helps us picture how we are all connected and that we must stay connected to survive. By staying connected we realize that "in their welfare resides your welfare" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a). Being in community, the family of God, we take turns giving and receiving. It is all about what it means to live the Christian life. We must go beyond the surface of the basic truths of the faith. Many times in history, Christians have challenged the status quo. Paul shocked some in the church by baptizing Gentiles without circumcision, St. Francis challenged materialism in the church by living a propertyless way of life, Martin Luther dared to suggest changes that were needed, Christians formed abolitionist groups to rid the world of slavery, and Joseph Smith dared to announce that God still speaks today, challenging us to live a life comparable to the New Testament church in Acts (Stephen A. Cooper in *Theological Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David Bartlett and

Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 476).

- What paradigms need to be changed today if we are to live the Christian life fully?

- How can our Mission Initiative Abolish Poverty, End Suffering give us vision for the way ahead?

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, abiding in community, yet reaching out to others that they might also be grafted in, receiving and giving love and life.

- Whose welfare are we called to pay attention to and do something about?

- Spend time in prayer, perhaps journaling steps you can take to care for others in the community who may be barely hanging on to the vine.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 23
6 May 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 15:9–17

Lesson Focus: God’s love for us as expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus is a model for how we should love others, and expands as we invite others into relationship with Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- consider God’s love and our own for our neighbors.
- envision ways to express God’s love for all creation.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

- Hand-drawn or computer-generated maps of the neighborhood around the church, labeling family names beside homes. (If your church is in a business district, locate areas that may need ministry or existing ministries in which you could take part.)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 15:9–17 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 75–76, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Walking the Neighborhood is a spiritual practice in which people walk in pairs or small groups in your own neighborhood or in the neighborhood around your church facility. As they walk, they pray about each home and for the blessing of God in the lives of the people who live there. If members of families are outside, walkers should greet them and wish them a good day. See *Pastors and Leaders Field Guide*, p. 14 www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/pastors-and-leaders-field-guide.pdf.

Take the class on a virtual tour using a hand-made map of your neighborhood. Name the people who live near the church. Discuss whether they are known to anyone in the class and if there are needs that could be addressed. Have class members take turns praying for the families who are our neighbors.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read John 15:9-17 together; then use the following to discuss and answer questions in small groups or as a whole.

It is clear through the use of the words “abiding” and “bearing fruit” that this is a continuation of last week’s metaphor of the vine and branches. We can only love as Christ loved and bear good fruit if we truly abide (live) in Christ.

We can look at this scripture passage in three different contexts. First is Jesus giving his farewell discourse to his friends. He is about to leave them and knows they will need his love and love for one another as they are left to continue on without him. He has chosen them, loved them, and shown them how to live a life of love.

- How might these words of love have been encouraging to Jesus’ first disciples?

Second is a message to John's disciples 60 years later. They have been kicked out of the synagogues for being too different. No longer having the protection the state afforded the Jews, they are being persecuted by the state and expected to bow down to the Roman gods. Persecution was real and often meant death.

- How might it have been important for them to support one another in love?
- What would the line "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" mean to them in their context?

Lastly, we hear the message in our lives today. We hear the message that Jesus wants us to experience joy through love; we are commanded to love one another as Jesus loves us. "As" may mean *like* or *in the same way*, or it could mean *since* or *because*.

- Does it have a different effect if we say love one another in the same way I love you or love one another because I have loved you? Which is more meaningful for you and why?

Jesus also shares that he has chosen us as friends and has shared everything he has heard from God.

- How is a friend different from a servant?
- What difference does it make to know "what the master is doing"?

3 RESPOND

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

Love is a word that can be misused, overused, and abused. The kind of love in this passage is *agape*. David S. Cunningham shares that *agape* love can best be understood through the example of the love among the persons of the Trinity:

...concerned about others; not possessive or subordinating, thus allowing genuine space for the other to be; and superabundant, such that it can be offered without reserve...Augustine offers...that God is the lover, the beloved, and the love that unites them.

He goes on to say,

...it is a disciplined habit of care and concern that, like all virtues, can be perfected only over a

lifetime... [and] should be so deeply woven into our lives that we might even find ourselves called to die for it... [A]ccording to Aristotle, one of the best ways to habituate oneself in a particular virtue is to emulate those who already embody it. This is most likely to be successful when we have become friends with those whose lives we seek to emulate. Therefore, by being friends with God, perhaps we can embody this *agape* that will bear fruit that will last.

—*Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 498–500

- How can we become so close to God that we begin to love as God loves?

In Community of Christ, we believe in the Worth of All Persons. Study the points under this Enduring Principle. Consider the following:

- Whom in our context are we called to love and support?
- When and how might we "lay down [our lives] for [our] friends"?
- Who are the people in our neighborhood waiting to experience *agape* from us and how can we share it?

4 SEND

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

As we partake of the Lord's Supper today, let us reflect on the covenant. God has chosen and called us; God loves us and asks us to love all others without reserve and bear fruit that will last.

- What will you do this week to respond to the call to love without reserve?

5 BLESS

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

Close this time together by singing or reading "Lord, Prepare Me" CCS 280.

LESSON 23 RESPONSE SHEET

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

6 May 2018

John 15:9–17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Enduring Principle Worth of All Persons

- God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.
- God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
- We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.
- We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

Love is a word that can be misused, overused, and abused. The kind of love in this scripture is *agape*. David S. Cunningham shares that *agape* love can best be understood through the example of the love among the persons of the Trinity:

...concerned about others; not possessive or subordinating, thus allowing genuine space for the other to be; and superabundant, such that it can be offered without reserve...Augustine offers...that God is the lover, the beloved, and the love that unites them.

He goes on to say,

...it is a disciplined habit of care and concern that, like all virtues, can be perfected only over a lifetime...[and] should be so deeply woven into our

lives that we might even find ourselves called to die for it....[A]ccording to Aristotle, one of the best ways to habituate oneself in a particular virtue is to emulate those who already embody it. This is most likely to be successful when we have become friends with those whose lives we seek to emulate. Therefore, by being friends with God, perhaps we can embody this *agape* that will bear fruit that will last.

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- How can we become so close to God that we begin to love as God loves?

In Community of Christ, we believe in the Worth of All Persons. Study the points under this Enduring Principle. Consider the following:

- Whom in our context are we called to love and support?
- When and how might we “lay down [our lives] for [our] friends”?
- Who are the people in our neighborhood waiting to experience *agape* from us and how can we share it?

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

LESSON 24
13 May 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:44–53

Lesson Focus: When God opens our minds to understand the scriptures, we realize that the past, present, and future are all interconnected. God is in control and our mission is Christ's mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- consider the importance of the sacred story.
- compare Jesus' blessing with an evangelist blessing.
- challenge one another to open our minds to new understandings of the scriptures and what God might be calling us to.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- Excerpt from a congregational evangelist blessing (if available)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Luke 24:44–53 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 77–78, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Luke 24:50 says Jesus blessed the disciples. In *Community of Christ* we are privileged to have the sacrament of evangelist blessing for individuals, families, households, groups, and congregations "seeking spiritual guidance to more completely give themselves to Christ's mission" (Doctrine and Covenants 165:5b).

Read an excerpt from the congregational blessing for your congregation and discuss how it has helped the congregation be a blessing to others.

Or

Have class members share in small groups something from an evangelist blessing that has been especially meaningful to them.

Close this portion with a prayer that through these blessings we will bless others.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read Luke 24:44–53 together; then read and discuss the following.

Today's scripture passage is tied to the rest of Luke 24 in which the women found the empty tomb and two of the disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Just as Jesus interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures to those disciples, so also he opens the minds of these disciples to "read their entire scriptures in a new light, to see new meanings and foreshadowings in stories and words long familiar to them" (George W. Ramsey in *Exegetical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], p. 523).

- When have you seen a familiar scripture in a new way? Explain.

As he opens their minds to the scriptures, Jesus emphasizes that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Repentance means to turn, and in the New Testament it means “to understand something differently after thinking it over...lead[ing] to changed actions....” (David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000], p. 1118). God forgives universally, and we must also. Community relationships depend on the members reconciling with one another many times over.

- How has turning and changing your actions led to blessings in your life?
- When have you forgiven or been the recipient of forgiveness, bringing wholeness back into your life?

Verse 48 speaks of the disciples being witnesses and for them to wait in the city until they receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. He has linked the scriptures together in such a way to emphasize God’s trustworthiness and now he asks them to trust once more.

- How difficult is it for you to wait and trust?
- Share stories of waiting and God’s faithful response.

The final verses tell us Jesus took the disciples to Bethany, blessed them, and was transfigured. After that they worshiped him, returned joyfully to Jerusalem, and blessed God in the temple. Bethany was the town in which Lazarus was raised from the dead and Jesus was anointed with expensive perfume. The name Bethany may derive from the Hebrew word meaning “house of the poor or afflicted” (Freedman, ed. p. 168).

- Discuss the significance of that place for Jesus and his disciples.
- Where did you choose to have your evangelist blessing? Was that place especially significant in your spiritual life? If so, why?

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

Sacred story is the unfolding drama of God’s reconciling work in the world. We learn about God’s relationship to people and all creation through sacred story. First made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, the sacred story continues in the New Testament through Jesus Christ and his disciples. The story of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sacred story that is rooted in

Christian history. Further, we create our own stories as we live as disciples, revealing that we each hold an important place in God’s unfolding story.

—*Of Water and Spirit*, p. 15

This understanding of the sacred story helps us connect past, present, and future in God’s larger plan.

Throughout the sacred story, people who have been touched by the Spirit have responded to a call to costly discipleship.

A diligent church with diligent members is the best way to proclaim and serve in God’s reign. It is important to remember this message that is both the announcement of a realm inaugurated by Jesus that promises a future of hope, to the glory of God, and a daily experience of walking with Jesus in the struggles, doubts, conflicts, and resolutions of life...The invitation is to open minds and hearts to the coming of something new and refreshing, even when the whole picture is not evident. People should await with great expectation and joy what God has offered!

—Carmelo Alvarez in *Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 522

- What are some ways your congregation is active in the sacred story? How do you witness of the risen Christ in your community?
- What stories are we creating as disciples who walk “with Jesus in the struggles, doubts, conflicts, and resolutions of life”?

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

This scripture passage has shared enlightenment, hope, trust, and joy. As you open your mind to the scriptures, reflect or write in your journal ways that God is working in you in the sacred story. Whom is God calling you to be in the story?

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

Close this time together by singing “We Thank You, O God, for Our Prophets” CCS 180.

LESSON 24 RESPONSE SHEET

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

13 May 2018

Luke 24:44–53

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation

- Scripture is an inspired and indispensable witness of human response to God’s revelation of divine nature.
- God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past.
- The Holy Spirit inspires and provides witness to divine truth.
- In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God’s will for our lives, the church, and creation more completely.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 12

Sacred story is the unfolding drama of God’s reconciling work in the world. We learn about God’s relationship to people and all creation through sacred story. First made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, the sacred story continues in the New Testament through Jesus Christ and his disciples. The story of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sacred story that is rooted in Christian history. Further, we create our own stories as we live as disciples, revealing that we each hold an important place in God’s unfolding story.

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This understanding of the sacred story helps us connect past, present, and future in God’s larger plan.

Throughout the sacred story, people who have been touched by the Spirit have responded to a call to costly discipleship.

A diligent church with diligent members is the best way to proclaim and serve in God’s reign. It is important to remember this message that is both the announcement of a realm inaugurated by Jesus that promises a future of hope, to the glory of God, and a daily experience of walking with Jesus in the struggles, doubts, conflicts, and resolutions of life...The invitation is to open minds and hearts to the coming of something new and refreshing, even when the whole picture is not evident. People should await with great expectation and joy what God has offered!

—Carmelo Alvarez in *Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 522

- What are some ways your congregation is active in the sacred story? How do you witness of the risen Christ in your community?
- What stories are we creating as disciples who walk “with Jesus in the struggles, doubts, conflicts, and resolutions of life”?

This scripture passage has shared enlightenment, hope, trust, and joy. As you open your mind to the scriptures, reflect or write in your journal ways that God is working in you in the sacred story. Whom is God calling you to be in the story?

PENTECOST

LESSON 25
20 May 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15, Acts 2:1–21

Lesson Focus: The Holy Spirit is a gift of comfort, truth, strength, and courage sent to walk beside us as we strive to share and live our testimony of the Living Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
- consider Community of Christ's Basic Belief of the Holy Spirit and how it calls us to Unity in Diversity and Grace and Generosity.
- be challenged to discern the Holy Spirit in their own lives as it walks with them daily.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- Symbols commonly used to represent the Holy Spirit (examples might include a dove, flame, wind chime, consecrated oil, water, compass)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15; Acts 2:1–21 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 79–82, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Display symbols commonly used to represent the Holy Spirit. Ask class members to reflect on these and share in groups of two or three which symbol is most meaningful to them and why.

Sing or read "O Holy Dove of God Descending" CCS 44 as a prayer of invitation to the Holy Spirit.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read the suggested scriptures together; then continue with the lesson breaking into small groups of two or three for discussion.

Today's scripture passage from John explains why the Holy Spirit will be gifted and describes what it will be. The Acts scripture describes the actual Day of Pentecost, who was there, and what they experienced. Both are important for our discussion. John and Luke differ in their telling since John has the Spirit coming to the disciples in the upper room on Easter, while Luke has the disciples waiting in Jerusalem until the Pentecost celebration 50 days after Passover. However, the gift is the same—the Holy Spirit will be there with all disciples, then and now, to fill the gap of the physical presence of Jesus.

Except for 1 John 2:1, John's Gospel is the only place in the NT [New Testament] to employ the name "Advocate" (parakletos), sometimes translated "Counselor" or "Comforter." The literal translation is "one called alongside" to take Jesus' place after his physical absence and to testify on Jesus' behalf.

—Paul L. Hammer in *Exegetical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 21–22

In verse 13, John also uses the name “Spirit of Truth” and says, “...he will guide you into all the truth.” In summary, John is saying we will be gifted with someone who will walk alongside us, counseling, comforting, testifying on Jesus’ behalf, and guiding us into all truth.

- Discuss examples in the New Testament when the Spirit walked alongside the disciples.
- When has the Spirit walked alongside you?
- Share times the Spirit has testified to you on Jesus’ behalf.
- What does it mean to be guided into all truth?

Acts 2:1–21 speaks of the actual Day of Pentecost, sometimes called the birthday of the church. This was a major Feast Day for the Jews, and people were gathered from many places to celebrate. Diversity abounded! The Spirit came with a rush of violent wind and as tongues of fire, allowing people to speak in other languages and to hear the gospel message each in his or her own language. Peter quoted Joel, claiming this Spirit as the fulfilling of the prophecy. All flesh would be included, dreaming dreams and seeing visions, making everyone equal. No one was excluded; equity among gender, age, and economic status was ushered in. Even though a diverse community, they were in this moment called into oneness as the body of Christ. “Peter proclaims that ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (v. 21). It is a proclamation spoken not in judgment but in love to all” (G. Lee Ramsey Jr. in *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], p. 7).

- Discuss the diversity in your congregation and community.
- Share times when people of all genders, ages, and walks of life have brought ministry to you.

Pentecost reminds us that even though we worship in small groups in a specific time and place, our identity extends beyond one congregation to the mission center, mission field, and even across borders into other countries and cultural traditions. We are many, we are one.

- Look at “Dios esta’ aquí” CCS 150, translated “God Is Here Today.” It was written by Raúl Galeano from Latin America and translated into four other languages. Thumbing through other pages, we see hymns contributed by people from many different countries. What a blessing our diversity is!
- Recite accounts of blessings you have received or heard about from people around the world.

3 RESPOND

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

One of the Basic Beliefs in Community of Christ is our understanding of the Holy Spirit.

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

Two of our Enduring Principles speak especially to our scripture passages today, Grace and Generosity and Unity in Diversity. The Spirit walks alongside us as we strive to be gracious, generous, and kind. We recognize that diversity is all around us. Sometimes we fight against it, and sometimes we embrace it. Blessings will be ours if we let the Spirit guide us through our struggles.

- How is the Spirit leading us to offer Grace and Generosity to the diversity in our congregation and community?
- Whom is the Spirit nudging you to embrace?
- What gifts are we willing to receive from others?
- Identify areas of tension or disagreement in your congregation or community. What can be done to graciously arrive at common consent, lovingly upholding our common faith in Jesus Christ and his mission?

4 SEND

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

Take special notice this week of the Spirit as it walks alongside you each day, in every moment. To whom is it calling you to love and reach out? Send a card, make a phone call, or visit that person who, even in their diversity, needs to feel the unity of God’s love and grace.

5 BLESS

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

Close this time together, holding hands in a circle, singing “Come, Holy Spirit, Come” CCS 154. Note that it is written in three languages in our hymnal. We are many, we are one.

LESSON 25 RESPONSE SHEET

PENTECOST

20 May 2018

John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15

²⁶When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning...

^{4b}I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Acts 2:1–21

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking

Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Basic Belief The Holy Spirit

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 12

Enduring Principle Unity in Diversity

- Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and congregations.
- Local and worldwide ministries are interdependent and important to the church's mission.
- The church embraces diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We seek agreement of common consent in important matters. If we cannot achieve agreement, we commit to ongoing dialogue and lovingly uphold our common faith in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church.
- We confess that our lack of agreement on certain matters is hurtful to some of God's beloved children and creation.

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

One of the Basic Beliefs in Community of Christ is our understanding of the Holy Spirit, and two of our Enduring Principles speak especially to our scripture passages today, Grace and Generosity and Unity in Diversity. The Spirit walks alongside us as we strive to be gracious, generous, and kind. We recognize the reality that diversity is all around us. Sometimes we fight against it and sometimes we embrace it. Blessings will be ours if we let the Spirit guide us through our struggles.

- How is the Spirit leading us to offer grace and generosity to the diverse in our congregation and community?

- Whom is the Spirit nudging you to embrace?

- What gifts are we willing to receive from others?

- Identify areas of tension or disagreement in your congregation or community. What can be done to graciously arrive at common consent, lovingly upholding our common faith in Jesus Christ and his mission?

Take special notice this week of the Spirit as it walks alongside you each day in every moment. To whom is it calling you to love and reach out? Send a card, make a phone call, or visit that person who, even in their diversity, needs to feel the unity of God's love and grace.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/TRINITY SUNDAY

LESSON 26
27 May 2018

Focus Scripture Passage: John 3:1–17

Lesson Focus: This passage speaks of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God generously gave his only Son to save the world and sends the Holy Spirit to search out our hearts that we might be born from above.

Objectives

The learners will...

- engage in the scripture text.
 - recognize God’s grace and generosity, giving both Jesus as an example and teacher and the Spirit to call and invite all to be born from above.
 - compare Nicodemus’s searching, questioning, and growing understanding with their own.
- be challenged to let the Spirit birth them over and over again as they strive to grow into whom God calls them to be.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copy of Isaiah 6:6–8 and questions for Dwelling in the Word

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 3:1–17 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 83, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Lead a Dwelling in the Word activity using Isaiah 6:6–8, a portion of another of our lectionary scriptures for today. Provide a printed copy of the scriptural text. Read the text aloud and pause for a few minutes to allow people time to reflect on what they’ve heard. Read it a second time. Ask people to make note of a word, phrase, or image they are drawn to as they hear it read again. After a short pause, form small groups and give people an opportunity to share their responses. Examples of questions to ask are as follows:

- Is there a place I feel drawn to dwell or explore?
- What words, images, or phrases are speaking to me in this text?
- What is God’s invitation to me or my congregation in this scripture?

(For more information on Dwelling in the Word, go to *Pastors and Leaders Field Guide*, p. 14.)

Pray for God’s blessing on the group as they learn together.

2 ENGAGE

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

Read John 3:1-17 together, then continue with the lesson breaking into small groups of two to four for discussion questions.

Trinity Sunday celebrates the tri-unity of God...the reality of God, Christ, and the Spirit permeates the NT [New Testament]...The NT readings for this Trinity Sunday, (Rom. 8:12–17 and our text from John 3:1–17 also refer to Father, Son or Christ, and Spirit. The same God is at work in today’s reading from

Isaiah 6:1–8, part of the sacred Scripture for Paul and John, as well as for Jesus and Nicodemus.

—Paul L. Hammer, *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 45

Each had responded to the Spirit and answered, “Here am I, send me.”

Nicodemus is an interesting character, not unlike ourselves. He has seen and heard Jesus, recognizing that Jesus has been sent from God because of the miracles he has done. He wants to know more. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. John’s Gospel develops the character of Nicodemus throughout its pages. In 7:50–51, he defends Jesus, asking the other Pharisees to grant him a hearing. Then in 19:38–40, he helps Joseph of Arimathea with Jesus’ burial, bringing the spices needed. Nicodemus is at first wondering, but afraid. Then as he continues to learn more about Jesus, he gains courage and respect, standing up for him among his peers. Finally, Nicodemus joins with Jesus’ disciples in love and mourning, helping care for him after death.

- What are some questions about Jesus you might be afraid to ask in public?
- How can we give people permission to wonder and question without fear of ridicule?
- Give examples of your growth in discipleship.

Our text often is used by those who speak about being “born again.” This hinges on the translation of an ambiguous Greek word (anōthen), which can be translated “again” or “from above.” It is Nicodemus who misunderstands and speaks of being “born again.” It is Jesus who says one must be “born from above.”

—Hammer, p. 47

For John, Jesus is saying that humans do not shape religious experience and enter into the Kingdom of their own choosing. “It is a gift of God’s Spirit, unshaped by human hands but ‘blowing’ where it will ‘from above’” (Hammer, p. 47). Furthermore, “Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and us, that God’s kingdom is here. The kingdom of God is not some far-off goal to be attained...The kingdom is present now, as a gift from God. Only God can gift us, can beget us as a totally new being in a new world” (Judith M. McDaniel in *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], p. 47).

- Discuss the difference between being “born again” and being “born from above.” Who is responsible for each?

- Compare discipleship when God’s kingdom is a far off image after we die to something in which we live each day.

The last section of today’s scripture passage is the most familiar of all; however, we often cut it short. It is all about God’s generosity and grace. God wants to save the world and all that is in it. Verse 14 says that if the Son of Man is lifted up, honored, and believed in, all who do this will have eternal life. Verse 16 reiterates this point, but adds an emphasis on how much God loves the world. Verse 17 continues the thought that God does not want to condemn or punish the world. God sacrificed and suffered for us so we could see how we should live with one another and be saved to live eternally in God’s kingdom starting the first day we respond to the Spirit.

- Compare the difference in discipleship if we look at this scripture without verse 17.
- How easy or difficult is it to receive God’s gift of grace through Jesus Christ every day?

3 RESPOND

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

Community of Christ’s Basic Beliefs statement begins with our belief in the nature of God.

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

- What in today’s scripture passage might have helped form this belief?

Our Enduring Principles of Grace and Generosity and All Are Called also highlight ideas found in today’s lectionary passages.

- How do John 3:8, 16, and 17 speak to you of God’s unconditional grace and generosity?
- Compare Isaiah, Nicodemus, and yourself. How are the responses similar or different?

God searches for us to complete the revelation of God's being. God searches for us to participate in God's life. God's seeking is not brought about by our circumstance, our worthiness, our sufficient understanding. Rather, that seeking derives from the anguish of God, God's longing for the work of God's hands. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world God created might be saved.

—McDaniel, pp. 47, 49

- How might we live in that kingdom where life is reborn from above?
- What does a community look like that is living the kingdom life?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived

(10% of total lesson time)

Spend time this week listening and searching for God's Spirit, asking questions you might have been afraid to ask before. God loves you and is calling you to be an active part of the kingdom. Whom will God send? What will be your answer?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

(5% of total lesson time)

Close this time together reading or singing "I, the Lord of Sea and Sky" CCS 640.

LESSON 26 RESPONSE SHEET

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/TRINITY SUNDAY

27 May 2018

Isaiah 6:6–8

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

John 3:1–17

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

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

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

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

Enduring Principle Grace and Generosity

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

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 12

Enduring Principle All Are Called

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God’s purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God’s call.

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

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Our Enduring Principles Grace and Generosity and All Are Called also highlight ideas found in today's lectionary passages.

—Judith M. McDaniel in *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 47, 49

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