



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

10 SEPTEMBER 2017–15 OCTOBER 2017

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS



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

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

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

Quick, easy: The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, available through Herald House.

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

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

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

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

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

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 18)

LESSON 42
10 September 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 18:15–20

Lesson Focus: Jesus teaches about reconciliation.

Objectives

The learners will...

- review the steps to reconciliation as taught by Matthew.
- discover why reconciliation was so important to the early disciples.
- apply these principles to the church today.
- explore reconciliation as a spiritual practice.

Supplies

- Bible
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 18:15–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 102–103, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Have someone read Isaiah 11:6–9 (NRSV).

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them...They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Read or sing “Gentle God, When We Are Driven” CCS 222.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a.

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

Ask class members to describe their understanding of God’s vision for reconciliation and unity described in these passages.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s verses are found in the middle of a larger portion of Matthew’s description of appropriate behavior for disciples of the day. These included instruction on personal morality, caring for each other, and forgiveness. The use of the term “brother” indicates that this is directed at the early disciples circa 85 CE. Most scholars believe this section was inserted by Matthew or his followers and not the recorded words of Jesus. These instructions were not about differences in opinion, but rather about offenses against a fellow disciple.

Respond to the following prompts in small groups, as a larger group, or on your Response Sheet.

- Read together Matthew 18:15–20 and identify the three steps Matthew describes as necessary for harmony within the “church.” How is the constant presence of Jesus described in this passage?
- Have you ever engaged in this reconciliation process with another? Do you feel it is an appropriate approach to disagreements and offenses? How could it be adapted?

3 RESPOND

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

Matthew says to treat an unrepentant sinner like a Gentile or a tax collector. Respond to the following prompts in small groups, as a large group, or on your Response Sheet.

- Recall what Jesus taught about this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:43–47). Translate that into contemporary language.

- Read together Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a.

Transformative encounters with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler await those who follow its [the Temple's] spiritual pathways of healing, reconciliation, peace, strengthening of faith, and knowledge.

- How is reconciliation a spiritual practice?
- In what ways can reconciliation be an opportunity for mission in your community?

4 SEND

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

Jesus has commissioned his disciples to be interpreters and living examples of the gospel. This is repeated in verse 18. The church is reminded to include Jesus in its daily business of reconciliation and healing (v. 25).

- How does your congregation honor its authority to “bind and loose” as reconcilers?
- How can you promote the reconciliation process in your own life?

5 BLESS

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

Have two or more members of the class offer prayers of thanksgiving for healthy relationships and a prayer of intercession for hurtful situations in the body of Christ.

LESSON 42 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 18)

10 September 2017

Matthew 18:15–20

¹⁵"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a

Transformative encounters with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler await those who follow its [the Temple's] spiritual pathways of healing, reconciliation, peace, strengthening of faith, and knowledge.

Read together Matthew 18:15–20 and identify the three steps Matthew describes as necessary for harmony within the "church." How is the constant presence of Jesus described in this passage?

Have you ever engaged in the reconciliation process with another? Do you feel it is an appropriate approach to disagreements and offenses? How could it be adapted?

Recall what Jesus taught about this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:43–47). Translate that into contemporary language.

How is reconciliation a spiritual practice?

In what ways can reconciliation be an opportunity for mission in your community?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 19)

LESSON 43
17 September 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 18:21–35

Lesson Focus: Jesus teaches about forgiveness in a parable.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the context of Matthew’s story.
- derive principles of forgiveness from the story.
- apply those principles to life today.

Supplies

- Bible
- Doctrine and Covenants
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 18:21–35 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 104, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read or sing together “Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive” CCS 215. What do the words tell us about forgiveness?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Matthew’s hearers would have been familiar with debt and the constant possibility of losing land, jobs, family, and social status. What others thought of you was an important aspect of life for them. Any debt (sin) would not be addressed by guilt but by a need to be restored to the community. The notion of paying it forward would be novel.

Read together Matthew 18:21–35. Forgiving someone 77 times and a repaying a 10,000-talent debt were extravagant

and overstated demands. Matthew uses hyperbole to make a point. What point is he making? Do you think you are more like the master who forgave his servant or the servant who wouldn’t forgive his fellow servant? Explain.

If you were Peter, how would you respond to Jesus’ answer? How does forgiving bring freedom to the offender? To the offended?

Share in small groups your responses to these questions.

3 RESPOND

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

Matthew suggests that God could change God’s mind about forgiveness under some circumstances. In small groups, as a large group, or on your Response Sheet, respond to the following question.

- What does Matthew teach about forgiveness? How does this fit with your understanding of God’s nature?

Repeated forgiveness for the same sin means the community must be vigilant. The community cannot ignore abuse, addiction, or violence. Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a,b reminds us, “As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law. If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles, questions arising about responsible human sexuality, gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other issues may be resolved according to the God’s divine purposes. Be assured, nothing within these principles condones selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships.

In small groups or as a larger group, discuss the following questions.

- What responsibility does the community bear when a person is abused by someone?
- Why is forgiveness so important to the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of individuals and communities?
- How can the community work to forgive the offender? Is there a limit to that?

4 SEND

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

Community of Christ upholds nine Enduring Principles which are essential components of our identity and mission.

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

Which of these Enduring Principles are reflected in the blessings experienced through forgiveness and reconciliation? Explain.

5 BLESS

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

Have each member of the class offer a one-sentence prayer (without mentioning names) for a person they have forgiven or need to forgive.

LESSON 43 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 19)

17 September 2017

Matthew 18: 21–35

²¹Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

What does Matthew teach about forgiveness? How does this fit with your understanding of God’s nature?

Compare Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer (6:9–15) with the focus scripture today. What similarities do you find between the two passages?

Enduring Principles

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

Which of these Enduring Principles are reflected in the blessings experienced through forgiveness and reconciliation? Explain.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 20)

LESSON 44
24 September 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 20:1–16

Lesson Focus: God is generous to all of God’s creation.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the parable of equal reward for each worker.
- discover the understanding of the early church about this parable.
- apply the parable to the 21st century.

Supplies

- Scriptures
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 20:1–16 in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 105, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read together “Grace and Generosity” from *Sharing in Community of Christ* (p. 12). What promises do you hear in these words? What is not promised?

Read or sing together “Standing on the Promises of God” CCS 257.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read together Matthew 20:1–16.

This parable only appears in Matthew and is thought to be a response to the early disciples who were struggling

with desperate poverty and persecution. Unusual events are described. The landowner returns to the marketplace several times to hire workers. There is no specified payment for the labor, just a fair wage. Note that the late-day workers were not promised anything at all. At the end of the day, all workers are paid the same wage. The all-day workers grumble about being treated unfairly, and the landowner replies, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” The landowner keeps his promise and pays them in spite of their negativity.

The story makes it clear that God’s kingdom is not about rank and sequence, but about grace and justice. Respond to the following questions in small groups, as a large group, or on your Response Sheet.

- What does this passage say about the faith of the late-comers who were promised nothing?
- Mercy and justice are two qualities of God described in this parable. How can God be both?
- With which laborers do you identify? Why? What invitation would you offer others who wish to “work”?

3 RESPOND

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

Some scholars believe that this parable might have been included because the early disciples were uncomfortable with the mission to the Gentiles. Jesus' message is one of inclusion, invitation, grace, and acceptance.

Read together Doctrine and Covenants 162:3a, b

Do not be discouraged. You have not been promised an easy path, but you have been assured that the Spirit that calls you will also accompany you. That Spirit is even now touching alive the souls of those who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within. Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

- What promise is made in this scripture?
- What is the challenge presented in this scripture?

Reread the statements about "Grace and Generosity" from *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition. Discuss how this Enduring Principle and Doctrine and Covenants 162:3a,b encourage us to be a gracious and generous people.

4 SEND

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

The people of Israel were the original recipients of God's covenants. Christians were latecomers to these promises. Some people develop a covenant relationship with God as a child, others later in life.

- How does this shape our generous response to mission?
- How can you respond to those who are seeking a new life in Christ?

5 BLESS

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

Because an entire life's work does not promise us wealth, ease, or health, we must humbly strive to be worthy of what is promised. Still, all good things come from God regardless of our ability to earn them.

Offer a prayer of thanks for God's mercy and faithfulness.

LESSON 44 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 20)

24 September 2017

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

Matthew 20:1–16

¹For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily

wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

The story makes it clear that God's kingdom is not about rank and sequence, but about grace and justice.

- What does it say about the faith of the late-comers who were promised nothing?

- Mercy and justice are two qualities of God described in this parable. How can God be both?

- With which laborers do you identify? Why? What invitation would you offer others who wish to "work"?

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 21)

LESSON 45
1 October 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 21:23–32

Lesson Focus: Jesus teaches that participation in God’s realm is not about rank and status, but about repentance and transformation.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the barriers to transformation.
- identify ways in which they are comfortable with the status quo in the church and in their discipleship.
- determine ways they can be more inclusive and accepting of others and new ideas.

Supplies

- Scriptures
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 21:23–32 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 106, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Sing or read together “A Man of Ancient Time and Place” CCS 30. How have you found Jesus’ love to be unexpected?

Ask someone to offer a prayer of gratitude for God’s love revealed in Jesus.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 21:23–32.

This encounter occurs the day after Jesus overturned the tables in the temple. It is not surprising that the Pharisees were aggravated at that event and in no mood

to play verbal games with Jesus. Earlier in Matthew Jesus has given authority to Peter and later the other disciples to “bind and loose” or interpret the law. He has healed, taught, raised from the dead, crossed societal lines, and reinterpreted Mosaic law. Now the Pharisees confront Jesus directly about his authority to do these things and delegate that authority to others. Rather than giving them a direct answer, he asks a question and tells a parable.

The authority of the Pharisees came from Rome. Rome allowed them to lead the Jewish religion as long as the godliness of Caesar was acknowledged. If Jesus claimed his authority through Caesar, his authority came from man. If he claimed it from God, he was committing treason. In small groups, as a large group, or on your Response Sheets, consider the following questions.

- Why do you think Jesus did not answer directly?
- By what authority do you minister?

The Pharisees were willing to give Jesus authority as long as it didn’t impact the status quo. Jesus was now “turning the tables,” and the leaders had a problem with that.

- What tendency do we have to want to maintain the status quo in the church?
- In our congregational culture, how accepting are we when newer or younger members take on leadership roles?
- How open are you to transformation in worship, spiritual practices, or ways of believing? What helps you work through these changes?

3 RESPOND

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

The God of Israel gave Jesus his authority. This same God welcomes sinners into God's realm.

- How are all welcomed to the table of fellowship in your congregation?

In small groups, search *Community of Christ Sings* for hymns that welcome others to the table of fellowship. Share your findings with the larger group. Discuss phrases or stanzas that encourage us to challenge the status quo and include everyone in our circle of fellowship.

4 SEND

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

Select one of the hymns identified above and sing or read together. Select one phrase or stanza to focus your meditation on this coming week.

Pray the Mission Prayer in earnest for the next week and be aware of any new understanding or opportunities.

God, where will your Spirit lead today?
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.
Grant me courage to risk something new
and become a blessing of your love and peace.
Amen.

5 BLESS

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

Spiritual transformation requires the presence of God. May we remember and ask for an awareness of God with us as we struggle with new ways of understanding.

LESSON 45 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 21)

1 October 2017

Matthew 21:23–32

²³When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

The authority of the Pharisees came from Rome. Rome allowed them to lead the Jewish religion as long as the godliness of Caesar was acknowledged. If Jesus claimed his authority through Caesar, his authority came from man. If he claimed it from God, he was committing treason.

- Why do you think Jesus did not answer directly?

- By what authority do you minister?

The Pharisees were willing to give Jesus authority as long as it didn't impact the status quo. Jesus was now "turning the tables," and the leaders had a problem with that.

- What tendency do we have to want to maintain the status quo in the church?
- In our congregational culture, how accepting are we when newer or younger members take on leadership roles?
- How open are you to transformation in worship, spiritual practices, ways of believing? What helps you work through these changes?

Pray the Mission Prayer in earnest for the next week and be aware of any new understanding or opportunities.

God, where will your Spirit lead today?
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.
Grant me courage to risk something new
and become a blessing of your love and peace.
Amen.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 22)

LESSON 46
8 October 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 21:33–46

Lesson Focus: God provides enough and to spare to build the kingdom. The fruits are a result of our response to the ministry of Christ.

Objectives

The learners will...

- consider implications of the parable in context.
- identify its relevance today.
- examine aspects of our response to God's generosity.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Doctrine and Covenants (Sections 147 and 165)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson read, "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 16:13–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 107–108, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

As Jesus' earthly ministry nears an end, his teachings become pointed as he identifies weaknesses of the religious leaders of the day. It is a reminder to repent of the "log" in our own eyes, serve with compassion, uphold the Worth of All Persons, and be generous with time, talent, treasure, and testimony.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection. How do these principles inform your discipleship?

Sing or read "Soften My Heart" CCS 187.

Offer a prayer for forgiveness and invitation for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 21:33–46. This is the first of three parables in which Jesus addresses the failure of religious leaders to produce fruits of loving kindness and justice. The parable lists several characters:

1. Landowner—God who has provided everything needed for a fruitful harvest
2. Vineyard—land of Israel
3. Tenant farmers—Jewish religious leaders
4. Representatives sent to collect fruits—prophets of old who were ignored, rejected, and/or killed

5. Son of landowner—Jesus, God’s son
6. Recipients of the vineyard—those who will produce fruits of the Kingdom

God remains landowner and the world is God’s vineyard. Discuss the characters of the parable in context of today’s world. Consider the following questions:

- What “fruits” of the Kingdom does God expect?
- Who is tending the vineyard?
- What pitfalls might cause workers to stumble, not bear fruit, or reject those sent by the landowner?
- How does this parable speak to God’s grace and generosity?
- Name lessons learned from this parable.

3 RESPOND

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

Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d states, “Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to offer every dimension of one’s life to God.” From this scripture, World Conference delegates agreed on the following affirmations as a guide in living out this scripture:

- Stewardship is a whole-life response to God’s grace and the ministry of Jesus Christ.
- One way stewardship is expressed is through the spiritual practice of tithing.
- Although tithing literally means a tenth, giving generously to one’s true capacity is the spirit of tithing.
- Tithing of time, talent, treasure, and testimony supports local and worldwide church ministries in pursuit of Jesus Christ’s mission.

- All disciples are called to live as faithful stewards who tithed.

As stewards of God’s vineyards, God calls us to accountability. Use of time, talent, treasure, and testimony bear fruit for building the kingdom when given freely with great love.

- Identify ways to increase generosity in the church.
- In what ways does Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d challenge the church?
- How does Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d challenge you?

4 SEND

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

Reflect on Doctrine and Covenants 147:5a.

“Stewardship is the response of my people to the ministry of my Son and is required alike of all those who seek to build the kingdom.”

Name one step you will take in response to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Plan an action you will do in the next month.

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing “Take My Life, That I May Be” CCS 610 as a prayer of commitment.

LESSON 46 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 22)

8 October 2017

Matthew 21:33–46

³³“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes’?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d

d. Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to offer every dimension of one’s life

to God. When defined by faith, love, and hopeful planning, including resolving unwise debt, capacity to respond becomes much greater than initially assumed.

Doctrine and Covenants 147:5a

a. Stewardship is the response of my people to the ministry of my Son and is required alike of all those who seek to build the kingdom.

Affirmations on Stewardship (part of World Conference Resolution 1314 Mission and Tithing, which was adopted by the World Conference June 11, 2016)

- Stewardship is a whole-life response to God’s grace and the ministry of Jesus Christ.
- One way stewardship is expressed is through the spiritual practice of tithing.
- Although tithing literally means a tenth, giving generously to one’s true capacity is the spirit of tithing.
- Tithing of time, talent, treasure, and testimony supports local and worldwide church ministries in pursuit of Jesus Christ’s mission.
- All disciples are called to live as faithful stewards who tithe.

What does the parable in Matthew say about stewardship?

In what ways does Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d challenge the church?

How does Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d challenge you?

Identify an action you will take in the next month to increase your capacity to share your “time, talent, treasure, and testimony” in response to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 23)

LESSON 47
15 October 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:1–14

Lesson Focus: Exploring the “robes” of discipleship helps us understand our mission in living Christ’s mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore God’s invitation to disciples.
- understand God’s intent for who is invited.
- examine ways to deepen discipleship.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Doctrine and Covenants (Section 162)
- *Ministry and Priesthood* chart
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 22:1–14 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 109, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Listen while Psalm 23 is read aloud.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

—Psalm 23 NRSV

- What words or images speak to you in this moment?
- Ask someone to read the psalm aloud a second time.
- What images or characteristics of God are depicted?
- Offer a prayer of invitation for God’s insight as the class continues exploration of a difficult parable.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Matthew 22:1–14.

The parable of the wedding feast is the third in a series of stories Jesus shares to illustrate God’s call to the people of Israel and their rebelliousness. Who are the characters and what are the symbols in this parable?

1. King (God)
2. King’s son (Jesus)

3. Wedding feast (covenant God has made with the people of Israel)
4. Invited guests (leaders of Israel who ignore the invitation)
5. Servants (missionaries sent to invite all to the table)
6. New guests (the overlooked, oppressed, outsiders, good and bad)
7. Wedding robe (mantle of discipleship which include characteristics of compassion, kindness, meekness, humility, patience—Colossians 3:12)

The parable reminds the audience that God will fulfill God's purposes to build the kingdom, the invitation is open for all to participate, but those that respond "yes" must do so according to God's will. It is not acceptable to call oneself a follower of Jesus unless one is willing to bear the mantle of discipleship through action.

God's invitation is not to be ignored. It was a great honor to be invited to a wedding feast, particularly the feast for a king's son. To ignore the invitation or refuse to come, to accept the invitation then not attend, or to ultimately harm those extending the invitation, was a serious breach of protocol.

- What kept guests from accepting the invitation to the wedding feast?
- When the invited guests did not attend, who was invited?
- How does this relate to our opportunities as disciples for invitation and welcome?

3 RESPOND

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

Disciples in Community of Christ are called to:

Represent Christ primarily as ministers...
who express the nature and love of God by growing in Christ-like character, love, concern, generosity, and mission.

Especially proclaim and promote...
Jesus Christ through covenant relationship with God and the faith community.

Particularly minister with...
individuals, households, families, and communities by nurturing right relationships with God, self, others, and all creation.

Support sacramental ministries by...
engaging in sacramental living and preparing spiritually to participate in the sacraments.

Promote community by...
engaging in activities that uphold the Worth of All Persons, caring for the congregation so it is welcoming, and inviting others to join in fellowship.

Promote justice and peacemaking by...
participating in partnership with the poor to overcome injustice and poverty.

Create ministry partnerships with...
other disciples, priesthood, pastors, and mission center officers.

—*Ministry and Priesthood* chart

In small groups, as a large group, or on your Response Sheet, respond to the following questions.

- Where do you see examples of discipleship as expressed in the *Ministry and Priesthood* chart in your congregation? In the community? In the world?
- Identify ways to increase examples of disciples living the ministry of Jesus Christ.
- What can we do to strengthen commitment of discipleship in our congregation, community, or world?

4 SEND

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

Spend time this week reflecting on the words to "Take the Path of the Disciple" CCS 558. In what ways is God leading you as a disciple in Community of Christ?

5 BLESS

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

Read as responsive reading (adapted from Doctrine and Covenants 162:b).

Leader: The Spirit is touching alive the souls who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within.

All: Lord, enliven me with the passion of discipleship.

Leader: Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

All: Lord, I will witness of you and extend an invitation to community. Amen.

LESSON 47 RESPONSE SHEET

ORDINARY TIME (PROPER 23)

15 October 2017

Matthew 22:1-14

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying:
²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

Disciples in Community of Christ are tasked to:

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who express the nature and love of God by growing in Christ-like character, love, concern, generosity, and mission.

Especially proclaim and promote...

Jesus Christ through covenant relationship with God and the faith community.

Particularly minister with...

individuals, households, families, and communities by nurturing right relationships with God, self, others, and all creation.

Support sacramental ministries by...

engaging in sacramental living and preparing spiritually to participate in the sacraments.

Promote community by...

engaging in activities that uphold the Worth of All Persons, caring for the congregation so it is welcoming, and inviting others to join in fellowship.

Promote justice and peacemaking by...

participating in partnership with the poor to overcome injustice and poverty.

Create ministry partnerships with...

other disciples, priesthood, pastors, and mission center officers.

—*Ministry and Priesthood* chart

- Where do you see examples of discipleship as expressed in the *Ministry and Priesthood* chart in your congregation? In the community? In the world?
- Identify ways to increase examples of disciples living the ministry of Jesus Christ.
- What can we do to strengthen commitment of discipleship in our congregation, community, or world?

Responsive Reading

(adapted from *Doctrine and Covenants 162:b*)

Leader: The Spirit is touching alive the souls who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within.

All: Lord, enliven me with the passion of discipleship.

Leader: Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

All: Lord, I will witness of you and extend an invitation to community. Amen.