

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: IMMIGRATION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Genesis 21:8-21
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	2024 Book of Resolutions #4271 “Welcoming the Migrant to the US”
OBJECTIVE:	To learn that just as God cared for Hagar and Ishmael, God cares for all marginalized people and calls us to show kindness and hospitality to immigrants in our communities.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Laptop with internet access, handout with printed excerpts from the <i>Book of Resolutions</i> , pens/pencils and scratch paper, copies of the 2024 <i>Book of Resolutions</i> #4271

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Before we begin, we are going to do a quick check-in together called Rose, Thorn, and Bud. This is a way for us to share a little about what’s going on in our lives.

A rose is something good that’s happened recently, something that made you happy or thankful.

A thorn is something that’s been difficult, stressful, or not so great.

A bud is something you are looking forward to, something that hasn’t happened yet, but you are excited or hopeful about.

We will go around the circle and each person can share one rose, one thorn, and one bud. You can share as much or as little as you want, just a few words is totally fine. And remember, this is a safe space. We listen to each other without interrupting or judging.

(Pause for sharing.)

Say: Thank you all for sharing. It helps us to understand and support each other better. Let’s carry these things with us as we move into our time together.

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SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Before we dive into today's scripture, let's start with a little bit of background so that we can all understand what's happening. This is a difficult passage to read, as God's chosen people—Abraham and Sarah—are not acting the way God calls us to act. Our scripture is about Hagar, an Egyptian woman who is enslaved to Sarah. Sarah is unable to bear children for her husband, Abraham, so she arranges for Abraham and Hagar to have a child together. Our scripture picks up a few years later when Hagar's son, Ishmael, and Sarah's son, Isaac, are little boys.

Read: Genesis 21:8-21

Ask: What happened in the story? Who were the characters involved? Were any parts of it confusing? How does hearing/reading this story make you feel?

Say: The Bible is full of stories about regular people who sometimes mess up, just like you and I do. In this story, Abraham and Sarah not only have a slave, but they banish her into the wilderness. This is a difficult story to understand, and it's natural to be bothered by it.

But there's something we can learn here: Even though we sometimes hurt each other and fall short, God is always there for us, just like God was there for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert. Hagar called out in fear and sadness, and the presence of God came to her. And Hagar gets a special place in scripture. In chapter 16, she becomes the first person to name God. An angel of the Lord comes to her while she is alone in the desert, pregnant with Ishmael, and planning to run away from Abraham and Sarah. Hagar speaks to God and says, "You are El-Roi" (16:13), which means "You are the God who sees."

Ask: Do you know any other names or descriptions of God from scripture?

Say: Hagar names God "the God who sees." God sees Hagar and recognizes her need, and God provides for her. Hagar is a woman, a slave, a foreigner, and now a migrant who has experienced violence and harm, but God comes to her. God sees all of us, especially the marginalized, the outsiders, the people who feel the most alone.

NOTES

Hagar is introduced in Genesis 16 as the Egyptian slave of Sarai, Abram's wife (16:1). Sarai is unable to bear children, so she instructs her husband to have a child with Hagar (16:2). Hagar becomes pregnant, which causes Sarai to treat her poorly, so Hagar runs away to the desert (16:6). (Note that the story of Hagar includes sexual violence, though it is not a focus of this lesson.) While in the desert, Hagar encounters an angel of the Lord, and it tells her to return to Sarai and to name her son Ishmael. The divine presence promises to multiply her offspring beyond what can be counted (16:9-10). In response, Hagar names God, saying, "You are El-Roi" (16:13), meaning "the God who sees me."

Fast forward a few chapters to today's scripture, Genesis 21:8-21. Hagar has a son named Ishmael. Abram and Sarai—now called Abraham and Sarah—have a son named Isaac. Sarah sees Ishmael and Isaac playing together and grows jealous, fearing that Ishmael will receive part of Isaac's inheritance, as they are both sons of Abraham (21:10). Sarah tells Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael. Distressed about casting out his son, Abraham goes to God. God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah and promises to make a nation of Ishmael (21:13).

Hagar and Ishmael wander in the wilderness and soon run out of water. Hagar fears that they will die of thirst and is in anguish about watching the death of her child. Then the angel of the Lord comes to her again, and God speaks to her. God creates a well of water for them to drink and promises to make a nation of Ishmael's descendants.

Ask students these questions to see how they heard the story, what resonated, what parts may be confusing, and what questions have come up. If it would be helpful, revisit confusing verses in the passage.

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Ask: Have there been times when you were feeling alone and the presence of God comforted you?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: In the story we read, Hagar has a marginalized identity.

Ask: What does it mean to be marginalized?

Say: A marginalized person or a marginalized group of people is treated as unimportant, excluded, and pushed to the edge of society. Hagar is a woman, a slave, and a foreigner who is literally cast out from society and into the wilderness with her small child.

As Christians, God calls us to love and show kindness to everyone, especially the marginalized. We are called over and over again to care for the foreigner by Jesus in the gospels, in the New Testament letters, and in the books of the Old Testament.

Read: Matthew 22:37-40 and Leviticus 19:33-34

Ask: I imagine that you may have heard that first passage a time or two, but the second one may be less familiar. What do these two scriptures have in common?

Say: You have likely heard people speak about immigration, whether that's politicians, people on the news, teachers at school, or even in your home. In the United States, immigrants are a marginalized community and often unfairly receive poor treatment. This is called xenophobia, which means "fear, dislike, or hostility towards people from other countries or cultures." But as we have seen in scripture, God calls us to love and care for the immigrant, just as God cared for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert.

Say: Our United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* teaches us about how God calls us to care for immigrants: "The United Methodist Church affirms the worth, dignity, and inherent value and rights of all persons regardless of their nationality or legal status. United Methodist churches throughout the United States are urged to build bridges with migrants in their local communities, to learn from them, celebrate their presence

NOTES (CONT'D)

For example, "Lord," is a name for God that appears often in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for Lord is "Adonai," pronounced ah-doh-nye. Scripture describes God in images, too, such as the rock of salvation, shepherd, and father.

Share an example of a time you have felt the presence of God. Maybe it looked like a family member or friend checking on you when you were sad or something that made you feel peaceful in a time of stress.

NOTES

Allow the students to share their understanding of what it means to be marginalized.

Invite students to read Matthew 22:37-40 and Leviticus 19:33-34. Use the Common English Bible translation for simpler language.

These scriptures—one with Jesus giving "the greatest commandment" and the other from Leviticus as God gives Moses the law—tell us how we are supposed to treat people with love.

Option A: If your church participates in ministries or community organizations that provide care for immigrants, this is a great place to talk about that work. Consider inviting a lay volunteer who works with the ministry to share about its work on a first-hand basis. Encourage the volunteer to share how welcoming new neighbors has influenced their own faith. Allow students to ask them questions.

Option B: If your church does not currently participate in any ministries or community organizations, use this time to learn more about the immigrant population in your local area. Go to the Migration Policy Institute's online

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in the United States and recognize and appreciate the contributions in all areas of life that migrants bring” (#4271).

Ask: Does our church participate in any ministries that care for local immigrant communities? *If the answer is yes, look to option A. If the answer is no, look to option B.*

Option A

Say: Let's take some time to learn about the ways our congregation is serving immigrants in our community.

Option B

Say: Let's look online to see how many people living in our county (or state) are immigrants.

Say: Now with that information in mind, let's look to what the United Methodist Church tells us about how we are called to serve the immigrants in our community. Split into pairs (or small groups), and take a few minutes to read together through the action steps on your handout. Highlight the ones that you think our church could do best, or come up with your own ideas.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Thank you all for your willingness to learn something new about how we are called to care for the immigrants in our community. Just as God saw Hagar and Ishmael in the Genesis story, God sees each of you. Now you can go out and be the hands and feet of Jesus, showing love, kindness, and hospitality to the people on the margins who you encounter at school, in your neighborhoods, on your sports teams, or anywhere else.

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database at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-immigrant-population-state-and-county>. Select your state and then your county (Note: if your county is not large enough for data to be listed, just use your state) to view the number of immigrants and the percentage of total population. Compare your county's (or state's) overall population with its immigrant population to give students an idea of the ratio. Show the website's map to the students, whether projected or simply on the laptop's screen.

For example, my home county had a total population of 183,215 in the most recent data. According to the MPI, it has an estimated immigrant population of 11,500. This means that about 6% of my home county's population is made up of immigrants.

Look to the United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* for ways that Methodists are called to action to support immigrant communities. Pass out the handouts, which include four pages from the Book of Resolutions. Invite students to split into pairs or small groups, read through the action steps, and discuss which steps seem most doable for your congregation. They are welcome to come up with their own ideas, too. They can highlight or make notes on their handouts. Depending on how much time is left in your lesson, give them a few minutes in their pairs/groups before inviting each pair to share one idea—whether one from the Resolutions or something original—with the larger group.

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Pray: Loving God, we lift up all those who journey far from home seeking safety, justice, and peace. Guide our steps as we walk alongside them, offering love, support, and hope. May we always see your image in every migrant and immigrant we encounter. Amen.

NOTES

Prayer from the General Board of Church and Society's Migrant Accompaniment guide. Access at <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/600>.