

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE: POVERTY, FAIR WAGES, WORKER’S RIGHTS, RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION, AND USING RESOURCES FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:

Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-8

**SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/
BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:**

Economic Community

OBJECTIVE:

Youth will explore how God calls us to prepare the way for Christ by turning toward God and helping remove the barriers that keep people from experiencing justice, dignity, and the fullness of God’s love.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Paper, markers, masking tape (or long piece of string), bibles, copies of the Economic Community from the Social Principles.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Welcome, everyone! I’m glad we’re together today. Before we begin, let’s check in with each other. Does anyone have prayer requests, exciting news, or something from this week they would like to share?

Pause for sharing.

Say: Today we are continuing our Advent Journey. Advent is a season of waiting, hope, and preparation. Last time, we talked about staying awake to what God is already doing in the world. Today, we are going to talk about preparing the way. When we know something important is coming, we usually have to prepare. Maybe we clean the house before guests, practice before a performance, study for a test, or train before a big game. Preparing takes more work than we expect. We may have to change our plans, clear away obstacles, or do things differently.

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Ask: What is something you had to prepare for that took more work than you expected?

Pause for response.

Pray: God of hope, as we continue through Advent, prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. Help us see what needs to change in our lives and in our world. Give us the courage to turn away from what harms others and the wisdom to choose what brings healing, fairness, and peace. Show us how to use what we have to care for our neighbors and make a way for everyone to flourish. Amen

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our first reading comes from Isaiah 40. To understand this passage, it helps to know something about its historical setting. The people of Judah had experienced the trauma of exile in Babylon. Their homeland had been devastated, Jerusalem and the Temple had suffered destruction, and many people had lost their homes and familiar ways of life.

Isaiah 40 begins with a message of comfort. God has not abandoned people. A new chapter is beginning, and the people are invited to prepare for God's coming.

As we listen to this passage, think about what it might mean to prepare a way for God.

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Say: Isaiah's message begins with comfort, but it also gives the people a picture of change. The road is being prepared, and God's glory will be revealed.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you imagine when you hear the words 'prepare the way of the Lord'? What might that look like in real life?
- What kind of things might a valley or a mountain represent in our world today?
- Why do you think Isaiah begins this passage with words of comfort? How might comfort help people face difficult circumstances?

NOTES

(Preparing our hearts to welcome Jesus. Also, making changes in our communities so people can experience greater dignity, safety, and care.)

Valley might represent a place where people lack what they need (housing, food, education, clean water.)

Mountain might represent something that stands in the way of people's well-being (unfair rules, discrimination, greed, waste, indifference to others.)

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Say: Our second reading comes from Mark. Mark begins his account of Jesus' ministry with John the Baptist, who appears in the wilderness calling people to repentance and baptizing them. John is preparing people for someone greater than himself. He tells them that one is coming after him who will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Read: Mark 1:1-8

Say: John calls people to repent. Sometimes we hear the word repentance and think it means feeling guilty or being told that we are bad people. But repentance means more than feeling guilty. It means turning around. It means recognizing that we are headed in a direction that is harmful or wrong and choosing a different direction.

Imagine walking down a road and discovering that you are going the wrong way. Feeling bad about being lost does not get you where you need to go. You have to turn around and start moving in the right direction.

Repentance is like that. We recognize what needs to change, receive God's grace, and begin to live differently.

Reflection Questions:

- What is the difference between feeling guilty about something and actually turning around and changing your behavior?
- Why do you think John wanted people to repent as they prepared for Jesus?

Say: John was preparing people to receive Jesus and the new life Jesus would bring. Repentance helps us make room for that new life. When we turn away from selfishness, cruelty, dishonesty, or indifference, we make room for love, honesty, generosity, and justice. Repentance is not a trap. It is an invitation to begin again. God's grace meets us as we turn toward the life God desires for us.

Let's connect our two readings. Isaiah describes a road being prepared for God. John the Baptist calls people to prepare the way for Jesus. Both passages invite us to consider what must change so that God's purposes can become visible in the world. Sometimes the changes we need to make are personal. We may need to change how we treat someone or how we respond when we see injustice. Other times, we need

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to look at the conditions around us. If people cannot find affordable housing, earn enough to support their families, or access the resources they need, the road is not level for everyone. Preparing the way for Jesus involves both personal repentance and a willingness to work toward a community where people can flourish.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: We are going to build a picture of what it means to prepare the way for Jesus. Isaiah describes valleys being lifted, mountains being brought low, and rough ground being made level. We will use those images to think about economic justice: whether people have what they need to live, whether workers are treated fairly, and whether our communities use resources for the common good.

We are going to create a road and identify two things: valleys, which represent needs people experience, and mountains, which represent obstacles that stand in the way.

Ask: Let's begin with the valleys. What are some things people need that they may not have enough of?

Pause for responses. Write the responses under 'valleys.'

Ask: What might happen to a person or family when one of these needs goes unmet?

Say: When people do not have what they need, the road can become difficult to travel. A family may struggle to afford rent even when someone works hard. A student may have trouble learning because they are hungry. A worker may have a job but still do not earn enough to support their family. Recognizing these valleys helps us see where care, support, and change are needed.

Ask: Now let's think about the mountains. If valleys represent things people lack, mountains can represent obstacles that make it harder for people to get what they need. What kinds of things might stand in the way of a fair and healthy community?

Pause for responses. Write the responses under 'mountains.'

Say: Sometimes people need immediate help, and sometimes the conditions around them also need to change. For example, providing food to a hungry family is im-

NOTES

Draw a long road on a large sheet of paper or place a long piece of string on the floor to represent a road.

Label one area **Valleys: What People Lack** and another **Mountains: What Gets in the Way**.

Valleys possible responses: affordable housing, enough food, safe schools, access to health care, clean water, fair wages, or reliable transportation.

Mountains possible responses: unfair wages, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, wasteful consumption, greed, or indifference to people who are struggling

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portant. Working with others to make food more accessible can also be important. Helping a worker in need matters. So does asking whether workers are paid fairly and treated with dignity. Preparing the way can mean caring for people today while also working to remove obstacles that make life unfair.

Say: John Wesley in his sermon 'The Use of Money,' offered three memorable rules: earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. But he did not mean that we should earn money in any way possible or save everything for ourselves. He taught that we should not earn money by harming ourselves or our neighbors. We should avoid wasteful spending, and we should use our resources generously to help others. In other words, how we use money is part of how we love our neighbors.

Ask: What are some ways people can use their money, time, skills, or other resources to help others?

Say: The United Methodist Social Principles include a section called Economic Community. It helps us reflect on the relationship between our faith and the way economic life affects people. This area of our church's teaching addresses concerns such as poverty, fair wages, workers' rights, consumption, and the responsibility to use resources for the common good.

Pass out copies of the Economic Community. As each person to read a section.

Reflection Questions:

- What would need to be lifted up or strengthened so people have what they need?
- What would need to be lowered or removed so people are not held back by unfair obstacles?

Say: Now let's choose one valley and one mountain from our road. Choose a valley that represents a need in our community and a mountain that represents an obstacle connected to that need. For example, the valley might be families who cannot afford housing, and the mountain might be a lack of affordable places to live. Or the valley might be workers who cannot meet their basic needs, and the mountain might be

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unfair wages or unsafe working conditions. We are not expected to solve these problems in this room. We are practicing the work of noticing, naming, and asking how God might lead us to respond.

Say: Let's look at the valleys and mountains we wrote. Let's choose one valley and one mountain.

Pause for activity.

Say: Let's take a moment to think about the two concerns we have chosen. As we prepare for Jesus, we can pray for people affected by these concerns, for those who are already working to help, and for wisdom about what our community can do.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say: I invite you to finish this sentence silently: This week, I could give _____ to help raise a valley.'

Pause for reflection.

Say: Today we heard Isaiah's call to prepare a road for God and John's call to repent and prepare for Jesus. We also explored how our Methodist tradition connects faith with the way we use our resources and care for our neighbors. Preparing the way for Jesus is not only about getting ourselves ready for Christmas. It is about turning toward God and making room for God's love and justice in the world. We can begin by recognizing what is unfair, asking what needs to change, and offering what we have to help others. We do not have to do everything ourselves. We can begin with one faithful step.

Pray: God of comfort and hope, thank you for reminding us that you are making a way toward restoration. Help us recognize the valleys where people lack what they need and the mountains that stand in the way of justice. Give us courage to turn away from selfishness, waste, and indifference. Teach us to use our resources wisely and to give generously according to what we have. Help us remember that repentance is an

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invitation to turn around and begin again. Through your grace, guide us toward a life of faith, love, and holiness. As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, make us people who help prepare the way for justice and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.