

SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

JUSTICE ISSUE: BELONGING AND EXCLUSION, POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY JUSTICE, IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WELCOME, YOUTH AND ELDER PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY RESTORATION	
SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	John 1:1-18, Jeremiah 31:7-14
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	Community of All Creation, Economic Community, Political Community, Social Community
OBJECTIVE:	Youth will explore how John’s description of the Word becoming flesh and Jeremiah’s promise that God gathers people who have been scattered reveal God’s presence and concern for the whole community. They will connect these passages to justice issues affecting their communities and create personal and group covenants for the new year using John Wesley’s General Rules: do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	paper and pens, chairs arranged in a circle, a candle (optional), envelopes, small slips of paper, a large sheet of paper or poster board.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Happy New Year! Welcome to our first youth Bible study of 2027! During Advent, we waited, prepared, and thought about what it means for God to come among us. Today, we’re going to carry those questions into the new year.

We’ll focus on two passages. In John, we hear that the Word became flesh and lived among us. In Jeremiah, we hear a promise that God will gather people who have been scattered and bring them home.

These passages invite us to think about the kind of community God wants to create—and what we can do to help make that community real.

NOTES
Arrange chairs in a circle. If using a candle, place it safely where everyone can see it and light it before the opening prayer.

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Ask: What's one thing from Advent that you want to carry into the new year?

Pause for sharing.

Say: Thank you for sharing. Today we'll think about how we can turn what we believe into a way of living. We are not making promises to earn God's love. We are responding to the love God has already shown us.

Pray:

God of new beginnings, thank you for bringing us into a new year. Thank you for coming among us in Jesus and for promising to gather people who have been scattered or forgotten.

Help us hear your Word today. Show us who needs to be welcomed, where our communities need to change, and how we can take part in your work of restoration.

Give us courage to make commitments, humility when we make mistakes, and friends who will help us keep going.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our first Scripture comes from the beginning of John's Gospel. Instead of starting with the story of Jesus' birth in a stable, John takes us back to the beginning of creation.

John calls Jesus 'the Word.' The Word was with God from the beginning, and all things came into being through the Word. Then John makes an extraordinary statement: the Word became flesh and lived among us.

Listen for what this passage tells us about who Jesus is, where God chooses to be, and what it means for our everyday lives.

Read *John 1:1–5 and 14*

Say: Let's begin with these verses. John tells us that the Word became flesh. One way

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to understand this is that God did not remain far away from human life. In Jesus, God entered the world and lived among people.

Sometimes we think of faith as something that happens only in church, during prayer, or when we read the Bible. But if God came to live among us, then faith also matters in our classrooms, our homes, our friendships, our neighborhoods, and the way we treat people we do not know. God is present in ordinary life. That means our everyday choices can become ways of sharing God's love.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think it means that God moved into the neighborhood?
- Where do you see people who need care or support in your neighborhood or school?
- What would it look like for someone to experience God's love through the way you treat them?
- How can a church show that God is present in the community beyond Sunday worship?

Say: Now let's hear a little more of John's description. Listen for what happens when the light comes into the world and how people respond to it.

Invite a volunteer to read John 1:9–14.

Say: John describes a world in which the light comes, but not everyone recognizes or welcomes it. Yet the light still comes. God chooses to be present in the world, even when the world does not always respond with love.

That matters for our understanding of justice. We can say that we believe God is present among us, but our actions can either help people experience that welcome or make it harder for them to belong.

For example, if someone is bullied, if a family cannot afford to participate in an activity, or if a person with a disability cannot access a building, we have to ask whether our community is reflecting the welcome of God.

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Discussion Questions:

- What might it look like for a community to welcome God's light?
- What kinds of actions make people feel that they do not belong?
- If God is present in everyday life, how might that change the way we treat people at school or church?

Say: John's message is not that we can fix every problem by ourselves. It is that God has come among us, and we are invited to respond. Our faith becomes visible in the way we treat people and care for the places where we live.

Say: Our second passage comes from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah spoke to people experiencing deep loss and disruption. Many had been displaced from their homes, and the future seemed uncertain.

In this passage, God promises to gather the people and bring them back. Notice that the promise specifically includes people who are blind, people who are lame, and women who are pregnant or in labor. These are people who might need additional care and support during a journey.

As we listen, notice who God gathers, how God treats them, and what the promised future looks like.

Read *Jeremiah 31:7–14*

Discussion Questions:

- Who does God promise to gather?
- Why do you think the passage specifically mentions people who might need extra care or support?

Say: God's promise is not simply about moving people from one place to another. It is about bringing people home, caring for them, and restoring their lives.

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God does not say, 'I will gather only the strongest people,' or 'I will gather only the people who can travel easily.' The promise includes people whose needs might be overlooked by others.

This gives us an important picture of justice. A community shaped by God's love does not ask only, 'Who can manage to fit in?' It also asks, 'What do we need to change so that people can participate and belong?'

Discussion Questions:

- What might it look like for a church, school, or community to make sure people are not left behind?
- How could a church make its activities more accessible?
- What might help a new family feel welcome?
- How can young people help make sure others are included?
- What might it mean to support people who are experiencing poverty or displacement?

Say: Let's bring our two passages together. John tells us that God comes among us in Jesus. Jeremiah tells us that God gathers people who have been scattered and brings them toward restoration.

One passage emphasizes God's presence. The other emphasizes God's gathering and care. Together, they give us a picture of a community where God is present and people are not forgotten.

This does not mean that every problem disappears immediately. It means that God's vision gives us a direction. We can ask whether our choices help people feel welcomed, cared for, and included—or whether they leave people on the outside.

Ask: If these two passages describe the kind of community God wants, what is one thing that community would do differently?

Pause for responses.

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[Write these three phrases where everyone can see them.]

- Do no harm.
- Do good.
- Stay in love with God.

Say: John Wesley taught that faith is lived in community. He used the phrase ‘social holiness’ to remind Christians that our life with God cannot be separated from our relationships and actions in the world.

Wesley’s General Rules give us three practical ways to respond to God’s grace.

- **Do no harm means** noticing what hurts people or damages creation and working to stop it.
- **Do good** means taking action to help others and make our community more just.
- **Stay in love with God** means continuing the practices that help us grow in faith, such as prayer, worship, Scripture, and serving together.

These rules help us turn the messages of John and Jeremiah into a covenant for the new year.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Covenant Charades

Say: We’ve talked about God coming among us and gathering people who have been scattered or overlooked. Now we’re going to practice recognizing what it looks like to live that message.

We’ll play Covenant Charades. One person will choose a slip of paper and act out the action without speaking. The rest of us will guess what they are doing. Once we guess, we’ll decide which of Wesley’s three rules it connects to: do no harm, do good, or stay in love with God.

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Some actions can connect to more than one rule. The point is not to get every answer exactly right. The point is to think about how our faith can shape everyday choices.

Invite participants to act out several slips. Keep the pace moving and make sure everyone who wants a turn has an opportunity.

Ask: Which of these actions would be easy for you to practice? Which might be harder?

Pause for responses.

Say: Sometimes doing good requires courage. Sometimes doing no harm means stopping something we have gotten used to doing. Sometimes staying in love with God means continuing to pray or worship even when life feels busy.

A covenant helps us pay attention to these choices. It reminds us that following Jesus is not only about what we believe; it is also about how we live.

Our Group Covenant

Place a large sheet of paper or poster board where everyone can see it. Write the heading: "Our Covenant for the New Year."

Say: Before we write personal promises, let's decide what kind of community we want to build together this year.

Think about John's message that God lives among us and Jeremiah's promise that God gathers people who have been scattered. What commitments could help our group reflect those messages?

Let's create three group promises, one for each of Wesley's General Rules.

Ask: For **do no harm**, what is one habit we want to stop because it hurts people or harms the world?

Pause for sharing. Write the agreed-upon promises on the poster

Ask: For **do good**, what is one action we want to begin?

NOTES

Before the session, write examples on slips of paper. Use a mix from all three General Rules.

Do no harm:

- Stop gossiping.
- Include someone who is being left out.
- Waste less water.
- Refuse to join in when someone is being bullied.
- Listen instead of inter-rupting.

Do good:

- Welcome a new student.
- Serve a meal.
- Help someone carry their things.
- Speak up when someone is treated unfairly.
- Pick up litter in a park.

Stay in love with God:

- Pray.
- Worship.
- Read the Bible.
- Give thanks.
- Serve with your church community.

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Pause for sharing. Write the agreed-upon promises on the poster

Ask: For **stay in love with God**, what is one practice we want to keep or begin together?

Pause for sharing. Write the agreed-upon promises on the poster

Say: Let's read our group covenant aloud.

Read the group covenant.

Say: This is not a contract that makes us perfect. It is a commitment we can return to throughout the year. If we fall short, we can acknowledge what happened, repair harm where possible, and begin again with God's help.

Give each participant paper and a pen. Offer envelopes if available.

Say: Now we're going to write a personal covenant for the new year.

This is just for you. You will not be required to share what you write. You can keep it in your Bible, put it somewhere you will see it, or seal it in an envelope to open near the end of the school year.

Begin with these words:

'This year, with God's help, I will...'

Think about the two Scripture passages. If God comes among us, how can you help others experience welcome and care? If God gathers people who have been scattered, how can you help make sure people are not left out?

If it helps, consider one of these questions:

- What is one thing I need to stop doing because it harms someone or something?
- What is one good thing I can begin doing?
- What is one practice that helps me stay connected to God?
- Who might need me to listen, welcome, or speak up?

NOTES

Write this sentence where it is visible.

'This year, with God's help, I will...'

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- What is one barrier to belonging that I could help change?
- What is one way I can care for my community or the created world?

Try to make your promise specific. Instead of writing 'I will be a better person,' you might write, 'I will stop joining in when people make fun of someone,' or 'I will invite someone who is left out to join us,' or 'I will pray for five minutes before school three days a week.'

Remember, this is not a way to earn God's love. It is a way to respond to God's love.

Pause for writing.

Say: If you want to, fold your covenant and place it in an envelope. You can write your name and 'Open at the end of the school year' on the front. If you would rather keep it with you, that is fine too.

Pause for envelopes.

Say: Take a moment to look at what you wrote. Ask yourself: What is one small step I can take this week to begin?

You do not have to change everything at once. Faithfulness often begins with one choice, one conversation, or one small action.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say: John Wesley and early Methodists gathered for covenant services, including services at the turn of the year. These services invited people to renew their commitment to God and offer their lives for God's purposes.

We'll close with a youth-friendly version of the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. As we pray, remember that this is not about earning God's love or promising that every day will go perfectly. It is about offering our gifts and choices to God and trusting God's grace to guide us.

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Pray:

God, I belong to you.

With your help, use my gifts to do good. Guide me when I am unsure. Help me stop when my choices hurt others. Give me courage to stand up for what is right and humility to learn when I am wrong.

Help me stay close to you through prayer, worship, Scripture, and service. When I cannot do everything, help me do what I can. When I need help, teach me to receive it from others.

Help me welcome people who have been left out and care for the places where we live. Let my life become part of your work of love and justice in the world.

I am yours, and I trust your grace to guide me.

Amen.