

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: ANDY UNGER

JUSTICE ISSUE: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, HUMAN DIGNITY AND INCLUSION

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Romans 8:12-25
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	Social Principles ¶160.A, ¶160.C, ¶162 Preface
OBJECTIVE:	Help students connect Paul’s message of hope and adoption to real-world justice concerns through engagement with the Social Principles.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Copies or excerpts of the 2024 UMC Social Principles, markers or pens, sticky notes or index cards (optional: Poster Board)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: We live in a world that groans for healing and yet we live with hope. We are children of God, led by the Spirit, and joined to a creation that waits for freedom.

(Pause)

Say: Let’s take a moment of silence. As you breathe deeply, think about where you see pain or injustice in the world, and where you long for God’s healing.

(Pause)

Say: What is something you hope for, not just for yourself, but for the world?

(Allow 2-3 brief responses. Affirm each one.)

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Let’s turn to our Scripture for today: Romans 8:12-25. Can I have a volunteer read it aloud?

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

(Allow for reading.)

Reflection Questions:

- According to Paul, what does it mean to be 'led by God's spirit'?
- Why do you think Paul says creation is 'groaning'? What might that look like today?
- Paul says we are adopted as children of God. How might that change how we respond to injustice or suffering?
- What kind of 'hope' is Paul talking about? How is it different from just wishful thinking?

Say: In the Social Principles we are reminded that both creation and people are deeply valued by God.

(Distribute Excerpts of the Social Principles. Read the following.)

Creation Care & Environmental Justice:

"We acknowledge that unsustainable human activities have placed the entirety of God's creation in peril...Overconsumption, shortsighted policies, poor management of natural resources, and other unsustainable practices have severely impacted the fragile, natural ecosystems on which all of life depends." (§160.A)

"Food systems that are ecologically sustainable, locally oriented, and equitably distributed are urgent priorities. We endorse policies and practices designed to ensure access to healthy nourishment and clean drinking water, especially for communities that have been subjected to environmental degradation or deprived of adequate resources to produce or purchase their own food." (§160.C)

The Dignity of All People:

"The church is called to be a distinctive community, marked by preaching of the gospel, studying of Scripture, breaking of bread, and witnessing to the power of redemption in the midst of a broken world. We respond to God's call in the world by giving witness to the transformative power of the gospel, engaging in acts of mercy,

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

and striving toward the attainment of justice and peace as hallmarks of God's coming reign." (§162 Preface)

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you see creation suffering today?
- Where do you see people being treated as less than sacred?
- What might it look like to be led by the Spirit in response to these things?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: We are going to break into 3 groups. Each group will visit a station with a real-life story of people putting faith in to action. At each station, read the story together and discuss the questions provided. You will have about 5-7 minutes at each station.

Station 1: Diversity-Embracing All People

Say: This story is about a church in Virginia that provided sanctuary for a Guatemalan refugee and supported her through translation and community.

Ask: What does this church teach us about being led by the Spirit?

Station 2: Justice- Environmental Advocacy

Say: This story highlights faith groups advocating around environmental issues and fossil fuel use.

Ask: How does this connect with the 'groaning of creation' and our role in responding?

Station 3: Action- Hope Lived Out

Say: This story is about a church creating a 'Blessing Box' with food, hygiene items, and notes of encouragement.

Ask: What kind of hope is this group living out? How does it reflect our hope in Christ?

NOTES

Station 1:

<https://umcmmission.org/story/crossing-language-barriers-for-sanctuary-in-charlottesville-virginia/>

Station 2:

<https://halifax.citynews.ca/2024/10/19/faith-based-environmental-groups-take-on-fossil-fuels-as-a-sacred-duty/>

Station 3:

<https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/routt-county-churches-help-feed-hungry-residents-with-community-meals-blessing-box-program/>

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

(Pause for groups to rotate through stations.)

Say: Let's come back together. Each group share one key insight or takeaway.

(Pause for reflection.)

Ask: What signs of hope did you notice in these stories?

(Pause for response.)

Ask: What action might we be called to take?

(Pause for response.)

Optional Activity

Say: Take a sticky note or card. Write:

One thing you hope for in the world.

One action you feel called to take.

Place it on this poster labeled 'Hope That Acts.'

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Let's close in prayer.

Pray: Loving God. We give thanks that even in the groaning of creation, your Spirit moves with hope. Send us out as people who listen, to the cries of the earth and your people, and who respond with action courage, and love. Remind us that we are not only heirs to a future promise, but bearers of hope in the present. Amen.

Say: God this week paying attention to where you see both brokenness and hope and how you might respond as something led by the Spirit.