

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS THROUGH ACTION AGAINST SYSTEMS OF EXCLUSION IN FAITH COMMUNITIES.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 22: 34-40 and Leviticus 19:18
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	2020/2024 Social Principles ¶163 Basic Rights and Freedoms: B, D, E, Book of Resolutions #4215 “Local Church Support for Young People” Book of Resolutions: R4215 (Local Church Support for Young People)
OBJECTIVE:	To explore Jesus’ teaching on the Great Commandment as a foundation for justice, belonging, and leadership—and to help youth name and act on real change in their churches and communities.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Basket or box of random everyday items (mirror, phone charger, key, band-aid, small plant, etc.), sticky notes, markers, paper, flipchart, or digital screens for all to view, handouts with the bible verses or digital versions, Optional: copies of the UMC Social Principles

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

(Place the basket in the center of the group. Invite two or three students to choose one item without looking.)

Say: Each of us brings something today—our energy, questions, our hope, and maybe even some weariness. These items may seem ordinary, but just like us, they have meaning. Let’s take a moment to listen with curiosity.

(Invite each volunteer to hold up their object.)

Ask the youth who picked the items:

- What could this item say about love, connection or healing?

Ask the group:

- “Who connects you to love?”

NOTES

We begin today not with answers, but with questions—and with some unexpected objects.

Set-up: Place a basket or box in the center of the group. Inside are random everyday items (like a phone charger, mirror, Band-Aid, plant, etc.). Invite 2–3 students to pick one item.

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- “Who might need love from you this week?”
- “What does it mean to love God with your whole self?”

Pray: God of love and connection, open our minds to understand, our hearts to care, and our hands to act. Make us brave in love. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

(Pair students and provide each pair with a bible)

Say: One partner will read from Matthew 22:34-40. The other will read from Leviticus 19:18. As you read, notice any words or phrases that stand out. Underline or circle them if you can.

(Allow several minutes for reading)

Reflection Questions in Pairs:

- What does “love God with your whole self” mean?
- What does it look like to love your neighbor?
- What connections do you see between these two scriptures?
- Why do you think Jesus says these two are the most important?

(Bring group back together)

Say: Jesus is quoting a command that his listeners already knew from Leviticus. But he makes a bold connection:

Loving God is demonstrated by the way we love other people.

God’s love reaches every part of who we are, and our love is called to reach every part of our neighbors’ lives as well.

This kind of love is more than a feeling. It becomes action, especially when people are excluded, ignored, or treated unfairly.

NOTES

This passage is often called the “Greatest Commandment,” but it is also one of the simplest. Jesus is being challenged by religious leaders who want to trap him. But Jesus doesn’t play their game—He flips the question, as He often does, and goes back to the heart of the law: love.

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Discussion questions:

- Who do we sometimes forget is our neighbor?
- What does it look like to love someone who is different, hard to understand, or ignored by others?
- When is it hardest to love your neighbor?
- What does love look like when there's injustice involved—like the various “isms” (racism, sexism, ageism), exclusion, or poverty?

Say: The UMC Social Principles remind us that loving our neighbors includes working for justice, dignity, and full participation in both church and society. That includes racial equity, gender equality, economic justice, accessibility, and recognizing young people as valued members of Christ's Body.

If love changes the way we treat people, it should also change the way our churches live.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

(Divide into pairs or small groups. Provide each student with sticky notes or index cards. Ask participants to write one response to each prompt.)

Questions:

- “What's one thing in our church or community where love is missing or incomplete?”
- “What's something you wish adults in your church understood better?”
- “What's one way youth already show up with love and leadership?”
- “What's one thing youth do really well in your church?”

(Bring everyone back together. Invite students to share. Record recurring themes on a whiteboard or flip chart. Look for common ideas rather than debating responses.)

NOTES

“Jesus didn't just say love your neighbor—He *acted* on it. Loving your neighbor in today's world means challenging injustice and participating in your church with purpose. The United Methodist Social Principles remind us that justice and community go hand-in-hand. And the Church is called to be a place that welcomes Youth as they are in this moment and the gifts they have.”

Instructions:

Each group will now build a **real-life proposal** to present to your youth leader, pastor, or church council. The goal is to turn “love your neighbor” into something that changes how your church **lives and leads**.

Ask each group to choose one real issue they care about that the church is not yet addressing boldly enough. Give them poster paper/flipchart/whiteboard or digital platform to create a **Church Action Proposal**.

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Part Two: Bold Proposals (15 minutes)

(Have youth work in pairs, small groups or one big group if the size of the group is around 5-7 people.)

Provide poster/flip chart paper, or a shared digital document. Each group should create a simple proposal to answer these questions.)

Say: Jesus doesn't simply tell us to love. He invites us to put love into action. Imagine your church asked your group to recommend one change that would help your congregation better love God and love its neighbors. What would you propose?

On paper or in a shared doc, answer the following questions:

1. What's the problem you see? What injustice, silence, or exclusion is present?

Some examples might be:

- Anti-racism education team in the congregation
- Environmental practices in the building or worship
- LGBTQ+ inclusion and safety such as gender neutral bathrooms or inclusive language in worship
- Mental health awareness support for youth and families
- Accessibility for disabled youth/adults
- Starting a community pantry for housing-insecure students

2. Why does this matter to God?

(Tie it to scripture or faith or experience—especially Matthew 22 or Leviticus 19.)

3. What do you want your church to do?

(Name 1–3 clear actions, like creating a youth-led justice Sunday, building inclusion into decision-making spaces, or partnering with a local justice org. Encourage them

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to think beyond platitudes – what can youth actually do? What would they need from adults to take action?)

4. How will youth lead?

- Hosting a youth-led justice panel for the congregation
- Presenting the proposal to the Church Council or pastor
- Asking for a Sunday service theme or bulletin feature on the issue
- Partnering with adult ministries for shared service projects

Say: You don't have to solve every problem. Faithful leadership begins with taking the first step.

(Invite each group to present its proposal. Model active listening and affirm thoughtful ideas.)

If time allows, each person writes a short open letter to:

- A church leader (pastor, trustee chair, lay leader)
- Their District or Annual Conference leaders/representatives or their Bishop
- A school board member
- A local official (mayor, council rep)

Prompt:

“As a young person of faith, here's what I want you to know about what love and justice require...”

Letters can be collected and shared (with youth consent) or turned into a public display in the church or youth room.

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Jesus says that all of scripture can be summed up with one word: **love**. But not a love that stays in your heart or just makes people feel good. This is a bold love that shows up—especially when things are unfair, when someone’s hurting, or when others are silent. This love takes root in our communities—especially in the **Church**, where we are called to live out this commandment.

Too often, youth are told that they will someday be the church, or that their leadership is limited to decorating, volunteering, or “sharing a few thoughts.” But Jesus doesn’t say, “Adults, love your neighbor.” He says it to everyone listening—including *young* people.

(Invite students to reflect on these questions during the week)

Reflection questions:

- How is loving your neighbor about more than simply being nice?
- How can our church become braver, not just kinder?
- What prevents young people from being fully heard?
- What would it look like for youth to help lead the church today?

Pray: God of bold love, thank you for trusting us to be your hands and hearts in this world. Help us to lead not just someday, but now—with clarity, courage, and joy. Show us how to love not only in thought, but in truth and action. Amen.