

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND DIVINE GENEROSITY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:

Exodus 16:2-15, Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45, Jonah 3:10-4:11, Psalm 145:1-8, Philippians 1:21-30, Matthew 20:1-16

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/

BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:

The lesson incorporates several UMC Social Principles, with Economic Justice (§163) serving as the primary framework. This principle emphasizes care for those with fewer resources and addresses systemic inequality.

Additionally, the lesson touches on complementary Social Principles that expand its theological foundation:

*Compassion and justice toward all people - Aligns with §162 (The Social Community) which addresses social justice and human rights for all people.

*Care for all creation - Corresponds to §160 (The Natural World) which covers environmental stewardship and care for God's creation. *Mentioned in the responsive reading from Psalm 145*

*Both individual actions and addressing systems that create inequality - Relates to §163 (The Economic Community), particularly regarding economic justice and systemic change. Throughout the lesson, students explore these principles through biblical examples of God's generosity, compassion, and justice as demonstrated in the scripture passages.

OBJECTIVE:

By the end of this lesson, students will: 1. Understand God's character as abundantly generous, compassionate, and just. 2. Identify how human concepts of fairness often differ from God's justice 3. Apply the Philippians 1 call to "live in a manner worthy of the gospel" to real-life situations 4. Commit to at least one specific action that demonstrates God's generosity and justice in their community.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Bibles (CEB Translation), paper, pens, timer, small cards or sticky notes, whiteboard or large paper, markers, small object (stone or other item) for closing activity, optional: soft instrumental music for centering activity

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Focus: Setting the tone for exploring God's generous and compassionate nature.

Say: Let's begin by settling into this space together. Find a comfortable seat in the circle. We'll start with about 30 seconds of silence. Take a few slow, deep breaths and allow yourself to become fully present.

(Pause for silence.)

Say: Now, we'll go around the circle. As each person has an opportunity share, please tell us:

- One thing you are grateful for from the past week
- One way you experienced or witnessed generosity recently.

There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to share as much or as little as you are comfortable with. Let's listen carefully and respectfully to one another.

(Allow each student time to share.)

Say: Thank you all for sharing. Today, we'll explore stories that reveal God's abundance generosity and compassion. We'll also wrestle with examples of God's justice that may surprise us and consider what these stories invite us to do as followers of Christ.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Focus: Exploring the connections between God's provision, compassion, and surprising justice.

Say: Today we are going to look at three different Bible passages. Although they come from different parts of Scripture, each one teaches us something important about God's generosity, compassion, and justice.

NOTES

- Create a calm atmosphere - consider playing soft instrumental music during the silence
- Model vulnerability by sharing your own example first If the group is large, have students share with a partner instead of the whole group
- Connection to lesson: This sets up the themes of gratitude and generosity that run through our scriptures today

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Let's divide into three small groups. Each group will explore one passage together.

Assign the passages:

Group 1: Exodus 16:2-15 – God provides Manna

Group 2: Jonah 3:10-4:11- God shows Mercy to Ninevah

Group 3: Matthew 20:1-16 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Take about 10 minutes to read your passage together. As you discuss, consider the following questions.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's character?
2. Who in the story is unhappy with God's actions? Why?
3. How does this story challenge our human understanding of fairness or justice?
4. What might this story teach us about how we should treat others?

(Pause for 10 minutes for small group work.)

Say: Let's come back together and hear what each group discovered.

(Invite each group to briefly summarize their passage and share one or two key insights from their discussion. As groups report, help students identify common themes across the passages: God's generosity, human resistance to God's surprising generosity, etc.,)

Say: These stories help us understand the God whom Paul is talking about in Philippians 1:21-30. After describing his own commitment to Christ, Paul encourages believers to 'live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.'

Ask: Based on what we've learned about God's character today, what do you think it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel?

(Pause for responses.)

NOTES

Key themes to highlight:

- God's abundant provision (manna, care for Nineveh, generous payment to workers)
- Human resistance to God's generosity (complaining Israelites, angry Jonah, grumbling workers)
- God's justice often looks different than human "fairness"
- God cares for all people (Israelites, Ninevites, latecomers to the vineyard)

For larger groups, create more small groups and assign the same passages to multiple groups

For younger students, consider reading the passages aloud and guiding the discussion as a whole group

Connect to UMC Social Principles on Economic Justice (¶163) which emphasizes caring for those with fewer resources

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Focus: Applying God's generosity, compassion, and justice to everyday life.

Activity: The Compassion Challenge

Part 1: Partner Brainstorm (10 minutes)

Say: We've spent time discovering what Scripture teaches us about God's generous and compassionate character. Now let's think about what it looks like to live that out in our own lives.

Find a partner. Each pair will receive several sticky notes or index cards. Work together to brainstorm real-life situations and write one idea on each card.

Here are some real-life situations to consider:

- A situation where someone might need compassion or generosity at school, at home, in church, or in the community.
- How human ideas of fairness might differ from God's justice in situations.
- One specific action that would demonstrate what it means to "live in a manner worthy of the gospel" in these scenarios.

(Allow 10 minutes for pair work.)

Part 2: Group Reflections (15 minutes)

Say: Let's bring all of our ideas together.

(Collect the cards and post them on a wall, whiteboard, or table where everyone can see them.)

Say: As a group, let's organize these ideas into similar categories. For example, you might notice themes related to school, friendships, family, inclusion, forgiveness, or serving others.

NOTES

Examples to suggest if students need prompting:

- Someone new at school who doesn't know anyone
- A person who made a mistake and is being excluded
- Someone who needs more help or time to complete work
- A community member experiencing homelessness

Emphasize that "living worthy of the gospel" involves both individual actions and addressing systems that create inequality

Reference UMC Book of Resolutions on specific issues if they arise in discussion

For smaller groups, do this activity as a whole group brainstorm

For youth with writing difficulties, offer to be their scribe or allow verbal sharing

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After organizing the responses, lead a discussion using questions such as:

- Which of these situations do we encounter the most often?
- Which responses seem the most difficult? Why?
- What would our community look like if everyone practiced God's kind of generosity and justice?
- How can we encourage and support one another in living this way?

Say: Following Jesus isn't about believing the right things, it's also about living in ways that reflect God's love and generosity every day.

(Invite each student to silently choose one specific action they will commit to practicing during the coming week. Allow a brief moment of silence for students to consider their commitment. Invite volunteers to share if they feel comfortable.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Focus: Reflecting on our call to embody God's generosity, compassion, and justice.

Say: As we close today, we'll remind ourselves of who God is and how God calls us to live.

(Invite everyone to stand in a circle.)

Lead the following responsive reading from Psalm 145:8-9

Leader: The Lord is merciful and compassionate

Group: Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Leader: The Lord is good to everyone

Group: God's compassion extends to all creation.

(Hold up a small stone or another meaningful object.)

NOTES

Create a reverent atmosphere for the closing

If a student doesn't want to share a word, they can simply pass the object

Consider writing down the words shared and sending them to students as a midweek reminder

Alternative: Instead of sharing words, have students write their word on a small card to carry with them

Emphasize that living out God's justice and generosity is an ongoing journey we walk together.

Extended Learning Options

- Challenge students to memorize Philippians 1:27 during the week
- Have students research UMC initiatives that embody God's justice and compassion
- Create a group service project based on needs identified in the Compassion Challenge
- For older youth, explore how Psalm 105 celebrates God's liberating justice throughout history

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Say: We are going to pass this around the circle. When it comes to you, share one word that describes how you want to respond to God's generosity and justice this week.

(Allow everyone an opportunity to share a single word.)

Closing Prayer:

Gracious God, thank you for showing us your generosity, compassion, and justice. Help us to reflect your love in the ways we treat others. Give us the courage to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, especially when it is difficult. Strengthen us to be people who offer mercy, practice generosity, seek justice, and share your love wherever we go. We offer to you the commitments we have made today. By your Holy Spirit, help us to live them out this week. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen .