

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 18:15-20
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶162 Other Social Issues B, ¶163 Government Responsibilities C, ¶163 Basic Rights and Freedoms
OBJECTIVE:	Students will explore Jesus’ teaching on accountability, reconciliation, and community, discovering how justice begins with honest relationships, courageous conversations, and restoring people rather than excluding them.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	rope/yarn (6-10 feet), candle, jenga blocks or wooden blocks, index cards, sticky notes, pens/markers

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

(Lay the rope in a circle in the center of the room. Invite everyone to gather around it.)

Say: This rope reminds us that we are connected. Every choice we make affects someone else. Sometimes those connections are joyful. Sometimes they come strained or even broken. Today we will hear Jesus teach us what to do when relationships are damaged, not so we can punish one another, but so that healing and justice can happen.

(Pause and light the candle)

(Lead the group in a breath prayer)

Inhale: God of justice

Exhale: Teach me to seek peace

(Repeat three times)

NOTES

Supplies: Rope/Yarn and Candle

The rope represents the relationships that connect us as the Body of Christ. Justice begins with recognizing that our actions affect one another.

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Say: As you breathe, think about someone who has helped repair a broken relationship in your life or someone who has stood up for what was right.

(Pause for silent reflection)

Say: Let's hear how Jesus teaches his followers to care for one another when relationships become difficult.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

(Read Matthew 18:15-20.)

Ask: What words or phrases stood out to you?

(Pause for responses)

Say: Jesus is teaching his disciples what life should look like inside Christian community. Disagreements and conflict will happen. The question is not whether people make mistakes. The question is how followers of Jesus respond. Notice that Jesus doesn't begin with punishment. He begins with conversation. Then community. The goal is always reconciliation whenever possible.

Discussion Questions:

- What steps does Jesus describe?
- Why do you think Jesus begins with a private conversation?
- Why involve other people later?
- What do you think Jesus hopes will happen?

Say: Justice isn't only about punishment. Biblical justice is about making relationships right whenever possible.

Ask:

- What is the difference between revenge and justice?
- Why is accountability important?

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- Can someone be forgiven and still be held responsible?
- Why might ignoring harm actually make things worse?

(Read verse 20)

Ask:

- How does knowing Jesus is present change the way we handle conflict?
- What makes it difficult to have honest conversations?
- What helps people feel safe enough to tell the truth?

Ask:

- Where do you see conflict among young people?

(Examples: Friend groups, school, social media, families, church)

Ask:

- What usually happens when conflict is ignored?
- What happens when people gossip instead of talking directly?
- What would Jesus encourage us to do differently?

Say: The United Methodist Social Principles remind us that every person has sacred worth because they are created in God's image. They also call Christians to seek justice, practice reconciliation, reject bullying and discrimination, and build communities where every person is treated with dignity. Justice means more than stopping harm. It means restoring relationships, protecting vulnerable people, and creating communities where everyone can flourish.

Ask:

- How does today's passage support those values?
- Why do healthy communities need both grace and accountability?

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: Jesus tells us that healthy communities don't happen by accident. They are built one relationship at a time. Today, we are going to build a tower that represents the kind of community Jesus describes in Matthew 18.

(Spread the blocks on the table/floor. Invite students to take several blocks. As them to write one word/phrase on each block or card that they believe helps create a healthy community.)

Examples: trust, honesty, respect, courage, forgiveness, listening, inclusion, kindness, accountability, mercy, patience, justice, humility, compassion

(As each student places a block onto the tower, invite them to briefly explain why they chose that word.)

(When the tower is complete, ask the following questions)

Ask:

- Which values showed up more than once?
- Which value do you think is the foundation for the others?
- Which value is the hardest to practice?

(Give each student two or three sticky notes)

Say: Even healthy communities experience conflict. Jesus doesn't pretend that people won't hurt one another. Instead, he teaches us how to respond.

(Ask students to write examples of things that damage relationships)

Examples: gossip, bullying, racism, exclusion, lying, broken promises, hurtful words, pride, cyberbullying, ignoring someone, discrimination)

(Invite students to place sticky notes on the tower.)

NOTES

Place a piece of tape on the blocks so students can write on them. After exercise tape can be removed.

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Ask:

- Which of these do you see most often at school?
- Which do you see online?
- Which do you think is hardest to repair?

Say:

- In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a way to respond when relationships are broken. The goal isn't punishment, it's restoration.

(Read Matthew 18:15-17)

Ask:

- If each sticky note represents harm, what actions could help repair the community?

(Ask students to write examples of restorative action)

Examples: Honest conversation, apology, listening, forgiveness, accountability, making amends, speaking truth in love, prayer, reconciliation, seeking understanding, including others, standing up for someone

(As students answer, remove one damage sticky note from the power and replace it with a restorative action sticky note)

(Continue until the tower once again reflects a healthy community)

Discussion questions:

- Which was easier? Finding ways to damage the tower or rebuilding it?
- Why does rebuilding trust often take longer than breaking it?
- Which step Jesus describes in Matthew 18 seems most difficult?
- How does accountability actually strengthen a community instead of weakening it?

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Say: Just like this tower, our church, our school, and our friendships become stronger when we choose honesty, accountability, forgiveness, and love. Jesus calls us to be builders of communities where justice and reconciliation are part of the foundation.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Jesus promises that whenever people gather in his name, he is present. That means Christ is present when we worship. Christ is also present when we apologize. Christ is present when we tell the truth. Christ is present when we choose justice instead of revenge. Christ is present whenever we help restore relationships.

Ask:

- What is one way you can help bring healing to a relationship this week?

Pray:

God of Justice and Peace,

Thank you for creating us to live in community.

Give us courage to speak truth with love. Give us humility to admit when we are wrong. Give us wisdom to seek justice that restores rather than destroys. Help us protect those who are hurting, including those who feel forgotten, and build communities where every person is treated with dignity.

May our words bring healing. May our actions reflect your love. May our lives help others see your kingdom. Through Christ, who is always present among us. Amen