SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: RACHEL DODD

JUSTICE ISSUE: CARE FOR THE ECOSYSTEM OF OUR HEARTS, OUR WORLD, AND OUR WATER SUPPLY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Isaiah 55:10-13
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	2024 Social Principles ¶160, Creation in Peril
OBJECTIVE:	Students will consider the ways God is present and active in their hearts and in the world around them and identify practical actions to steward God's creation through water conservation.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Paper and markers or colored pencils

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Ask:

What's something in nature that inspires you or brings you peace?

Or, for a more active option, go outside and invite students to listen to nature for 2 minutes in silence. Then, ask:

What's something you heard or saw that inspired you or made you feel peaceful?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Ask a student to read Isaiah 55:10-13 aloud.

Say: God gave the world order and rhythms that interconnect us—with nature, with one another, and with God. These words in Isaiah 55 were written to people in exile, offering them hope and reminding them to look to the natural world around them for signs that God is still very much at work. When life gets stressful or we feel off-balance, we can come back to these words to remind us that God is always present and active in our world—and is always giving us reasons to have hope.

NOTES

If choosing the more active option for this centering moment, direct students to an outside area that is quiet and away from traffic—such as a garden. After two minutes of silence, you may choose to ask students to share their reflections in pairs.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

Discussion Questions

- Can you think of a time when a word or encouragement stuck with you and changed or helped you?
- What do you think it means that God's word does not return empty?
- Where do you see God's word shaping your life right now? Where might you be resisting it?
- What do you think it means that God's word "provides seed to the sower and food to the eater"?

Say: These verses also paint a picture of mountains, hills, fields, and trees joyfully and confidently flourishing when God's word is fulfilled. That's because, through God, we're interconnected with the natural world we live in. When one flourishes, we all benefit.

Ask:

- What does it look like when God's word brings flourishing?
- If God's word brings flourishing to the earth, how should we treat creation?

NOTES

Isaiah 55 offers words of hope to God's people in exile. These words in verses 10-13 would have inspired confidence in their hearers, inviting them to look to the reliability of familiar patterns in nature (such as seasons and the cycles of growth and harvest) as a reminder that God has not abandoned the world. Further, the joyful scene of celebration offers reassuring hope that God's people will one day return from exile and experience restored order.

In this context, the "word that comes from [God's] mouth" (v. 11) can be understood as God's loving will, which creates and orders the natural world and promises hope and restoration.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Ask students to divide into pairs, and give each pair a copy of the preface from Social Principles, Community of All Creation.

Invite students to read the preface in their pairs and discuss:

- What echoes from Isaiah 55:10-13 do you find in this section of the Social Principles?
- What can we learn from nature about patience, renewal, and responsibility?

Next, ask each pair to draw a picture of the water cycle (precipitation, collection, evaporation, or condensation) on a piece of paper and brainstorm:

NOTES

You can offer this as a printout from https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124, project it onto a screen, or invite students to access it from their devices.

When your time together is finished, encourage students to take a photo of their drawings (using their phones or devices) to remind them of their practical action steps.

Consider using the drawings to create a display in your gathering space.

- What are some environmental concerns threatening this cycle in our local community or region?
- What's one practical action we can take to help steward God's creation by conserving or caring for our water sources?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Take a deep breath and imagine your life as an ecosystem for a moment. What needs watering? And what feels like it's flourishing? Spend a minute silently telling God thanks for what God has provided and asking for what you need.

After a minute of quiet, pray:

God, our creator and sustainer, we thank you that we are a part of this big, beautiful world. Help us to hear and be inspired by your words of encouragement, wisdom, and care as you speak in us and through us each day. Amen.