

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: KURT COOPER

JUSTICE ISSUE: SEE LESSON NOTES AND HANDOUT.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24, Psalm 100, Psalm 95 1-7a, Ephesians 1: 15-13, Matthew 25: 35-46.
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	See Lesson Notes and Handout.
OBJECTIVE:	To help young people see points of intersectionality between their lives, scripture, and social justice as 21st-century followers of Jesus Christ. And to help them grow in their understanding of God’s nature as a Shepherd.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Bibles, copies off the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, and items for making a collage (paper, magazines, glue, scissors, pencils, and markers), handout

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Before we begin today’s Bible study, take a moment to think back over your week. Where have you seen God at work? Maybe you experienced kindness, witnessed someone standing up for another person, noticed beauty in creation, or saw hope in a difficult situation. Hold that moment in your mind as we listen to today’s Psalm

Read **Psalm 100** aloud for the group.

- ¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his (God’s) presence with singing.
- ³ Know that the LORD is God.
It is he (God) that made us, and we are his (God’s);[a]
we are his (God’s) people, and the sheep of his (God’s) pasture.

NOTES

Be intentional in making sure that a variety of voices are heard in responding to the Psalm and how students have seen God present in the world this week.

Depending on the size of your group you may need to limit the number of responses or ask students to turn and share with their neighbor what words or phrases stand out to them in the Psalm.

Verse three of the Psalm is featured on the handout. The language on the handout has been changed to eliminate male personal pronouns for more inclusive language.

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⁴ Enter his (the Lord's) gates with thanksgiving,
and his (God's) courts with praise.
Give thanks to him (God), bless his (the Lord's) name.

⁵ For the LORD is good;
his (God's) steadfast love endures forever,
and his (God's) faithfulness to all generations.

(Pause)

Ask:

- What words or phrases stood out to you?
- What do these verses teach us about God as our Shepherd?
- Where did you notice God at work this week?

(Invite students to share)

Say: Throughout today's lesson we'll continue asking where God is caring for people and how we are invited to join that work.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

(Divide the group into four small groups/pairs and assign each group one scripture passage)

Each group will:

- Read your assigned scripture silently
- Choose one person to read the passage aloud while everyone else closes their eyes and simply listen
- Read the brief background information. Then read the passage aloud one more time. Finally discuss the reflection question together.

NOTES

Depending on the size of your group divide the students into pairs. Give each pair one or two of the follow scriptures with which to work.

All four of the scripture readings, context, and questions, are featured on the handout. You will need to decide how best to use this material for your group or class.

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Group One:

- Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24
 - o Context - This reading comes just after Ezekial has received word that Jerusalem has fallen and that the majority of the Hebrew population has been taken into exile in Babylon.
- **Reflection Question:**
 - o How do you think the image of God as a Shepherd seeking out lost sheep would speak to those who have been taken into exile?
 - o What do you think it means when God says I will feed the sheep with justice?
 - o Where in the world today do you believe God is seeking out lost sheep?

Group Two:

- Psalm 95:1-7
 - o Context - This Psalm is a celebration of the worship of God. In it we find the image of God as a Shepherd with humankind as the sheep of God's pasture.
- **Reflection Questions:**
 - o What acts of worship do you find present in the Psalm?
 - o Does the image of God as a Shepherd speak to you? Is there another image of God you are drawn to?
 - o Why do you think humankind is imagined as sheep in the reading?

Group Three:

- Matthew 25: 31-46
 - o Context - This reading from the Gospel of Matthew is the last of Jesus' teaching sections prior to the Gospel heading into the narrative of the plot to kill Jesus and the passion of Jesus Christ.

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- **Reflection Question:**

- o Who are lifted as the least among us in the story?
- o Do you think this story as the last teaching section in the Gospel prior to the story of the plot to kill Jesus elevates the lesson it teaches?
- o Who would you name as the least among us in your community?

Group Four

- Ephesians 1:15-23

- o Context - This reading, at the beginning of Ephesians, is a prayer offered by Paul after he has recounted the Good News of all that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ

- **Reflection Question**

- o When and where do you set aside time to pray?
- o What images from the prayer Paul offers stand out to you as a 21st-century follower of Christ?
- o Paul prays for believers to have the gift of wisdom, what gift would you pray for people of faith to have today?

(Gather everyone for group discussion)

(Invite each group to summarize their scripture, one important insight, and one question they are still thinking about.)

Say: Although these passages are different, they all remind us that God is actively caring for people and inviting us to join that work.

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: Each of today's scripture shows God caring for people in different ways. The United Methodist Social Principles help us to think about how Christians continue that work today.

(Invite each group to choose one issue connected to its passage)

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24 (potential topics)

- The Economic Community, Economic Challenges, C. Human Trafficking and Slavery (p 16).
- The Social Community, Other Social Issues, L. Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism (p. 29).
- The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, G. Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees (p. 38).

Psalms 95: 1-7 (potential topics)

- Community of All Creation, Creation in Peril, A. Destruction of Ecosystems (p. 9).
- Community of All Creation, Stewardship of Creation, B. Sustainable Policies and Practices (p. 11).
- Community of All Creation, Stewardship of Creation, F. Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom (pp. 12-13).

Matthew 25:31-46 (potential topics)

- Community of All Creation, Stewardship of Creation, C. Food Justice (pp. 11-12).
- The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, A. Health Care (p. 36).
- The Political Community, Government Responsibilities, C. Restorative Justice (p. 33).

NOTES

Hopefully, your group of young people have become familiar with resourcing the United Methodist Social Principles. If not, please take time to introduce the material to them through the Preface and the Preamble.

A quote from the Preface to the Social Principles is included on the hand-out.

The act of creating a collage that speaks to the experience of each young person, scripture and an area of social justice can take time. Not all young people will approach this in the same manner. Allow time and space for each student to work at the pace that works for them.

If need encourage them to continue their work on this project and bring it back to share with the group of class next week.

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Ephesians 1: 15-23 (potential topics)

- The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms (pp. 35-36).
- The Political Community, Government Responsibilities, A. Church and Government (pp. 32-33).
- The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, J. Religious Minorities (p 39).

Say: Create a collage in your group that answers the following questions.

- What challenge exists
- How is God responding as the Good Shepherd?
- How can Christians be participating in God's work?
- What gives you hope?

(Invite each group to briefly present its collage.)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: At the beginning of today's study, you thought about where you had seen God at work this week. After reading scripture and listening to one another, has anything new come to mind?

(Pause for sharing)

(Invite participants to share: joys, concerns, people/situations they want to pray for)

Ask:

- What is one way you can be a good shepherd to someone this week?
- How can you help someone feel seen, cared for, or included?

Closing Prayer Option, Ephesians 1: 17-19.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father (Creator) of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him (God), so that with

NOTES

As you close your time with the young people feel free to use a portion of the prayer Paul offers to the Ephesians for wisdom. Or if it better suits the young people you work with pray a prayer that speaks to the shepherding needs of your community and the ways the young people can be engaged in God's work this week.

The closing moments are not included on the student handout.

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the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he (our Lord) has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for those who believe, according to the working of his (God's) great power. Amen.

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GBCS YOUTH

Psalm 100: 3
³ Know that the Lord is God.
 It is God that made us,
 and we are God's;
 we are God's people, and
 the sheep of God's pasture.

26TH SUNDAY
 After Pentecost

EZEKIEL
34:11-16,
20-24

This reading comes just after Ezekiel has received word that Jerusalem has fallen and that the majority of the Hebrew population has been taken into exile in Babylon.

- How do you think the image of God as a Shepherd seeking out lost sheep would speak to those who have been taken into exile?
- What do you think it means when God says I will feed the sheep with justice?
- Where do you believe God is seeking out lost sheep today?

This Psalm is a celebration of the worship of God. In it we find the image of God as a Shepherd with humankind as the sheep of God's pasture.

- What acts of worship do you find present in the Psalm?
- Does the image of God as a Shepherd speak to you? Is there another image of God you are drawn to?
- Why do you think humankind is imagined as sheep in the reading?

Psalm
95:1-7

Matt.
25: 31-46

This reading from the Gospel of Matthew is the last of Jesus' teaching sections prior to the Gospel heading into the narrative of the plot to kill Jesus and the passion of Jesus Christ.

- Who are lifted as the least among us in the story?
- Do you think this story, as the last teaching section in the Gospel prior to the story of the plot to kill Jesus, elevates the lesson it teaches?
- Who would you name as the least among us in your community?

This reading, at the beginning of Ephesians, is a prayer offered by Paul after he has recounted the Good News of all that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ

- When and where do you set aside time to pray?
- What images from the prayer Paul offers stand out to you as a 21st-century follower of Christ?
- Paul prays for believers to have the gift of wisdom. What gift would you pray for people of faith to have today?

Ephesians
1:15-23

1

The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are thus a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. Moreover, they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice. (Preface, p. 5).

As you create your collage, consider the text you read, your own experience, and a specific matter of justice from the Social Principles.

EZEKIEL
34:11-16,
20-24

Potential Collage Topics

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Ephesians
1:15-23