

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: REV. DR. SUZANNE ALLEN

JUSTICE ISSUE: ENVIRONMENT AND CONSUMERISM

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Exodus 32:1-14, Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶160 Creation in Peril A, ¶160 Stewardship of Creation B
OBJECTIVE:	To reflect on the connection between consumption, environmental destruction, and idol worship. Environmental destruction increases when we trust in the material items we consume and control rather than trusting God. Idol worship occurs when we perceive resources as ours and give them more value than God.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	copies of handout for opening and closing, pens, blank paper, colored pencils, space to create the sculpture, extra items for sculpture and an optional iPad, copies of the Social Principles section Community of All Creation—Creation in Peril, A & B, copies of handout (attached)

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Welcome, everyone! Today we are going to think about how our faith leads us to worship God and care for God’s creation. Before we begin, I’d like to spend a couple of minutes reflecting on three questions.

(Pass out paper and utensils.)

Say: On your paper:

- Draw a quick sketch of one part of creation that you are especially grateful to God for.
- Write the name of one person or organization that helps care for creation.
- Write one example of a way God creation is being harmed today.

NOTES

Take time to acknowledge each person in the room and make sure that they are introduced to each other if they don’t already know each other.

See handout.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

(Invite a few volunteers to briefly share what they wrote or drew.)

Say: The psalm we will read today praises God while also confessing how God's people sometimes lose sight of what matters most. As we pray together, you'll have opportunities to name some of the things you just reflected on.

(Read Psalm 106:1-6, 19-21, responsively or together, follow the handout.)

Time of Welcome

Today we will be thinking about how our faith leads us to care for creation and to worship God.

On the paper that is in front of you, take about two minutes to:

1. Make a quick sketch of one of your favorite parts of the natural world that you are grateful to God for.
2. Write down the name of one person or an organization that helps care for creation.
3. Write down a situation where creation is being harmed.

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 offers praise to God and is a confession of Israel's sins.

Let's read it together as our opening prayer and name the items we listed at the times they are asked for on our handout.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: The psalm we just prayed retells part of one of the most important stories in the Old Testament, the story of the golden calf. Before we read it, what do you already remember about this story?

(Allow students to share)

(Read Exodus 32:1-14 aloud)

NOTES

We have been following the Exodus story in the lectionary readings since the end of August.

The Exodus is a central narrative of scripture. It offers many formative stories, laws, and points of covenant identity for the Jewish people. It has also been meaningful to other groups of people who have been enslaved, providing hope and offering witness to God's desire for all people to be free and God's willingness to intervene to bring that freedom about.

In the story, the Israelites are getting closer to the promised land, and yet there is still a long way to go. They still struggle to know and trust God as a free people. It is easy resume the patterns and habits of Egypt, especially when Moses seems to have disappeared.

As we begin reading these verses in Exodus 32, Moses is up on Mt. Sinai with God, receiving the two tablets of the covenant. The people get tired of waiting for Moses, turn to Aaron, and ask him to make them gods who will lead them so that they can start moving again. Their request violates the first and second commandments found on the tablet as recorded in Exodus 20:3-6.

Aaron does what they ask by collecting the gold jewelry that God allowed the people to take from the Egyptians as they left the country and making an idol from it. The people have a festival with the golden calf as a focal point.

God is angry and ready to give up on the Israelites. Moses, however, intercedes on their behalf. As he does, God changes God's mind. This scene reveals the character of God as loving and merciful. It also gives an example of the way that God listens to human mediators such as Moses and even us when we intercede on behalf of others and our world.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

Discussion questions:

1. Who are the main characters in this part of the story?
2. What do the people ask Aaron to do? Why?
3. Where is Moses? Why has he been gone so long?
4. Do you think they were right to give up on him?
5. When have you felt like giving up on God or someone important in your life? What did you do?
6. The Israelites were formerly enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt. Where do you think they got the gold jewelry Aaron asked them for?
7. What do the people say and do in response to the golden calf that appears from the fire?
8. How is this similar and different to our worship today?
9. Have you ever had someone take credit for something you did? How did it feel?
10. Did you ever take credit for something someone else did? Why?
11. How are the people in this story taking the credit for rescuing them away from God and giving it to someone else? Why?
12. How does God respond?
13. What does Moses do in response to God's anger? What would you have done?
14. Why does God change God's mind?
15. What does this story tell us about God?
16. What does it tell us about our worship of God or other things?

Say: The Exodus story is one of the most important stories in the Bible. It tells how God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and formed them into a new people. As they journey toward the Promised Land, they are still learning what it means to trust

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

God. When Moses disappears up Mount Sinai for a long time, they become impatient and return to familiar patterns from Egypt.

Aaron gathers the gold jewelry that the Israelites carried out of Egypt and uses it to make an idol. Instead of trusting the God who rescued them, they place their hope in something they created themselves.

God is deeply grieved by their actions, but Moses prays for the people. His prayer reminds us that God is compassionate, listens to those who interceded for others, and desires mercy rather than destruction.

The story also invites us to ask an important question: What are the 'golden calves' in our own lives?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: The gold used to make the calf came from Egypt. In many ways, it represented the values the Israelites carried with them; wealth, power, luxury, and status. Let's imagine we are standing with Aaron.

(Invite students)

Say: Place a few everyday items, like a watch, phone, earbuds, jewelry, or another object on the table. Together we'll arrange them into a sculpture representing something our culture values more than God.

(Allow 8-10 minutes for students to create the sculpture.)

Reflection Questions:

- Where do the materials in the items we made the sculpture of come from?
- What impact did the creation of these items have on the environment? Who made them? How can we find out if they made a living wage?
- When added together, how much are all of these items worth?
- How long will you keep these items? What happens to them when you are done with them?

NOTES

You will need a designated space for people to work together to create this sculpture. You may want to bring extra items in case the group doesn't have much with them.

If they don't know the answer to some of the questions, encourage them to do research on an available iPad to find out.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

- What do the sculpture and the items it is made of tell us about what we worship in our culture?
- How do we give these things more value and credit than God?
- How is that leading to the destruction of the environment?
- How might putting worship of God first change this outcome?

Say: The United Methodist Social Principles include a section called Community of All Creation, Creation in Peril. It reminds us that caring for creation is part of our Christian calling.

(Invite participants to read the section individually or in pairs)

Ask:

- What is one idea that stood to you?
- What is one practical action you or our group could take to care of creation this month?

Say: Think of this action as prayer in motion. Just as Moses prayed for the people and asked God to bring healing instead of destruction, our actions can become part of God's work of healing creation.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

(Close with the Litany to the Social Creed- handout)

Our Social Principles include a Social Creed.

Let's use the first part of the litany that goes with it as our closing prayer of commitment.

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ, calls us by grace

to be renewed in the image of our Creator, that we may be one in divine love for the world.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

Today is the day God cares for the integrity of creation, wills the healing and wholeness of all life, weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.

And so shall we.

Today is the day God embraces all hues of humanity, delights in diversity and difference, favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we.

...Today is the day God brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, gives sight to the blind, and sets the oppressed free.

And so shall we.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST CONT'D

HANDOUT

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 NRSV

Read together:

¹ Praise the LORD!

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?

³ Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.

***Take time to share the drawings, names, and situations that you are thankful for.*

Read together:

⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you deliver them;

⁵ that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory in your heritage.

⁶ Both we and our ancestors have sinned;
we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.

***Take time to name the situations where creation is being harmed.*

¹⁹ They made a calf at Horeb
and worshiped a cast image.

²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God[a]
for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²² wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.[b]

²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,

stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

Praise the LORD!

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer from “A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed”

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ, calls us by grace
to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one in divine love for the world.

Today is the day God cares for the integrity of creation, wills the healing and wholeness of all life, weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.

And so shall we.

Today is the day God embraces all hues of humanity, delights in diversity and difference, favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we...

...Today is the day God brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, gives sight to the blind, and sets the oppressed free.

And so shall we.