SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CONTRIBUTOR NAME: TINASHE TEMBO

JUSTICE ISSUE: SUBSTANCE ABUSE , ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO USE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	Social Principles ¶162 *Other Social Issues, A.* 2024 Book of Resolutions #3200 "Alcohol and Other Drugs"
OBJECTIVE:	To understand the cultural and historical context of ancient Jewish culture and its expectations of prophets and to explain the role of faith and spirituality in addressing from substance abuse.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: We are going to begin with a reflective practice called Lectio Divinia. This helps us slow down and listen for God through scripture. I'm going to read a short passage slowly. Just listen and notice what stands out to you.

Read slowly: Zechariah 9:9-12

Say: Now take a moment to reflect quietly. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you? Let it settle in your mind and heart.

(Allow 1-2 minutes of silence)

Say: Now in your own words, silently or quietly, talk to God about what came to you. Share your thoughts, feelings or questions.

(Pause.)

Say: Now just rest in silence. Be present with God. You don't need to say anything, just be.

(Sit in silence for about a minute.)

NOTES

The facilitator to create a sacred space for participants.

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Say: If anyone wants to share what stood out, you are welcome to."

(Pause for sharing.)

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Now let's turn to our main passage: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30. Can I have a couple volunteers read it out loud?

(Allow reading.)

Say: To understand this passage, John the Baptist lived very simply and strictly, and Jesus spent time eating and connecting with all kinds of people. Both were criticized even though they were very different. Jesus also talks about the "wise and intelligent" likely religious leaders who didn't accept his message. And when Jesus talks about a 'yoke' people back then would think of something heavy used to carry burdens, but Jesus reframes it as something lighter.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think Jesus compares people to children in a marketplace?
- How are John the Baptist and Jesus different in how they do ministry?
- Jesus says, 'Take my yoke upon you...for my yoke is easy.' What do you think that means for you personally?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: In the Social Principles, the church is called to care about real issues affecting people, including substance use and addiction. (¶162 Other Social Issues, A)

Ask: Why do you think it's important for the church to talk about things like alcohol, tobacco and drug use?

(Pause for responses.)

Ask: What effects of substance abuse have you seen or heart about in your community?

NOTES

Encourage contextual understanding and help participants understand the cultural and historical context of the passage.

Primary Audience

Jesus' disciples: The passage is likely addressed to Jesus' followers, who would have been familiar with the cultural and historical context.

Jewish audience: The passage assumes a knowledge of Jewish scripture and tradition, suggesting that the intended audience is primarily Jewish.

Secondary Audience

Pharisees and religious leaders: The passage may also be addressing the Pharisees and other religious leaders who were critical of Jesus' ministry.

Wider audience: The passage's themes of rejection, wisdom, and rest may also be relevant to a broader audience, including those who are seeking spiritual guidance or questioning the nature of Jesus' ministry.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 , serves as a reflection on Jesus' ministry, highlighting the contrasting responses to his message and the importance of humility and openness in receiving God's revelation. It connects with the Christian calendar as part of the lectionary readings for the following Sundays:

Third Sunday after Pentecost: This passage highlights the division caused by Jesus' ministry, focusing on the failure of those who witnessed Jesus' ministry to respond and the success of his ministry among the most vulnerable.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Some sources suggest that Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 is also read on this Sunday, emphasizing the themes of confounded expectations and the revelation of God's truth to "infants" rather than the wise and intelligent.

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(Be sensitive. Allow space, don't force sharing.)

Say: This isn't just a local issue, it's global. Different countries struggle with substance abuse in different ways.

(Summarize brief in your own words as needed.)

Insights into drug abuse in various countries

1. United States

The United States is in the grip of an opioid epidemic, earning it an unfortunate spot on this list. What started as an overflow of prescription opioids in the late 1990s has now morphed into a full-blown crisis. The misuse of prescription drugs and the subsequent transition to more potent substances like heroin and illicitly manufactured fentanyl have resulted in a catastrophic increase in overdose deaths.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdose deaths exceeded 70,000 in 2019, the majority of which involved opioids. The proliferation of fentanyl in the drug supply has exacerbated the crisis due to its extreme potency, often leading to fatal outcomes. Aside from the direct health effects, the opioid crisis also burdens the economy with increased healthcare costs, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.

2. Russia

Substance abuse, particularly alcohol and opioids, is a significant concern in Russia. A World Health Organization (WHO) report estimates that nearly 1.8% of the Russian population is dependent on opioids, predominantly heroin. The problem is amplified by a large number of people who inject drugs (PWID), contributing to a parallel HIV epidemic.

Russia's drug problem is further compounded by punitive drug policies and stigmatization, deterring many from seeking help. The lack of harm reduction services, such as opioid substitution therapy and needle exchange programs, poses additional challenges in combating the crisis.

NOTES CONT'D

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: Another possible Sunday for this passage, where Matthew 11:16-19 provides a parabolic take on how people responded to John the Baptist and Jesus, two prophets with different approaches.

Foster reflection and application: Guide participants to reflect on their own lives and consider how to apply Jesus' teachings.

Create a safe space: Encourage open discussion and sharing thoughts and experiences

NOTES

Establish a safe and nonjudgmental space: Ensure participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Set ground rules: Encourage respect, active listening, and confidentiality.

Prepare for sensitive topics: Be aware of potential triggers and have resources available for support.

Source https://scottsdalerecovery.com/an-insight-into-the-six-countries-with-the-worst-drug-addiction-problems/

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3. Afghanistan

As the world's leading producer of opium, Afghanistan faces a severe drug addiction problem. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that over 2.9 million people in Afghanistan are drug users, with a high prevalence of opium and heroin use.

The turmoil and instability caused by decades of conflict have undoubtedly contributed to the addiction crisis. Substance use has become a coping mechanism for many dealing with the mental toll of constant violence and uncertainty. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to treatment services further exacerbate the problem.

4. Iran

Iran is another country severely affected by drug addiction, primarily due to its proximity to Afghanistan, the epicenter of opium production. The country has one of the highest rates of opioid addiction worldwide, with an estimated 2.8% of adults addicted to opioids, according to a study published in the Addiction journal.

The Iranian government has ramped up efforts to combat the crisis, including establishing treatment centers and implementing harm reduction strategies like needle exchange and opioid substitution programs. However, these efforts have been hampered by economic sanctions, limited resources, and social stigma associated with drug use.

5. Brazil

Brazil faces a significant substance abuse problem, with cocaine and its potent derivative, crack cocaine, being prevalent. The country's position as a key transit point for cocaine trafficking from Andean countries to Europe and its internal market's growth has led to increased drug availability.

Brazil's "cracolândias" (cracklands), areas in major cities where crack cocaine use is rampant, exemplify the issue's magnitude. Inadequate access to addiction treatment and socioeconomic inequalities contribute to the crisis. Brazil's struggle to address its drug problem underscores the need for comprehensive, evidence-based drug policies and health services.

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6. Philippines

In the Philippines, methamphetamine, locally known as "shabu," is the primary drug of concern. The country has been grappling with a significant meth problem, leading to the controversial "war on drugs," which has been criticized for its brutal approach and human rights violations.

Drug addiction in the Philippines is often associated with

socioeconomic disparities and lack of access to education and healthcare. While the government has made efforts to address the issue, the punitive approach may deter those struggling with addiction from seeking help due to fear of punishment.

Discussion Questions:

- What do all these situations have in common?
- (Possible responses: pain, need for help, broken systems, stigma.)
- How do you think Jesus would respond to people struggling with addiction? (Possible responses: Encourage compassion, not judgment.)
- How could we respond in a way that reflects Jesus? (Possible responses: support, awareness, kindness, reducing stigma.)
- What is one thing we could do, as individuals or as a group, to show compassion in situations like this?

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Let's take a moment to quiet ourselves again.

Pray: God of Compassion, You see the burdens we carry and the struggles in our world. Help us to come to you when we are weary. Give us hearts that reflect your love, especially toward those who are hurting or overlooked. Teach us to respond with compassion, not judgment, and to be part of your healing work in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

Encourage participants to reflect on what they've learned and how they can apply it to their lives. Offer a prayer for guidance, wisdom, and strength.

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Say: Thank you for being open and thoughtful today. As you go this week, pay attention to where you see people carrying heavy burdens and how you might respond with compassion.