

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, DEATH PENALTY, CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY	
SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 and John 1:6-8, 19-28
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	Political Community
OBJECTIVE:	Students will explore how God call us to bring good news to the poor, care for people who are hurting, and work for freedom and justice. They will discover how Christians can point toward Jesus through acts of mercy, restoration, and care for people who are often overlooked or harmed.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Paper strips or index cards, Pens or Markers, Optional candle, including a pink candle for Gaudete Sunday, Bibles

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Welcome, everyone! I’m glad we’re together today. Before we begin, let’s check in with each other. Does anyone have prayer requests, exciting news, or something from this week they would like to share?

Pause for sharing.

Say: Thanks for sharing! Today we’re talking about good news. Not just the kind of good news we hear when our favorite team wins, we get a day off school, or something exciting happens in our lives. We’re talking about the kind of good news that can change someone’s life. Our Scriptures today talk about people who are poor, people who are hurting, people who are trapped, and people who need hope. They also remind us that God cares about justice and wants people to experience healing, freedom, and dignity. Today we’ll think about what it means to share that good news—

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and how we can point people toward Jesus through what we do.

Say: When did you last feel real joy, even when things were hard? Maybe you were going through something difficult, but someone helped you. Maybe something made you laugh when you needed it. Maybe you felt hopeful even though your situation hadn't changed yet.

Pause for 15–20 seconds.

Say: If you'd like, share your moment with the group in a sentence or two.

Invite two or three volunteers to share. If the group is quiet, offer a brief example without pressuring anyone.

Say: Thank you for sharing. Notice that joy doesn't always mean everything is perfect. Sometimes joy means knowing we're not alone. Sometimes it means believing that something better is possible.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, often called *Gaudete Sunday*, which means 'Rejoice Sunday.' We rejoice because we trust that God is at work, even when the world is still hurting.

Let's hold that idea as we hear our Scriptures: Rejoicing is not pretending that everything is okay. It is trusting that God is making things right.

Light a candle, if available.

Pray: Loving God, thank you for gathering us today. Open our hearts to hear your good news. Help us see people who are hurting, notice where justice is missing, and discover ways to bring hope. Teach us to follow Jesus—not just with our words, but with our actions. Give us courage to do good and to treat every person with dignity. Amen

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our first passage comes from Isaiah 61. Isaiah speaks to people who have experienced hardship and loss. The passage offers a vision of restoration: people who are

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hurting will receive comfort, people who are trapped will hear about freedom, and broken communities will be rebuilt. Listen for the different kinds of work God's Spirit calls people to do.

Read *Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11*.

Say: Isaiah describes a mission that includes good news for the poor, healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for captives, release for prisoners, and comfort for people who mourn. The passage also says that God loves justice. These are not just comforting words. They describe work that changes people's lives and helps repair communities.

Reflection Questions:

- Which part of Isaiah's mission stands out to you the most: good news, healing, freedom, release, or comfort? Why?
- Which of these five kinds of help do you think is hardest to provide in our community? Why?

Say: Isaiah's vision reminds us that God cares about people's whole lives. God cares about spiritual needs, but also about hunger, safety, grief, freedom, and whether people are treated fairly. God's good news is not only something we hear. It is something we are called to help put into practice.

Our Social Principles include a section called *Political Community*. It explores how communities, governments, and public systems should serve people and protect human dignity. The church has a concern for people who are harmed by crime, people who are incarcerated, and people who are trying to rebuild their lives. We can care about safety and accountability while also asking whether our systems help repair harm and whether every person is treated with dignity. Today, I'm going to share one statement from the United Methodist Social Principles' Political Community section. I'll put it into everyday language so we can discuss what it means.

Reflection Questions:

- What does this statement say about how people should be treated?

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Leader preparation: Before the session, select one relevant statement from the current Political Community section or an appropriate United Methodist Book of Resolutions resource. Read the statement accurately, then explain its meaning in plain words.

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- What might this look like for someone who has been harmed by a crime?
- What might it look like for someone who has caused harm and is being held accountable?

Say: Restorative justice is one way people think about responding to harm. Instead of asking only, 'What punishment should happen?' restorative approaches also ask, 'Who was harmed? What do they need? Who has responsibility? What can be done to repair the harm and help prevent it from happening again?' Restorative justice does not mean ignoring harm or forcing someone who was hurt to forgive. Safety, accountability, and the needs of the person harmed still matter. The goal is to seek a response that takes harm seriously and works toward healing and repair.

Say: Our second passage introduces John the Baptist. People are wondering who John is. Is he the Messiah? Is he someone they should follow? John is clear that he is not the Messiah. He is a witness. His job is to point people toward the One who is coming.

Read *John 1:19-23*

Reflection Questions:

- What stands out to you about the way John answers the people's questions?
- John says he is 'a voice.' He doesn't claim to be the most important person in the story. He uses his voice to point toward Jesus. What do you think it means to point people toward Jesus today?

Say: John reminds us that we don't have to be the hero or have all the answers. We can point toward Jesus through our words, our choices, and the way we treat people. We also need to remember that pointing toward Jesus is not about making ourselves look good. It's about helping people experience God's love.

Ask: If your actions were the only message someone heard about Jesus this week, what might they learn from you? You don't have to answer out loud. Just hold that question in your heart.

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Pause for response/reflection.

Say: Our United Methodist tradition teaches that faith is something we live. John Wesley called acts of love and service *works of mercy*. These include visiting people who are in prison, feeding people who are hungry, caring for people who are sick, and helping people who are poor.

Wesley didn't see these acts as extra credit for especially religious people. He understood them as ways God's grace works in our lives and through us to reach other people.

When Wesley visited prisoners, fed the hungry, and taught people who were poor, he was putting faith into action. He believed that we grow in love as we practice loving our neighbors.

Ask: Why do you think helping someone else can also change us?

Say: Our United Methodist General Rules include three simple commitments: do no harm, do good, and attend to the practices that help us grow in love for God. Today, we're especially focusing on the rule to do good.

Doing good doesn't mean we can solve every problem by ourselves. It means we look for faithful ways to respond to the needs around us.

Sometimes doing good means offering direct help. Sometimes it means speaking up when a system is unfair. Sometimes it means listening to people whose experiences are different from our own. And sometimes it means supporting efforts to make our schools, communities, and justice systems more fair.

Let's think about how we might turn Isaiah's vision into action

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: We're going to create a series of short news reports called Good News Broadcast. Imagine that a news station wants to report on places where good news is making a real difference. Your group will receive one of the five jobs described in Isaiah: good news, healing, freedom, release, or comfort. Your task is to create a 30–60

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second TV or radio news report showing what that kind of good news could look like in real life.

Divide the group into small teams. If the group is small, work together as one team and choose several of the five jobs.

Say: Here are the five jobs. Listen for the different needs each one addresses.

1. Good news for the poor: Share hope and practical help with people facing poverty or financial hardship.
2. Healing for the brokenhearted: Support people experiencing grief, loneliness, trauma, or other deep hurts.
3. Freedom for captives: Work toward safety, dignity, and freedom for people who are trapped by injustice or harmful circumstances.
4. Release for prisoners: Care about people who are incarcerated, support accountability and rehabilitation, and help people rebuild their lives when they return to the community.
5. Comfort for those who mourn: Stand with people who are grieving and help them know they are not alone.

Your report should include three things: a headline, a reporter describing what is happening, and an interview with someone whose life has changed because of this good news.

You can make your report serious, hopeful, or even a little funny, as long as you treat people with dignity. You do not need to act out a real person's trauma or share anyone's private story. You can invent a respectful example.

Give each group a paper strip or index card and a pen. Assign one of the five jobs to each group.

Say: You have eight minutes to prepare. Think about these questions:

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Small-group adaptation

Say: Let's list all five jobs together. For each one, we'll name one person or group who might need this kind of good news and one practical action we could take. Then each person can choose the action that speaks most strongly to them.

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- Who in our community might need this kind of good news?
- What is one practical thing a teenager or church could do?
- How would that action help someone experience dignity, hope, freedom, or healing?

Choose your headline, reporter, and interviewee. Everyone should have a way to contribute, whether that means speaking, writing, or helping plan the report.

Walk around to support groups. If they need examples, offer possibilities such as collecting hygiene supplies, welcoming a student who feels excluded, writing letters through an approved prison ministry, supporting a food pantry, or learning about fair school discipline.

PRESENT THE REPORTS

Say: Welcome to Good News Broadcast! Each team will have up to one minute to share its report. As you listen, notice what the good news actually changes for people.

Invite each group to present.

After each report, thank the group and transition to the next.

Say: Let's think about what we just heard. We weren't simply reporting that people had good intentions. We were imagining actions that could make a real difference.

Debrief Questions

- What did the good news actually do for people in these reports?
- Which report showed a need that people in our community might overlook?
- What is the difference between feeling sorry for someone and helping them experience dignity?

Say: That distinction matters. Good intentions are important, but people also need to be treated as people with dignity, choices, and gifts of their own. We are not here to

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be heroes who rescue everyone. We are here to be neighbors who listen, serve, and work alongside others.

Ask: Remember John the Baptist. He pointed away from himself and toward Jesus. How can we do good without making ourselves the center of the story?

Pause for responses.

Say: John reminds us that our role is to point toward Jesus. Isaiah reminds us what God's good news looks like: healing, freedom, comfort, restoration, and justice.

We may not be able to fix everything, but we can take a faithful next step. We can do good, speak up when someone is mistreated, and help create communities where people are treated with dignity.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Give each youth a paper strip or index card.

Say: We've heard Isaiah's call to bring good news and John's example of pointing toward Jesus. We've also heard how John Wesley practiced faith through works of mercy and the commitment to do good.

Now I want you to think about one small, concrete way you can share good news this week. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It could be checking on someone who is lonely, helping with a community need, standing up for someone being treated unfairly, or learning more about an issue that affects people's dignity.

On your card, complete this sentence:

'This week, I can point toward Jesus by _____.'

Allow a minute for writing.

Say: You can keep your card private or share your commitment with a partner if you feel comfortable.

Invite optional sharing.

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Say: Remember, joy doesn't mean ignoring suffering. It means trusting that God is at work and choosing to join that work. Isaiah tells us that God loves justice. John shows us how to point toward Jesus. Wesley reminds us to practice our faith through works of mercy and to do good. May the good news we hear become the good news other people experience through us.

Pray: God of justice and mercy, thank you for the good news of your love. Be with people who are poor, grieving, lonely, incarcerated, or struggling to find a new beginning. Be with those who have been harmed, and help our communities respond to harm with safety, accountability, compassion, and a commitment to repair what has been broken.

Give us the courage to speak when something is wrong, the humility to listen, and the wisdom to know how to help. Teach us to follow Jesus through our words and actions. May we be voices of hope who point beyond ourselves to your love. Help us do good this week and every week. Amen.