

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE: DIGNITY OF EVERY PERSON AND THE CARE OF GOD'S WORLD.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:

Isaiah 64:1-4, Mark 13:32-37

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:

Community of All Creation and Social Community

OBJECTIVE:

Advent is a time to stay awake to what is happening around us, recognizing where God's grace is already at work, and take faithful steps toward a world where every person is treated with dignity and God's creation is cared for with love.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Bibles, sticky notes, pens/markers, wall space, two headings: People and Creation, printed excerpts from the Social Principles (optional)

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 is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the season when the church prepares for the coming of Jesus. It is a season of waiting, hope, and expectation. It is not just about waiting for Christmas, it is also about looking honestly at the world around us.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

We know that the world is not always the way God wants it to be. People experience hunger, loneliness, bullying, discrimination, and injustice. Our environment is also suffering in many ways. Sometimes we look at the world and wonder, 'God where are you? When will things change?'

Today, we will explore what it means to wait for God while also paying attention to what God may already be doing around us.

Let's start with a simple question. What is something you have been waiting for lately?

Pause and allow students time to reflect. Invite several volunteers to respond. Not everyone has to share.

Hear responses.

Say: Thank you for sharing. Waiting can be exciting, frustrating, hopeful or even painful. Sometimes we wait because we are looking forward to something. Other times, we wait because something is wrong and we want it to change.

In our Scripture passages today, we will hear people longing for God to act and Jesus telling his followers to stay awake while they wait.

Pray:

God of hope, thank you for bringing us together today. As we begin this Advent season, help us to be honest about the things in our world that are broken. Help us to see the people who are hurting and the parts of your creation that need our care. Open our eyes to your presence. Awaken our hearts to the needs around us. Help us recognize the ways you are already at work and show us how we can participate in your work of love and justice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our first passage today comes from Isaiah 64:1-4. The prophet Isaiah speaks for people who are longing for God to show up and make things right. They are living in a world where things are not as they should be, and they want God's presence to be unmistakable.

Ask: As I read the passage from Isaiah, listen for words or images that express longing, hope, or a desire for God to act.

Read: Isaiah 64:1-4

Reflection Questions:

- Why do you think Isaiah asks God to 'tear open the heavens'? What does that image communicate to you?
- What kinds of situations in our world today might cause people to cry out for God to act?
- Have you ever seen something unfair or harmful and wished someone would do something to change it? What did you wish would happen?

Say: Isaiah gives us words for longing and waiting for God to act. But what are supposed to do while we wait? Our next passage from Mark, we find Jesus giving the answer to this specific question.

As we listen to this passage, pay attention to what Jesus tells his followers to do while they wait. Listen for the repeated instructions and think about what it might mean for our lives today.

Read: Mark 13:32-37

Say: Jesus tells his followers to keep awake because they do not know when the master of the house will return. He describes servants who have been given responsibilities while their master is away. They are not told to sit around doing nothing. They each have work to do, and the doorkeeper is told to stay awake. Jesus is teaching his followers to remain attentive and faithful while they wait.

NOTES

Background: Historical context of Isaiah is from a period when the people of Judah were experiencing the challenges of returning from exile in Babylon and rebuilding their community and religious life. Although the people had returned to their homeland, Jerusalem and the Temple had been devastated, and restoration was difficult and incomplete. Isaiah 64 is the community's longing for God to intervene, restore their people, and make God's presence known.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think it means for the doorkeeper to stay awake? Is Jesus talking only about being physically awake, or could he mean something more?
- Who are some people in your life who stay awake or pay attention because they care about others?
- What might happen if we stopped paying attention to the people around us? What might we miss?
- What does staying awake have to do with following Jesus during Advent?

Ask: Has anyone heard the phrase 'prevenient grace' before? What do you think it might mean?

Say: Prevenient grace is God's grace that goes before us. In our Wesleyan tradition, we believe that God is at work in our lives before we fully recognize God's presence or know how to respond. God's love is not something we earn by doing good things. God reaches toward us first, inviting us into a relationship of love and calling us to respond. This means that God is already at work in the world, even when we do not notice it.

Think about a time when someone helped a person who was lonely, welcomed someone who felt excluded, provided food for a family in need, or worked to protect a river or a forest. Those actions can be signs of love, compassion, and healing at work in the world. As Christians, we can recognize these as places where we see God's grace at work.

In Isaiah, we hear people longing for God to come and make things right. In Mark, Jesus tells his followers to stay awake and pay attention. Prevenient grace helps us understand that even while we are waiting and longing for change, God is already at work. We may not always see it immediately, but there are signs of grace around us. Our responsibility is not to make God show up. Our responsibility is to notice where God is already working and consider how we can join in.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

Ask: If we believed that God was already at work in our school, neighborhood, and world, what might we begin to notice?

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Step One: Notice the Needs

Say: I am going to give each of you some sticky notes and a pen. For the next three minutes, I want you to think silently about the needs you notice in your school, community, or the wider world. What problems do you see? Who might be struggling? What is happening in the environment that concerns you? You might think about hunger, loneliness, bullying, pollution, discrimination, or damage to the natural world. Or something else.

Write one concern on each sticky note so that we can notice what is happening around us.

We are going to do what Jesus said, 'Keep awake.'

Pause for activity.

Step Two: What We Notice

Say: On the wall there are two headings' People and Creation. Under People put the concerns related to human dignity, relationships, fairness, belonging, and well-being of our communities. Under Creation put concerns related to the earth, water, animals, plants, and the natural world. I invite you to come forward and place your sticky notes under the heading that best fits your concern. If your concern fits both, you can place it between them.

Pause for activity.

Say: Let's take a moment to look at what we have written. These are needs and concerns that exist in the world around us. Some may affect us directly, and others may affect people or places we do not know personally. Paying attention is an important step. We cannot respond faithfully to needs we refuse to see.

NOTES

*feel free to share excerpts from the Social Principles as it connects to the concerns posted on the wall.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

Ask: What patterns or connections do you notice on this wall?

Pause for responses.

Step Three: Connect Our Concerns to Our Faith

Say: The Social Principles help us think about how our faith shapes the way we live together and care for the world. They help us reflect on how to live our faith in the circumstances we face today. The concerns that we shared today fall under two sections of the Social Principles. The Community of all Creation and the Social Community.

The Community of All Creation reminds us that human beings are part of God's creation and have a responsibility to care for the world God has made. The earth is not simply something for us to use without concern for its future. We are called to be responsible stewards of God's creation.

The Social Community reminds us that people have dignity and that our relationships and communities should support human well-being. Our faith calls us to care about whether people are treated fairly, whether they belong, and whether their needs are taken seriously.

Reflection Questions:

- Which of the needs on our wall connects most clearly with the church's responsibility to care for people or creation? Why?
- Which concern on this wall makes you feel restless, concerned, or unable to ignore it?
- Who might be most affected by the problems we named? Are there people or parts of this creation that are especially vulnerable or easily overlooked?

Step Four: Notice Where God Is Already at Work

Say: Remember, prevenient grace means that God's grace goes before us. God is already at work before we recognize it.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

Reflection Questions:

- Where do you see people already working to address one of the needs on our wall?
- How might God already be working through those people, even if they do not describe their work in religious terms?

Say: As Christians, we can look for signs of love, compassion, justice and healing. We give thanks for that work and ask how we might participate. Staying awake means noticing both what needs to change and where hope is already growing.

Step Five: Choose One Faithful Response

Say: We have spent time noticing needs, connecting those needs to our faith, and looking for signs of God's grace. Now I want you to think about one small, realistic action you could take during Advent. You might welcome someone who is often left out, check in on a friend, help with a food drive, pick up litter, encourage people to vote, or learn more about an environmental concern in your community.

I want you to complete this sentence by writing it on a sticky note. 'This Advent, I will stay awake to _____ by _____.'

Pause for activity.

Say: Would anyone like to share their commitment with the group?

Pause for sharing. Not everyone has to share.

Say: Small actions matter, especially when they become part of a larger community working together. We can begin with what is in front of us and trust God to guide us as we continue.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT CONT'D

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Say: Thank you for sharing today. I invite you to practice staying awake this week. Notice someone who may need encouragement. Notice a place in creation that needs care. Look for signs of kindness, healing, and justice. Then ask yourself, 'How might God already be at work here, and how can I join in?' You do not need to have all the answers. You simply need to remain willing to notice and respond.

Pray:

God of hope and grace. Give us courage to respond when we see injustice. Give us patience when changes take time. Help us remember that we do not have to do everything, but we can faithfully do what is ours to do. Keep us awake this Advent. May we recognize your presence and join in your work of love, mercy, and justice. Amen.