

Human Degradation and Spirituality for a New Humanity

Calendar of Lessons

For Liturgical Year 2016-2017, the lessons are subdivided into these four scopes and strands:

- **Scope 1: Rootedness**
Strand 1: ***Jesus' Encounters with Human Degradation and its Transformations***
 - Advent and Christmastide (27 November 2016 – 1 January 2017)
 - Epiphany (8 January – 26 February 2017)
- **Scope 2: Identity: On Being and Becoming**
Strand 2: ***Jesus' Choice of the Kind of Messiah***
 - Lent (5 March – 9 April 2017)
 - Eastertide (16 April – 28 May 2017)
- **Scope 3: Unity and Solidarity**
Strand 3: ***The Church United to Respond to Human Degradation***
 - ***Pentecost (4 June – 20 August 2017)***
- **Scope 4: Fruitful Lifeworks**
Strand 4: ***The Church Manifesting the Marks of a Christ-like Life***
 - Kingdomtide (27 August – 26 November 2017)



Quadrennial Theme: Spirituality for These Critical TimesYear 3 Theme: **Human Degradation and Spirituality for a New Humanity 2016-2017**Scope 1: **Rootedness**Strand 1: ***Jesus' Encounters with Human Degradation and its Transformations***

Included Sundays for Advent and Christmastide Season (6 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(1) November 27, 2016	First Sunday of Advent	Liberating Cultural Breakthroughs	1 Samuel 25:13-34 Matthew 1:18-24	There are cultural practices and beliefs that cause human suffering and degradation, thus, the church should make a cultural breakthrough in the transformation towards a new humanity.
(2) December 4, 2016	Second Sunday of Advent/Family Sunday	Seeds of New Humanity	Isaiah. 7:14 Luke 1:26-35	Like the enslaved people in Egypt, the new humanity emerges from among the victims who long for freedom and wholeness.
(3) December 11, 2016	Third Sunday of Advent/Human Rights Sunday	Challenging Oppressive State Powers	1 Kings 12:1-16 Luke 2:1-6	The church has the duty to expose and challenge state policies that violate human rights.
(4) December 18, 2016	Fourth Sunday of Advent	Jesus as God's Love Incarnate	Isaiah 49:1-3 John 3:11-17	In the midst of a broken humanity, God came in Jesus

				to mend it and make it whole.
(5) December 25, 2016	First Sunday after Christmas	The Birth of Jesus	Psalms 91:11 Luke 2:7-18 John 1:14	We joyfully celebrate the birth of Jesus in a world that longs for fullness.
(6) January 1, 2017	First Sunday after Christmas	Defending Children, Symbols of a New Beginning	Isaiah 43:18-19 Matthew 2:1-16	Upholding the rights and welfare of children makes a just and compassionate society now and in the future.
Included Sundays for Epiphany Season (8 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(7) January 8, 2017	Epiphany Sunday	Channels of God's Healing	2 Kings 7:1-16 John 9:1-41	We are all healers to one another.
(8) January 15, 2017	First Sunday after Epiphany/Christian Unity	The Inclusive Healing Ministry of the Church	2 Kings 5:1-19 Mark 1:29-31	"The kingdom of God is present...where healing is given to the sick." (UCCP Statement of Faith)
(9) January 22, 2017	Second Sunday after Epiphany/National Bible Sunday	Healing of Animosities	Isaiah 11:1-9 Galatians 3:28	Respecting and appreciating differences is a condition for creative unity and harmony.
(10) January 29, 2017	Third Sunday after Epiphany	Healing as a Message of Salvation	2 Kings 4:8-37 Luke 8:41-56	Salvation comes whenever healing happens.
(11) February 5, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Epiphany	Healing of Social Divides	Ruth 1:1-21 Luke 13:10-17	Social division is eradicated when human fellowship, care, respect,

				and dignity are restored.
(12) February 12, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Epiphany	Healing of Broken Relationships	Genesis 32:1-32, 33:1-4 Matthew 5:24	Where there are broken relationships, it is the duty of the church to bring about reconciliation through forgiveness and repentance.
(13) February 19, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Epiphany	Healing from Demon Possession	1 Samuel 16:14-23 Mark 5:1-20	The Spirit of God drives away the demons of envy, fear, and greed for the Spirit to dwell in.
(14) February 26, 2017	Seventh Sunday after Epiphany/Transfiguration Sunday	Healing towards Transformation	Exodus 34:29-35 Mark 9:2-8	The transfiguration of Jesus is a preview of his resurrection which is our hope and destiny.

Scope 2: **Identity: On Being and Becoming**
 Strand 2: ***Jesus' Choice of the Kind of Messiah***

Included Sundays for Lent (6 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(15) March 5, 2017	First Sunday in Lent	Choosing our Destiny	Jeremiah 1:4-10 Matthew 16:21-23	Jesus chose to obey God's will and it became his destiny. When we make a choice to follow Jesus, it becomes our destiny.

(16) March 12, 2017	Second Sunday in Lent	Servant Messiah	Isaiah 53:4-6 Mark 10:42-45	As a servant messiah, Jesus served the suffering ones. As a result, he suffered with them. When we serve the suffering ones, we also suffer with them.
(17) March 19, 2017	Third Sunday in Lent	Loyalty to God	Ruth 1:16-17 Luke 7:1-10	The love for God is the basis of our unwavering loyalty to God.
(18) March 26, 2017	Fourth Sunday in Lent	Peace-building	Jeremiah 1:9-10 Matthew 10:34	Building peace, as a messianic mission, requires forcible removal of obstacles to peace— inequitable distribution of resources, abusive relationships, and injustice.
(19) April 2, 2017	Fifth Sunday in Lent	Marks of the True Messiah	Isaiah 42:1-7 Matthew 11:2-6	The true messiah is known through his healing, liberating, and restoring deeds.
(20) April 9, 2017	Sixth Sunday in Lent/Palm Sunday	Jesus Encountering the Powers	Zechariah 9:9-10 John 12:12-19	Jesus enters Jerusalem to challenge the powers-that-be that cause human misery.

Included Sundays for Eastertide (7 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(21) April 16, 2017	Resurrection Sunday	Resurrection of the Righteous	Daniel 12:1-3 John 11:25-27 Romans 6:5	Those who remain faithful to the end will not perish but have eternal life.
(22) April 23, 2017	First Sunday after Resurrection	Suppressing the Truth of the Resurrection	Jeremiah 28:15-17 Matthew 28:11-15	The response of the powers-that-be to the resurrection was to cover up the truth with a lie and criminalize those who believe.
(23) April 30, 2017	Second Sunday after Resurrection	Moment of Human Frailties	2 Samuel 21:10 Mark 16:1-8	After Jesus died, the disciples experienced a lacuna moment of mourning, confusion, fear, depression, and disbelief. This experience is not sin but needs to be accepted and brought to the Lord.
(24) May 7, 2017	Third Sunday after Resurrection	Appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene	2 Kings 7:7-20 Mark 16:9-11	The testimony of those who speak the truth are often discredited on account of their status in society.
(25) May 14, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Resurrection	Failure to Recognize the Appearance of Jesus	Genesis 18:1-15 Mark 16:12-13	Due to their extreme grief, the disciples were not able

				to apprehend the risen Lord. But Jesus overcomes our failure to discern and communes with us.
(26) May 21, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Resurrection/UC CP Sunday	Celebrating the Resurrection	Exodus 16:1-26 Luke 24:36-46	Jesus comes to commune with us in ordinary, basic, and common activities and struggles.
(27) May 28, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Resurrection/Ascension Sunday	Anticipating the Fullness of God's Reign on Earth	Daniel 12:13 Mark 16:15-20	Jesus ascends to heaven to receive God's authority to realize God's reign in its fullness.

Scope 3: **Unity and Solidarity**Strand 3: ***The Church United to Respond to Human Degradation***

Included Sundays for Pentecost Season (12 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(28) June 4, 2017	Pentecost Sunday	The Spirit Breaking through Cultural Captivity	Joel 2:28-29 Acts 2:1-12	The Spirit enables the Gospel to be communicated in the languages and cultures of the people.
(29) June 11, 2017	First Sunday after Pentecost/Trinity Sunday	The Holy Trinity in the Faith of the Church	Genesis 1:26-27 Jude vv. 19:21	God is a community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the source and basis of the

				church as community.
(30) June 18, 2017	Second Sunday after Pentecost	The Holy Spirit Sustaining the Church	Jeremiah 7:1-11 Matthew 23:13-28	The Holy Spirit bids the church to unite with the people to confront the oppressive powers.
(31) June 25, 2017	Third Sunday after Pentecost	Defending the Powerless	Psalms 82:3-4; 146:5-9 Proverbs 31:8-9 James 1:27	The Holy Spirit sustains the church in its ministry of protecting the oppressed and the helpless and upholding their rights.
(32) July 2, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Pentecost	Breaking Down Walls that Divide	Isaiah 56:3-8 Amos 9:7 Luke 14:12-14	The church, by nature, is inclusive. It embraces differences and does not harbor animosities.
(33) July 9, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Pentecost	Confronting Human Greed	Deuteronomy 5:21 Acts 2:44-47; 4:33-35	The church confronts the issue of human greed which is the root of many evils and broken relationships.
(34) July 16, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Pentecost	Casting Out Demonic Powers	Psalms 103:2-5 Mark 1:23-27; 7:24-30	The church's ministry of healing requires the driving out of demonic powers that hold people in their sway.
(35) July 23, 2017	Seventh Sunday after Pentecost	Being Present	Deuteronomy 31:8 Psalm 40:1-3 Revelation 21:3-4	The church embraces the ministry of presence to embody God who is Immanuel.

(36) July 30, 2017	Eighth Sunday after Pentecost	Nurturing Hope	Job 5:15-16 Psalm 34:17-20 Matthew 11:28-30	The church journeys with people in the darkness of despair, reviving the hope and keeping it alive.
(37) August 6, 2017	Ninth Sunday after Pentecost	Reaching Out to Victims of Abuse and Social Evils	Isaiah 25:4 Matthew 18:21-35	The church is a community that provides comfort, assistance, shelter, and intervention to victims in their needs.
(38) August 13, 2017	Tenth Sunday after Pentecost	Pursuing and Building Peace	Psalm 34:11-14 1Peter 3:8-12	The church plants peace in a world rocked by conflict, violence, and wars.
(39) August 20, 2017	Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost	The Church Awakened to Do Mission	Isaiah 59:17 Ephesians 6:14	An awakened church girds up and equips itself for mission.

Scope 4: **Fruitful Lifeworks**Strand 4: ***The Church Manifesting the Marks of a Christ-like Life***

Included Sundays for Kingdomtide Season (14 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(40) August 27, 2017	First Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Mission Sunday	Leaving Everything to Follow Christ	Isaiah 6:1-8 Luke 5:1-11	Obedience to Jesus means letting go of those cares that keep us from following him.
(41) September 3, 2017	Second Sunday in Kingdomtide/ CEN Sunday	Mission to the Periphery	1 Samuel 18:1-5 Philippians 2:5-8 2 Corinthians 8:9	Removing our self from the center of our life so that we can put others in its place.
(42) September 10, 2017	Third Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Children' Sunday	Humility-Powered Mission	Proverbs 15:33, 11:2 Luke 18:9-14	Behind genuine mission is a humble heart that seeks the well-being of others.
(43) September 17, 2017	Fourth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Youth Sunday	Accountability in the Kingdom	2 Samuel 12:1-13 Luke 15:11-24	Being created in the image of God, we are responsible and accountable to each other.
(44) September 24, 2017	Fifth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Fellowship of the Least Coin Sunday	The Kingdom as a Forgiving Community	Genesis 45:1-5 Acts 7:59-60	Being forgiving is a quality of those who belong to the Kingdom of God.
(45) October 1, 2017	Sixth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Worldwide Communion Sunday/CYAP Sunday	Towards a Reconciled Community	Genesis 45:9-15 Philemon 1:10-20	True reconciliation moves relationships to a higher plane.
(46) October 8, 2017	Seventh Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Peace Sunday	Living the Faith	Esther 4:13-16 James 1:27	Forgiven and reconciled, we

				are freed to do good.
(47) October 15, 2017	Eighth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ UCM Sunday	Being Accepted in the Kingdom of God	Hosea 1: 1-3, 3:1 John 4:7-15	The Christian community is accepting of others unmindful of any advantage.
(48) October 22, 2017	Ninth Sunday in Kingdomtide/Solidarity with Indigenous People Sunday	Reverence for Life	Exodus 2:1-10 Luke 7:1-10	Life is respected beyond social class, ethnicity, and religion.
(49) October 29, 2017	Tenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Reformation Sunday	Discerning God's Ways through Jesus	Job 42:1-6 John 14:5-11	To know Jesus is to know God. The gospel makes faith simple to everyone.
November 5, 2017 (50)	Eleventh Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Church Workers Sunday	Prayerful Life	Daniel 6:6-23 Mark 14:32-38	Communing with God through prayers encompasses all of life.
(51) November 12, 2017	Twelfth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Theological Education Sunday	Audacious Compassion	1 Kings 17:8-16 Luke 10:25-37	Those who have less in life or regarded low are the most compassionate.
(52) November 19, 2017	Thirteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Migrant Workers Sunday	Learning from the Faith and Witness of Migrants	Psalms 137:1-6 1 Peter 1:1 James 1:1-4	Being steadfast in the faith makes us complete and whole.
(53) November 26, 2017	Fourteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Stewardship Sunday	Service Motivated by Love	Judges 5:6-13 Mark 2:1-12	Stewardship is manifested through the collective response of the faith community.

Season: **Pentecost**

Age Level: **Youth**

The Nurturing and Equipping Power of the Spirit

23 July 2017

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NRSV)

⁸"It is the LORD who goes before you. God will be with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Psalms 40:1-3 (NRSV)

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

¹I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ²He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

New Testament:

Revelation 21:3-4 (NRSV)

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

General Concept: The church embraces the ministry of presence to embody God who is Immanuel.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit makes God always present in our lives so that we can trust in him and be not afraid.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

Deuteronomy 31:8. Moses is now very old, and he has to pass on the reins of leadership to Joshua. So in an assembly before all Israel who were getting ready to cross the Jordan, Moses assures Joshua of God's abiding presence and utters these words of empowerment and encouragement.

Psalms 40:1-3. These verses are part of a psalm of thanksgiving by one who called on God and was saved. The text describes how the psalmist was helped by God, and because of this, a song of praise and thanksgiving naturally came forth. It tells about the importance of putting one's trust in God.

Revelation 21:3-4. This text depicts how God is really present with God's people, on top of having a covenant relationship with them. God will comfort them and ease their pain and sorrow, and promises that death will be no more. In God's alternate reality of a "new heaven and a new earth", God is God's people, Immanuel.

God is present in the lives of God's people since the beginning of the world. We are assured by God's word that God is always with us, Immanuel. May this knowledge enable and encourage us to forge forward as we continue to do the ministry God has entrusted to us as a church: that of ushering in God's Reign of love, kindness, and peace with justice.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

- tell the origin of the name Immanuel;
- realize that the Holy Spirit fulfills the truth that God is with us and makes it possible for Christ to be present in our lives;
- explain that the presence of Christ in our lives will make us strong and unafraid; and
- get involved in the ministry of presence in the church that would make us strong and courageous in serving others.

Materials: The Holy Bible (NRSV), worksheets

Learning Experiences:*A. Opening Worship*

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God who indwells the Church through the Spirit of Christ, be with us today as we study your great love for us and how we can demonstrate our gratitude to you. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Holy Spirit Truth Divine" (HFJ # 179) first and second stanzas

B. Getting Ready

Provide the following information: (1) "Immanuel (Hebrew: meaning, "God with us") is a Hebrew name which appears in the Book of Isaiah as a sign that God will protect the House of David"; (2) "The Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 1:22–23) quotes part of this, 'a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel'; and as a prophesy of the birth of the Messiah and the fulfillment of Scripture in the person of Jesus"; and (3) "The name Immanuel, therefore, implies that God, the Son, is with us in a whole host of wonderful ways. May we always strive to stay with him."

C. Learning Time

Divide the class into three groups and assign each group to study the biblical references and be ready to retell what they have read. Tell the students to share their thoughts.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the story and ask these questions:

1. Read Deuteronomy 31:1-7. Why do you think Moses proclaimed God's promise of presence to the Israelites after choosing Joshua as his successor? (Moses wanted the Israelites to trust God and to know that God fulfills God's promises to God's people.)
2. How does God help his people in trouble? How can patience and trust keep one from trouble? (In this psalm of thanksgiving, David tells how God rescued him from the pit. Remind them that when the Lord rescues us from the pit, we need to proclaim God's goodness.)
3. What are the things that will not happen anymore in the new heaven and earth?"

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Who helps the church to embrace the ministry of presence? (The Holy Spirit enables the church to embrace the ministry of presence to embody God who is Immanuel.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Ask the students to choose a key verse from the biblical references that they have read.

2. Tell the class to visualize the “new heaven and earth.” Tell the class to complete the phrases to describe the new heaven and earth.
- No more death, instead, there will be _____ (life).
 - No more crying, instead, there will be _____ (joy).
 - No more pain, instead, there will be _____ (healing).
 - No more lies, instead, there will be _____ (truth).
 - No more guilt, instead, there will be _____ (freedom).
 - No more murder, instead, there will be _____ (love for life).
 - No more stealing, instead, there will be _____ (giving).
 - No more idol worship, instead, there will be _____ (worship of God).
 - No more bad language, instead, there will be _____ (praise).
 - No more hate, instead, there will be _____ (love).
 - No more greed: instead, there will be _____ (contentment).
 - No more selfishness: instead, there will be _____ (thoughts of others).

G. Closing Worship

- Offering
- Closing song: “Holy Spirit Truth Divine” (HFJ # 179) third and fourth stanzas
- Closing prayer: “Merciful and glorious God, we are grateful for your presence in our lives. We trust you. We are sure that you will help us and will not leave us. With the Holy Spirit that manifests your presence, we can be strong and courageous in serving others to honor and glorify your name. May our lives be always pleasing in your sight. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.”



30 July 2017

8th Sunday After Pentecost*Old Testament:* Exodus 4:1-17

Moses' Miraculous Power

¹Then Moses answered, 'But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, "The LORD did not appear to you." ' ²The LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff.' ³And he said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail'-so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.'

⁶Again, the LORD said to him, 'Put your hand inside your cloak.' He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous,*as white as snow. ⁷Then God said, 'Put your hand back into your cloak'-so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body—⁸If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign.

⁹If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.' ¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' ¹¹Then the LORD said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.' ¹³But he said, 'O my Lord, please send someone else.'

¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, 'What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. ¹⁵You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. ¹⁷Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.'

New Testament: Ephesians 4:11-12

¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...."

General Concept: The Holy Spirit instructs the faithful on the enduring faith of the church which equips them to face the challenge of the present realities.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit nurtures and equips us to face the trials and challenges of the present realities.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The second book of the Pentateuch deals with the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt. The account in this story contains the story of the call of Moses to be God's prophet or spokesperson, to be the one to announce to the enslaved Hebrews that the Lord God is going to act in a very powerful and decisive manner to bring them out of the house of bondage. This is in response to the cries of the people earlier, crying for rescue and release from such condition. The Lord then heard their cries and had seen in-depth their affliction

and became so moved with pity and compassion that God decided to act in a way that will prove to be a history-altering, game-changing event in the fate of Israel—the event that would mark the birth of the community of the people of God (3:7-10).

To carry out such a radical plan for the Hebrews to become God's people, God called on a fugitive Egyptian prince to be the primary instrument. Initially, Moses was very hesitant and appears even to have a very low regard for his own ability to be listened to and accepted by the people, expressing his fears that they may not believe what he would proclaim to them since he is known as an Egyptian prince just running away from his crime of killing an Egyptian taskmaster.

The Lord then showed to Moses three miraculous signs (4:2ff). All three signs involved changing something into something else. In the case of two signs, (Moses' staff turning into a snake, and his hand turning leprous) what got changed was immediately changed back to its original state, so that change was only temporarily frightening. In the case of the third (water to blood) what got changed stayed changed - and the consequences were far more widespread and life threatening. Moses' first two protests were of the formal sort, properly expressing humility before such a great assignment, but here his words still revealed the presence of uncertainty in his mind (v.10). God had already assured him in unmistakable language that the Israelite leaders would listen to him; now he wondered if he could be sure that this would happen - that they would believe his claim that the Lord had appeared to him and do what he said ("obey me" NIV "listen to me") .

Indeed, God calls and equips anyone, even those who think that they are not qualified enough to become God's instruments in realizing the Lord's plan for the transformation of both church and society. It is God through the Spirit who will equip and uphold even those who think so lowly of themselves. It is not by their authority but by God's that they are going to speak and carry out the divine plan for the redemption of God's people.

Ephesus is a city of the Roman province of Asia near the mouth of the Cayster River. It was the most easily accessible city in Asia, both by land and sea. Its location therefore, favored its religious, political, and commercial development, and presented a most advantageous field for the missionary labors of Paul and his disciples.

However, the residents of the city of Ephesus were generally known to be adherents of the cult of the goddess Diana. Here, the write is able to look out on the church and view it in its entirety, to see the part it is to play in God's scheme for the restoration of the human race, to see God's purpose in it and for it and its relation to the creator of all. God's eternal and ultimate purpose is to gather into one the whole created universe, to restore harmony and reconciliation and peace among God's creatures and between them and the Lord. Its purpose is to set before the readers this great mystery of the church as God's means by which, in Christ, God may be able to restore everyone to union with Himself. The different gifts which the Christians have for the upbuilding or sanctifying of the church into that perfect unity which is found in Christ so that in the end it will be able and equipped enough to face the various challenges of the times.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

The faith received by the church through the apostolic witness to the events surrounding Jesus has endured through times of trials and has remained a vital force for its life and work. Amidst changing circumstances the church is holding fast to its truths, trusting in the Spirit, the Paraclete who is the teacher of truth.

Entire populations today are being held in thrall by information moguls whose access to the most sophisticated tools of technology have monopoly control of what people hear and see. The concept of truth has become obsolete since information on a global scale has turned into an instrument of mind control. This lack of truthful information has also impacted the church's proclamation of its truths.

The contemporary church is weighed down with an inherent handicap. Its symbols of faith remain dressed in the ancient apparels of its historic heritage. It has been slow in adapting to a language that is suitable to a fast changing age. To illustrate, this particular piece of literature written for the first quarter of the 21st century employs concepts, terminology and nuances originating from many centuries ago. The reason is not just the normal difficulties of learning new tools of communication. The problem is inherent in the nature of historical faiths: the fear of losing its historic content in the process of cultural adaptation.

This is a formidable obstacle that appears humanly impossible to hurdle. By all calculations, the Christian faith should have already been swept into the dustbin of history. But the fact that it has remained a vigorous and persistent critique of contemporary realities is a sign that the Christian faith is being kept alive by its author, Jesus Christ through his Spirit. As the author of truth, the Spirit is keeping the church as a repository of the enduring truth that human beings are created in the image of God and the earth is God's creation. The church's truths from the Spirit are a thorn on the flesh that deflates human hubris and cuts down to size the idols that pretend to be God. The church's message to the world is old, its language archaic but it will endure and ultimately prevail.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. state that the church, through the Spirit of Christ, teaches us about our enduring faith in God;
2. participate continuously in proclaiming about the love of God using the spiritual gifts given to each of us; and
3. express one's joy and appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit in teaching the faith.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story

Learning Experiences:**A. Opening Worship**

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God, we know you love and care for us. As your children and with your Holy Spirit's intervention, we may learn more about you. Prepare our hearts and minds as we do our lesson today. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Search Me, O God" (HFJ # 216)

B. Getting Ready

1. Group the class into two. Assign the two sets of verses to each group and let the members analyze the verses in Genesis 3:8-9 and Exodus 3:1-5 to show how God talked to some characters in the Bible.
2. Ask each group to share their insights.

C. Learning Time

1. Instruct the class to read Exodus 4:1-17 in unison.
2. Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group verses for further study. After they finish discussing the verses, tell each group to role play the assigned verses. Emphasize that the three signs involved changes into something else.
 - a. Verses 1-5. The changes in the staff of Moses
 - b. Verses 6-8. The changes in Moses' hand

- c. Verse 9. The changes in the Nile River
- d. Verses 10-17. Reluctance of Moses to obey God and God's solution to Moses' reluctance to do what he is told to do
- 3. Tell the class to read Ephesians 4:11-12. Instruct the students to find the meaning of the following words:
 - a. apostles
 - b. prophets
 - c. evangelists
 - d. pastors
 - e. teachers

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson.

1. Read again Exodus 4:1, 10, 13 and answer these questions.
 - a. What excuses did Moses say about the command of God? (His audience might not listen to or believe in him.)
 - b. What were these excuses centered around? (His fear and unbelief)
2. Read Exodus 4:11-12, and 14-17 and answer these questions.
 - a. How did God respond to Moses? (God's supremacy in equipping God's people)
 - b. What was God trying to tell Moses by God's response? (When God asks us to do something for God, God will provide the means to accomplish this.)
3. Read again Ephesians 4:11-12. Examine yourself and answer these questions. Expect varied answers from the class.
 - a. What gifts do you think God has given you? How do you feel about these gifts?
 - b. Why do you think you are inadequate to serve God?
 - c. How can we balance the gifts and strengths we receive from God in serving God knowing that they are not our own?
 - d. In what areas are we tempted to become proud in the use of our gifts?
4. Tell the class to think about the biblical texts.
 - a. Say: God sees us in a different from the way we see ourselves. God's sight is more important than our human sight. Ask: How do you see yourself—God's way or your way?
 - b. Say: God is aware that we are inadequate and hesitant because of our fears and incompetence. But God still wants to use our God-given gifts for God's glory. Ask yourself these questions:
 - 1) Are you willing to put aside your fears, hesitations, and inadequacies and to follow God's will for us through the leading of God's Spirit?
 - 2) How can prayer help us in honestly telling God about our fears, hesitations, and inadequacies?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How does God, through the Holy Spirit, nurture and equip us to face the trials and challenges of the present realities?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12)
2. Ask the class to read the nurturing and equipping ministries of the church. Let them write opposite each the impact of these ministries on their lives.

Nurturing and equipping ministries of the Church	The impact of these ministries on my life
1. Divine Service	
2. Sunday School	
3. Vacation Church School	

4. Summer Camp/Christmas Institute	
5. Campus Ministry	
6. Lay Formation	
7. Retreats/Fellowships	
8. Community Ministry	

3. Instruct the class to choose one of these ministries in which they would like to be involved in. Let them give the reasons for their choice.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Search Me, O God" (HFJ # 216)
3. Closing prayer: "Loving God, thank you for the nurturing and equipping power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, this is our prayer. Amen."



6 August 2017

9th Sunday After Pentecost**Old Testament: Ruth 2:1-16****Ruth Meets Boaz**

¹Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.' She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you.' They answered, 'The LORD bless you.' ⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' ⁶The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.' ⁷She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.'

¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?' ¹¹But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!'

¹³Then she said, 'May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.'

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, 'Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.'

New Testament: Galatians 3:28

²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

General Concept: The Holy Spirit breaks down barriers that divide the church and society to form an inclusive community.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit enables the church to be a welcoming community to everyone regardless of the origin, background and orientation.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The name Ruth signifies "comrade" or "companion" or simply friend. This name and its meaning is significant enough due to the fact that it is being applied to a non Jew. A faithful

non-Jew, a Moabite has become a faithful friend, and loyal companion of an aging and lonely Jewish widow. The book of Ruth details the history of one decisive episode by which Ruth became an ancestress of David and of the royal house of Judah. From this point of view, its peculiar interest lies in the close friendship or alliance between Israel and Moab, which rendered such a connection possible.

At Bethlehem, Ruth employed herself in gleaning in the grain fields of Bethlehem during the harvest season. She arrived there from Moab with her mother-in-law Naomi who had migrated there several years ago. It was in Moab where they lost their respective husbands. One day, Ruth was noticed by Boaz, the owner of the field. She was gleaning at the time. Boaz was a relative or kinsman of her father-in-law Elimelech. Boaz gave her permission to glean as long as the harvest continued; and told her that he had heard and was so impressed by her loving and steadfast loyalty to her mother-in-law. Boaz then adopted the customary and legal measures to obtain a decision to marry Ruth. He summoned Ruth's late husband's next of kin before ten elders at the gate of the city, related to them the circumstances of Naomi's return, with his desire that Ruth should be married to the next of kin and be settled in her father-in-law's land as her marriage portion. But the next of kin declared his inability to undertake the requirements of the levirate law. Upon announcing his inability in legal form, it then favored Boaz who really wanted to marry her according to the ancient custom of Israel.

The life and history of Ruth are important in the eyes of the narrator because she forms a link in the ancestry of the greatest king of Israel. From a more modern point of view, the narrative is a simple idyllic history, showing how the faithful loving service of Ruth to her mother-in-law met its due reward in the restored happiness of a peaceful and prosperous home-life for herself.

The book is without the name of the author and there is no direct indication of the date. Its aim is to record an event of interest and importance to the family history of David, and incidentally to illustrate ancient custom and marriage law along with the proclamation that foreigners like Ruth can also play a very significant and decisive role in the ongoing history of God's people. Israel need not remain as a highly exclusivistic nation giving favor and regard only to fellow Jews as the only neighbor who can be the object of their concern, compassion and respect. Foreigners are to be regarded also and equally as fellow children of God.

The problem addressed in this letter of Paul was that the Galatian churches were troubled by a Judaizing teaching that required Gentile converts to keep parts of the Law of Moses especially the requirement of circumcision in order to be part of God's people.

The controversy started when circumcision becomes proposed by the Judaists as a supplement to faith in Christ, as the qualification for sonship to Abraham and communion with the apostolic church. After the council at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15), they began to say outright "Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Paul's Galatian converts are to be admitted, and "be perfected" and attain full Christian status by conforming to Moses's law. With such conformity "Christ will profit" them much more, that is, if they add to their faith the matter of circumcision. This insidious proposal might seem to be in keeping with the findings of the Council; Peter's action at Antioch lent color to it. Such a grading of the Circumcision and Uncircumcision within the church offered a tempting solution of the legalist controversy; for it appeared to reconcile the universal destination of the gospel with the inalienable prerogatives of the sons of Abraham. Paul's reply is that

believing Gentiles are already Abraham's "seed" - nay sons and heirs of God; instead of adding anything, circumcision would rob them of everything they have won in Christ; instead of going on to perfection by its aid, they would draw back unto perdition.

Paul argues, that the law of Moses tends to bring condemnation not blessing, on its subjects and that instead of completing the work of faith, its part of the Divine economy was subordinate. This event marks a great theological watershed for the eventual spread of Christianity that has now crossed all barriers of creed, race, political affiliation and others. Now, acceptance into the body of Christ no longer depends on the adherence to Jewish law but mainly in being confronted and accepting the claims and meaning of the Lordship of Christ in one's life. There should never be set forth any boundary or restriction on those who would like to respond in faith to the calling of Jesus to follow him all the way even up to the cross.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Human beings are good and quick at erecting barriers that they can't remove. Old barriers often stay beyond the original purpose for which they were placed even as new barriers are added. This is true literally and metaphorically as the human community is broken up along ethnic, economic, social, ideological, gender lines and many other reasons. Eventually, these divisions lead to violent confrontations and even wars.

A broken world is an object of God's salvation. Through the Spirit, God works to tear down the barriers and turn them into level pathways connecting different parts of one human commonwealth under God. In the Book of Revelation the vision that the "sea is no more" (21:1) symbolizes the ultimate disappearance of barriers leading to the reunification of humankind.

Within the church there are invisible barriers that damage the fellowship. Biblical references are often cited to justify the discrimination and marginalization of members based on the conventional profiling of persons. Especially in rural areas, class stratification determines leadership in the church. An issue of special concern is about gender choice and sexual preference. The coming of age of gays and lesbians has turned out quite troubling to a large segment of the church.

These realities fall short of the new being created by the Spirit wherein the antagonisms and mistrust underlying the construction of barriers are banished. The existence of distinctions, however, remains. The distinctions based on the vast diversity of the natural order arise from the inexhaustible richness of God's creation. The church celebrates these distinctions but condemns the artificial barriers that human beings have established over them.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. conclude that we are all children of God and created in God's image;
2. explain how the Holy Spirit helped Boaz welcome Ruth who is not Hebrew;
3. perform activities that show acceptance of everyone as brothers and sisters in Christ; and
4. express one's feelings through creative activities one's appreciation of the love of God.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story

Learning Experiences:

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Thank you dear Lord for gathering us again this Sunday. May the welcoming power of the Holy Spirit be with us. In your Son's precious name, we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "In Christ There is No East or West" (HFJ # 271) first two stanzas

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the needed materials: a brown egg, a white egg, and two bowls. Let the students describe the eggs. Call on some students and ask which egg do they prefer to cook for breakfast. Let them explain their answers.
2. On each bowl, break the egg and pour its contents. Let them realize that both the brown egg and the white egg have the same contents inside.
3. Explain that even though the eggs have shells of different colors, they look the same on the inside.
4. Relate the activity with people who have different looks but experience similar emotions—love, joy, anger, sadness, hatred, fear, and jealousy. Encourage the class to see Jesus who did not care about the outside looks but instead saw people on the inside. With this attitude, the class should remember not to judge others on the basis of their outside looks.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read aloud Ruth 2:1-16 and Galatians 3:28 in unison.
2. Let them discuss the two texts using the given key sentences.
 - a. Ruth 2:1-16
 - 1) Ruth volunteers to glean leftover grains from some farmers so that she and Naomi have food to eat.
 - 2) As Ruth sets out to gather grains, she meets Boaz, a rich farmer.
 - 3) Boaz tells Ruth to stay in the field and praises Ruth for her kindness to Naomi. He tells his workers to amply provide grains for her.
 - b. Galatians 3:28. This verse is an assurance that all may share in God's promise to Abraham.

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson.

1. In the story of Ruth, compare Ruth and Naomi. (Both Ruth and Naomi are widows. They live in Moab. Naomi is a Hebrew while Ruth is a Moabite. Ruth is young and Naomi is old. Both left Moab to return to Israel to look for food.)
2. What did Ruth show Naomi? (Kindness and loyalty to Naomi) How? (Ruth returned with Naomi to Israel.)
3. Knowing that Ruth is not a Hebrew, how did Boaz treat Ruth? (Boaz acknowledged Ruth's loyalty to Naomi even though Ruth has a different origin, background, and orientation)
4. What did Boaz see in Ruth—her being different from Naomi or her being kind and loyal to Naomi? (Ruth's kindness and loyalty to Naomi) Explain your answer.
5. What are the commonalities of people that lead to becoming an inclusive church? (People are created in the image of God and they are all God's children.)

6. In Galatians 3:28, what distinctions have been removed when a person is in Christ? (race, socio-cultural-political status, gender)
7. What do you think is the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling Ruth to be kind and loyal to Naomi, Boaz in welcoming Ruth for her attitude towards Naomi?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How can the Holy Spirit empower the church to accept and welcome others in the community of faith who may differ in origin, background, and orientation? (Through fellowship, welcoming and accepting programs and ministries)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Tell the class to analyze their local church. Encourage the students to describe its welcoming ministry in terms of the following:
 - a. Hosting fellowship programs
 - b. Being an evacuation venue during disasters
 - c. Hosting fora for understanding and respecting people with different gender preferences
 - d. Hosting ecumenical and interfaith seminars
2. Based on the activities listed above, ask the class to make appropriate posters or slogans to promote the welcoming activities of the church.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Reflective action: "I accept everyone."
3. Closing song: "In Christ There is No East or West" (HFJ # 271) last two stanzas
4. Closing prayer: "Loving God, we thank you for the welcoming presence of the Holy Spirit. Thank you very much for the love and care you have bestowed on us! This is our earnest prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."

13 August 2017

10th Sunday After Pentecost**Old Testament: Genesis 33:1-17**

¹Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ²He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.

³He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. ⁴But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

⁵When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, 'Who are these with you?' Jacob said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant.' ⁶Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸Esau said, 'What do you mean by all this company that I met?' Jacob answered, 'To find favour with my lord.' ⁹But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.'

¹⁰Jacob said, 'No, please; if I find favour with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God-since you have received me with such favour. ¹¹Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.' So he urged him, and he took it.

¹²Then Esau said, 'Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.'

¹³But Jacob said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.'

¹⁵So Esau said, 'Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.' But he said, 'Why should my lord be so kind to me?' ¹⁶So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

New Testament: Philemon 1:1-35

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. ⁶I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we* may do for Christ. ⁷I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

⁸For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful* both to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

¹⁵Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother-

especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.

²⁰Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.

²¹Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²²One thing more-prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

²³Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers. ²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

General Concept: The Holy Spirit heals broken relationships.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit enables people to be reconciled and heal their broken relationships.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

After Jacob through the help of his mother Rebekah deceived Isaac when Jacob disguised himself as Esau to receive Isaac's blessing, he fled in fear of his brother's anger. Rebekah then instructed Jacob to go to her brother Laban in Haran until Esau's anger would subside. Jacob stayed with Laban and as the years went by Jacob married Laban's daughters Sarah and Leah. God blessed Jacob with children and vast properties. After his good relationship with Laban turned ill because of false accusation, Jacob was forced him to go back to his homeland as instructed by God in his dream.

Jacob prepared himself to meet with Esau with fear and anxiety after knowing that Esau will bring four hundred men to meet him. During Jacob and Esau's reunion, Jacob bowed down and humbled himself before Esau hopeful that Esau have forgiven and forgotten the sins he committed. Esau showed Jacob no grudge and hatred when he embraced Jacob and welcomed him and his household warmly. In return, Jacob offered to Esau livestock as his act of thanksgiving for receiving him and his whole family safely favorably.

The letter to Philemon was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. The letter is a plea that implies for Philemon to accept and forgiven a certain Onesimus who must have been a runaway slave whom Paul met and converted. The letter of Paul is to remind and encourage Philemon to uphold his Christian faith and character since runaway slaves would usually face harsh punishment even death when caught. Paul hoped that Philemon would treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ and receive him as a member of the community of faith.

The stories of Jacob and Philemon illustrate how the power of the Holy Spirit inspires individuals to forgive and lead people toward reconciliation despite the predicament and amidst the anger. Both stories show that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the hearts and minds of those whom it convicts will know humility, learn acceptance and become willing to mend broken relationships all in God's perfect time.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Reconciliation completes the cycle of repentance and forgiveness. But a relationship once broken cannot be the same again. It is either thoroughly diminished or terminated or it turns into an enmity. Thus, the goal of reconciliation is not just to restore an old relationship but to raise it to a new level. It is a process of re-creating a new and better relationship out of the old one.

Two images in the Bible of creating a new reality out of the old one may illustrate the essence of reconciliation. The creation story in Genesis 1 depicts God's act of creating order in the universe from out of a state of chaos: "without form and void." A broken relationship is a non-relationship, that is, void of the things that make a true relationship, such as affection, trust, mutual respect and appreciation, and loyalty. Instead of order, harmony, continuity and predictability that characterize authentic relationship there is confusion, conflict or disengagement. God brought order, rhythm, sequence and harmony to create the universe.

The other biblical image that demonstrates the meaning of reconciliation is the image of the new being in Christ: "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17.) The old being which is given to corruption and decay and headed towards death is rendered a thing of the past because a new one opposite it has come into being. The old may still be remembered but it has no more power to impose its will on the new.

The Genesis account shows the Spirit of God "moving across" the chaos for God to transform it into the universe. In Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the Spirit is God's power that renews and sanctifies the church. The church becomes a new creation as a fruit of reconciliation with God.

In the aftermath of wars and violent revolutions, various attempts have been made to constitute what is known as Reconciliation Commission. So far, these efforts ended up in failure largely because the protagonists at the opposite sides of the table didn't go through the process of forgiveness and repentance. The roots of the conflict, basically injustice, were not undone (repentance) - while the injuries suffered by the other party have remained open wounds (forgiveness). And neither side could agree on a common agenda of a new order.

It's in situations like this that the church ought to "let its light to shine" which means letting the world know that the church knows a few things that make for peace. First, the conditions for reconciliation—forgiveness and repentance—must be satisfied. And second, the establishment of a radically new order should be on top of a common agenda. It is by following the leading of the Spirit that the enormously complex and tedious process of reconciliation may find completion.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the learners are expected to:

- explain the meaning of reconciliation by analyzing the stories of Esau and Jacob and Philemon and Onesimus;
- discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the two stories and relate it with the restoration of broken relationships among the people;
- explain how the church acts to make reconciliation possible among members; and
- express one's appreciation and joy to what the church does to restore broken relationships.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, picture of two person who hugged each other, cardboard, scissors, glue, thread

Learning Experiences

A. *Opening Worship*

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners personally and warmly. Let the students participate in the preparations needed for the session.

2. Opening prayer: "Our heavenly Father, we humbly come to your presence. May your Holy Spirit help us realize our wrongdoings so that we may repent and ask for forgiveness. We know this will renew our relationship with you. This is our prayer in your Son's name. Amen."
3. Opening song: "For You I Am Praying"
(Lyrics: Samuel O. Cluff Music: Ira D. Sankey)

B. Getting Ready

Make a big puzzle from a picture of two persons hugging each other. You can cut it to several pieces glued in a cardboard or any hard material. Let the students put together the puzzle until they have completed. Then the teacher says- "Our lesson for today is about "The Reconciling Power of the Holy Spirit."

C. Learning Time

1. Group the students into two groups.
2. Assign the first group to read Genesis 33:1-17. Encourage the first group to role play the message of the passage which is about the meeting and reconciliation of Jacob and Esau.
3. Assign the second group to read Philemon 1:1-25. Ask the second group to role play the role played by Paul in being able to reconcile Onesimus with Philemon not with a master-slave relationship but as Christian brothers.
4. Process the role playing done by both groups and assist the class to realize the need to repent and ask for forgiveness before reconciliation happens.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Ask these questions that are related to the story of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau.
 - a. Who are the characters of the story? (Jacob, Esau)
 - b. What is their problem? (Esau got angry with Jacob who stole his birthright.)
 - c. After many years, who initiated for a reconciliation? (Jacob) Do you agree with what he did? Why or why not? (Answers may vary.)
 - d. Who helped Esau and Jacob reconcile with each other? (the Holy Spirit)
2. Discuss the story found in Philemon 1:1-25. Ask these questions.
 - a. Who are the characters of the letter?(Paul, Philemon, Onesimus)
 - b. Who is Philemon? (prominent member of Church at Colossae)
 - c. Who is Onesimus? (once slave of Philemon who ran away)
 - d. Who is Paul? (the writer of the letter to Philemon)
 - e. What is the plea of Paul to Philemon? (for Philemon to forgive Onesimus and reconcile with him not as a master but as Christian brothers.)
 - f. Who helped Philemon do that? (the Holy Spirit)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Say: Paul writes to Philemon to make an appeal for Onesimus to be reconciled with Philemon not as slave but as Christian brother. Ask: Who do you think helped Paul to make an appeal and Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus? (The Holy Spirit)

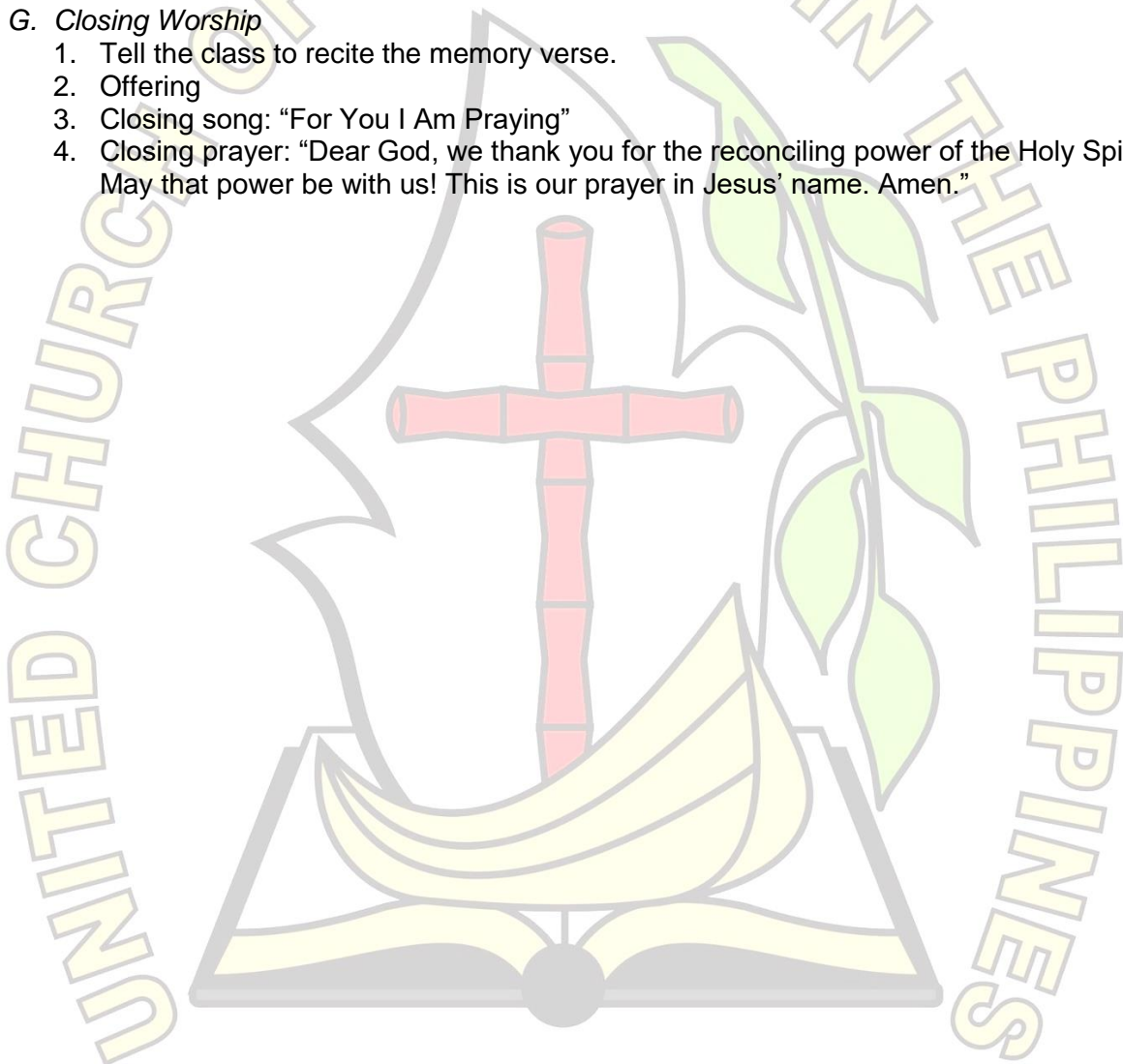
F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." (Genesis 33:4)
2. Present the following to the class and ask them for their comments and insights.

- a. Reconciliation takes place between Jacob and Esau, and between Philemon and Onesimus. Broken relationships are restored again.
 - b. The Holy Spirit enables people to be reconciled and heal their broken relationships.
 - c. Led by the Holy Spirit and through the Christian Witness and Service programs, the UCCP is a channel of reconciliation, a channel of healing broken relationships between God and His people, between persons and the rest of creation. Thus, the ministry of reconciliation is an important element on UCCP's part in building a trustworthy and peaceful social order.
3. Have the class make a book mark with the symbol of a dove that signifies the Holy Spirit. Let the students depict reconciliation between people and the rest of creation.

G. Closing Worship

1. Tell the class to recite the memory verse.
2. Offering
3. Closing song: "For You I Am Praying"
4. Closing prayer: "Dear God, we thank you for the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit. May that power be with us! This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."



20 August 2017

11th Sunday After Pentecost*Old Testament:* Isaiah 40:1-2

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

New Testament: Matthew 5:4, 11:28-30

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

General Concept: The Holy Spirit enables the church to bring comfort to the distressed and hurting and to sustain those who suffer in order for them to live in hope.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit works through the church and other people to uplift the conditions of the distressed, the grieving and oppressed.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

Isaiah was an Israelite prophet who lived under the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He personally knew the major political leaders of Jerusalem, and guided them through the serious social, political, and military challenges they faced. While he himself was a member of the elite, he was a vocal spokesman on behalf of the common people. He railed against corruption within the leadership, demanding that they begin to dispense justice and protection to the weaker members of Israelite society, such as the poor, orphans, and widows.

Starting from chapter 40 however, the events described concern the destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian Exile, which occurred more than a century after Isaiah lived. Thus, the passage in Isaiah 40 was written by an unknown prophet using the name Isaiah. It was an attempt to continue the powerful legacy of the original Isaiah.

Entering into greater detail, the first verse demonstrates the deity of Yahweh as a bringer of comfort whom the prophet announces is Israel's incomparable God. In the midst of the misery of the exile, the prophet exhorts the people not to suppose that Yahweh is ignorant of, or indifferent to Israel's misery. Israel must wait for salvation which is coming very soon though they are clamoring for deliverance prematurely. The passage simply proclaims one main and central message of this prophet writing in the name of Isaiah: that their God Yahweh will soon act and make God's presence known as a real, comforting, liberating presence. For them who had been waiting for so long and isolated in a foreign land, unable to fully practice the worship of their God without their beloved temple, they should never lose hope for they will soon receive and experience the joy of real deliverance and homecoming as their God comes to lead the exiled people back to Jerusalem and Judah and enable them to rebuild their lives and even rebuild their temple. They will once again become a community of God's people worshipping Yahweh and living right in their homeland. This is because they have already been pardoned of all their sin and iniquity. Their rebellious ways before for which they have been punished through the exile is now forgiven and they are now restored as God's people. They can once again start anew as a covenant people. All these will happen all because of God's unmerited grace was extended to them in a time of their despair, grief and alienation.

The account of Matthew is an expansion of the kerygma concerning the blessings that can be received through Jesus. This is fundamentally the good news concerning the saving activity of God. This good news is primarily addressed to those who had been suffering the tragic and oppressive burdens of life. They are those who mourn because of the terrible losses in life they have been experiencing as a result of very cruel and unjust policies of those who rule and control their lives. They are those who mourn the loss of their crops due to a terrible calamity like a prolonged drought or famine which is very common in the land. They are also those who mourn because of the loss of precious property due to foreclosures on account of unpayable debts with unregulated interest imposed on them or because of state confiscation because of failure to pay very high taxes. They are also those who mourn the loss of loved ones who had been unjustly prosecuted, imprisoned or executed for simply raising their voices against such oppressive policies or those who had actually lost their loved ones who were forcibly drafted into the Roman army.

In Mathew 5:4, those who thus mourn are promised comfort. These are the victims of those who have power in the land and use them to abuse and exploit the weak. The traditional view that Matthew wrote primarily to prove that in Jesus of Nazareth is to be found the fulfilment and realization of the Messianic predictions of the OT prophets and seers is beyond doubt correct. Jesus comes to the victims of the oppressors of his time as the messiah they have long been waiting for, their savior and bringer of comfort to all of them who mourn.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

The Spirit is the Comforter that the risen Jesus sent to dwell among the disciples as he ascended to the Father. The Spirit alone is able to fathom the depths of suffering even more than the sufferers themselves. Subsequently, the church is empowered by the Spirit to bring comfort to those who are distressed and hurting that they may find hope even as they are loaded with burdens in their life journey.

Like Jesus, the church leans towards the suffering ones. This attitude has drawn comments that religion is for the weak or those who fail to keep in step with the others. At the onset of modern times, secular intellectuals regard religion as an illusion and an opiate. The Christian faith, they argue, serves this social function but it will fade away at humankind's coming of age.

But for as long as there are people who are burdened and broken under the weight of life's cares, the church will be there to give them succor and comfort. The Spirit leads the church to where people suffer from poverty, neglect, abuse, and injustice. Giving with generosity is among the gifts that the church has received from the Spirit. This is done out of compassion that they may be saved from despair and from giving up on God.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. describe persons who are distressed, aggrieved, and oppressed;
2. explain the significance of comforting these persons;
3. discuss the role of the Holy spirit in comforting those people who need comfort; and
4. make a commitment to help in the ministries that provide comfort to those who need it.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart

Learning Experiences: A. *Opening Worship*

1. Welcome time

2. Opening prayer: *Our heavenly Father, we thank You for your steadfast love to us and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we can learn to forgive one another as well as ourselves. In your Son's precious name, we pray. Amen.*

3. Opening song:

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the class to do a word jumble. Make triads and give each group a set of scrambled words. After unscrambling the words, tell each group to submit their work and let the leader of each group read their answers.

OSNOCGNIL	(CONSOLING)		
TRAEHEGNIN	(HEARTENING)	PPUSORGNTI	(SUPPORTING)
SLOBETGNIR	(BOLSTERING)	SITASFGINY	(SATISFYING)
SSUAERIRGN	(REASSURING)	SIRUONINHG	(NOURISHING)
OONGITHS	(SOOTHING)		
MALCNGI	(CALMING)	FTLIPUGIN	(UPLIFTING)
EEHCINGR	(CHEERING)		

2. After the activity, ask the class what word is common to the above words (comforting).

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read the texts in unison. Discuss the texts using these key sentences.
2. Isaiah 40:1-2. The verses show how God redeems God's people by forgiving them from their sins after they repent from their sins. Thereby God provides them with comfort.
3. Matthew 5:4, 11:26-28. These verses show how God invites God's people through Jesus to come to God to find comfort.

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson by asking these questions.

1. Say: God provides for true comfort. Isaiah reminds God's people of God's covenant with them and of God's everlasting love.
Answer: What does true comfort mean? (True comfort happens when God makes God's presence known as a real, comforting, liberating presence: the sad are made happy, the lonely finds friends, the hurting are eased of their pain, the hungry are fed. We then become reconciled with God. This is our faith in God manifested in action towards our neighbor.)
2. Say: Mourning is a word that means grieving for the dead. But mourning can also mean sadness or grief that makes one feel hurt in the heart and stomach.
Answer: Who among the following people are mourning? Explain your choice.
 - a. Those that are hungry
 - b. Those that are homeless
 - c. Those that are sick
 - d. Those that are unjustly treated and cannot protect themselves
 - e. Those that have committed mistakes and are not ready to repent
 - f. Those that have committed mistakes and are ready to repent
3. Why does God comfort those who mourn? (When we mourn and turn to God, God will comfort us. Then we will feel better and we are ready to comfort others who are mourning.)
4. Why do you think Jesus invites us to come to him when we are "weary and heavy laden"? (Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus offers us to learn from his gentle and humble heart (be his disciple) and to accept his yoke that is easy and light. Jesus wants his people to submit to God who will help them carry the heavy load and for them to find rest in God.)

5. Say: When we sin, we may be physically alive but spiritually dead. We are then separated from God. God gives us life, and we remain alive as long as we follow God. Answer: How can we be spiritually alive? (To submit ourselves to God and do according to God's will; to abide by God's commands, to do what is right)
6. Comment on the following:
 - a. Paul says, "When we are really, truly, deeply, painfully sorry for our sins, it will lead to repentance. Mourning over our sins will make us turn away from them and instead turn to God. When we repent and turn away from our sins and toward God, he saves us! God forgives us of all our sins and makes us right with him." (text?)
 - b. John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)
 - c. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Ephesians 2:1)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How does the Holy Spirit work through the church and other people to uplift the conditions of the distressed, the grieving, and the oppressed? (The church leans towards people who are mourning, suffering, and distressed especially those that are weak and cannot protect themselves and those who repent from their sins. The church provides comfort to those burdened by life's cares.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

Tell the class to think of ways by which they can help the church in comforting others after being comforted. Instruct them to present their answers creatively.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song
3. Reflective action: Let each one extend a hand to the person next to them and say, "Through the Holy Spirit, I will comfort others."
4. Closing prayer: "Dear heavenly Father, we come to you in thanksgiving for declaring us righteous as Christ died for us. We also thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit in comforting us during the difficult times of our lives. Help us to repent from our sins and forgive us to be able to abide in you. Bless us as we are comforted and use us to comfort others. Cleanse us and teach us your ways. In your precious Son's name, we pray. Amen."