



Youth Level

February 18, 2018

1st Sunday in Lent

Lectionary Title 13: **Jesus as the Suffering Messiah***Old Testament: Isaiah 53:1-12 (NRSV)*

¹Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. ⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. ⁹They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

New Testament: Matthew 16:21-23 (NRSV)

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' ²³But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

*General Concept: Jesus embraced his destiny as a suffering Messiah.**Key Concepts Youth: Jesus readily faced suffering as part of his being the Messiah.***Exegesis of the Biblical References**

Isaiah 53 is one of the four "Servant Songs" in which the prophet describes how God will redeem Israel through the suffering servant. It portrays the arrival of a kind of messiah who will challenge the existing powers that dominate, oppress and humiliate the Israelite people. Here, the suffering messiah though not identified by the writer is suffering and afflicted. But he will become God's instrument to exalt and restore Israel's glory. However, he will be the kind of messiah that confronts rejection and endure torment for a greater cause in a manner contrary to the usual ways of the world which is to conquer and impose change through military and political power and authority. The

messiah however will carry on with his mission through silence and nonviolence, and even in his acceptance of suffering and death. This is the new image of messiah that will now define the mission and ministry of Jesus as the messiah sent by God.

After being affirmed by Peter as the Christ, Jesus now prepares for the next phase of his destiny, his eventual death. Here, Jesus not only anticipates his suffering in the hands of the worldly power, but also prepares his disciples by explaining and describing to them what will happen to him in the days to come. Peter's reaction to Jesus' attitude of embracing his forthcoming suffering symbolizes the typical reaction of the world, a reaction contrary to how God works. Jesus' rebuking Peter suggests opposition and defiance of God's unique redemptive plan through Jesus and his own adherence to the usual ways of the world. Jesus reveals the human's incapability to understand this new mystery in God's ways.

Jesus continued his ministry after he predicted his death and suffering proclaiming a sort of reversal theology which suggests opposition to the norms of the world. Jesus now use opposing illustrations in his teachings that signify contradictions in meaning with disorienting implications for one party but empowerment for the other such as the last becoming the first, adults becoming a child, and the rich not inheriting the kingdom but the poor among other examples.

The suffering servant described by Isaiah who underwent many forms of misery to bring redemption and restoration to the people in a way reflected how Jesus understood his destiny. Both the suffering servant in Isaiah and Jesus embraced their destinies as suffering messiahs prepared to undertake all the gruesome challenges for the good of the people. In addition, both intend to create a conflict highlighting the differences between the worldly ways and that of God's ways. Furthermore, Jesus shares similar view with the suffering servant who disregard the option of conquering adversaries by force to fulfill his mission. Rather Jesus mirrored the suffering servant's full reliance on God's power despite the great physical, emotional and spiritual demands involved in the process of liberating the people. Jesus took upon himself the identity of a suffering messiah as his act of total obedience to God's will and full dependence on God's righteousness.

Early Christians point to Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy because of the manner he gave his life for the people. Though this has been debated, we cannot deny that Jesus reflects the description of Isaiah's suffering servant. Moreover, whether Jesus is the expected messiah long waited by the Jews to restore their nation and redeem them from the Roman rule or not, Jesus has successfully overcome the ways of the world and proved that God's ways is the ideal way even how seemingly contradictory, absurd and difficult it may appear to be.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

In his time, the traditional image of God's anointed, that is, messiah, is that of a conquering hero like King David. It was this kind of messiah that the disciples expected Jesus to be. But Jesus was not a populist political leader whose aim was to please the crowd in order to keep their loyalty. As they drew closer to Jerusalem he intimated to the disciples that he was going to suffer in the hands of wicked men, but even his most trusted disciple, Peter, didn't get it and rebuked him. At that point, the notion of a suffering messiah has not appeared on their horizon.

Jesus didn't invent the idea of a suffering messiah. He was acquainted with what may be considered a marginal concept of a suffering servant of Yahweh in the hind portion of the Book of Isaiah which scholars today refer to as Deutero- or II Isaiah. Here, it's not by fiat of conquest but by virtue of the affliction suffered by the Lord's servant that Israel may obtain redemption. Jesus rejected the dominant or mainstream view of a conquering messiah as he saw himself fulfilling the role of a sacrificial lamb being dramatically played out by an obscure and mysterious messiah.

In his mind, Jesus realized that his journey to Jerusalem was not an entrance of a king seeking to

reclaim his crown but an act of total defiance and provocation to the powers of the authorities. In this, he wished to bring about the ultimate confrontation between the powers of Rome and Jerusalem and the righteousness of God. Either the authorities would respond by crucifying him or God would bring down the heavenly forces to scatter his enemies and right then and there establish God's reign throughout the world. He offered his life to set up the final crisis between heaven and earth. He was hoping for God's vindication but he also expected Rome to claim his body. From hindsight, the church believed that Jesus got both — God's vindication and Rome's pound of flesh. For Rome it was just a routine cleaning up of a minor commotion. But God elevated that piece of human history into the realm of the eternal.

I. Objectives

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

1. define the meaning of suffering through a concept map;
2. enumerate the different things that Isaiah foretells the Messiah will suffer;
3. compare what Jesus describes about his death and resurrection with the prophecy of Isaiah;
4. realize that being the Messiah, Jesus is ready to face suffering; and
5. demonstrate willingness to suffer for Christ's sake.

II. Concept: Jesus readily faced suffering as part of his being the Messiah.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, wooden cross or picture of a cross, coloring sheet: cross, crayons or water colors, glue, pen, cut-out emoticons

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners with your welcoming smile and your big warm hug. Make a distinct hand-shake for your learners, e.g., Fist-bump. Take time to converse with at least 2 students about their engagements this week.
2. Opening prayer: Body Prayer
Be in your comfortable position and just close your eyes. Be aware of God's presence who is with us and for us. Breathe in God's love, joy and peace. Let this breath fill every cell and fiber of your being. Breathe out God's shalom that people and other creatures seen or unseen around you will experience such love, joy and peace. Place your palms down in front of you or on your lap, symbolizing your desire to release whatever you need like tiredness, boredom, worries and problems-hold that position for 60 seconds. Turn your palms upward, symbolizing your desire to receive from God whatever you need. Pause in that position for 60 seconds. Bring your hands together in a folded prayer position. Be still. Be in that position for 60 seconds. Let all God's children say, "Amen." (Amen.)
3. Opening song: "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" (Hymn of a Faith Journey # 149)

B. Getting Ready

Tell the class to compare and differentiate suffering and sacrifice. Record their answers and set them aside.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read the biblical texts found in Isaiah 53:1-12 and Matthew 16:21- 23.
2. Ask the class to complete a concept. Let the class look for key words from the verses in Isaiah 53:1-12 and Matthew 16:21-23.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. How will you describe the Suffering Messiah referred to in Matthew 16:21-23 and Isaiah 53:1-12. Read the verses aloud.
2. Thinking about the kind of suffering the Messiah will go through as written in Matthew 16:21-23 and Isaiah 53:1-12, what emotions do you feel and what makes you feel this way? Have the learners get one of the emoticon cut outs and hold it up as they answer this question.
3. Why do you think the Messiah had to go through this kind of suffering? Form three groups and brainstorm the question. Then have the learners discuss their thoughts in the big group.
4. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples about his incoming suffering? Why do you think Jesus considered the way of the cross as the only way to fulfill his calling?
5. Is there still a need for the Messiah to suffer today? (As we are still awaiting the redemption of the whole of creation, we must accept the truth that there will still be suffering in our world today. But this doesn't mean that we are not able to do anything to bring transformation to our fallen world.)
6. Who are called to transform creation? (We are. The Church as stewards of God's whole creation is called to work towards transformation. The process of transformation is a slow and most of the time painful process. God challenges God's people to be agents of transformation and be willing to suffer to make change happen.)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: "How did Jesus face his suffering as part of his being the Messiah? How can we face our challenges today?"

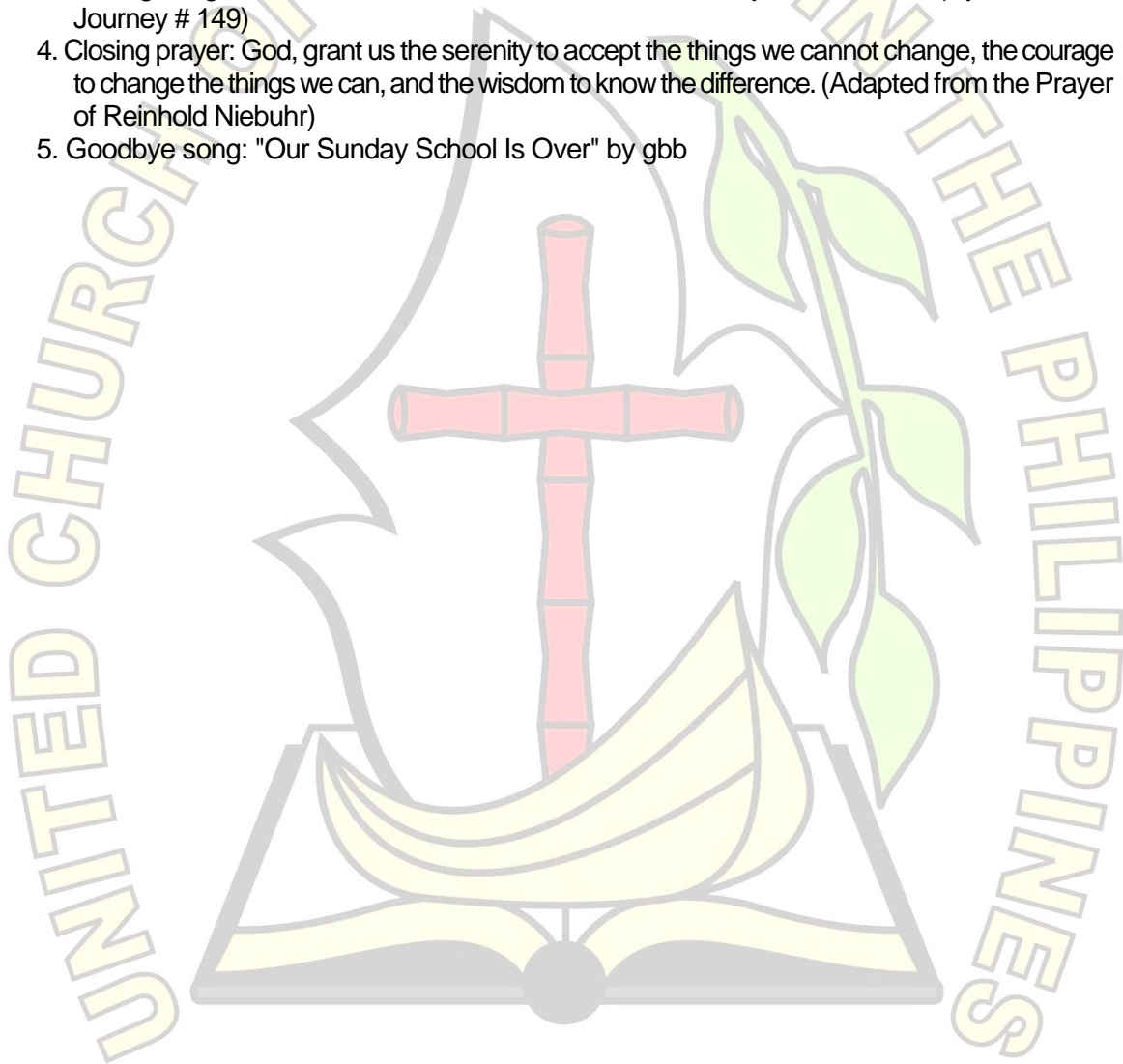
F Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way. But the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)
2. Go back to the responses of the class related to the meaning of suffering and sacrifice and relate these answers with the Suffering Messiah.
3. Craft: Let the class design a paper or wooden cross. (Pre-assign materials needed for this activity.)
4. Faith in Action
 - a. Facebook Profile Picture: Post a picture that support the mission of the Church in your FB Account as Your Picture Profile. Eg. Stop Lumad killing, Stop Extrajudicial Killing, and others
 - b. Posting to one's Twitter, Instagram or Facebook account a statement from our UCCP Statements and Resolutions that need to be known to our church and web wide community, e.g., A Statement of Concern on the Worsening State of our Natural Resources and its Effect on the Lives of the Filipino People, First Youth Congress Ellinwood Christian Youth Fellowship 27-30 December 1989. Pg. 185- 186 of UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)
 - c. As a member organization of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), pick an organization with a focus on development work in Lumad and Muslim communities.

G. Closing Worship

1. Reflective action: Tell the class to complete the sentences:
 - a. "I will follow Jesus even if it takes _____"

- b. "I will be loyal and faithful to God by _____"
 - c. "I commit to raising _____ amount to contribute to the whole class' goal in order to help _____ (organization) in transforming God's creation."
 - d. "I will demonstrate my willingness to suffer for the sake of God's creation by giving up _____ in order to save enough money for our class' financial support to the _____ *organization)." (Each will offer their cross-art after saying these sentences.)
2. Offering: Put a basket offering at the center and instruct the learners to bring their offering, their commitments, and their art work-cross.
 3. Closing songs: "Make Me a Servant" and "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" (Hymn of a Faith Journey # 149)
 4. Closing prayer: God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. (Adapted from the Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr)
 5. Goodbye song: "Our Sunday School Is Over" by gbb



February 25, 2018

Second Sunday in Lent

Jesus, the Messiah for All

Old Testament: **Genesis 21:18-20** (NRSV)

¹⁸“Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.”

¹⁹Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.

New Testament: **Matthew 15:21-28** (NRSV)

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶“He answered, It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

General Concept: **The inclusiveness of Jesus' mission is formed through his encounters with outcasts and people of other faiths.**

Key Concepts Youth: **Jesus, as the Messiah, helps all unconditionally.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

Hagar and Ishmael were threats to Sarah's security as wife of Abraham. She considered them rivals to Abraham's attention and inheritance. So she drove them away to the desert. When travelling in the desert, the ideal Middle Eastern practice was to bring enough water, food and other supplies on camels or horses. They usually travelled in groups for safety and to ensure survival in the harsh desert. But Hagar and Ishmael travelled by themselves with only a little food and water. They were unsure of where they were going. They were at risk from possible attacks from bandits. Their chances of survival in the desert were minimal. But God saw their struggles and heard their cries. Even without Abraham's protection, God provided for their needs and took care of them, especially Ishmael. God is merciful and just to all people, especially the suffering, oppressed and rejected.

In the Book of Matthew, the story of Jesus encounter with the Canaanite woman comes before the story of the feeding of the five thousand. The way the stories are arranged is fitting. Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman is the turning point of Jesus' ministry. It is a reorientation of his purpose as Messiah. From being the messiah exclusive only for the Jews, he becomes the bread of life that provides spiritual nourishment to many people, and eventually to all nations. Jesus and his disciples are on their way to the region of Tyre and Sidon. This region was where the non-Jews lived. Here they encounter the disturbing and persistent Canaanite woman. Jesus and his disciples respond to her in the usual way Jews respond to non-Jews, to people they consider less important or even to an enemy. At first, they ignored the cry of the Canaanite woman. They avoided responding to her needs. They viewed her as an outcast unworthy of their time and attention. But the faith and persistence of the Canaanite woman made Jesus realize that he needed to reevaluate the scope of his mission. Here, the Canaanite woman is teaching and reminding Jesus that his God is one and the same as the God of other peoples.

After Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman, we see a shift in the tone of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry now extends and offers salvation to all people regardless of ethnic or religious background. In fact, he commissioned his disciples to go and baptize all nations. His commissioning symbolizes the breaking of boundaries. Jesus abandons the old thinking that only Jews are the chosen people worthy of God's love and mercy. Here, the loving, accepting and forgiving character of God in the Old Testament is embodied in Jesus' dealings with the people, especially the outcast and neglected.

Jesus now becomes identified as the messiah that will save not just the Jews, but also the outcast and the oppressed. Jesus intends to fulfill God's call for justice and to exhibit God's love, acceptance and mercy so all may experience the Reign of God.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

The term, messiah, which means "anointed" has a specific meaning in Jewish history and theology. It refers to God's chosen agent to save the people of Israel. When used by the church as a divine title exclusive to Jesus, the word took on new meaning. Jesus Christ is savior of both the Jewish people and the nations of the world (Gentiles). This transition is not a church invention but is derived from Jesus' earthly ministry itself. Jesus' messianic self-understanding was first informed by Jewish tradition. But his encounters with people in need who were ethnically non-Jewish caused him to make a radical turn outwards. It was the Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician woman who educated him that Israel's God was also her God. This broadened understanding about God was already anticipated by the Old Testament prophets but had been drastically toned down by the more dominant nationalistic authorities of the law. In this instance, Jesus the messiah has fulfilled the prophecies of old.

Jesus the Christ reveals and realizes in his ministry the all-encompassing broadness of God's love, justice and mercy. Faith communities that emerged alongside tribal, ethnic or national formations tend to develop a narrow theological perspective. There is a close association of religious identity with national, tribal or ethnic identity. For example, being Jewish is both an ethnic and religious identity. For several centuries at the peak of modern Western colonialism, Christianity was identified with Europe and North America while paganism was used as a generic religious term referring to native populations. Today, Muslim people are profiled also in terms of their demographic origins.

A particular community of faith is like a window from which one is able to view the larger environment outside the house. This means that Christians see Muslims from a Christian point of view and tend to evaluate them based on Christian standards. This is unavoidable and may not be completely overcome but this limitation does not necessarily lead to religious bigotry. Let it serve as a condition and challenge to seek dialogue and cooperation in a mutually enriching relationship. Underlying the process is a genuine recognition that they are both children of one and the same God and that God has a different and special plan of salvation for each.

I. Objectives

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

1. compare how Hagar and her son Ishmael and the Canaanite woman and her daughter are helped by God;
2. illustrate how Jesus learns from the Canaanite woman as he begins to understand his being the Messiah; and
3. compose creative work to demonstrate how God uses each of us to help others unconditionally.

- II. Concept:** Jesus, as the Messiah, helps all unconditionally.
Materials: The Holy Bible (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners warmly with your welcoming smile and your big warm hug. Give them a high five and lead them to their seats.
2. Opening prayer: "Our Creator God who created all things with colors and shapes, we thank you for loving us all. Thank you for this beautiful day and for the loving fellowship with one another. Lord, teach us how to accept others and to welcome them as you welcomed and cared for Hagar and the Canaanite woman. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen."
3. Opening songs;
 - a. "The Love of Jesus"

The love of Jesus sweet and marvelous (thrice), O..o.. Wonderful love...
Higher than the sky above, deeper than the ocean
Wider than the universe, O..o.. Wonderful love.
 - b. "I'm Part of You" by gbb (Tune: "His Banner Over Me")

I'm part of you and you're part of me together in God's family (thrice).
We're living together in God's household.

B. Getting Ready

Tell the class to look for verses that tell about relationships of parents and children in the Bible. Then let them describe these relationships related to how God shows God's love for God's children.

1. Abraham and Isaac
2. Naomi and Ruth
3. Jacob and Joseph
4. Lois, Eunice, and Timothy

C. Learning Time

1. Form two groups. Assign the first group to read and discuss the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:18-20 and the second group the story of the Canaanite woman and her daughter in Matthew 15:21-28.
2. Instruct each group to act out the verses that have been discussed. In their presentation, let the groups contextualize their story. Instead of the stories of Hagar and the Canaanite woman, tell them to tell a story of God helping a single mother in distress.
3. After each group's presentation, say: God's grace embraces all God's people. Though God promised Abraham to be the father of all nations, God extended God's loving grace to Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness. God never let this unwanted mother and son to just die in the desert. God heard their cries of despair and rescued them. God even promised them blessings and God's presence. Draw from the class these ideas.
 - a. As God's beloved Son, Jesus loves all kinds of people. He welcomes and helps every person who needs his help especially those people who are considered as the least, the lost and the last of our community.
 - b. There was a time where Jesus thought that His ministry was for the Jewish people only. He thought that He had been sent by His Father to help the Jewish people alone. But when Jesus met the Canaanite woman, things became clear to Him. Jesus realized that his mission was for all the people of God whether Jews or Gentiles—all are recipients of God's gift of salvation.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson. Ask these questions.

1. What was the story all about? (Address this question to both groups)
2. Who were the main characters of the two stories? (God, Hagar, Jesus and the Canaanite woman)
3. What similarities can you find between the two stories? (Hagar and the Canaanite woman are mothers whose children need urgent help to save them from imminent death.)
4. How did God/Jesus respond to the needs of Hagar and the Canaanite woman?
5. What great action did God/Jesus do to respond to the women's plea?
6. Why do you think Jesus gives us second chances to repent? (To serve others by doing what is right)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: "Why do you think God extended God's grace to Hagar? What made Jesus change one's perception of his Messiahship upon his conversation with the Canaanite woman?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "O woman, great is your faith!" (Matthew 15:27).
2. Think-Group-Share. Use the same two groups formed earlier. Tell each group to think of ways by which they can share their time and talents in addressing the situations listed below. After their group work, ask them to share their work to the whole class.
 - a. Meeting a sibling from your father's previous relationship who wants to visit your family before leaving for work broad
 - b. Visiting single parents or children of migrant workers
 - c. Involving in the church's outreach ministry by accommodating displaced tribes or victims of natural or man-made calamities in your community and in distributing food, clothes and other relief items.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Make me a Servant"
3. Closing prayer: Lord, show us the way. Help us be grateful for every day. Show us the difference between right and wrong. Keep us safe, Lord, all night long. Give us direction on what to do, lead the way, Lord, We trust in you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

March 4, 2018

Third Sunday in Lent

Jesus' Encounters with the Powerful and Wealthy

Old Testament: Psalm 72:1-7 (NRSV)

Prayer for Guidance and Support for the King

Of Solomon.

¹Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. ²May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. ³May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. ⁵ May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. ⁶May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. ⁷In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

New Testament: Mark 10:17-25 (NRSV)

The Rich Man

¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. ²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

General Concept: Jesus is challenging the powerful and the wealthy to become compassionate, repentant, and just.

Key Concepts Youth: Jesus calls the powerful and wealthy to repent and to be just.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

Psalm 72 indicates that it is a prayer originally of Solomon but it was later adapted by succeeding kings as the standard prayer for use during their coronation. The prayer is asking God for wisdom that will allow the king to see the needs of his people. The king is asking God to help him know what is righteous, to discern what is just, to have compassion to defend those who are poor. This in effect, defines the qualities that would characterize and differentiate Israel's kings from the kings of other nations. This suggests that there had been kings before who succeeded in power but avoided following this standard for the rule of an anointed king. The prayer reflects the experience of a person who witnessed the cruelty and abuse of the powerful and wealthy towards the lowly and the weak of the land. This is supposed to provide the yardstick for evaluating the rule of every ruler and leader of any nation, how he/she practices justice toward those who have less in life as a defining quality of one's regime and administration.

The life and ministry of Jesus undeniably favors the poor, oppressed and marginalized. On the other hand, his teachings is seen as an antagonist that is persistently challenging the powerful and wealthy usually identified with the Pharisees and scribes and the rest of the ruling elite of Judah. They have become the usual target of his denunciations and bitter critical diatribes (e.g., Matt.23). After Capernaum, Jesus went to the region of Judea across the Jordan and met again a large crowd. Here, Jesus directs his teaching towards the powerful and wealthy who are capable of either upholding justice

or inflicting oppression. Jesus also reminds them of their responsibility towards the poor who are weak, vulnerable and helpless. This passage reflects the context during the Roman regime where there are a few rich and powerful while so many are poor and struggling because of very unequal distribution of wealth and because of the abuse and corruption of government officials and temple leaders. Jesus' encounter with the rich young man is part of Jesus' teachings that challenges the powerful and wealthy to look into their relationship with the poor and how they use their power and wealth.

Power and wealth are highlighted by Jesus as the stumbling block for the rich young man that keeps him from becoming one of those who can enter the Kingdom of God despite his efforts of following the law. The rich young man's obedience to the law is admirable, yet for Jesus it is not enough since this has only benefited him but not others specially the poor. Here, Jesus was concerned not about the person's obedience to the law but how the man used his wealth and power.

Inheriting the kingdom of God entails following Jesus and becoming an agent of change and reform for oneself and for one's relationship with others especially the poor. Jesus provided the rich young man the way to inherit eternal life. However, Jesus' answer was not favorable to the rich young man so he was displeased. This suggests that the rich young man was not willing to surrender not only his wealth, but also his status, power and privileges. The rich young man's resistance to Jesus' invitation to follow him clearly shows his unwillingness to participate in a just reordering of relations by sharing his wealth and helping the poor. A just reordering of economic relations involving sharing and redistribution of wealth to uplift the poor and the downtrodden is a vital expression of a life of repentance and commitment to follow Jesus all the way.

Like the kings, people with power and wealth are viewed as people entrusted with God's blessings so they can look after the welfare of their subordinates. They are not to abuse and maltreat the people from the lower social classes. Kings and the wealthy who possess power are expected to become the defenders of the powerless against all forms of unrighteousness and injustice. Their leadership should primarily benefit the poor and the downtrodden. Perhaps the powerful and wealthy can learn from the prayer of Solomon who asks God for wisdom to know the purpose why God has blessed him. The powerful and wealthy are not ruled out as unable to enter the kingdom of God, they are constantly being invited by God just like Jesus invited the rich young man to follow him—all they have to do is to have the compassion, to repent and to practice justice.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Jesus preached a message of repentance in view of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. His intended primary audience was the rich and powerful of his time whose repentance would benefit the poor and downtrodden. This is dramatically illustrated in the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. So, the gospel is good news (Greek, euangelion) to the poor. This line comes straight from the prophets of old, whose prophetic message was addressed to the rulers of the nation. To those who bore the brunt of injustice, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount which enumerates the blessings of the coming kingdom of God for them.

In other words, Jesus' message was good news to the poor but he was speaking to the rich. Aside from being theologically sound, there is a good economic sense to it. We live in a world where so very few people own so much wealth, while so many subsist on so little. According to Oxfam International, 1% of humankind own more than half of the world's total wealth. A simple redistribution of the world's wealth could easily provide food, health care, housing and education to every family everywhere. That would, of course, require a new mechanism of managing the world's resources. Before God, everything has a spiritual dimension in that nothing lies outside God's judgment. For every amount that a person makes, she or he will have to account to God on the Day of Judgment. In an intricately interconnected world, the bulging wealth of one is the impoverishment of many others. To people with

moral scruples, this is scandalous; before God, this is an abomination. According to Oxfam again, this situation is leading towards a global catastrophe that will spare no one. To put it theologically, it means the apocalyptic coming of God's final judgment.

No other message rings with more urgency today than this: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." The rich and the powerful must repent, that is, smash the poverty-generating machine of corporate globalization and replace it with a social economy that puts the public well-being first before profit. Short of that, the world will perish.

I. Objectives

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

1. tell the meaning of repentance and justice;
2. describe the characteristics of a king as shown in the psalm to indicate justness;
3. explain how Jesus pointed out to the man the need to share and care for others as a sign of willingness to follow Jesus as a way to repentance; and
4. express in creative ways why justice and repentance are prerequisites to following God.

II. Concept: Jesus calls the powerful and wealthy to repent and to be just.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners with your welcoming smile and your big warm hug. Initiate your unique class handshake with your learners and converse with 5 learners about their whereabouts last week.
2. Opening prayer: "Our Parent God, be with us as we learn more about you. Inspire and move us to make a step further in our journey with you. Embrace us with your loving care and nurturing caress. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Just as I Am" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 157)

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the class to play the game "Life's Treasures". Say: "List 3 people or 3 things that you consider as your life's treasures. Write how many hours you spend time with each item." Allow time for the class to write their answers and let them share their answers to the class. Try to synthesize the sharing by pointing out the similarities and the differences of their views and opinions.
2. Ask: "Do you consider your relationship with God as your life's treasure? How many hours do you spend time with God?" Say: "Most of the time, our treasured possessions can sometimes get in the way of loving God with our whole heart."

C. Learning Time

1. Say "Today we are going to find out what Jesus tells a young man about what to do to inherit eternal life."
2. Divide the class into two groups and assign each group to read one of the following biblical texts using the given guide questions. Then let them share creatively their thoughts.
 - a. Psalm 72:1-7
 - 1) Who wrote this psalm?
 - 2) What does he pray for the king?
 - 3) What can happen when a king rules with God's righteousness?

b. Mark 10:17-22

- 1) Who came to see Jesus? Why did he visit Jesus?
- 2) How did Jesus answer him?
- 3) Why did he leave with a sad face?

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Tell the class to react to the following statements.

1. Why do you think the rich young man asked Jesus for the most precious gift? (It was a gift only God can offer: eternal life.)
2. Why do you think the rich young man refused God's offer? (The rich young man cannot accept God's discipline and he wanted his riches more than the precious gift.)
3. Why do you think Jesus wants the rich young man to understand the real meaning of God's salvation? (Jesus wanted the rich young man to sell all his possessions and share his riches with the poor. Salvation and inheriting the kingdom of God entails following Jesus and becoming an agent of change. In a society where there are so many poor people, it is against God's will that so many suffer while there are a few who are rich. The wealth of the world must be shared with everyone, not just a few.)
4. Why does Jesus consider repentance and justice important to inherit eternal life? (Expect different answers and draw from the class what they understand about repentance and justice.)
5. Why do you think Jesus commented that it is difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? (In the Kingdom of God, there is no rich and there is no poor. Everyone equitably shares in the wealth.)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Why does Jesus call the powerful and wealthy to repent and to be just?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21b)
2. Discuss the context of Jesus' time where the rich and powerful lorded it over the poor and marginalized. Why is Jesus' command to "go sell everything that you own, and give the money to the poor" so important in that context?
3. Discuss our present context. How does our society look like? What are the similarities between Jesus' context and our present context? What must the richest 1% of our present world do in order to be included in the Kingdom of God that Jesus' Christ proclaims?
4. Tell the class to meditate on how they can, as followers of Jesus, repent and be just to others by considering this possible mission work: Helping Those in Need. Let the class brainstorm on how to accomplish this. Remind them that this mission work involves firstly, the people in the church who need help and secondly, the people in their community who need help. One way of raising funds could come from their dedicated one-day allowance in a week. Say: "Jesus wants us to change our ways in accordance to his will and to be just by sharing what we have with others."

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Make Me a Servant"
3. Closing prayer: O God our Parent, we thank you for teaching us today about what matters most in our lives and that is You, O God. May we hold nothing from you and bring all our very selves

to you alone. This we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.



March 11, 2018

Fourth Sunday in Lent

The Mystery of the Messianic Grace

Old Testament: Isaiah 58:6-12 (NRSV)

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am." If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

New Testament: Matthew 20:1-16 (NRSV)

The Laborers in the Vineyard

¹ For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴ and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷ They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."

⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." ¹³ But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

General Concept: Jesus is the embodiment of God's grace.

Key Concepts Youth: Jesus reveals the fullness of God's grace.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The practice of fasting has always been part of Israel's life, faith and religious tradition. The Israelites practice fasting either individually or communally as an expression of grieving or mourning or as a form of repentance and seeking forgiveness or as part of their worship ritual or as an expression of total reliance on God's grace. Whether fasting is done in private or as a community, it requires a sincere faith with a concrete corresponding action in the hope of receiving God's favor. Over time, however, fasting as a practice became a venue for some people to project their religiosity even as

they continue with their sinful ways, ignoring the more important social and ethical implications of their faith in God.

After Israel has returned from their exile in Babylon and have settled back in their homeland, people began putting more emphasis on the ritual dimension of fasting. In response to this new development, the unknown prophet of the post exilic period (known to the scholars as Third Isaiah) began criticizing the kind of fasting that people are practicing and the hypocrisy behind such practice as he sees the contradiction between the rituals undertaken by the rich Jews and the denial of basic care, compassionate assistance and support for the needy especially for those fellow Jews (kababayan) who are working for them. The prophet wants to remind the Israelites about the true essence of fasting that God expects from them - providing food for the hungry and clothes for those with nothing to wear especially during the winter. In other words, Isaiah is proclaiming the kind of fasting that God intends them to do and that is to become God's instrument of grace and source of hope especially for their fellow Israelites who are poor and weak. It also illustrates one very profound truth about what is really the true essence of religious faith- that religious rituals such as fasting become empty and devoid of any relevant meaning at all if the actual practice of the ethical requirements of such religion is ignored. Actual practice of these ethical requirements in daily life experiences is indispensable and non-negotiable for one's faith to be acknowledged as truly an authentic one.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard illustrates the rather unexplainable mystery behind God's sovereignty in dispensing God's grace. Jesus' teaching in parables mirrors God's mysterious nature and ways - incomprehensible, unpredictable and hidden to those unworthy to receive the grace, but for those chosen by God who remained obedient, faithful and trusting it is not impossible to understand and follow. In this parable, Jesus emphasizes that the grace of God is available to all and will be given to all who accept and help propagate the gospel not on the basis of one's social, religious or economic status or of one's vocation nor of the amount of effort a person gives. Grace depends on God's prerogative, will and purpose and not on human effort nor on the amount of time, energy or talent invested or offered for the advancement of God's kingdom. Jesus reminds the people that no one can dictate the amount of grace a person deserves to receive. Here, Jesus proclaims a radical message that challenges the traditional interpretation of how one can earn the grace and favor of God. He also challenges the authority and integrity of the Pharisees and scribes as the acknowledged dispensers of God's grace and official teachers and implementers of the law. The gospel of Jesus reverses the traditional understanding that the grace of God depends upon one's obedience to the law and constant good works. Instead, Jesus reminds the people that God's grace does not rely on human efforts or obedience to the law but through one's faith and loyalty to God's will regardless of whether they have been long time believers in God like the Jews or new or late entrants to the faith like the newly converted Gentiles.

For Christ's followers, the law remains an important part of their faith that guides them in their daily living. But they now also perceived that God's grace abounds so much that they become empowered to live and aspire more than what the law requires. Like Jesus who embodies the grace of God, his followers now accept their call not because the law mandates them but it is an expression of their faith and loyalty to God in response to the grace of God they received in and through Jesus Christ.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Law determines the standards of justice. Laws may vary from one society to another but underneath the various legal provisions are universal concepts of justice. This is true from the time of Hammurabi, the ancient lawgiver of Mesopotamia up to the modern times. Of course, there are laws that are patently unjust because they serve special vested interests rather than the entire population. But on the whole the law is justice's most trusted servant.

The Jewish law continues to have an important role for the regulation of Christian life and community. This was affirmed by Jesus himself and recognized by the Apostle Paul. But the place and value of the law was now to be seen only in the light of the gospel which is about God's grace that was manifested in and through Jesus Christ. The glory of the law shines forth from the light reflected from grace.

God's grace was already there in the law but it had remained a mystery until it was disclosed in Jesus Christ. Due to human weakness, human beings have misunderstood and misused the law to serve and glorify one's self rather than be subject to it to fulfill humanity's destiny as appointed by God. As a result, God's grace is hidden from human beings and consequently have missed the law's true and primal purpose. In Jesus' life and work, death and resurrection, grace and law found their rightful places in the economy of God's salvation.

Created and redeemed by grace, Christians obey the call to mission in gratitude rather than being compelled by law. Such obedience exceeds the requirements of the law and without any thought of reward as promised by the law. Jesus exemplified grateful obedience to a gracious God as he subjected himself completely to God's will.

I. Objectives

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

1. define God's grace;
2. explain God's grace through the story of the hired workers in the vineyard;
3. discuss why the workers received the same wages despite their differences in the time they worked; and
4. express creatively the fullness of God's grace in one's life.

II. Concept: Jesus reveals the fullness of God's grace.

Materials: The Holy Bible (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Welcome the learners with your big warm hug and a smile. Do your handshake greeting. Initiate conversation especially with the early comers.
2. Opening prayer: "Our loving and gracious God, we thank you for your love you show to us each day through Jesus Christ. Continue to inspire and direct us with this love as we mature in our faith in you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "The Old Rugged Cross" Hymnal of a Faith Journey" #156

B. Getting Ready

Let the class recall some experiences they had when relationships were affected because of the jealousy of some people on the accomplishments of others or when people feel they are great and indispensable. Let them exchange ideas about how they will be able to assist these people to restore good relationships. You may invite a resource person who can talk about this.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read the two biblical references and say these verses in their own words. Assign all the boys to read the OT text and all the girls the NT text.
2. Isaiah 58:6-12
6-7 *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to*

share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

8-9 *Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator = shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

10-12 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins

shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

2. Matthew 20:1-16

1-2 *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage,-he sent them into his vineyard.*

34 *When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went.*

57 *When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."*

8 *When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first."*

9-10 *When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.: Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.:*

11-12 *And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."*

13-16 *But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?: Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Discuss the lesson.

- According to Isaiah, what kind of fasting would please God? [(Verses 6-7: God is displeased with those who boast about their fasting. God is pleased with those who fast by sharing their food and clothes to the poor as contrasted to those who boast of their fasting (verses 1-5)]
- What could happen to people who please God with what they do? (Verses 8-12: God will always guide them.)

- c. What does Isaiah foretell about the coming of the Lord? (That the Anointed One will come to restore God's relationship with His people.)
 - d. How did the landowner in the story by Matthew show grace? (He was kind and generous. He offered work and equal pay beyond legal considerations.)
 - e. Why do you think God is represented by the landowner? (God loves all His people the same way. The landowner offered work and pay the same way.)
 - f. Who do you think are represented by the workers? (We are represented by the workers in the story. God graciously offered the gift of salvation to everybody all the time.)
 - g. How can you define God's grace based on this story? (Grace in Christianity is the free and unmerited favor of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowing of blessings.)
2. Discuss how God through Jesus showed grace to God's people. Jesus welcomes the outcasts of society like the blind, leprous, and the poor. Jesus heals people who are sick and dying. He dines with people who are different like tax collectors, prostitutes, and corrupt officials.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How can Jesus reveal the fullness of God's grace to us today? (God still offers the gift of salvation to us today.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: "The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11)
2. Tell the class to prepare for the Grace Project. First, let the class brainstorm about concrete ways to actualize God's grace in one's context. Identify a person or a group who will be the recipient of the project. Set the time and the date of implementing the said project.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing songs: "Amazing Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey" # 208) and a goodbye song
3. Closing prayer: "O God our Parent, we thank you for being gracious to us. Your extravagant grace overwhelms us. Move us to be gracious to others as you are to them. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

March 18, 2018

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Amazing Gift of God's Grace

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:34

³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

New Testament: Luke 15:11-24

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them.

¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

²²But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

General Concept: God's amazing grace builds a forgiving community by restoring the alienated back to the fellowship of the church.

Key Concept

Y: **God's amazing grace enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other.**

I. Objectives

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

1. accept the fact that God forgave us first so that we may forgive others;
2. relate the act of being forgiving with the restoration of our relationship with God and others as illustrated in the parable; and
3. write some insights on the effect in one's life being forgiving and being forgiven.

II. Concept: God's amazing grace enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story, candies/chocolates/banana/kamote, bond paper, ballpens, pencils, cartolina

III. Learning Experiences

A. *Opening Worship*

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God, we thank you for this time that we are gathered to study the truth of your word. We acknowledge your presence of in our midst as you accompany us as we study and in sharing the God News of your love to others. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen."
3. Opening song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (HFJ # 180)

B. *Getting Ready*

1. Begin the class with a hand meditative activity (<http://www.chrisgribble.com/a-celtic-meditation-exercise-hand-meditation/>). Let them sit on the floor. Prepare mats for them to sit. While soft music is being played, the leader dramatically reads the following Celtic Meditation Exercise:
 - a. Sitting with your palms up resting in your lap, eyes closed, tune into your breathing, relax your tension points and go into your center.
 - b. Become aware of the air at your fingertips, between your fingers, on the palm of your hand. Experience the fullness, strength and maturity of your hands. Think of your hands, think of the most unforgettable hands you have known the hands of your father, your mother, your grandparents. Remember the oldest hands that have rested in your hands. Think of the hands of a new born child, your nephew or niece of the incredible perfection, delicacy of the hands of a child. Once upon a time your hands were the same size.
 - c. Think of all that your hands have done since then. Almost all that you have learned is through your hands turning yourself over, crawling and creeping, walking and balancing yourself; learning to hold something for the first time; feeding yourself; washing and bathing, dressing yourself. At one time your greatest accomplishment was tying your own shoes.
 - d. Think of all the learning your hands have done and how many activities they have mastered, the things that they have made. Remember the day you could write your own name.
 - e. Our hands were not just made for themselves but for others. How often were they given to help another. Remember all the kinds of work they have done, the tiredness and aching they have known, the cold and the heat, the soreness and the bruises. Remember the tears they have wiped away, our own or another's, the blood they have bled, the healing they have experienced. How much hurt, anger and even violence have they expressed and how much gentleness, tenderness and love they have given. Remember the times when you offer your hand for forgiveness. How often they have been folded in prayer; both a sign of their powerlessness and of their power.
 - f. There is a mystery which we discover in the hand of a woman or a man that we love. There are the hands of a doctor, a nurse, an artist, a conductor, a priest, hands which you can never forget.
 - g. Now raise your right hand slowly and gently place it over your heart. Press more firmly until your hand picks up the beat of your heart that most mysterious of all human sounds, one's own heartbeat, a rhythm learned in the womb from the heartbeat of one's own mother. Press more firmly for a moment than release your

hand and hold it just a fraction from your clothing. Experience the warmth between your hand and your heart. Now lower your hand to your lap very carefully as if you were carrying your heart. For it does. When you extend your hand to another, it's not just bone and skin, it is your heart. A handshake is a real heart transplant.

- h. Think of all the hands that have left their imprint on you. Fingerprints and hands that have left their imprint on you. Fingerprints and handprints are heart prints that can never be erased. The hand has its own memory. Think of all the places that carry your handprints and all the people who bear your handprint. They are indelible and will last forever.
 - i. Now without opening your eyes begin to write out of your stream of consciousness. Slowly become more aware of your outer extremities. The pressure of the air on your forehead. The sensation of the air touching your fingertips.
 - j. Slowly as you are ready become present to your reality once more. (You may add the following sentences to conclude) Now give your hands to the persons beside you. Hold their hands and try to express how thankful you are to them as you press slowly their hands. Whose hands were those? They may be another person's hand. It may be God's hands. Indeed, they are God's hands. And your hands are God's hands. Amen.
2. Invite participants to share reflections after the meditation. Encourage them to connect reflections with the things that they have done so far for the church and people around them. Particularize their answer about giving forgiveness.

C. Learning Time

1. Let the students read and study Jeremiah 31:34 and discuss what the Lord will do about their sins as they will begin to know God.
2. Ask the class to read Luke 15:11-24 in unison using their own personal Bibles.
3. After reading and studying, group the class into two groups. Ask each group to pretend they are newscasters and they would cover the story of the Prodigal Son. Let them think of catchy headlines that can attract the viewers.
4. Let each group present their headlines and encourage a healthy discussion afterwards.

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Discuss briefly the lesson. Ask these questions.

1. How will you describe the characters of the story?
2. Why do you think the father gave all the possessions to the younger son?
3. What did the younger son do to his possessions?
4. After realizing all of his wrong doing, he came back to his father. Did the father forgive him?
5. How did the father forgive him?
6. Who do you think helped the father to forgive his son?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

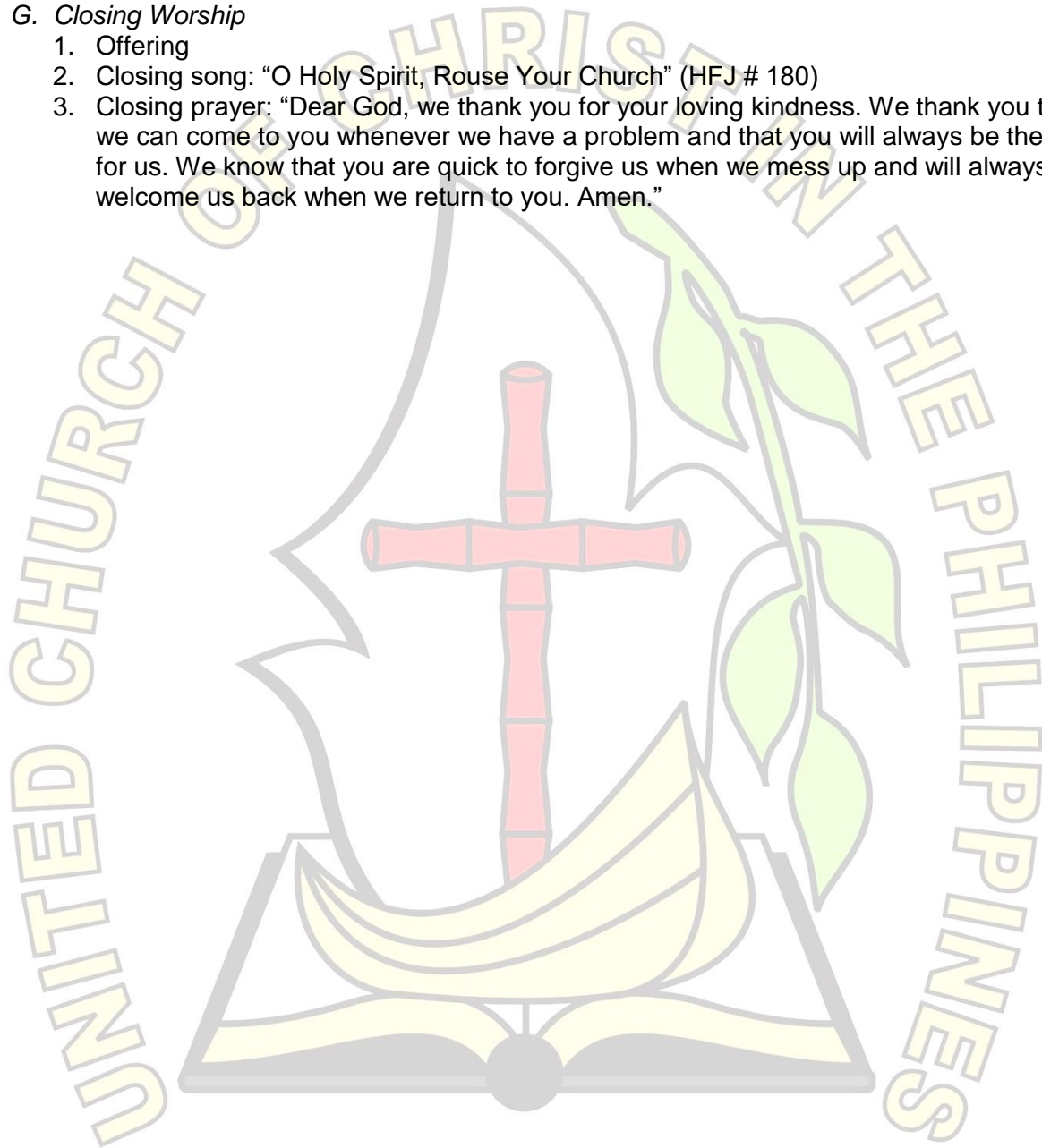
Ask: What is it that enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other? (God's grace)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Tell the students that forgiving is the work of God.
2. Instruct the students to write some insights on the effect in one's life being forgiving and being forgiven. Tell the class to use this title: My Experience on the Effect of Being Forgiving and Having Been Forgiven.
3. Reflective Action: Tell the class to share what they have written on their paper.

G. *Closing Worship*

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (HFJ # 180)
3. Closing prayer: "Dear God, we thank you for your loving kindness. We thank you that we can come to you whenever we have a problem and that you will always be there for us. We know that you are quick to forgive us when we mess up and will always welcome us back when we return to you. Amen."



March 25, 2018

Sixth Sunday in Lent/Palm Sunday Lectionary

Entry to Jerusalem

Old Testament: Psalm 118:26 (NRSV)

²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD: We bless you from the house of the LORD.

New Testament: Mark 11:1-10 (NRSV)

Jesus Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

General Concept: Jesus defines his being the Messiah not from the Jewish and imperial perspectives but according to God's call.

Key Concepts in Youth: Jesus enters Jerusalem to obey God's will and purpose.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The entire chapter of Psalm 118 can be observed as taking place in the context of worship to God for the protection and victory experienced by the worshipper. Some scholars attribute this psalm to David during his ascension to the throne or someone appointed by God for a higher position praising God with so much joy. Verse 26 is a line used by priests to greet and welcome pilgrims who are entering the gate of Jerusalem during the celebration of Passover.

Jesus' triumphant entry to Jerusalem is part of the fulfillment of his messianic plan. Jesus had long foreseen the arrival of this moment and he knew the outcome of this occasion. Jesus' entering Jerusalem marked the climax of his ministry and this portrays his total obedience and loyalty to God despite the plots and plans of religious leaders against him. Jesus' entry to Jerusalem conveys a strong message to the authorities that Jesus was not afraid of their power nor the suffering that awaits him. This is also to provide encouragement to his disciples who are worried and afraid of losing Jesus.

As Jesus marched into Jerusalem, people celebrated by waving palm leaves and putting their cloaks on the ground to welcome him in anticipation of the eventual restoration of Israel's glory as in the time of David. But how people welcomed Jesus in his supposed triumphant entry was nothing special at all. This is a common expression by people who welcome generals in the same manner during their homecoming after winning battles. Jesus' riding on a colt instead of a war-horse or chariot suggests that he came in peace and not as a conquering savior that people wanted and hoped him to be.

Jesus's entry to Jerusalem is his concrete expression of responding to God's call in total, unconditional obedience. His entry was not to fulfill the vision of the Jews nor to satisfy their desire for

glory, but to respond to God's call to come to Jerusalem to fulfill God's plan to establish God's reign here on earth.

The passage does not describe Jesus' response to the celebration and call of the people. This is unusual since Jesus often responds by instructing people not to disclose his identity as the Messiah. Nearing the end of his ministry, Jesus perhaps knew that it was time for all people to know his identity as the Messiah specially the religious leaders who, understandably, will feel threatened with his coming and being acclaimed as the Davidic Messiah. His seeming triumphant entry represents the open and public acknowledgement of his messianic claim and the alternative reality and alternative message that he represents which has given hope to the hopeless and powerless of the land. This is certainly most threatening for the powers-that-be in the land who would do and resort to anything just to protect the status quo. The prevailing system benefited them so much that they prevented any meaningful change to occur that will benefit the majority especially the poor of the land. The day of Jesus' entry was the start of the open clash between the powerful Jewish and Roman authorities and the solitary Jesus who had taken an unequivocal stand of solidarity with the powerless and marginalized of the land. The powerful simply had to act to stop the advance of this alternative reality and message this simple carpenter had been proclaiming and witnessing to. They had to immediately act against him. This was the way Jesus' mission was to be fulfilled as he courageously confronted his soon to be persecutors and executors.

God in Jesus expects his believers to respond in similar degree of loyalty and obedience to the call of God to proclaim the gospel and establish the Kingdom even in the face of danger, and resistance from those who may feel threatened. Jesus' followers must be prepared for the consequent sacrifice and suffering that await. Furthermore, believers must not be distracted with the glamour, cheers, and ecstatic ovation while marching toward God's call. Instead, believers must stay focused, committed and faithful not to satisfy others' expectation, but to simply and sincerely respond to God's call in all loyalty and obedience to God's gracious, loving, and liberating will.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

As Jesus and his retinue entered the gates of Jerusalem, the people waved branches, put clothing on the road and shouted his name in acclamation signifying the entry of the long-awaited messiah. It was a rehearsed action after the manner of welcoming a Roman military commander returning from conquest. They expected Jesus to seize control of Jerusalem, the nation's seat of power. Jesus went on to enter the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers and drove them out with a whip. It was an outrageous act that had a chilling effect on the authorities of the city.

Most probably, the religious leaders went on a hurry to report the incident to the Roman governor with an urgent appeal to quell a rebellion against the Empire. Apparently, Pontius Pilate sent in his soldiers not so much to suppress a real uprising as to oblige and accommodate Rome's allies. It was clear to him that Jesus' action was more symbolic of the Jewish people's aspirations for freedom rather than a real and imminent danger to the Empire. It was also possible that Pilate was a kind of person who could not tolerate a mere nuisance to the Pax Romana.

But Jesus had other things in mind when he entered Jerusalem. He was there for a meeting with destiny—the fate of a suffering messiah. Everything that happened from the time he accepted God's call in the wilderness up to the moment of his arrival in Jerusalem pointed to just one direction—the cross. He knew what the cross meant to the sufferer since many before him had gone that way. It was the most gruesome way of leaving this world ever invented, the most horrifying prospect of dying. But he could not have known what lay behind the cross. Was it going to be worse than dying by crucifixion? Was it but a passage to a glorious life never disclosed to any human being? Or was it simply the end?

God has disclosed to him the cause for which he was going to suffer and die. But God is silent

about what awaits him after the cross. Perhaps this was more horrifying than crucifixion itself. But it is not for him to know. It was sufficient for Jesus to know that he was putting his fate completely in God's hands.

I. Objectives

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

1. define the meaning of a suffering servant in the context of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem;
2. debate on the possible feelings of Jesus as he obeyed God knowing that he will be in harm's way; and
3. recall occasions when we struggle to obey God because of the sacrifice that results from our decisions

II. Concept: Jesus enters Jerusalem to obey God's will and purpose.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Thank you, O God, for your love." Tell each student to shake hands with their classmates and say: "Thank you, Lord, for the gift of friendship."
3. Opening song: "Who is He?" (Tune: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee")
Who is He who comes in triumph? Who is He who comes to die,
Comes in peace and comes in power, Hidden One now lifted high?
Jesus, Jesus, Lord, Messiah, Mighty master of the grave!
See Him ride, the King of Glory! God Incarnate come to save!
See Him there in humble splendor. Hear them shouting all around.
Joy explodes in wild procession. Praise is now the victor's crown.

"Glory, glory in the highest!" Like the angels, hear them sing,
Dancing round the long-awaited, once their hope, and now their King.
Rise and join the glad procession! Hear them passing by again.
All the ransomed, all God's children, marching to Jerusalem!
Look ahead, the gates of splendor! Hear the everlasting hymn!
Open wide your hearts in worship! Let the King of Glory in!

B. Getting Ready

In groups of three or four, invite the class to ponder on these questions. After the group discussion, tell them to share their thoughts with the big group.

1. What sort of welcome do you think Jesus will have if he will arrive in your hometown and would visit your church?
2. What would it be like when Jesus arrives? Who would be there?
3. How do you think Jesus would be treated (huge traffic, expensive cars, red carpet, lots of media)? How do you think would Jesus feel being welcomed by your town and particularly to your church?

C. Learning Time

1. Greet the students and make them feel special and welcome. Talk about a parade or waiting for a special person to come to town. Ask: "Have you seen a parade? How do people act when they see a parade? Why do you think they feel that way?"
2. Inform the class that in Bible times, there were special days when all people left what they were doing and, if they were physically able, went to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. One

of these celebrations is the Passover. Everyone who could make the trip to Jerusalem did so — even Jesus and his friends.

Say: In today's Bible story, the people are excited about the arrival of one person in particular. They have heard about him. They have heard about all that he has done. Now they want to see him for themselves. Ask: "Who do you think it is?"

3. Tell the class to read in unison Psalm 118:26 and Mark 11:1-10.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Discuss the lesson. Ask these questions.

- a. Why is it necessary for Jesus to go to Jerusalem? How is it related to the 26th verse of Psalm 118? (To fulfill what the prophets said and to fulfill his being a Messiah.)
- b. Why did Jesus ask for a donkey instead of a mighty horse? (He fulfilled what the prophets said that a donkey symbolizes humility and servanthood.)
- c. How did Jesus manifest his being a suffering servant when he entered Jerusalem? (He came in peace and he was ready to serve.)
- d. What could Jesus have felt when he knew that in obeying God, he would be in harm's way? (He wanted to avoid it but he obeyed the will of God.)
- e. Would it make a difference if Jesus decided otherwise? Would he still be saving the world? What could happen to humankind if Jesus disobeyed God? (Answers may vary.)

2. Share an experience when you struggle to obey God because of the sacrifice that result from your decisions. Tell how you managed to persevere and eventually succeeded in obeying God. Ask: "Have you had any second thoughts of quitting and leave everything behind?"

3. Debate. Group the class into two groups and allow them to decide who will stand for the affirmative and the negative side: Is Jesus being a suffering servant necessary to achieve salvation for all?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem? (Jesus enters Jerusalem to obey God's will and purpose.) Why is Jesus' absolute obedience to God necessary to achieve salvation? (It is the only way by which humans can be saved from the sins of this world.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord." (Psalm 118:26)
2. Tell the class to simulate a TV program and prepare an evening report of the contextualized triumphal entry of Jesus to Jerusalem using a news format. Assign students who will do these tasks: news scriptwriter, the anchor person, the camera people, field reporter, and the news director. Assign also the audience.
3. After the news report, let the class exchange ideas on how this report will be received by the people today. Encourage the class to comment on the following concepts: All of us can rely on God's Word. Jesus showed his humility and servanthood when he entered Jerusalem. We can show our humility and servanthood when we obey God's will and purpose for us. There are ways by which we could share God's love with others.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Who is He?" (Tune: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee")
3. Closing prayer: "Our Parent God, teach us how to live in obedience to your word. Lead us to follow your way, truth and life. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."