



Adult 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 Adult: ***Jesus embraced his destiny as a suffering 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. enumerate the different things that Isaiah foretells the Messiah will suffer;
2. compare what Jesus describes about his death and resurrection with the prophecy of Isaiah;
3. realize that being the Messiah, Jesus is ready to face suffering; and
4. share one's experiences involving suffering for Christ's sake.

II. Concept: Jesus embraced his destiny as a suffering Messiah.

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 a warm hug. Make a distinct hand-shake for your learners.
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

Teach the song "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?" (HFJ 286) and discuss the highlights.

Won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?

Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too. We are

pilgrims on a journey, we are travelers on the road;

We are here to help each other go the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the shadow of your fear;

I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long hear.

I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh, I'll laugh with you I will share your joy and sorrow 'til we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,

Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony. Won't you

let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I may have

the grace to let you be my servant, too.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read the biblical texts and the explanation under each.
 - a. (Excerpt from the Exegesis) *Isaiah 53:1-12*. 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.

- b. (Excerpt from the Companion Guide) Matthew 16:21-23. Jesus tells his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day will be raised. Peter rebuked Jesus for he did not know understand why Jesus must do this. But Jesus corrected Peter for his mind setting was not on divine things but on human things.

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.

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.

2. Tell the class to enumerate the different things that the Messiah will suffer as foretold by Isaiah.
3. Let the class compare what Jesus describes about his death and resurrection in Matthew 16:21-23 with the prophecy of Isaiah. Tell the class to read the verses in the OT text and underline the verses in the NT text to describe the suffering Messiah.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Ask these questions.

1. How will you compare the suffering Messiah referred to in Matthew 16:21-23 and suffering Messiah foretold by Isaiah?
2. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples about his incoming suffering?
3. When was the time the disciples finally understood about Jesus' Messiahship?
4. When Peter prevented Jesus from fulfilling his mission of God's plan of salvation, was Jesus right in saying that Peter thinks only of the things of men and not of the things of God? Explain your answer.
5. Why do you think Jesus considered the way of the cross as the only way to fulfill his mission?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How did Jesus embrace his destiny as a suffering Messiah? How do we embrace our calling in fulfilling God's purpose for us?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss 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 56:6)
2. Ask the class to list down ways by which they can fulfill their calling (the way of their cross). They can refer to the UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990) found in the UCCP website.
3. 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: I will follow Jesus even if it takes _____ . I will be loyal and faithful to God by _____
2. Offering
3. Closing songs: "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" (Hymn of a Faith Journey # 149) and "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?" (HFJ 286)
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)

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 Adult: Jesus, as the Messiah, commits to help all, especially, the poor and the marginalized.

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 Ishmael and the daughter of the Canaanite woman are helped by God;
2. discuss the choice made by Jesus to become the Messiah for all people;
3. realize how people are used by God to extend help to those who are poor and marginalized; and
4. share one's resolve to extend help unconditionally to those who really need it.

II. Materials

The Holy Bible (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer:
3. Opening song: "All Because of Our Sins" (Dahllan Sa Atang Mga Kasalanan) Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 154 Words: Cirilo A. Rigos; English Translation: Dominica Faurillo, 2002; Music: Hilarion F. Rubio

B. Getting Ready

Let the class read the words of St. Teresa of Avila and share their thoughts about it. Refer to the activity sheet.

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which to look out

Christ's compassion to the world
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless people now."

- St. Teresa of Avila

C. Learning Time

1. Form two groups. Assign the first group to read and discuss the 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. Tell each group to discuss the following:
 - a. Description of Hagar and Ishmael for Group 1
 - b. Description of the Canaanite woman and her daughter for Group 2
 - c. Their similarity of circumstances that require urgent need and attention
 - d. The way God showed God's love for them although the women are not Jews
 - e. The value or significance of Jesus modelling his messiahship for all
2. After their group discussion, have each group share to the class the insights that they have gleaned from the two stories.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Tell the class to say whether they agree or disagree with the following and explain briefly their answers.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 to God's gift of salvation.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How did Jesus manifest his being the Messiah for all people? Why do you think God use people to extend help to those in need?

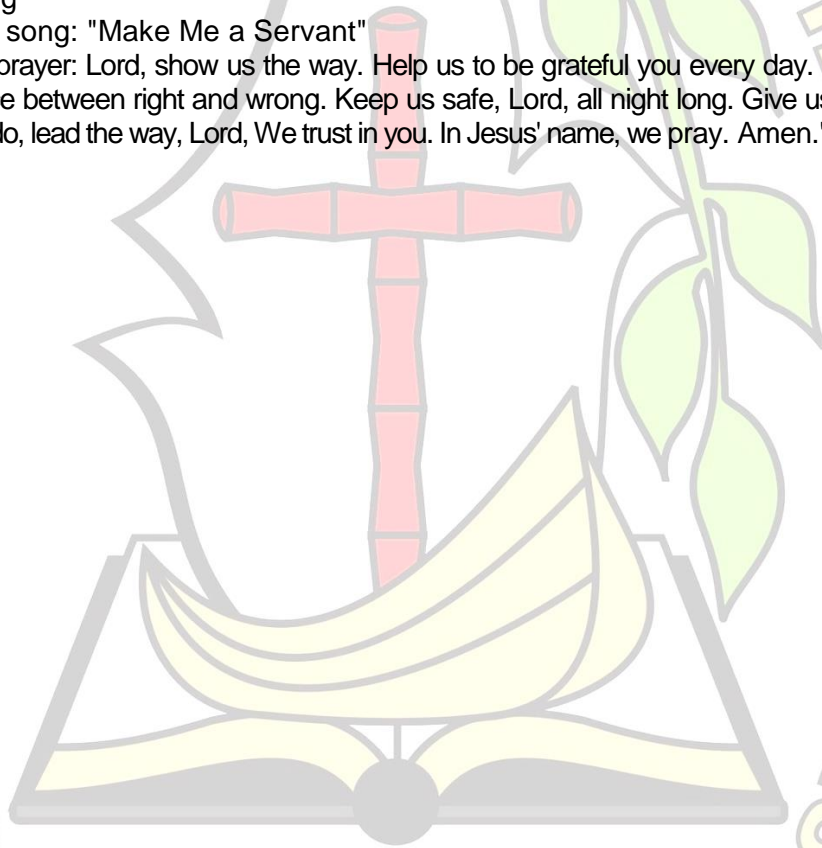
F. Applying the Biblical Truth

Tell the class to choose anyone of the following and make some life applications showing their unconditional love.

1. Start a food and relief bank in your church. Think of practical ways of doing this.
2. Conduct Disaster Management and First Aid Seminar. Remind them the things they need to know about service.
 - a. It's how people know God's grace (an outward discipline)
 - b. It's not optional (commanded in the Scriptures).
 - c. It's hard (disciplined) life.

G Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Make Me a Servant"
3. Closing prayer: Lord, show us the way. Help us to be grateful you 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 Adult: Jesus is challenging the powerful and the wealthy to become compassionate, repentant, and 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, compassion, and justice;
2. describe how these characteristics can be shown by kings and leaders as expressed in the psalm;
3. explain why Jesus pointed out to the wealthy and powerful the need to repent, by showing compassion to those in need, and by being just, as signs of willingness to follow Jesus; and

4, realize that sharing and caring are encouraged among the believers to prepare them for the coming of the Kingdom.

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

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

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Our compassionate and just God, we thank you for gathering us once again to engage and learn more about your words. Inspire and move us to become more mature 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. Tell the class to complete this table, then form dyads. Let each dyad compare their work with the other dyads and make agreements. Let each group present their work.

Life Treasures 10 years ago	Reasons and Insights for choice	Life Treasures today	Reasons and Insights for choice
1.			
2.			
3.			

2. After the presentation, let the class glean from their work the meaning of compassion, justice, and repentance.

C. Learning Time

1. Form two groups and assign each group to read the verses and discuss them according to the given outline.
 - a. Psalm 72:1-7
 - 1) The writer of the psalm and the significance of his position
 - 2) The prayer for the king and leader to be righteous
 - 3) The consequences of being a righteous leader

b. Mark 10:17-22

- 1) The visit of the rich young man and his request to Jesus
- 2) The free offer of eternal life by Jesus and the refusal of the rich young man of God's salvation
- 3) The difficulty of the rich and powerful in choosing the right ingredients of enjoying eternal life

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Present the following paragraphs and let the class explain their thoughts about each one of them.
 - a. Psalm 72:1-7 foretell the characteristics of a righteous king and leader as will be manifested by Jesus, the coming Messiah.
 - b. The verses in Mark 10:17-22 tell about the request of the most precious gift of God to humankind—God's salvation. It is a gift through the grace of God. However, the young man refused this gift because he could not part with his riches.
 - c. Mark lived during the Roman regime where there were a few rich and powerful while so many were poor and struggling because of very unequal distribution of wealth. In the Gospel of Mark (and in the other two synoptic gospels, Matthew and Luke), Jesus tells the rich to sell their possessions and share their riches with the poor. The readers also need to consider the danger of the rich and powerful in making their riches their god and their life's treasures their life.
 - d. While the rich young man confessed that he followed the commandments, yet he missed some important values while following these commandments—equitable sharing of God's resources, compassion for the needy, kindness to the weak and helpless, and trust in God for the sufficiency of his needs on earth. Without these values, it is really difficult to follow Jesus.
2. Go back to the table on life's treasures. Ask the class whether their choices of treasures at the present are confirmed to be right.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How significant to the present-day Christians is the challenge of Jesus to the powerful and the wealthy to become compassionate, repentant, and just?

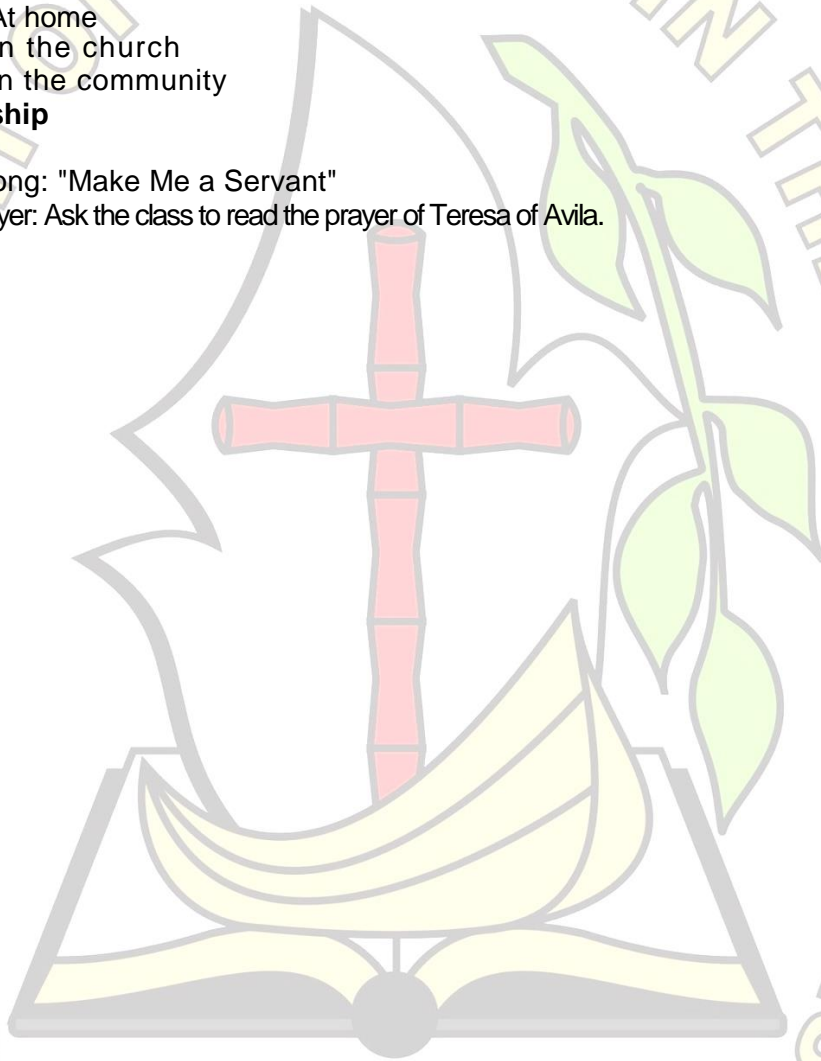
F. Applying the Biblical Truth

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. Encourage the class to write one way for each place where they can show compassion and kindness to others. As followers of Jesus who proclaims equitable sharing in the Kingdom of God, what can we do in order to manifest this?
 - a. At home
 - b. In the church
 - c. In the community

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Make Me a Servant"
3. Closing prayer: Ask the class to read the prayer of Teresa of Avila.



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 Adult: **Jesus is the embodiment 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. describe God's grace as Isaiah describes it;
3. describe God's grace as illustrated in the hiring of the workers in the vineyard; and
4. show one's appreciation in the manner God shows his love through Jesus even though we do not deserve it.

II. Concept: Jesus is the embodiment 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. Initiate a conversation about how gracious God is to everyone this week.
2. Opening prayer: "Our loving and gracious God, we thank you for your love you have shown to us each day through Jesus Christ. Continue to inspire and direct us with this love as we journey with you every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "The Old Rugged Cross" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey" # 156)

B. Getting Ready

Group the class into dyads. Let them talk about a ministry that they are involved. Have them talk about the effect of these attitudes: being happy with the accomplishments of others versus being envious with the accomplishments of others. Let them talk about showing grace by encouraging the first attitude when relating with others. After each dyad has finished discussing, call on selected groups to share their thoughts to the big group.

C. Learning Time

1. Divide the class into two groups and assign the first group with Isaiah 58:6-12 and the second group, Matthew 20:1-16.
2. Guide the first group in discussing the OT text. Tell that Isaiah emphasized the following:
 - a. Importance of true fasting: Sacrificial giving to the poor and weak by sharing food and clothes
 - b. God's provision to people who care for the poor, the helpless, and the weak
 - c. The foretelling of the coming of the Lord
3. Guide the second group in discussing the NT text using this outline:
 - a. The landowner giving work and same pay to all workers even beyond legal

considerations and God's grace by offering everyone with the gift of salvation

- b. The workers accepting the work offer and the people receiving the gift of salvation
- c. The workers who got stuck with envy and missed the gracious intention of the landowner and the submission to God's will by the believers
- d. The inclusive grace of God by giving equal chances to people who heard the Good News in the past, at present, and in the future

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson.

1. Why do you think God is pleased with fasting that involves sacrificial giving to the poor, helpless, and weak? (See Isaiah 58:6-7)
2. How can we make the following work for us today?
 - a. Your light coming out like the dawn
 - b. Your quick healing
 - c. God answering whenever you call on Him
 - d. God guiding you always
 - e. God satisfying your needs
3. How did the landowner show God's grace among his workers? (He was a kind and generous employer.)
4. How can you define God's grace based on this story? (Grace is when God offers the gift of salvation to all people though nobody merits it. Grace is the reason why God sent his son to die on a cross to save us from our sins. Grace is when we believe in God and receive eternal life.)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Why is Jesus the embodiment of God's grace?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss 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. Ask: What can we do to respond to God's grace into our lives? Encourage the class to express God's grace in their chosen church ministry. Let them determine the recipient of their plan and prepare a practical way of implementing it.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering: "Give Thanks"
2. Closing song: "Amazing Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey" # 208)

3. Closing prayer: O God our Parent, we thank you for gracious love and care to us. Your extravagant grace overwhelms us even to those who are hard to love. Move us to be gracious also to others. 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

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

I. Objectives

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

1. explain the virtue of being forgiving and reconciling as exemplified by Jesus;
2. note the act of forgiveness as illustrated by the parable;
3. state the significance of a forgiving community of faith to all its members;
4. list the church ministries that promote forgiveness; and
5. make a commitment to forgive others and accept forgiveness from others.

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

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

Think-Pair-Share Activity is a discussion strategy that can be used as pre-reading activity. Each student becomes an active participant.

1. Let the adults form pairs. One's partner would be the person sitting beside her/him.
2. Let them think of a situation where they were being hurt by somebody. Have them share these situations with their partners.
3. Discuss what process was used in forgiving or reconciling with that somebody who did wrong to him/her.
4. Conclude by coming back together as a whole group and having students share their ideas and discuss the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit.

C. Learning Time

1. Ask the adults to read in unison Jeremiah 31:34 and realize that God said I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more.
2. Tell the adults to read responsively the verses in Luke 15:11-24. Direct their attention to the characters of the story.

3. Let the student think deeper about the forgiving power of the Father over his prodigal son.
2. Before the lesson, collect some play money, sandals, a play ring, some food scraps in a plastic bag or bowl, a toy pig, a toy cow or picture of a cow, a party invitation or balloon, a Bible, and some binoculars. Show your child the items, one at a time, and see if they can guess how they relate to the story. You could also see who can find the passage in Luke first that relates to the object:
 - Money - 12 - "give me my share of the estate."
 - Sandals - 22 - "and sandals on his feet."
 - Ring - 22 - "Put a ring on his finger"
 - Food Scraps - 16 - "He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating"
 - Pig - 15 - "sent him to his fields to feed pigs."
 - Cow - 23 - "Bring the fattened calf and kill it."
 - Party Invitation or balloon - 23 - "Let's have a feast and celebrate. "
 - Binoculars - 20 - "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him"

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Tell them to react to the following statements regarding forgiving:

1. Christ has forgiven us so we forgive others.
2. We are able to forgive or pass over the wrong done by a person to another in the same spirit and manner demonstrated by Jesus in his life and ministry.
3. We are able to reconcile when we commit ourselves to actively find ways and means in bringing together conflicting parties and creating in the process a spirit of acceptance and understanding of each other.
4. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. We therefore need God's strength and grace to be able to forgive others.
5. Forgiveness ends the cycle of hatred, guilt and violence.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: What is the importance of forgiveness-reconciliation-acceptance to us? Who helped us bring unity, wholeness, completeness, totality among us?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Memory Verse: Luke 15:21
2. Let them list the church ministries that promotes forgiveness I support the Peace-making ministry of our Church (e.g., call for the resumption of the NDFP-GPH Peace Talks)

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Reflective Action: I commit to forgive others and to accept forgiveness from others.
3. Closing song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 180)
4. 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

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 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 Adult: Jesus enters Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny and calling as the suffering Messiah.

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 issue of whether Jesus entered Jerusalem victoriously or not;
3. express the entry to Jerusalem as the defining moment for Jesus as the Messiah; and
4. recall occasions when people obey God by putting their complete trust in Him.

11. Concept: Jesus enters Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny and calling as the suffering Messiah.

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 warm hand of fellowship. Initiate a conversation about the need of obeying God at all cost. Make it a free-flowing

discussion.

2. Opening prayer: "O God, we are ready to meet your Son like the people in Jerusalem, shouting Hosanna in the Highest. You are our God! Inspire us today as we go back in time where you obediently fulfilled your being a suffering servant in order to save us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" [HFJ # 148]

B. Getting Ready

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Ask each group to recall and discuss how God spoke to people in the biblical times (directly by the prophets, through objects like the burning bush, quieting angry waves, through the angels, through dreams).
2. Ask: How does God speak to us today? Encourage discussion. (Some possible answers are: God speaks through similar ways as in the biblical times; through significant adults like parents, pastors, teachers, friends, nature, prayer, music, worship, Sunday school lessons, etc.).

C. Learning Time

1. Remind the class that today is Palm Sunday.
2. Tell the class to read the biblical texts. Discuss the verses using the given ideas.
 - a. Psalm 118:26. The psalmist prophesied that that the Messiah will make a triumphal entry to Jerusalem.
 - b. Mark 11:1-10. Jesus was at the Mount of Olives. He asked his disciples to get him a donkey that he will use in entering Jerusalem. The donkey is the symbol of Jesus' humility and his being a servant. As prophesied, Jesus entered Jerusalem and it was his defining moment in presenting himself as the Messiah. The crowd prepared his path and praised him as the blessed one who comes in the name of the Lord.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Discuss the lesson. Ask these questions.
 - a. How are the OT and NT texts related? (The OT text is a prophecy and **the** NT text is **the** fulfillment of the prophecy by Jesus, from a Christian perspective.)
 - b. Why do you think Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was his defining moment as the Messiah? (It was the appointed time for him to tell everybody that he was ready to die to save the world.)
 - c. Jesus knew that in entering Jerusalem, he is obeying God. How did this decision of Jesus show that he is the suffering servant? (Jesus was ready to face his death in order to serve humankind.)
 - d. What is the significance of using a donkey instead of a horse? (A person riding on a donkey shows humility and servanthood.)

- e. Jesus submitted his trust in God and obeyed God completely. How can people obey God today? (By putting their complete trust and dependence on God)
- f. If Jesus chose to disobey God and did not accept his death, what could happen to us? (Answers may vary.)

Debate. Tell the class to debate on this question: "Is Jesus' entry to Jerusalem victorious or not?" Assign the affirmative and the negative sides.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem? (Jesus enters Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny and calling as the suffering Messiah.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss with the class the importance of saying hosanna in the context of the challenges in their daily life.
2. Encourage the class to list ways on how they can follow and obey God in order to experience abundant life. Remind them of the Kingdom values such as love, compassion, peace, patience, forgiveness, justice, and unity.
3. Tell the class to share their thoughts if Jesus would come now. Ask them what they will prepare, what they will say, and what they will do.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Who is He?" (Tune: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee")
3. Closing prayer: "Our God, would we have understood? Would we have been blinded by our own expectations? Like your followers, we want so much from you, dear Lord, and we want it now. Help us today to see where we have allowed cataracts to build up and cloud our mind's eye. Bring us back to the way, the truth and the life. Amen."