

Episcopal Migration Ministries
Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Luke 4:21-30

Background: This is the fourth in a four-part series focusing on refugee resettlement through Episcopal Migration Ministries. Today's lesson focuses on the prophetic ministry that is part of the ministry of refugee resettlement.

Theme: The Path of the Prophet

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or copies of the lesson, copies of The Book of Common Prayer, copies of the activities you intend to use.

Beginning: The ministry of a prophet is not to prophesy or predict the future. It is to call God's people to ministries of justice, compassion, and love for God's beloved world and all God's children, in the here and now. The Biblical prophets cried out to call the People of Israel back to their call as God's Chosen and Beloved: to do justice and love mercy, to care for the orphan and the widow, to offer hospitality and welcome to foreigners and strangers in their land.

A prophet's words are often unpopular. A prophet speaks a truth that the people do not want to hear. In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus reflect on this very thing.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, you have given each of us gifts for ministry. Some of us are called to be evangelists, others pastors, other prophets. Be with us as we discern, individually and together, who you are calling us to be in our community and our world. What role would you have us play, Lord, in your work of redemption? In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Scripture: Luke 4:21-30 Ask two volunteers – a man and a woman – to take turns and read the Gospel lesson aloud, twice, to the group. After the passage has been read once, sit in reflection and silence for about a minute. Then, listen to the passage again.

Importantly, reflect with the group on Jesus' challenging words – Jesus, who was Jewish, preaching to his brothers and sisters, who are Jewish.

Jesus speaks about the Hebrew prophets reaching out to help and share God's mercy with Gentiles, those who were not Jewish. Elijah was sent by God to a Gentile widow, who provided him food and drink. Later, Elijah prayed for the woman's son, who had died, and he was brought back to life. Elisha healed a Gentile man named Naaman, a Syrian, from leprosy. The prophetic tradition that is our heritage is one in which God sends his people out to serve, love, and care for those who are different from us – people from a different land, tribe, nation, or religion.

(If interested, here is a piece written by The Rev. William Willimon, Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, which discusses this Gospel text in light of current events: <http://bit.ly/Willimon>.)

Reflection Questions:

- How is the Church called to proclaim God's love, mercy, and justice to the wider culture?
- When is proclaiming the truth of the Gospel unpopular?
- How have you, individually and as a congregation, taken on the role of prophet in the wider culture and community?

Option: Activity 1, Matching Your Gifts with the World's Need

If you used the Called to Transformation (www.calledtoformation.com) gifts discernment activities three weeks ago, the welcoming activities brainstorming last week, and if you have supplemental information about refugee resettlement in your area, today is the day to 1) bring the two activities and resettlement information together to begin to discern your call to mission, and 2) discover and explore your call to prophetic ministry of advocacy.

Bring the newsprint or materials from January 10 and the newsprint from last week together, displaying them for all to see. Reviewing and reflecting on the gifts of the congregation (January 10), and the brainstorming of potential needs (January 24), begin the process of matching gifts to needs. Does a member of your congregation have proficiency in another language, or experience teaching English as a Second Language? Match this with the potential need that refugees might have to practice and improve their English skills. Does a member of your congregation have a local business with entry-level employment opportunities? Match this with the potential need refugees may have for their first American job. Continue this activity, working together to match gifts with potential needs.

Next, if members of your group did some research on local resettlement in the past week, ask them to share what they learned: specifically, what agencies are working locally, what opportunities there are to assist the local agency and to welcome your newest neighbors. "Flag" or set aside items from your gifts-needs matching activity that seem to align with opportunities to engage with and support the local resettlement agency.

Ask a member of your group to act as note-taker or secretary, to type up the results of the conversation, including the matching activity and the potential ways the congregation could assist the local agency. Save this document for your future planning and work.

During the season of Lent, consider using various resources from Episcopal Migration Ministries to learn more about refugee resettlement, and reach out to the local resettlement agency to ask if someone from their office could come speak during a coffee hour or adult forum.

Option: Activity 2, Discerning a Call to the Prophetic Ministry of Advocacy

Background: Following the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, refugee resettlement, in general, and resettlement of Syrians and Iraqis, in particular, came under attack. Misinformation about the rigorous and lengthy security screening process for Syrians and Iraqis was widespread, promulgated by elected leaders and political candidates. The House of Representatives passed

HR 4038, the so-called American SAFE act, a proposal which may still go to the Senate in 2016, and which would have effectively halt the resettlement of innocent men, women, and children fleeing civil war and persecution in Syria and Iraq, including Iraqis who served alongside American interests as interpreters, contractors, and aides. For a time in December 2015, it appeared as though certain “riders” would be attached to the omnibus funding bill, containing provisions similar to HR 4038. While none were attached and refugee resettlement for all populations remained safe, funded in the omnibus, we are likely to continue to see bills that seek to curtail, halt, or cease resettlement of vulnerable populations in the weeks and months to come.

Beyond the threats to the life-saving humanitarian resettlement program, in the final quarter of 2015, the American Muslim community also faced significant prejudice, hatred, and suspicion from their neighbors. Death threats and hate crimes were on the rise, and many Muslim families feared for their own safety and security.

Threats to the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness for the American Muslim community, as well as attacks on the resettlement program, are likely to come up again throughout 2016 and beyond. This is a critical time, a turning point in our culture. It is a time when the Church has a important role to play. We have a prophetic message to share within our communities, our state, and the wider culture. Ours is a message of hope, of compassion, of understanding, and of love for the stranger, whom the Bible teaches us is our neighbor. This is a moment for us to live into our call to the prophetic ministry of advocacy.

Discussion:

Pose the following questions to your group:

- How is your congregation called to be a prophetic voice, in this time?
- What skills, gifts, and resources do you have to offer in this ministry?
- What existing relationships do you have – ecumenical and interfaith – that can help amplify your words of welcome? What relationships can you build?

Ideas of Follow-Up Activities: There are many options and opportunities, including writing or calling your elected officials, submitting op-eds to the local paper, sharing your views in a reflection or blog post, joining in prayer and solidarity with others in virtual and real spaces.

Many Episcopal congregations are joining with ecumenical and interfaith partners throughout Epiphany and into Lent to host community-wide prayer vigils for refugees, interfaith prayers for peace, and other similar events. Other congregations are making their church space open for community education, offering “Islam 101” classes in partnership with the local mosque and Muslim leaders.

How is your church called to be part of this movement, this work of welcoming all those who are our neighbors?

Resources from Episcopal Migration Ministries:

- *Mission and Advocacy to Support Refugees*: On-Demand Video, <http://bit.ly/CrisisWebinarVideo>

- *Creating Welcome* Resources Page: Information on the refugee crisis and welcoming refugee neighbors, how you can help, prayer and vigil resources, on-demand educational videos, resources to stand with your Muslim brothers and sisters, and more:
<http://bit.ly/CreatingWelcome>

Closing Prayer: In place of a traditional prayer, ask the group to stand and form a circle, taking hands. Each member is invited to offer a short reflection on where they felt God's presence in the day's conversation. Invite each member to begin, "I felt God's presence in....." or "I felt God's presence when....."

After each member has offered what they wish, ask the group to offer one more reflection. "I offer a prayer for....." Each member is invited to offer their special intentions.

Episcopal Migration Ministries

Episcopal Migration Ministries welcomes thousands of refugees each year from conflict zones across the globe. Working in partnership with offices and groups within the church as well as with governments, nongovernment organizations, and a network of 30 affiliate offices in 26 dioceses, EMM provides vital services for thousands of refugee families upon their arrival in the United States. More information at www.episcopalchurch.org/emm.

The Episcopal Public Policy Network

The Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) is a grassroots network of Episcopalians across the country dedicated to carrying out the Baptismal Covenant call to "strive for justice and peace" through the active ministry of public policy advocacy. EPPN is part of The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations located in Washington, D.C. The actions, programs, and ministry of the Office of Government Relations are based entirely on policies approved by the church meeting in General Convention or by the Executive Council. More at <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org>.

If you have questions, feel free to email or call Allison Duvall, EMM's manager for Church Relations and Engagement, at (212) 716-6027 or aduvall@episcopalchurch.org. She will be happy to assist you in enriching your lesson plan with information about Episcopal Migration Ministries and refugee resettlement.

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