

Lesson Plans that Work

Faith Practice and Climate Justice

Lesson Plans for Young Adults: Lesson Five

Theme: Practicing faith means dying and rising with Christ.

Background: As Easter people, we know that the love of God wins out over sin and death in the end. We also know that we are called to walk in the way of Christ which is the way of the cross. Just as Jesus took up his cross, we are also called to take up our cross as we follow him. The climate crisis happening right now is a cross we can't avoid. By accepting it as reality and working to address it, we serve God and seek the way to eternal life.

Supplies Needed: You will need a prayer table, a candle, a prayerbook, and Bibles for each participant. If you have a crucifix, you can add it to the table as well. If you are in person, you will need clipboards with a piece of paper and a writing instrument for each person. If you are gathering a young adult group for the first time, and meeting in person, get blank nametags for people to fill out with name and pronouns.

Before: Prepare your prayer table. Open the prayerbook to p. 99 "A Collect for Fridays" and place it on the table open to this page.

Beginning: Gather around the prayer table. Begin with any opening routine your group usually uses. If you are a new group, start with the basics: welcome new people, assure people that this is a safe space to be honest and also to pass if you aren't comfortable speaking, tell them that you expect a variety of backgrounds and experiences and we're here to learn with and from each other. Invite people to share highs and lows from the past week. Remind everyone that on Good Friday, we remember Jesus' death, which happened three days before his resurrection. Ask everyone how many participated in Good Friday worship this year, or any year. Ask them how many participated in Easter Sunday worship this year, or any year. If anyone has gone to Good Friday worship, encourage them to describe it for the rest of the group.

Opening Prayer: Light the candle, tell the students the prayer is adapted from one prayed every Friday by Episcopalians honoring the death of Christ on Good Friday, and pray:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Tell the story: If you have not yet, or if some people are new, share the "Note on Scripture" in the curriculum overview. Also, share the background above. Then invite everyone to open their Bibles to Matthew 16:21-26.

Invite someone to read aloud Matthew 16:21-23. Summarize what it teaches:

- Jesus knew that he would be killed and rise from the dead, and he told his friends.
- His friend Peter tried to get Jesus to be in denial about it and to stop talking about it, because talking about it made Peter uncomfortable.
- Jesus tells Peter that denying reality comes from Satan, the unholy one.

Invite someone to read aloud Matthew 16:24-26. Summarize what it teaches:

- Jesus teaches Christians that our walk in life is to imitate his. This means we can't be in denial about the death-dealing forces in our day.
- Christ teaches us that we are meant to die to self and rise again. Christianity isn't comfortable.
- Picking up our cross means entering into, rather than denying, what is difficult. By doing this, we practice faith and discover the meaning of resurrection in our own lives.

Make the connection to the climate crisis:

- The powers of the day (religious and political) killed Christ, because they feared his power. But he rose from the dead to show the power of God over the powers of the day.
- Our time in history is a cross we bear. When we accept the climate crisis as part of our lives, we pick up our cross. That's the first step.
- Addressing and mitigating the climate crisis requires radical personal and societal change. Facing this reality can feel like death and dying. It's easier to be in denial. But as disciples we have faith that on the other side is eternal life.

Reflection Questions: What do you notice in this story beyond the points already made? Have you ever had a friend try to make you stay quiet about something that was uncomfortable to discuss? Have you been in a situation like Jesus was with Peter, where you speak a difficult truth despite how hard it is? The climate crisis is a difficult truth to address. How easy is it for you to talk about the climate crisis with friends, at home, at church? Does it feel overwhelming, confusing, or scary to talk about? Or is talking about climate justice an ordinary part of your life? What makes it easier or harder to discuss?

Optional Activity: Hard Truths

Either using the clipboard/paper or an online document, ask people to make a list of everything they do in a typical weekday, starting from when they wake up in the morning and ending when they go to sleep. This is a no-shame list, just meant to surface what their typical day looks like. Then, ask them to go through the list and circle everything on it that supports releasing carbon into the atmosphere. (All transportation that is not carbon-neutral; time in buildings that are not carbon neutral (including the church); all food that is not carbon-neutral... they will probably need to circle everything.)

Discuss your lists. Is there anyone who has something on their list that is NOT circled? Is it a result of public policy and/or individual choice? How have participants attempted to make shifts in their own lives to avert the climate crisis? Ask for stories from those who have already made life changes related to climate justice. How did they do it? Did it feel like dying to one way of life, in order to find a different one?

Then, ask them to review their lists again. This time, invite them to star any circled items on the list that they have some capacity to shift on their own. Ask them to underline items that require larger policy decisions beyond their ability to control. Discuss what they identified in each of those categories. Ask what kind of mutual aid might be helpful if they sought to shift just one starred item. Also ask if there are larger policy change efforts anyone is already involved in, so you can learn about the existing commitments in the group.

Gather/Ending:

When we think about how much our everyday lives contribute to the climate crisis, it's easy to be overwhelmed. And it can feel like our whole way of life has to die in order for the earth to heal. But we know that when we name hard truths, and when we accept difficult realities, we follow in the path of Jesus who spoke truth and accepted reality. We can trust Jesus to lead us forward when we speak truth. The death and resurrection of Jesus are why we are here today. We can trust Jesus with our lives. Because we trust him, day by day we can turn aside from all that is sin and death, and find our way to newness of life, through his grace. Ask people to share a sentence or two about what stood out to each of them today.

Prayer: To close, pray for all those gathered, and offer the Collect for Fridays again.

Written by The Rev. Nurya Love Parish, Plainsong Farm

Published by the Department of Faith Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2021 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

All rights reserved.