

Lesson Plans that Work

Easter People: Faith Practice and Climate Justice

Lesson Plans for Youth: Lesson One

Theme: I Belong to God's Beloved Creation

Background: Climate change is often portrayed as something that happens on a global scale, far beyond our capacity to understand or affect. Human beings are often portrayed as somehow separate from the rest of God's creation. As we practice faith in an era of climate chaos, we need Scripture's wisdom, which teaches us that we belong in Creation and have a special role to play.

Supplies Needed: You will need a prayer table, a candle, Bibles for each participant, and small shallow dishes of soil (any kind you can access) and water to place on your prayer table. If you have access to branches, seeds, or plants, include them on the prayer table.

Before: Prepare a central table with a candle, your dish of soil, a dish of water, and any other elements of God's creation that you can include. Open the prayerbook to p. 814, "Prayer For Joy in God's Creation," and place it on the table open to this page. If you are using the spiritual gifts assessment, print out a copy for each participant.

Beginning: Gather around the prayer table. Begin by asking about the youth's current climate understanding and backgrounds. Ask: Where you have talked about climate change and justice before today? What do you know about climate change? Do you think it matters to your life?

Opening Prayer: Light your candle, tell the youth the opening prayer is adapted from the one in the prayerbook on the prayer table, and pray:

*Dear God, you have filled the world with beauty.
Open our eyes to see your hand in all your works.
Help us to find joy in your creation
and to serve you with gladness
For Jesus' sake, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

Tell the story: Share the basic facts about climate change: it is real, it is human-caused, it is a long-range consequence of the industrial revolution (when society began to burn fossil fuels), the impacts are serious and those impacts unjustly fall on the poorest and most vulnerable. Tell the youth that the Bible can teach us how to live wisely as servants of God in a broken world. (You may wish to share the "Note on Scripture" in the curriculum overview and the background above.) Then invite the youth to open their Bibles to Genesis 2:4.

Read aloud, or invite youth to read aloud, Genesis 2:4-2:9. Summarize the story so far:

- Human beings are of one substance with the soil - we are the earth.
- God's breath breathes in our lungs - we are animated by the Holy Spirit.
- The first human was named "Adam" before there was male and female.

- In the original Hebrew, “Adam” means human and “adamah” is the word for soil.

Read aloud, or invite youth to read aloud, Genesis 2:15-17. Summarize:

- The first human is placed in a garden and charged with the care of that garden.
- The garden has boundaries - there is one tree that is off-limits.

Read aloud, or invite youth to read aloud, Genesis 2:18-25. Summarize:

- This is a story called an “etiology” which means it is an ancient story told to explain why things were the way they are.
- It teaches us that God didn’t want the first human to be lonely, and that humans need other humans of different genders to find community.
- It teaches us that in the infant stages of human life, we were like infants, who don’t care whether they were wearing clothes or not.

Read aloud, or invite youth to read aloud, Genesis 3:1-13. Summarize:

- The serpent tempts the humans by promising them the power to be like God.
- The humans accept temptation and trespass against the boundaries God set for them.
- So many things happen: they put on clothes, they get scared, they hide from God, and they blame each other instead of taking responsibility.

Reflection Questions: “Climate justice” refers to the reality that the climate is changing due to human activity, and it has an unjust effect on the poorest and most vulnerable. The words “climate justice” speak to the hope for both a stable climate and more fair society. Ask the youth: Do you see any connections between the story from Genesis and climate justice? Listen to their thoughts, and ask them what they think of these ideas:

- God put us on a garden planet and charged us to take care of it, but we haven’t done that very well. Climate change is an unintended consequence of choices our ancestors made to do things like drive cars, fly planes, have light in the middle of the night - to live more like God. Are we more like Adam and Eve than we might think?
- When things go wrong and we are part of the problem, we still have the power to choose. We can choose to blame or to take responsibility. We can hide from God in fear or we can seek God in faith. What might have happened if Adam and Eve had not hid, but looked for God and said, “We made a mistake, we are sorry, please help us try again?”

In-Person Activity: Label the four corners of a large room “Climate” “Justice” “Garden” “Planet.” Pick one youth to stand in the middle of the room with their eyes closed. The rest quietly go to corners of the room of their choosing (socially distant depending on pandemic status). The one in the middle counts to ten, then selects one corner to be “Out” and all the youth in that corner have to sit down. This game is played until only one youth remains in a corner. This youth then “wins” the right to stand in the center and begin again. (This is an adaptation of “Four Corners.”)

Online Activity: Give the youth three minutes to look around their house for an animal, plant, fruit or vegetable or rock or mineral that is from God’s Creation (not human industry).

Tell them the object of the game is to bring back to the group an inanimate object that is the least altered/manipulated/changed by humans. Have the youth present their items and why they chose them. Discuss ways humans change Creation unintentionally (choosing particular items to eat/planting those items/mining rocks/selling houseplants, etc.), then vote to determine a winner.

Alternate Activity (In-Person or Online): You are part of God's Creation! Take time to explore how God created you, and the gifts God has given you to be a healer in this world by taking a spiritual gifts assessment: https://www.fumcr.com/June_8_-_Youth_Spiritual_GiftsTest.pdf

Gather/Ending: Summarize what Scripture teaches: We are not meant to be destructive to the earth. We were created one with the earth. We are not meant to blame others when we sin. We are meant to confess, repent and begin again in love. This is the way of love that brings health and healing instead of harm to future generations.

Prayer: To close, offer the Prayer for Joy in God's Creation again, either in the words of the prayerbook or the adaptation:

*Dear God, you have filled the world with beauty.
Open our eyes to see your hand in all your works.
Help us to find joy in your creation
and to serve you with gladness
For Jesus' sake, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

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