

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources



Summer 2026

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

May 31, 2026—September 6, 2026

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Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Ruth 1:1-22

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. ⁶Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” ¹¹But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been

far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.” ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” ¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

¹⁹So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” ²⁰She said to them, “Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. ²¹I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” ²²So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Secondary Text: Matthew 5:3-9

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Naomi, Ruth, Women

Narrator: In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law,

Naomi: Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.

Narrator: Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her,

Ruth: No, we will return with you to your people.

Narrator: But Naomi said,

Naomi: Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters,

go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.

Narrator: Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said,

Naomi: See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.

Narrator: But Ruth said,

Ruth: Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!

Narrator: When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said,

Women: Is this Naomi?

Narrator: She said to them,

Naomi: Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

Narrator: So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.



Loss and Loyalty, Ruth 1:1-22

A word cloud of terms from the Book of Ruth, with 'Gone with the Wind' as a background watermark. The words are arranged in various sizes and orientations, creating a dense, artistic composition. The largest words are 'Gone', 'Wind', 'Ruth', 'Maiden', 'Moab', 'People', 'Land', 'Babylon', 'Sons', 'Lodge', 'Wives', 'Return', 'Law', 'Two', 'Back', 'Country', 'Growth', 'Dead', 'Both', 'Came', 'Name', 'Lord', 'Moab', 'Brought', 'Return', 'Well', 'Given', 'One', 'Brought', 'Return', 'Well', 'Given', 'One', 'Brought', 'Return', 'Well', 'Given', 'One'. Other words include 'Gone', 'Wind', 'Ruth', 'Maiden', 'Moab', 'People', 'Land', 'Babylon', 'Sons', 'Lodge', 'Wives', 'Return', 'Law', 'Two', 'Back', 'Country', 'Growth', 'Dead', 'Both', 'Came', 'Name', 'Lord', 'Moab', 'Brought', 'Return', 'Well', 'Given', 'One', 'Brought', 'Return', 'Well', 'Given', 'One'. The watermark 'Gone with the Wind' is visible in the background, written in a large, elegant script.



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God holds onto us in our pain, our vulnerability, our hunger, and our uncertainty. And because of that, we have endless permission to grow.

Ruth is a book all about how *hesed*—the steadfast, unending love of God—speaks to us, animates us and shapes us throughout our lives. *Hesed* is on full display here in Chapter 1, considered by most biblical scholars to be the explanation behind why Ruth chooses to cling to her mother-in-law.

It seems that Ruth has truly internalized the faith of the family she married into, and that the thought of disconnecting from it is worse than anything that her already-significant trauma could bring. It seems that Naomi has modeled God's *hesed* for Ruth in their life together so far, and that Ruth is taking this opportunity to model it back.

A legitimate and genuinely beautiful preaching path to take this week is to center around the idea of Ruth having been transformed in the most foundational ways by the unending, unconditional love of our Creator. When have you witnessed this kind of transformation? When might you have been a part of it? Who are the "Naomi"s in your life? The "Ruth"s?

If we take that preaching path, though, we have to be careful not to depend on the fallacy of contrast between Ruth's choice and Orpah's. Orpah disappears in the biblical narrative after she decides to return to Moab, which means that it's easy to make her a rhetorical tool in the story—to reduce her to something that shows the familiarity, conventionality and safety that Ruth *might* have pursued as opposed to the ambiguity, vulnerability and risk that she ultimately embraced.

But Orpah is a whole, complex person with her own story. It would be silly of us to assume that a return to Moab would actually have been easy for her. She was still widowed. She was still hungry. She had lived for a long period of time in a different way and with a different culture from the people who raised her. It's worth noting, too, that Orpah would likely have experienced Naomi's *hesed* from the exact same vantage point as Ruth did! From the position of "daughter in law." Why would we assume that the unending, unconditional love of our Creator wouldn't have changed Orpah's heart just like it did Ruth's?

Perhaps a different preaching path we could take is one of imagination. One of speculation. It's very unlikely that Orpah stayed static in her identity as she departed from her sister- and mother-in-law. Perhaps we could guide our congregations in wondering: How did God's provision guide Orpah to make her ultimate decision? What might Moabite reentry have looked like for her? Who, and how, would Orpah love differently upon getting home, as another witness to God's *hesed*?

This story shows us that the miracle of a life following the cross is the miracle of change itself. On our own, we are not capable of true evolution. But held and empowered by God's presence—bolstered and protected by God's abiding love—we can experience newness day to day. Evolution moment to moment.

(continued)



Theme

Preaching Theme, continued

In connecting this story with modern-day examples and allegories, it's hard not to gravitate toward the characters of Elpheba and Galinda in *Wicked*. Both love magic, and want to do good with it. Both share a space and a life for a significant period of time. They are equally convicted and equally faithful, but ultimately, circumstances call each one to a different future.

In one of the last songs of the show, Elpheba and Galinda sing to each other:

"I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn / And we are led to those who help us most to grow if we let them / And we help them in return. Well I don't know if I believe that's true / But I know I'm who I am today because I knew you. / And because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

Scripture Summary

Naomi makes the difficult decision of returning to a hometown that no longer feels like her own. Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth, makes a difficult decision, too—to follow Naomi as a transformed witness to God's devotion and presence.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God calls us to follow.

C: We will go where God leads us.

L: The journey requires sacrifice.

C: We will trust in our God.

L: The journey leads through pain to joy.

C: Thanks be to God.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.

P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: As Ruth left all she knew and followed Naomi into a new and unfamiliar land out of love and loyalty, so stir up in us a willingness to go to any lengths to love and serve you and our neighbor. Help us to follow in the Way of Jesus—compassion, caring, healing, teaching, loving—today and every day. In his holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Abundant God, you provide for our needs and lavish your good gifts on us. In love and loyalty to you, we return this portion of what you have given us so that you might use them according to your will for the sake of all who are in need. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Gracious God, in spite of hardship, Ruth and Naomi remained faithful to each other trusting in your power to sustain them. Show us how to live faithfully as they did, and help us to trust you in all things. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us the same faithfulness to your good creation as to one another, that we may honor, respect, and care for all that you have made. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Teach humility to those who lead, and confidence to those who follow. Bring justice into this world, and make us instruments of your peace. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With bitterness we sing songs of grief, illness, addiction, isolation, abuse, and neglect. For all who suffer, we pray your mercy and healing, (*especially*). God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Remind us that this world is not too big for our compassion. Show us how to act in love for all people, no matter how distant from us, no matter how different they may seem. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We praise and thank you for all the saints who have gone before us, whose lives teach us how to live with mercy, kindness, and compassion. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God, who guided Ruth and Naomi into a new life, now invites you into new life in Jesus Christ, who meets you in this meal of bread and wine and strengthens you for whatever journey you have ahead. Come and be fed.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- 2: They will be filled**
- 1: Blessed are the merciful
- 2: They will receive mercy**
- 1: Blessed are the pure in heart
- 2: They shall see God**
- 1: Blessed are the peacemakers
- 2: They will be called children of God**
- 1: Bless us, O God, for we are your beloved children.
- 2: Make us hunger and thirst for justice, make us merciful and pure in heart, and make us to work for peace in your creation.**

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Woman 1, Woman 2

Woman 1: Well, I guess that's it, then. It's all over.

Woman 2: I am so sorry. This company was so beautiful. We did so much to help the community thrive.

Woman 1: I don't know. I feel like it was cursed. We really were making a difference, but then everything went wrong.

Woman 2: What will you do now?

Woman 1: I'm going to go back to my old company now that the economy has bounced back a bit. I can't imagine they'll have a high position for me there at my age, but there will be something.

Woman 2: I want to go with you.

Woman 1: Nonsense. You have so much potential. You could go anywhere and I'm sure you'd be successful.

Woman 2: I don't want to go somewhere else. I have been so inspired by you. I believe in what you do and I want to be there to support you.

Woman 1: Wow. Just...wow. It's going to be hard, you know. I mean, I don't even know exactly what we're going to find there.

Woman 2: I'll do whatever it takes. Even work in the mail room. I know we can make your vision work.

Woman 1: I still think you're nuts, but I have to be honest. I feel so much better knowing you're coming with me. You're the one who is inspiring me.

Woman 2: Lead the way, my friend. Lead the way.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We need each other.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The book of Ruth tells the story of how a gentile woman was received into God's Israelite family and became the great-grandmother of King David, one of the most beloved figures in the Jewish tradition. It's themes include loss, loyalty, devotion, generosity, resourcefulness, acceptance, and new birth. Have fun exploring these themes with the kids over the next several weeks.

Begin with the most beloved passage in Ruth, where she refuses to return to her own people but declares her entire loyalty and faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Do a simple activity to represent how people need each other, and how God wants us to be in relationships.

Set the Scene

Tell the kids you'll be reading a story over the next few weeks about a woman named Naomi, her daughter-in-law, Ruth, and a man named Boaz. Explain that a daughter-in-law is a woman who marries your son. Ruth married Naomi's son, but that son died, so Ruth was not married anymore.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Have the kids find a partner who is about the same size as them. Have the partners stand face to face, close together, and join hands. Then have them lean back as far as they can, holding each other up.

Ask what would happen if one of the partners let go (*they would both fall*). Draw a parallel to the story of Ruth and Naomi. They needed each other. They were both very sad and by holding on to each other, they both benefitted.

Discuss ways that we all need each other, to take care of one another physically, but also to be kind and loving to each other. God knows how much we need each other, like Ruth and Naomi, and wants us to be in relationships.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us hold each other up in love.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Small, individually-wrapped candies (be aware of food allergies)
- Two baskets



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Ruth 2:1-23

2Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." They answered, "The Lord bless you." ⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" ⁶The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." ⁷She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment." ⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" ¹¹But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward

from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" ¹³Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." ²¹Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'" ²²Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field." ²³So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Luke 6:36-38

³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.
³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, Reapers

Narrator: Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi,

Ruth: Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor.

Narrator: She said to her,

Naomi: Go, my daughter.

Narrator: So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers,

Boaz: The Lord be with you.

Narrator: They answered,

Reapers: The Lord bless you.

Narrator: Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers,

Boaz: To whom does this young woman belong?

Narrator: The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered,

Reapers: She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, ‘Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.’ So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.

Narrator: Then Boaz said to Ruth,

Boaz: Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.

Narrator: Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him,

Ruth: Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?

Narrator: But Boaz answered her,

Boaz: All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!

Narrator: Then she said,

Ruth: May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: At mealtime Boaz said to her,

Boaz: Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.

Narrator: So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men,

Boaz: Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.

Narrator: So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her,

Naomi: Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.

Narrator: So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said,

Ruth: The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.

Narrator: Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law,

Naomi: Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!

Narrator: Naomi also said to her,

Naomi: The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.

Narrator: Then Ruth the Moabite said,

Ruth: He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'

Narrator: Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law,

Naomi: It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.

Narrator: So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.



Gleaning and Hope, Ruth 2:1-23

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Boaz models for us how to channel compassion: honoring, assuring and taking care of our neighbors.

Gleaning is the ancient agrarian practice of gathering crops left over from an actual harvest. In recent Modern history, gleaning has evoked both emotion about, and association with, class politics. And that's because, particularly in Western culture, gleaners have represented the poorest of the poor. The scavengers. The most unfortunate of the unfortunate. The least of these. (For a visual, consider featuring [The Gleaners](#), an 1857 painting by Jean Francois Millet.)

In Ruth's time, gleaning referred to the exact same physical act, but had a much different connotation and set of social expectations around it. Leviticus 19 shows us that God's law explicitly charged landowners with leaving leftover crops at the edges of their fields for the most vulnerable members of their communities. Those who picked up the food were most often elderly and widowed individuals who didn't have another way to provide for themselves.

So, in biblical days, gleaning was a very neutral kind of social contract—a duty and act of care on the part of the wealthy, and an opportunity for security on the part of those who weren't.

Knowing all of this puts Boaz in context for us. Not only is he fulfilling his call to allow Ruth to glean in his fields, but he is going the extra mile to give her guidance on the most fruitful places to gather; to feed her in the middle of her work; and to protect her from strangers who might threaten her safety.

The reason Boaz claims for doing all of these things is deep faith—he has heard of Ruth and her family. He knows a little of what they have been through, and is

actively praying for their success while doing everything in his power to help move it forward. And with this prayer—with this support—Ruth is able to take an entire ephah of barley home on her first day. For reference, that's 20 dry quarts, or almost 30 pounds of food!

Boaz is showing us that where we put our love and our attention, good, substantive and nourishing things come. (It's interesting that the way he decides to help Ruth is not by inviting her to the harvest itself, but by encouraging her in her gleaning—she and Naomi end up with more than enough from the most piddly possible starting point.)

Ruth models living by faith here, too—a different version of going the extra mile. She tries radically new things, discerning signs as she goes. She trusts Boaz and listens to him. She works hard and with integrity. And all of that means that where once she had nothing, she now sees abundance—an abundance she is able to multiply by sharing with her loved ones.

The faith, commitment and collaboration in this text combine to help us remember that the kingdom of God is much more in real life than it is on paper. Boaz and Ruth both live by the spirit of the law instead of the letter of the law, knowing that mercy and compassion will only manifest in more mercy and more compassion.

Scripture Summary

After deciding to start a new life in Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth need to get to figure out how to survive. Ruth takes it upon herself to glean for grain and barley in select fields nearby. Little does she know the compassion and support she will soon receive.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come glean in the fields of God's abundance.

C: We come with joy, asking to be nourished.

L: Come and be fed on the word of God, that you might flourish.

C: We come with gratitude for all God has given us!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.

P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of compassion,

C: We come into your presence with hungry hearts, looking for a word of hope in a world that so often feels hopeless. Open to us your abundant store of grace and mercy, that we might be filled with trust that you still reign in heaven and on earth. Strengthen us to bear your unconditional love to our neighbors and the world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, as Jesus made plain, the measure we give will be the measure we receive. In gratitude and joy we return to you these gifts that they might be multiplied by your bountiful grace and that their goodness might run over into the whole world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray
for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of kinship, by working together, Ruth,
Naomi, and Boaz supported one another. Give us
hearts that desire cooperation and collaboration,
so that others may be loved, supported, and
protected. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Love and protect all the amazing things in your
great creation, O God, and show us how to
participate in the tender stewardship of all that
you have made. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Show the leaders of this world how to govern in
ways that encourage empowerment, cooperation,
and community, so that all may be lifted up.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Pour your healing upon all who are in need, who
suffer from illness, grief, disempowerment,
isolation, and abuse, (*especially*). God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Knit this world together into one community,
united in your name, doing the works of your
hands, and the will of your heart.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We remember with gratitude all who have come
before us, living lives of humble dependence
upon you, who by their example have taught us
that you are always faithful. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these
things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who sustained Ruth and Naomi in their
poverty now calls you to be sustained on the body
and blood of Jesus Christ, and be strengthened for
service with your siblings in his name. Come with joy
to the feast of all creation.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: God is merciful and just.
- 2: **Boaz was merciful and just to Ruth and Naomi.**
- 1: Do not judge, and you will not be judged.
- 2: **Boaz did not judge Ruth for being an immigrant, but reached out in compassion.**
- 1: Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
- 2: **Boaz did not condemn Ruth and Naomi for their widowhood, but served them.**
- 1: Give and it will be given to you.
- 2: **Boaz gave generously to Ruth and Naomi, and saw that as its own reward.**
- 1: God calls us to be like Boaz.
- 2: **Let us be merciful, just, compassionate, welcoming, and generous to our neighbors.**

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Woman 1, Woman 2, Woman 3

- Woman 1:** The company was surprised to see me back, but they were willing to take me on in an advisory position. It's not much.
- Woman 2:** I'm in admin. How will we ever get to a place where we can rebuild your community outreach program?
- Woman 1:** Well, there's an executive vice president for program development I knew a little before I left here. Maybe you should go talk to her. Her name is [Woman 3].

Woman 2: Me? I...what do I say to her?

Woman 1: Just go introduce yourself and ask how you can help.

Woman 2: Okay. If you say so.

(Woman 1 exits, Woman 3 enters)

Woman 3: Oh, hi there. You're [Woman 2], right?

Woman 2: Um, yes.

Woman 3: I've heard a lot about you, actually. How you worked for [Woman 1] at her community development company and then followed her back here to help her out however you can.

Woman 2: You heard all that?

Woman 3: Yes, and I'm very impressed. That kind of loyalty is rare these days.

Woman 2: Well, I believe in what she stands for.

Woman 3: And you were willing to take a minor admin job just to be here for her, too.

Woman 2: If that's what it takes for now.

Woman 3: Well, you're on my radar for sure. You just do your best in admin and I'll see if I can find better opportunities for you both.

Woman 2: Wow. I don't know what to say. Except thank you!

Woman 3: Well, I'm not promising anything, but at least you have the basics for now.

Woman 2: Thanks again. I'm just grateful for whatever support you can give.

Woman 3: You're welcome.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can be generous.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Small, individually-wrapped candies (be aware of food allergies)
- Two baskets

Background

The book of Ruth tells the story of how a gentile woman was received into God's Israelite family and became the great-grandmother of King David, one of the most beloved figures in the Jewish tradition. It's themes include loss, loyalty, devotion, generosity, resourcefulness, acceptance, and new birth.

This section introduces Boaz, who will later become Ruth's husband. He takes notice of her, a woman from a foreign country, and immediately resolves to care for her. Do a simple activity to represent how Boaz was generous to someone from outside his community, and how God wants us to be generous to everyone we meet.

Set the Scene

Remind kids that you're reading the story of Ruth and quickly re-cap last week. Let them know that today, they will be meeting a new, important person, who does a pretty cool thing for Ruth and Naomi.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Give the bag of wrapped candies to one of the kids. Tell them that this kid is Boaz and the candies represent all the barley growing in his fields. Have Boaz scatter the "barley" over the floor.

Choose two kids to be Boaz's workers. Ask them to collect the "barley" into a basket but leave some along the edges. Explain how God's law said they had to leave some for people who were poor to get food. Talk about what it means to be generous and how God made generosity a law!

Choose a kid to be Ruth. Ask her to collect some of the leftover "barley" in another basket. Talk about how Boaz heard about Ruth's generosity in taking care of Naomi, and how it made him want to be even more generous to Ruth, even though Ruth was from another country.

Have Boaz put some of the "barley" from his basket into Ruth's.

Work with the kids to come up with some examples of ways to be generous. Are they generous with people who are different from them? Or just their friends? Remember that Boaz was generous to a woman from another country. We can be generous to everyone!

Close with the prayer asking God to help us be generous to others, then send the kids back to their seats with one or two of the wrapped candies.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Small, individually-wrapped candies (be aware of food allergies)
- Paper cups



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Ruth 3:1-18

3Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. ²Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” ⁵She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”

⁶So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. ⁷When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. ⁸At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! ⁹He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.” ¹⁰He said, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. ¹²But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is

another kinsman more closely related than I. ¹³Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.”

¹⁴So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, “It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” ¹⁵Then he said, “Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. ¹⁶She came to her mother-in-law, who said, “How did things go with you, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, ¹⁷saying, “He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, ‘Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” ¹⁸She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.”

Secondary Text: Matthew 7:7-8

⁷“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz

Narrator: Naomi her mother-in-law said to her,

Naomi: My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.

Narrator: She said to her,

Ruth: All that you tell me I will do.

Narrator: So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said,

Boaz: Who are you?

Narrator: And she answered,

Ruth: I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.

Narrator: He said,

Boaz: May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.

Narrator: So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, "It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." Then he said,

Boaz: Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.

Narrator: So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. She came to her mother-in-law, who said,

Naomi: How did things go with you, my daughter?

Narrator: Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying,

Ruth: He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, 'Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'

Narrator: She replied,

Naomi: Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.



Daring to Act, Ruth 3:1-18

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: There are many ways for us to be bold in faith—to advocate for ourselves and others.

The theme of our story today is commonly seen as boldness, because Ruth's behavior has been read for thousands of years as salacious. She approaches Boaz when he is alone and lays her body next to his. (There is even debate about the correct way to translate "feet" from Hebrew—in some instances, the word can be used as euphemism for male genitalia.)

But what if we looked at Ruth's boldness through the lens of advocacy, and not seduction? Historically and literarily, this would be the more accurate reading of the text. Ruth is not acting boldly for the sake of acting boldly—she is acting boldly as a means to an end. She and Naomi need safety. Security. A legal anchor in a society where being *any* type of single woman guarantees you disenfranchisement.

Ruth has risked everything she has, and everything she is, out of her belief that her God will protect and provide for her and her mother-in-law. When we read this portion of the Book of Ruth through the lens of advocacy, we see Ruth not as a self-centered vixen, but as somebody who is willing to make daring, gutsy moves that are both inspired by her faith and intended to help her live into it more fully.

We also notice that Ruth is not the only bold one in this story! True advocacy here is shared between three actors, each operating out of—and aiming to bolster—deep faith, themselves:

- The Ideator (Naomi)
 - a. A namer of a discrepancy or conflict
 - b. A brainstormer; a hypothesizer and strategist
 - c. An original communicator—she speaks the need into the world for the first time

- d. Usually a beneficiary of the proposed changes
- The Instigator (Ruth)
 - a. An active listener and sympathetic believer; a receiver who is willing to be shaped/moved
 - b. A bold and committed actor; an embodier
 - c. A secondary communicator—a translator between the Ideator and the Reciprocator
 - d. Usually a beneficiary of the proposed changes
- The Reciprocator (Boaz)
 - a. *Also* a listener and, ultimately, a believer—simply from the other end of the exchange
 - b. *Also* a brainstormer and strategist of solutions—simply from the other end of the exchange
 - c. An agent of change in communication; an answerer to the Ideator and Instigator; an accountability-taker for the lived solutions (as opposed to the hypothetical ones)
 - d. *Also* a beneficiary of the proposed changes

How can this passage from Ruth help us understand the sociopolitical landscape we're navigating today? Who does our faith tell us we need to advocate for in our day-to-day lives? And which role, or roles, might the Holy Spirit be calling us to take up, remembering that we will never be alone or isolated in the holy work of boldness?

Scripture Summary

With Naomi's guidance, Ruth proposes a bold move to Boaz: that they take their relationship to the next level. He promises to deliver on everything she is asking for, but has his own ideas about how to approach the matter.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: The time for action has come!

C: We open our hearts for God's instruction.

L: Beloved, let us ask God for what is needed.

C: We trust that God will provide.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.

P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God if inspiration,

C: Show us what your will is for us today and every day. Guide us in making decisions that lead to flourishing for ourselves and our neighbors. Sustain us when the journey is difficult and the outcome uncertain. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of the harvest, you send rain on the earth that all good things might grow, and you generously provide us with the fruits of the earth for our benefit. In gratitude we return to you these gifts and tithes, that you might bless them for the work of bearing your abundance to all the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray
for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of passionate devotion, your servants Ruth,
Boaz, and Naomi, loved and cared for each other.
Their compassion benefitted all three and the
greater community. Show us how to love with
great devotion, so that through us your kingdom
might be blessed. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Bless the seas, the sky, and the land, and the
loving hands that tend to all your creation with
compassion and care. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Bless all who serve and lead, all who follow, all
who decide and who carry out the decisions that
are made. Help us live into our callings with grace
and gratitude. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Bless all who are in need of your healing touch,
(*especially*). Bring all who suffer to wholeness of
body, mind, and spirit. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Bless all the communities of the world; those who
look, sound, and believe as we do, and those who
do not. Make our hearts big to receive those whom
we do not comprehend. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With gratitude we remember the saints who have
gone before us, members of your beloved family
throughout time and place. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these
things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who inspired Boaz to gift Ruth with an
abundance of barley now invites you to be nourished
at this holy table, where Jesus meets us in bread and
wine and strengthens us to bear his light to the world.
Come and be fed, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: Ask and it will be given to you.

2: Then why do we still want more?

1: Seek and you will find.

2: Then why do we still feel lost?

1: Knock and the door will be opened to you.

2: Then why do we still feel excluded?

1: Perhaps we are asking for the wrong things.

**2: Perhaps we are searching for meaning in
meaningless things.**

1: Perhaps we are knocking at the wrong doors.

2: How, then, shall we receive?

1: Seek first the reign of God and God's
righteousness.

**2: Only then will we understand what is required
of us. Only then will we receive what we
require.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Woman 1, Woman 2, Woman 3, Assistant

Props: A desk and 2 chairs

Woman 1: I think it's time for you to move forward.

Woman 2: Me? Why me? This community development project was your idea.

Woman 1: I'm getting too old for this. I'll definitely stay on in an advisory role, but you're the one with the amazing potential.

Woman 2: If you say so. What do I do?

Woman 1: I just found out that [Woman 3] is looking for new community relations initiatives. She's already aware of you and our background. Go tell her you want to head up a new department doing what we used to do, but here, in this community.

Woman 2: So...just waltz right into her office and put it out there.

Woman 1: Yep.

Woman 2: Are you nuts? Am I even qualified to do something like this? Why on earth would she choose me?

Woman 1: Because you're exactly what she's looking for, whether or not she even knows it.

Woman 2: I feel sick to my stomach.

Woman 1: Trust me. Go to her office, let her assistant know you want to see her, and just wait.

Woman 2: If you say so. (*crosses stage to Assistant*)
Excuse me, I'd like to see [Woman 3].

Assistant: She's on a call. Please have a seat.

(*Woman 2 sits down and waits.*)

Assistant: (*glancing up toward a clock*) Oh dear. It's been half an hour. Are you sure you want to keep waiting?

Woman 2: I'll wait.

Woman 3: (*entering*) Oh, hello [Woman 2]. I didn't realize you were out here. Have you been waiting long?

Woman 2: I would have waited as long as it took.

Woman 3: That sounds interesting. What's up?

Woman 2: I have an idea for a new department—that community relations initiative you were thinking about?

Woman 3: Word travels fast. I wondered if you'd come to see me, considering your background with [Woman 1]. Truth be told, I've been so impressed with you I'm ready to give you a department head job right now.

Woman 2: But?

Woman 3: There is one other person who's expressed an interest and he has seniority. Let me go talk to him. Meanwhile, go let [Woman 1] know we've talked.

Woman 2: Thank you for considering me.

Woman 3: How could I not?

(*All exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Kindness makes God's family grow.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Small, individually-wrapped candies (be aware of food allergies)
- Paper cups

Background

The book of Ruth tells the story of how a gentile woman was received into God's Israelite family and became the great-grandmother of King David, one of the most beloved figures in the Jewish tradition. It's themes include loss, loyalty, devotion, generosity, resourcefulness, acceptance, and new birth.

In this chapter, Naomi gives Ruth advice on how to get Boaz to marry her. The women are aware that they cannot survive long term if Ruth doesn't have a husband to support them; women could not work in this time period and culture. By the end of the chapter, Boaz is ready to marry Ruth, pending one legal detail. Ruth's kindness to Naomi caught Boaz's attention. Boaz's kindness to Ruth caught Naomi's attention. Now Naomi's kindness in giving advice to Ruth will bring them all together as one family.

Do a simple activity to represent how paying kindness forward build's God's family.

Set the Scene

Catch kids up on the story so far.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Divide the kids into groups of three. Have them decide which kid will be Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Give each kid a paper cup. Hold up the bag of wrapped candies and tell them it represents kindness. Fill each Ruth's cup about half full with "kindness." Fill each Boaz's cup about half full with "kindness."

When Ruth showed kindness to Naomi by promising to stay with her, God's family grew. Have each Ruth pour some of her "kindness" into Naomi's cup.

When Boaz heard about Ruth's kindness, he was so impressed he showed kindness to Ruth (and, by extension, Naomi). Have Boaz pour some of his "kindness" into Ruth's cup, and some into Naomi's.

When Naomi heard about Boaz's kindness to Ruth, she gave Ruth wisdom about how to bring Ruth and Boaz together. When she shared that kindness, God's family grew again! Have Naomi pour some of her "kindness" into Ruth's and Boaz's cups.

Reiterate that when we are kind to one another, we are acting like God's family, and that family grows in love. Make sure all kids get the same amount in their cups before closing with a prayer asking God to help us be kind to everyone we meet.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Ruth 4:1-22

No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, “Come over, friend; sit down here.” And he went over and sat down. ²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, “Sit down here”; so they sat down. ³He then said to the next-of-kin, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.” So he said, “I will redeem it.” ⁵Then Boaz said, “The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance.” ⁶At this, the next-of-kin said, “I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.” ⁷Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, “Acquire it for yourself,” he took off his sandal.

⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also

acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.” ¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹²and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

¹³So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Boaz, Kinsman, Witnesses,
Women

Narrator: No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said,

Boaz: Come over, friend; sit down here.

Narrator: And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said,

Boaz: Sit down here;

Narrator: So they sat down. He then said to the next-of-kin,

Boaz: Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people.

If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.

Narrator: So he said,

Kinsman: I will redeem it.

Narrator: Then Boaz said,

Boaz: The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance.

Narrator: At this, the next-of-kin said,

Kinsman: I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.

Narrator: Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, “Acquire it for yourself,” he took off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people,

Boaz: Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.

Narrator: Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said,

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Witnesses: We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.

Narrator: So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi,

Women: Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of

life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.

Narrator: Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying,

Women: A son has been born to Naomi.

Narrator: They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: This text serves as both a witness and a promise. It tells us that where there was once famine, there can be abundance. Where there was once death, there can be new life. Through God and with God, we experience miracles—the upending of what oppresses us, and the infusion of what makes us free.

The very beginning of this passage can throw us off a little, because it takes on a goofy tone that we haven't yet experienced in the Book of Ruth.

Earnest Boaz offers Ruth's next-of-kin her late husband's inheritance. (To underscore his credibility, Boaz does this in public with multiple witnesses, all the while narrating how his actions fit perfectly into local laws, precedents and tradition.) The next-of-kin, whose name we very intentionally never learn, ends up playing the part of the fool. At first, he is eager to take Boaz up on the deal. But when he learns that it would require him to marry Ruth, he makes up a shoddy excuse and leaves just as quickly as he came. It's like something out of a bad romcom.

The very end of this passage can throw us off, too, because it crams generations worth of miracles into just a few verses. Ruth, who never had children in her first marriage, conceives immediately in her second with a son, Obed. Naomi, Ruth's perimenopausal mother-in-law, serves as the Obed's wet nurse. Oh, and as a casual aside, Obed's lineage will grow to include David the most significant king in the history of Israel. All of this all together makes things feel too perfect. Too tidy. Too good to actually be true.

But what if the promise we need to hear today is that there is no such thing as "too good to be true?" Not in a life with Christ, at least.

Sure—the hyperbole and almost absurdity of the joy and the success throughout the entire ending of the Book of Ruth sits in direct contrast to the bleak, wanting set of circumstances we started with in Chapter 1. But who among us can't name drastically different highs and lows in our own experiences? Moment to moment, day to day, month to month and year over year, we are transitioning between extremes.

Most of us have experienced a kind of survival mode, and most of us have experienced genuine success. When we stop to reflect on our journeys, it isn't so crazy to think that we could author something just as hyperbolic and just as absurd—just as *miraculous*—as this story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

And that is our good news in this story—that we dwell in and with a God of *miracles*. The God of Ruth. The God of Mary and her Magnificat.

God is the hope and the beauty that persists in times of little. The force that pulls us and drives us. And God is the challenge and discomfort that breeds skepticism in times of plenty. The force that convicts us and emboldens us. God's presence is what sustains us. God's promises feed us and, in turn, shape the entire cosmos.

Today we are reminded to take the most ridiculous times *and* the most incredible times in our lives seriously; to treat them like the miracles that they point to; and to continue leaning on the God who knows them as intimately as we do.

Scripture Summary

Boaz's plan to marry Ruth unfolds, and the two of them, together with Naomi, take care of a family that we learn will eventually grow to include King David.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God calls us into new life in God's name.

C: We come seeking to answer that call.

L: God showers us with mercy and grace.

C: We come rejoicing in all that God has done for us!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.

P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of new life,

C: With Naomi we rejoice in the birth of Obed, a child of an immigrant outcast, who would become the grandfather of King David and the ancestor of Jesus. Make us grateful for those who came before us from around the world, and help us extend hospitality to all our neighbors. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of love, we bring before you our gifts and our tithes out of gifts you have given to us. Accept these, bless them, and use them toward proclaiming your love to all creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray
for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of promise, with the birth of a son, Obed, to
Ruth and Boaz, the hope of new life in your
earthly kingdom was born. With the birth of his
descendant, Jesus, the hope of new life in your
heavenly kingdom became a reality as well. Bless
us with the hope that one day we will become
inheritors of all that is yours. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: All the things that you have created, both big and
small, carry the hope of newness of life. Show us
how to be intentional caretakers of all that you
have made so that this earth sustains life long
beyond our years. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: All the leaders that you have chosen and equipped
carry the hope of new ways of living in justice and
peace. Make them stewards of your people so that
peace reigns in this world. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: All the children who suffer in body, mind, and
spirit carry the hope of healing. Bring to health
and wholeness all who cry for your healing touch,
(*especially*). God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: All the people who wake each morning in parts of
the world that suffer from oppression, exile, or
torment, carry the hope that one day soon you
will bring an end to their suffering. Make that day
a reality so that all may live without fear.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: All the saints who have preceded us carry the
hope of the resurrection and eternal life with you.
May we look forward to the day of our reunion.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these
things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus Christ, whose ancestor, Ruth, rejoiced in the
birth of her child, now calls you to rejoice with him at
this holy table, where he meets us in the bread and
the wine and fills us with hope and strength to be
beacons of his light to all the world. All is ready—
come to the feast!

Litany

1: God is great! Let us rejoice in God!

2: **God looks with favor on the lowly.**

1: God does great things for us.

2: **God's mercy is for all who are in awe of God.**

1: God scatters the proud.

2: **God brings down the powerful.**

1: God fills the hungry,

2: **And sends the rich away empty.**

1: God, help us, your servants, in remembrance of
your mercy.

2: **God, keep your promises to be our God.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Woman 1, Woman 2, Woman 3, Man

Woman 3: Thanks for meeting me, [Man].

Man: No problem. What's this all about?

Woman 3: Well, someone has expressed an interested in heading up a new community development department, but I know you were somewhat interested in doing that, too, and I wanted to give you the option, since you have seniority.

Man: I think it would be a great thing for the company and the community. About time, too. Can you give me any more details?

Woman 3: Well, it's pretty open to however the department wants to approach it. But I will tell you that if you take it on, it comes with your team already determined.

Man: Who?

Woman 3: [Woman 2], who would be directly under you, and [Woman 1] in an advisory role.

Man: [Woman 1]? That's not intimidating at all. Didn't she start her own company doing this stuff?

Woman 3: That's why she'd be a good advisor.

Man: You know, I think I'll pass. I'm pretty happy where I am right now and at this point, the idea of starting a new endeavor with a new team isn't all that appealing.

Woman 3: Fair enough. Just wanted to give you the choice.

Man: I appreciate it. *(exits)*

Woman 2: *(entering with Woman 1)* What did he say?

Woman 3: The job is yours! The whole department. To go forth and make the world a better place!

Woman 1: Oh, [Woman 2], congratulations! That's wonderful!

Woman 3: You'll report directly to me, of course, but this baby is yours.

Woman 2: *(to Woman 1)* You mean ours. This is going to be your legacy, [Woman 1]!

Woman 1: *(grinning)* Yeah, the thought had occurred to me. Even though my own company didn't last, because of you *(turning to Woman 3)* and you, we're going to make a huge impact. Maybe for generations to come!

Woman 3: Okay, then. I'm taking you both out to celebrate. Then on Monday morning, we'll hit the ground running.

Woman 2: I am so happy I could burst!

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Everyone is welcome God's family.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The book of Ruth tells the story of how a gentile woman was received into God's Israelite family and became the great-grandmother of King David, one of the most beloved figures in the Jewish tradition. It's themes include loss, loyalty, devotion, generosity, resourcefulness, acceptance, and new birth.

The last chapter is the grand finale and the "happily ever after." In it, Boaz and Ruth are married and give Naomi a happy, healthy grandson: Obed. Obed would become the grandfather of King David, which means that Ruth, a non-Israelite, was an ancestor of Jesus. At a time when people rarely married outside their own community, and when genealogy was enormously important to establishing people's identity, the introduction of a woman from Moab into David's ancestry was a big deal.

Do a simple activity to show how everyone is welcome in God's family.

Set the Scene

Catch the kids up on the story. Emphasize the fact that the Israelites were God's special people and they didn't want to mix with other people, and the fact that Ruth was from Moab and the Israelites didn't like the Moabites very much.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Choose a volunteer to be Ruth. (You might want to consider an older kid and explain that for part of the activity they will be left out/rejected, so there are no bad feelings.) Have Ruth stand to one side and have the rest of the kids join hands in a circle. The kids in the circle will be the Israelites. Have Ruth try to join into the circle, but tell the rest of the kids to hold hands as hard as possible and not let Ruth in.

After a minute, talk about how lots of people in our lives can feel like Ruth. When we feel comfortable with our friends or groups we might have a hard time letting other people in. But in God's family, everyone is welcome. In the story, Boaz, an Israelite, married Ruth, a Moabite, and she became an ancestor of Jesus!

Now tell the circle that they are God's family, not any specific group. Have them open up and let Ruth join them. Encourage them to remember to welcome all people into their groups because we're all part of God's family.

Close with a prayer thanking God for Ruth being the ancestor of Jesus and for welcoming everyone into God's family no matter what.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Esther 4:1-17

⁴When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; ²he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. ⁴When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. ⁹Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹"All the king's

servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." ¹²When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." ¹⁵Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Secondary Text: Luke 9:23-24

²³Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Esther, Mordecai

Narrator 1: When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Narrator 2: When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

Narrator 1: Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

Narrator 2: Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying,

Esther: All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.

Narrator 1: When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther,

Mordecai: Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.

Narrator 2: Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai,

Esther: Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.

Narrator 1: Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.



For a Moment Like This, Esther 4:1-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God's justice manifests in our unique traits, our unique situations, and our unique abilities to listen for, and to actively engage, the creativity that permeates our world.

In the beginning of Chapter 3, we learn that Haman was promoted to a position of power over other officials and servants of King Ahasuerus. As Haman transitions into his new role, he expects his now-subjects to bow down to him in reverence. Mordecai is the only one who refuses to do so, citing his Jewish faith—his steadfast obedience to God, and God alone—as the reason. Haman's response is laid out for us shortly afterward:

¹³Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. ¹⁴A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation, calling on all the peoples to be ready for that day. ¹⁵The couriers went quickly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

Haman took advantage of his new resources, his platform, and King Ahasuerus's trust in order to exact petty revenge on someone he deemed lesser than himself. He wanted to make a big statement, and he chose ethnic and religious cleansing as his tool.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about our passage today, then, is the indirectness of the conversation that takes place between Mordecai and Esther. This is *such* a dire, desperate circumstance. And a time-sensitive one, at that. Why would the author of this book take the time to explain that Esther and Mordecai communicated via middleman? Why include Hathach in this exchange at all?

It could be that highlighting the messenger duties of a eunuch speaks to the historical norms and expectations of Esther's time. But a richer theory is that fleshing out all three characters and including them equally in such an important call to action speaks to the fact that God's salvific work in the world is participatory. The author is trying to show us that Mordecai, Hathach and Esther each have something unique and necessary to bring to the solution.

There are deeply interesting gender-based, class-based and generally privilege-framed questions that come up for us in comparing Mordecai, Hathach and Esther. Whose voice matters the most? And when? And where? Who is closest to which kinds of power in day to day life? Who is the most free from stereotypes based on station? Who has the most influence—and of what kind?

In listening to their negotiation, we learn that success in their venture will take a lot of different skill sets, commitments and ideas unique to individual people. A speaking of truth to power. An earnest representation of multiple perspectives. Deep listening. Quick, instinctual responses. Risk-taking. Patience. Challenges. Questions. Invitations. Personalizations.

(continued)



Theme

Preaching Theme, continued

The fluidity and intersectionality of Mordecai, Hathach and Esther—not to mention the textual implication that success will depend on *all* of them being engaged and involved—is fascinating sermon fodder. It shows us that kingdom building doesn't ever look just one way. It promises us that leaning into a call isn't the same thing as walking a tightrope. And it helps us engage congregational imagination today, asking:

What are the unique traits you bring into your relationships? Where are you situated in your family and in your community? If you were Mordecai, banging on the palace door in fear for your life, what is the moment you would be calling your leadership to meet? If you were Hathach, stewarding precious messages from vastly different perspectives, how would you practice integrity in translation? And if you

were Esther, moving at the speed of an entire reality shift, what would signal to you that you were uniquely suited to try something different?

We shape the arc of God's justice through our talents and our circumstances—through nature *and* through nurture. In a time when ethnically-driven political movements, organized mass killings and a range of approaches to the act of protest are all too familiar, let us remember that we can—we *must*—take multifaceted and creative approaches that stem from our very essence. God wouldn't have it any other way.

Scripture Summary

Esther struggles with the risk she will have to undertake in order to save her people from annihilation.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: It is not always easy to follow God.
C: God strengthen us to do your will.
L: The path may be dangerous.
C: God protect us as we do your will.
L: We may be called to sacrifice much.
C: God sustain us as we do your will.

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
P: Merciful God,
C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.
P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of power,
C: Stir up in us a resolve to carry your message of love for you and neighbor into all we do and say, especially when it is challenging to do so, when we might injure our reputations or incur the disapproval of others when we speak truth and act accordingly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious God, your generosity is without measure, and your help sure. With joy and thanksgiving we respond to your generosity with our own. Accept now our gifts of money, time, or skill, that you might use them for the benefit of all that you have made. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray
for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of love, when we look around we see time
and again the way our neighbors are harmed by
the powers that be. Give us courage for ‘just such
a moment as this,’ in the same way you gave
Esther courage to risk for the sake of her people.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us courage to speak up on behalf of your
beautiful creation as so many seek its destruction
for their own benefit, and to change our own
ways in order to have less of a negative impact on
our environment. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us courage to hold our leaders accountable
to the people they serve, and give courage to our
leaders to stand up for what is right even if it
might tarnish their reputations. God in your
mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us courage to walk with our siblings who are
struggling with illness, injury, mental health issues,
addiction, or grief, (*especially...*) Give courage to
those who are struggling, and to their caregivers.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us courage to look honestly at ourselves, our
choices, and the harms we have done knowingly
or unknowingly, that we might seek to put right
any wrongs we have done. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Give us the courage that so many of our forebears
showed throughout history, enduring all manner
of challenges and yet keeping their faith in you.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these
things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus calls us now to this holy feast, forgives us all the
ways we have fallen short, and strengthens us with his
own body and blood to follow where his path led.
Come with your siblings in his name and be
nourished for the work ahead.

Litany

1: If any want to follow Jesus,

2: Let them deny themselves.

1: Let them take up their cross.

2: Let them follow Jesus to the end.

1: We are afraid to lose our possessions.

2: We are afraid to lose our lives.

1: Do not be afraid, beloved of God, for you are not
alone.

2: God will give us courage.

1: God will hold you through whatever is to come.

2: Let us follow Jesus, come what may.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2, Kid 3

Kid 1: Did you hear what Payton said on the playground at recess?

Kid 2: You mean about how they were going to get a bunch of friends together and start terrorizing us?

Kid 1: Yeah, that.

Kid 3: Payton. Payton Krantz?

Kid 2: Payton Krantz.

Kid 1: Wait a minute. You're friends with Payton, aren't you?

Kid 3: "Friends" is a kind of a stretch. I mean, we live on the same block. We grew up together. Our parents are always hanging out and stuff. So... I mean...

Kid 1: So you're friends.

Kid 3: We have been, I guess.

Kid 2: This is perfect! Why don't you go talk to your parents about what they're threatening.

Kid 1: Then your parents will talk to their parents and maybe this won't happen!

Kid 3: I guess I could... but...

Kid 2: But what? If Payton gets going, it's not like they're going to spare you.

Kid 1: Especially when they find out you're one of my best friends. Payton absolutely hates me.

Kid 2: And me.

Kid 3: But if I get in the middle of this... I mean, it could mess up my parents' friendship with their parents. And if Payton finds out I'm the one who ratted on them...

Kid 1: Yeah. It's like painting a target on your back and handing Payton the bow and arrow. I get it.

Kid 2: But if you don't say something, they're going to make your life miserable anyway. And everyone else's on top of it.

Kid 1: Hate to say it, but it's kind of a lose/lose for you.

Kid 2: Maybe. But it could also be a win for all of us.

Kid 3: True. If I might go down either way, I might as well do it defending my friends.

Kid 2: That's the spirit!

Kid 3: Okay. I'm going to talk to my parents when I get home. Wish me luck.

Kid 1: Thanks, [Kid 3]. You're a good friend.

Kid 2: Good luck!

(exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's love makes us brave.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The book of Esther is actually a comedy, and probably one that was performed as a play with lots of audience participation. It uses humor to draw out themes of human foibles, danger, “relief and deliverance” (4:14) and how an ordinary girl, an orphan, could become a great hero. Today's passage from the story focuses on how Esther needs to act—even at the risk of her own life—and act now, before time runs out for her people. She makes the decision to do just that and asks her relative, Mordecai, to drum up a bunch of people to fast and pray for her, so that she might have the courage to do what was right.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever seen someone being mean to another person. How did they respond? What was the outcome? Tell the kids they're going to hear a story about a girl who found out that someone wanted to hurt all of her people.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Unpack the story a little. What did Queen Esther find out from her cousin, Mordecai? What did Mordecai want her to do? Why was it scary? (*she could be killed*) In the end, what did Queen Esther decide?

Ask the kids what they think courage means. Does having courage mean you don't have fear? (*no*) Having courage means doing what is right even though you are scared.

Is the world sometimes a scary place? (*yes*) Invite the kids to share what scares them, but don't put pressure on anyone to share. If they kids don't want to speak up, you can share one or two things that you find scary in the world—especially things you can't control. Then ask the question: is God bigger than scary things? (*yes*) Make the point that God loves us so much and God is with us no matter how hard or scary something is. When we know God is with us and God loves us, it helps us to be brave.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us be brave when we need to do what is right.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A photo of Mister Rogers along with his famous quote about looking for the helpers (see next week)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Esther 7:1-10, 9:1-2, 20-22, 29-32

7 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. ⁴For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” ⁵Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” ⁶Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

⁷The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. ⁸When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. ⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

9 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king’s command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, ²the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who had sought their ruin; and no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples.

²⁰Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, ²²as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

²⁹Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with the Jew Mordecai, gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. ³⁰Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews, to the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, ³¹and giving orders that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as the Jew Mordecai and Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants regulations concerning their fasts and their lamentations. ³²The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Luke 1:68-72

⁶⁸“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷²Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Narrator 3, Narrator 4, King, Esther, Harbona

Narrator 1: So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther,

King: What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled

Narrator 1: Then Queen Esther answered,

Esther: If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.

Narrator 1: Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther,

King: Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?

Narrator 1: Esther said,

Esther: A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!

Narrator 1: Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said,

King: Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?

Narrator 1: As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said,

Harbona: Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.

Narrator 1: And the king said,

King: Hang him on that.

Narrator 1: So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Narrator 2: Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king’s command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who had sought their ruin; and no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator 3: Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Narrator 4: Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with the Jew Mordecai, gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews, to the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, and giving orders that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as the Jew Mordecai and Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants regulations concerning their fasts and their lamentations. The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.



From Sadness to Joy, Esther 7:1-10, 9:1-2, 20-22, 29-32

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: What makes God's protection so unique is the radical joy that it can bring out of deep fear and overwhelming sadness.

Where Chapter 4 of Esther shows us the *risk* that Mordecai and Esther took, Chapter 7 shows us the *reward*. Where Chapter 4 gives us our set up, Chapter 7 hits us with our punchline.

Through Esther's clever rhetorical structuring, King Ahasuerus figures out that Naman secured permission and a budget for his genocidal decree in bad faith. By presenting partial truths, Naman was able to put King Ahasuerus's name on something that King Ahasuerus didn't actually agree with. Three deeply ironic things happen in succession just after this, all of which point to God as the winner—the ultimate authority figure and protector—in this story:

1) Esther refuses to advocate for Haman.

When Mordecai begged Esther for her time, her strategy and her activism in favor of the Jews, she listened, considered his points and, ultimately, agreed to help him. Now, when Haman is begging Esther for much the same combination of things, Esther doesn't even have time to dignify his requests with a response before King Ahasuerus makes his decision.

2) Haman is hanged in the gallows that he had prepared especially for Mordecai.

Mordecai is a special target for Haman's anger. Haman's vindictiveness drives him to plan a personalized and cruel death for Mordecai—a death by hanging. As it turns out, *Haman* is the one who suffers the consequences of his own pettiness. Haman ends up dying at his own hand.

3) Esther and Mordecai communicate safety for Jewish communities across Persia by letter.

Haman and his team of officials and servants had initially communicated upcoming violence and extermination to Jews across the kingdom via written notice. Letter. Now, the good news of God's protection is coming to the Jews in the very same format, spurring gatherings of celebration and gratitude as opposed to gatherings of confusion and desperate planning.

The heavy-handedness of Esther and Mordecai's successes—really, God's successes—in our passage today is meant to establish that God's protection goes beyond the level of pure need (sustenance) and ventures into the level of giving entirely new life (creation). Not only do Mordecai and Esther curry favor with the king, but they also grow very close to one another, expanding their collective leadership and faith-filled influence past Susa for years to come. Not only do God's people end up safe thanks to Mordecai's loyalty and Esther's advocacy—but they also end up thriving; feasting and gifting and renewing their efforts to provide for one another and to flourish into the future.

An anachronistic reading of this text pulls us to Romans 8:31 asking, "If God is for us, who is against us?" While it can be tempting to interpret Chapter 7 of the Book of Esther as a story of cosmic revenge, it's more accurate to preach it and teach it as a story of our witness of God's distinctive and enduring protection.

Scripture Summary

Moved by both a genuine love for Esther and a combination of pride and anger directed toward Naman, King Ahasuerus agrees to Esther's terms for saving her people.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We come to God in sorrow.

C: God, turn our sorrow into joy.

L: We come to God in discouragement.

C: God, turn our discouragement into hope.

L: We come to God in trust.

C: God, increase our trust.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have fallen short in our commitment to you and our neighbors. We have neglected the immigrant, the outcast, and those suffering poverty or oppression in our communities and around the world. We have failed to see you in the faces of our neighbors. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive all who seek only to live peacefully with us. Make us to have the willingness of Ruth, the compassion of Boaz, and the courage of Esther, for the sake of Jesus Christ whose ministry and death fully embodied these principles.

P: Our God, whose hand created all that is, and whose heart is for all that God created, reaches out to you with mercy and grace and calls you beloved. Know that your sins are forgiven, and that God empowers each of you to grow closer to God's will for you each day. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of deliverance,

C: You walk with us through even the most difficult and devastating of our challenges in life. Remind us always that you are with us, that we might trust you with our deepest hurts and greatest fears. Save us from all who seek to diminish and disparage us, or to do us harm in any way. Make us beacons of hope to others experiencing harm, that they might experience your sustaining presence through our compassionate acts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you have provided us with more than we need and you open our hearts and our hands to respond in generosity. Accept these gifts and bless them for their use on behalf of all who suffer in any way. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that God acts on our behalf, we pray
for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, the psalmist sings that weeping may
last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.
Help us to trust in the promise of your presence
with us in our trials and in the joy that follows.
God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We weep for the devastation we have wrought on
your beautiful creation, and the continued
unwillingness to work to heal it. Turn our
weeping to joy in our work to live in harmony
with all that you have made. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We weep for the devastation we witness in our
nation and around the world. Turn our weeping
to joy in our work for peace and justice. God in
your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We weep with all who are journeying with illness
or injury in body, mind, or spirit, (*especially...*)
Turn our weeping to joy as we care for one
another and witness your healing power. God in
your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We weep with all who do not have enough to eat
or a place to live especially in this, the richest
country in the history of the world. Turn our
weeping to joy in our work to support all our
neighbors. God in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We weep when we lose loved ones, and at the
memory of what so many of our loved ones
endured. Turn our weeping to joy at the memory
of all who came before and modeled for us a life
of faith, until we see them again face to face. God
in your mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With gratitude for your faithfulness, we pray these
things in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God who transforms sadness into joy now invites you
to this feast of God's beloved son, Jesus Christ. Come
to the table, where Jesus meets us in this holy meal,
forgives us all our sins, and raises us to a joyful new
life in his name. All is prepared.

Litany

1: Esther's courage saved her people.

2: She risked her life for the good of others.

1: Jesus' courage saved *all* people.

2: He died for the good of all creation.

1: God calls us to have courage for the sake of
others.

2: We, too, must sacrifice for our neighbors.

1: God's promise is sure—deliverance from all who
would cause us harm.

**2: Let us trust God to protect and sustain us as
we work for peace and justice in all the earth.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid (last week's Kid 3), Adults 1-4 (two couples)

Adult 1: Hey, [Kid]. What's up?

Kid: Um. Hey. I didn't know you'd be over, Mr. and Mrs. Krantz.

Adult 3: Your folks invited us for dinner and then we're going to go to Payton's basketball game together.

Kid: Oh. Well I guess we can talk about this later.

Adult 2: Are you sure? You don't look okay.

Adult 4: We've known you since you were born, [Kid]. No secrets here.

Kid: I just needed some advice on something. There's this kid at school...

Adult 1: We're listening.

Kid: They said they were planning to get a bunch of friends together to start beating up on some of the other kids... including my friends.

Adult 2: That's terrible! Have you talked to your teacher?

Adult 3: Or the principal?

Adult 4: Oh, come on. You know how bullies are. If [Kid] rats the other kid out, guess who their next target is?

Adult 1: So what would you like us to do to help? We could certainly go to talk to the principal.

Adult 2: Anonymously, of course.

Adult 3: So who's the bully? Maybe we could talk to their parents first.

Kid: I... Yeah. About that.

Adult 4: What is it?

Kid: *(takes a deep breath)* It's Payton.

(uncomfortable pause)

Adult 3: Are you sure about that?

Kid: Unfortunately.

Adult 4: We have noticed some changes in them lately. But this... I am so sorry.

Adult 1: Wow. Is there anything we can do?

Adult 3: No. Leave this to us. [Kid] you were very, very brave to tell us this. I know how hard that was.

Adult 4: And it's hard to hear our kid is causing problems at school. Especially for you! You've known each other since you were babies.

Kid: I know. That's why I was afraid to say anything. But if I didn't, my friends...

Adult 2: No, you did the exact right thing. We've got this, [Kid]. You and your friends at school can relax. It's all going to be okay.

Kid 1: Thanks. I can't wait to tell my friends the good news.

(all exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God helps us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A photo of Mister Rogers along with his famous quote about looking for the helpers (see below)

Background

The end of Esther is pretty macabre, honestly. King Ahasuerus not only reverses course on the decree that would allow the killing of the Jews, but he makes a new decree that the Jews can kill anyone they want in retaliation. (This after hanging Haman on the gallows prepared for Mordecai). The turning of “sadness into joy” comes with a whole lot of vengeful violence. So, yeah, avoid that. Focus instead on how no matter how bleak things got for Esther’s people, God stood by them in their fear and sorrow, and guided Esther to act on their behalf to result in a happy ending. In short: as Mister Rogers famously said, “Look for the helpers.”

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they ever feel scared about things that are happening in the world around them. Are they aware of scary things? Share a story of a time when you were scared and asked God to help. Don’t say what happened in the end. Just set it up. Then...

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Show the kids the picture of Mister Rogers. Ask if any of the kids know who he is. If not, tell them he used to have a show for children that was so full of love and joy and help for kids like them.

Share with them his famous quote: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

In the story, terrible, scary things were going to happen to God’s people. But who were the helpers in the story? (*Esther, Mordecai (from last week), King Ahasuerus*).

Return to the story you shared at the beginning of a time when you were scared. Who were the helpers in that story? What happened?

Ask the kids who the helpers are in their lives. Who helps them feel better when they’re scared? Make the point that God is in the helpers. Every time someone is a helper, that someone is sharing God’s help.

Close with a prayer thanking God for helping us through the wonderful people in our lives.

Next Week’s Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A scroll



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

¹²I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Secondary Text: Luke 15:4-7

⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Narrator 2: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.



Have Confidence in the Gospel, 1 Timothy 1:12-17



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Modeling the good news of Jesus Christ starts with having confidence in the Gospel. And having confidence in the Gospel starts with rereading your own story through lenses of humility, honesty and grace.

It's difficult for us to imagine Christianity as a new faith or as a marginal one. In the United States, Christianity is running on 2,000 years of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and societal momentum. It's had time to become an institution powerful enough to shape the people who adhere to it *and* the people who don't.

We need to take great care to sympathize with Timothy as we read this story, because his Christianity is nothing like ours. It is small. It is scattered. It is decentralized and at constant ideological odds with itself. It has no brand recognition. It has no market share. It doesn't even really have a name—Paul, Timothy, and their contemporaries certainly wouldn't have referred to themselves as Christians.

It would be safe to assume that Paul is writing to Timothy because Timothy needs reassurance in uncharted territory. Guidance in his ministerial charge. The central questions we encounter through Timothy today are: How do I model something that doesn't quite exist yet? How do I lead something that I'm not entirely sure I understand?

We might not be living in Timothy's world, but when we really think about it, our world forces us to ask those exact same questions. We might not be operating in Timothy's church, but when we really think about it, our church is animated by the same Holy Spirit as his.

And that means that our Gospel isn't actually as cut-and-dried as we fall victim to thinking it is. Our relationship to the Living Word is just as fresh—just as ever-changing—as Timothy's.

We can't claim that we always know what it means to have confidence in the Gospel. So maybe Timothy's Christianity *is* actually a little bit like ours. Maybe we can listen for the same wisdom that Timothy listens for in his first letter, today.

Paul tells us here that sharing the good news of Jesus hinges on having confidence in that good news. Not an intellectual mastery of it; not a systematic understanding of it; not the ability to draw complex flowcharts and matrices on a whiteboard to accurately map it out; but confidence in it. And confidence implies a personal experience with the Gospel—an embodied, ongoing engagement of our faith.

Verses 12-16 are written as a testimonial. Paul lays out his own encounters with God's saving grace in order to speak to how Timothy might frame things for himself. Paul imposes interpretive lenses of humility, love, and salvation on his self-reflections—lenses that he can revisit time and time again in order to grow his confidence (and, by extension, the confidence of others).

How might the lenses of humility, love and salvation change your own self-reflection this week? If your faith were an emerging faith—virtually unknown to the rest of the world—how would you talk about it? Live into it? Share it? The combination of those answers will lead you to understanding more deeply what your own confidence in the Gospel looks like.

Scripture Summary

Timothy is one of the central evangelist figures in Ephesus (just a few miles inland on the western coast of modern-day Turkey) and benefits from Paul's reminders to stay true to the Gospel, even and especially when the newness of the church movement makes it difficult to know what that means.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come and hear the good news of Jesus Christ!

C: We come hungry for the gospel.

L: Come and be nourished on the Word of God.

C: We come rejoicing to the feast of life.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have sinned and fallen short of your desire for us. We have lost confidence in your saving power. We have turned inward and sought after our own security at the expense of others. We have forgotten your call and the example of your Son, Jesus Christ, to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves, believing that somehow that call is not literal or does not apply to us. Forgive us our short-sightedness, our selfishness, and our fear. Restore our faith in the good news of Jesus' resurrection, that we might be an Easter people, new creations, living to love and serve as you would have us.

P: Our gracious and loving God sees and knows your hearts, and forgives you and all God's children for your sins. Go forth in gratitude to live this new life in Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Almighty God,

C: Guide us in our faith, that we might be renewed and reinvigorated for the life that faith calls us to live. Encourage and sustain us through our doubts and our fears, strengthen our resolve to love and serve you and our neighbors, and lead us into beloved community with all the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of love, we bring before you now these gifts of our financial resources, our time, and our skills. Accept them and use them for the sake of sharing your world-transforming love in all the earth. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Together with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Give us confidence in the good news of your son, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for the benefit of your beloved creation. Make us to see where we, too, ought to sacrifice for the good of others. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: When we fall short, creation suffers. Yet when we strive for faith, hope, and love, creation sings your glory. Make us good stewards of all you have made, that we may sing your praises together. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Throughout scripture, your chosen leaders failed to live blameless lives. Forgive today's leaders for the things they do or don't do, and give them repentant hearts, that they might govern with justice. Uniting God,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Heal all who struggle with illness, pride, selfishness, addiction, abuse, grief, or anything that causes suffering, (*especially*). God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Open our eyes to the struggle for survival in our communities and beyond, and open our hands in compassionate service to address those needs at every turn. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With gratitude we look to the saints for their leadership in modeling humility with their lives of love and service to you. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift these prayers to you, Gracious God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who forgives even the most grievous of sins invites you to the table of redemption and grace, where Jesus meets us in bread and wine and strengthens us for the work of his holy reign. Come and be fed.

Litany

1: All we, like sheep, have gone astray.

2: We have sinned against our God.

1: We have sinned against our families.

2: We have sinned against our friends.

1: We have sinned against strangers.

2: We have sinned against creation.

1: And still, God loves us.

2: Still, God forgives us.

1: Still, God knows what we are capable of.

2: That we are capable of love and service.

1: "Gospel" means "good news."

2: Good news of new life in Christ.

1: We will have confidence in the gospel,

2: And live out our call with joy.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (high schoolers)

Kid 1: (*to Kid 4*) I don't get it. Why did Ms. Nuñez choose you to be our class representative?

Kid 2: Yeah. You used to be the biggest bully in school.

Kid 3: And you got in trouble for disrespecting teachers more times than I can count.

Kid 4: Don't forget that I had the worst grades in our class for a few years and almost had to repeat ninth grade.

Kid 1: Yeah and—

Kid 4: Or that I got kicked off the lacrosse team for vandalizing another team's equipment before a game.

Kid 2: You... what?

Kid 4: Or that I stole money from the band fundraiser to buy expensive sneakers.

Kid 3: Seriously.

Kid 4: Should I go on?

Kid 1: No. You should definitely not go on. What you should do is explain why Ms. Nuñez gave you a leadership job.

Kid 4: I've changed.

Kid 1: Hah. People don't change. You're just going to take advantage of everyone in the class.

Kid 2: Hold on. When's the last time [Kid 4] got suspended.

Kid 1: That we *know* of.

Kid 3: No. We'd know. It's been a couple years.

Kid 2: And I remember that lacrosse scandal. A couple years later, someone made a donation

to their team to pay for new equipment. (*to Kid 4*) That was you wasn't it.

Kid 4: I cannot begin to tell you how many lawns I mowed.

Kid 3: (*to Kid 4*) Didn't you make honor roll last quarter?

Kid 4: I was in the top 1% of our class for the last six quarters.

Kid 1: So, what. Now you're better than everyone?

Kid 4: No. The opposite. I know I was unbearable. Horrible to lots and lots of people. I had my reasons, but I'm not going to go into them because they'll sound like excuses.

Kid 2: So what happened?

Kid 4: Ms. Nuñez.

Kid 3: What, so you had her for one class in 9th grade and now you're better?

Kid 4: No. It took way more work than that. But she never once gave up on me. I don't know. She saw something no one else did. Not even me. And she pushed me to be better.

Kid 1: She is a pretty amazing teacher.

Kid 2: I heard she's had a pretty horrific life herself. She's pretty open about it.

Kid 3: I've never had a teacher who sees things the way she does. Who does things the way she does.

Kid 4: Exactly. So she chose me to be our class rep because she knows I'm exactly the person to be up front about how lousy I used to be. And if she can believe in me, and if I can change, then anyone can.

Kid 1: Ok. You've convinced me. I guess I have a lot to learn from both of you.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Anyone can share God's love.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A scroll

Background

While attributed to Paul, this letter was probably written one to two generations after he died. Timothy had been a worker with Paul, and he stayed in Ephesus to lead the growing church there. It was a time when Christianity was still very, very new (in fact, neither Paul nor Timothy would have said they were a "Christian.") There was little agreement about what it actually meant to follow in the Way of Jesus—many conflicting ideas and even gospels were turning up. Timothy had to deal with "false teachers" saying things about Jesus—who he was, what he did, and what it meant to follow him—that disagreed with Paul's understanding. In this letter, the writer is trying to convey the importance of sticking to the central idea of the gospel: Jesus' death, resurrection, and the promise of eternal life. It offers encouragement to Timothy, and to us today, about how to share God's love authentically. The letter begins with Paul identifying himself as a lousy human being, to make the point that if God can use *him* as a messenger, God can use *anyone*.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever written or gotten a letter. You can point out that nowadays most people communicate electronically, but some people still

write letters. When the church was very, very new, people wrote letters to share good news about Jesus. Show them the scroll and tell them this was the most common form of letters at the time. Tell the kids that for the next few weeks, they're going to hear about one letter in particular.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids to name some people they think would be really good at sharing the good news of God's love. (*pastors, parents, teachers*) Ask if they think there are any people who shouldn't be allowed to share God's love. What if they've done bad things? What if no one likes them? Tell them that one of the earliest people who followed Jesus was named Paul and he had been a terrible, terrible person. But God changed him and he became one of the most well-known followers of Jesus. If Paul could share God's love, then anyone can!

Ask the kids if they've ever made bad choices. Does that mean they can't share God's love? No! God can use every single one of us, no matter what, to share God's love with the world. Encourage the kids to write a letter to someone telling them about God's love this week. Close with a prayer thanking God for loving us no matter what.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Paper money (real) to show the kids.



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. ¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of

kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. ¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Secondary Text: Luke 16:27-30

²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—’ ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

Narrator 2: But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Narrator 1: But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Narrator 2: In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony

before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Narrator 1: It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

Narrator 2: As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.



Take Hold of Eternal Life, 1 Timothy 6:6-19

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: “The good fight of faith” is a defiance of avarice in the pursuit of contentment—a relentless effort to center ourselves where God would center us.

A subtle message throughout Paul’s first letter to Timothy is that the effectiveness of Timothy’s leadership will depend heavily on his knowledge of himself and his knowledge of the people to whom he is ministering. And, according to Paul, the people to whom Timothy is ministering struggle with something that many of us also struggle with, today: the temptation to find security through wealth.

To be clear, Paul’s condemnation in this passage is not of our needs, and not of our yearnings. He thinks that it makes sense to want goodness for ourselves and our communities. Goodness like comfort, safety, nourishment, connection, affirmation, and delight.

Paul’s condemnation is of the misguided places we tend to go to look for that goodness, especially wealth. His condemnation is of the surface-level tactics we use to try to answer a deeper set of questions.

Fast food can serve as a helpful metaphor in understanding Paul’s points here. He argues that investing time, energy and resources into material possessions is like the drive-through of spiritual enlightenment. It sounds tempting to us upfront, it feels really good to us in the moment, and it’s convenient—there are a million different outlets, opportunities and price points for you to choose from at any given time.

But fast food is only designed for those specific purposes. It isn’t intended to provide you with lasting nutrition; it isn’t supposed to help you live a healthier life. Short-term, you’re going to feel a little sluggish with a value meal in your system. Long term, the intentionally addictive properties in the fats, the sugars and the additives will keep you coming back for more, not because it’s benefitting you, but because you’re locked into a vicious cycle.

Fighting “the good fight of faith” doesn’t mean that we never cave—it doesn’t mean that we never grab a quick combo meal on a weird day. It just means that we do everything we can for ourselves and for others to access the goodness that God imagines and holds for us.

After all, God keeps promising us that this mortal life is not our end all, be all. God keeps comforting us by reminding us that this seemingly finite existence is actually an infinite one. God says that there is a plane beyond this to which we can connect and from which we can draw all of those good things we really need.

Scripture Summary

Paul reminds Timothy of the temptations to amass wealth and to build an identity based on material possessions—temptations he considers common to most people and charges Timothy to remind his fellow Christ followers that true wealth and true identity are rooted in God’s promise of eternal life.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God is here!

C: God is here in this beloved community!

L: Have no fear.

C: We will trust God to care for us.

L: God is with us always.

C: We will seek God for all our needs.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have sinned and fallen short of your desire for us. We have lost confidence in your saving power. We have turned inward and sought after our own security at the expense of others. We have forgotten your call and the example of your Son, Jesus Christ, to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves, believing that somehow that call is not literal or does not apply to us. Forgive us our short-sightedness, our selfishness, and our fear. Restore our faith in the good news of Jesus' resurrection, that we might be an Easter people, new creations, living to love and serve as you would have us.

P: Our gracious and loving God sees and knows your hearts, and forgives you and all God's children for your sins. Go forth in gratitude to live this new life in Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: You call us to reject the idea that we can create our own security through the pursuit of wealth and power. You offer us an alternative—eternal life in you, which begins in the here and now. Turn our attention away from ourselves and toward you and our neighbors. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, you provide what is needed. We offer now these, our gifts, out of your loving provision. Bless them and use them for your good purposes, that the whole world might know your lovingkindness. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Together with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, you promise us the gift of eternal life with you. Make us to live each day as if we are already experiencing this promise fulfilled, as it has been. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Teach us to lavish extravagant care on all that you have made. Make this planet whole for the benefit of all who call it home. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Give our leaders the spirit of your generosity, that they might strive to put in place systems of economics that do not victimize some for the benefit of others. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Heal all who are in need of your care and attention; all those who hurt in body, mind, or spirit, (*especially*). God of all that is,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: As we reflect on the ways we desire to change, help us also to see the ways we show up just the way we should. Help us to live contentedly with ourselves and with all people. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We thank you for all the saints who have labored for the sake of the gospel. Give us that same

commitment until we all taste the fruits of your sacred vine together. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift these prayers to you, Gracious God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who calls us to take hold of eternal life offers it right here at this holy table, where Jesus Christ meets us in bread and wine and fills our hearts with forgiveness and love. Come with your siblings in his holy name, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: We are tempted by the trappings of this world.

2: We are bombarded with images of wealth.

1: We are told we are not enough.

2: We are told there is not enough for everyone.

1: The love of money is the root of evil.

2: So many wander from God in search of it.

1: But we are called to shun all this.

2: We are called to pursue righteousness.

1: We are told we are enough.

2: We are told there is enough for everyone.

1: Loving God, remind us of what is true every day.

2: That we might serve you and not mammon.



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies:

- Images of material possessions printed on half-sheets of 8 ½ x 11 paper. For example, large homes, fancy cars, jewelry, cash, electronics, vacations, brand-name clothing, gourmet foods
- Blank half-sheets of 8 ½ x 11 paper.
- Crayons and markers
- Mural paper and painter's tape

During the Creative Expression Portion of Worship:

- Share your own story of giving up a material possession for your faith.
- Invite the congregation “sacrifice” a material good (the image they’ve chosen) by taping it to the mural paper, and then to put their drawing covering the image.
- Bless the mural, asking God to make it a reminder of our dependence on God.

Advanced Preparation:

- Hang a large piece of mural paper where everyone can see it.
- Lay out the images on a long table in the narthex or just inside the sanctuary.
- As people enter, invite them to choose an image of something they have or wished they have. Ask them to think about how this image makes them feel, and what it would feel like to give it up for the sake of others.
- Also give each person a blank half sheet. On this piece of paper, invite them to draw one way God has shown up in their lives when they have allowed themselves to be fully dependent on God (something they could not have done/gotten for themselves).



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can love God or love money. Not both.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Paper money (real) to show the kids.

Background

While attributed to Paul, this letter was probably written one to two generations after he died. Timothy had been a worker with Paul, and he stayed in Ephesus to lead the growing church there. It was a time when Christianity was still very, very new and there was little agreement about what it actually meant to follow in the Way of Jesus—many conflicting ideas and even gospels were turning up. A lot of the instructions in 1 Timothy are deeply problematic in our modern world. But today's text makes a simple, bold, and irrefutable claim: The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Help the kids distinguish between seeking wealth and trusting God.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the money. What is it? What can you do with it? How do you get it? Tell the kids that today's story has something to say about it.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about the money you have again. Are there good ways and bad ways to get it? How many of the kids want more of it? Open that question to the congregation. Why do people want more money? (*Ultimately, it is so they can have security*). Can money really make you safe from every bad thing? (*No*). Can trying to get more money cause you to hurt other people? (*Yes*)

What do the kids think it means to “love” money? (*To make it the most important thing in your life.*) What does it mean to “love” God? (*To make God the most important thing in your life.*) Can both things be the most important? (*No*).

Reiterate the point in the *KidStuff* bulletin that instead of trying to be rich, we can try to be gentle and kind and happy with what we have.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us remember what is most important, and to love God more than anything else.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A candle, lighter, and snuffer



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. ⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according

to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. ¹³Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Secondary Text: Luke 17:5-6

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Narrator 3

Narrator 1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

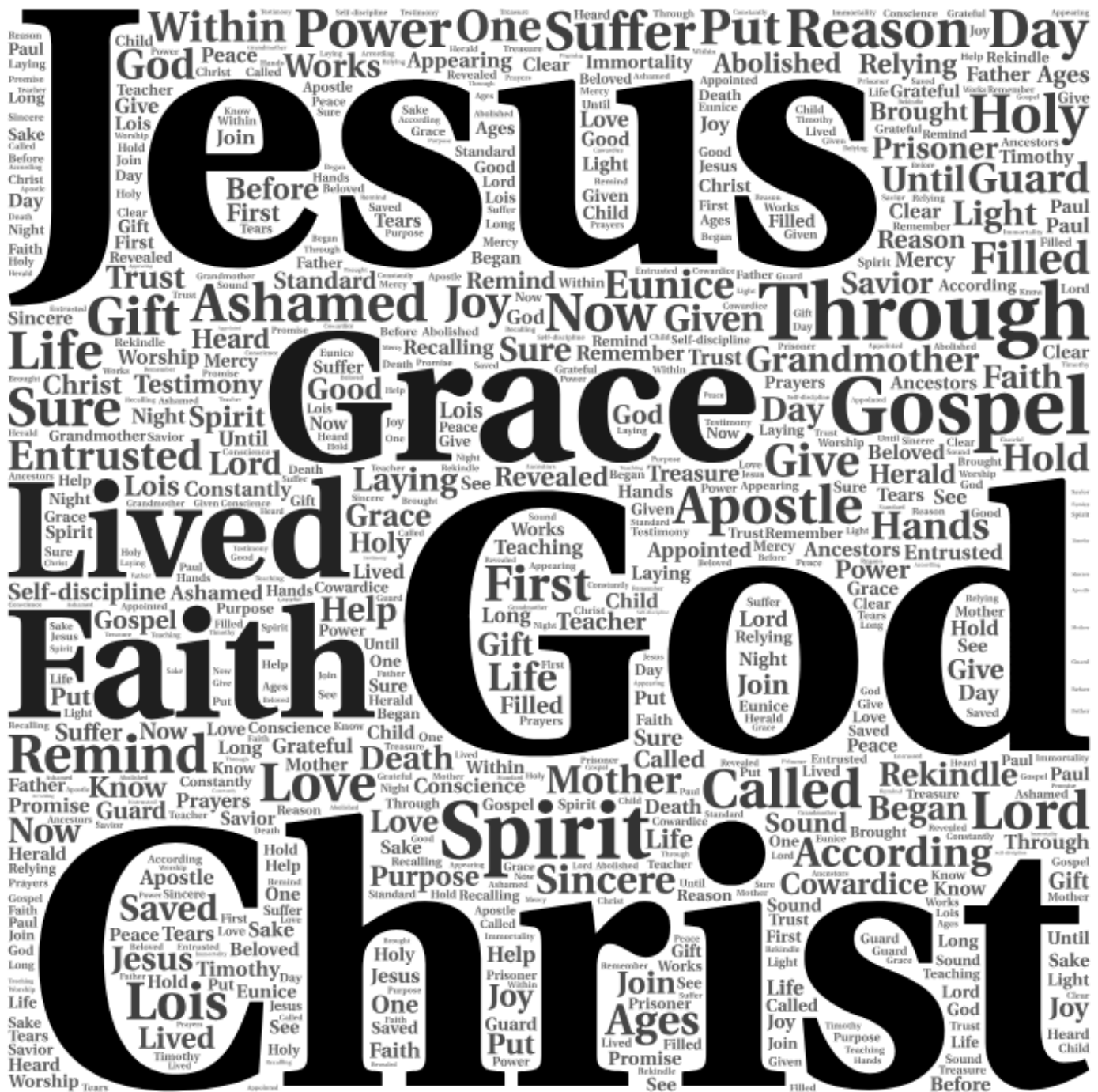
Narrator 2: For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner,

but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Narrator 3: For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Paul's reassurance to Timothy is a reminder for us to be loud and proud in building up the confidence and faith of the people around us.

The “gift of God” inside of Timothy can seem to us a bit ambiguous. But it would be fair to translate “gift of God” here, as Paul uses it, in its most literal sense, meaning that the gift inside of Timothy *is* God. God dwells inside of Timothy, inseparable from Timothy.

Essentially, then, Paul is telling Timothy that in the times where it doesn't feel like he is good enough, strong enough, smart enough, or just generally enough, he needs to channel the divine *that never actually left him*. He needs to recenter and recharge in God's all-encompassing love.

Important to note here is the practical bent that Paul puts on this otherwise abstract advice. Paul lays out for Timothy two crucial ways to get back in touch with the Holy Spirit.

The first is the “laying on of hands,” by which Paul means that Timothy needs to get his faith out of his head. Following Jesus is an embodied venture: the ways we breathe; the things we eat; the types of movement we choose; all of them inform and reflect the fact that we have been radically transformed by Christ. By nudging Timothy toward a laying on of hands, Paul is telling him to shake things up a bit and to reflect on his faith in a different way—a way that will instill for him that his faith is tangible.

The other is an invoking of Timothy's ancestors. Paul takes some pressure off of Timothy by reminding him that his faith doesn't have to be carried, shaped and tended to by him, alone. In other words, his faith doesn't have to be exhausting. Rather, his faith is something familiar. Something established. Something

passed down to him by people who love him. If Timothy is struggling to connect to his faith, he should try, instead, to connect to his community and see what happens next.

But *most* important to note here is that Paul is saying anything at all. Most of us listen to these words as if we were Timothy. Most of us connect to this passage as centuries-later recipients of the spiritual boost that Paul is providing. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. But what if we flipped the script and listened to these words as a call to action? What if we connected to this passage as centuries-later imitators, seeking out every possible opportunity to speak loving reminders onto our friends, our families and our greater communities?

We don't need to be at 100% or feel at 100%, ourselves, to be able to bolster others up. We don't need to have mastered any part of our faith to be able to call others into it. All we need to do is exactly what Paul lays out here—to remember Christ in our bodies and to remember Christ in our people—and then to bring it up. Explicitly and on purpose.

What would have happened here if Paul assumed that Timothy knew all of these things, and that he could get himself through this round of trials and tribulations? We don't know for certain—but we *do* know that these words were powerful enough to persist in a canonized version of scriptural witness that far outlived Timothy, and that is begging for our engagement today.

Scripture Summary

When Timothy struggles in his leadership in Ephesus, Paul writes some encouragement for Timothy to rekindle the “gift of God” that is within him.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest."

C: We are weary of the cares of the world.

L: Our God gives us a spirit of power and love.

C: Fill us with this spirit, O God.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have sinned and fallen short of your desire for us. We have lost confidence in your saving power. We have turned inward and sought after our own security at the expense of others. We have forgotten your call and the example of your Son, Jesus Christ, to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves, believing that somehow that call is not literal or does not apply to us. Forgive us our short-sightedness, our selfishness, and our fear. Restore our faith in the good news of Jesus' resurrection, that we might be an Easter people, new creations, living to love and serve as you would have us.

P: Our gracious and loving God sees and knows your hearts, and forgives you and all God's children for your sins. Go forth in gratitude to live this new life in Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy Spirit,

C: You do not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of love, power, and self-discipline. Help us to lean into you and this beloved community that we might be refreshed for your work in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, you kindle in us a spirit of generosity, that we might meaningfully respond to the needs of our neighbors. Accept these gifts from what you have first given us, and use them on behalf of our suffering world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Together with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Sustaining God, we so often grow weary in our work; we don't see how anything we do does any good for your beloved children. Rekindle in us the knowledge of your presence with us, that the Holy Spirit might inspire us anew. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We are in awe of the work of your hands, O Creator. Teach us to understand the interconnectedness of all of nature, that people, animals, plants, and the earth itself might flourish together. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Help our leaders to recognize the value of every single human being, so that they would strive to create a society that is welcoming to all, without exception. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Bring up all who have been brought low by sickness, grief, imprisonment, addiction, isolation, neglect, or illness, (*especially...*). God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Open our hearts to extend your hospitality to all the people of the earth. Let us tear down the artificial barriers we construct between peoples and cultures. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We thank you for all the saints whose faithfulness has kindled in us a holy fire—a passion for the work of the gospel. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift these prayers to you, Gracious God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who kindles in us gifts of the spirit now invites us to the feast of God's son, Jesus Christ, where we might be nourished and inspired to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Come and meet Jesus in this bread and wine and be strengthened in his holy name.

Litany

1: We are discouraged, O God.

2: We see evil all around us.

1: We weep in frustration and fear.

2: We cannot understand others' actions.

1: We want to proclaim your love for the world.

2: We are sometimes too tired to even try.

1: Take heart, children of God, for you are not alone.

2: Take joy in this community.

1: Take strength in our shared vision.

2: Take comfort in our shared history.

1: God will rekindle in us the Holy Spirit.

2: Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with new life.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Person 1: I am exhausted.

Person 2: You have good reason to be, I think.

Person 1: But why? There are so many things wrong with the world, with our community, with the way things work.

Person 2: Yeah, and that's exhausting.

Person 1: But something needs to be done. I can't just sit back and throw up my hands.

Person 2: There are some things you just can't change. Not by wanting or wishing or even working to change them.

Person 1: But if I'm not out there working to change things, aren't I complicit in the problems?

Person 2: Accepting the things you can't change doesn't mean condoning them.

Person 1: It sure feels like it.

Person 2: Listen, the world has always been a mess. Literally always. And people have always popped up to work against it, organized communities, taken action. And a lot of things have changed for the better.

Person 1: I don't see it.

Person 2: That's because you didn't live it. Would you like to go back to the 19th century and live with tuberculosis and slavery and women's rights or lack thereof?

Person 1: Of course not!

Person 2: Those things were real. They happened. And things have gotten better.

Person 1: That's easy for you and me to say. We're privileged. We don't have to deal with the things other people do.

Person 2: Maybe so. But it is true. *And* there is still lots of work to be done. But you don't have the power to just make it better. You're not God.

Person 1: Where *is* God, then?

Person 2: You're discouraged. And tired. I get that. But here's the thing—your dad spent his whole life teaching peace and justice studies, right?

Person 1: Yeah.

Person 2: And *his* dad was the first banker to give a home loan to a Black person in their affluent suburb in the 1960s, right?

Person 1: Yeah.

Person 2: And I've met your mom and I don't know anyone with a stronger faith and a greater commitment to service than her.

Person 1: But doesn't that put pressure on me to do more? To be like them?

Person 2: You *are* like them. The point is that you're not doing this alone. You're doing it with all the people who have come before, who have worked and suffered and made things better.

Person 1: I guess.

Person 2: And you have this amazing faith community supporting you, too. Don't forget all the other people around you.

Person 1: Thanks, [Person 2]. I really do need a recharge to my faith.

Person 2: The Holy Spirit will oblige, I'm sure.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's Spirit is like a flame in us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A candle, lighter, and snuffer

Background

While attributed to Paul, this letter was probably written one to two generations after he died. Timothy had been a worker with Paul, and he stayed in Ephesus to lead the growing church there. It was a time when Christianity was still very, very new and there was little agreement about what it actually meant to follow in the Way of Jesus—many conflicting ideas and even gospels were turning up. Timothy was tired and discouraged. He was dealing with false teachers, quibbling in the congregation, and who-knows-what-else. The writer of the letter reminds Timothy that the Holy Spirit can build us up and give us hope again.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever heard of the Holy Spirit. What is it? (*It's God's spirit living inside us, helping us love God and others*) What are some symbols for the Holy Spirit? (*water, oil, wind, breath, fire*) One of them is a flame. Light the candle. How is God's spirit like a flame? It warms us, gives us light to show us the way, gives us energy and hope, takes away darkness. Tell the kids that in today's story, they're going to hear about what God's holy spirit can do for us.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids what it means to be "discouraged." (*to cause to lose hope, enthusiasm, or courage*) Have a discussion about how sharing God's love can be fun and exciting. Ask for examples and give some of your own. Then ask the kids if they ever feel like God isn't really with them or helping them. Share your own example if the kids aren't forthcoming. Snuff the candle and say "this is what it can feel like when sad or scary or hard things happen." What can we do? when we feel discouraged and our flames are snuffed out? (*Talk to our grown-ups, pastors, teachers; do kind things for others, read Bible stories, etc.*) What happens when we do those things? Re-light the candle and talk about how God re-lights our spirits.

Close with a prayer thanking God for lighting the flame of God's loving spirit in our hearts.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A paper chain



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; ¹³if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

¹⁴Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Secondary Text: Luke 17:16-19

¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Narrator 2: Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.



Remember Jesus Christ, Raised from the Dead, 2 Timothy 2:8-15

A word cloud where the words are arranged to form the sentence "Worship Jesus Christ Good". The words are of various sizes and orientations, creating a dense, textured effect. The colors are primarily shades of blue, green, and yellow, with some white and light blue accents. The words are scattered throughout the image, with some appearing multiple times. The overall shape is roughly rectangular, with the words filling the space and creating a sense of movement and energy. The words are of various sizes, with some being significantly larger than others, emphasizing certain words. The colors are vibrant and eye-catching, making the word cloud stand out. The words are arranged in a way that they are easy to read, even though they are scattered. The word cloud is a creative and visually appealing way to represent the sentence "Worship Jesus Christ Good".



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Trying to do too much with the Gospel, too much around the Gospel and too much about the Gospel will result in missing the entire point of the Gospel. Understanding that Jesus lived for us, died for us, and then rose to new life—also for us—is all we truly need at the center of a faithful and faith-filled life.

In Chapter 14 of Antoine de St. Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, the author describes a planet whose sole inhabitant is a lamplighter. When the sun goes down, he brings a flame to life and when the sun sets, he puts the flame out. But the planet spins so fast that each day only lasts a minute, which means that the lamplighter just keeps sparking and extinguishing the fire in this lamp. When the Little Prince asks him what he is doing and why, the lamplighter just says, "Orders are orders."

The Little Prince is confused, mostly because there is nobody else living on this planet who would benefit from a lamp guiding their way in the dark. Out of shock and a bit of a concern for the well-being of the lamplighter, he asks a few questions and suggests some alternative strategies. Ultimately, the lamplighter won't consider or instigate anything new. He has honed his focus so tightly on the obligations surrounding his work that he seems to have forgotten the purpose of the work in the first place.

This is the exact trap that Paul is trying to help followers of Christ avoid: to miss the forest for the trees. Paul speaks to Timothy's church, specifically, saying that they "wrangle over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening." This

sounds familiar, right? We know our own versions of this phenomenon, especially in church. Whatever our intentions and however pious our postures, we sometimes get caught up in the nuances of our scripture.

In and of itself, this isn't a bad thing. We are stewards of God's Word, which means that we *should* actively engage with it. We *should* examine it. We *should* interpret and re-interpret it based on questions from our lived experience. The problem arises when our focus on details of the Word prohibits the execution of the Word—when our insistence on the little things detracts from the meaning and power of the big things.

Martin Luther is famous for his conviction that the most crucial systematic theology is actually one of pastoral care—that the best, most Godly work any of us can do is to "calm the terrified conscience" no matter how dogmatically "right" or "wrong" we might be in the moment.

This call to centrality in the Gospel mirrors that of Paul to Timothy's church: rest assured in the deep, grounding love that you know through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Start there. Whatever else you need to figure out, you *will* be able to figure out if you can keep the remembrance of Jesus, risen, central in your heart.

Scripture Summary

Paul calls us to remove the obstacles that we put in the way of the Gospel, and encourages Timothy to recenter in the most visceral, foundational convictions of his faith and call his followers to join him.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Jesus lived for us.

C: Jesus died for us.

L: Jesus was resurrected for us.

C: We will live in Christ Jesus!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess to you and to one another that we have sinned and fallen short of your desire for us. We have lost confidence in your saving power. We have turned inward and sought after our own security at the expense of others. We have forgotten your call and the example of your Son, Jesus Christ, to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves, believing that somehow that call is not literal or does not apply to us. Forgive us our short-sightedness, our selfishness, and our fear. Restore our faith in the good news of Jesus' resurrection, that we might be an Easter people, new creations, living to love and serve as you would have us.

P: Our gracious and loving God sees and knows your hearts, and forgives you and all God's children for your sins. Go forth in gratitude to live this new life in Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of new life,

C: It can be easy to be pulled in so many directions, even within the life of our faith community. Draw us back to the foundational truth that Jesus' death and resurrection redeemed all of creation, and that as Easter people, we, too, are raised to new life in his name each day. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, you open your hand and creation brings forth sustenance for all that you have made. In gratitude we return to you this portion of what you have given us, that we might participate with you in the holy work of healing and wholeness for all the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Together with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: We remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, whose resurrection is a promise to us that we will never die, but live in, through, and for you, for the good of all that you have made. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We remember all who have worked side by side with you in caring for creation. May we follow their example for the sake of generations to come. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We remember all who have been leaders at every level, from the smallest club to the largest nation, and give thanks for those who centered the needs of all over their own self-interest. May today's leaders be inspired by the best of those who have gone before. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We remember those who have endured illness in body, mind, or spirit—those who experienced healing in their lifetime and those who did not. Today we uplift those experiencing any suffering that you would bless them with endurance, faith, and healing, (*especially...*). God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We remember all those who have striven for peace and justice in our nation and around the world. May we be inspired to carry on their work with persistence. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We remember the saints, those canonized and the everyday saints that surround us, both living and dead. Give us confidence in the promise of the resurrection, when all shall feast together in your presence. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift these prayers to you, Gracious God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who died and was raised for our sake now invites you to join him at this holy table, where he meets us in bread and wine and gives us new life in his name. Jesus is here! Come and be fed!

Litany

1: If we have died with Christ,

2: We will be raised with Christ.

1: If we have turned away from the call of the world,

2: We will be able to hear the call of the Holy Spirit.

1: Help us, O God, to not argue about things that don't matter,

2: Or try to justify ourselves by cherry-picking your word.

1: Help us present ourselves to you as the workers you desire,

2: And equip us for the work you have for us to do.



Creative Expression

Congregational Activity: The Word of God is Not Chained

Supplies:

- Strips of construction paper
- Markers
- Tape—multiple small rolls that can be shared among the congregation.
- Scissors

Advanced Preparation:

- Cut construction paper into strips.
- As members enter, invite them to take a strip and write one thing about the Bible that bothers them. It might be a challenging passage or the way it is used to justify something evil in our society.

During the Creative Expression Portion of Worship:

- Talk about how important it is to wrestle with the Bible. Be honest about the things about it that are problematic. Remind the

congregation that the Holy Spirit is present in your discernment.

- Invite each row or larger grouping of your congregants to take tape and fashion chains from their strips.
- Invite two people from each group to bring their chains to the front and stand on either end.
- When all the chains are assembled, make the point that there are some things that are so central to the gospel that they trump all the problematic issues; that we can “wrangle over words” in our attempt to interpret, but ultimately, “The Word of God is not chained.”
- Hold up the scissors and say that they represent the central truth of the gospel: that Jesus died for the redemption of absolutely everything in all creation, and that because of him, we are freed to live in love and service to God and neighbor. Then dramatically cut the chains that were created, symbolically freeing God’s word.
- Close with a prayer.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's love is on the loose!

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A paper chain

Background

While attributed to Paul, this letter was probably written one to two generations after he died. Timothy had been a worker with Paul, and he stayed in Ephesus to lead the growing church there. It was a time when Christianity was still very, very new and there was little agreement about what it actually meant to follow in the Way of Jesus—many conflicting ideas and even gospels were turning up. The writer of this letter reminds Timothy of the central point of our faith: Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. Help kids visualize that God's love is on the loose, no matter what is happening around us.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the chain. Ask what it is. What are real chains for? One of the earliest followers of Jesus, Paul, was put into prison because he shared the good news of Jesus with others. It was a time when people didn't like the followers of Jesus because their message was about love of God and loving others, especially those who were poor or oppressed by powerful people.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids to restate the good news that makes people want to follow in the Way of Jesus (*Jesus' loves us so much that he chose to die, was raised from the dead, and tells us we will one day be with God forever.*) How do we follow in the Way of Jesus? (*Speak up for people who are being hurt.*) Can this sometimes get us in trouble even today? (*Yes! Many people get in trouble for speaking up for others as Jesus would have them.*)

Show them the chain again. Can God's love and the good news of Jesus be put in prison? (*No!*)

Dramatically break the chain and proclaim that God's love is on the loose! Where is it? What's it doing? Can the kids see it? Invite the kids to give examples and give some of your own.

Close with a prayer thanking God that God's love is on the loose no matter who tries to stop it!

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Earbuds



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 2 Timothy 3:14—4:8, 16-18

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. ⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I

have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

¹⁶At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Secondary Text: Luke 18:6-8

⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Narrator 3

Narrator 1: But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Narrator 2: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit

their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Narrator 3: At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.



The Lord Stood By Me, 2 Timothy 3:14—4 :8, 16-18

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: No matter where we go, what we are called to do there, and with whom we are called to do it, God will stand by us as eternal inspiration, provision and sense-maker.

We're now at the end of the Book of 2 Timothy. We've seen a few different approaches to and strategies behind Paul's encouragement to Timothy. And by now, we're definitely wondering: why is Timothy in such dire need of a pep talk? What kind of an impasse might he be experiencing with his followers? His critics, even? Why is he so exhausted? Why is he so disheartened?

We have the chance this week to reflect on the fact that planting something new is hard—that protecting it and cultivating it to the point of *real* growth can be an all-consuming venture. It's not only possible, but probable, too, that Timothy isn't seeing the fruits of all his evangelizing labor. He is almost certainly feeling like no one wants to buy what he's selling, which would, understandably, leave him tired, lonely and disheartened.

After all, with any mission that relies as heavily as Timothy's does on translation work—on speaking a revolutionarily thing into “status quo” language and system—we would want to see a spark of interest on the listening end. We would want to know that the work is making sense to the people for whom it is intended, and that they are getting on board with it. All of the sudden in the work of kingdom building, public opinion seems like *everything*.

Timothy must not have public opinion on his side. So, he must be feeling like he has...well, *nothing*.

Paul's call to Timothy can be our call today: to forget what we know about supply and demand. To do good, Godly work without focusing on any kind of end result. To employ good, Godly methods without

worrying about any sort of market penetration or adoption patterns.

Paul's argument here invites us to consider that even if we can't see the impact of what we're doing, there *is* an impact playing out. Paul explains a divine economy of sorts wherein the end results of our sourcing, packaging, transporting and communication labor is already pre-solved; pre-secured. The true metric for our success in a life of Christ does not lie in the opinion or behavior of others, but rather, in the confidence, love and grace that we build with God over time. A faith-filled life is one that sees no difference between destination and journey.

And the good news there is that God's presence isn't as fickle as public opinion—God's provision isn't questionable or conditional. Paul witnesses the fact that God is the only force who will ever be with us and available to us 100% of the time. God is our sole source of incentive, insight and enthusiasm—and we never have to be worried about operating separate from God, or outside of God's grace.

Why put stock in the opinions that others have about your efficacy when their opinions aren't actually measures of truth? Let us worry about others, instead, from a place of love, empathy and community building. As God has stood by us—and as God continues to stand by us—that is our only charge.

Scripture Summary

Paul advises Timothy to practice integrity moving forward—to pursue his mission for its own sake, regardless of how his mission might be received by his community. Paul testifies that God is the only source of confidence, affirmation and energy that any of us needs.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Come and be fed on the Word of God.
- C: We come open to God's call to us.**
- L: Come and be nourished for the work of God.
- C: We come open to God's call to us.**
- L: Come and be strengthened in the presence of God.
- C: We come with joy to God's house.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Merciful God,
- C: We confess to you and to one another that we have sinned and fallen short of your desire for us. We have lost confidence in your saving power. We have turned inward and sought after our own security at the expense of others. We have forgotten your call and the example of your Son, Jesus Christ, to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves, believing that somehow that call is not literal or does not apply to us. Forgive us our short-sightedness, our selfishness, and our fear. Restore our faith in the good news of Jesus' resurrection, that we might be an Easter people, new creations, living to love and serve as you would have us.**
- P: Our gracious and loving God sees and knows your hearts, and forgives you and all God's children for your sins. Go forth in gratitude to live this new life in Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of grace and power,
- C: You have always stood by your servants even in the worst of times, even when the weight was so great they could not see you. Open our minds and our hearts to recognize you in one another and in the whole Christian family, that we might be strengthened for the work of sharing your love with all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Ever-present God, you have given us gift upon gift and sustained us through the pains and trials of life. In joyful gratitude we offer our money, time, and talents to the work of ensuring that all creation sees and knows you in vital and life-giving ways. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: Together with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.
- A brief silence.*
- L: Loving God, you stand by us in all our pains and trials, as well as in our joys and victories. Make us to stand with our neighbors, that we might be your presence in their lives. God of all that is,
- C: Hear our prayer.**
- L: Your blessed creation relies upon us to preserve, protect, and nurture it. Make us committed stewards of all the earth, that all might thrive. God of all that is,
- C: Hear our prayer.**



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Prayers of the Church, cont'd

L: Shake our leaders out of their myopic focus on their own power and influence, so that they might truly see the people they serve, and work diligently for equity and justice. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Strengthen caregivers, medical staff, and all who serve you by working for the health of others. Pour your healing blessing upon all who are ill or in pain, (*especially...*). God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Help us live in peace with all your children throughout the world. Make us ever mindful that you are in each of us, and we should treat one another accordingly. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We remember with thanksgiving all the saints who have suffered challenges because of their commitment to you and others. Inspire us by their example to live in faithfulness to you. God of all that is,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift these prayers to you, Gracious God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God, who stands by us in all our challenges invites you now to the feast of victory for God's son, Jesus Christ. Come and be nourished on bread and wine in which Jesus meets us and strengthens us with his steadfast presence and love. All is prepared.

Litany

- 1: Sometimes it is so hard to find you, O God.
- 2: **We cannot see you through our tears.**
- 1: We cannot see you with eyes closed by exhaustion.
- 2: **We cannot see you through the haze of strife in our communities.**
- 1: We cannot see you through the hail of lies coming from our leaders—those we are meant to trust.
- 2: **We do not know how to find you, O God.**
- 1: And yet, our faith tells us you are here.
- 2: **Our experience shows us that you never leave us.**
- 1: Our hope in you does not die.
- 2: **Strengthen our faith that you stand by us no matter what.**

Creative Expression

Personal Stories

Invite one or two members of your congregation to share personal stories of their response to God's call to work for peace, justice, equity, and the flourishing of all creation. Ask them to focus on what it is in their faith that leads them to pursue this work. Ask them to be open about setbacks, frustrations, and times when their faith failed them. Ask them to share how God stood by them.

End by reminding the congregation that God stands by them no matter how challenging life is.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God stands by us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Earbuds

Background

While attributed to Paul, this letter was probably written one to two generations after he died. Timothy had been a worker with Paul, and he stayed in Ephesus to lead the growing church there. It was a time when Christianity was still very, very new and there was little agreement about what it actually meant to follow in the Way of Jesus—many conflicting ideas and even gospels were turning up. The writer reminds a tired and discouraged Timothy that even when everyone else deserted him, God was right there. Help the kids see that God stands with them no matter what.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids to identify the people in their lives who take care of them. (*Parents/guardians, teachers, pastors, extended family, friends*). Ask them to imagine how it would feel if they got in trouble and then everyone ran away from them and refused to help them. If you have a story of when something like that happened to you, feel free to share it.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids if they've ever seen a spy movie or some media where someone gives instructions to another person through a microphone in their ears. Show them the earbuds and put one in your ear. Point out that someone on the other end can be giving you information or instructions and no one else could hear it. Ask the kids to go back to imagining what it felt like to be abandoned. Then ask them to imagine they had an earbud in their ear with God's voice in it. How would that feel? To know that they aren't actually alone, that God is still with them, helping them, giving them the right words to say? Point out that God's Holy Spirit is always within us, always stands by us no matter what. We may not have an actual earbud in our ears, but God speaks to us in our hearts.

Close with a prayer thanking God for standing by us no matter what.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bird nest
- Bird plush



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-2

19 On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

20 Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Secondary Text: Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God

Narrator: On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying,

God: Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.

Narrator: Then God spoke all these words:

God: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.



Nineteen Comes Before Twenty, Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-2

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Having freedom and living free are not the same thing. Luckily, we are beloved children of a God who guides us in both.

We're so familiar with the story of Moses that we sometimes gloss over what an immense and complicated transition the Hebrews are having to navigate as they cross into the wilderness.

A matter of only months ago, these families were slaves under Pharaoh's rule. For generations, the Hebrew people had been coerced into an alternate reality wherein their value was determined by one thing, and one thing only: what they could produce.

While the Israelites probably felt indescribable relief, joy and celebration as they followed Moses onto the Sinai peninsula, it's difficult to imagine they didn't also feel indescribable anxiety, confusion and disorientation. Exhaustion. Uncertainty.

These are the people to whom God spoke through Moses in Exodus 19. Vulnerable people. Messy and starting-over people. People much like ourselves. To these people, God brought two promises:

- 1) I'm bringing you into your freedom
- 2) I'm giving you structure and guidance so that you're not left on your own in that freedom

This passage is about the fact that God sets boundaries for God's people. Boundaries aren't God's rules on a scorecard or measuring sticks of our salvation. Boundaries aren't about exclusion—keeping checks on other people, or putting them down. In fact, boundaries aren't about other people at all.

Boundaries are about keeping a mission intact; about knowing yourself and growing yourself. Boundaries simply tell you where not to go so that you can explore everywhere else to the absolute fullest.

In Disney's *The Lion King*, Mufasa sits on a ledge with his son, Simba, surveying the land and speaking to the lion's place in the circle of life.

Mufasa: "Look, Simba. Everything the light touches is our kingdom."

Simba: "What about that shadowy place?"

Mufasa: "That's beyond our borders. You must never go there, Simba."

Simba: "But I thought that a king can do whatever he wants."

Mufasa: "There is more to being a king than getting your way all the time."

It's not that a lion *can't* go to the Elephant Graveyard in the shadows—Simba ventures there in the very next scene. But when he does, he finds nothing that feeds him. He finds only danger, fear and emptiness.

Mufasa's boundary was not about obedience—it was about stewardship. Mufasa's boundary was not punitive—it was in the pursuit of livelihood. Simba's purpose in creation is made manifest in everything the light touches. Why spend time anywhere else?

God's steadfast love is the foundation of our freedom in Christ. Our kingdom is everything the steadfast love of God touches. Before we delve into God's Ten Commandments, this text allows us to hear why they matter, and the promise that they will help us to live free.

Scripture Summary

As God guides the Hebrews out of a life of slavery and into a life of freedom, God reveals to Moses the laws that will mark, and more importantly, sustain them as God's chosen people.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come in the name of our God.

C: We come rejoicing in God's name.

L: Come in love of neighbor.

C: We come with love for all God's children.

L: Come and rest in God's presence.

C: We come to be nourished on God's love.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess that we have failed time and again to follow your good commandments to us. We have not loved you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have been unfaithful to one another. We have neglected the needs of our neighbors. We have coveted more than what we need. We have not loved others as we love ourselves. Forgive us for all the ways we have sinned and fallen short, and bring us back into harmony with you and your whole creation, for the sake of Jesus, our savior and friend.

P: Beloved, hear this good news! The God who still bears you on eagle's wings loves and forgives you all your sins, and invites you to go forth in newness of purpose to share God's love and forgiveness with the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Mothering God,

C: You have always borne us on your wings like a loving mother eagle cares for her brood. Continue to guide us as we grow in your word. Feed, protect, and strengthen us for the work of carrying your love into our families, communities, and the world. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God, in your tender care, you have gifted us with an abundance of good things. In joyful gratitude we now return a portion of these gifts that you might bless and use them for the sake of the whole of your beautiful creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the faithful promises of our God, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of the covenant, you have claimed us as your own, and you have called us “treasured.” Show us how to live as people who are jewels in the eyes of the one who created heaven and earth.
God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Your chosen people kept time by counting the moons that passed. Teach us to pay attention to the movement of your creation and remind us daily to care for all things you have made.
God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We place in your care the leaders of this world whose duty it is to execute the laws that protect and support their people. Help them use their power responsibly, and with wisdom and compassion. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We entrust to your care all who are in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit, (*especially*). Give peace and patience to caregivers so that they might have the strength to endure long nights and thankless days. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Let us never forget that every single person on earth is your beloved child. Show us how we might be welcoming, loving, and accepting of everyone, regardless of our differences.
God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With gratitude we remember Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and all the saints who have gone before us. By their example, show us how to follow your laws of love with humility and grace.
God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With humble hearts we lift these prayers to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who has always provided for our needs now calls you to this table to be nourished once again on this bread and wine, in which Jesus is fully present to love, forgive, and strengthen you in all things. Come to the feast!



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

L: I am your God; I have saved and will save.

C: We are your people; we remember your deeds.

L: I carry you like a mother eagle.

C: You bear us on your precious wings.

L: I will make you a holy nation.

C: We will listen to your words.

L: 'This is a covenant between us.

C: We will honor it in word and deed.

L: I am your God.

C: And we are your people.

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-3

Kid 1: I am so sick of all these rules!

Kid 2: What did you do now?

Kid 1: It doesn't matter what I did! Or forgot to do.
Or broke.

Kid 3: Yikes. Your mom must be pretty mad at you.

Kid 1: Maybe. I skipped out after the last...well,
anyway, I don't even want to know what she's
going to say.

Kid 2: You're going to have to deal with it eventually.

Kid 1: Yeah, I know. I just feel like she asks way too
much. Do this. Don't do this. Don't do that.
Don't do the other thing.

Kid 3: I think your mom's rules are pretty good,
actually.

Kid 2: I agree. She's just making sure you're safe and
you get along with your sisters and stuff.

Kid 1: Ugh. You sound just like her.

Kid 3: Well she's right, isn't she?

Kid 1: But how come I have to do all this stuff and
she doesn't have to do anything.

Kid 2: Um...You wanna think about that statement?

Kid 1: What are you talking about?

Kid 3: She does way more for you than you do for her.

Kid 2: She's the coolest mom I have ever met, to be
honest. I wish she were my mom.

Kid 3: Agreed. You probably don't even notice how
good you have it.

Kid 1: Maybe you're right. I mean, she makes sure
I'm safe, that I have enough to eat; she takes
me to the doctor and helps me with my
homework. And when I follow the rules—
which I do sometimes!—I do get along with
my sisters a lot better.

Kid 2: And that's just the tip of the iceberg, isn't it?

Kid 3: Maybe you shouldn't think of them as rules.
Think of them as gifts.

Kid 1: You're pushing it, now.

Kid 3: No, I'm serious!

Kid 1: I guess I can try. For my mom's sake.

Kid 2: I'm sure she'd appreciate it. But you know she
loves you anyway, right?

Kid 1: Yeah, yeah. I do.

Kid 3: Which just goes to prove the point that she
does waaay more for you than you do for her.

Kid 1: Okay, I get it. I'll go home and apologize.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God cares for us like a mother bird.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bird nest
- Bird plush

Background

In lots of places in the Bible, God describes God's love for the people in feminine and/or mothering terms. In Exodus, God speaks of caring for the people like an eagle caring for her young. Help kids engage with this feminine imagery of God, and articulate the ways God cares for them.

Set the Scene

When you invite the kids forward for Kids' Storytime, have the nest and bird plush set aside until after you read the story from the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids, "What was God compared to in this story?" (*a mother eagle*) Discuss the ways a mother eagle might care for her babies. Use the bird plush and nest to show her warming the babies with her body, feeding the babies, preening them with her sharp beak to keep them clean, teaching them to fly, etc.

Ask, "Is God like a mother to us, too?" Ask the kids the ways their parents and guardians care for them. Make the connection that God cares for them through their caregivers.

Ask kids to close their eyes and imagine that God is holding them in God's loving arms, feeding them yummy food, playing with them, teaching them how to do new things, etc.

Close with a prayer thanking God for caring for each and every one of us like a mother eagle cares for her babies.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 20:3-11

³You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. ⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Secondary Text: Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Narrator 2: You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Narrator 1: Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.



Tuned Into God, Exodus 20:3-11

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: We cannot fully live into, a good, Godly life until we understand what frames it: our connection to the divine.

We live in a time of identity curation. We operate believing that each of us builds a “self” by selecting the elements of history, culture, and image that resonate with us and putting them on display to tell the rest of the world who we are and what we’re about: The music we listen to; the hobbies we take up (or don’t); the organizations we support (or don’t). Every decision we make matters in creating our “self.”

Anthropologists refer to this as cultural appropriation or cultural exchange. In layman’s terms, it’s cherry-picking. Each of us isolates and selects specific things to form one bigger, more cohesive thing. One evolving identity.

Without meaning to, we often quantify our religious identities in the same way. God becomes just one of the cherries available for us to pick. But this passage invites us to pause and challenge this notion. It proclaims that God is not just a cherry to be picked.

That’s because God cannot be isolated—separated—from anything in creation. God is the tree the cherry is growing on, the breeze that rustles the leaves, the light that feeds the tree, the water that flows through it, the bird perched in its branches. God is the basket that holds all of the other cherries you pick, the force that protects them, and that allows you to bring them with you as you go from place to place.

The central Jesuit principle *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* gets to this idea. It says that nothing we experience can possibly exclude God or evade God, because God is present in every thing, every circumstance, every movement and every season in creation. God is the glitter on our craft table—it’s everywhere, covering

everything all at once, regardless of whether that was your intention.

In our text today, God shares three imperatives:

- 1) You shall have no other gods before me ... you shall not make for yourself an idol.
- 2) You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God
- 3) Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy

When we read these commandments through the lens of God’s everywhere-ness, we realize that they are much less directives and much more recollections of God’s inevitable, inescapable, incomparable connection to God’s people. Let’s take some artistic liberties in translating:

- 1) “I’m here, with you and for you. You have no need for other gods or idolatrous forces in your life.”
- 2) “I am only for you—you will not find me in spaces, places, or causes that seek to harm you.”
- 3) “Let’s never forget that the creative connection between us is where your energy comes from. Let’s give it space to recharge.”

Our main takeaway—our comfort—today is that God’s everywhere-ness is the real, true basis of self-building. There is an unshakable connection between us and our Creator that lays the relational groundwork for our entire identity in Christ and our entire life in faith.

Scripture Summary

God outlines the first three commandments, which emphasize and describe the foundational connection between us and our Creator.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
C: We come to rest in the presence of God.
L: Remember all that our God has done for us.
C: We will honor God's holy name forever.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess that we have failed time and again to follow your good commandments to us. We have not loved you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have been unfaithful to one another. We have neglected the needs of our neighbors. We have coveted more than what we need. We have not loved others as we love ourselves. Forgive us for all the ways we have sinned and fallen short, and bring us back into harmony with you and your whole creation, for the sake of Jesus, our savior and friend.

P: Beloved, hear this good news! The God who still bears you on eagle's wings loves and forgives you all your sins, and invites you to go forth in newness of purpose to share God's love and forgiveness with the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
C: Open our eyes to see you in every good thing around us. Free us from the desire to pursue other gods—those things of the world that pull us away from your unending goodness, grace, and mercy—that we might rest secure in the knowledge that you provide all we need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of grace and mercy, you pour out your generous gifts on us until our cups overflow. In joy and thanksgiving we return to you a portion of what you have given us, and we ask that you bless these offerings and use them according to your will for the benefit of all creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the faithful promises of our God, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: One and only liberating God, you have been faithful to us, asking for our faithfulness in return. Help us to live as faithful servants, obeying your commandments, and loving you with our whole hearts. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: In your commandment to rest on the Sabbath, you also commanded that we retire the workers, the livestock, and the land. Remind us that even now, your creation needs to rest. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Grant all who serve you through all manner of leadership positions the time and space to rest. Remind them that you, not they, are God. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Pour your healing waters over all who suffer afflictions of spirit, mind, or body, (*especially*). Let no one remain in bondage to illness, addiction, abuse, neglect, poverty, exile, or isolation. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Let all people throughout the earth turn away from the empty idols of wealth and possessions, and toward you as their God. Let no one stand upon another, but instead let all kneel before you. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We celebrate the lives of all the saints whose lives of faith have inspired and challenged us to follow in your ways. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With humble hearts we lift these prayers to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God in which we live and move and have our being now invites you with your siblings in the name God's son, Jesus Christ, to the table where Jesus meets us in bread and wine and gives us rest in his name. Come and be fed.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

L: Remember that I am God.

C: You are the only God.

L: Do not get distracted by other things.

C: Like wealth and celebrity and possessions.

L: My name is holy.

C: The name of God is sweeter than honey.

L: Do not make my name cheap by abusing it.

C: We will honor and respect your name.

L: Remember to rest in me.

C: You have given us the gift of self-care.

L: Take time to pray and recharge.

C: We delight in the time spent with you.

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Person 1: I. Am. Exhausted.

Person 2: What's going on? You okay?

Person 1: I just got done with a huge work project, a traveling soccer tournament, and baking six dozen cookies for the school bake sale.

Person 2: That's insane. No wonder you're tired!

Person 1: And this week doesn't look any better.

Person 2: Didn't you have anyone to help you with that work project?

Person 1: Sure. A couple people said they'd help. But I wanted to do it myself. You know—impress the boss. I wanted the credit.

Person 2: Huh. Okay. So what about the traveling soccer? Do all your kids play?

Person 1: Yep. Tournaments are almost every weekend all over the state. It's insane, never mind expensive.

Person 2: Have you ever thought about having them just play local community or school soccer? I know there are leagues...

Person 1: Yeah, but they don't look as good on college applications.

Person 2: Aren't your kids all in elementary school?

Person 1: Your point?

Person 2: Never mind. So...the cookies?

Person 1: Well, you know how it is. I'm new on the PTO. Gotta make a good impression.

Person 2: So you've completely exhausted yourself so you can look good to other people.

Person 1: I...well...when you put it that way, I guess so.

Person 2: But you do know that you're pretty awesome just for being you, right?

Person 1: Sure. I suppose.

Person 2: No, seriously. The only person you need to impress is God. And, guess what? God already thinks you're awesome.

Person 1: I guess I hadn't thought about it like that.

Person 2: And God wants you to rest! And, you know, spend time with God more than, say, the PTO...

Person 1: Seems like I need to think about what really matters and make some changes to my priorities.

Person 2: I think you'll feel a lot better if you do.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's rules are a gift to us.

Props

- Today's *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped

Background

God's commandments to the Israelites were a covenant—a promise between two parties. God had delivered the people from Egypt and now wanted to establish an enduring relationship with them. God promised to care for them in all they did, and the people would promise to follow a few simple rules that would allow them to live peacefully in community with one another and with God.

Kids are still trying to figure out where they end and the world begins. Rules that might seem simple to us (don't hit your friends) are actually quite novel to them and need to be lovingly taught and re-taught. That's why kids get frustrated and fight back against even rules that clearly benefit them. Help kids see that rules—especially God's rules—are a precious gift.

Set the Scene

As the kids come up, hold up the present. Ask kids to guess what's in it. What do they think would be a really good present. Then open the gift and pull out the *KidStuff* bulletin. Say, "Our story today has some really great rules in it. Do you think rules are a good present?" Discuss why or why not. Specifically touch on how rules help people to live together in peace and be happy. Have the kids hold further thoughts while you tell the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Go through the first three commandments and unpack how they all teach us how to love God. Ask if the kids can think of one way they can show love for God. How does resting show love for God? Be open to their ideas. Tell them you're going to look at some more great rules over the next couple weeks.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us see God's rules as a gift.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 20:12-16

¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³You shall not murder. ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵You shall not steal. ¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Secondary Text: Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Narrator 2: You shall not murder.

Narrator 1: You shall not commit adultery.

Narrator 2: You shall not steal.

Narrator 1: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.



Tuned toward the Neighbor, Exodus 20:12-16

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God is very clear about what we should not do and what community does not look like. This means that we are able to invest all of our energy figuring out how we should treat our neighbors—what we should do to build up God’s kingdom in faith and love.

Over the past two weeks, we have seen just how explicit God was with Moses as he received the Ten Commandments. Today, God adds another conviction: My love will empower you to love others differently and more fully than you ever have before

The five commandments in this passage—honoring your parents; not murdering; not committing adultery; not stealing and not bearing false witness—all speak to that different, full love. While the brief, curt, simple nature of each of them rings of the letter of the law, their collective message is more about the spirit of the law. If God is making plain what we should avoid, then what should we, instead, pursue?

God defines things in the negative sense so that we can define them in the positive. So what comes next?

What comes next is us truly honoring our families.

That means us paying special attention to the people who brought us up. That means making every good faith effort we can to afford our mothers, parents and siblings esteem, distinction and dignity. Honor means being patient in our learnings; patient in our pursuit of understanding our origins. Honor means empathizing the best we can—above and beyond how far we think we could go for the average person.

What comes next is whatever murder isn’t. And that can be so many things. To reaffirm, strengthen and add to life. To add enrichment in the day-to-day experience of the people around us. What do we have access to? What are we uniquely gifted with? What are

the assets we have at our disposal to interject curiosity, joy, opportunities and connection?

What comes next is the opposite of cheating. If cheating is betraying another person through words, actions or both, then our call is to align what we say and what we do. To combat adultery is to enter into deep relationship with our temptations—to get foundationally familiar with our baseline instincts—and to resist with every fiber of our beings the pieces of them that would do damage to our neighbors.

What comes next is the opposite of theft. If theft depletes and drains, then our call is to nourish and build. To contribute. Where are we thinking in terms of survival or scarcity? How can we flip things on their head—to turn the question of desperation—“What can I *possibly* do?”—into a question of creation—“What can I *possibly* *do*?”

What comes next is the opposite of lying. If lying is masking the truth, then our call is to reveal it. Even if we don’t like it. How can we remember that our accountabilities do not include cosmic blueprints or eternal judgment? How can we recenter in our charge to love and serve, calling things as we see them and trusting ourselves in that witness?

God wants nothing more than for us to mirror, personalize and push to every would-be limit the love and protection God desires for our neighbors. Our invitation in this passage is to envision and embody what that love and protection might look like lived out in our houses. Our churches. Our communities.

Scripture Summary

In commandments four to eight out of ten, God outlines and condemns the most serious transgressions we could ever commit toward others.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come into God's presence with joy.

C: We come side by side with our neighbors.

L: God invites you to love one another.

C: We will rejoice in this beloved community.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess that we have failed time and again to follow your good commandments to us. We have not loved you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have been unfaithful to one another. We have neglected the needs of our neighbors. We have coveted more than what we need. We have not loved others as we love ourselves. Forgive us for all the ways we have sinned and fallen short, and bring us back into harmony with you and your whole creation, for the sake of Jesus, our savior and friend.

P: Beloved, hear this good news! The God who still bears you on eagle's wings loves and forgives you all your sins, and invites you to go forth in newness of purpose to share God's love and forgiveness with the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: Your commandments are gifts to all your beloved children. Make us to receive them with open-mindedness and openheartedness, that we might practice love, patience, encouragement, and honesty within this community and wherever we go. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, you gift us not only with your commandments, but with our daily bread. Out of what you have freely given us, we freely return these offerings for your work of peace, justice, and love in all the earth. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the faithful promises of our God, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of mercy, teach us to love one another so deeply that treating each other with kindness and respect, ethically, and honorably, comes more naturally to us than hatred and fear. Show us how to love boldly. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us hearts to tend to all things that you have made. For tangible things and for those things that we cannot grasp: love, shame, compassion, fear, and mercy, we pray your blessings upon all that we say and do. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us hearts to lead and to follow as you see fit. Give discernment to those whom we follow, and confidence to those whom we lead. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us hearts to care for all who are in need of healing, and pour your restorative love upon those whose healing is beyond our reach, *(especially)*. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us hearts to remember those who live in conditions that prevent their flourishing, in our nation and across the world. Turn our remembering into action, that your justice might be done. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Give us hearts to honor the example of parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors, and countless others who have gone before. We gratefully praise your name for all these good saints in our lives. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With humble hearts we lift these prayers to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who commands us to love our neighbor now invites us into the presence of the one whose love transformed all of creation. Come and be fed on the bread and wine where Jesus meets us and strengthens us to love one another and the world.

Litany

L: Honor your parents and your elders.

C: They have wisdom to guide us.

L: Do not cause harm to anyone.

C: We will help and support everyone we meet.

L: Do not be unfaithful in your relationships.

C: We will love and honor those in our lives.

L: Do not take what is not yours.

C: We will protect the property of others.

L: Do not lie about others.

C: We will defend and speak well of them.

L: Live in peace with one another.

C: We praise you for your loving guidance.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Youth 1-3, Adult

Youth 1: This club stinks.

Youth 2: That's because you stink.

Youth 3: I think you both stink.

Adult: What on earth is going on here?

Youth 1: The principal told us we had to be in some kind of club and we thought all the regular school clubs were dumb so she made us form our own.

Youth 2: Which was a huge mistake, seeing as we can't stand each other.

Youth 3: Yeah, because you both stink.

Youth 2: Only because you stole my airpods and I got you busted for it.

Adult: Well, as your faculty advisor, it's my job to help you "create a viable extracurricular social experience with positive outcomes for all participants."

Youth 1: Um...what?

Youth 2: They're supposed to make us get along and be all "happy happy joy joy."

Youth 3: Good luck with that.

Adult: Actually, I think it's pretty simple.

Youth 1: Do tell.

Adult: First things first, you need to start seeing each other as people.

Youth 2: Duh. Of course we're all people.

Adult: People with value. People worth getting to know and like.

Youth 3: How do we do that when we can't stand each other?

Adult: Let's set some ground rules. The first thing is to trust me, as your advisor, and follow my advice.

Youth 1: I guess. You seem pretty cool for a teacher.

Adult: Next, stop trash-talking each other. Words have the power to hurt and we are not going to hurt each other. Instead, you'll need to find the best possible ways to talk about and support each other.

Youth 3: Maybe you two don't totally stink.

Adult: (*sighing*) It's a start, I guess. Next, commit to each other and the club. Don't go running off to another club and leave the rest of us high and dry.

Youth 2: Okay. This is our club, and gosh darn it, we're going to be faithful to it!

Adult: Are you being sarcastic?

Youth 2: Maybe a little.

Adult: (*to Youth 3*) Next, don't steal people's airpods. Or anything else.

Youth 3: (*sullen*) I gave them back.

Youth 1: Because you had to.

Youth 3: Fine. I'll respect your stuff if you respect mine.

Youth 2: Deal.

Adult: And don't lie about each other. In fact, don't share anything we talk about outside this group.

Youth 1: Seems like a lot of ground rules.

Adults: Yeah, but I don't think you'll find them hard to follow. And when you do, it will create a safe space where we can all feel okay about ourselves and each other.

Youth 2: We'll try.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's rules help us live together in peace.

Props

- Today's *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped

Background

God's commandments to the Israelites were a covenant—a promise between two parties. God had delivered the people from Egypt and now wanted to establish an enduring relationship with them. God promised to care for them in all they did, and the people would promise to follow a few simple rules that would allow them to live peacefully in community with one another and with God.

Kids are still trying to figure out where they end and the world begins. Rules that might seem simple to us (don't hit your friends) are actually quite novel to them and need to be lovingly taught and re-taught. That's why kids get frustrated and fight back against even rules that clearly benefit them. Help kids see that rules—especially God's rules—are a precious gift.

Set the Scene

As the kids come up, hold up the present. Do any of them remember what's in the box? Talk about how God's rules are a gift that help people to live together in peace and be happy. Let them know that today they're going to hear about five more rules. Unwrap the gift and pull out the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Go through the next commandments as they are written in the *KidStuff* bulletin and unpack how they all teach us how to love each other and live in peace. Ask if the kids have ever broken one of these rules. What happened? How does following these rules show love to others? Be open to their ideas. Tell them you're going to look at a couple more great rules next week.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us follow God's rules so we can live together in peace.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 20:17

¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Secondary Text: Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

Narrator 2: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Commandments 9 and 10 sever us both from Creator and from community. Grace assures us that we do not need to fear coveting, but the commandments tell us why we should be wary of it.

We've categorized the Ten over the past few weeks in terms of:

- 1) Context/foundation of God's law in general
- 2) Commandments speaking to the connection between God and us
- 3) Commandments speaking to the connection between us and neighbor

We end by looking at one specific idea: coveting. And that's intentional, because coveting is what brings us back, full-circle, to the context for, and foundation of, God's law in general.

To covet is to begrudge or envy your neighbor for the things that they have, or perhaps more seriously, the things you perceive them to be. Put more plainly, to covet is to be consumed with jealousy. To be chronically unsatisfied and unfulfilled.

Coveting kills the trust in—and connection with—God that we hear promised to us in commandments 1-3 because in coveting you paint something other than God as your ultimate source of truth. You deny that God is everything.

Coveting also kills the trust in—and connection with—others outlined in Commandments 4-8, because in coveting, your jealousy doesn't just poison you—it simultaneously degrades and discredits your neighbor. As you feed narratives of resentment and moral judgment against the people around you, you chip away at their humanity.

Coveting binds you to something that is decidedly not God at your very center. Coveting puts you in a state

of obsession, which subjects you to a master. An oppressive, limiting, value-extracting force. Coveting makes you victim to the very things God tries to outlaw for God's people: death, unfaithfulness, theft and lies. Coveting puts you into a state of slavery, when God's love is—and only ever has been—calling you into a state of freedom.

God's love for us may be cosmic in scope, but to be clear, it doesn't include any black holes. There is no room in God's love for matter so dense and gravitational pull so strong that violence and suppression prevail.

Commandments 9 and 10 combine to create an opposing inverse to the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40), because coveting is so powerful a temptation that every one of us will struggle with it over the course of our lives. For different reasons, in different chapters, and to varying degrees.

But none of us has to worry that the power of coveting will do us in. Paul reminds us in the Book of Romans that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; [and that] they are now justified by his grace as a gift ... For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works" (Romans 3:23-28).

Our call this week is to be mindful of this powerful, closing Commandment, and to root in God's reasoning behind giving all of the Commandments in the first place: our freedom. Our redemption.

Scripture Summary

The act of coveting is siloed from the rest of God's laws because it is uniquely destructive—it threatens both our relationship with God and our relationship with others.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God provides all we need.

C: There is enough for everyone.

L: Let us praise God for God's generosity,

C: And give thanks for what we have.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We confess that we have failed time and again to follow your good commandments to us. We have not loved you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have been unfaithful to one another. We have neglected the needs of our neighbors. We have coveted more than what we need. We have not loved others as we love ourselves. Forgive us for all the ways we have sinned and fallen short, and bring us back into harmony with you and your whole creation, for the sake of Jesus, our savior and friend.

P: Beloved, hear this good news! The God who still bears you on eagle's wings loves and forgives you all your sins, and invites you to go forth in newness of purpose to share God's love and forgiveness with the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: In this world you have created there is more than enough for each of your beloved children to flourish. Turn us from our desires to acquire more than we need, relieve us of our envy of others' material means, and strengthen our work for justice, that all might have what they require. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of love, we bring to you our gifts and our tithes, our skills and our talents, even our very lives, that you would use them according to your will for the good of the world. May they be signs of our continued commitment to the wellbeing of all creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the faithful promises of our God, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of plenty, open our hearts to know that you have and will provide all that we need. Turn our eyes away from the possessions of others, and show us how to live gratefully with all that you have given to us. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Turn our eyes toward all that you have made, and show us where your creation is in need our attention and care. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Turn our eyes toward those who lead, and help us to support them with our patience, tolerance, and love. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Turn our eyes toward those who are in need of healing, (*especially*). Help us to offer with grace and compassion the love and care they need for healing and wholeness. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Turn our eyes toward those who possess less than we do. Show us how to love, empower, and provide for those who live in poverty of body, mind, and spirit. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Turn our eyes toward those who have gone before. May we heed their example of contentment and gratitude. God of Promise,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: With humble hearts we lift these prayers to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who provides all we need now provides this holy meal in which we meet Jesus Christ, our savior and friend, and are forgiven all our sins. Come with your siblings in this beloved community and be strengthened for the work of following in the Way of Jesus.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

L: There is enough for everyone.

C: Sometimes I find that hard to believe.

L: There is enough for everyone.

C: Surely if others get more, I will have less.

L: There is enough for everyone.

C: And if I want more, it will have to come from someone else.

L: Do not buy into the lies of the world.

C: Help us to see that there is enough.

L: Do not wish to take away what others have for yourself.

C: We will honor and protect what rightfully belongs to them.

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2

Kid 1: Did you see what Keesha brought to day camp today?

Kid 2: Yeah. A Nintendo Switch.

Kid 1: It just made me so mad!

Kid 2: Why?

Kid 1: Because I don't have one.

Kid 2: That makes sense. You asked for one for your birthday last month, right?

Kid 1: Yeah, and I didn't get it. So when Keesha brought hers in, I just wanted to scream. Actually, I still want to scream.

Kid 2: Are you really that upset?

Kid 1: I spent the whole day wishing she would drop it and it would break.

Kid 2: Wait, so it's not just that you want one, but you wanted her not to have hers?

Kid 1: Exactly.

Kid 2: Wouldn't you have felt bad if it actually happened? I mean, think about how sad she would have been.

Kid 1: I guess. Yeah. I would have felt bad. Probably I would have thought it was my fault for wishing it.

Kid 2: Sometimes I want things other people have, too. But it only makes me feel rotten.

Kid 1: So what do you do about it?

Kid 2: My mom tells me to look around at all the things I do have and be thankful.

Kid 1: Does it work?

Kid 2: Most of the time.

Kid 1: I really don't like feeling this mad. And wishing I had a Switch. And wishing Keesha didn't. It's gross.

Kid 2: So...I have a Switch.

Kid 1: (*scoffing*) I know.

Kid 2: And I've got some great multiplayer games and extra controllers. Why don't you come over and play?

Kid 1: How do I know I won't just wish yours would break, too?

Kid 2: (*smiling*) Because you're going to be thankful I have one so you can use it.

Kid 1: Fair enough. Let's go.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God gives us all we need.

Props

- Today's *KidStuff* bulletin in a box, gift-wrapped

Background

God's commandments to the Israelites were a covenant—a promise between two parties. God had delivered the people from Egypt and now wanted to establish an enduring relationship with them. God promised to care for them in all they did, and the people would promise to follow a few simple rules that would allow them to live peacefully in community with one another and with God.

Kids are still trying to figure out where they end and the world begins. Rules that might seem simple to us (don't hit your friends) are actually quite novel to them and need to be lovingly taught and re-taught. That's why kids get frustrated and fight back against even rules that clearly benefit them. Help kids see that rules—especially God's rules—are a precious gift.

Set the Scene

As the kids come up, hold up the present. Do any of them remember what's in the box? Talk about how God's rules are a gift that help people to live together in peace and be happy. Let them know that today they're going to hear about the last two rules. Unwrap the gift and take out the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Go through the next commandments as they are written in the *KidStuff* bulletin and unpack the word "covet." It's not just wanting what someone else has, it's wanting them not to have it.

Share a story of a time you coveted something. Talk about how it showed that you didn't trust God to take care of you. How did you let go of your coveting? What happened? Invite them share what they think it means to trust God. Do they think there is enough for everyone? Be open to their thoughts.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us trust God that there is enough for everyone.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- 4 to 5 images of tattoos done over scars (do a web search for "tattoos over scars" and you'll get a whole bunch of options.)



Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

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Other materials by R. M. Fergus, MA-CYF