[[1]](#footnote-1)Week 1 Preaching Resources: In Times of Grief

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 20:1-18 |
| Focus Statement | Have moments of shock, grief or unexpected trauma taken your breath away? We all experience the heartache of loss. Even when we are standing at the tomb, the Gospels offer us a word of hope! |
| ME | Share a time when you, or someone near to you were so overcome by bad news that you could barely draw in a full breath. How were you physically, emotionally or spiritually running away during those awful moments? Who could you run to for support? What did you find as time passed, you caught your breath and faced the horrible time? |
| WE | We’ve all felt this way. No one wants to receive bad news, but at one point or another we all face loss, grief, or trauma. We have all stood at the tomb heartbroken and distraught. As much as we may want to avoid these tragedies of life, our faith offers us a word of hope and strength. |
| GOD | Mary goes to the tomb, and is distraught by the absence of Jesus’ body, and she runs to Simon Peter. We need fellow people of faith to run to when facing distress, when we have our breath knocked out of us. They face the difficult situation of Jesus’ missing body together. One disciple “saw and believed”. Mary had a powerful encounter with the Risen Christ and tells others. Each processed differently, yet together recall the Scriptures, experience God and find hope to face their grief. God challenges us to let go of the things that we cling to; the way things were. God, triumphant over the grave, invites us to see and believe that Christ holds the keys to hell and death. The worst news does not have final word over our lives. Together, we have faith in a Resurrected Christ. |
| YOU | How might God be calling you to let go of the past to embrace the new life God has in store for you today? After running to or from our grief, how might God be calling you to participate in your church community to see and believe? To encounter Christ? To share the Good News? |
| WE | God takes the most difficult moments we face as humans, and breathes new life into us, filling us with a fresh perspective. God invites us to see that even when we face death and sorrow, we do so with the strength of our faith and hope in the Resurrection power of God. |

Week 2 Preaching Resources: In Times of Fear

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 20:1-18 |
| Focus Statement | There are many things that keep us locked in fear. Finances, broken relationships, addictions, the unknown, our past, the list can go on and on. We all have fears. Even when we are locked in the room of our fears, Jesus breathes new life into us! |
| ME | Share a time when you, as an adult were afraid. Did it keep you up at night? How do you react to fear? Do you let others in, or do you keep your fears guarded, locked away? Share how the fear affected your relationships, your thoughts, your perspective on the world around you. What power does fear have over us when we are put in to situations that threaten our life, our livelihood, or our loved ones? |
| WE | We have all felt fear before. Fear is a natural response to fight or flight, it is a gift that keeps us alive and offers strength in moments that are truly dangerous for us. Fear can also become unhealthy and keep us locked away from our authentic selves, one another and even God.  |
| GOD | The disciples were as close to Jesus as one could get during his earthly ministry. They were his inner circle, the ones called to faithfulness and carrying forth Jesus’ mission. After seeing their Lord and Savior crucified and knowing that their own lives were similarly at risk, they hid behind locked doors, for fear of the Jews. God offers them peace, twice, and breathes on them inviting them to receive the Holy Spirit.God invites those who are afraid to believe to touch and see.God blesses those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. |
| YOU | Christ wants to step right into the heart of your fears and breathe peace into you. Christ is offering you the gift of the Holy Spirit, in that place you don’t want anyone else to know about. If you are afraid God can’t find you in that hidden place, if you are afraid God can’t work powerfully, how can you touch Christ and find out just how big our God is? For those who believe without seeing the Resurrected Christ, how have you been blessed by your blind faith?  |
| WE | In modern American Christianity we do not have to fear for our lives because of our faith. If we did, would we still have the strength to be faithful? At the same time in modern American Christianity, churches are declining, budgets are shrinking and many of us are in fear about the place we call our church home. How is God present in our fear of the future breathing in hope and Spirit? How do we touch and see what God has instore as we receive the new life Easter offers? |

Week 3 Preaching Resources: In Times of Exhaustion

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 21:1-19 |
| Focus Statement | Are you expected to do more work in the same amount of time? Are you overwhelmed by all that needs to be done in your professional, personal, church and volunteer life? Most us are exhausted by all of life’s demands. When we think we have nothing left to give, Jesus offers us nourishment and restores all that we need! |
| ME | Share a story of when you were unable to find a healthy balance in your life and were overwhelmed by your commitments. A great resource for this week is *Present Over Perfect* by Shauna Niequist. Open worship space and set up one folding chair for each commitment in your life to show the chaotic mess that our lives become when we are bombarded by all the demands when we choose to say yes. |
| WE | At one time or another our lives have all looked like chaotic mess, even if the things we are doing are important and good, we need to find a healthy balance of “doing” and “being” in order for God to really use us for a higher purpose.  |
| GOD | The Risen Christ has work for the disciples to do! After a night of fishing and working hard (yet unsuccessfully), Jesus sends them back out to work more. When Jesus sends them to work we see the fruits (well in this case the fish) of their labor.As much as the disciples needed to work for Jesus, Jesus also provided space for them to just “be”. Jesus loves his disciples enough to feed them physically and spiritually. In being fed by Jesus, we are sent back out to feed others as a sign of our love for Christ. |
| YOU | Are you a do-er or a be-er? How is Christ calling you to find balance between the two?  |
| WE | There is no doubt that Christ has work for us to do. We, the church are called to roll up our sleeves and do the work. At the same time, we are called to work in balance with being fed. Invite people to look at the cross and see the vertical beam as being fed- God to us. The horizontal beam is the work we need to do in sharing God’s love with others by feeding His sheep. God invites us to clear out the chairs of our chaotic, messy lives and catch our breath. Come to the Table he has prepared for us! |

Week 4 Preaching Resources: In Times of Doubt

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 10:22-32 |
| Focus Statement | Life after death? Touching the wounds of a risen man? Miracles at the sea? If it is all hard to believe, you are not alone. Many of us wrestle with our doubts and question our faith and even God. The angriest doubters are invited to come to Jesus and bring their questions to him. Amid our doubts, Christ calls us into relationship and invites us to believe! |
| ME | It is tempting to put ourselves as the sheep who hear Jesus’ voice and inherit eternal life knowing we will never perish. Share a time when, instead of this ideal picture of faith, you wanted to cast stones at Jesus and ask him deep, hard questions.  |
| WE | Doubt is something we all struggle with. Share how faithful powerhouses have had their own doubts and struggles. Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, even John Wesley wrestled with deep questions at different points. In sharing their doubts, we are all freed to ask our questions and share our struggles without fear of judgement or worrying that doubt means we are losing our faith. |
| GOD | From Job to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, God has never shied away from our questions or doubts. Sometimes the questions we ask are returned with answers we do not like. Even when God’s people doubt, question and have anger, God engages in relationship building with a spirit of love and grace. |
| YOU | Knowing that God meets our questions and doubts with love and grace, ask your congregation to spend a few minutes writing down the big faith questions they wrestle with. If comfortable, ask them to bring them and lay them down at the foot of the cross. Pray for these anonymous questions, the people who wrote them and their struggles. Use the questions to formulate future newsletters and sermons.  |
| WE | There was a time in our church history where we were told to go to church just because that is what you were “supposed to do”. There have been times in our Christian history where asking questions was frowned upon as it could lead to people losing their faith. We live in a culture where people are wrestling with serious questions about their faith, about God, and about life. How is God calling us to be a place where people can come in and ask their authentic questions? |

Week 5 Preaching Resources: In Times of Loneliness

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 13:31-35 |
| Focus Statement | We can be surrounded by people and still feel incredibly lonely. We can experience abandonment and betrayal by loved ones. We all wonder if we are in the world alone as an individual, or if we are connected to one another by something bigger and deeper. During these struggles, Christ calls us into a powerful community that is based on loving one another! |
| ME | If able, play the video *The Lunchbox* by Leo Burnett. Speak about a time when your “lunch box” of life was empty. Share of a time of loss or loneliness in which you just felt empty and wondered how you could be filled up again. |
| WE | There are times when we feel isolated. Discuss the impact cell phones have had on social isolation including the banter/community building that would happen in lines at stores vs. everyone being on their phone and not connecting to others face to face. Feelings of isolation and loneliness have created high levels of anxiety and depression, particularly in our young people. |
| GOD | Our Scripture this week takes place at the Last Supper. The fear of the political climate was palpable, and a sense of gloom hung over the Passover supper celebrations. Jesus, foreshadowing his death and all that is about to take place, knows that his disciples will be overcome by grief and their missing his presence. And so, with deathbed wisdom, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved him.Share some of the radical ways Jesus loved usHow shall we love one another?What if the Christian community was like the classroom in the Lunchbox video and each person gave a piece of themselves to help fill up those who were lonely? |
| YOU | One of the greatest gifts Jesus gave his followers was the Christian community and a place to belong, love, and be loved. Your place in this community matters and the gifts you bring fill up the lunchboxes of the others. The community is here for you in your time of isolation and loneliness. |
| WE | We rejoice that we have not been orphaned. Christ has empowered us with the Holy Spirit and surrounded us with a fellowship that keeps us strong in our faith. Church is more than a place where we go. It is a community that is Christ’s love to us in our times of loneliness. How is Christ calling us to BE the Church and love one another as he loved us? |

Week 6 Preaching Resources: In Times of Suffering

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 5:1-9 |
| Focus Statement | Do you want to be made well? After years of suffering and isolation, Jesus asks this powerful question and invites the paralyzed man to take his mat and walk. When we get news of suffering in our world, it takes our breath away. Christ invites you to catch your breath and receive the blessings of his healing. |
| ME | Share a time when you were suffering or felt isolated and wanted/hoped others would step up to help you but did not. Share how it felt to be passed by others. Share what it is like when that feeling goes on for a prolonged period of time without resolution.  |
| WE | There are times when all of us feel like we are unseen, that we have to carry our suffering alone and wonder how long our suffering will continue. Give examples of groups of people who are often unseen in our society, ways that we are made to cover up our true selves, leaving all of us feeling unseen at one time or another. |
| GOD | God sees the people that get passed over. Share stories of those passed by in Scripture, and how God saw them. God saw Noah’s righteousness, Sarah’s barrenness, and the cries of those enslaved by the Pharaoh. God saw the smallest of Jesse’s sons. Lift up the nameless, insignificant people that God sees and uses in profound ways. |
| YOU | Consider this story: there was a church leader, called Jane Doe, having a difficult meeting with other top church leaders. At a controversial point the person in the meeting with the most power shamed Jane and brashly silenced her in front of all of her colleagues. The consultant leading the meeting caught Jane Doe during a break and simply said “Jane, I see what happened there.” Knowing that her pain was seen by others deeply moved Jane and helped her not only heal but go back into the meeting with confidence. Being seen matters! The good news in this passage is God sees all of us, even those who have been routinely passed by or shamed for who they are. Not only does God see us but God invites us to take our mat and walk or return to the meeting or whatever it is that we need! |
| WE | We all deep places that need healing, today God says to all of us “take get up, take your mat and walk” In other words, God says to all of us, that deep wounded place that the world wants to ignore-all those times you have been shamed or made to feel ashamed-God says I see you. I see all of you. You are healed not because you earned it, fixed it yourself, or even deserve it. You are healed because God loves us all that much. If you are ready to get up, take your mat and walk you are invited to come forward and be anointed. |

Week 7 Preaching Resources: In Times of Division

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture Passage | John 17:20-26 |
| Focus Statement | Lost friends or family members when discussing politics? Can’t agree on the little things let alone the big national and global issues? We live in a much divided time. Jesus shows a better way, a way of unity that brings us together! |
| ME | Share a time when you were faced with division over a controversial issue. Maybe it was a debate on Facebook or a time around the Christmas dinner table. How did the controversy escalate? How did it change the dynamics? Were friendships lost? Or relationship ties severed?  |
| WE | We are living in a divisive time. Provide recent examples of issues that have divided people. |
| GOD | Jesus prays in vs. 21 that “they” meaning all who believe in him, will be one. Our Trinitarian understanding is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are inseparably one. Jesus prays that we will be united in the same way. There is a powerful SO THAT statement in verse 21! Jesus prays that we will be one SO THAT the world may believe that Christ is Lord. Share an example of how Christians coming together in unity has been able to transform individuals, communities or a societal issue. Jesus goes further and says in verse 22 and 23 that our unity is not only so that the world will believe, it also brings glory to God and is a testimony to the Creator sending the Redeemer and a testimony to the Father’s love for us. Our unity mattered to Jesus and it should matter to us. |
| YOU | Share how the division you opened with has progressed (hopefully toward reconciliation) and how that unification has transformed the relationships. Perhaps there are places in your life where this kind of controversy or division has occurred, but Christ is calling you to work toward being one. How can you disagree but still agreeable? How can you hold on to your truths while still being one with people who you don’t agree with? |
| WE | We all do better when we can see our common humanity and all that unites us. Wesley called for unity in the essentials. What are our essentials and how can we work toward unity in our families, in our congregations, in our denomination and in national politics?  |

1. To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)