

Week 1 Preaching Resources: From Marginalization to Mutuality

Scripture Passage:
Luke 10:25-37

Focus Statement:

We often view people who are different from us in a negative light. Jesus invites us to see our neighbors through the eyes of mutuality. Mutuality expects that every person I encounter--even and especially those I might assume are my inferiors and enemies--has the capacity to become an agent of God's mercy and grace for me.

ME:

Share a story about a time you received help or insight from an unexpected source. When did you overlook or misjudge someone, and how did you come to see them in a new light? Summarize the moral of your story. Try something like, "I thought I was there to bless them, but really, they were there to bless me."

WE:

Think about the people you have trouble getting along with, at home, work or wherever--I'll bet they're different from you in some significant way. It also happens when there are differences between groups--not just between neighbors, but between neighborhoods. Think about the people who live in the next neighborhood over, or in the city of [name]. If there are differences regarding the color of people's skin, how much money they make, or what zip code they're from, we don't tend to interact well. We all know differences tend to divide. But we're not always sure what to do about it. Jesus gives us an unexpected answer, at the very heart of his story of the Good Samaritan...

GOD:

Walk through Jesus' conversation with the religious expert:

1. A man asks Jesus about what it means to be a good neighbor. Instead, Jesus tells him a story about a man who *needs* a good neighbor.
2. The man in need of a neighbor finds one in the least likely of people--he is rescued by a Samaritan. Jesus asks the religious expert to identify the good neighbor in the story. The expert admits that mercy and blessing can come through a social "outsider."
3. The big idea here is the concept of mutuality: Every person I meet is my neighbor. Moreover, every person I encounter (even my supposed enemies and social inferiors) is a potential agent of God's help and blessing too.

What does this mean for you and me? What does it mean to start seeing the people we meet as potential agents of God's blessing?



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YOU:

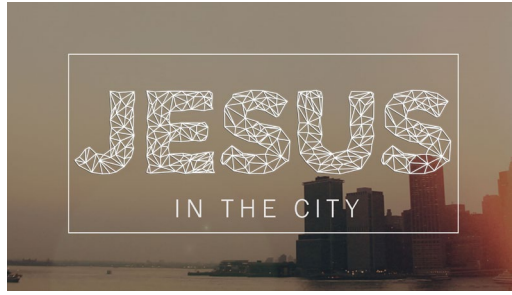
Author and speaker, Elizabeth Lesser, has a challenge called, “Take the Other to Lunch.” She invites people to get to know someone they might have negatively stereotyped over a simple meal. Lesser tells people to start with some ground rules. In her TED Talk on the subject, she says: “Don't persuade, defend or interrupt. Be curious; be conversational; be real. And listen.” Imagine what God might do, if you sent someone an invitation this week. Can you imagine what would happen if we all viewed the people around us through the eyes of mutuality?

WE:

The life that Jesus calls us to isn't always easy, but it is always good. When we look through the eyes of mutuality, we're reminded that Christ is present in the life of every person we encounter. We might find, like the man who was robbed, that we had it all wrong from the start: the people we considered to be “outsiders” are essential to our own life and liberation. Or else, like the Good Samaritan, we might discover the power of Christ-like love to overcome evil with good. The best way to love our neighbors is to recognize a beautiful truth: my neighbor might just be the one to end up neighboring me.



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Week 2 Preaching Resources: From Invisible to Affirmed

Scripture Passage:

Luke 13:10-17

Focus Statement:

God calls us to see and respond to injustices and the marginalization of our brothers and sisters, even when they are invisible to others. When others refuse to acknowledge the reality of the community, Jesus always sees.

ME:

Share a story about a situation where others were overlooked, and someone intervened to reconcile the situation. Describe the conditions that allowed for the person(s) to be overlooked in the first place.

WE:

We can all relate to the feeling of being overlooked in some way, whether it was not being chosen on the playground for a game of basketball or not receiving a grant, after spending numerous days preparing an application. Others may be able to relate to being overlooked because of the “-isms” (e.g., sexism, racism, or classism). Structural systems can lead to certain individuals being consistently overlooked (e.g., food deserts, gender pay gap, etc.)

GOD:

Luke gives us an account of a woman who was crippled with an illness for 18 years. Her illness had her bent over, unable to stand up. Despite her condition, she pressed her way to the synagogue. The structural systems in place at the time would have led most to dismiss this woman. She would have been ostracized because of her physical deformity.

Women were also not permitted in the sanctuary of the Jewish synagogue so she must have waited around until after the Sabbath service. In the face of systems of inequality created to keep people bent in conditions of oppression and marginalization, when Jesus encounters their situation, transformation is possible.

Jesus saw her and called her from the back to the front of the room. He acknowledges her in front of everyone, who possibly passed her by heading to the synagogue.

When Jesus sees, lives are made whole and restoration is made possible. Jesus extends grace to someone who wasn't expecting it. Jesus reminded her she is more than her condition. He called her, “a daughter of Abraham.” Jesus saw a woman with promise.



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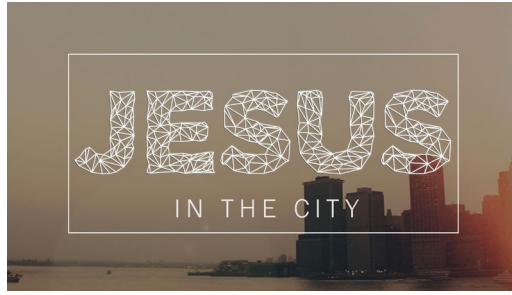
As children of God, within the body of Christ, we are called to acknowledge and stand on behalf of those impacted by the systems of oppression and marginalization that exist in our world today.

WE:

Identify opportunities within your immediate context to join in seeing and standing up for the socially invisible. Perhaps, there's a school located within your area that's in need of resources or a building within the area in need of repairs. Maybe, your congregation can create opportunities to invite those who are underrepresented in your congregation to an event or congregants can be encouraged to participate in community events. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "All men [and women] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly..... This is the inter-related structure of reality." When we move beyond our spaces of comfort, all of God's children will be seen as equal and a vital part of God's plan.



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Week 3 Preaching Resources: From Possession to Liberation

Scripture Passage:

Luke 8:26-39

Focus Statement:

Just as God sets us free, we are called to go to the inhospitable places and set others free. The liberation of Jesus is meant for all.

ME:

In this Scripture, Luke takes us to an unclean, inhospitable place to those in civilized society. Where are inhospitable places where you have experienced God's redemptive acts? Are there movies or books that illustrate this?

WE:

What are inhospitable places in your community or the world? Think about places where people live have been disenfranchised (e.g., Flint, MI; underfunded public schools; Chernobyl [there is a mini-series on HBO that explores this]). Try to find examples that will resonate with or feel familiar to your congregation.

GOD:

When Jesus arrives at the country of the Gerasenes, the demons in the man of the city are not the only inhospitable things he encounters. This man lived in tombs, which were considered a source of ritual uncleanness in Jewish custom. Pigs were also considered unclean and associated with Gentile uncleanness. Custom taught that this uncleanness or impurity was contagious.

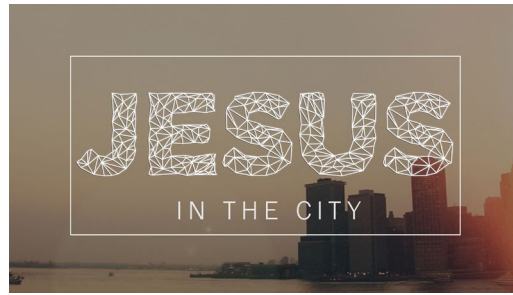
Yet Jesus was not afraid to enter into that place to liberate the possessed man. He cared about this man who had been pushed to the edges of society. The demons did not give up easily. They, like the evil we find in our world, wanted to survive and so asked Jesus to be sent into the nearby herd of swine instead of into "the abyss."

While Jesus allowed it, he tricked the demons into destroying themselves but driving the swine into the lake.

Note that when the man freed of demons wants to go with Jesus, Jesus tells him to return home and tell others what God has done for him. He is freed to spread the message of liberation in his own context. Instead of spreading uncleanness, he is freed to spread good news.



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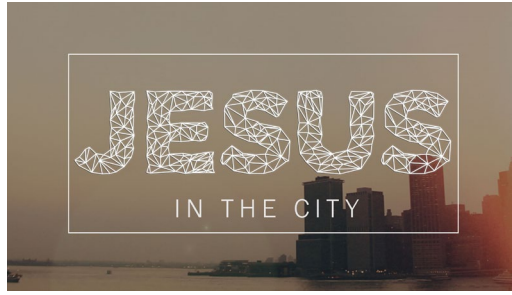
We all have 'demons' of some sort but none of us are beyond redemption. Jesus cares for each of us and comes into the inhospitable places to set us free. In turn, Christ's redemptive works call faithful people to be in the margins and to remove the evil from this world. This is heavy lifting even for Jesus. Encourage congregants to start thinking about how they can be involved in changing their community, making it safer, cleaner and more open.

WE:

Suggest that congregants commit to talking with one other person about what they believe to be a solvable need within the community. Create an opportunity for ideas to be shared, pick one need (to start) to work on together, and find others who are interested, energized and capable to help solve the need.



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Week 4 Preaching Resources: From Scarcity to Abundance

Scripture Passage:

Luke 9:10-17

Focus Statement:

Needs in ministry, life and the community can feel overwhelming. The temptation is to see ourselves and others through the lens of scarcity. The good news is God works abundance in places of scarcity!

ME:

Share a time when you or someone near to you felt like there just wasn't enough to go around. How did it make you feel? How did you view others or yourself during that time? Did you feel the need to take extreme measures to guard the little you had? How did the Holy Spirit surprise you or change your point of view?

WE:

Think about the people you have trouble getting along with, at home, work or wherever--I'll bet they're different from you in some significant way. It also happens when there are differences between groups--not just between neighbors, but between neighborhoods.

Think about the people who live in the next neighborhood over, or in the city of [name]. If there are differences regarding the color of people's skin, how much money they make, or what zip code they're from, we don't tend to interact well. We all know differences tend to divide. But we're not always sure what to do about it. Jesus gives us an unexpected answer, at the very heart of his story of the Good Samaritan...

GOD:

In Luke 9:10-17, after a long day of Jesus speaking to the crowds about the kingdom of God, the apostles make the very sensible and practical suggestion that Jesus should send the crowd into the villages to get food and stay overnight. There is no way five loaves of bread and two fish will feed the crowd of 5000+! Jesus responds with the miracle of feeding the crowds, with plenty to spare (verses 13-16).

The point, for us, is not to figure out how Jesus did this or to expect such obvious miracles. Rather, when the apostles operate according to the world's logic, sending each to provide for themselves, Jesus calls them to remain in community, to have faith in God's provision, to share with one another and to be open to creative and astonishing possibilities.



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YOU:

How might God be calling you to let go of your fear of scarcity? How would your life change if you stopped focusing on the crumbs and started eating the feast God has prepared for you? How would you treat people differently if there was enough for everyone? How might you view the neighborhood?

WE:

God works abundance in places of scarcity. Imagine a church where everyone worked together and shared, a world where everyone had enough and there was plenty to go around. The good news is that we don't have to see the world through the lens of scarcity because God is working miracles of abundance everywhere!



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