

Current

Worship

**SEEKING JUSTICE
TOGETHER**

Contents

Bible Outline	iii
Evaluation Form	iv

Sessions

Jesus Calls for Justice.....	1.1
------------------------------	-----

Caring for the Vulnerable

Welcoming Everyone.....	2.1
Caring for Those in Need	3.1
Enough for All	4.1
Sisters Ask for Land.....	5.1
Nathan Confronts a King.....	6.1
Esther Saves Her People.....	7.1

Setting Things Right

Proclaim Jubilee	8.1
A Son Returns Home.....	9.1
Zacchaeus Makes Amends	10.1
Jesus Turns the Tables.....	11.1
A Widow Insists on Justice	12.1
Nehemiah Sets an Example.....	13.1

These Worship Resources are produced for pastors, worship leaders, and congregations. *Current: Seeking Justice Together* is published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia for *Shine: Living in God's Light* Curriculum. Joan L. Daggett, project director.

Credits for "Current: Seeking Justice Together" Worship Resources:

Writer: Carrie Martens, including Bible essays

Editors: Chrissie Muecke, Joan L. Daggett, Rachel Nussbaum Eby

Designers: Reuben Graham, Debbie Noffsinger

Illustrators: Images not otherwise credited are from Getty Images.

Bible texts: Scripture quotations marked (CEB) from the COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. Copyright © 2011 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. All Rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.CommonEnglishBible.com). Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2021 by Brethren Press, Elgin, IL 60120; MennoMedia, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to churches or organizations who purchase the *Current* Worship Resources to print and/or use the images and documents in online or in-person teaching sessions and in emails or social media posted to private groups or websites for use within the church's or organization's circle of ministry. The files may be printed and distributed or emailed to teachers or families within the church's or organization's circle of ministry.



Seeking Justice Together

	Session Title	Scripture Text	Faith Link
1	Jesus Calls for Justice	Luke 4:14–30	We can care for “outsiders.”
CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE			
2	Welcoming Everyone	James 1:27–2:8, 14–17	PreK–Kindergarten: We can treat everyone with kindness. Others: We can love others as we love ourselves.
3	Caring for Those in Need	Matthew 25:31–46	We can respond to the needs we see.
4	Enough for All	Acts 4:32–37	We can make sure everyone has enough.
5	Sisters Ask for Land	Numbers 27:1–11	PreK–Kindergarten: God cares about fairness. Elementary: We can speak up when rules are unfair. Youth/Adult: We can challenge unfair rules and laws.
6	Nathan Confronts a King	2 Samuel 12:1–15 PreK–Kindergarten: 12:1–6, 13 Adult: +Psalm 51	PreK–Kindergarten: God cares about people who are being hurt. Elementary: We can speak up when people are being hurt. Youth/Adult: We can call leaders to account.
7	Esther Saves Her People	Esther 2–8	PreK–Kindergarten: God helps us to do what is good. Others: We can use our power for good.
SETTING THINGS RIGHT			
8	Proclaim Jubilee	Leviticus 25	We can work for freedom and fairness.
9	A Son Returns Home	Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32	PreK–Kindergarten: We can say “I’m sorry.” Others: We can confess when we’ve harmed others.
10	Zacchaeus Makes Amends	Luke 19:1–10	We can right our wrongs.
11	Jesus Turns the Tables	Mark 11:15–18	PreK–Kindergarten: We can pray and worship God. Others: We can act boldly when we see injustice.
12	A Widow Insists on Justice	Luke 18:1–8	PreK–Kindergarten: We can ask God for help. Others: We can be persistent in seeking justice.
13	Nehemiah Sets an Example	Nehemiah 5	PreK–Kindergarten: We can give generously. Others: We can do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Jesus Calls for Justice

Scriptures

Luke 4:14–30; Psalm 19:1–6

Faith Link

We can care for "outsiders."

Prepare Essay

by *Carrie Martens*

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." These words from the prophet Isaiah are often read during Advent. Some receive them with fond nostalgia, while others experience deep longing. They are familiar words about a hoped-for future. And when read from Isaiah, they can feel somewhat distant.

This text from Luke invites a much more immediate hearing. Here is Jesus, fresh from his encounter with the devil in the wilderness. The waters of his baptism have dried, but his baptism of the Spirit is ongoing. Word of his teaching has begun to spread through the countryside. Now he has arrived in his hometown of Nazareth to preach his inaugural sermon. When he speaks these prophetic words from Isaiah, there is not only the opportunity to witness his bold proclamation that he is the fulfillment of the promise, but also the crowd's reaction—the first and the second.

After Jesus reads from the scriptures and declares that he is the anointed one, Luke says that *all* were amazed. Those who knew Jesus when he was just a little boy are delighted. They speak well of him, and they wonder, "Is this not Joseph's son?" This is their first reaction.

And then Jesus turns the tables, not the last time he will do so. He sees through their admiration. He knows they want him to perform wonders for them—*his* people—as he has done for others. But Jesus knows what they really need is difficult truth. The truth that release, healing, and freedom are for everyone, not just for them. Ouch.

Jesus reminds them of the years of drought in which Elijah is sent, not to an insider, but to an outsider from Zarephath. And among all the lepers Elisha could have healed, God sends him to heal Naaman, the Syrian.

Jesus' proclamation is both good news and difficult truth. And this leads to the crowd's second reaction—anger. They realize that Jesus is criticizing them for their exclusivity and preoccupation with purity, and they are filled with rage. They drive him out of town so they can attempt to throw him off a cliff.

In Jesus, Isaiah's prophecy is not an image of a distant future but an immediate call. Jesus calls the people to bring release, healing, and freedom for all people, as God has been doing throughout their history. And there is also the reminder that what is good news for one can be difficult truth for another.

Read the words that Jesus speaks from the prophet Isaiah in Luke 4:18–19. What might those words look like in your own community? How are Jesus' words good news for you? How are they difficult truth?

God, remind me daily that you are for all people. Help me to receive your gift of healing even as I work to bring about your healing for others. Amen.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

—Luke 4:18–19

Order of Worship

Suggested Songs

- “Jesus Calls Us Here to Meet Him” by John L. Bell
- “Jésus, je voudrais te chanter” (Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song) by les Petites Souers de Jésus and L’Arche Community, translated by Stephen Somerville
- “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness” by Rusty Edwards
- “Slowly Turning, Ever Turning” by Delores Dufner
- “Mayenziwe” (Your Will Be Done) by John L. Bell, from the Lord’s Prayer
- “Let Justice Flow Like Streams” by Jane Parker Huber
- “Kyrie Eleison” by Chris Tomlin
- “Rise Up” by Bifrost Arts
- “The Same Love” by Paul Baloche
- “No Outsiders” by Rend Collective

Everybody Sing: Worship Songs for Children

- “God’s Love Is for Everybody” (track 2)
- “Love the Lord Your God” (track 5)
- “Jesus, Be the Center” (track 8)
- “Som’landela” (We Will Follow) (track 11)

Call to Worship

(based on Psalm 19:1–6)

One: The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the skies proclaim God’s handiwork.

Many: Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

One: There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

Many: yet their voice goes out
through all the earth
and their words to the end of the world.

One: Come, let us join our praise
with the heavens and all of creation
as we worship our God.

Prayer

God of Justice,
you are for all people,
comforting the troubled
and troubling the comfortable.
Inspire us and challenge us
as we hear your word and worship you today.

May the words from our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you, O Lord,
our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Readers Theater or Presentation of Scripture

See the Readers Theater on page 1.5 of this guide. Encourage children to listen carefully so they can participate as fully as possible during Children’s Time.

Children’s Time

See the Children’s Time materials on page 1.4 of this guide.

Sermon Seeds

For additional reflection, see the Prepare Essay on page 1.1 of this guide.

Early in Jesus' ministry, he boldly proclaimed that he had been sent by God to bring good news. The good news that he embodied is healing, freedom, and justice, not only for the people of Israel, but for all people. At first, Jesus' words were welcome. However, when he began to flesh them out using the stories of foreigners, the good news soured quickly. The crowd realized that the healing and freedom Jesus proclaimed may not be for them, or at least not only for them. What is good news for some is difficult truth for others.

Consider what Jesus' words mean for individuals in your congregation. Are there individuals for whom Jesus' words serve as powerful hope on a personal level? Are there others for whom this good news may cause discomfort? As a congregation, is good news always seen as something that goes out from the congregation? Elijah may have been good news for the widow of Zarephath, but she was good news for him as well. How might God's good news also flow from "outsiders" into the church? In your community and social systems, are there people or spaces that many consider to be "outside" of God's love and justice?

Offering Prayer

In gratitude for all that you have given to us,
we offer these gifts to you
and our compassion to one another.
Bless what we have given in our offering
and received in our worship
so that your love may be extended
to this community and far beyond. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Before you begin, invite the congregation to respond with "Hear our prayer" when you speak the words "Lord of life" at various points in the prayer. Optional: Leave time for the congregation to name specific people or situations needing prayer before you say "Lord of life."

One: Loving God,
Companioning Christ,
and Holy Spirit,
as we seek to live as you have called us,
we face struggles and challenges.
We are exhausted by the suffering and
sorrow, so we turn to you now.

Source of Comfort, be with those who are
weeping and seeking peace. Lord of life . . .

Many: Hear our prayer.

One: Source of Light, illuminate the shadows
for those who feel lost and in need of
guidance. Lord of life . . .

Many: Hear our prayer.

One: Source of Peace, make things right for
those who are suffering because things
have gone so wrong. Lord of life . . .

Many: Hear our prayer.

One: Source of Love, gather in those who are
left out and those who long to belong.
Lord of life . . .

Many: Hear our prayer.

One: Fill us with your love and your hope.
Heal us and transform us
so that as we are made whole
we may be your disciples here on earth.
Amen.

Benediction

Go from here,
transformed by the love of God,
to be Christ's disciples here on earth,
a people who care for all.

Children's Time

Weeks 1–7

In weeks 1–7 of *Current* worship, children will be invited to explore the theme of good news. The scripture text for week 1 has Jesus unrolling the scroll from Isaiah and proclaiming good news to the poor, release to the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed. These are big ideas for little people to understand—they're big ideas for adults to understand! Through story, conversation, and activity, we want to help children to explore and share God's good news of freedom, healing, and love.

The primary prop that will be used each week is a large paper banner. On a length of paper (roughly 3 ft x 6 ft / 1 m x 2 m), write the words "Good News" in bold. The words should be easily visible throughout the worship space. Roll the paper toward the middle from each end to form a scroll. The scroll can be simple, or it can be made more elaborate by attaching dowels at each end and closing it with a ribbon.

Invite an older child, youth, or adult to be your official "scribe" during children's time each week. The leader can also play the role of scribe if another person is unavailable.

Children's time should happen after the readers theater or scripture reading. Before the readers begin, children should be invited to listen carefully so they can participate as fully as possible in the children's time to follow.

The material for children's time is in the format of a repetitive, easy-to-use script. Leaders can feel free to use the script as-is or adapt it to work with their personality, skill set, available time for preparation, and the children in their congregation.

Each week, children will be asked to share their own ideas about good news. This may take some time as children begin to wrap their heads around the concept, so be patient and give plenty of time for them to think. It also takes a lot of bravery for children to name their ideas in front of others. Treat each child with respect and honor that bravery, even if the idea somewhat misses the mark. If your group for children's time is generally quite small, invite children to bring youth or adult friends up with them. Or you might invite the whole congregation to participate, with children holding open the scroll and acting as scribe.

At the end of the seven weeks, you may want to find a place to display the completed scroll in your worship space.

Week 1: Jesus Calls for Justice

Luke 4:14–30

Welcome the children warmly. When everyone is seated, ask for two volunteers to help unroll the scroll and hold it open. Read the words on the scroll, or invite an older child to read them.

When Jesus went to worship in the synagogue he was given a scroll to read. It may have looked something like this one. He read, "God has sent me to preach good news. Good news for people who are poor, hurting, or in trouble." Jesus traveled all over sharing and showing that good news. He gave food to people who were hungry, he healed people who were hurting, and he loved everyone, even the people that others didn't want to love.

We have our own scroll here that says "Good News." Over the next few weeks we want to add words to our scroll so we can share the good news of God's love with others.

Writing on scrolls was always done by a scribe. _____ (*person's name*) is our scribe today. As we come up with ideas to go on the scroll, she or he will write them down.

I wonder . . . If you are poor and have no food, what would be good news for you? (*Pause for responses.*) If you are sick and in the hospital, what would be good news for you? (*Pause for responses.*)

If children need a bit of help, start with one of your own suggestions, such as "If I am poor and have no food, I think good news might be that a church is having a free supper where everyone is welcome" or "If I am sick and in the hospital, I think good news might be that a friend is coming to visit me." When the scribe is done writing, roll up the scroll. Invite the children to place their hands on the scroll as you pray:

God, thank you for sending Jesus to share your good news with all people. We are glad that you care about people who are hurting. Help us to share the good news of your love with everyone. Amen.

Jesus Calls for Justice

Characters: Narrator, Jesus, Crowd Member 1, Crowd Member 2

Narrator: After being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus went back to Galilee, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught in the synagogues and news about him spread everywhere. People were very impressed. He went home to Nazareth. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as usual. The attendant picked up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and gave it to Jesus. Jesus stood up, unrolled the scroll, and began to read.

Jesus: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. God has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Narrator: Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue attendant, and sat down. Everyone stared at him as he said:

Jesus: Today, this scripture from the prophet Isaiah has come true in your hearing.

Narrator: The people began raving about Jesus.

Crowd Member 1: This is Joseph's son, right? He speaks so well!

Crowd Member 2: I've known Jesus since he was a young boy. Wow! Listen to him now!

Narrator: Then Jesus stood, and everyone fell silent. He said to them:

Jesus: I suppose now you are going to quote me the proverb, "Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what you have done elsewhere." Well, let me tell you, no prophet is ever welcome in the prophet's hometown.

Do you remember when it didn't rain in Israel for three and a half years? It was in the time of Elijah the prophet. There was hardly any food in Israel and many widows went hungry. God did not send Elijah to help the widows in Israel. No, God sent Elijah to help a widow in the city of Zarephath of Sidon. And do you remember when many people in Israel had skin diseases? It was in the time of Elisha the prophet. But the only person who was healed was Naaman, a foreigner from Syria.

Narrator: When those gathered in the synagogue heard this, they became angry.

Crowd Member 1: How dare he say this to us!

Crowd Member 2: Is he saying that God loves foreigners more than us?

Narrator: The crowd rose from their seats and ran Jesus out of town and up the crest of the hill. Some in the crowd said:

Crowd Members 1 and 2: Let's throw him off the cliff!

Narrator: But Jesus slipped through the crowds and went on his way.