

Lesson 36 : What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 16, 2020

General Concept: The Good News is that Jesus came, died and rose from the dead so we have new life in Christ: life abundant and meaningful.

Biblical Reference/s: John 10: 10

Age Level Concepts

- The ministry, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a manifestation of the Good News to many, especially to those who are poor and oppressed.
- Believing in the message of Jesus, following His way of life and doing His ministry gives meaning and fulfillment to the lives of many.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Articulate their understanding of the Good News
- Share experiences of how Jesus' life and work gave them new life
- Discuss the manifestations of new life in Christ in individuals and in the Church

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket, construction paper, scissor, markers

Biblical Background

John 10:10

In the story of the good shepherd, Jesus was continuing the teaching he had begun after healing the blind man. Among his hearers were the Pharisees (see [John 9:40](#)), but they could not see that he was contrasting their treatment of the blind man with his. They acted like thieves and robbers, but Jesus acted like a good shepherd. As a result, the man rejected the leadership of the Pharisees, but he clearly recognized Jesus as the shepherd-saviour and gladly followed him ([John 10:1-6](#)).

To explain further, Jesus likened himself to a door, by which people could come to God and so find life, freedom, protection and provision. But the Jewish leaders, instead of leading people to God, exploited and oppressed them ([John 10:7-10](#)).

Jesus was the true shepherd and spiritual leader of the people, but the scribes and Pharisees fought against him, setting themselves up as leaders. By teaching human traditions instead of God's commandments, they enslaved the Jewish people and strengthened their own power. Like thieves they robbed the flock, like wolves they destroyed it, and like hired labourers they worked for their own profit without any real concern for the flock. By contrast, Jesus sacrificed everything for his flock, even being prepared to die for it so that his sheep might be saved ([John 10:11-13](#)).

The flock of Jesus consists not merely of those in the sheepfold of Israel, but includes people of all nations and languages. They are drawn together as one flock under the shepherd Jesus. The understanding between the shepherd and the sheep is the same as the understanding between the Father and the Son (John 10:14-16). The basis of the relationship between Jesus and his flock is his death and resurrection. He has complete authority over life and death, and his enemies are powerless to take his life from him. Yet he willingly lays down that life so that he might save his people (John 10:17-18; cf. Acts 20:28). (The Bridgeway Bible Commentary)

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "The Word of God" Children Praise God, 44
The Word of God shall guide my feet wherever I may go
The Word of God shall teach my heart the things it ought to know,
The Word of God shall make me strong and bless me through
My whole life long, and bless me through my whole life long.

The Word of God upon my life, helps me to spread the story
The Word of God before my eyes will show me all God's glory
The Word of God within my heart will give me strength
to do my part, will give me strength to do my part.

Opening Prayer

We are grateful O God, to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. We gather as a community renewed by spirit of the bearer of such good news. Pour out your spirit upon us today in this hour of study and reflection. In Jesus' name. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read John 10: 10
 - What is Jesus' purpose and good news for the people?
 - How would you react to the responses of the people like that of the Pharisees?
 - How would you describe the kind of life that Jesus promised?

Lessons Learned

TESTIMONIES. Ask some volunteers to give testimony on how the good news of Jesus changed their life.

After the testimonies, ask the learners:

- What are the manifestations of new life in Christ in individuals and in the Church?

Applying the Lessons Learned

CARD GIVING. Prepare small cards made out of cartolina or construction paper. Give each learner a card and tell them to share their experience of change upon knowing Jesus and his good news.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "Ginawaak Manema"

Ginawaak Manema, ines inged, ines inged

Ginawaak Manema, ines inged, ines inged

Tinged kini igbagayden andas anak den

Kended en pamentuan sa kanden

Dirig, dirig, dirig, kataren

Taman sa taman, taman sa taman

Taman sa taman, taman sa taman.

Closing Prayer

We receive the good news of Jesus freely and experienced new life in him. These are gifts from you O Lord which are beyond our comprehension. We can only respond with utmost thanksgiving with humility in our hearts. Praise be your name O Lord, who remain gracious in all our journeys. All glory and honor be yours, O God of history who brings good news to all. Amen!

Lesson 37 : What is the significance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the life and mission of the church?

Transfiguration Sunday

Last Sunday before Lent

February 23, 2020

General Concept: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of the life and mission of the Church.

Biblical References: 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:5-8

Age Level Concepts

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of the life and faith of the Church.
- Jesus Christ's mission is the foundation of the Church's mission.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- To share the challenges and gains they have experienced and encountered for proclaiming and doing deeds in the name of Jesus.
- To discuss the effects of having Jesus as the foundation of the life and faith of the believers.
- To affirm that Jesus is the foundation of the life, faith and mission of the Church.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

2 Peter 1: 16-21

In speaking as he has concerning God's power to change lives, Peter has not been giving some theory out of his own imagination. He himself saw the power of God of which he speaks. He also saw something of the majesty and glory that will be revealed when Christ returns, for he was one of the three chosen disciples who were with Christ at the time of his transfiguration. Besides seeing the evidence of God's power, Peter heard the testimony that the Father spoke concerning his Son. What Peter speaks of is not a myth, but an actual event that happened at a certain place and a certain time in history. It cannot be denied (16-18; cf. [Mark 9:2-8](#)).

Apart from Peter's own witness of the power and glory of Christ, there is the witness of the Old Testament writings. Prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were fulfilled, and this gives assurance that those concerning his second coming will also be fulfilled. These prophecies are like a lamp in the night. They are useful and helpful until the full light dawns at the return of Christ (19).

It is important that Christians pay attention to these prophecies, for they are not stories that people have invented (cf. v. 16), but messages from God. They were given through God's Spirit, and people can understand them properly only with the help of the same Spirit (20-21) (The Bridgeway Bible Commentary)

Matthew 17:5-8

Jesus' transfiguration took place on a high mountain, possibly Mount Hermon, which was not far from Caesarea Philippi. The event was a revelation of Christ's glory and was witnessed by only three chosen apostles. In coming into the world as a human being, Jesus had laid his divine glory aside, but now it reappeared briefly through a human body. It gave an indication of the glory he would receive after he had finished the work he came to do ([Matthew 17:1-2](#); [Luke 9:28-29](#)).

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus during his transfiguration, possibly to symbolize that the law and the prophets found their fulfillment in him. He was the one to whom the entire Old Testament pointed. They talked with Jesus about his coming death, confirming what Jesus had recently told the apostles. The Messiah had to die before he could enter his glory ([Matthew 17:3](#); [Luke 9:30-31](#)).

The apostles were confused about what was happening, but the Father's voice from heaven told them that it was an expression of his satisfaction with the entire ministry of Jesus. By combining words from one of David's psalms with words from one of Isaiah's servant songs, God declared that the kingly Messiah would lay down his life as the suffering servant. This Messiah was also God's prophet, and people were to listen to his message ([Matthew 17:4-5](#); [Luke 9:32-35](#); cf. [Psalms 2:7](#); [Isaiah 42:1](#); [Deuteronomy 18:15](#); [Deuteronomy 18:18](#); [Acts 3:22](#)).

When the transfiguration was over and Jesus' appearance returned to normal, he again told the apostles that they were not yet to reveal what they had learnt ([Matthew 17:6-9](#); [Luke 9:36](#)). The vision of Elijah prompted the apostles to ask if Elijah would come before the Messiah. If Jesus was the Messiah, why had Elijah not come? Jesus replied that John the Baptist was the promised Elijah, but just as people rejected the Messiah's forerunner so would they reject the Messiah ([Matthew 17:10-13](#)). (The Bridgeway Bible Commentary)

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "I Love To Tell the Story" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 309

I love to tell the story of unseen things above
Of Jesus radiant glory, of Jesus' endless love.
I love to tell the story, because I know it's true,
It satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.

Refrain: I love to tell the story and when I am in glory
I'll tell the old, old story of Jesus' endless love.

I love to tell the story more wonderful it seems
Than all the golden visions of all our golden dreams.
I love to tell the story, I tell it now to you,
Because I want to share it, because I know it's true. (Refrain)

Opening Prayer

Most gracious and loving God, we ask you bind us together in this hour of study and reflection. We are gathered to affirm that Jesus is

the very center of our worship and his life serves as an example for our life and witness. Be with us now, In Christ's name. Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read 2 Peter 1:16-21
 - What prophetic message was confirmed by the words of Simeon Peter?
 - What was that event to which the writer was an eyewitness of?
 - What does the text tries to tell the readers?
- Read Matthew 17:5-8
 - What important event is being told in the text?
 - What important message does the text tries to convey to the readers?
 - What faith affirmations can we draw from the story?

Lessons Learned

DYADS. Tell the learners to find a person as their partner. Within the dyads, discuss the following:

- What are the challenges and gains they have experienced and encountered for proclaiming and doing deeds in the name of Jesus?
- What are the effects of having Jesus as the foundation of the life and faith of the believers?

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask the learners to read aloud our affirmations on God:

“We believe

In One God: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, who provides order, purpose, meaning and fulfillment to all creation.

That in Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary. God became human and is Sovereign Lord of life and history.

That in the Holy Spirit, God is present in the world, empowering and guiding believers to understand and live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

“I Will Serve You”

I will serve you because I love you

You have given life to me

I was nothing until you found me
You have given life to me
Heartaches, broken people
Ruined lives are why you die on calvary,
Your touch is what I long for,
You have given life to me.

Closing Prayer

It is reassuring to know Lord that amidst challenges, pains and gains we experienced, you remain faithful and abiding to your people. As we continue our journey of faith and witness, may your spirit that inspires and empowers will be our companion and guide. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen

Lesson 38 : Why do we need to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?

First Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2020

General Concept: We need to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ because it is an expression of our faithful obedience as commissioned followers.

Biblical References: 2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 8:28

Age Level Concepts

- We need to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ because we are mandated as his followers.
- We need to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to express our obedience to his mandate.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- To discuss how to respond to the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- To identify the usual excuses made by followers of Jesus in order to deflect from their responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel.
- To affirm the call to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an expression of obedience to his mandates.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

2 Timothy 2:15

Paul repeats the advice of his previous letter that Timothy should not waste time discussing fanciful theories (cf. **1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:6-10**). Christian teachers build up their hearers by presenting the truth of God clearly and honestly, not by allowing the imagination to control their preaching (14-16).

Foolish speculation and self-invented theories were what caused Hymenaeus and Philetus to depart from the faith. They denied the future resurrection of the body, apparently by asserting that the resurrection was the spiritual awakening experienced at conversion (17-18; cf. **1 Timothy 1:19-20**). But false teaching does not shake the firm foundation of God's truth. God protects those who belong to him, though they on their part must turn away from wrongdoing (19).

The presence of good and bad in the visible church is compared to the presence of many types of articles in a large house. Some articles are precious, but others are of little value and are unfit for honourable use (20). If believers are to be clean and fit for God's use, they must avoid sinful desires and foolish arguments, and seek instead the company of those who strive for the truly Christian virtues (21-23). By wise and patient instruction, the servants of God may be able to release wrongdoers from Satan's grip and lead them into the freedom that comes from knowing God's truth (24-26)

Acts 8:28

From Samaria Philip headed south towards the region of Philistia on the Mediterranean coast (26). On the way he met another non-Jewish person who responded to his preaching. This man, a government official from Ethiopia in north Africa, was already one of the God-fearers and was reading the Old Testament when Philip met him (27-29). However, he did not understand what he was reading. When Philip explained the Scriptures to him, the man learnt the meaning of Jesus' death, became a believer and was baptized (30-38). The man was overjoyed as he continued his journey homeward, and no doubt readily spread the good news of Jesus Christ among his fellow Africans. Philip, meanwhile, preached around the towns of Philistia, then moved north along the coast till he came to the provincial capital, Caesarea (39-40).

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "We've A Story To Tell to the Nation"

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 310

We've a message to give to the nations that the Lord who reigns above,

Has sent us the Christ who save us and show us that God is love
And show us that God is love, and show us that God is love.
For the darkness shall turn to dawning and the dawning to noonday
bright
And Christ's great kingdom shall come to earth, the kingdom of love and
light.

We've a Savior to show to the nations who the path of sorrow has
trod
That all of the world's great peoples might come to the truth of God,
Might come to the truth of God.
For the darkness shall turn to dawning and the dawning to noonday
bright
And Christ's great kingdom shall come to earth, the kingdom of love
and light.

Opening Prayer

Accompany us O Lord as we journey with your words today. May our
gathering be pleasing to You and the sharing of our life experiences
opens up our hearts to others. Bless us with your presence. In Jesus'
name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Acts 8:28
 - How was the Gospel being shared in the story?
 - To whom should the Gospel be given?
 - Where should we proclaim the Gospel?

- Read 2 Timothy 2:15
 - How does a worker present oneself before God?
 - How should a worker respond to the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Lessons Learned

DISCUSSION. Divide the class into small groups. Within the groups, tell
them to discuss the following:

- Why should followers of Jesus proclaim the gospel?
- What are the usual excuses of usual excuses made by followers of Jesus in order to deflect from their responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel?
- What are the usual challenges encountered in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Applying the Lessons Learned

SUGGEST WAYS. After discussing the challenges, excuses and reasons why we should proclaim the gospel, ask the learners to suggest ways concrete and doable to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “The Church that Is Called by God”
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 315

The church that is called by God where the believers
Strive to obey and serve and to do the will of the Lord;
In times of ease and in times of great need, all would follow
Christ’s command.

Refrain: Praise you God, you are Lord of human kind,
You are Savior of the world, you are Savior of us all.
Let all people their voices raise to the Lord,
Eternal praise to the Lord, eternal praise.

Ang iglesia nga tinawag sa Dios, masinugtanon sa pag-alagad
Kaniya,
Ug buhaton ang kabubut-on Nya, sa kasayon ug sa kalisud
magpadayon
Kay si Kristo nagmando sya gayud.

Koro: Daygon ta ang Ginoo atong Dios, manluluwas sa tanan
Himayaon nato Sya. Maghiusa katawhan nga
tanan
Mag-ambahan Kaniya, mag-ambahan kanunay.

Closing Prayer

You have called us and commanded us to do your mission in the world, O Lord. We recognize that we are not merely spectators but should be obedient followers of your will. Forgive our excuses and making our personal concerns as barriers to proclaim your gospel. Take away our doubts O Lord and fill us with your spirit. Make us effective proclaimers of your Word, Lord, we pray. In Jesus’ name. Amen

***Lesson 39:* As a church, how do we establish and unite the community of faith for the life-proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ towards the transformation of both church and society?**

International Women's Day

Second Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2020

General Concept: The Church must have a common understanding of faith that will impel believers to participate in and live out their prophetic witness.

Biblical References: *Romans 4:16-17; John 3:16-17*

Age Level Concepts

- The Church must have a common understanding of faith that will impel believers to participate in the work for transformation of church and society.
- The Church must embrace and own its beliefs, aspirations and principles to enable its members to live out its prophetic witness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- To discuss the policies and laws of the Church as provided in the Constitution and By Laws that members need to be enlightened with.
- To orient the members of its responsibilities and functions and mandated obligations.
- To commit to embrace and own the laws, principles and programs which the Church adheres to.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Romans 4:16-17

The Christian faith is not merely a mental belief, but something that is practised. Those who say they have faith must give evidence of it by their behaviour. In the case of the poor Christians just referred to, it is useless to talk sympathetically to them but not give them food and clothing. A professed faith must produce a corresponding change in behaviour, otherwise it is dead and useless (14-17).

Genuine faith will prove itself by good deeds. The simple belief that God exists is not enough. Even demons have such a belief, but it will not help them escape God's judgment (18-19).

Abraham also had a belief in God, but it was a belief that completely changed his life and actions. True, Abraham was justified by faith when he whole-heartedly trusted God, even though he did not know how God could possibly fulfill his promise (*Genesis*

15:6; Romans 4:1-3; Romans 4:16-25). But that is not the incident James is talking about here. He is talking about the incident thirty years later, at the time of Abraham's offering of Isaac (20-21; cf. Genesis 22:1-18). Abraham not only said he believed in God, but he proved it by being willing to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. He believed that God could fulfill his promise of giving Abraham a multitude of descendants through Isaac, by bringing Isaac back to life (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19). Genuine faith is demonstrated not simply by the set of beliefs a person holds, but by the actions that those beliefs produce (22-24).

John 3:16-17

God's purpose in sending his Son into the world was positive. He wanted people to believe in him and so have eternal life. But if people prefer the darkness of their own sin to the light of salvation through Jesus, they bring judgment upon themselves by their own choice (John 3:16-18). Now that Jesus has come into the world, the difference between light and darkness, good and evil, is clearly seen. People either come into the light of Jesus for cleansing or remain in the darkness of their sin. Once they have come into God's light, they see that every action of their new life is only the result of God's work within them (John 3:19-21)

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Hymn of Our Faith Journey" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 01

The Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer is the great triune God of our lives,
All creation finds purpose and meaning and fulfillment in God's
wondrous plan.

In Christ God became flesh to dwell among us; Through the Spirit
we're guided along. God empowers us all to live out our faith, to the
glory of the triune God.

We're created to be in God's image; men and women in equality,
God anointed us all for the service, and be stewards of all God's great
works.

To live in communion with all creation and establish a just social life.
God created the world for us to enjoy all the blessings that tell of
God's love.

Opening Prayer

We are gathered here today, Lord to affirm your work in us and the
rest of creation. We come to affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord
and Savior. We come to celebrate our faith in you –our Creator,

Redeemer and Sustainer and the wonderful works you have done for us all. Accept us O Lord before your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Romans 4:16-17
 - What are the beliefs that Paul wanted his readers to affirm?
 - How would grace be guaranteed to all the descendants of Abraham?
- Read John 3:16-17
 - What affirmations of faith can we draw out from the text?
 - Who should be the receivers of the Good News?

Lessons Learned

GROUPINGS. Divide the learners into three groups. Assign each group a material to read on. Ask them to respond to the following:

- What are the points in the material you read that you strongly affirm?
- What are the points in the material that you have questions?

UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals

Vision

A responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of Christian believers committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all.

Mission

Establishing and uniting the community of faith for the proclamation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ towards the transformation of both church and society.

Goals

To strengthen the faith community- which addresses our relationship within the faith community at all levels and in all aspects of its life and work- individual, collective, organizational and institutional.

To enrich the life-work of communities where Local Churches are located- which speaks of the relationship of the Local Churches with the communities where they are situated and where issues are more effectively and meaningfully addressed.

To deepen the impact of its collective response to societal issues and concerns- which reflects the relationship of the whole UCCP with issues and concerns that affect the life-work of the whole nation, the global community and all of creation.

THE UCCP STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE, in One God; Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer who provides order, purpose, meaning and fulfillment to all creation. That in Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, God became human and is Sovereign Lord of life and history. That in the Holy Spirit, God is present in the world, empowering and guiding believers to understand and live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE, persons are created in the image of God and destined to live in community with God, with other persons and with all creation. That by disobedience, they have become sinful, but, by grace through faith, they are redeemed in Jesus Christ. That being entrusted with God's creation, they are called to participate in the establishment of a just and compassionate social order.

WE BELIEVE, that the Church is the one Body of Christ, the whole community of persons reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with God's ministry.

WE BELIEVE, that the Holy Bible is a faithful and inspired witness of God's self revelation in Jesus Christ and in history, to illumine, guide correct and edify believers in their faith and witness.

WE BELIEVE, that God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world God's Kingdom in which love, justice and peace prevail. That the Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.

WE BELIEVE, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has overcome the power of death gives assurance of life after death, and we look forward to His coming again in all fullness and glory make all creation new and to gather all the faithful in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

(Revised in 1992 by the UCCP Faith and Order Committee)

Article II
DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Section 1. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines is an integral part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

Section 2. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines affirms its Protestant heritage as a reformed and reforming church.

Section 3. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines is a united and uniting Church, in response to the prayer of Jesus Christ “that they may all be one . . . that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (John 17:21, RSV).

Section 4. The doctrines and beliefs of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are based on the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and articulated in the historic Christian creeds, expressed in the diverse heritage of faith and practice brought into the union by its uniting Churches, and embodied in its Statement of Faith.

Section 5. The fundamental values of love, justice, truth and compassion are at the heart of our witness to the world and our service to the Church.

Section 6. At all levels of its life and government, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines shall ensure, as far as practicable, the equitable representation of its general membership in terms of gender, age, sector, and geography.

Section 7. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines affirms the catholicity and ecumenicity of the Church of Jesus Christ. This is expressed in the UCCP’s relations with other church bodies and in its support of efforts in interchurch cooperation and union in the Philippines and in the world.

Section 8. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines affirms its historic faith and its pastoral and prophetic witness in the life and culture of the Filipino people. The Church supports the people’s aspirations for abundant life and holistic redemption from all forms of bondage, in accordance with the vision of the reign of God.

Section 9. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines advocates vigorous Christian stewardship expressed in the cheerful giving of tithes, time, talents and possessions.

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines shall observe responsible Christian stewardship by utilizing the properties under its care towards self-reliance and support of its various ministries.

Section 10. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines shall encourage and provide the means for amicable settlement of conflicts and disputes between and among members, as well as those involving the Church and its constituencies.

Section 11. In accordance with the biblical understanding that all persons are created in the image of God, the Church affirms and upholds the inviolability of the rights of persons as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements on human rights, the international covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights, the 1984 Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and those that relate specifically to refugees, women, youth, children, minority groups and other persons who cannot safeguard their own rights.

Section 12. As steward of God's creation, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines shall protect, promote and enhance the ecological balance and the integrity of creation.

Section 13. **The United Church of Christ in the Philippines recognizes that nurturing the faith is part of its primary responsibility.**

Section 14. Consistent with the heritage and commitment of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the autonomy of the Local Church shall be respected. The scope of such autonomy shall be defined in the By-Laws.

AMENDED UCCP-BY-LAWS

Article I **CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

SECTION 1. *Membership.* Members of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are those who have been received as members of the local churches.

SECTION 2. *Types of Membership.* Membership may be regular **or** associate, affiliate, preparatory or honorary.

SECTION 3. *Regular Members.* Regular membership shall be held in only one Local Church. The regular members are the following:

- a. ***Those baptized as infants and confirmed in the Local Church, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;***
- b. ***Those who are baptized as adults in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;***
- c. Those who are not yet baptized or who wish to be baptized, and who by public confession of faith and baptism, are accepted as such members; and,
- d. Those who are members of other denominations or communions whose baptism uses the Trinitarian formula, and
 - 1) who, upon having obtained a letter of transfer from their Local Church, are duly received by the Local Church;
 - 2) who, having officially resigned or withdrawn their membership from their former church, profess and are accepted as such members by the Local Church; or
 - 3) who, by marriage to members, profess to become such members of the Local Church.

SECTION 4. Associate Members. Associate members are those members of another Local Church whose circumstances make it necessary to participate in the ministry of another Local Church and obtain associate membership in such Local Church. Except for the right to vote and be voted upon, associate members shall enjoy all the rights and privileges of regular members.

SECTION 5. Affiliate Members. Affiliate members are those members of other Christian communions who are temporarily absent from their home church and who, upon application, are received as affiliate members. Except the right to vote and be voted upon, affiliate members shall enjoy the rights and privileges of regular members in the Local Church they are affiliated.

SECTION 6. Preparatory Members. Preparatory members are the following:

- a. Those baptized or dedicated as infants; and,
- b. Adults who are seeking to be baptized.

SECTION 7. Honorary Members. Honorary membership may be granted to members of other Christian churches who have performed extraordinary service.

SECTION 8. Rights and Privileges of Members. Membership in the Local Church bestows the following rights and privileges:

- a. Continuing nurture in the faith and pastoral care;
- b. To be informed of, and participate in, all programs and other activities of the Church;
- c. To avail of the services of the Local Church; and,
- d. In the case of regular members, **who are at least twelve (12) years of age**, to vote and be voted upon in, or appointed to, any position in the Local Church.

SECTION 9. Commitments of Members. Membership in the Local Church entails the following obligations and commitments:

- a. To proclaim the Gospel and bear personal witness in both word and service in the context of one's immediate community, the nation and the rest of humanity;
- b. To lead a peaceable and godly life worthy of one's Christian calling; and to endeavor to be a follower of Jesus Christ;
- c. To be diligent in prayer, the faithful practice of family worship and Bible study, and attendance at services of public worship of the Church;
- d. To exhort one another in the faith, and to strive in every way to strengthen the unity and fellowship of the Church;
- e. To study and practice the principles of Christian stewardship, cheerfully giving of one's tithes, pledges, time, talents and possessions;
- f. To protect, promote and enhance the ecological balance and integrity of God's creation; and,
- g. To affirm and adhere to the historic Christian creeds, the UCCP Statement of Faith, and the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws.

SECTION 10. Transfer, Loss and Restoration of Membership.

- a. **Certificate of Transfer of Members.** Whenever a regular member moves from one Local Church to another, he/she shall obtain a certificate of transfer, signed by the Pastor and Secretary of the

Church Council. In the absence of the Pastor, the Chairperson of the Church Council becomes a signatory.

- b. **Notice of Forwarding Certificate.** The Pastor who issues a certificate of transfer as provided for in the immediately preceding sub-section shall forward such certificate, with appropriate explanation to the Pastor of the Local Church to which the member bearing the certificate shall be received.
- c. **Notice of Reception of Members on Certificate.** Upon reception of a member bearing a certificate of transfer, the Local Church of origin shall be properly notified.
- d. **Limitations of Certificate.** A transfer certificate issued to a member as provided for in the preceding sections must be presented to a Local Church or returned to the church of origin within eighteen (18) months, beyond which time, it becomes null and void.
- e. **Loss of Membership.** Members shall be delisted from membership roll on account of:
 - 1) **resignation;**
 - 2) absence from his/her home church for a period of three (3) consecutive years, and despite **diligent efforts** by the Local Church, his/her whereabouts remain unknown;
 - 3) expulsion, and
 - 4) death
- f. **Expulsion of Member.** A member may be expelled for committing any of the following offenses:
 - 1) Offense against the unity or integrity of the Church;
 - 2) Offense against accepted norms of morality;
 - 3) Offense against religious worship and other sacred ceremonies and rituals of the Church;
 - 4) Disrespect for the Church, its councils and officials, and fellow members; and,
 - 5) Willful and flagrant violation of the Constitution, By-Laws and statutes of the Church, including decisions of the National Commission on ***Discipline and*** Conflict Resolution (***NCDRC***).
- g. **Admonition and Suspension.** In cases of flagrant neglect of duty, indulgence in sinful temper or word, or disobedience of any order of the Church, admonition shall be given by the Pastor or a duly designated member of the Board of Elders upon such erring member; and, if there be acknowledgment of fault, proper repentance and a promise to reform, the member may retain his/her good standing.

On a second offense, the Pastor or duly designated member of the Board of Elders shall take with him/her one of the faithful members and strive to bring the offender to repentance.

On a third offense, and, if there be no satisfactory repentance of offender, the latter shall be subject to the penalty of suspension for such period as the Board of Elders ***may fix and confirmed by the Church Council.***
- h. **Restoration of Membership.** A regular member whose name has been delisted from the Local Church shall be restored as a regular member after giving satisfactory evidence of his/her conduct to the Board of Elders and reaffirming his/her faith before the congregation. He/She shall be restored to his/her original standing as member upon confirmation by the Church Council and acceptance by the congregation.

A member may not, earlier than one (1) year from date of his/her expulsion, apply to the Local Church from which he/she was expelled from restoration of his/her membership, and no other Local Church has authority to restore him/her to full membership after the period of his/her suspension.

As the penalty for expulsion is applied only in extreme cases, great care should be taken by the Board of Elders in recommending (a) the expulsion of a member; or (b) the restoration to full membership of one who has been expelled from the Local Church.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask the learners: "How would we show that we embrace and own our faith affirmations, our laws and responsibilities as members of UCCP?"

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "Hymn of Our Faith Journey" Hymnal of Faith
Journey, 01

God's inspired instrument to instruct us,
is the Bible the great Word of God,
To illumine, to guide and correct us
and to brighten our pathway to heaven.
God is working to make us new beings in Christ,
and the whole world God's kingdom to be.
Where God's presence is felt, the hungry are fed,
The oppressed and the captives are freed.

We have triumphed over death with our Savior,
Jesus Christ is our own risen Lord,
He will gather us all in his fullness,
To inherit the Kingdom of God.
He has given the gift of eternal life
So that all who believe may be saved
We all look forward to his coming again
To gather us all in his fold.

Closing Prayer

We commit ourselves O Lord to follow and serve as our faithful response to Your grace. Use us for your purpose and will. Equip us with the necessary tools so that we can be effective and helpful partners with others whom you called in doing Christ's mission. In Jesus' name. Amen

Lesson 40: Why is it important for a church to have goals?

Third Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2020

General Concept: It is important for the church to have goals to direct its mission in order to realize its vision.

Biblical Reference: John 4:21-30, 39-42

Age Level Concepts

- It is important for the Church to have goals.
- The Church must have goals to give direction for doing its mission.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Give an analogy to explain what “goal” means
- Discuss the significance of having goals to the life and work of the Church
- Affirm God’s guidance in attaining the goals set by the Church

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

John 4:21-30, 39-42

As Jesus approached one of the villages of Samaria, he began a conversation with a Samaritan woman whom he met at a well (John 4:4-9). The woman had a similar problem to Nicodemus in that she interpreted Jesus' words literally instead of figuratively. She did not understand that when Jesus offered her living water, he was not speaking of ordinary water but of eternal life. If she accepted what he offered, her deepest needs would be satisfied for ever (John 4:10-15).

Realizing that the woman would have to see her personal sin before she could see her spiritual need, Jesus began to speak of her marital affairs. At first she tried to hide her sins, but Jesus' searching remarks soon made her realize that she was in the presence of one with divine knowledge (John 4:16-19). She therefore turned the conversation to religion by referring to the dispute between Jews and Samaritans about the location of the temple. (Concerning relations between Jews and Samaritans see earlier section, 'The New Testament World'.) Jesus told her that the important matters were not those of race or locality, but those that concerned a right attitude of spirit and a right relation with God (John 4:20-24).

The woman saw that the conversation was leading to things she knew nothing about. She therefore tried to finish it quickly by saying that she would wait for the Messiah to come and explain it all to her. Jesus replied that the Messiah was already talking to her (John 4:25-26). In wonder and excitement the woman hurried back to tell the villagers of her discovery and urge them to come and see this remarkable person (John 4:27-30).

Next it was the disciples who interpreted Jesus' words literally instead of figuratively. This time the subject was food. Jesus told them that his strength came from obedience to the will of God. That was his real food, and he intended to keep feeding on it till he finished the work he came to do (John 4:31-34).

After a farmer sows the seed, he may have to wait many months before he reaps the harvest. But in the case of the Samaritan woman, the seed sown in her heart was already bearing fruit, for the Samaritan villagers were already hurrying across the fields to learn about Jesus. Jesus had sown; the disciples would reap. It was a foretaste of the harvest they would reap from seed sown by messengers of God who had gone before them, from the prophets of Old Testament times to John the Baptist (John 4:35-38).

Though the woman had introduced the villagers to Jesus, they needed to exercise personal faith if they were to receive the eternal life he offered. Many responded in genuine faith, realizing that Jesus was a Savior whose blessings were not limited to selected races or nations (John 4:39-42).

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “Balaan nga Espiritu” Hymnal of Faith Journey, 180
(O Holy Spirit Rouse Your Church)

Balaan nga Espiritu, pukawa ang Imong iglesia
Kay daghang kausaban man nga makatandog sa katawhan.

Lihuka ang iglesia mo, way pagtagad sa kaakohan
Sugnibi sa kalayo mo, magdilaab sa pag-alagad.

O Holy Spirit rouse your church, from apathy and idleness
Make us aware of changing times that threatens all of humankind.

O Holy Spirit, move your church, to have the zeal to spread the Word
Make stronger now your spirit's fire, publish your love to all the world.

Opening Prayer

Awaken in us the spirit of eagerness to find new light in Your word. Awaken us from apathy and open our hearts to what is happening around us. Make our discussions a doorway to new learnings and new commitments. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read John 4:21-30, 39-42
 - What is the most important point of the conversation between Jesus and the woman?
 - How did Jesus picture out the time that is to come to the Samaritan woman?
 - How did the woman make others believe in Jesus as the Christ?
 - What symbolisms were being used by Jesus to further explain his goals?
 - What do you think are the goals of Jesus?
 - How do you think Jesus will achieve these goals?

Lessons Learned

A "goal" is defined by Merriam Webster as something that you are trying to do or achieve; the end toward which effort is directed; an aim.

As a church, we expect that "individual church members committed to the commonly arrived at vision and mission of the church will then have such statements as their basic guidelines in formulating their own life goals and purposes, in forming their own standpoints and perspectives." (A Primer Study Guide to the VMG, UCCP)

GROUPINGS.

Divide the learners into 3 groups or groupings may depend on the number of learners. Give to the group the following instructions:

- Find an analogy that will explain what "goal" means.
- Present the group's analogy to the big group creatively.
- Other learners may raise questions for clarifications.

DISCUSSION. Ask the following for discussion:

- Why do you think it is needed for the church to have goals?
- What do you think is the purpose of having goals?
- What will happen if the church has goals?
- What will happen if the church doesn't have goals?

Applying the Lessons Learned

- Review your Local Church Plan. Identify the goals set by your local church and the strategies laid out to achieve those goals.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

“O Holy Spirit Rouse your Church”
Hymnal Of Faith Journey,180

O Holy Spirit shake your church, to face the evils of our days
What hinders us, we cast aside, our minds be changed to do your will.

O Holy Spirit fill your church, transform our lives with love and care
That on this earth your goodness reign and peace with justice
prevail.

Closing Prayer

Fill us Lord so that we may be able to realize our vision and mission
through our goals. May the Spirit empower not just individuals but
the whole community to participate and work together achieve our
aims. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson 41: What does it mean to strengthen the faith community?

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2020

General Concept: Strengthening the faith community means nurturing the faith of the members, equipping them with skills, and inspiring them to participate in the ministry of the local church.

Biblical Reference/s: Ephesians 4:11-13,15-16

Age Level Concepts

- Nurturing the faith of the members and teaching them will make the local church formidable and alive.
- To strengthen the local church means to equip members with necessary skills, develop their capacities and inspire them to participate in the ministries of the Church.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss how their local church nurtures them to grow in faith and witness
- Identify the skills and capacities that the members need in order for them to participate in Christ’s mission

- Commit to participate in the ministries of the Church and inspire others to do likewise in order to strengthen the faith community

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
 song chart, offering plate or basket, pieces of paper, tape, pens or marker pens

Biblical Background

Ephesians 4: 11-13,15-16

The church as a body of believers will carry out Christ's ministry. To carry out the mission, spiritual gifts are given to the believers. God's main and great purpose for the church is to exemplify a new life both of the church and members of the faith community.

Though the people in this faith community differs in culture, social background, principles and practices, they must not allow these differences to destroy God's body. Rather, these differences and varied gifts are blessings that reflect God's greatness and love.

God has given divine gifts for the purpose of the church and ministry. Some of these gifts are people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. They are gifts to build up and equip the Body of Christ in doing its mission through its programs and ministries. This giftedness will help the Christians individually and the church as a whole to grow in maturity towards the perfection and fullness that is found in Jesus Christ. (Bridgeway Bible Commentary)

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "We Want to learn to Live in Love" Hymnal of Faith
 Journey, 188

We want to learn to live in love,
 To follow what is good and true
 Through friends at church, at home, at play,
 We find what God would have us do.

When we are sad or feeling mean
 Or fail to love or to be fair
 Our friends at church, at home, at play
 Can help us know that God does care.

Opening Prayer

We ask you O Lord to enter our lives today, renewing and refreshing our minds with the power of the Spirit. Accept us despite our weaknesses and frailties and make us worthy to speak about You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Ephesians 4: 11-13,15-16
 - What did Paul call the believers in Ephesus?
 - According to the writer, how should the believers remain steadfast in their faith?
 - How can believers participate in doing Christ's mission as a church?
 - How can different gifts strengthen the faith community?

Lessons Learned

Identifying Skills and Capacities. Give each learner a piece of paper (half-lengthwise). Tell the learners to:

- Write on the piece of paper the skills and capacities which they think are needed to help strengthen their local church.
- Let them post their pieces of paper on the board for everyone to see.
- Validate their answers.

DISCUSSION. Ask the learners the following:

- If these were the needed skills and capacities to strengthen the local church, what were the actions done by the church to respond to these needs?
- What steps were taken by the local church to nurture the faith of the members?

Applying the Lessons Learned

- Give the learners another piece of paper. Tell them to write on the paper their suggestion as to how to nurture the members to strengthen their faith and witness and what can be done to equip members with skills and capacities for their participation in the ministries of the church.

Let them post their papers on the board.

- Ask someone to pray for strength as a community by nurturing the faith of all members and giving them the capacities needed for their participation in the mission of the church.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "The Hands of God" Hymnal of Faith

Journey, 295

The hands of God that make the church to live and grow
That give its power to face all fears and woes
The hands that make for peace to reign all o'er us
Are hands of God that work through you and me.

Refrain:

The hands of God that guide us through the years
From doubts and fears those hands have led us through
They call for faith and hope and love to reign all o'er us
The hands of God that work through you and me.

Closing Prayer

Strengthen us O Lord as we continue to be faithful witnesses of your love and mercy. Make our faith alive in the way we live and treat others. Fill us Lord with the skills and gifts that will help us become active participants in your ministry. This we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lesson 42: Why do we need to strengthen the faith community?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2020

General Concept: We need to strengthen the local church for it to be an efficient, effective, and empowered instrument in the attainment of the Church's Vision, Mission and Goals.

Biblical References: Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 11:25-27

Age Level Concepts

- We need to strengthen the local church.
- A strong local church becomes an efficient, effective, and empowered instrument in the attainment of the Church's Vision, Mission and Goals.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Review the local church's plans and programs and see at which points they are either weak or strong

- Identify what strengthens the local church to make it efficient, effective, and empowered in its work towards the realization of the VMG of the Church
- Commit to strengthen the local church so that it can become an efficient, effective, and empowered instrument in the realization of the VMG of the Church

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Prophet Ezekiel prophesied and ministered to the Israelites in Exile. About the year 593 BCE, he together with King Jehoiachin and other leaders of Judah were carried away in exile to Babylon. The message of Ezekiel could be divided into two periods. In the first seven years of his prophetic ministry (593-587/6 BCE), he was confronted with people full of hope: *“Babylon, the world power is soon to crush down”,* they thought, *“We will be home soon!”* The people did not need comfort at the time; they felt comforted already.

Ezekiel used all his prophetic talent to tell them that it would not happen that way. Their period of exile would not yet come to an end. Instead of returning, more people would be deported, because - and that was absolutely shocking - the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed!

Prophet Ezekiel gave reasons for this: The laws of the **Torah were not followed; other gods were worshipped** even in the temple (Ezekiel 8-11; 22:6-12). What a horrible message! The deportees in Babylon did not want to hear it; they closed their ears and preferred to live in their sweet dreams of returning to Judah as soon as possible. In this first period of his preaching, Ezekiel was surely not comforting the people. Quite contrary, he gave them **discomfort**.

In the next years of his ministry (587/6-573 BCE), Ezekiel’s prophecies were proven right. Upon hearing about the **destruction of Jerusalem and the temple** and upon receiving a big new group of deportees, the first group of exiles lost their hope. *“We will never return”,* they thought, *“Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed forever!”* The people were desperate and homesick. In their despair they composed Psalms 137: *“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (v.1).*

In this time of despair, Ezekiel preached **a new message**; he preached **hope**. The end of the temple is not the end of God. He left the temple (Ezekiel 11:23). And he will return to a new temple, which Ezekiel described in a long vision (Ezekiel 40-48). With his vision of the **“dry bones”** he made it clear, that **God could even bring new life** to dried bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14). This would be the time in which the deported Jews

would return: *"As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered..."* (Ezekiel 34:12).

In God there is always hope even in the midst of hopelessness. In God there is always life even for dried bones. The hope of the Israelites to return to their homeland was not only dead, but already dried up like dried bones. But even then, Prophet Ezekiel firmly believed that God could rekindle that hope of coming home to Judah and would soon bring it into fulfillment.

John 11:25-27

This is also the message of Jesus Christ our Lord in John 11. In God there is always life even in the midst of death; there is always hope even in the midst of sorrows and despair. Lazarus was raised to life even if he had already been buried for four days (v.39).

As Christians, we always view death not as defeat but victory. For not until we look at death victoriously can we learn to live victoriously; and not until we live victoriously can we face death victoriously. Jesus' own teachings about life and death are our sources of hope, comfort and consolation.

First of all, Jesus teaches us not to fear those who can destroy the body only. Rather, we should fear him who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell (cf. Mt. 10:28). We do believe that we are not merely physical beings. According to the Scriptures, God has breathed the breath of life in us, and thus we have become a living soul (cf. Gen. 2:7). Our soul is our inner life. It is our sense of what is right and wrong, what is just and unjust, and what is true and what is false. This is a gift of God that no one could ever destroy.

The problem of our society today is that many of us have no more souls, or as one writer said have damaged souls. For instance, every election time, we put into power people who do not have the national interest at heart, but people whose ambition is only to amass personal wealth. We applaud leaders who are merely verbose and bombastic rather than truly intelligent; the shrewd and merely clever rather than the wise; the dishonest and corrupt rather than the ones with integrity and mental honesty. We have become an economically impoverished nation, simply because our souls have been impoverished or seriously damaged, or simply disappeared.

Secondly, Jesus also teaches us that there are some things worse than dying. He said, *"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but loses his own soul?"* (Mt.16:26). The loss of Christian virtues and respect for human rights, sacrificing human life for selfish gains, denying the truth for the sake of a lie - these things are far worse than dying physically. For the death of our souls is an eternal death.

And thirdly, Jesus also teaches us that the quality of life is far more important than the length of life. According to historians, Jesus started his ministry at the age of thirty, and he ministered to the people of his day for two to three years. He had never written a book; he had no letters attached to his name. He never established an empire nor built a mansion of his own. But of all the politicians who sat in parliaments, of all the generals who won in battles; no one had ever influenced the world like this man of Nazareth, who spent his short life in caring for the poor, the sick and the downtrodden.

Science has learned to preserve and lengthen human life. Modern medicine can cure our bodies of nearly every malady. It is marvelous, indeed. We take pride in long life, but what if we have nothing to live for? Martin Luther King, Jr. at one time said, *“He who doesn’t know the thing he would die for is not fit to live.”* There is no virtue in number of years, if we have not learned how to live. Quality life is more important than quantity.

Sometimes we actually live more in one day than we do in one month, or more in one hour than we do in an entire day. The most tragic death is that of the one who has never learned to live. When a person dies without friends: that is tragic. When a person dies without having contributed for the good of the world: that is disaster. When a person dies without having created within a spirit worthy of fellowship with God and others: that is ultimate failure.

Our life consists not in the things we possess, nor in the abundance of our years, but in the quality of our living. *Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die”* (Jn. 11:25). This is the kind of life that live victoriously even in death. As one poet says, *“For when the One Great Scorer comes to write against your name, He writes – not that you won or lost – but how you played the game.”*

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn. *“God Has Formed the Church to Be”*

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 238

God has formed the church to be sign of Christ throughout the world

Many peoples, many tongues in one body reconciled.

One Lord is our unity, one faith is our only Rock,

Baptized fully into Christ, his life flows out through us all.

All are called to do God’s will: faith grows strong when proved by works

People sharing myriad gifts, find one love, one peace, in Christ.

One Lord is our unity, one faith is our only Rock,

Baptized fully into Christ, his life flows out through us all.

Opening Prayer

Most gracious and loving God, we come today filled with eagerness to learn and study with our sisters and brothers. We pray that the sharing of our experiences together as a community will enrich our understanding of your mission and our part in it. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14
 - What was the situation of the people when the story was told?
 - What gives life to the dry bones?
 - What could be the intention of God in giving life to the dry bones?
 - To whom was the prophecy being addressed?
 - What do you think was God's intention in giving such prophecy?

- Read John 11:25-27
 - What do you think is the intention of this account?
 - What kind of a life does Jesus give to those who believe?
 - How would you justify that belief in Christ gives life?
 - What happens or what is the effect of believing in Christ to the community of believers?

Lessons Learned

DISCUSSION. Ask the learners:

- If the church is a community of believers in Christ, what kind of a life do we have today?
- Why do we need to be strengthened as a church?

ASSESSMENT. Provide a copy of the local church's OGSM Plan. Let the learners read the plan and explain that the assessment is only in line with the topic. Make an assessment on the following:

- The strength and weaknesses in implementing their plan
- The factors behind those weaknesses and strengths
- What can be done to improve, to be more effective and efficient?

Applying the Lessons Learned

PLAN OUT. After realizing the weaknesses and strengths and after knowing what can be done to become more effective, efficient

and empowered instruments for the realization of the VMG, what proper steps should you take to make others know about these?

Let the learners plan out their next move.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “God Has Formed the Church to Be”

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 238

Now the Church in every place holds her lamps of hope aloft
Where the Spirit gives them light, they will shine by day, by
night.

One Lord is our unity, one faith is our only Rock
Baptized fully into Christ, his life flows out through us all.

Closing Prayer

We acknowledge that we have a great task to do as believers in Christ whom you have sent to us O God. Despite our weaknesses, we commit our lives in doing your mission. Make us not be arrogant and proud of our strengths for we know that those are gifts from You. With your empowering Spirit, make us effective and efficient in our work so that we can be of help in realizing our vision. This we ask, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson 43: How do we strengthen the faith community?

Liturgy of the Palms

Sixth Sunday in Lent

April 5, 2020

General Concept: We strengthen the local church through continuing education, fellowships, faith-formation, and mutual concern.

Biblical Reference/s: Matthew 21:8-11

Age Level Concepts

- Studying and reading Scripture together, listening to each other’s and the people’s stories and struggles will strengthen the local church.
- Fellowshiping with each other and with other faith communities will strengthen the local church.
- Showing concern and responding to the needs of others will strengthen the local church.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Mention programs, activities, advocacies and relationships of the local church that help strengthen their point of view, principles in life, attitude towards others and the rest of creation, and their love for the Church
- Suggest ways to further strengthen the local church's life, faith and witness

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Matthew 21:8-11

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus started his ministry not in Jerusalem like in the Gospel of John, but outside the city, among the poor people of Galilee. But time came when Jesus and his disciples had to go to the center of power. Jesus instructed two of his disciples to go to the village ahead of them, and there they would find a colt tied up. They would untie it and bring it to Jesus. Then, if someone would ask them why they are untying it, they would tell him that the Master needs it. Apparently, there were silent (or secret) followers of Jesus in the surrounding towns and villages of Galilee.

And so, the disciples went on their way and found everything just as Jesus had told them. They brought the colt to Jesus. And after placing their cloaks over the animal, they helped Jesus ride on it. Then, Jesus and his disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, while people were spreading their cloaks on the road. Some cut branches of palm trees and spread them on the road (Mt. 21:8).

And when they came near Jerusalem, the large crowd of his disciples began to thank God and praise him in loud voices for all the great things that they had seen. *“God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”* they shouted. *“Peace in heaven and glory to God!”*

In the Lukan version of the incident (Lk. 19:21-40), some of the Pharisees in the crowd spoke to Jesus and said, *“Teacher, command your disciples to be quiet!”*(v.39). Perhaps, the Pharisees viewed the cry and shout of Jesus' disciples as mere noise or a threatening sign of a revolution or uprising in the making. Thus, they wanted them to stop and keep quiet. But Jesus answered, *“I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out!”* (Lk. 19:40).

Now, what were the disciples really shouting about making the Pharisees very angry at them? Certainly, the Pharisees got angry not merely because the disciples were crying out very loudly. There must be something in their shouts that really irritated the Pharisees.

According to the Biblical story, the disciples were shouting: *“God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!”* Other versions

put it this way: *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, glory in the highest!”*

Definitely, these are not bad words! The Pharisees should have been glad that the disciples were praising the glory and majesty of God, considering the fact that the Pharisees were supposed to be very religious people.

But if we would analyze the words carefully, we would perhaps realize that the Pharisees had reasons to be angry and to stop the disciples from crying out loudly. The cry of the disciples was not an ordinary cry. Rather, it was a deep cry of hope and faith in God. That through *“the king who comes in the name of the Lord”*, genuine change will finally be realized. The word, *hosanna* which literally means *save us*, is a cry for the fulfillment of God’s saving act among the masses of people.

During Jesus’ time, the Pharisees were part of the ruling powers who claimed to have control over the lives of people, not only on earth but even in heaven! And experiences would tell us that when we talk of genuine change, the first who are against it are actually those who are in power. Those who would benefit from the existing structural arrangement of things would never allow genuine change to happen. They would rather find ways and means to strengthen the status quo.

No wonder in the Lukan version of the story, the Pharisees had to stop the disciples from crying out, because the disciples were shouting *“hosanna!”* – God save us! God transform us! God renew us! The disciples, indeed, were crying out for genuine change.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees according to Luke was very significant. *“If these were silent,”* he said, *“the stones would cry out”* (Lk. 19:40).

The cry of our time, the cry of Palm Sunday is a cry for change – a genuine and meaningful change in government, in our society, in the church, but even more importantly in our selves. This is more than just a charter change! This will necessarily involve a radical change in our way of life. Such genuine change is not easy to achieve.

But the words of Jesus remind us of the truth that the purpose of God for humanity cannot be hindered by anyone, not even by those in power. *“If these were silent,”* Jesus said, *“the stones would cry out!”* (Lk. 19:40).

Genuine and meaningful change ultimately comes from God. It is God who is *“at work to make new beings in Christ and the whole world as God’s Kingdom”* (UCCP Statement of Faith). It is God who is making *“new heavens and new earth”* (cf. Rev. 21:1-2). But God calls us to be bearers as well as instruments of God’s mission in the world. And this would make us humble and hopeful at the same time. Humble in

the sense that it is God who will make all things new, and therefore, there's nothing we could brag about. And hopeful in the sense that despite all our weaknesses and limitations we have the assurance that God will make all things new in his own way and in his own time.

It is significant to note that "stones" in the Scripture refer to the masses of people. The "people of the land" were the downtrodden and marginalized sector of society in Jesus' time. They were the victims of the oppressive structures of the Roman Empire. They were the ones longing for genuine change. Yes, they would be the ones to cry out as Jesus said if and when the disciples would become silent. Genuine and meaningful change, indeed, comes through the victims themselves.

Hence, the call of the hour is for us not to stop crying out for genuine change. For if and when the church becomes silent, then the stones will cry out. God, indeed, is never left without a witness (cf. Acts 14:17).

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "A Common Love"

A common love for each other, a common gift to the Savior
A common bond holding us to the Lord
A common strength when we're weary
A common hope for tomorrow
A common joy in the truth of God's word.

In God's family, we can meet each one's need
We can light each one's path, we can bear each one's grief
As God's children we can comfort each care
We can build each one's faith, we can work, we can share.

Opening Prayer

We come as members of a big family, Lord. Without the presence and active participation of one or two, the family will slowly break. So we ask your power to inspire us so that we may always aspire to strengthen your church every day. May our gathering today as we study your words will help strengthen your family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Matthew 21:8-11

- What was being affirmed when Jesus entered the city?
- How did the people show their common joy and aspiration?
- From this story, what are the factors that unite the people of Jerusalem?
- What reflections can we draw out from this text?

Lessons Learned

GROUPINGS. Divide the learners into three. Assign to each group the following:

Group 1 – Identify activities, programs, strategies of the church that help strengthen your beliefs, principles and mold your point of views in relation to people, rest of creation and faith.

Group 2 – Identify activities, programs, strategies of the church that help strengthen your relationships with other people, other faith communities and awakened your concern for others.

Group 3 – Identify the activities, programs, strategies of the church that honed your skills and capacities, that tapped your talents and gifts and challenged you to practice faithful stewardship.

Let each group share their lists. Other groups may add to the list.

DISCUSSION. Ask the following:

- Do you think these activities/programs of the church has helped you strengthen your beliefs, principles and point of views in relation to your faith and life? Cite examples.
- How do these activities/ strategies/programs of the church strengthen or equipped your church?
- What significant signs can you give that show your church being strengthened?
- What area of the church's life that needs to be strengthened further?
- How can these areas of the church's life be strengthened more? Suggest ways.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Tell the groups to make a declaration/statement based on the discussion and be presented to the big group through a song or poem. Their declaration should focus on **areas which they believe the**

church is strong and how to strengthen the weak areas/aspects of the church's life and faith.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "We Are the Church" by Richard K. Avery & Donald S. March

Refrain:

I am the church! You are the church!

We are the church together!

All who follow Jesus, all around the world!

Yes, we're the church together.

The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple
The church is not a resting place, the church is people.

We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces
All colors and all ages too, from all times and places.

burning
Sometimes the church is marching, sometimes it's bravely

Sometimes it's riding, sometimes hiding
Always it's learning.

Closing Prayer

Knowing we can be equipped and further strengthen our life and faith is both an opportunity and a blessing for us believers, O Lord. We believe you are with us in our journey. With the power of your Spirit, there is no challenge that we cannot overcome. You called us into a covenant community to be your servants. We offer whatever gift we have to strengthen your church and become a useful instrument to further your work in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 44: What do we mean by "life-work" of communities?

Resurrection of the Lord

Easter Day

April 12, 2020

General Concept: Life-work of communities refers to the aspirations, ideals, strivings and experiences of the people for their own common good.

Biblical References: Acts 10:36-43, Matthew 28:1-10, 1 Corinthians 15:17-19

Age Level Concepts

- The people in the communities also have their aspirations, ideals, experiences and struggles.
- Through their life-work, the people strive and struggle to achieve aspirations and ideals for the common good.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Describe the community of which they are a part
- Mention the problems, needs, and situations of the people in the community that have to be addressed
- Share what they anticipate to happen in their community amidst the changes in the coming years

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket, manila paper, pentel pens

Biblical Background

The resurrection is one of the most important aspects of our Christian faith. Without faith that Jesus was raised from the dead, perhaps there would be no Christianity. It was not the ethical teachings of Jesus or his noble death that gave birth to the Christian church that spread throughout the Roman Empire. Rather, it was the news of his resurrection.

It was when the first Christians believed in the Risen Christ that they looked back to ask about the meaning of his birth, of his life, and of his death. Apostle Paul was right when he wrote to the Christians in Corinth, saying: *“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins. It would also mean that the believers in Christ who have died are lost. If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world”* (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). Indeed, how would the so-many victims of injustice in this world obtain justice if there would be no hope for the resurrection?

The earliest confession summarizing the whole faith of the first Christians was the confession that *“Jesus is Lord”* - a title conferred on him because of his resurrection. Sometimes the church would make the cross the center of its faith. Of course, this is not totally wrong. The Risen Lord is no other than the Suffering Servant who gave himself for us. But the cross is an appropriate symbol for the Christian faith only if it is an empty cross. The foundation and center of the Christian faith is not death but life; not tragedy, but victory beyond tragedy; not a gloomy fascination with a dead sacrifice, but a triumphant faith in the Living Lord.

Jesus had been raised to life! This is where the Christian faith begins. And for us Christians, it is the one event in history, which gives meaning to all history, including our own.

In Matthew 28:1-10, we are told about that early Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb of Jesus. Then, suddenly there was a violent earthquake. And an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

An angel is believed to be a messenger of God. That is precisely what the word *angel* means - a messenger. The dramatic descriptions of what happened - like the violent earthquake, the lightning appearance, the white clothes, the stone rolled away, and the trembling guards - all these speak of the importance and urgency of the message that the angel had come to proclaim. It is a powerful message that no one, not even the guards nor the huge stone could hinder its proclamation. It is a message that everyone should listen to.

There is a threefold message that comes from the Risen Christ through the angel. It is a message for the women who visited the tomb of Jesus. It is also a message for all of us who remember and celebrate the Risen Christ.

First of all, our Risen Lord is saying to us, “*You must not be afraid! He has been raised!*” These were the words of the angel to the women (v.5). Perhaps, Mary Magdalene and the others were still overwhelmed with fear, when they went to see the tomb of Jesus on that resurrection morning. But we may say that at least they had overcome their fear a little bit. Unlike the men disciples of Jesus, these women were able to muster enough courage to go and see the tomb of this dangerous person, an enemy of the state, even if they knew that soldiers were guarding his tomb. Who would not be afraid after seeing their Lord and Master being arrested and undergo a mock trial, tortured and finally crucified? The disciples had to run for their own lives. Who knows, they might be the next to be crucified.

With the imposition of *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) under Augustus Caesar, the Jewish people had been living in fear. Palestine was heavily militarized. The people must have to follow the wishes of the Roman authorities and their local collaborators. Anyone caught disturbing the Roman Peace would be considered a rebel of the Roman Empire and would be meted out the capital punishment of crucifixion. Death was used to instill fear in the hearts of people.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was accused of being a disturber of Roman Peace. As a matter of fact, he was accused of many things. He was accused of claiming to be the Messiah, the one who would come to liberate the people from their Roman

oppressors (cf.Lk.24:21). He was accused of claiming to be the King of the Jews (Jn.19:19). And this would mean that he usurped the authority of King Herod, the one who was appointed by the Roman Empire as King of the Jews. He was accused of misleading the people and inciting them not to pay taxes to the Roman Empire (cf.Mt.22:17). From the eyes of the Roman and Jewish authorities, Jesus indeed was public enemy number one. And, therefore, he must be crucified.

Jesus was a victim of false accusations and mistrial. The truth of the matter is that he came to proclaim in words and in deeds the truth of God's Kingdom by curing the sick, forgiving and accepting sinners, giving hope to the poor and outcasts of society, and challenging the hypocrisies of the powers-that-be. His message was so powerful that it had shaken the very foundations of the Jewish religion and of the Roman Empire. Hence, the powers-that-be was threatened by the truth that he proclaimed, and by the life that he lived.

Jesus knew from the very start that faithfulness to God's mission would mean crucifixion. Many times he was tempted to give up. But every time this temptation comes to him, he would rather say: *"Worship the Lord your God, and He alone you shall serve"* (Mt.4:10), *"Not my will but your will be done"* (Mt.26:39).

And now that he had accomplished God's mission, he was saying to his disciples through the angel, *"You must not be afraid!"* Jesus was raised from death. This would mean that death, which the Roman Empire used to instill fear in the hearts of people, is not really the end. The life Jesus lived is more powerful than death; it is a life that goes beyond death.

Secondly, our Risen Lord is also saying to us: *"Come and see."* The angel of the Lord said to Mary Magdalene and the other women: *"Come and see the place where he was lying"* (v.6). This was actually an invitation for the women to see for themselves the truth of the resurrection. It is an invitation for them to personally experience its reality. Unless they would be able to see and experience themselves, they may not be able to have the passion and commitment to proclaim it and to live by it. Belief in the resurrection is not just an intellectual assent. To believe in the resurrection is to live in the power of the Risen Christ. It is to live the life that the Risen Christ had lived.

To live in the power of the resurrection is like the story of the Lost Son, who took his inheritance from his father and went away to a faraway place and spent everything he had in an easy kind of life devoid of meaning and purpose, until he had nothing to eat (Lk.15:32). He had to experience living and eating with the pigs before he was able to realize life's meaning and purpose in his father's house. He went back to his father and asked for forgiveness. His father was so gracious enough to accept him, and he said, *"Let us celebrate, for my son was lost but now is found; he is dead but now he is alive"* (v.32).

To live in the power of the resurrection is like Zaccheaus, the tax collector. He was despised by everyone, because he was a traitor to his own people and a corrupt official of the Roman government (Lk.19:1-9). No one would ever dare to talk with him as a friend, or to come to his house as guests. But when Jesus said to him, *“Zaccheaus, I will come to your house today”*, he really felt a sense of joy. Then, he said to Jesus, *“Lord, I will give one half of my money to the poor, and if I cheated anyone I will pay back four times as much.”* He was a changed person! Indeed, he experienced the power of the resurrection.

Resurrection is not something that would happen only after we have died. Rather, it is something that we could experience everyday as we bring hope in the midst of hopelessness, forgiveness in the midst of sinfulness, life in the midst of death.

Hence, the best proof of the resurrection is not the empty tomb, but the lives of countless people through the ages that have been changed by the power of the Risen Christ. If someone would ask us to prove the reality of the resurrection, we must not only point to the empty tomb, but rather we must be able to say like the words of a song, *“For once I was lost, but now I’m found; Was blind, but now I see”*. This, I believe, is the best proof that Jesus Christ our Lord is alive, indeed!

And finally, our Risen Lord is also saying to us, “Go and tell!” The angel of the Lord said to Mary Magdalene and the other women, *“Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!’ ”* (v.7). The women left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and they ran to tell his disciples.

Our experience with the Risen Lord is not something that we have to keep to ourselves, but rather it is something that we have to share to others, especially those who have not experienced it themselves. Telling the Good News of the Risen Christ is an urgent task. The women had to go in a hurry; they had to run with joy to tell the Good News (v.8).

One of the problems of churches today is that they seem to have lost the sense of urgency as well as the joy to go and tell the Good News of the Risen Christ. In order for the church to recover the joy and the sense of urgency to go and tell the Good News, it should also experience what the women disciples had experienced. The church, in other words, must recover its courage in proclaiming its genuine faith in the Risen Christ.

It is quite significant to note that the angel instructed the women to go to Galilee. Galilee was the center of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus ministered to the people of Galilee. The angel’s instructions would simply mean that it is in ministering to people that we really experience the reality of the Risen Christ. It is in going to our own Galilee, to

our own place of ministry, to our own reality, to the place where the people lived and struggled that we experience the empowering presence of the Risen Christ. He promised to be there with us.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “Living In Community” Children Praise God, 54

God made you, God made me, God made our community,
We must learn to love and share and live together in God’s care,
We’ll live together, brothers and sisters respect one another
Accept each other and together we will live in community.

Opening Prayer

We come in this place Lord not just as individuals who only thinks of one self. We are also part of a bigger community into which you have called us to live and serve. We come bringing with us stories and experiences of people around us. May our sharing and discussions open our minds and hearts so that we may be shaken to involve in the lives of others. This we pray, in Christ’s name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Acts 10:36-43, *Matthew 28:1-10*
 - How do you think the believers and followers lived during that time?
 - What do you think the people need most at that time?
 - What could have been the aspirations or hopes of the people when Jesus was not with them?
 - What common affirmations can we draw out from these stories?

Lessons Learned

- SOCIAL INTROSPECTION AND COMMUNITY APPRECIATION.
Divide the learners into three groups. Tell the groups to do the following:

Group 1 – Draw a map of their community.

- Identify the livelihood/job/source of income of the members of the community

- Mark in the map where these people are located. (yellow pins)
- What are their usual problems/ needs and struggles?
- What do they hope to happen in their lives after five- ten years?

Group 2 – Draw a map of their community.

- Identify the basic services rendered by the local government to the community. (ex. Hospital, schools, etc.)
- Mark where they are located in the community (red pins)
- What are the factors for the good delivery/ poor delivery of the basic services to the community?
- What do they hope to happen in terms of delivery of services in their community ten years from now?

Group 3 – Draw a map of their community.

- Identify the different churches/ faith communities found in the community
- Mark where they are located in the map/community (green pins)
- Describe the relationships between these churches.
- What are the positive contributions of these churches in the community?

- DISCUSSION

- Tell each group to share their community map. Others may have something to add to the presentations.
- Ask :
 - Why do you think it is important for the church to know the community where it is located?
 - Why should the church know the needs/problems and aspirations of the community where it is located?

Applying the Lessons Learned

MY HOPE FOR THE COMMUNITY. Ask each learner to finish the statement,

“Amidst the changing times, I hope that my community will _____ in the coming years.”

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

“Pananagutan”

Walang sinuman ang nabubuhay para sa sarili lamang
Walang sinuman ang namamatay para sa sarili lamang.
Tayong lahat ay may pananagutan sa isa’t isa
Tayong lahat ay tinipon ng Dios na kapiling Nya.

Closing Prayer

We recognize that we are part of a bigger community. We also believe that as members of a community, we have tasks to involve in the life and journey of the community where we belong. Equip us Lord with the gifts of the Spirit so that in our participation in the life-work of our community, we will be able to shine the light of Your love and grace to others. Make us instruments Lord for change and effect a difference in the community’s life-work. In Jesus’ name, we pray.
Amen

Lesson 45: What is the local church’s role in the community?

Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2020

General Concept: As part of the community, the church plays a shepherding and prophetic role.

Biblical References: Acts 2: 14, 1 Peter 3:8-9

Age Level Concepts

- The local church takes on the role of a shepherd that guides the community in its life and work.
- The local church takes the role of a prophet that speaks for truth, justice and uprightness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss the roles the local church should take in the community
- Express their thoughts on the concepts of being a “shepherd” and a “prophet”
- Point out what aspect of the community’s life and work can the local church exercise its role as shepherd and prophet
- Resolve to help the local church take part in the life and work of the community

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket, bond papers (cut length-wise),
pentel pen, tape

Biblical Background

In Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts, we read about the coming of the Holy Spirit empowering the Early Christians to courageously proclaim the life, death, resurrection, and coming again of Jesus Christ our Lord. Then, Apostle Peter stood up and delivered a message accusing the powers-that-be in Jerusalem as the ones responsible for Jesus' death, and proclaim that God raised him from the dead. Then, in Chapters 3 and 4, we read a story about Apostles Peter and John. As they entered the Temple to pray, they saw a lame man begging for money. The existence of beggars in a particular society, as we know, is a sign of desperation and hopelessness. But in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, the two apostles healed the lame man. And those who witnessed the event were greatly amazed.

Peter and John took the opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus' life and death. But they were still speaking when the Temple guards arrived and arrested and imprisoned them. However, many of those who heard the good news believed - about five thousand men according to the Scriptures.

Then, Peter and John were questioned before the Jewish Council, and they courageously testified for Christ. The leaders of Jerusalem were greatly surprised to witness the courage of these two apostles, knowing that they were not highly educated. They were just ordinary men. Perhaps, you are even more educated than them. But nevertheless, the leaders of Jerusalem warned Peter and John to stop speaking in Jesus' name.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, these two apostles, however, responded to them saying: *"You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight – to obey you or to obey God; for we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard"* (vs.19-20).

The Jewish authorities would like to punish Peter and John, but they could not do it because of the people. The people might rise up in protest. And so, the authorities could not do otherwise but to release them.

This Biblical story would show us what it means to play a prophetic as well as pastoral role as a church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

First of all, the story tells us that to play a prophetic as well as pastoral role as a church is to speak out for the truth. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter and John spoke courageously about the truth of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Without fear and favor, they pointed to the powers-that-be in Jerusalem as the ones responsible for the mistrial, execution, and death of the man Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead. Consequently, Peter and John were arrested; they were imprisoned; they were harassed and questioned before the Jewish Council.

Truly, an encounter with truth is oftentimes an encounter with suffering. The wicked spiritual forces cannot withstand the truth. Truth is so naked that it must be covered with falsehood. Truth is so eloquent that it must be put to silence. This organized crime against the truth defiles our true humanity; it mocks the tears of people, and it defies the power of God's love.

Truth is so bright and clear. But those who are blinded by the authority and power in their hands could not see it. At least, the leaders in Jerusalem themselves saw it. For the truth that the lame man was healed and restored into wholeness was right there in front of them. In fact, they could not help seeing it, because the man was standing right beside Peter and John.

This is something we should always remind ourselves: that we cannot quarrel against the truth. The bearers of truth may be arrested and imprisoned, like Peter and John, but the truth will always come out. This is our hope. This is our courage to be. For our God is a God of truth.

Moreover, the story also tells us that to play a prophetic as well as pastoral role as a church is to take people seriously. People are the basic force for the building up of new Christian communities. This is the reason why the disciples directed their proclamations of the truth of Christ to the people themselves. And thousands of them believed the Good News. And because of people's power, the Jewish authorities were not able to punish Peter and John.

People have the truth. Of course, people commit mistakes. As a matter of fact, they have committed mistakes many times before. Perhaps, we remember the story of the Golden Calf in the Old Testament. In the absence of Moses, the people persuaded their acting leader, Aaron, to make a Golden Calf to serve as their god (Ex. 32).

People can be manipulated by certain power groups for certain vested interests. This was the case of the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem shouting hosannas, but demanded his death shortly afterwards simply because of the manipulation of Jewish authorities. We must not make idols of people. People are not gods. We must remember this always in our theology of people.

However, there are situations wherein people have the truth. These are situations wherein people are condemned to poverty, exploitation and hopelessness, or even death. This is where God seeks to exercise the power of hope. This is where we could most likely encounter our Living God. This is where we could discover the imperatives of our faith. For God takes up the cause of the suffering people as God's own, and calls us to be partners in this missionary task. It is in being with people and learning from them that we discover, my friends, what God is telling us to do in our present time.

Then finally, the story also tells us that to play a prophetic as well as pastoral role as a church is to obey God rather than men. Peter and John were commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop all preaching in the name of Jesus. However, they answered full of courage and faith that if and when they were required to choose between the will of God and the decree of men, they have no other choice but to obey God.

Oftentimes, obedience to God rather than men would make us live a very dangerous kind of life. But then, it is also such kind of life that brings hope in the midst of hopelessness, and life in the midst of death.

Hence, the call of the hour is a call for us to proclaim in words and in deeds Jesus Christ our Lord as the only hope in the midst of hopelessness, in the midst of a world that seems to be dominated by the wicked forces of this present age. This means to offer ourselves for the cause of fulfilling God's saving act in the world: to become bearers of God's truth in a society dominated by lies and deceit; to become instruments of God's love and forgiveness in a community wherein to deny one's self, one's pride, and one's hatred is the hardest thing to do.

Our world today, needs men and women who are willing to manifest the love of God in a world of hatred, selfishness and greed, and transform it into a world of peace, of justice and of love.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "You are the Salt for the Earth"
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 246

You are the salt for the earth O people, salt for the Kingdom of God
Share the flavor of life O people, life in the Kingdom of God.

Refrain: Bring forth the kingdom of mercy, bring forth the kingdom of peace
Bring forth the kingdom of justice, bring forth the city of God.

You are the light on the hill O people, light for the city of God
Shine so holy and bright O people, shine for the Kingdom of God.

Opening Prayer

Amidst struggles and challenges we face every day, we wanted to discern Your purpose for our lives, O Lord. Make our study today help discern as to the reason why we are called and gathered as a community – your body. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Acts 2: 14
 - Who do you think was addressed by the apostle Peter?
 - What role/s can you perceive Peter was taking when he stood before the people of Jerusalem?
 - What are the main tasks of that role Peter was taking?

- Read 1 Peter 3: 8-9
 - To whom was the letter addressed by Peter?
 - What role/s should the believers take in their community according to the letter?
 - What values were supposed to be lived out by the believers?

Lessons Learned

FAMILIARIZATION OF WORDS. Write on the board or post on the board the words "PROPHET" and "SHEPHERD."

- Distribute two blank papers to the learners (bond paper cut length-wise).
- Tell them to write on the paper the meaning of each word or what are the tasks involved in each word.
- Let them post their answers on the board and explain briefly.

DISCUSSION:

- "From the tasks you have mentioned by that of a "prophet" and "shepherd", can we identify which tasks are being performed by our local church in the community?" Let the learners point out the tasks and let them explain.
- What are other roles can/did our local church take in our community?
- How do you feel about the roles our local church has taken in the community?

Applying the Lessons Learned

GROUPINGS. Divide the learners into three groups. Consider these three aspects of the life of the community: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL and SOCIO-CULTURAL.

- How can the local church exercise its role as a "shepherd" and "prophet" in these three aspects of the life of the community?
- What can members do to help the local church perform these roles?
- Let them share their responses to the whole group.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "You Are the Salt for the Earth"
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 246

(Teacher) You are a seed of the word O people

(All) bring forth the Kingdom of God.

(Teacher) Seeds of mercy and seeds of justice
grow in the Kingdom of God.

(all) Bring forth the kingdom of mercy,
Bring forth the kingdom of peace,
Bring forth the kingdom of justice,
Bring forth the city of God.

Closing Prayer

We recognize that our local church does not stand on its own and for its own. We believe we are called to perform certain roles in our community because we are part of it. But doing such tasks requires certain level of commitment and dedication, a spirit of unity and solidarity. We can only do these Lord with your empowering spirit. And so we pray that You may fill our local church with your spirit and make us useful instruments to bring about your kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen