

Leader's Guide
Practicing Resurrection:
The Gospel of Mark and Radical Discipleship

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Special Supplementary Resources

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United Methodist Women Purpose

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

The Vision

Turning faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world.

Living the Vision

We provide opportunities and resources to grow spiritually, become more deeply rooted in Christ and put faith into action.

We are organized for growth, with flexible structures leading to effective witness and action.

We equip women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, workplaces, governments and churches.

We work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems.

We provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.

{ TABLE OF CONTENTS }

Introduction	5
Session 1: Faith We Can See	10
Session 2: Engaging the Powers: Liberation and Life	17
Session 3: Sabbath Economics	25
Session 4: Practicing Resurrection	32
Appendix	39
Special Supplementary Session	45
About the Authors	53

{ INTRODUCTION }

The goal of this spiritual growth study, *Practicing Resurrection: The Gospel of Mark and Radical Discipleship*, is to encounter Jesus as liberator and to respond to Christ's call to radical discipleship, so we can experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ and live out a vision of society based on the kin-dom¹ of God.

But what if this liberating Jesus does not fit with our long-held assumptions about who Jesus is and what it might mean to commit to discipleship in his name? Mark's Gospel may surprise us with its fierce urgency, with stories of intense conflict and escalating violence, and insistence that there is no discipleship in Jesus' name without radical personal and communal transformation.

There is a short video clip from BBC Three that begins with a young white man praying in a dimly lit sanctuary with stained glass. His accent is British and he is asking Jesus for help, noting that he is desperate and has no where else to turn. Suddenly Jesus appears with blinding light and comforting words: "I can hear you, my son. I have always been listening . . . I heard your prayer and I've come to help you."

Baffled by this robed black man with dreadlocks who says he is Jesus, the young white man exclaims, "You're not Jesus!" He points to a portrait of a white-skinned, blond-haired and blue-eyed Jesus on the wall of the sanctuary to underline his certainty.

Jesus explains that the Bible is very clear about where he was born, in the Middle East, making the blond-haired and blue-eyed Jesus impossible. Jesus notes that his story should have been a clue: he was arrested by a mob of angry government officials and beaten for a crime he did not commit. "That . . . doesn't happen to white people," Jesus notes.

The young man seems perplexed and so Jesus asks, "Would you like me to fetch white Jesus instead?" "Could you?" the young man responds enthusiastically. And then Jesus counters, "No! There is no white Jesus! Do you want my help or not?"

The young man considers the offer, begrudgingly agreeing that he supposes he would like help from this Jesus. "After all," he says, "black or white we're both still Christians, right?" The last comment from Jesus comes, "I'm guessing now's not the time to tell you I'm Jewish."²

This study invites us, as does Mark's Gospel, into a journey with the Jesus who is Jewish, a member of a systemically oppressed people who live with their backs against the wall.³ This Jesus does not fit into many of the popular notions of a messiah, then or now. Like the pig herders and townspeople in Mark 5:17, some people may beg this disruptive, disturbing, demanding Jesus to leave.

This Jesus embodies the radical prophetic traditions, living into and out of God's vision of shalom, God's kin-dom, and in direct contrast to and in defiance of the violently oppressive powers of empire. Again and again the Gospel of Mark encourages us to encounter this liberating Jesus from

the location of those who have been oppressed by systems and structures, theologies and practices. We are invited to side not with those who are powerful and privileged, but with those who are assaulted day after day by these powers of domination. We are invited to side with Jesus who exposes the death-dealing powers of empire and calls disciples to practice a faith you can see. Jesus who seeks justice in a world of escalating economic inequality, violent political and military occupation, and relentless systemic injustice.

This leader's guide is designed for Mission u, but it can be easily adapted for small groups such as Sunday school classes and book study circles, or with larger groups such as congregational gatherings and United Methodist Women's retreats.

This guide focuses on transformative or liberating pedagogy: learning that happens through the process of communal dialogue, rather than the traditional model of teacher and learners. In this transformative community of collective wisdom, everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. The leader, then, is defined as an animator, one who seeks to bring to life, to create movement, or a facilitator, one who helps make the process flow and who helps shape a learning environment in which everyone is invited to be an active partner. This liberating pedagogy emphasizes process over product, openness over linear agendas, accompaniment rather than control. This requires flexibility, creativity, deep listening, compassion, and a wild sense of humor.

The study invites facilitators to prepare in a variety of ways:

1. Commit to a daily practice of meditation and prayer, understanding that this may take many different forms, including walks in the woods, centering mantras or breath prayers, opening ourselves through readings that disrupt, and music that catches our hearts.
2. Read the entire Gospel of Mark several times, each time doing so in one sitting. My friend and United Methodist elder, seminary professor, author, and distinguished Mark scholar Theodore Jennings, suggests we do so and then ask: "What would we say about Jesus if this was all we had to go on, if these were the only stories handed down?"
3. Read the focus texts for each chapter in *Practicing Resurrection* before reading the content about the texts. This will allow you to come to the stories with your own experience and ideas and then, in conversation with this book, explore additional experiences and ideas.
4. Read the spiritual growth text with a pen so that you can jot down questions, ideas, and links to other resources in the margins while you are reading. Talk back to the text and note pieces of the text that are especially challenging, troubling, helpful, important for you.
5. Begin a journal in which to jot down reflections, images, stories, notes about your encounters with the stories of Mark, especially the stories of women, and your encounters with this particularly disruptive and demanding Jesus. Write down your responses to the Personal Reflection: Wrestling with Radical Discipleship sections at the end of each chapter.

6. Place an empty box near the place where you read so that you can collect articles, newspaper clippings, comic strips, photographs, and notes about documentaries, video clips, songs, social media, and other resources that might be useful in shaping your sessions.
7. Define your social location, naming your citizenship status, geographic location, gender, age, education, race, ethnicity, family of origin, economic status, marital status, sexual identity, language, physical abilities, identifying what gives you privilege, power, and status in your location. Consider whether or not you are privileged or targeted by the systems and structures around you. In my location, for example, those who are white, middle to upper income, somewhere between young and old, heterosexual, male, able-bodied (one of my friends prefers the term “tab” or temporarily able-bodied) citizens with college educations are privileged, kept powerful by the systems and structures. Reflect on how your social location impacts your hearing of and response to the Jesus of Mark.
8. Engage in the participatory Bible study process. If you are someone with power and economic stability, you may do so without changing your social location (though it is infinitely more powerful if you can relocate into partnerships with those in the margins), but it is highly recommended that you engage the voices and stories of those who have their backs against the wall, if not in person, at least through readings, videos, films, poetry, music, and other forms of art. Test out this participatory Bible study process with a variety of texts.
9. As you journey through this study in partnership with the Jesus of Mark’s Gospel, note marks of radical discipleship. Where do you encounter the following in the spiritual growth text and in Mark’s Gospel, and how might they define radical discipleship in Jesus’ name? What might be missing from this list?

Radical discipleship in Jesus’ name includes:

- Nurturing beloved community, giving flesh to boundary-breaking, out loud loving;
- Living as liberated and liberating disciples, personally and communally embodying a faith you can see;
- Practicing proximity and partnership, listening to and learning from, shaping ministry among and with those who are systemically oppressed rather than ministry *to* or *for*;
- Embracing salvation as radical personal and communal transformation here and now;
- Investing in justice rather than charity; publicly and collectively unmasking, naming, engaging, confronting, challenging, disrupting, dismantling and transforming systems and structures, theologies and policies, empires and cultures of domination and oppression in us and in the world around us;
- Practicing resurrection day after day, living as a partner in the Jesus movement, refusing to be complicit with or complacent about, silenced or sidelined by systems and structures of domination and death.

Preparing the Classroom

You may not have control over which room you will be using for your sessions, but you can shape the learning environment as a welcoming space no matter what room you have. Explore the room before setting anything up, checking acoustics, electrical outlets, Internet connections (make sure you can easily connect with any video clips or music you might want to use), lighting, temperature settings, possibilities for hanging things on walls and the door, potential locations for displays and resource tables. **United Methodist Women has secured permission for you to reprint, play, or project the music and videos that are required in the four sessions, the appendix, and the supplementary session. During the Gathering Times, you may play the suggested songs or songs of your own choosing as background music only.**

Arrange the chairs in a circle with the resources you will need somewhere close by. Locate newsprint, easel, markers, and tape near your seat but a little behind the circle. Place a journal on each chair. Composition books are available from grocery stores for less than a dollar each, and you will be inviting participants to begin creating covers for their journals during the second session.

Create an altar/worship table in the center of the circle, preferably on a low, round table that is covered with a colorful cloth. Begin with only a few items, perhaps a cross, battery-operated candle/s, and a vase or bowl. Additions to the worship table may be made before each session, including items from participants.

Locate a table or shelf to display books, magazines, articles, and other resources you might have brought with you. These could include books from the bibliography.

Identify a corner table on which to place all your art supplies: crayons, colored pencils, thin markers, chalk, pens, glue, tape, scissors, construction paper, blank white paper, poster boards, colorful pipe cleaners, and other craft items, magazines, newspapers, sticky notes, and index cards. Prepare wall space with room for newsprint and sticky notes for the following topics:

- **Practicing amazement:** Participants will be invited to share specific “signs and wonders” in each session so the list will grow. An alternative would be a bowl on the worship table and blank strips of paper so people could write their amazement on a strip and place it in the bowl; participants might be invited to take a slip of paper with them at the end of a session.
- **Unlearning and letting go:** Participants will be invited to concretely identify what they believe they need to unlearn and how they will let that go.
- **Resisting in order to heal/healing in order to resist:** Participants will be invited to identify practical and concrete ways this is happening.
- **Key words defined in the Introduction:** Participants will be invited to explore the meaning of “kin-dom,” “justice,” “liberation/salvation,” “radical discipleship.” Jot down brief descriptors after each.
- **Parking lot:** Participants will be invited to share their questions, struggles, and topics they hope will be included in the discussions in this space.

Supply List for Every Session

The following items should be available at each of the four sessions:

- Newsprint with easel
- Markers
- Tape
- Journals and pens (one for each participant)
- Books and other resources for the sessions
- Altar/worship table and accompanying supplies
- Art supplies: markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, chalk, pens, glue, tape, construction paper, blank white paper, poster board, colorful pipe cleaners, magazines and newspapers for cutting, sticky notes, and index cards

Session Design

The sessions in this guide are designed for four two-hour gatherings. Each session includes: centering thoughts, session goal, supply list, and preparation notes followed by an outline for the program itself, which includes a gathering time, opening and closing circles, worship suggestions, options for engaging the texts, and concrete possibilities for personal and communal practices of radical discipleship plus assignments/preparation for the next session. The Appendix also provides an optional litany or reading for each session that you may use to close your time together.

A special supplementary session is also included. This two-hour session provides additional content as needed to engage with the study text and could easily be adapted for a church setting.

ENDNOTES

1. Please note the use of “kin-dom” in place of the traditional “kingdom.” This term was first coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. It emphasizes relationality, community, and equity as the basis of God’s reign.
2. “There Is No White Jesus,” *Famalan*, British Comedy Guide, BBC Three video, 1:58 minutes, accessed April 12, 2018, comedy.co.uk/tv/famalan/videos/15832/there_is_no_white_jesus.
3. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996; first published by Abingdon Press, 1949), 11.

SESSION 1



Faith We Can See

Centering Thoughts

Use these quotes taken from portions of *Practicing Resurrection* to focus your mind and heart on our topic for this session.

We don't know who wrote Mark. Theodore Jennings, United Methodist elder, theologian, and seminary professor, chooses to use a female pronoun when referring to the anonymous author of Mark, noting that while we cannot know who the author was, we do know many women accompanied Jesus from the beginning to the end of his journey. Jennings writes that women have too often "been rendered invisible and anonymous by our male-centered histories, our male ecclesial leadership, our male academic and scholarly institutions. Thus, the pronoun 'she' serves fittingly to designate one who has deliberately chosen this, the lot of women, anonymity, even in the community of Christ."¹ Following Jennings' lead, I will use the pronoun "she" for the author of Mark as a reminder of the ways in which we silence, dismiss, and invisibilize women in the Bible and the church—the ways in which leftover patriarchy lives in us so that we are still startled by the female pronoun for a Gospel writer (page viii).

In Mark, discipleship is this fierce and "holy impatience,"² an unwillingness to continue with business as usual, with getting by, with going along with the way things are. Twenty-seven times Mark, the shortest Gospel, uses the word "immediately" (NRSV). Mark pushes us forward, pushes us out the door, and pushes us into the streets. We hear her push expressed by what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as the "fierce urgency of now," a decisive moment in which we must respond (page 10).

We are called into a radical discipleship that tears through the structures that get in the way of healing happening, including structures and policies in the church that maintain narrow theology, exclusionary policies and practices (page 47).

We are called to work together persistently, passionately, creatively, courageously. We are called to be willing to take risks and be outrageous so that new channels of healing might be opened (page 44).

Session Goal

Identify our social location and reflect on how that shapes our hearing of and response to the Gospel of Mark and Jesus' invitation into radical discipleship.

Supply List

- Music for the Gathering Time (see suggestions below)
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- Handout with the words to the prayers and other readings
- Bibles
- Recording of Lucinda Williams “Born to Be Loved” found online at:
[youtube.com/watch?v=tbCT1HT2nD4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbCT1HT2nD4&feature=youtu.be)
- Create a poster with the images of “Faith We Can See” that are noted in the study text: Leymah Gbowee and her women’s prayer movement in Liberia; South African liberation movement; civil rights movement in the United States; Movement for Black Lives; Standing Rock; Poor People’s Campaign in 1968 and 2018; United Methodists’ Affirmation and Reconciling Congregations; sanctuary movement including No More Deaths. You may want to supply a blank poster board next to this one so that participants can add drawings or images of other examples obtained from magazines, newspapers, and the Internet.

Credit: “Born to Be Loved.” by Lucinda Williams. ©2010 UMG Recordings, Inc.

Preparation Notes

1. Review your writings about your social location and how that might impact your engagement with the texts and Jesus' invitation to radical discipleship. Ask yourself: Are you among the groups targeted by the systems of oppression, or are you among the groups privileged by those systems? Or both? How can you incorporate stories written by, voices from, encounters with communities targeted by the systems of oppression as you facilitate?
2. What are your reactions to the Centering Thoughts? How do you respond to the identification of Mark's author as a woman and the emphasis on women as examples of radical discipleship? How might you be challenged to redefine your understanding of faith?
3. Familiarize yourself with the biblical and spiritual growth texts, especially Mark 2:1–12, Mark 7:24–30, Matthew 15:21–28, and sections in the study text that explore Mark 7:24–30, including the Personal Reflection: Wrestling with Radical Discipleship section at the end of Chapter 1. What might personal and communal, public and radical discipleship look like in your congregation and community?
4. Create an outline of key points for the participatory Bible study on Mark 7:24–30.
5. Consider possibilities for community guidelines that you want to make sure are included. Some version of “time’s up” or “bring your comments to a close now” or “make space/take space” helps to prevent any one person from dominating conversations.

6. Identify possibilities for participants to engage as teachers, learners, and as co-facilitators.
7. If you have received a list of participants, write down each name on a separate index card and note any special needs that may have been identified. Offer prayer for each person by name, welcoming them into your heart as partners on the journey. Use the index cards to jot down notes you might want to remember about a particular person. This might be done after each session and may include a specific concern or grief or celebration.
8. Make copies of the opening hymn to pass out or project. Ask someone ahead of time to lead the singing. **Reminder:** Permission for required songs and videos have been secured. During the Gathering Time, you may play the suggested songs or songs of your own choosing as background music only.
9. Go over your room preparations once more to make sure the resources and materials you will need are close at hand, the worship center is ready, and the easel with newsprint, markers, and tape is in a convenient location. Double check that your “Faith We Can See” poster is visible, handouts are nearby, and the music ready to be played.

Gathering Time

Be sure to individually welcome participants as they come into the room by introducing yourself and finding out who they are. It is helpful to have a resource table so that people arriving early can explore books, articles, and other resources while they wait for others to come. You might also have music playing in the background. I use Spotify so that I can have a playlist ready but other services or CDs work just as well. For this opening session, you might consider playing “I Told Jesus” and “Changed Mah Name” with Roberta Flack; “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” with Eric Bibb; “Guide My Feet, While I Run This Race” with Bernice Johnson Reagon, and other songs that emphasize the invitation and challenge of discipleship.

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Explain that circles are a part of ancient practices honoring collective wisdom and acknowledging the value of everyone’s voice and participation. Circles allow us to create a community of equals and a space in which no one person is at the front of the room speaking at others lined up in rows. Circles remind us that everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. Begin the conversation by asking an open question. It should be something simple, perhaps what gift do you bring to this space today or one thing you are grateful for today—something everyone can answer. Ask each person to offer the name they want to be called, no titles, just names, and then their brief response (two to five words) to the question. Remind people that even though we may know someone’s name, when a name is spoken it is an invitation for others in the circle to offer silent gratitude for the gifts and participation of that person.

Community Guidelines (10 minutes)

Work together to create community guidelines by asking for a popcorn response (one or two words offered quickly, one person after the other, as the words come to mind) to the following: What do you need and what will you offer others in order to make this space safe? What do we need for this to be a space where each person can bring their authentic self?

Write down responses on a chalkboard or poster paper. Ask participants to be brief and take time to clarify what individuals mean by the words they add. For example, if someone says “confidentiality,” ask what is meant by that so that everyone understands that what is said in this space, stays in this space unless we have the speaker’s permission to repeat it elsewhere. After about five minutes of brainstorming together, ask if any of the words or phrases need clarification. Then, ask if everyone in the circle is willing to be held accountable by these community guidelines. If there are problematic suggestions, work to clarify so that the group reaches consensus and everyone agrees to honor and be held accountable by the Community Covenant. Make sure someone records the notes so you can come back to them each time you meet. It is helpful to have someone type the notes so that everyone has a copy of the covenant by the second session. Confirm that everyone agrees to everything on the list and that this is our Community Covenant.

Opening Worship (20 minutes)

Songs

“Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 133

“Thy Word Is a Lamp,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 601

Credits: “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.” Music by Anthony J. Showalter, 1887. Words by Elisha A. Hoffman, 1887. Public domain; “Thy Word,” aka “Thy Word Is a Lamp/Psalm 119.” Words by Amy Grant. Music by Michael W. Smith. ©1984 Words and Music, LLC/Meadowgreen Music Co. All rights reserved. Used with permission. CCLI #11221925.

Prayer

Invite participants to hold hands and briefly share one- to five-word celebrations and concerns. Remind them to be brief, limiting their responses to five words at most. When everyone has had an opportunity to respond, close the prayer time with your own brief prayer. For example: Gracious God, we thank you for this circle and for our time together. Open us to your Holy Spirit that we might hear and respond to your word and will. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Journal

Make sure everyone has a journal and a pen and explain that these are theirs to keep. Encourage participants to use their journals to jot down reflections, questions, ideas, challenges. Then explain the writing process for this session. When they are asked to begin writing, they are to write for seven minutes without stopping the movement of their pen. This helps us move past the censors that often sit on our shoulders arguing that we don’t know what to write, our writing isn’t good enough, we can’t find the “right” words. Just write whatever comes into your head without stopping to think about it or offer critique. Explain that you will be playing a song by Lucinda Williams and that you will play it through twice. The first time they are just to listen and when it starts to play the second time they are to begin writing. You will call time when the seven minutes are up. Play Lucinda Williams’s “Born to Be Loved” twice, reminding participants to begin their journal writing as soon as the song begins for the second time. After time has been called, ask those who wish to share to read what they have written, limiting responses to two or three individuals.

Prayer (unison)

Like the sun that is far away and yet close at hand to warm us, so God's Spirit is ever present and around us. Come Creator into our lives. We live and move and have our very being in you. Open now the windows of our souls. Amen.

—*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, no. 473

Credit: From *1987 United Methodist Clergywomen's Consultation Resource Book*, p. 61.

Engaging the Texts (60 minutes)

This session will focus on Mark 7:24–30 and Chapter 1 of *Practicing Resurrection*.

Social Location (15 minutes)

Remind participants of the text's consistent references to the power of social location and invite them to note in their journals their own social location. Work through this list, writing your answers next to each item and then go back and star the ones that indicate privilege and/or power in the dominant culture.

- Citizenship status
- Geographic location
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Family of origin
- Economic status
- Marital status
- Sexual identity
- Language
- Physical abilities

As you read through the list, ask participants to think about where we stand, what we see, who we listen to, whose stories we value, whose voices we dismiss and how this shapes the way we understand the world and the Bible. For those of us immersed in the dominant culture of the United States, especially those of us who are white and economically secure, it can be difficult to hear stories that challenge our interpretation of the world around us. Facilitate a brief discussion on how social location might impact our response to Mark's Gospel.

Remind participants that there is a blank sheet of newsprint on the wall labeled "Parking Lot" to note any questions, struggles, or issues they hope might be included in discussions and that they should feel free to add to it before and after the session as well as during breaks.

Small Groups (25 minutes)

The facilitator identifies the characters or groups in the biblical text chosen for this session, and, while prioritizing diversity and fairly even distribution, asks people to choose where they want to be in the story. People may choose to be disciples, Jesus, or the Syrophenician woman. Read Mark 7:24–30 aloud and then read the same story in Matthew 15:21–28. Remind the participants that in the Matthew version, Jesus has already admonished disciples to go nowhere among the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5). Share instructions before everyone breaks into their small groups, noting that they will have twenty minutes for discussion. The facilitator will call time for each section of the exercise listed below and move around the room to listen in on conversations. Make sure all are clear about their assignments:

1. Spend the first five minutes in your group choosing a facilitator to help the group stay focused and make sure everyone is included in the conversation, a notetaker to keep track of the group discussion, and a reporter to help the group frame and focus their report back to the larger group.
2. Spend ten minutes immersing your group in the story from your character or your group's perspective. What is going on in your head and heart? Why do you do or say what you do? What scares you? Threatens you? What gives you hope? Joy? Do not hurry through this part of the process—do not explain anyone else's behavior or any overall themes from the text. Focus on who you are and what is happening with you.
3. This is often difficult for people as we are quick to move into some kind of summary of the story. Encourage people to enter into the hearts and minds of their character/s. You may need to help those in the Syrophenician woman's group so that they do not spend energy defending Jesus but really try to feel what the woman must have felt.
4. Spend five minutes engaging the larger story. Ask how this particular text holds a mirror to our world—what do you see through the lens of your character's social location?
5. Spend your last five minutes asking, “So what?” What does this story provoke in you? How has it broken you open, challenged, or changed you and why does that matter? Very concretely, ask what does it look like to respond to the challenges of this story; how does this story invite us into the radical discipleship of walking with Jesus into kin-dom, into living and loving here and now?

Reports (20 minutes)

After twenty minutes of small group discussion, ask everyone to come back to the larger circle. Invite each group to bring their report to the whole group, in whatever way they want, but briefly. This is the moment of greatest challenge—and a gift!—for the large group facilitators as you will need to pull threads from the reports to focus the discussion and conversation. Be ready for surprises, humor, and hard truths. Invite the groups to respond as reports are being made but focus first on asking who each group is and why they do what they do. Only after those initial reports grounded in the world of each character or group will the facilitator move the conversation to the present and ask where we see our world in the text and, most importantly, to name the stakes, and answer the question, “So what?”

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

End your time together with a closing circle: Offer your name and a brief response to a question that everyone can answer. For example, what is one gift you take from this time together? Then ask participants to follow suit, working their way around the circle. Remind them to offer silent gratitude for each person as they say their name.

Closing Prayer

Left: Come, Lord Jesus, confront me as a prophet: disturb my indifference . . .

Right: . . . shatter my brittle certainties, and craze me into a holy awareness of my common humanity

Left: and so of my bony, bloody need to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with you— and with myself,

Right: trusting that whatever things it may be too late for, prayer is not one of them,

Left: nor a chance, nor change, nor passion, nor laughter,

Right: nor starting yet again to risk a way to be together,

Left: nor a wild, far-sighted claim that this human stuff of yours is stronger still than fail or time,

Right: graced to share a kingdom and spirited for joy.³

Credit: Litany from “*Wrestling the Light: Ache and Awe in the Human Divine Struggle, Prayers and Stories*,” by Ted Loder. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Preparation for Session 2 (5 minutes)

Invite participants to read the section on Dorothee Soelle’s three practices and ask them to be prepared to write sticky notes about them, being as concrete as possible. In addition, encourage them to bring an item to place on the altar that represents one of the three responses: practicing amazement, unlearning and letting go, resisting in order to heal/healing in order to resist.

ENDNOTES

1. Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *The Insurrection of the Crucified: The “Gospel of Mark” as Theological Manifesto* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2003), 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 29.
3. Ted Loder, *Wrestling the Light: Ache and Awe in the Human-Divine Struggle* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1991), 57.

SESSION 2



Engaging the Powers: Liberation and Life

Centering Thoughts

Use these quotes taken from portions of *Practicing Resurrection* to focus your mind and heart on our topic for this session.

It is likely that our theological problem in the church is that our gospel is a story believed, shaped and transmitted by the dispossessed; and we are now a church of possession for whom the rhetoric of the dispossessed is offensive.

—Walter Brueggemann¹ (page 1)

Walter Wink argues that Gospel healings are never simply individual healings but public challenges to narrow theologies and oppressive systems.² And Ched Myers notes that in the Gospel healings, Jesus shifts the scandal from people labeled unclean to the systems, structures, and theologies that are unclean (page 58).³

Radical discipleship calls us to engage powers and principalities, systems and structures that diminish life, and this work has never been more urgent or difficult. . . . God's kin-dom inevitably clashes with economic and political systems (page 62).

John Wesley . . . insisted that unless we immerse ourselves among the vulnerable, impoverished, imprisoned, we cannot hear the gospel and cannot be the church of Jesus Christ. He writes:

One reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know because they do not care to know; they keep out of the way of knowing it—and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart (page 82–83).⁴

Do we “keep out of the way of knowing”?

Session Goal

Explore the conflict between empire (Roman and American) and God's kingdom, identifying concrete possibilities for collective engagement with and transformation of the systems, structures, theologies, and practices of domination and oppression, with a specific focus on the sacrality and well-being of children and youth.

Supply List

- Music for the Gathering Time (see suggestions below)
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- Handout with the words to the prayers and other readings
- Bibles
- Recording of “Ella’s Song” by Bernice Johnson Reagon (5:14 minutes), found online at: youtube.com/watch?v=1tG1dNJh2rw&feature=youtu.be
- Video of “Who’s Looking for Me” spoken word by Romal Tune (4:07 minutes), found online at: youtu.be/5e7yzIrjpbI
- Copies of the handout with the six youth voices
- “Something Inside So Strong” video from the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools (5:44 minutes), found online at: youtu.be/1Sj-fpzT2v4
- Blank index cards, one for each participant

Credits: “Ella’s Song” by Bernice Johnson Reagon. Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock. ©1988 Rounder Records; “Who’s Looking for Me,” spoken word by Romal Tune. Video production and editing by Eric Totten. All rights reserved; Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools, 2013.

Preparation Notes

1. Review the Parking Lot newsprint to check for questions, concerns, suggestions.
2. Make sure the Community Covenant is clearly visible.
3. Check to be sure you have sufficient art supplies, including index cards.
4. Choose music for the Gathering Time and make sure it is ready to play.
5. Make copies of the opening hymn to pass out or project. Ask someone ahead of time to lead the singing. Reminder: Permission for required songs and videos have been secured. During the Gathering Time, you may play the suggested songs or songs of your own choosing as background music only.
6. Review the biblical texts, Mark 5:1–20 and Mark 9:14–29, and Chapters 2 and 3, making a list of key points for discussion. Be sure to include the sections called Personal Reflection: Wrestling with Radical Discipleship. What might justice seeking, authentically rooted in partnership prison ministry look like and how does that reflect the call to restorative justice? How might we redefine Christian education, ministry with children and youth, through the

lens of public, communal, radical discipleship that seeks justice for all God's children? Check for examples including Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools, Child Watch Teams, and Children's Sabbath celebrations.

7. Ask six volunteers to read the youth handout and distribute it as the group gathers.
8. Prepare a poster with images that depict several of the book's possibilities for engaging and transforming powers and policies, systems and structures, theologies and narratives; these can be brief reminders including United Methodist Women's work, ending criminalization of communities of color in the United States, and dismantling the cradle-to-prison pipeline; ending zero-tolerance school discipline policies; creating and sustaining Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools, creating an interfaith Children's Sabbath, partnering with CDF's Proctor Institute gathering to redefine Christian education, theological education, children and youth and prison ministry, restorative/transformational justice. You might want to leave room for others to add examples.
9. Watch the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School video of the song "Something Inside So Strong" and familiarize yourself with the words and motions.
10. Go over your room preparations once more to make sure resources you will need are close at hand, the worship center is ready, the easel with newsprint, markers, and tape is in a convenient location, handouts are nearby, and the music and videos are ready to be played.

Gathering Time (10 minutes)

As participants come into the room, greet them and invite them to post their sticky notes on Soelle's three practices: amazement; unlearning/letting go; resisting in order to heal/healing in order to resist. At the same time, encourage them to move to the art supplies to make a cover for their journal after they have posted their notes. Play music while they work; some suggestions include "I Love to Tell the Story" and "Amazing Grace" with Alan Jackson; "What a Wonderful World" with Louis Armstrong; "Hold On" by Alabama Shakes.

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Invite participants to offer up the names they want to be called and one very concrete—and brief—moment of amazement. Model brief examples: sunrise splattering red into the sky; listening to the wood thrush sing; being welcomed with a hug. Remind people that as a participant offers their name, the rest of us offer silent gratitude for their presence in this circle. After everyone has spoken, remind participants of the Community Covenant.

Opening Worship (18 minutes)

Song

"For the Healing of the Nations," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 428

Credit: "For the Healing of the Nations." Music by John Hughes, 1907. Public domain. Words by Fred Kaan. ©1965 Hope Publishing Company. Rights reserved. Used with permission. CCLI #11221925.

Prayer of Confession

“Confession and Pardon,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 8

Left: Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.

Right: We have failed to be an obedient church.

Left: We have not done your will,

Right: we have broken your law,

Left: we have rebelled against your love,

Right: we have not loved our neighbors,

Left: and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Right: Forgive us, we pray.

Left: Free us for joyful obedience,

Right: through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Credit: From *A Service of Word and Table I*, ©1972, 1980, 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Journal

Remind participants that you will be playing the writing prompt song twice, once for them to simply listen to and the second time for their seven minutes of writing without stopping the movement of their pen. Play “Ella’s Song” performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock. When time is called invite two or three people to share their writing. Be sure to invite different people each time.

Prayer (unison)

“For the Spirit of Truth,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 597

From the cowardice that dares not face new truth, from the laziness that is contented with half-truth, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, Good Lord, deliver me. Amen.

Credit: Prayer from Kenya, Public domain.

Engaging the Texts (60 minutes)

This session will focus on Mark 5:1–20 and 9:14–29 and Chapters 2 and 3 of *Practicing Resurrection*.

Small Groups (15 minutes)

Divide the group into small groups of no more than seven people per group; half of the groups will focus on Mark 5 and the other half on Mark 9. Remind the small groups that they will need to identify a facilitator, recorder, and reporter before they begin. Give the groups twelve minutes to identify the key points, challenges, and invitations in their biblical texts, giving particular attention to the man who is possessed and the father with his son.

Reports (8 minutes)

Invite participants to rejoin the larger circle and facilitate brief reports from each of the small groups, recording their key points on newsprint.

Listening to Young People (8 minutes)

Play the YouTube video of Romal Tune’s “Who’s Looking for Me.”

Introduce the voices of young people in prison, inviting the six readers to share their readings: *See handout on page 22.*

Small Groups (20 minutes)

Invite the participants to return to their small groups. For the first seven minutes, participants are asked to share their responses to the video and voices in light of the biblical texts. For the remaining thirteen minutes, participants are asked to identify concrete possibilities for dismantling the cradle-to-prison pipeline and creating life-giving alternatives in partnership with children and youth, especially those in impoverished communities of color. Ask them to list these on a piece of newsprint and be prepared to bring it to the front of the room. Share this reference on United Methodist Women’s efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline: **unitedmethodistwomen.org/racialjustice**.

Reports (9 minutes)

Invite people back into the large circle and ask each group to present their ideas on newsprint, offering very brief reports.

Six Youth Voices

Voice 1: I was caught under the influence of marijuana—not caught with drugs, just under the influence. Instead of the school showing some concern for a child who apparently had a problem and was obviously on a path of destruction, or getting me some help for what in other communities would be considered a child crying out for help or a child in crisis, I was treated like a criminal. I was kicked out of public school due to zero tolerance and sent to an alternative school. And being sent to alternative school kinda made me feel like the system had given up on me—now I realize that it never believed in me to begin with.

Voice 2: I'm not a lost cause; the system sets us up to fail. They put their labels on us but never try to really see us; they write us up for nothing which means we get more time. I was written up for speaking Spanish.

Voice 3: I was written up for having tattoos.

Voice 4: I was written up for asking for shampoo. Ain't thinking we're nothing.

Voice 5: Just another kid in a lock-up facility.

Voice 6: I wish churches would just come get us and take us places we've never been, places we wouldn't be comfortable going on our own, make us feel like somebody wanted us, like we had someplace we belonged. And then change this crooked system, beginning with hiring people who actually give a damn about any of us. Sometimes I think we're just invisible—like nobody can even see us. Can you see me? For real?

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Invite participants to offer up the names they want to be called and a two-word response to: By God's Spirit and through the love of Jesus Christ and the care of this community, I am being liberated from (word) and liberated for (word). Remind participants to offer silent gratitude each time someone says their name.

Closing Song (6 minutes)

Explain that this video featuring the song "Something Inside So Strong" is from a national training of the almost two thousand young people who are teachers and servant leader interns in Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools across the country. The song is a South African freedom song and has become the Children's Defense Fund's Freedom School theme song. Play the video and invite participants to sing along and follow the motions.

Closing Prayer (unison; 3 minutes)

"A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 883

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

 who has created and is creating,
 who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new,
 who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church:

 to celebrate God's presence,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Credit: "A New Creed" from *Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of The United Church of Canada*. United Church Publishing House, 1996, p. 918. Used with permission.

Preparation for Session 3 (3 minutes)

Ask participants to take an index card as they leave and, before the next session, write down seven words or phrases to describe who they are. Encourage them to be creative but brief. For example: I am a woman, sister, mother, grandmother, teacher, poet, dancer, dreamer; I am creative, courageous, thoughtful, loving; I am a compassionate partner, prophetic preacher; determined change agent. I am a vision seeker, nonviolent freedom fighter, a witty and wise womanist. Bring the cards with you to the next session. Encourage participants to identify themselves not as others see them but as they want to define themselves. Also encourage people to arrive early to complete the cover on their journal, explore the resources on the table, add response notes to one or more of Soelle's three practices, and/or a comment on the Parking Lot sheet.

ENDNOTES

1. Wendy Robins, ed. *Through the Eyes of a Woman: Bible Studies on the Experience of Women* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1995), 29.
2. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 137.
3. Ched Myers, Chapter 4 in *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1988). See also "Challenging the Status Quo: Jesus Contests Scribal Authority," *Radical Discipleship*, accessed August 8, 2017, radicaldiscipleship.net/2015/01/29/lets-catch-some-big-fish-jesus-call-to-discipleship-in-a-world-of-injustice-2.
4. Pamela Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 56.

SESSION 3



Sabbath Economics

Centering Thoughts

Use these quotes taken from portions of *Practicing Resurrection* to focus your mind and heart on our topic for this session.

A church that does not join the poor in order to speak out from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them is not the true church of Jesus Christ.

—Oscar Romero, February 17, 1980¹ (page 89)

Jim Lawson, United Methodist pastor, professor, and the man Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as “the leading non-violent strategist and theorist in the world,” writes:

Moses’ life is abruptly, and without explanation, changed. After his encounter with God, he is essentially radically and eternally changed. His transformation causes him to hear and see and observe and feel and grieve. So Moses alters his life and confounds his own people and the Pharaoh, who stood as a symbol of the systems of inequities. Similarly, Jesus, in the spirit, walks into the temple in Nazareth and declares fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah to rewind the traditional and historic message of salvation. Christianity largely seems to ignore these two major, saving enterprises of the Bible . . . Americans codified the spiritual wickedness of racism, violence, impoverishment and greed . . . we human beings will often develop a theology which justifies our inexcusable behavior (page 100).²

In the *Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016*, we too commit to this work. The resolution reminds us:

“As a church, we are called to support the poor and challenge the rich . . . we emphasize measures that build and maintain the wealth of poor people, including asset-building strategies.”³ We frame the issues theologically, “[t]hat Jesus was born of a poor, unmarried woman who was living in a small nation, occupied and oppressed by a mighty foreign empire, concretely reveals God’s full identification with poor, powerless, and oppressed people” (page 111).⁴

It is a caricature of love to try to cover over with alms what is lacking in justice, to patch over with an appearance of benevolence when social justice is missing.

—Oscar Romero, April 12, 1979⁵ (page 89)

Session Goal

Identify concretely how economic justice is related to radical discipleship using Dorothee Soelle's framework: define what we must unlearn and let go; how we might resist death-dealing systems in order to heal personally and communally; and heal in order to strengthen our resistance to empire, our commitment to God's kin-dom and radical discipleship.

Supply List

- Music for the Gathering Time (see suggestions below)
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- Handout with the words to the prayers and other readings
- Bibles
- Copies of the handout with the voices on Sabbath economics
- Newspaper articles cut from several papers, making sure there will be twice as many articles as participants. They will take these with them at the end of the session.
- Alt J's "Taro" video (5:06 minutes), found online at youtu.be/S3fTw_D3110
- Sister Simone Campbell's illustration of economic disparity in the United States (6:40 minutes), found online at youtu.be/IFLPNoMC_Os

Credits: Fan-made music video for the song, "Taro," by Alt-J. Old footage from the 1988 film, "Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation"; Human bar graph by Sister Simon Campbell, Executive Director, Network Lobby and leader of Nuns on the Bus.

Preparation Notes

1. Review the Parking Lot newsprint to check for questions, concerns, suggestions.
2. Make sure the Community Covenant is clearly visible.
3. Check to be sure you have sufficient art supplies.
4. Choose music for the Gathering Time and make sure it is ready to play.
5. Make copies of the opening hymn to pass out or project. Ask someone ahead of time to lead the singing. Reminder: Permission for required songs and videos have been secured. During the Gathering Time, you may play the suggested songs or songs of your own choosing as background music only.
6. Review Mark 10:17–31 and Chapter 4, making a list of key points for discussion and reflecting in the Personal Reflection: Wrestling with Radical Discipleship section.
7. Write down your reflections on the Centering Thoughts.
8. Go over your room preparations once more to make sure resources you will need are close at hand, the worship center is ready, the easel with newsprint, markers, and tape is in a convenient location, handouts are nearby, and the music and videos are ready to be played.

Gathering Time

Greet everyone who comes in, inviting them to comment on the newsprint space and reminding them they will need their index card with seven words or phrases. Consider playing music as people enter, possibly “Waiting on the World to Change” with John Mayer; “How Many Miles Must We March” by Ben Harper; “People Get Ready” with The Blind Boys of Alabama; “A Change Is Gonna Come” with Sam Cooke.

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them to offer their names and one hope they have for our time together today, using less than five words. Remind people to offer silent gratitude as each one speaks.

Opening Worship (12 minutes)

Song

“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 338

Credit: “Where He Leads Me I Will Follow.” Words by E.W. Blandy, 1890. Music by John Samuel Norris, 1890. Public domain.

Litany (unison)

We are all on a journey of discipleship,
all seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

We are all learners and all teachers;
we all have gifts to share and so we work
to listen to and learn from each other,
treating each other with respect and dignity.

We are a community of grace and forgiveness,
glad for our diversity and differences.

Disagreements will come,
but we are willing to remain a part of the community
and a part of the conversation
so we will not walk out or close our hearts or minds.

—Community covenant by Hobson United Methodist Church, Nashville, Tennessee

Credit: Community covenant by Hobson United Methodist Church. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Journal

Invite participants to watch the video of Alt J’s song “Taro” and, while they are watching, to jot down words or short phrases that come to them. Encourage them to focus on the images and not the words; the words are hard to understand and not necessary for this exercise. When the video has ended, invite participants to quickly share popcorn style what came to their minds and hearts. Ask someone to write the words and phrases down on newsprint so everyone can see. Allow about five minutes for this.

Prayer for a New Heart (unison)

The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 392

by Dag Hammarskjöld, Sweden

Thou who art over us

Thou who art one of us,

Thou who *art*.

Give me a pure heart, that I may see thee;
a humble heart, that I may hear thee,
a heart of love, that I may serve thee;
a heart of faith, that I may abide in thee. Amen.

Credit: “Thou who art over us” from MARKINGS by Dag Hammarskjöld, translated by Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden, translation copyright © 1964, copyright renewed 1992 by Penguin Random House LLC and Faber & Faber Ltd. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Engaging the Texts (88 minutes)

This session will focus on Mark 10:17–31 and Chapter 4 of *Practicing Resurrection*.

I Am/We Are (25 minutes)

Ubuntu is a term used most often in Zimbabwe and South Africa that has been defined to mean: “I am because we are; because we are, I am.” This mirrors Mark’s understanding of community and discipleship—we need each other; our interdependence and our differences are gifts that strengthen our community and that strengthen us as individuals. Ask participants to take out their cards that have the seven words or phrases describing who they are. Then, divide everyone into small groups of five people. Ask participants to share with their group what they have written on their cards. When this is completed, invite each group to consider all the words and phrases offered and, from those gifts, work collectively to create a poem, skit, song, or art piece that defines who they are together. Encourage the groups to include everyone’s ideas in considering their communal identity and to work to reach consensus. When groups have completed this work, invite them to share with the whole group.

Sabbath Economics Brainstorm (10 minutes)

Invite everyone to offer a word or phrase to define Sabbath economics. Have someone record the responses on newsprint so everyone can see. Then play the video clip of Sister Simone.

Small Groups (25 minutes)

Invite people to move into groups of five or so people, assigning each group one of the following pieces on Sabbath economics from the text, with Mark 10:21, 23 at the beginning of each quote. Ask the groups to spend their first ten minutes wrestling with their assigned quotes and then the next fifteen minutes identifying as concretely and specifically as possible their “so what” and developing their presentation. Remind groups that their “so what” is what we must unlearn and let go of and their presentations should address in what specific ways we might resist in order to heal and

Continued on page 31

Voices on Sabbath Economics

1. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me . . . How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:21, 23).

The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, senior minister at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, argues that there is a deep theological and moral problem with offering charity to the poor while at the same time blaming them for their poverty. Lewis comments:

We are forced to ask ourselves about whether the ways these systems work are consistent and coherent with our belief in a God of love and justice, whose compassion was shown uniquely in the life of a poor Jewish Rabbi from Palestine . . . We have to ask ourselves are we following in the Way of Christ or are we following in the Way of Empire.¹

2. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me . . . How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:21, 23).

[Retired United Methodist bishop Kenneth] Carder argues market values have been baptized and ritualized by the church and the gospel has become a commodity of self-interest, success, and national security. Wesley was clear, notes Carder, that wealth changes our logic and decreases our dependency on grace so that individual conversion is seen as more central to the gospel than shaping and seeing communities that are signs or foretastes of God’s kin-dom. As a result, we define evangelism as that which finds a need and meets it rather than announcing God’s reign and living it. When, Carder asks, do disciples become transformed by Jesus Christ, cross-bearing but risen?²

3. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me . . . How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:21, 23).

Peter Storey, former Methodist bishop of Southern Africa, argues that our complicity with domination is the result of our proximity to Caesar, the wealthy, and our distance from the poor. He writes,

The public square has been captured . . . by those who offer a religious face to power, to economic greed, to its accompanying violence . . . John Wesley’s transformation into an evangelist who evangelized not just individuals, but the institutions in society, was all about location . . . When John Wesley was with the poor, he found that he had unknowingly arrived at the home address of Jesus . . . Why is it that the United Methodist Church seems to have lost its prophetic voice? . . . Because it’s rich . . . It has become a church of the comfortable. It has become the church of the middle class and the affluent . . . The Methodist Church in Southern Africa was able to make the stand that it did because 80% of our members were from the poor and oppressed.³

Continued on page 30

4. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me . . . How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,’” (Mark 10:21, 23).

Wesley argues that it is our captivity in and cooperation with the economic system that stands in the way of discipleship. He writes:

Now, it is your money that pays the merchant, and through him the captain and the African butchers. You therefore are guilty, yeah, principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies, and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion; they would not stir a step without you; therefore the blood of all these wretches who die before their time, whether in their country or elsewhere, lies upon your head . . . Instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness! Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands, are at present stained with blood.⁴

5. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me . . . How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,’” (Mark 10:21, 23).

Jesus does not say there will always be people condemned to poverty; he says the poor will always be with and among us. The Jesus movement, the communities of Jesus’ followers, takes sides with the poor. Like Jesus and John Wesley, they locate themselves among the impoverished, working not simply for charity but for justice. They work for an economic system in which there are no wealth disparities, in which the policies and practices of Sabbath economics redistribute wealth and resources, power and privilege, so that everyone has enough. As Ched Myers notes, “In capitalism, redistributive justice is high heresy—but this Jesus has clearly equated it with the Kingdom of God . . . economics is ultimately a theological issue.”⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Carol Kuruvilla, “Christians Are More Likely To Say It’s Poor People’s Fault That They’re Poor,” *HuffPost Politics*, August 3, 2017, huffingtonpost.com/entry/christians-are-more-likely-to-say-its-poor-peoples-own-fault-that-theyre-poor_us_59833a3be4b00f0084ae61d6.
2. Ken Carder, “Markets or Missions” (lecture, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, possibly in 1994).
3. Peter Storey, “Re-Evangelizing the Church to Its Prophetic Ministry” (sermon, Methodists for Social Action Banquet, Ames, Iowa, June 11, 2005), 3–5.
4. Bill Wylie-Kellerman, “Unholy Alliances: John Wesley and the Global Economy” in *Witness Magazine*, October 28, 2002, thewitness.org/article.php?id=656, accessed April 25, 2005, 1.
5. Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (Washington, D.C.: *Tell the Word*, 2002), 105.

heal in order to resist. What does Sabbath economics look like when it takes on flesh in our families, our congregations, our communities, states, and nation? Encourage groups to be concrete and creative in their presentations, listing their responses on newsprint or poster board but also using artwork and symbols that represent their ideas and commitments.

Museum Walk (20 minutes)

Assign groups to go on a “museum walk” through the different group presentations. One person remains at their group’s location to explain their ideas and commitments, while the groups rotate to visit one location at a time, asking questions and adding their comments by placing sticky notes on the newsprint or poster board. The facilitator will need to note when it is time for a group to move to the next station. Allow three to four minutes for each visiting group.

Small Groups (8 minutes)

Small groups reconvene to discuss comments and questions that arose and consider incorporating some of the new ideas into their commitments. Posters or newsprint should be hung around the room as each group completes their work.

Closing Circle (7 minutes)

Invite participants to offer their names and one word to describe what they are taking from this time together. Remind everyone to offer silent gratitude as each person speaks.

Closing Song

“Shalom to You,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 666

Credit: “Shalom to You (Somos Del Señor).” Words by Elise S. Eslinger, 1980. Music by Carlton R. Young. ©1983 United Methodist Publishing House. Harm. ©1989 United Methodist Publishing House. All rights reserved. Used with permission. CCLI #11221925.

Preparation for Session 4 (3 minutes)

Encourage participants to add comments on the Parking Lot newsprint and to jot down their response to at least one of the three Soelle practices. Ask participants to take home one of the newspaper clippings and to carry the news article with them into their prayers and thoughts as we move toward the cross and resurrection.

ENDNOTES

1. Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, compiled and translated by James Brockman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 228.
2. James Lawson Jr., Foreword to *The Poverty and Justice Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995).
3. “Global Economic Justice: The United Methodist Church, Justice, and World Hunger,” Resolution 4051, *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 537.
4. *Ibid.*, 558.
5. Romero, *The Violence of Love*, 157.

SESSION 4



Practicing Resurrection

Centering Thoughts

Use these quotes taken from portions of *Practicing Resurrection* to focus your mind and heart on our topic for this session.

Jesus was crucified. Not simply killed, but crucified. He was nailed to the cross under the sign, “King of the Jews,” a title that belonged to Herod. His crucifixion was a public declaration of harsh retribution against anyone who might follow in his path. And radical discipleship, discipleship in Jesus’ name, requires confrontation with these powers and principalities, with all that diminishes life, with ongoing crucifixions.

James Cone, a Pentecostal pastor and preacher, activist theologian, and seminary professor, is often referred to as the father of black liberation theology. Writing on what crucifixions look like today, he tells us:

Churches, seminaries, and theological academies separated Christian identity from the horrendous violence committed against black people. Whites could claim a Christian identity without feeling the need to oppose slavery, segregation, and lynching as a contradiction of the gospel for America . . . Where is the gospel of Jesus’ cross revealed today? The lynching of black America is taking place in the criminal justice system . . . One can lynch a person without a rope or tree (pages 120–121).¹

As Theodore Jennings writes:

This resurrection is the “uprising,” the insurrection, of one who rejected the rules of respectability, the religious laws, the institutions of family and church and state. It is the resurrection of the one who provoked these structures, enraged them and was condemned by them . . . the structures and institutions that rejected and condemned him are themselves exposed as the enemies of God. The structures of piety, of morality, of liturgy of law and order, of nation and empire—these crumble now before the message of the uprising of the crucified . . . This is by no means a consoling word but a profoundly disturbing and challenging one . . . a shattering force . . . it isn’t over. It’s about to begin (page 126).²

Session Goal

To define concretely what it might mean to practice resurrection, personally and collectively, publicly, day after day; to follow Jesus into the streets, embodying a radical discipleship that seeks systemic justice and transformation.

Supply List

- Music for the Gathering Time (see suggestions below)
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- Handout with the words to the prayers and other readings
- Bibles
- “Glory” video with John Legend and Common (3:08 minutes), found online at youtu.be/HUZOKvYcx_o
- Handout of the voices on radical discipleship
- Small wooden stars, at least one for each participant

Credit: “Glory,” by John Legend, Common, and Rhymefest. Music and promo video featuring scenes from the movie, “Selma,” with artists, Common and John Legend. All rights reserved.

Preparation Notes

1. Review the Parking Lot newsprint to check for questions, concerns, suggestions.
2. Make sure the Community Covenant is clearly visible.
3. Check to be sure you have sufficient art supplies.
4. Choose music for the Gathering Time and make sure it is ready to play.
5. Make copies of the opening hymn to pass out or project. Ask someone ahead of time to lead the singing. Reminder: Permission for required songs and videos have been secured. During the Gathering Time, you may play songs of your own choosing as background music only.
6. Review Mark 16:1–8 and Chapter 5 and the Postscript of the study text, making a list of key points for discussion, including your response to the Personal Reflection: Wrestling with Radical Discipleship section.
7. Make a note to ask six individuals to be readers of the closing litany.
8. Go over your room preparations once more to make sure the resources and materials you will need are close at hand, the worship center is ready and includes the wooden stars, and the easel with newsprint, markers, and tape is in a convenient location. Double check that the handouts are nearby, and the music and video are ready to be played.

Gathering Time

Play music as participants gather for the session.

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Invite participants to offer the name they want to be called and one word for how they are feeling at this very moment. Remind participants to offer silent gratitude as each person speaks.

Opening Worship (15 minutes)

Song

“Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 351

Credit: “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior.” Words by Fanny J. Crosby, 1868. Music by William H. Doane, 1870. Public domain.

Journal

Explain that you will play a music video with John Legend and Common singing the song “Glory” that contains clips from the movie *Selma*. The video is three minutes long and you will play it twice. The first time participants are asked to watch closely. When you start the video for the second time, ask them to begin writing and continue without stopping the movement of their pens for seven minutes. When time is up, invite two or three people to share what they have written.

Prayer (unison)

We renew our baptismal covenant, saying yes to God’s Word and God’s will all over again.

We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin. We accept the freedom and power God gave us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as our Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races, all genders, sexualities, cultures, and classes. With God’s help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround others with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

—Adapted from the “Baptismal Covenant I,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, pages 34–35

Credit: From Baptismal Covenant I, ©1976, 1980, 1985, 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Engaging the Texts (60 minutes)

This session will focus on Mark 16:1–8 and Chapter 5 and the Postscript of *Practicing Resurrection*.

Small Groups

Invite participants to move into small groups of five or six. Each group will focus on the scripture from Mark, the words from Ched Myers, and one of the excerpts from the study text in the following handout to frame their responses. They will have twenty minutes for discussion, focusing on what it means to be a cross-bearing disciple in Jesus’ name and to identify concrete possibilities for practicing resurrection personally and communally.

Continued on page 37

Voices on Radical Discipleship

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

—Mark 16:8

The church has been reborn time and again whenever it has remembered that it is first and foremost a movement for radical personal and political transformation accountable to God's dream of justice and shalom.

—Ched Myers¹

1. The cross, the crucifixion of Jesus, exposes in no uncertain terms this fierce clash, this fiery confrontation between empire and the kin-dom of God. Crucifixion in Jesus' time was a common form of torture and a reminder of the power of the state to define what would and would not be tolerated. . . . Public crucifixions served as a warning to others who dared imagine a world freed from the systems of domination and empire, who dared to turn toward freedom. Crucifixion was meant to terrify and intimidate, to silence and sideline, to contain and control.

This first interpretation of the cross invites people into a faith that has little if any impact on the systems and structures of death—on economic exploitation and perpetual impoverishment, on sexism and heterosexism, on militarism and other forms of systemic violence, on xenophobia and white privilege, on white supremacy and plantation capitalism.² . . . In the second interpretation, however, cross bearing is required of all disciples.

2. The shorter ending of Mark ends at verse 8, waiting for us to wake up and love the world all over again, prodding us to move into the streets where Jesus waits. We know from other stories in the Bible that the women disciples in these stories from Mark moved through their fear and silence, spilling into the streets of Galilee, embodying love, practicing resurrection, persisting as partners in this being-saved-on-the-journey community of radical disciples.
3. If Jesus raised does not simply mean life after death, if the resurrection pulls us back into the streets of Galilee where the Jesus movement began, if it pushes us back into conflict and persecution, surely we would feel both terror and amazement. If Jesus, crucified and raised, invites disciples into life in defiance of all the powers of death, into life that requires unmasking, naming, and engaging to transform powers and principalities, structures, systems, theologies, and institutionalized religion, might we not hope to be passed by?
4. The world waits for the church to really be the church, to embody love, practice resurrection, to put flesh on a faith you can see. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "Love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."³ Cornel West, philosopher and theologian, professor inside prisons and seminaries, summarizes this, arguing, "Justice is what love looks like in public."⁴

Continued on page 36

ENDNOTES

1. Ched Myers, “What Is Radical Discipleship?” radicaldiscipleship.net/2015/03/05/what-is-radical-discipleship, accessed August 2, 2017.
2. “Plantation capitalism” is a term often used by Rev. James Morris Lawson Jr., architect of the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States, a colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King’s, and a United Methodist pastor.
3. Martin Luther King Jr., “A Time to Break Silence” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 247.
4. “Cornel West Talks to David Shuster,” *Aljazeera America*, February 24, 2014, america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/talk-to-al-jazeera/interviews-and-more/2014/2/24/cornel-west-talkstodavidshuster.html.

After twenty minutes of discussion, remind small groups to identify concrete possibilities for shaping and sustaining communities that embody cross-bearing, radical discipleship and practice resurrection. Groups will have twenty minutes to solidify their ideas and develop a creative presentation summarizing their commitments. This presentation could be a poster, other visual art, song, skit, or spoken word. When time is called, invite groups to share their commitments. If these presentations take less than twenty minutes, invite brief comments and responses from the whole group.

Closing Circle (15 minutes)

Invite participants to offer their names and, using no more than ten words, say one way in which this study has challenged and/or changed them. Remind everyone to offer silent gratitude as each person speaks.

Closing Worship (20 minutes)

Bernice Johnson Reagon tells a story about her work as a young member of the Freedom Singers, a group that shared leadership in community meetings and gatherings during the civil rights movement in the United States. They were in a church one night, getting ready to go out into the streets, knowing they would be met by angry policemen with heavy batons, by dogs and water hoses, by stone-throwing mobs. They decided to sing one more song to gather up their courage. One person suggested they sing “This Little Light of Mine.” Another commented that perhaps they should sing “This Little Light of Ours,” noting the importance of collective witness. But then an older black woman in the back of the church interrupted, saying, “No. I want us to sing ‘This Little Light of Mine,’ because I need to know that you and you and you—that everyone here is committed to letting their light shine. Then,” she said, “we’ll shine so bright, they’ll have to put their shades on just to walk by!”

Their singing solidified their collective courage and shaped their individual and communal commitment, reorienting them from fear fueled by the powers of the white supremacists, to the faith fed by the Holy Spirit already moving among us—the ongoing powerful presence of the God of justice and grace, life and liberation. Their singing was an engagement with powers and principalities, a persistent prayer, a leaning into the kin-dom.

As we sing this song, you are invited to take one of the wooden stars on our worship table, as a sign of your willingness to embody radical discipleship in Jesus’ name. You are also invited to add verses that might reflect our time together, such as: “Even when it’s hard, Lord,” “Can’t nobody stop us,” “We’re gonna shine real bright now.”

Song

“This Little Light of Mine,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 585

Credit: “This Little Light of Mine/Lattimer.” Words by Harry Dixon Loes, public domain. Music adaptation by William Farley Smith. ©1989 United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission. CCLI #11221925.

Prayer

A call and response litany written by Janet Wolf.

One person will introduce the litany, noting the collective response: “People get ready/A change is gonna come!” Invite the group to practice twice. Then, six readers will offer the sections—with passion!

Reader 1: God is even now moving among us to disturb our apathy, challenge our complacency, and set us on fire with a holy passion for justice, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

Reader 2: The way the world is, is not the way it’s supposed to be; we serve the God who yearns for the healing and wholeness of all creation, the God who causes deserts to bloom and water to run in dry places, the God who sends us to be agents of change and challenge, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

Reader 3: With the help of God and each other, we leave here ready to be the church, the body of Christ in and for the world: to engage powers and principalities, to expose, unmask, challenge and confront, contradict and dismantle systems and structures of injustice one piece at a time, in the name of the One who calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation and redemption, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

Reader 4: For God is even now breaking down the walls that divide and building up the ties that bind us together, teaching us to dance on the common ground of astonishing, amazing, marvelous, startling, awesome, transforming, death-defying, life-giving, joy-creating GRACE, sending us to be channels of healing and hope, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

Reader 5: God still brings down the powerful and lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, empowering us to be instruments of justice, generosity, and wild, wonderful, spilling over, cannot be contained joy, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

Reader 6: For God gives us this day, the vision and holy boldness to turn dreams into reality, to live as kin-dom people here and now with passion and persistence, with outrageous hope and creative courage, with soul-stirring laughter and a wide open love that stuns the world, so people get ready/**A change is gonna come!**

All six readers: People get ready!/**A change is gonna come!**

May it be so in Jesus name. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 159, 163.
2. Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *The Insurrection of the Crucified: The “Gospel of Mark” as Theological Manifesto* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2003), 309–10.

{ APPENDIX }



Use these optional litanies and readings to close your time together in the sessions.

Session 1: Closing Litany written by Janet Wolf

Left: We are the church of Jesus Christ not because we gather on Sunday mornings or sing hymns or recite creeds, not because we have buildings that say so or an altar with a cross, and not because we send money to mission.

Right: We are the church when we live out the radically inclusive love of Christ Jesus. As Theodore Jennings notes, we are the church “when we stand against all that threatens to diminish, destroy, belittle” any part of God’s good creation.¹ And C.S. Song writes, we are the church when the “oppressed are set free and those in exile come dancing home.”²

Left: We are the church when lies are exposed and the truth is told, when love is lived out loud and the Word becomes flesh among us; when open hearts, minds, and doors is not a campaign slogan but a true sign that congregations are engaged in the hard work of wrestling with race, class, and sexual identity; when isms—all the isms—are recognized, named, challenged, confronted, and changed.

Right: We are the church when yokes are broken and prison doors opened, when the “hungry not only get fed but splash in the sweet waters of justice,”³ when folks the world labels as nobodies rise up, knowing we are God’s somebody, wonderful, beloved, and holy.

Left: We are the church when broken-hearted individuals, broken communities and nations find healing and reconciliation happens; when lives and systems are changed and wounds are washed in the waters of grace, when we claim the joy of salvation.

Right: Beyond our wildest dreams God comes, inviting us to feast and laugh and dance and dream, empowering us to be persistent, passionate, prophetic practitioners of resurrection, to be the body of Christ in and for and with the world.

All: God invites us to not just join the church but to *be* the church, knowing we are called to advocate and agitate, to organize and strategize, to reconcile and redeem, companion and comfort, trouble and transform, disrupt and disturb, protest and problematize, until justice—God’s justice—rolls down like a mighty river.

Session 2: Closing Litany written by Janet Wolf

*Divide circle in half and practice this call and response: “Teach us to pray. **Thy kin-dom come!**”*

Left: Not our kingdoms, O God, where so many of your children are consigned to the edges of death, but thy kin-dom, where little ones are held, cherished, loved, and made safe.

Right: Thy kin-dom where swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, where all sit under their own vines and fig trees and no one is made to be afraid. God of power and glory teach us to pray:

All: Thy kin-dom come!

Left: Thy kin-dom where the powers of oppression and poverty, death and despair are now being broken;

Right: Thy kin-dom where, as C.S. Song says, the hungry not only get fed but splash in the sweet waters of justice;

Left: Thy kin-dom where the oppressed are set free and those in exile come dancing home. Awesome, wonderful, and liberating God teach us to pray:

All: Thy kin-dom come!

Right: Thy kin-dom of love and light; kin-dom of justice, gentleness, generosity, and joy;

Left: Kin-dom of revolution, reconciliation, and redemption;

Right: Kin-dom of mercy, manna, and miracles; kingdom where chains are broken and prison doors opened;

Left: Thy kin-dom where justice rolls down like a mighty river. God of the prophets, teach us to pray:

All: Thy kin-dom come!

Right: Thy kin-dom where not only our tears are wiped away, but we find laughter for our souls, where love triumphs over division;

Left: Thy kin-dom where no one waits for crumbs, but all are invited to sit down side by side at the banquet table, where people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, all colors, cultures, and classes, all genders, generations, and sexual identities,

Right: dance on the common ground of God’s amazing, wonderful, awesome, astonishing, startling, marvelous, world-transforming, death-defying, life-giving, joy-creating grace. Wild and holy God, teach us to pray:

All: Thy kin-dom come!

Left: Thy kin-dom where folks the world labels nobodies discover we are somebody wonderful, precious, and beloved, awesomely and wondrously made;

Right: Thy kin-dom where those who are bowed down and bent over are rising up to be all God created us to be;

Left: Thy kin-dom already breaking into this world. Sweet Jesus, teach us to pray:

All: Thy kin-dom come! Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, forever and ever. Amen.

Session 3: Closing Litany

Ask four people to read the introduction, then respond Left/Right.

Reader 1: Theodore Jennings, United Methodist elder and seminary professor, writes: “When Methodists get nervous about how their church is doing they are apt to recall Wesley’s own gloomy assessment of the movement toward the end of his career. The words so often cited from the essay ‘Thoughts upon Methodism’ (1786) run as follows:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power (Works Vol XIII, p. 258).

Reader 2: “Wesley was not concerned about loss of membership, declining Sunday school enrollment, slackening of evangelical emphasis, or a reduction in the number of new converts. Methodism was an evangelistic movement in full stride . . . It nearly concerns us to understand how the case stands with us at present. I fear, wherever riches have increased, (exceeding few are the exceptions,) the essence of religion, the mind that was in Christ has decreased in the same proportion.

Reader 3: “What concerns Wesley is that Methodists are becoming prosperous! . . . In Wesley’s view, the only way to escape the satanic snare of prosperity which threatens Christendom with self-destruction and which makes Methodism liable to become ‘a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power’ is to divest ourselves entirely of the trappings of prosperity and turn in solidarity with the poor . . .

Reader 4: “Methodism, instead of continuing in Wesley’s ‘preferential option for the poor,’ was even then beginning to make another option, the preferential option for the middle class. This was Wesley’s diagnosis. And it is even more applicable today. Have we not turned resolutely toward the idle class ethos and so emptied the Methodist movement of the authentic power of true religion? When do we have the form without the power of religion?”⁴

Left: When we develop church growth strategies that target the middle class instead of [creating partnerships with] the poor, then we have the form without the power.

Right: When we spend more of our resources on constructing and maintaining church buildings and property than we do on feeding the hungry then we have the form without the power.

Left: When we spend more on pastor’s salaries, benefits and pensions than we do on clothing the naked and sheltering the homeless then we have the form without the power.

Right: When we turn stewardship into financial campaigns for the church rather than sacrifice for the poor, then we have the form but not the power.

Left: When we blame poverty on the sloth of the poor rather than the avarice of the prosperous and the indifference of the comfortable, then we have the form but not the power.

Right: When we furnish our sanctuaries and social halls in such a way as to make the prosperous comfortable rather than make the indigent welcome, then we have the form but not the power.

Left: When we dedicate Methodist institutions like universities and hospitals and retirement homes to the needs of the affluent rather than the needs of the impoverished, then we have the form but not the power.

Right: When we preach a grace which saves us without changing us, then we have the form but not the power.

All: Renew your church, Lord, your people in this land.

Save us from cheap words and self-deception in your service.

In the power of your Spirit transform us and shape us by your cross. Amen.⁵

Session 4: Closing Litany (unison)

This prayer was taken from Canadian theologian and author Alyson Huntly's book, *Daring to Be United: Including Lesbians and Gays in the United Church of Canada* (United Church Publishing House, 1998, pages iii–iv), and adapted by Janet Wolf with her permission.

To all who have loved
With fierce loyalty or tender pride,
With great courage and against all odds,
Risking their reputation, their jobs,
Their friends, their family, even their lives
To all those who have put love before security,
Refusing to be bound by the fetters of law or fear or convention,
Who by their daring have created new paths in wild places
to all who love
I say thank you.

To all who have challenged sexual oppression
By speaking out, taking responsibility,
Calling others to account, changing their language
And their behavior,
Creating safe space, sharing power
To all those who have protected the vulnerable,
Welcomed the outcast, shared bread,
Given shelter, stood vigil, written letters, spoken out, stood to be counted
To all those who have worked
To make this world tender and more just
I say thank you.

To all those
Who have dared to ask
For what they are entitled to,
Who have refused to be ignored
Or turned back or passive or victims,
Who by their persistent belief
That justice is not only right but possible
Have halted armies, changed structures,
Saved forests, fed children
To all people who have demonstrated justice
I say thank you.

To all those
Who have chosen to be family,
Who have adopted children,
Loved someone of their own gender,
Liked their in-laws,
Formed unusual alliances and unlikely friendships,
Created community, nurtured hope,
Befriended themselves and one another,
To all those who have discovered
That community is not built like a wall but grown like a garden
And have chosen to tend that garden,
Seen one another through, wept, listened,
plotted and made possible
Knowing that family is, in the largest sense,
A choice and a gift
To all those who have chosen to be family
I say thank you.

ENDNOTES

1. Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *The Insurrection of the Crucified: The "Gospel of Mark" as Theological Manifesto* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2003), 8, 214.
2. C.S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 150.
3. *Ibid.*, 154.
4. Excerpts from an unpublished speech by United Methodist theologian and seminary professor, author and activist Theodore Jennings given during a United Methodist gathering in Atlanta in 1992.
5. "Cry Justice!" by John de Gruchy, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 574.

{ SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTARY SESSION }



by Denise Smartt Sears

This supplement offers additional content that study leaders can use in their sessions at Mission u. The session may also be used in small group United Methodist Women or United Methodist Church settings to provide an overview of *Practicing Resurrection: The Gospel of Mark and Radical Discipleship*.

Opening Worship (20 minutes)

Song

“Breathe on Me, Breath of God,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 420

Credit: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God (Trentham).” Words: Edwin Hatch, 1878. Music: Robert Jackson, 1888. Public domain.

Inhale and Exhale Exercise

Ask the group to sit in silence for seven minutes, instructing them as follows: Inhale through your nostrils and exhale with your mouth. Make sure your body posture is relaxed. Do not hold your neck stiff or your stomach tight, just breathe.

Prayer (unison)

Gracious God, as we pause to breathe, we give you thanks. You, O God, use us to bring new life with others. You inspire us to stand up for justice and to create places of peace. Move among us throughout our study and everywhere. We are the ones we have been waiting for. Gracious God, we are in awe of your presence. You have called us and made us wonderfully in your image. Help us to be in awe of your handiwork and learn to accept others as you have accepted us. Amen.

Litany

Reader 1:

Help us, O God, to lift up the urgent needs of your people.

Teach us to stand on your Word.

We know that you have a word for us:

A word of healing and hope,

A word that brings change for all people.

No more business as usual, the time is now.

Listen for God’s Word . . .

Listen for God’s Word.

We have the power to be a part of the transformation of the whole world.

God is right here, right now.

Reader 2:

What about those who say, “Wait your turn?”

It is your turn . . .

The time is now.

No need to wait.

God is up to something new.

Be courageous and prophetic.

Reader 3:

We are not acting alone.

The Holy Spirit will direct our path.

Listen.

Listen.

God is calling our name.

“Follow me . . .

Trust me . . . hope in me.”

Facilitator: My prayer is that we will hear God calling us to be bold and courageous witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is calling us.

Song

“Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 100

Credit: “Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name.” Traditional. J. Cleveland/V. Nix. ©1979 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved. Used with permission. OneLicense #A-709087.

Journal

How is God calling us? What is God calling us to do? Take three minutes to write a response in your journal or on blank paper. We will continue to read, reflect, and renew our understanding of who we are in Christ.

Prayer (unison)

Today is the day! God can heal our broken spirits and make us whole.

We are ready to face our fears and recommit our lives to God. Today we will stand boldly as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Engaging the Texts (10 minutes)

This time will focus on Mark 5:1–20 and Chapter 2 of *Practicing Resurrection*.

Scripture

Read Mark 5:1–20 out loud.

Note: This task can be divided among two or three readers.

Learning from Leroy

Ask three readers to share this excerpt from the study text taken from a workshop on redefining prison ministry that was co-led by author Janet Wolf and Leroy.

Reader 1: Leroy tells the circle he is one of the 6 million people who have lost their right to vote because they have a felony conviction, and that he is less than a year removed from being one of the 2.3 million people in this country living in cages.² He shares a bit of his story, including the consequences of being criminalized at an early age, the difficulties of growing up in prison, and of reentering a world in which he had never driven a car, never held a cell phone, never used an ATM, never ordered in a restaurant, never paid a bill, or owned anything other than his clothes and a used bike. And then [they invite] the participants into a biblical text about Jesus' arrival to a place of exile.

Reader 2: Janet begins: Forget any sermons you have heard on Mark 5:1–20, any commentaries or Bible studies. For twenty minutes, immerse yourself in the story, and imagine you are either the man who was possessed or Legion; either the pig herders and townspeople, or Jesus. Instead of trying to explain or interpret the story, ask, from the viewpoint of your location in the story, why you do what you do. What brings you hope and what provokes fear? What is happening in your head and your heart as this story unfolds? Everyone has to be some place in the story. There are no bystanders.

Reader 3: Leroy continues: If you are in the small group identified as the man who was possessed, ask yourself what it feels like to be chained, to break the shackles only to have them replaced over and over again; to know the townspeople must hear you howling and yet abandon you to exile? What does it feel like when Legion speaks for you, when you have no voice to offer up your own version of your story? What does it feel like to be “clothed and in [your] right mind” and have people still be afraid of you? How do you feel when Jesus sends you back to the very community that exiled you? What does it mean to you that this text is most often referred to as the story of the “Gerasene demoniac,” even though you are no longer possessed?

Reader 1: Only after the small groups listen to the story from their particular perspective—not attempting to explain anyone else’s behavior, only focusing on the story’s impact on them—do they begin to explore the question that invites them and their world in: “So what?” Great story, but where does it sing to our souls with enough power to move us in new directions? Where does it challenge us? Where and how does it frighten us? What might it look like when it takes on flesh in our home territory? Leroy pulled out his parole card—a photo ID with large red letters that identified him as a parolee under the jurisdiction of the Tennessee Department of Corrections—and his pass papers, the document that allows him to travel to this national conference.

Reader 2: Leroy comments: See this piece of paper? This paper says I belong to the state of Tennessee, that if I am ever found without this paper and this identification card from the Tennessee Department of Corrections, I am subject to immediate arrest and imprisonment. Not because of anything I do, not because I broke some law, but just because after seventeen years of being locked up and one year being out, I still belong to the prison system in Tennessee.

Reader 3: The identification card and travel pass remind folks of the passes black and brown South Africans were required to carry during apartheid. And of Jim Crow laws. And of Legion in this story, the powers that occupy, inhabit, possess, and diminish individuals, communities, and nations.

Finding Freedom Using the FREE Method (10 minutes)

Take out your journals and think about Leroy’s experience in light of this session’s scripture. Write your responses in your journal. Use the FREE method to process your thoughts. There will be time later in the session to share with your small group.

F—Find the reading component. Find yourself in the reading of the scripture.

R—Reflect on the questions (below), listening to each other without being judgmental.

E—Enlighten: What new things did you learn?

E—Expect that things will change, and acknowledge that you have a role to play in living free and setting others free.

Questions:

- Jesus, what have you to do with us?
- Does your church respond to those who are locked up or in chains?
- How can we confront the systems and assist in dismantling the oppressive theologies, structures, and policies of this world?
- How can we shift our social location so we can stand with, hear the cries, and begin to see the wounds of those who are struggling to get by?

Engaging the Texts (20 minutes)

This time will focus on Mark 10:17–31 and Chapter 4 of *Practicing Resurrection*.

Readings

Read Mark 10:17–31 and the quote from Oscar Romero below:

A church that does not join the poor in order to speak from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them is not the true church of Jesus Christ.¹

Small Groups

Divide into small groups of no more than seven people per group. Ask each group to identify a facilitator who will assure all voices are included and no one person dominates the conversation. Groups will also identify a reporter who can take notes on chart paper and help facilitate a brief report highlighting key points in the group’s conversation. Spend ten minutes on this activity.

- How does Oscar Romero’s voice resonate with the scripture that we just read?
- How is it that some people stay in the struggle for social justice and others walk away?
- Jesus is laying out the way of discipleship, creating space for economic justice and hope for the future. What does the text mean to us and the communities that we serve?

Take ten more minutes for the groups to share their reports and then hang the chart paper with their notes where everyone can see them.

Break (10 minutes)

Call the group back together by playing “I Need You to Survive” using this online video (5:42 minutes): youtu.be/F9yAct5a7DM

Credit: Lyric video for the song, “I Need You to Survive,” by Hezekiah and The Love Fellowship Choir.

After the song, invite participants to return to their small groups. Read the perspectives about the cradle-to-prison pipeline on the following handout to the whole group and follow that with the scripture reading. Ask participants to discuss the questions listed on the “Sharing Perspectives” handout within their small groups and create and share a presentation with the larger group as described.

Sharing Perspectives (30 minutes)

Marian Wright Edelman writes,

... incarceration is becoming the new American apartheid and poor children of color are the fodder ... Child poverty and neglect, racial disparities in systems that serve children and the pipeline to prison are not acts of God. They are America's immoral political and economic choices that can and must be changed with strong political, corporate and community leadership ... We must call for an investment in all children from birth through their successful transition to adulthood, remembering Frederick Douglas's correct observation that it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.¹

The discussion on how to dismantle the cradle-to-prison pipeline is not an easy conversation. We must be aware of our complicity with the systems that perpetuate injustices and oppression.

Wolf shares Joseph's response to a question about dreams. He is caged in a maximum security prison and has participated in a restorative justice class:

Joseph wrote about his experience of sitting in class the night one of the co-facilitators asked everyone to answer the question, "What did you dream of growing up to be when you were young?" Joseph was startled because he suddenly realized he had never dreamed as a child. He writes,

I did not come from a loving, nurturing family. "MF, you little ugly MF." I could go on telling you how I was spoken to as a child but the words remain the same. ... One day in class we were asked to tell people what you dreamed of being when you grew up. It got to me and I had to tell the class that I never had a dream of becoming anything in my life. My childhood was spent wanting my parents to love me, crying because I was hungry, or crying because one of them had hit me or hurt me with hollering. At the age of thirteen my mother tried to beat me to death. Those years were spent learning how to fight so I would never have to endure another beating like that by anyone. ... I lived each day of life just surviving. ... What if I would have known how to think and dream? What if I could have experienced the love that was so obvious in those young people's conversation? The love from family and friends that allowed them to dream. What if I had had a dream?

Read Mark 10:13–15.

Discuss in your small groups:

What does the cradle-to-prison pipeline mean for us and for the communities we serve?

- What new possibilities may arise if we make children a priority in the life of the church?
- How is our budget impacted?
- How can we begin to see all children as our children?
- Where will they come from, what will they bring, what will we offer?

As a group, write a poem, song, or rap that expresses our response to God's spirit calling us into the streets to work for justice for all children. Take time for group presentations and a brief discussion.

ENDNOTE

1. "Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign," *Children's Defense Fund*, accessed September 11, 2017, childrensdefense.org/child-watch-columns/health/2009/the-cradle-to-prison-pipeline-americas-new-apartheid.

Write Your Story (20 minutes)

Listen to the following quotes from *Practicing Resurrection*, then take some time to write your own story of how God has freed you, renamed you, and equipped you to tell your story.

As Fayette says, “. . . God is still working on me. If you come back tomorrow, I’ll be so beautiful I’ll take your breath away!”

In a world where so many are paralyzed by forces that diminish life—powerful in so many nations, churches, neighborhoods, and individuals—we are urgently called to a radical discipleship that brings folks together. We are called to be creative, aggressive, persistent, passionate, and sometimes outrageous disciples. We are called to open up new possibilities for healing in Jesus’ name.

Over and over again, we meet a God who frees us and renames us and equips us to tell the story.

Take five minutes to write your story in your journal and then continue exploring your story with the following hymn.

Sing

“For the Healing of the Nations,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 428

Sing each verse together then allow two minutes for journaling on each of the reflection questions.

Verse 1: For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord; for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords; to a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.

Write a sentence in your journal that identifies a concrete piece of this Good News.

Verse 2: Lead us forward into freedom; from despair your world release, that, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace. Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.

Write a sentence in your journal naming some of your fears and hopes.

Verse 3: All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned; pride of status, race, or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan. In our common quest for justice may we hallow life’s brief span.

Write three words in your journal to name God’s transforming power.

Verse 4: You, Creator God, have written your great name on humankind; for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind, that by our response and service earth its destiny may find.

Write a description in your journal of a new way of living (a fresh way of seeing something).

When congregations and communities study the radical nature of Jesus we can see the possibilities, which were once closed. Thanks be to God that we can sing and shout Hallelujah, Jesus is able. Amen.

Credit: "For the Healing of the Nations." Music by John Hughes, 1907. Public domain. Words: Fred Kaan. ©1968 Hope Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Used with permission. CCLI license #11221925.

Sing

"Thank You, Lord," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 84

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Prayer (unison)

Today is the day! God can heal our broken spirits and make us whole.

We are ready to face our fears and recommit our lives to God. Today we will stand boldly as disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, compiled and translated by James Brockman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 228.
2. "Felony Disenfranchisement: A Primer," *The Sentencing Project*, accessed September 11, 2017, sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/fd_Felony%20Disenfranchisement%20Primer.pdf.

{ ABOUT THE AUTHORS }



Janet Wolf

The Rev. Dr. Janet Wolf has lived in Nashville, Tennessee, since 1968. After working for twelve years as a community organizer around poverty rights, she received her MDiv from Vanderbilt Divinity School and was ordained as an elder in The United Methodist Church in 1988. She served as a pastor of rural and urban congregations for twelve years. In 2001, Janet was appointed as director of public policy and community outreach with Religious Leaders for a More Just and Compassionate Drug Policy, a national interfaith coalition working on harm reduction, alternatives to incarceration, and restorative justice.

In 2005, Janet was appointed to American Baptist College, a historically black college in Nashville, where she served as a full-time professor and interim academic dean. In July 2012, Janet was appointed to work with Marian Wright Edelman and the Children’s Defense Fund, focusing on nonviolent, direct-action organizing and the cradle-to-prison pipeline, including Children’s Defense Fund’s Freedom Schools and the annual Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute.

Janet is a partner with several think tanks inside prisons and a co-facilitator with insiders in courses on death row and in maximum security. She is also part of a teaching team working to provide undergraduate and seminary courses taught inside prisons. She was co-creator of a DMin program in prisons, public policy, and transformative justice at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Jersey, in which she was both a professor and a student, graduating with a DMin in 2015.

She is the author of “To See and To Be Seen,” a chapter in *I Was in Prison: United Methodist Perspectives on Prison Ministry* edited by James M. Shopshire Sr., Richmond Stoglin, and Mark C. Hicks (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2008). Most of this chapter was also published in *And the Criminals with Him: Essays in Honor of Will D. Campbell and All the Reconciled*, edited by Will Campbell and Richard Goode (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012).

Janet is married to Bill Haley, a retired public school teacher and former legal services director, and they have five sons and six grandchildren.

Denise Smartt Sears

The Rev. Dr. Denise Smartt Sears, a native of Brooklyn, New York, serves as the conference missional strategist of the Metropolitan District of the New York Annual Conference. Denise is privileged to be a part of an annual conference that is trailblazing the way to transformation and leads the district in creating new spaces for all of God's people. In restructuring the local church, human and financial resources are used to support the missional needs of the church while developing ways to connect with the changing communities. Within this context she enthusiastically fulfills her task as missional strategist and dean of the cabinet. The Metropolitan District consists of ethnically, culturally, economically, and theologically diverse congregations throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island, and lower Westchester. Denise seeks to equip the laity and clergy by providing leadership training, "DS chats," and dialogues on sexual humanity with pastors of color. She has also formed strong interfaith and community relationships.

Denise holds a BA from Dillard University in New Orleans; an MS in Mathematics Leadership from Bank Street College of Education in New York City; and an MDiv from Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. She also earned her DMin in Congregational Growth and Development from Drew University. She was ordained a deacon in 1999 and an elder in 2002 in The United Methodist Church.

Denise is married to Wendell T. Sears. They are thankful for their best blessings ever, Daniel and William.