

Presbytery of Lake Erie Youth Event 2021:

Neighbor

As the Youth Leadership Team came together this Summer to explore the possibility of gathering for our annual Fall Youth Event, there were some questions that guided us: *What does Jesus mean when he tells us to love our neighbor as our self? What does it look like to be a neighbor in your neighborhood? What does it mean to be a neighbor to someone who practices a different religion or Christian tradition than you do? How does what you think or believe about God's love for you affect your love for others?*

Our hope was to gather to explore these faith questions in community. However, we have learned as the Church that we need to be flexible and wise. At our planning meeting a little over a month before we plan to gather youth from across the Presbytery, two of our members' families were in quarantine. We knew then that we need to come up with a way to explore and edify our youth separately but together. There are several videos that you will find on the Presbytery of Lake Erie Youtube Channel that accompany this curriculum. The first is Jacob Tobolewski speaking on Luke 10: The Good Samaritan Passage. This video talks about the overall theme of Neighbor. Spend time watching and then discussing the video. The next two videos talk about loving our neighbors who come from a different culture and faith tradition. The second video is Jacob Tobolewski speaking on Genesis 14: Melchizedek. This is an interesting passage, so please encourage the students to open their Bible and find this passage. Jacob uses a lot of references, so having Bibles available to flip to and from each passage will help students navigate the talk. The third video is Rev. Nate Royster speaking on 2 Kings 5. This is a beautiful story. Take time to read it through as a group. Each of these videos have questions included. Some are included in the video. Below, you will find the questions for the 2 Kings 5 video:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 2 Kings 5:1-14

-Assign different character to participants:

- *Naaman
- *Naaman's servant girl
- *The king of Israel
- *The prophet Elisha

Name all of the differences with other characters that made it difficult to give or receive love.

*FOLLOW UP: How do you see those differences impacting our community and society today?

*FOLLOW UP: Do those differences get in the way of your ability to love your neighbor?

-What risks did characters take in this story?

*FOLLOW UP: How can loving your neighbor be a risky act?

-What was the value or purpose of people choosing to love in this story?

*FOLLOW UP: Why should we choose to love others? Especially strangers and those with whom we have profound differences?

-There is an old saying, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." What does this mean? What does it tell us about the choice to love?

-Part of the characters' ability to choose love in a difficult situation is because they had been practicing it as a way of life and it had become second nature. What can we do now to make love our way of life so we can be prepared to choose love in difficult situations?

-Where is God in this story? How does God help make the choice to love possible?

-Naaman finds it difficult to accept the gift of healing at first. Are there situations where you find it difficult to accept love? From other people? From yourself? From God?

Our last video is a conversation between Rev. Britney L.V. Knight and Niken Astari-Carpenter. She is one of our neighbors here in Erie. Niken works in the Mayor's office. She is a practicing Muslim. Listen to the conversation. What did you find surprising? How can neighbors of different faiths find common ground? Do you have neighbors, friends, or family of different faiths? What draws you together? What separates you? In what ways can you be a better neighbor to people of different faiths?

Part 2: Prayer Stations:

The next section is Prayer Stations that focus on loving ourselves the way God loves us. How can we possibly love others if we cannot love ourselves like God loves us?

PRAYER STATIONS FOR YOUTH AND ADULT GROUPS **FOR LAKE ERIE PRESBYTERY**

The theme of these prayer stations is encountering God's love for you. Paul prays that "you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be fulfilled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19). By delving into the mystery and enormity of God's love for us, we may better understand and strive to live out Christ's commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34).

SENDING OUT TO PRAYER STATIONS:

Before sending participants to prayer stations, set the tone with a brief gathering. Give a sense of what they can expect, impart a spirit of openness, curiosity, and wonder. This will be a time for personal discovery, and we will return to debrief and share at the end. Do a brief spiritual exercise as a group.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES TO SEND PARTICIPANTS OUT

Singing a song of Taize: *Bless the Lord, My Soul* (6x)

Lectio Divina of Isaiah 43:1-7

- *Explain up front what you will be doing so the participants know what to expect.
- *Read it aloud the first time just for a word or phrase that gets your attention (give 60 seconds at least of silence).
- *Read it aloud the second time and listen for what the scripture is telling you personally (give 60 seconds at least of silence).
- *Read it aloud the third time and be open to some new action or attitude the scripture is calling you to (give 60 seconds of silence at least).

ONE MORE SUGGESTION:

Consider playing gentle instrumental music in the background. It creates an environment that engages more of the senses, and might help avoid a complete silence that might be discomfiting for youth that are not used to stillness and silence.

BAPTISM PROMISE

MATERIALS: Baptismal font
 Post-it notes
 Sharpies
 Large Banner Paper
 8 ½ x 11 clear plastic stand

At Jesus' baptism, God the Father proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Each one of us is invited to hear those same words spoken for us.

Touch the water. Feel its coolness and allow it to refresh your fingertips. Repeat to yourself the words that Jesus heard at his baptism, "This is my beloved child with whom I am well pleased," and claim them as God's declaration over you.

Approach the wall that says “This is my beloved...” at the top and “with whom I am well pleased” at the bottom.” Write down on a post-it note your name and place it on the wall. Stay with the wall and let this promise keep speaking to you: “This is my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.”

THE TORN CLOAK

MATERIALS: Card with story printed on it
Pieces of cloth

Read the following story and reflect on its message:

From the Desert Fathers of the Christian faith

An elder was asked by a certain soldier if God would forgive a sinner. And he said to him, “Tell me, beloved, if your cloak is torn, will you throw it away? The soldier replied and said, “No, I will mend it and put it back on.” The elder said to him, “If you take such care of your cloak, will God not be merciful to his own image?”

On back of card:

What parts of your life feel torn or broken?

What feelings do you have about that?

Take a piece of cloth from the pile. Hold it in your fingers; look at its pattern and stitching closely. See its beauty and complexity; know the care and intention that made it. Reflect on the God who has made you in God’s own image; the wisdom, love, and purpose with which you were made. Know the mercy and concern God has for you; know that healing and renewal are possible from the God who promises to never leave you.

NEW LIFE

MATERIALS: Scrap paper
Pen
Candle
Large fire-proof bowl
8 ½ x 11 clear plastic stand

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For I am convinced that [nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

What is something that *feels* like it separates you from God? What is something that hinders you from the knowing and living the joy, peace, and love of Jesus Christ? Is there a guilt or shame? A grief or hurt? Something that seems too big to handle? Write it on a piece of paper and reflect on it as a confession and as a prayer for healing. Then offer the paper to the flames in the faith and hope that in Christ the old life has passed away and that we are raised up to new life.

THE FIRST STONE

MATERIALS: Rocks
8 ½ x 11 clear plastic stand

Have printed John 8:2-11 (woman caught in adultery).

Take up a rock and hold it in your hand. Imagine that the rock is every shame and judgment that you hold for yourself or that others hold over you. Let it sit in your hand and feel the weight of that burden and its hardness.

Now think back to the story. No accuser is left in a position to judge, and Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you." Let those words speak deeply to your heart. And as the forgiveness of peace of Jesus Christ speaks to you, allow the rock to slip out of your hand into the pile. There is none left to accuse you.

Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ Jesus, and it is Christ who died for us, Christ who was raised, Christ who is at the right hand of God, Christ who intercedes and prays for us (Romans 8:34).

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

MATERIALS: Sharpies
Banner paper
8 ½ x 11 clear plastic stand

Banner Paper reads across top: "I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE."

Paper display reads:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well" (Psalm 139:14-15).

What about you is "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God? What about you is special and unique? What special gifts to you offer to the world? Reflect on these things and write or draw

them on the banner paper. Then stop and give thanks for the God who created you with wisdom, purpose, and love.

SITTING WITH JESUS CREDIT: Theresa Cho at theresaecho.com

MATERIALS: White floor tiles
Permanent markers
Candle
8 ½ x 11 clear plastic stand

Have a few floor tiles put together on the floor with a lit candle sitting on them. Have the rest of the tiles available with permanent markers.

Have the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) printed for participants to read and have the following instructions:

Comfortably sit on the floor in Jesus' presence like Mary, consider the value of simply soaking up his presence. Simply stop and be with him.

Take a floor tile and write a word representing the gift you receive by simply sitting and listening or the feeling you find just by reflecting upon his company.

Take a few moments to allow this to become a part of you.

Invite God to keep this alive in your faith journey.

GATHERING BACK TOGETHER: LOVING KINDNESS PRAYERS

Invite participants to find a comfortable place to sit upright and be fully present. Invite them to take a deep breath, hold it, then let it out, receiving God's most fundamental gift, and letting out praise and gratitude. Then invite them to silently speak these loving kindness prayers in their own heart.

First to self:

I wish you joy
I wish you peace
I wish you love

Think of someone you love dearly:

I wish you joy

I wish you peace
I wish you love

Think of someone with whom you are in conflict:

I wish you joy
I wish you peace
I wish you love

Think of the greater community of your hometown:

I wish you joy
I wish you peace
I wish you love

DEBRIEFING AND PROCESSING

Give your group an opportunity to share their experience with prayer stations. Potential questions:

- *What impression of God did you get from these exercises?
- *Did you discover something about yourself?
- *Were there particular things that you found helpful at the stations?
- *Was there anything distracting? Distressing?

CLOSING

Invite participants to share their “high” and “low” of the day. After each participant shares, the group does the following refrain:

LEADER: May God give you peace.

GROUP: May God give you strength.

Part 3: MISSION:

Lastly, we want to encourage you to pick a mission project that reflects your neighborhood and puts loving your neighbor into action. Right where you are there are needs that are not being met, people who need to be told they are loved, and ways to reach beyond the walls of your church. The easiest way is to ask! Ask the students what neighbors they would like to help. What organizations are they curious about that help others? What issues are they passionate about? Children, women, homeless, food insecurity? Some thoughts:

If you are in the Erie area and would like to do a mission project between now and December 8th, First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant is hosting Study Space and we need snack bags for students. A list of snacks and instructions are available from Rev. Britney L.V. Knight.

If you are farther away, check in with your local women’s shelters to see what types of supplies they might need this winter. Have your youth head up a drive for these items. Help them learn why these items are necessary. Another idea is to check in with your local food pantry. CLP Josh

Botts suggests doing "Birthday in a Bag." Many food pantries do not have cake mixes or icing or candles. For families with young children this is an excellent opportunity to put a bag together (one for boys and one for girls) with cake mix, sprinkles, icing, candles, some party hats and a banner that a family could easily put together on their own to celebrate a birthday!