



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 1: Imagining Peace

Focus: To explore what it means to imagine and nurture the peace that God wills for all people.

Getting our bearings

Option A: Write the question, “How do we achieve freedom and security?” on two sheets of paper. One will be for answers from political leaders and popular culture (movies, news programs, music, and cartoons) and the other for answers based on Christian faith. Ask the group to list as many answers as possible for each sheet. Another option would be to divide the group in half and ask each group to work on a sheet and then trade. What do you notice about these lists? What are the differences? Are there areas that overlap?

Option B: Reflect on the differing ways in which the United States and Canada achieved independence from Great Britain. (Refer to the second chapter of *The Missing Peace* by James Juhnke and Carol Hunter.) For citizens of the U.S., discuss how the Revolutionary War is usually understood as the only way to achieve freedom from tyranny. Then discuss the alternatives that were available. How might those options have changed the nation? What other examples from history or popular culture reinforce this assumption that violence is the only way to deal with evil? What examples demonstrate that there are alternatives to violence? For Canadians, what have been the assumptions about the effectiveness of violence and its alternatives? How did these apply in relation to Great Britain, to Aboriginal and Metis peoples, or to other nations?

Checking our compass

Read aloud the reflection from 2 Kings 6 as dramatically as possible. Before beginning, summarize the events leading up to this scene as recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-20. You may also want to divide the class into two groups: members of the Aramean army, and servants and soldiers of the King of Israel. Ask each to imagine the feelings, thoughts, and fears of their group as the story unfolds. How do they respond to this story? What thoughts and feelings did they have? What surprised them most? Do they agree with the statement that “the first step toward peace is that of the imagination”? Is this one of the tasks of the church? How does this match Elisha’s role? Should the church today be filling Elisha’s shoes—imagining new possibilities and speaking to government leaders?

Before moving on, pray together the litany, “Creating God.”

Moving on

Option A: Read the story about Dan and Evanna Hess and discuss the questions listed. Also use the quote by Menno Simons. How does Menno’s statement compare to the experience of this church in Belgrade or to their understanding of Christian faith? Has anyone in your group or congregation directly experienced violence or terrorism? What thoughts or feelings would they

share? What is most helpful in nurturing a vision of peace and security?

Option B: Read “Born in War” by Father Mussalam. How does the group respond to this statement? To what extent does it describe their feelings? How does it differ? Invite everyone to spend a few minutes imagining a world without terror and violence. What changes are needed? What would need to change in Father Mussalam’s world? Do any of these changes involve your country, your church?

One could also focus on the aftermath of terrorist attacks like those of September 11, 2001. What has helped people feel more secure and what has been most frightening, leading to more insecurity or despair? What steps can Christians take to help imagine and move toward a more peaceful and secure world? What advice would Elisha give? Are there any steps that the group can take together?

Next steps

Encourage everyone to follow the “Path of Peace” step. Note that there will be opportunity at the next meeting to share about the symbol or article they found and to pray for God’s imagination and power to transform these situations. Prepare a table or shelf on which the symbols can be placed.

Ask for a volunteer to do the “Surfing for Nonviolence” step and report back what they learned. What did they find exciting or hopeful? What was discouraging? Was there anything that surprised them?

Notes:



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 2: Whose Peace?

Focus: To examine the biblical vision of peace and compare it to the peace that governments promise.

Getting our bearings

Begin by asking the group to share the symbols and articles they brought representing situations that often call for a violent response. Brainstorm some possible nonviolent responses and pray together, seeking God's wisdom. Also, thank God for imagination, courage and the assurance that God's love is strong enough to transform even the most difficult situations.

Option A: Ask the group to think back over the past week about what they heard or read about peace and security. Who was speaking and what tools were they using to secure peace? You may also use the excerpt entitled "Pax Americana." Then read the quote by Menno Simons. To what extent do the tools advocated by current leaders match those that Menno described as able to defeat the kingdom of the devil?

Option B: Read the quote from Menno Simons and the reflection on "Nonresistance." How does the group understand nonresistance? To what extent are they comfortable with this position? What words do they use to describe a peace position? How do they respond to Wink's translation of Matthew 5:39? How do they understand and apply Jesus' instructions about how to respond to evil?

Checking our compass

Move into this section by noting that the Bible also deals with many questions related to peace and security.

Option A: Read the verses from Luke 2 and invite everyone to share the first words or images that come to mind. Then ask the group to imagine what life was like for these shepherds and for others in Bethlehem who heard the shepherds' story. Remind them that this incident occurred in the midst of a major disruption in people's lives, as the Roman Empire was undertaking a census for the purposes of tax collection.

The tax issue was indeed a major one at that time. Scholars estimate that Jewish peasants were required to pay at least 15 percent of their produce to Rome, as well as a head tax and other duties. In addition, people were expected to give tithes and offerings to the temple. For people living hand-to-mouth with very little surplus, the struggle to survive was intense. If illness or some other disaster struck, they could be forced to borrow against future harvests to pay these taxes. The resulting debt could eventually cost them their land, forcing them to become tenant farmers or day laborers, even more insecure than before.

Thus, it is not surprising that when Herod the Great died and his son Archelaus wanted to become the next king, the people demanded a reduction in taxes and the release of prisoners. At the same time, numerous revolts broke out, including one in Judea (the region surrounding Bethlehem) led by the shepherd Athronges. For additional background, read the first four

paragraphs of “Two Types of Peace,” which describe how Rome established “peace.” Given all of this, how would the shepherds have understood the peace promised by the angels’ song?

(Also see Crosson, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 128, 200-202, 451-452, and Douglass, *The Nonviolent Coming of God*, pp. 70-72, 90-93.)

Option B: Assign each person one of the Scriptures in the “Peaceable Kingdom” step. As these are read or summarized, ask everyone to pay attention to what themes and images reoccur. Also, what do they imagine life was like for the people who first heard these visions? What do they note about the peace and security that God gives? Conclude by reading together the verses from Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth, Luke 4:18-19.

Moving on

Divide the class into two groups. Using “Two Types of Peace” and your discussion so far, ask one group to work on describing the “Peace of Rome” (Pax Romana) while the other focuses on the “Peace of Christ” (Pax Christi). As they report to each other, ask everyone to notice the areas of overlap as well as the areas of greatest difference and tension. Where in our world today do they see evidence of the peace of Christ? Where is Rome’s kind of peace at work?

Read the quote by Dorothy Soelle, “Pax Christi.” How does the group respond to this statement? Do they agree on the need to choose which peace to live by? Why or why not? How is her position similar to or different from Menno Simons’ and the Dordrecht Confession of 1632?

Ask the group to reflect on their relationship with government structures. Examples might include: police protection or harassment and profiling from law enforcement personnel, street repair, environmental laws, food safety inspection, tax collection, military recruitment, foreign policy decisions. In what ways do these activities contribute — or not — to peace and security in our world? To what extent are they compatible with the weapons which Menno Simons described as belonging to Christ’s followers?

Are there times when they experience tension between their faith in Christ and their role as citizen? At what points? Have they ever had to choose one over the other? When? How could the congregation give more priority to the peace of Christ? Are there ways to strengthen ties to the global church? What new step would they like to take along this path?

Next steps

Create a short drama about these two types of peace to present to the congregation during worship. One option would be to imagine your community’s response to a newspaper headline: “Armed Forces Disband: Citizens Urged to Trust God.” Resist the temptation to resolve this issue, but use the opportunity to think more deeply about the tensions that are involved.

Ask for volunteers to learn more about the Anabaptists and their understanding of peace, and/or arrange to view the video, *The Radicals*, as suggested in the “Explore Your Roots” step.



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 3: Making a Choice

Focus: To look at the choices Christians have made about military service and Christ's way of peace.

Getting our bearings

Begin by asking for any further reflections that grew out of reading the Scriptures about peace. Also, what was learned about the Anabaptists or from watching *The Radicals*? What was most surprising? Most encouraging? Most challenging?

Option A: In small groups or pairs, invite people to share their experiences with regard to military service and conscientious objection. What decisions did they or others in their family make about military service? What reflections do they have now on those experiences? Another option would be to invite two or three people with differing experiences to share with the group. (Try to keep this short, no more than ten minutes.)

Option B: Read "This Train." How does the group respond to this piece? To what extent does your congregation teach about peace or discuss these questions? Which train would most young people in your church choose? Why?

Checking our compass

Give everyone paper and colored markers. Read John 14:27 several times and ask people to draw or jot down the images, colors, and words that come to mind. Invite several volunteers to share their drawings or word pictures with the group.

Reflect together on the kind of peace Jesus gives. How is this peace different from what is offered by the world? Why does he urge his disciples not to be afraid? Note that the Greek word for "afraid" in this verse has the meaning of being timid or shrinking.

Also, note that Jesus was tempted to choose other ways to peace. One clear example is found in John 6:15, when the people wanted to make him king following the feeding of the 5,000. As David Shenk pictures it, "Galilean leaders eagerly invited Jesus to become their king. Zealot freedom fighters were nearby in the Galilean hills. They could have been recruited for the army of King Jesus. He could feed the troops miraculously. They would fight the Romans and establish the rule of God throughout the earth, just as the prophets had promised the Messiah would do" (*Where was God on Sept. 11?* Herald Press, 2002, p. 50).

Jesus however rejected this option. He still went to Jerusalem, but peacefully, healing those who had been cast aside by their own people and offering forgiveness without the need for temple sacrifice or strict observance of the law. He invited everyone to repent and enter God's kingdom of peace and justice. Truly, as he explained to Pilate in John 18:36, this was a different kind of kingdom, not achieved or defended through military force. Nevertheless, it challenged the social

and political structures that allowed some to benefit from Roman rule at the expense of others. And so Jesus was betrayed and crucified. Still, he trusted in God and in the power of love, daring to hope that God's kingdom would triumph in the end.

Moving on

Option A: Read the essay, "Then and Now." Ask the group to think about what most Christians in their country believe about military service. Would most feel comfortable with Justin Martyr or with Constantine and Theodosius? How should Christians be involved in the public arena? At what points should Christians refuse to participate?

Option B: Summarize the piece, "Looking Back," on the history of conscientious objection to military service in North America. Note that while these choices were being made, other people also faced difficult decisions. Ask someone to read the piece by Chief Joseph. What can we learn from people like him who have experienced war and its devastation? How would Jesus have responded to this lament? What choices have people in your congregation made in times of war?

Option C: Read the poem, "Man of God." Explain that a military chaplain has the same military training as everyone else, yet with responsibilities to tend to the religious and spiritual needs of people in the unit. A helicopter door gunner is stationed with an automatic weapon at the door of a helicopter in order to shoot at targets as they fly over an area. How are these roles compatible? What contradictions exist? Then read the essay, "Why are You Here?" What are the points of commonality with the chaplain? What are the differences?

Next steps

Encourage everyone to work on the "Leaves and Branches" step. Also, if there are people in your congregation who did alternative service, invite them to share their experiences with the group or invite the youth to videotape their stories.

Ask for two or three volunteers to work on the "Getting It Together" step. If it is not possible to arrange a Sunday school class as suggested, perhaps they could talk with the youth during a Bible study or interview several young people over a meal. Investigate what options are available to young people attracted to the educational benefits promised by the military.

Another way to include youth would be to view the video clip, "Silent Night," which features military action figures in a manger scene. Or, set up a manger scene and insert military action figures (buy them cheap at a thrift store!). How do these scenes illustrate or exaggerate the views of Constantine and the chaplain as described in "Then and Now" and "Man of God"? Explain. (The video clip is available from MCC through Titus Peachey, 717-859-3889 or ttmp@mccus.org.)

Give each person a train car shape made from construction paper. Ask them to write down a quality needed for traveling the train of Christ's peace to reflect on throughout the week. Also, invite them to jot down the primary influences that have formed their convictions about peace, faith, and military service, and any questions that continue to trouble them. These can be brought back to class for further sharing.



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 4: Understanding Violence & Nurturing Peace

Focus: To better understand the underlying causes of violence and what is needed to build peace.

Getting our bearings

Begin by inviting any reflections from the past week. What did the group learn from the train car exercise, their family history, or relating to youth?

If an artist brought a depiction of peace or war, ask them to share about it and invite comments from the group. What do they see? What thoughts or feelings arise?

Explain that the focus of today's lesson is to better understand the root causes of violence. Then ask the group to name situations in which children have been harmed or killed, or bring several copies of a story from your local newspaper. Identify who was hurt and who inflicted the harm.

Refer to the drawing of the iceberg in the student pamphlet and explain the different levels of violence, both above and below the water.

Checking our compass

Explain that children in the Bible also faced violence. Read the passage from Matthew 2 and the reflection, "Understanding Violence." Discuss the iceberg for this story and add any additional responses from the group. Are these or similar beliefs and policies present in your community? How common are they?

In a similar way, peacemaking takes place on different levels. Try to envision a nonviolent outcome to the Bethlehem story and fill in the levels of the iceberg. For instance:

Tip of the iceberg: Armed soldiers do not enter Bethlehem; children grow to adulthood

Middle of the iceberg: Government or institutional policies protect the rights of children; people are trained to protect children from violence

Bottom of the iceberg: All people are created and loved by God; all people are valued and treated with respect

Compare and contrast these icebergs.

What kind of work would it take to transform the violence iceberg into the peace iceberg? Describe the different kinds of tasks required to address the different levels. How long would it take? In which level of action would it be most difficult to work? Why?

Moving on

Choose an issue raised at the beginning of the class and create both violence and peace icebergs on newsprint. Or, follow the instructions in the step, “Share and Compare.” Also, think through what kinds of work it would take to transform the violence to peace. What would need to happen?

One example could be the suffering of people in Colombia. This violence iceberg might include:

- Tip: Thousands of Colombians are killed each year
Millions flee their homes, are hungry and homeless
Crops are destroyed as the government and U.S. fumigate coca fields
- Middle: Unjust economic policies and poor land distribution lead to conflict and coca cultivation
Government, paramilitary and guerrilla forces arm themselves
The U.S. gives military aid to the Colombian government
- Bottom: Superior violence ensures security
Violence is ultimate power
Innocent people may be sacrificed to protect the interests of the powerful

The peace iceberg might look like this:

- Tip: Colombians live in peace and grow life-sustaining crops
- Middle: Colombian institutions maintain a culture of peace
World political and economic structures ensure that resources are shared fairly
Nations provide development assistance rather than military aid
- Bottom: All people are created and loved by God
Justice ensures security
God’s love is ultimate power
All human life is precious and should be protected

Read “Home Coming” as a responsive prayer, alternating every other line between one side of the room and the other. Then pray together about the situations of violence discussed.

Next steps

Work together or individually on the “Get Involved” step. Ask if anyone has ever written a letter to the editor or to a politician. What prompted them to do this? Or why would they choose not to do this? What difference does it make? What happens when Christians speak up? When they are silent? Would the group want to write a joint letter? If so, agree on who it should be sent to and what some of the main points would be. Ask for one or two volunteers to work on a draft and bring it to the next meeting for further refining.

Invite everyone to continue praying about a specific situation of violence, paying special attention to whether the Holy Spirit is calling them to a specific action that would help to nurture peace in that situation.



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 5: Of Soldiers and Peace

Focus: To look at how the church should relate to soldiers and military recruitment.

Getting our bearings

Invite reports or thoughts from the previous week and explain the day's focus.

Option A: Obtain several military recruitment pamphlets from an armed forces recruitment station, or ask the group to describe advertisements they have seen for the military. What images are presented? What is promised? What information is missing? Compare these messages to what Jesus says about being a disciple, as suggested in the step, "The Few, the Proud."

Option B: Ask the group to think about people they know who are serving in the military. Why did they join? What has been their experience? In what ways are they connected to a church? It is important here not to make judgments but rather to focus on the experiences and history that people bring to these questions. What happened in their lives? What would they do differently today?

Checking our compass

Read the Scriptures about the centurion and Cornelius, as well as the piece, "Including Soldiers." What qualities did these men display that amazed Jesus and the early church? How did Jesus and the early church include them? How might these men have changed as a result of these interactions?

Although the New Testament does not spell out exactly what happened in these cases, it is likely that inclusion in the church did change behavior. "The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus," a document from the second century, details how candidates for baptism should be examined before receiving instruction from the church. In addition to moral questions, these candidates also had to answer questions about their professions and trades. Anyone associated with pagan religion or with gladiator events had to change their occupation. Similarly, "a soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill people and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath.... A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected" (Bart Ehrman, ed., *After the New Testament, A Reader in Early Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 353).

Although these rules appear restrictive, they highlight the fact that Christian faith involves not only new beliefs but also changes in behavior and identity. It is also intriguing that the early church had to deal with these issues. Clearly, Christianity was attractive to people from all walks of life, and inviting enough that people would consider making substantial life changes.

Invite the group to list those whom they would find hard to include in their fellowship, e.g.,

Iraqi soldiers, al-Qaida members, U.S. Marines. What qualities would these people need to display before they could join the congregation? How could the congregation be more open to people seeking a different way? In what ways can the church maintain a clear peace witness while also being winsome and inviting?

Moving on

Option A: Ask someone to read “One Small Stone.” How does the group respond to this story? What was uncomfortable? What was hopeful? What is the history of how soldiers have been treated in your congregation? How should your congregation handle such a situation today?

Then ask two volunteers to read “Military Enlistment and Conscience,” one as James and the other as the pastor. Again, how does the group respond? What was uncomfortable in this story? What was hopeful? What would your group do if faced with a similar situation?

Option B: Read “That’s Wonderful?” and “Loyal Americans.” What are some differences between how European Americans and communities of color might view military service? Why? How do military recruitment efforts in these communities differ? What responsibilities does the church have to address these issues and provide alternatives? How could your congregation help?

For additional information, see “Making It Over the Mountain,” *Seeking Peace*, pp. 153-155. Or see the American Friends Service Committee website: <<http://www.afsc.org/youthmil/issues.htm>> and click on “People of Color and the Military.” The article, “Chicano Youth Face War in LA,” notes that Roosevelt High School has five military recruiters for every college counselor.

Close by praying together the prayer, “God of Compassion.”

Next steps

Arrange to view the video, *Change of Command*, with others in the congregation. What questions or ideas come up? What actions would they like to take?

Talk with someone who is in the military or considering this option. What has been their experience? What questions do they have? What other options did (or would) they consider?

Talk with someone who has experienced war or its aftermath. What do they want the church to know or understand?

As preparation for *The Shadow of War # 6*, explore whether the group would like to do the following exercise. Note that this will explore questions surrounding the payment of military taxes and that it would be instructive to figure out group totals for what was paid in income taxes that went to the military and what was given in charitable contributions for the same year. Explain that this would be done in an anonymous way, with each person using two identical slips of paper, one for the total of their federal income tax payments for the previous year and one for the total of their charitable contributions for that year. These would be placed in separate jars and then the totals in each jar would be added together. The group would decide



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 6: Paying for War

Focus: To explore how Christians balance their commitment to peace with the legal obligation to pay taxes used for war.

Getting our bearings

Invite reflections from the week. Are there any thoughts or questions related to viewing *Change of Command* or to conversations with others? Explain the focus of today's lesson.

Option A: In small groups of two or three, invite people to share about their first memory of paying taxes. When and how did they first become aware of the military portion of the income tax? How did they respond?

Option B: Read the reflection from Nathan Barge in "Taxes, War, and Conscience." How does the group respond? Do they agree with the way he connected taxes to the violence he experienced that day? Why or why not? (Another option would be to interview someone who has experienced war first-hand. Has anyone in the group seen a building blown up, the effects of a bomb exploding, or someone who was shot? What connections do they make—or not—to the payment of taxes?)

Option C (especially for U.S. citizens): Take a "penny poll" in the group regarding how they would like to see federal income taxes used. Label five containers as follows: General Government (Legislative, Justice Department, State Department, Treasury), Human Resources (Education, Health and Human Services, Food Stamps, Housing, Labor), Physical Resources (Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Environmental Protection, Transportation), Current Military, and Past Military (veterans benefits and interest on the national debt due to past military spending). Give each person ten pennies to distribute as they would like among the containers. How did the class distribute these funds? Compare these percentages to how these taxes are actually used. (For Fiscal Year 2003, the War Resister's League calculates these to be: 16 percent, 32 percent, 6 percent, 26 percent, and 20 percent; see www.warresisters.org.) Where are the biggest differences? What would the group most like to change about how their taxes are used?

Checking our compass

Jesus also faced questions about taxes. Ask someone to read the passage, "God, Caesar, and Taxes." Why were the people surprised? How might they have understood Jesus' answer?

Note that this particular tax was a head tax, demanded by Rome from all its subject peoples. Not only was it paid to Rome, but it also had to be paid with a Roman coin bearing the image of Caesar. Thus, it forced people to essentially admit, "one's body belonged to Caesar" (Herzog, *Jesus, Justice and the Reign of God*, p. 231). No wonder this was such a problem tax! For the Jews believed that they belonged to God. As they knew from Genesis, they were made in God's image, not Caesar's. Thus, when Jesus talked about giving to God what belongs to God, he was reminding people of that fact. As a conquered people, perhaps they had to pay this tax, but they must be sure not to give to Caesar more than what was his. They must take care

not to become minted in his image. They belonged to God and should seek God's will on earth. How has the group understood Jesus' words here? What sermons or teachings have they heard on this passage? How is their life situation different from or similar to Jesus' setting? How do their taxes support violence or injustice? How do they support efforts that are more compatible with God's will for the world?

Moving on

Option A: If the group brought the amounts of their charitable contributions and federal income taxes, ask them to place the anonymous slips in separate jars, one for contributions and one for taxes. Quickly add each set of figures to arrive at group totals. Multiply the military percentage to arrive at the military portion of these taxes. Discuss the questions suggested in the step. How do the two figures compare? How do they reflect Jesus' concerns? What changes would they like to see? What might they be willing to try? Write letters? Vote? Give more away? Reduce one's income and tax liability? Support a peace tax fund? Withhold a symbolic amount? Withhold the full military portion of their tax obligation? Something else?

Option B: Review the history of this question as summarized in "To Pay or Not to Pay" by Carol Penner, and read "Being True to Jesus" by Hartzler. How is conscription of money similar to or different from conscription of people? How important is this issue? Should Christians be doing more to oversee what their money is doing? What are some options? What are they willing to try? See ideas listed in Option A above.

Option C: View the video, *Compelled by Conscience*, or interview someone who has tried to avoid paying military taxes. What was their experience? What are their current thoughts on this? Should this be an issue of conscience for Christians? What would the group want to do together? See ideas listed in Option A above.

Close by praying the litany together.

Next steps

If you did not do the "Year in Review" step as a group, encourage people to look at this individually or as a family and answer the accompanying questions.

Ask for a volunteer to research the history of this issue in your congregation. How did people respond during the world wars when there was much social pressure to buy Liberty Bonds or contribute in other ways to the war? Over the years, who has felt strongly about this issue? How did others respond? What is the current thinking on this question?

Encourage everyone to choose one of the ideas listed in Option A of *Moving on*.

Ask for a volunteer to obtain information from one of the organizations listed.



THE SHADOW OF WAR # 7: The Work of Our Hands

Focus: To explore how one's Christian peace commitment should affect career choices and decisions on the job.

Getting our bearings

Invite reflections and reports from the previous week. What was learned about the congregation's history related to the payment of war taxes? What information is available from groups working on this issue? What further thoughts or questions came up? Explain that today's focus will look at one's daily work and career choices.

Option A: Ask the group to name occupations they would consider to be off-limits for Christians, e.g., gambling, prostitution, and military service. Why would these be wrong? How do they conflict with Christian values and beliefs?

Option B: Ask the group to name businesses in your community that currently have military contracts. Do any in the group work for or know people who work for these companies? Why do companies accept military contracts? What do these contracts or businesses promise? At what points would military work conflict with Christian values and beliefs?

Checking our compass

The early church also had to deal with beliefs and practices in their communities that clashed with their newfound faith in God. Read the Acts passage along with "Paul in Ephesus."

It is difficult today to understand a situation in which tangible idols were worshiped, since people in our cultures no longer do this in obvious ways. In Ephesus at that time, people believed that their idols and worship rituals would guarantee security, well-being, and good fortune. They believed that if they honored and served these gods, the gods would in turn bless and prosper them. This was fine for those who were able to work the system or who were experiencing health and abundance. Yet for many people, this system did not work and they felt bound by evil spirits, illness, and poverty.

The Christian message was thus liberating for many people. It was a relief not to serve these gods or perform these rituals. Instead, they were freed to serve the true God, a God who loved and cared for them, and who did not just reward those who could perform the right ceremonies. Rather, this God wanted justice and welfare for all, even the most humble, sick, and poor.

Refer back to the issues raised in Option A or B at the beginning of the session. How do those activities serve a similar purpose of promising to guarantee security, health, and prosperity? At what point do they become idolatrous, false gods "made with hands," who cannot deliver on their promises? When and how should Christians separate themselves from these gods?

Moving on

Read “Sharing the Harmer’s Guilt” and then “Weapons Made with Hands.” Does the group agree that weapons are similar to the idols of Ephesus? Why or why not? Do they agree that Christians should not practice vengeance or make such weapons? That those who make weapons “share the harmer’s guilt”? Why or why not? What would they have done if faced with Sarah’s situation?

In small groups, invite everyone to follow the step, “Be All You Can Be.” Also, invite them to share situations in which they or someone they know refused a job or an assignment because it conflicted with their values. What beliefs guided their responses? What kinds of support should the church provide in these situations? What if jobs are scarce and people feel that there few alternatives?

Next steps

If you have access to the Internet, before class, print out a list of defense contractors in your home community and follow the suggestions in the step, “Hammering Swords into Plowshares.”

Ask someone to research the history of this issue in your community. Are there people in the congregation or the community who faced situations similar to Sarah Wenger? What decisions did they make? How did this affect them? How did the community around them respond?

Conclude with the prayer, “Remembering those people....”

Notes:



SPIRITUALITY OF PEACE #1: Practicing Peace

Focus: To explore how and why spiritual disciplines are needed for the journey with Jesus.

Getting our bearings

Option A: Ask the group to reflect individually or in small groups about what spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, meditation, Bible reading, fasting, spiritual retreats, worship) they have found most helpful. When in their lives were they most aware of their dependence on God, most likely to use these disciplines? When have they been least attentive to God? What would they most like to change about their worship and prayer life?

Option B: Invite to the group someone from your congregation who is known to pray faithfully or who has much spiritual wisdom. Invite them to share about what spiritual disciplines they keep. What has been most helpful and what most challenging? (This may take considerable time and thus require a separate session.) Another option would be to ask each person to think of someone who is a model for them in their Christian life. What spiritual disciplines does that person keep? How do they nurture their Christian faith?

Checking our compass

Read the passage from Mark and discuss why Jesus spent time in prayer.

What did Jesus gain through prayer, worship, and immersion in the Scriptures? Dan Epp-Tiessen suggests that these disciplines enabled Jesus to nurture and maintain a “vision of God’s alternative kingdom of peace and justice.” Wink states it this way: “Intercession is spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces. It infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present” (*Engaging the Powers*, p. 298).

In other words, the powers that rule the world want us to believe that the way things are is the way they must be, that there is no possible alternative to the current ruling systems. However, worship, prayer, meditation, and fasting help us to envision and begin to live as God wants us to. These disciplines link us to God’s prophetic voice, which declares that a “thinkable alternative can be imagined, characterized, and lived in” (Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*, p. 224).

Invite class members to reflect on the statements quoted above. When have they experienced prayer or worship in this way? In what ways have spiritual disciplines enabled them to imagine and live more in line with God’s will and purpose for the world?

Pray the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) together slowly, asking people to pay special attention to the words. What words or phrases stand out in a new way?

Moving on

Option A: Refer to the essay, “A Mennonite and an Oblate.” Note that after Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century, the tradition of religious orders was one way in which some Christians continued to emphasize community, simplicity, service, and peacemaking. Discuss the questions on that page. Also, what do people find attractive about this option? What might be problematic? Are there ways that congregations or small groups could provide similar kinds of support and accountability?

Option B: Focus on “Rhythms of Worship.” How does the group respond to this passage? Do they agree or not? How have they experienced the rhythms of worship, of going to church? In what ways have these rhythms provided nurture and comfort? How have they been more routine than life giving?

Option C: Read “The Mute’s Testimony.” When have they felt similar to the mute? When have they experienced the poem’s reassurance that “an enormous ear strains to hear me”? When have they not experienced that comfort? Can they affirm this even though it may not be felt?

Next steps

Encourage each person to follow the “Ask and Receive” step. Another option would be to ask each person to pray for a specific group in the congregation, e.g., children, youth, leaders, seniors, Sunday school teachers, young adults, middle-aged folks.

Invite several volunteers to work on the step, “Share the Joy.” Another option would be to invite one or two people to share with the congregation about how they practice spiritual disciplines and how this has changed them. Or several people could be interviewed about this.

Close by praying together “The Bread of Life.”

Notes:



SPIRITUALITY OF PEACE # 2: Fullness of Life

Focus: To examine what gives true meaning to life and how to find this fullness for oneself.

Getting our bearings

Option A: Invite the group to share the first words or images that come to mind when they hear the phrase, “fullness of life.” In what ways do they feel their lives are full? In what areas do they feel that something is lacking?

Option B: Prepare a list of various aspects of life, such as work, eating, sleep, physical exercise, time with family and friends, spiritual disciplines, relaxation, cleanliness. Ask each person to note the areas in which they generally maintain good habits. What factors help them to be disciplined in these areas? An internalized sense of responsibility? habit? felt need? accountability to others? meaningfulness or fulfillment? In what areas is it harder to maintain good practices? Why?

Checking our compass

Ask for two volunteers, one to read the passage from Mark and the other to read “Fullness of Life” by Dorothee Soelle. How does the group respond to Soelle’s interpretation?

It may be helpful to look at the social setting in which this rich man addressed Jesus. This was a world in which the gap kept widening between a very wealthy class and the majority of people who were barely surviving. As heavy taxes, illness, or some other misfortune devastated peasant farmers, the wealthy could lend to them at high interest. This often forced those less fortunate into an ever-deepening cycle of debt, until they lost their land and were compelled to work for others as tenant farmers or day laborers.

Moses’ law included several instructions to prevent this very situation. For instance, the Hebrew people were commanded to lend without interest (Deuteronomy 23:19-20), practice debt forgiveness every seven years (Deuteronomy 15:1-11), and implement a year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55). The religious and political rulers of Palestine, however, chose to ignore these laws and instead insisted that worshipping God meant primarily temple sacrifice, ritual purity, and careful observance of the Sabbath. Wealth enabled them to observe these rules, while extreme poverty made these practices impossible for most of the people. In this way, the rich could view their wealth as a sign of God’s blessing and the poverty of others a result of their failure to keep God’s law.

Yet, the wealthy man in this story sensed that something was wrong. Perhaps he was missing something important, something that could give his life true meaning and fulfillment. Although he kept the letter of the law, he had missed its underlying purpose. This is what Jesus wanted him to see. Worshipping God is not just about keeping certain rules; it is also about justice and compassion. It is about caring for and protecting the most vulnerable members of the

community. It is about loving others as God does. Thus, Jesus is not exaggerating here. He is simply asking this man to redistribute the possessions and lands that originally belonged to his brothers and sisters. He is asking him to do as Zaccheus did and give away the wealth that he had acquired at the expense of others (Luke 19:8).

This concern for the poor continued to hold a central place in the early church. In the third century, the pagan emperor Julian complained that the “impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well” (Julian, Ep. 22). And Cyprian, who became the bishop of Carthage, is a good example of one who responded positively to Jesus’ challenge. Originally a wealthy ruler in that city, he admitted that he was drawn to fine clothing, food, and honor. Yet, he found that the rich person “is held in bondage by his gold, and is the slave of his luxury and wealth rather than their master” (Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, p. 8). In finally choosing to become a Christian, Cyprian sold his lands and thereafter lived simply and hospitably, with his home open to the poor.

Divide the group in half. Ask one group to focus on how their church is like the rich person who came to Jesus. How might it have too much? How might it be focusing on the wrong things? How might wealth and privilege get in the way of truly worshipping God? How might these things bring bondage?

Ask the other group to address how their church is faithful to Jesus and his challenge to empty oneself. How do they honor God’s concern for justice and compassion? How does this contribute to finding fullness of life?

After both groups share, look again at Soelle’s statement, “Fullness of life does not come when you already have everything. You have to become empty for God’s fullness.” Do they agree? Why or why not? Invite people to reflect on whether this has ever been true for them. When have they felt empty, especially needful of God’s help and love? When have they felt most full, most touched by God’s grace? What is one thing that blocks their dependence on God that could be given up or given away?

Moving on

Option A: Read the passage, “With Prayer and Fasting,” by Hedy Sawadsky. In pairs or small groups, invite them to share about their experiences with fasting. When have they done this? How was it helpful—or not—in focusing on God and hearing God’s voice?

Option B: Read “Staying Power” by Henry Krause. Ask the group to identify people they would see as having this kind of staying power or patient endurance. What nurtures and sustains these people? What would help them strengthen their own endurance?

Option C: Read “Spiritual Discipline,” especially the sentence: “Spiritual discipline isn’t about adding more busyness to life. It’s about sorting through all the good things that we do to find out what is essential.” Do people agree or not? How do they sort through the many demands of life and choose what gets priority? In what areas of their lives would they like to become more intentional and disciplined?



CREATION CARE # 1: Let All Creation Praise

Focus: To explore how creation reveals God's glory and love, and how thanksgiving is the way in which creation returns that love back to God.

Getting our bearings

Option A: Play several minutes of the chorus, "The Heavens are Telling," from a recording of Haydn's oratorio, *Creation*. Invite the group to reflect on how nature reveals God's glory. As they listen to the music, what images or words come to mind? What do the heavens and earth tell us about God?

Option B: Assemble a collection of varied nature scenes (e.g., mountains, sky, ocean, lakeshore, streams, fields, wooded areas, gardens, parks, etc.) Ask each person to choose one scene that they especially enjoy. Then ask them to share in pairs or small groups why they made that choice. What do they most appreciate about that setting? What do they learn about God there?

Keep these pictures and post them around the room for the rest of these sessions. Or, if you have an artist in the group, invite him or her to bring or create a piece that can be an ongoing visual reminder of creation. Or, you may want to ask children in the congregation to draw or paint their favorite nature scenes.

Checking our compass

Divide the group in half and read Psalm 148:1-5 responsively. Or sing together 50 or 51 from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, both of which are based on this psalm. Then read or summarize, "A Life Cycle of Thanksgiving." Especially note Widrick's emphasis that God's love expresses itself in creation and that thanksgiving is the way in which creation returns that love to God. How do hills, plants, birds, and animals offer praise to God? How do humans? How is our praise similar to or different from this praise? How are all parts linked together in this offering of praise? Use the suggested questions and answer them together or individually.

If there is time, do the step, "A Song for You," or ask a volunteer to do this during the next week.

Moving on

Option A: Read "The Best Part." Hanson considers several themes in this piece: reducing her dependence on cars and gas, modeling this for others, and finding refreshment and renewal in nature. Invite the group to think about how they incorporate these values into their daily routines. What environmental choices have they made and how have these yielded unexpected benefits? Is there an additional step they can take that would both enrich their life and help them live in more sustainable ways?



CREATION CARE #2: The Master Artist

Focus: To look at creation as God’s “masterwork,” and reflect on how humans should treat nature.

Getting our bearings

Invite reflections from the previous week. What did the group learn from the Psalms or from examining their household’s waste stream? What items did they bring to represent what they observed or heard from nature? Assemble these on a table or shelf as a reminder of what was shared.

Ask each person to identify a place in nature they would most want to preserve as a natural sanctuary. How would they respond if this place were vandalized or fundamentally altered? If they knew that such damage was planned, what would they do to prevent it?

Checking our compass

Read through Genesis 1, with a different person reading each paragraph. Or use the dramatic poem, “The Creation,” by American poet James Weldon Johnson. (It can be found at www.newtrix.com/poems/jwj-poem.htm.) During the reading, encourage everyone to picture God at work. What do they see? Count how many times God uses the word “good.” Can they imagine that God truly delights in this creation, much as an artist who is pleased with his or her work?

Read or summarize “Living in God’s Work of Art.” How does the group respond to this piece? How is creation like a piece of art? How is it different? How do they respond to the statement, “To destroy any part of God’s creation is to sin against God”? What are good and legitimate uses of creation? What uses are destructive and sinful?

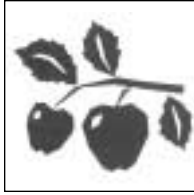
Moving on

Option A: One controversial issue today concerns the preservation of plants, birds, and animals that are in danger of extinction. Invite the group to respond to the question, “Why save endangered species?” Then read the answers given by the children in that article. How many of the group’s answers were similar to these? How many reflected the understanding that these species may be useful to humans? How does creation have value apart from human use? (Note that next week’s lesson will deal with the idea of human dominion over the earth.)

Ask someone to read “A Procession of Animals.” Why might a child link the church with killing animals? How does your congregation celebrate life and all aspects of creation? What additional steps could be taken?

Option B: Watch and discuss the video, *Keeping the Earth*, as suggested in the step, “Honor Your Elders.” (Or arrange a separate time to do this.)

Close by reading together the verses from Job 12, which begin “But ask the animals....”



CREATION CARE # 3: Serve the Earth

Focus: To examine the role of human beings in creation and what it means to “have dominion.”

Getting our bearings

Invite responses from the previous week. What did the group learn from their study of nature? From pondering Dostoevsky’s statement?

Explain that the focus of today’s lesson will be on the role and purpose of human beings in creation. Invite the group to reflect on what teachings they received from their parents or the church about this.

Why did God create human beings? What responsibilities or privileges were they given? List responses on a board or flipchart. Then reflect on what the dominant culture teaches about this. What messages or assumptions about nature are seen in advertisements, the media, or government policies? How do these messages compare to the church’s teachings?

Checking our compass

Read Genesis 1:27-28 and then the piece, “Be Fruitful and Mature,” which provides an alternative translation of these verses. How does the group respond to this? How is it different from or similar to the teachings they identified above?

One key concept in this discussion is the understanding of what it means to have dominion or rule over others. Often, this kind of power is understood as the capacity and right to do whatever one wants, as well as the ability to force others to do one’s bidding.

However, as Epp-Tiessen explains in “Serve the Earth,” the biblical understanding of power and authority emphasizes service and responsibility. It is strength used on behalf of others, as when a shepherd guides and protects his sheep or a mother hen shelters her chicks. Jesus often used this imagery for himself and demonstrated by his life that he came “not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

Of course, Israel’s kings and leaders often failed to live up to this ideal, and the prophets repeatedly warned them about the consequences of using their power to oppress or dominate others. As Ezekiel 34 makes clear, God cares deeply about those who are weak, sick, injured, and lost, and will hold accountable those who have been given responsibility for their care.

How does the group respond to this understanding of power? Again, how is this different from or similar to the ways that our society usually understands power and strength? Which kind of power best fulfills God’s expectations for human responsibility toward the earth? Explore what images best describe these responsibilities, e.g., steward, caretaker, ruler, gardener, sovereign, owner.

Moving on

Read or summarize the story of “One Church.” If your group owns land or buildings, reflect on how it has cared for these. In what ways are they shared with the larger community? Are there additional things that could be done?

Take a walk in your neighborhood or ask for volunteers to do some research over the next week. Pay attention to how churches in your area use land. What kinds of open spaces are available to people? Also, who in your community cares about this? Who has proposed or advocated for parks or gardens? Is there a current need in your community for a playground, park, or community garden? If so, how might the group be involved in making this a reality?

Close by praying together 744 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Next steps

If any new ideas emerged, assign someone to draw up a plan of action for the group to work on.

Read over the creation pledge and choose one or two things to do during the next week. Or write your own creation pledge, as suggested in the “Make & Take” step.

In preparation for next week, ask for three volunteers: one each to check the budget of the congregation, the conference, and the denomination for what kinds of support are given to environmental programs, if any.

Work on the step, “Hug a Tree Today.” Learn what environmental concerns exist in your community and find a way to get involved in addressing one of these.

Notes:



CREATION CARE # 4: The Mission

Focus: To explore how resurrection and the mission of the church extend to all of creation.

Getting our bearings

Invite any reflections from the past week. Did anyone do the creation pledge? What thoughts do they have on that experience?

Option A: Ask the group to respond to the questions, “Will God save the earth? Will creation be redeemed?” Ask them to line up along a continuum, with one side of the room meaning yes and the other side meaning no; being in the middle means not being sure. Invite them to explain why they placed themselves where they did.

Option B: As Schmidt notes in “Salvation for All,” the church has emphasized God’s will to save individuals, with little attention given to God’s will for all of creation. Indeed, some groups stress that God will rapture Christians away from the earth and then destroy it. Invite the group to reflect on these claims. Which do they believe is more biblical? Why has there been so much stress on human salvation? What biblical stories or verses can they name that highlight God’s concern for all creation?

Checking our compass

Ask four people to read Psalm 96:10-13, Psalm 98:7-9, Isaiah 42:10-13, and Romans 8:18-23. As they read, jot on a board the parts of creation that are called to praise God. Are there any surprises? Discuss the reasons given for why these parts of creation should join in praising God. How might God’s justice and righteousness extend to all of creation?

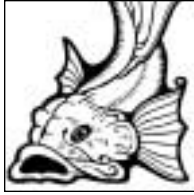
Read or summarize “The Mission.” How does the group respond to this understanding of the mission of the church, this understanding of the resurrection? How do they respond to the statements that “the gospel of resurrection reaches out to endangered species as well as endangered souls,” that “soil evangelism” should accompany “soul evangelism”? What would be different if the church believed and taught this understanding of salvation?

Moving on

Option A: Read or summarize “Noah’s Call.” How does the group respond to this piece? How is Burkholder’s work like Noah’s? How is it different?

Option B: Work through the step, “Separation of Church and State.” What did the group learn about congregational, conference, and denominational support for environmental programs? Should there be more or less support? To what extent is this the responsibility of other groups, such as volunteer associations or governments (townships, cities, states, provinces, or nations)? How should Christians be involved?

Option C: Work on the “Down with Styrofoam” step. List the ways in which your group has



CREATION CARE # 5: Whose Garden?

Focus: To emphasize God's ownership of creation and examine how Christians should respond when creation is harmed.

Getting our bearings

Prior to meeting, cover any nature scenes/objects in the room with gray or sand colored paper or cloth to represent the world being dead and lifeless. Read "The Last Fish" by Widrick. What images or colors come to mind? What feelings and thoughts? Does the group agree that humans are destroying the earth for the sake of money? That humanity will not learn to care for the earth until it is too late?

Checking our compass

Read Jeremiah 12:4 and then refer to "Whose Garden?" This essay reiterates the concern discussed in the previous lesson about how human beings view creation. Is it a resource to exploit or a gift to treasure and care for tenderly? How do people continue to exploit the earth and live as if God does not see or care about what is done to the earth? What steps have been taken to be more careful and responsible?

Invite the group to name local environmental issues that are currently receiving attention in your community, e.g., poor air quality, unsafe drinking water, preservation of farmland, acid rain, landfill expansion. Are there some concerns that get little support or attention, e.g., toxic problems on native reservations or in poor neighborhoods? What factors contribute to these problems? Who are the major players? How do race and class affect the problem? What steps are being taken to improve the situation? Is there one particular concern that the group would like to address further? Is there someone who could talk with you further about this, perhaps in the next session? Or would someone be willing to research the issue and report back with more information?

Moving on

Option A: Explain the concept of the "Ecological Footprint" or read that essay. Ask for several volunteers to work through the website in the next week and report back on their findings, along with what changes they want to consider. Or as a way to encourage others, you may want to work through this yourself and report to the group.

Ask each person to work through the "Earthkeepers' Checklist." How do they react to this? How many of these items are already a part of their life? How many are new? (If there is not time in class, this could be done over the week and brought back at the next session.) Another option would be to use three columns: what their parents did, what they do, and what they see their children doing.

Option B: Look at "An Invitation to the Church." Which of these actions does the group already do? Which would they like to adopt? Are there other steps the church could take that would indicate being aware of God's watchful concern?

Option C: One issue not directly addressed in the pamphlets is the destruction of the earth that happens as a result of war and militarism. This reality lies behind Jeremiah 12:4, as well as verses 10-12. As stated in *The Missing Peace*, “When people make war, or when they prepare for war in the name of deterrence, nature suffers” (p. 255). (For additional information, see *The Missing Peace*, Chapter 13, “Nature and the Ecology of Warfare: Peace with the Land.”) Are there areas in your community that have been affected by military preparations or testing? Are there people in your community who have experienced or observed environmental destruction caused by war? If this is an area of interest, how might the group become more involved in addressing it?

Next steps

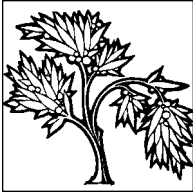
Arrange to view the 45-minute video, *Advertising and the End of the World*, by Sut Jhally, available from the MCC Resource Library. This gives a disturbing look at how our consumption-based economy is maintained and driven by advertising, and how this promotes short-term, individualistic values with little attention to long-term, sustainable policies for the common good.

Ask someone to do the “Surf the ‘Net” step and research the website of the Mennonite Environmental Task Force.

In preparation for Creation Care # 6, ask someone to research the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, as suggested in the “Back to Nature” step in that pamphlet.

Ask for a volunteer to check the church library. What resources are included? Are any of the resources suggested in these pamphlets included?

Notes:



CREATION CARE # 6: Plant the Seeds

Focus: To celebrate the nourishment and joy received from creation and renew commitments to its ongoing care.

Getting our bearings

If you covered nature scenes/objects in the room, remove some of those for today, but allow some to remain in order to represent the areas of creation that still await restoration. Receive any reports that people have prepared from last week. What did they discover or what thoughts do they have about the Mennonite Environmental Task Force? Their “Ecological Footprint”? The “Earthkeepers’ Checklist”?

If you invited someone to the group who is active on an environmental issue, allow them to tell their story. How did they decide to become involved? What was their motivation? What has been their experience? How might others in the group contribute to their work?

Checking our compass

Read Revelation 22:1-2. What phrases or images are especially striking? What feelings or emotions does this image evoke? Has anyone seen a painting of this scene? If your group enjoys visual images, invite them to draw or depict the scene. Note that this image is also found in Ezekiel 47:12. It is also similar to the images of trees and rivers in the Garden of Eden. Clearly, it is a hopeful picture, speaking of abundance, restoration, and health ... of nature existing in harmony with human civilization. How does this scene fit the group’s images of heaven, or of what God ultimately intends for the earth when God’s reign is complete? To what extent is God’s reign already evident in the world, already restoring creation? What is the church’s role in this?

Moving on

Option A: Refer to “Have You Thanked a Green Plant Today?” This article highlights how essential it is to cultivate a deep appreciation for nature. It also emphasizes that it is important to go beyond individual actions and also “work within the business and political world if improvements are to have a lasting effect.” How does the group respond to this statement? Do they agree or not? What new steps are they willing to take as a result of this study?

Also, respond to the suggested questions. In what specific ways does your group teach children about the earth? What do children teach adults about the world?

Option B: Read or summarize “Hull’s Gulch.” How does the group respond to this story? Do they agree with how members of Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship became involved in that project? Refer back to Creation Care # 2 and your discussion about good and bad ways to use nature. What kinds of development are legitimate? What are destructive? Would they change any of those answers or add additional qualifications? What areas in your local area should be preserved? What guidelines should be used to decide? Is there anyone in the group or in your

