

## **Sermon Starters for Lent**

### **Introduction**

The Conference Board of Church and Society offers these Sermon Starters for Lent.

The goal is to acquaint our congregations with the Social Principles as found in The Book of Discipline. They are summarized in “Our Social Creed”. *(It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in every congregation. It is further recommended that “Our Social Creed” be frequently used in Sunday worship. 2004 The Book of Discipline, paragraph 166).*

It is our recommendation that The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church be the theme for Lent. A good way to do that is to use The Social Creed in every worship service. Sometimes it might be used as a creed; sometimes as a litany (attached). It is helpful to have copies of “Social Principles of The United Methodist Church” available for distribution. They are available in quantity from the General Board of Church and Society.

The Sermon Starters, using 2009 lectionary texts for the six Sundays in Lent are an attempt to relate these texts to the Social Creed. You will find two formats – one using all the lectionary texts and another, using just the Gospel.

An excellent resource on Mark’s Gospel, now in its second edition is Binding the Strong Man, A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus, Chad Myers.

### **March 1, 2009**

Mark 1:9-15

Jesus, following John, stands firmly in the prophetic tradition. John is arrested and will die. Jesus, too, will be arrested and die. Why? Is it for advocating the Kingdom of God? What is that “kingdom”, then and now? Some commentators suggest that we could better call these kingdoms empires. What was the empire resisted by John and Jesus? What are today’s empires that may be resisted by the empire of God? How well do present empires promote our social principles and creed? It is well to remember that one is not crucified for telling children’s stories.

March 8, 2009

Mark 8:31-38

Am I ashamed of Jesus' words? What would I really like to say about this text or any other text? Do I think our Social Principles and Creed amplify the message of Jesus, but to focus on them too much will cause me some suffering and rejection? "The son of man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected..." "Those who are ashamed of me..." Is there a cross for me to take up?

Story: A pastor's wife came home from shopping with a new dress. After asking the price, her husband said, "you know we can't afford that." "I know," she replied, "But the devil was there and said I should buy it." "You should have replied, "Get behind me, Satan!" "I did, he did, and said, "It looks wonderful from every angle."

March 15, 2009

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; I Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

**Social Creed Affirmation** "We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends."

**Scripture themes:** for giving foundational meaning to this portion of the Social Creed:

- 1) Idolatry is central in all the material.
- 2) Genesis in the Ten Commandments reminds us not to make an idol for ourselves.
- 3) The Psalm states that the law of the Lord is more to be desired than gold which we so often idolize!
- 4) Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians says that even God's foolishness and weakness are wiser and stronger than ours. So much for the "gods" we proclaim. Christ is not an idol but the very power and wisdom of God!
- 5) In the Gospel of John we discover again that even our "temples" are sometimes looked at as if idols. Our gifts may be idolized. It is Christ and not any of our idols which is lasting.

We are called to remember who we are; we are called to remember whose we are! When the relationships are clear we need no idols and must rather confess the sin of wherever and whenever we have erected them: physically, emotionally, spiritually. Then turn again to worship the true Creator of all that is!

March 22, 2009

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

**Social Creed Affirmation** “We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.”

**Scripture themes:** It is our own sinfulness that keeps us from peace. The witness of our living righteously can be an encouragement to others to live at peace.

- 1) In Numbers as the people wandered in the wilderness Moses prayed for the people asking God, in light of their sinfulness to take evil from them.
- 2) The Psalmist believes that because of sinful ways real affliction was endured.
- 3) The writer of the Letter to the Ephesians is blunt: “You are dead through trespasses and sins. But the hope offered is that by grace we are saved – even when we have led ourselves to death through our sin.
- 4) John calling again on the symbol of light reminds us of how often we seem to love darkness rather than light – because our deeds are evil.

By grace we are saved through faith and in salvation find meaningful and lasting peace. Peace is God’s gift not just for us but for all people everywhere. Strong implications are here not only for our personal lives but for the life of the nations.

March 29, 2009

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

**Social Creed Affirmation** “We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world.”

**Scripture themes:**

The “triumph of God’s Word” occurs when the Word takes root in our lives in real and committed ways.

- 1) Jeremiah reminds us of God’s new covenant when the Law of God is written on our hearts. God shall be our God. We shall be God’s people.
- 2) The Psalmist knows that God’s purposes can take root in our lives when we are cleansed from our sin and we are washed thoroughly from our iniquity.

- 3) The source of eternal salvation, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, is in obeying God even as Jesus did.
- 4) Service undergirds the living out of God's Word in the Gospel: Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

It is in incorporating the Word, Purpose and Spirit of God's love into our lives and lived out in the world that the Gospel becomes evident in the world and is the triumph of God's Creative Work in the affairs of humankind.

April 5, 2009

Mark 14:1-15:47

Use this long reading as both scripture reading and sermon. At the beginning announce that the reading will stop at various places for reflection. The reflections may be your own and/or congregational. Keeping the Lenten theme in mind, the reflections should relate to The Social Creed. For example (and only "for example", there are many ways to go,) after v. 7, "For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me.", you could ask for comments or "We believe in the right and duty of persons to work...and in the protection of their welfare." Or, "What is the relation between "you will not always have me" and "the present and final triumph of God's word."

Other suggested stops:

"in remembrance of her"

"rights of men, women..."

"one of you will betray me"

Do we do the same-ignore social responsibilities

"I will never again drink"

Now – fulfilled or still waiting?

"keep awake" (betrayal)

Is Social Creed a wake-up call?

"what you (God) wants"

Is Social Creed a guide?

### **Our Social Creed**

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world.  
Amen.

**The Social Creed Litany**

*God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ calls us by grace  
to be renewed in the image of our Creator,  
that we may be one in divine love for the world*

Today is the day we accept that God  
embraces all hues of humanity,  
cares for the plight of the world's children, and  
weeps as we undo earth's goodness.

*And so shall we.*

Today is the day we accept that god  
values the health, healing and wholeness of all life,  
delights in diversity and difference and  
favors hospitality turning strangers into friends.

*And so shall we.*

Today is the day we accept that god  
cries at the masses of starving people,  
abhors the increasing disparity between rich and poor,  
and years for the just treatment of workers in the marketplace.

*And so shall we.*

Today is the day we accept that God  
deplores the violence in our homes and streets,  
rebukes the world's warring madness, and  
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.

*And so shall we.*

Today is the day we accept that God  
rejoices when the hungry are fed,  
celebrates when captives are set free,  
and exults when the wolf lies with the lamb,

*And so shall we.*

*God in the spirit revealed in Jesus Christ calls us by grace to make the reign  
of God visible in our homes, churches, communities, nations and world.*