



Now to  
**EACH ONE**  
the *manifestation*  
of the Spirit  
is given for the  
**common good.**

1 Corinthians 12:7



Image description: 7 blue accessibility logos at the top of the image (wheelchair user, neurodivergence, blind, uses cane, deaf, ASL, assistance animal) with multicolored drawn flowers and the PDC (Presbyterians for Disability Concerns) logo at the bottom. In the center it says: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7

# Disability Inclusion Sunday Worship Material

Created by members of Presbyterians (USA)  
For Disability Concerns Network  
2022

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## WORSHIP – SCRIPTURE

### Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

<sup>11</sup>At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse— a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

<sup>22</sup>"For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good." I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

**Thoughts:** "stupid, foolish, and having no understanding" are harsh words to person with disability. Through Jeremiah, God is speaking of people who do not willingly refrain from sin. No matter the level of ability or the type of disability, every member of the human family needs restoration to wholeness through use of kind and wholeness words and care.

### Psalms 14

<sup>1</sup> Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."  
They are corrupt; they do abominable deeds;  
there is no one who does good.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven on  
humankind  
to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.

<sup>3</sup> They have all gone astray; they are all alike  
perverse;  
there is no one who does good,  
no, not one.

<sup>4</sup> Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers  
who eat up my people as they eat bread  
and do not call upon the LORD?

<sup>5</sup> There they shall be in great terror,  
for God is with the company of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> You would confound the plans of the poor,  
but the LORD is their refuge.

<sup>7</sup> O that deliverance for Israel would come from  
Zion!

When the LORD restores the fortunes of his  
people,  
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

**Thoughts:** Psalms 14 vv. 1-4 define “fools” as those who willingly and knowingly reject God. They have rejected God’s offer of salvation to every human but these have, in effect, said, “no thanks”.

\*Contrast remainder of the psalm, noting that God is with the righteous, refuge for the poor, and will restore God’s people.

## 1 Timothy 1:12-17

<sup>12</sup>I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, <sup>13</sup>even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me<sup>[a]</sup> with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup>But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup>To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible,<sup>[b]</sup> the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.<sup>[c]</sup> Amen.

**Thoughts:** Timothy explains that God is redemptive, forgiving, and full of mercy and grace. God seeks those who seek God. As we consider the effects our words have on those to whom we minister, we are obligated to carefully select our words so as to heal and restore.

## Luke 15:1-10

**15** Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup>Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

<sup>8</sup>“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”



## Speaking Words that Welcome

Language, Messages, and Communications (with Visual Cues)

Our words matter. When we are teaching, preaching, and leading our words matter. Language around ability and disability should be positive and affirming, or *ability positive*. In addition to the language we choose, we need to exercise intentionality about the messages we share about differing abilities as we approach scripture, employ curriculum, and select or create music and liturgy. Finally, to welcome all, we should look to expand our methods of communication, especially enhancing our words with visual cues.

### Welcoming Language

Our positive view and language around disability helps our whole congregation have a more positive view of people of all abilities.

- Part of being ability positive is to be mindful about using [person first or identity first language](#). Here are some other resources:
  - [This video](#) from Special Olympics is accessible and memorable. o For the use of language in formal writing, check [this resource](#). o Forbes has a helpful article on [the dos and don'ts of identity language](#). o The National Youth Leadership Network offers [this youth-focused resource](#).
  - For writers and those who prepare written materials, check out the [Guidelines for Writing](#) sheet from the ADA National Network.
- When in doubt about when to use person first or identity first language, pay attention to how a disabled person speaks of themselves and model your language after theirs.
- Be careful to talk about mobility supports as gifts from God that help people engage fully. Stay away from “wheelchair bound,” instead talk about “using a wheelchair,” or “wheelchair users.”

### Welcoming Messages

Many of us have come to recognize the gender-biased or racially-biased messages we encounter in Bible stories, lesson plans, and hymnody, whether they be intentional or unintentional, and we have learned ways of mitigating the exclusion they create. We may not be as versed in identifying and addressing unwelcoming messages about ability diversity.

## Messages in Scripture

The portrayal of disability in the Bible can be a challenge for us, with disability sometimes being used to highlight healing, weakness, or someone being unfit for religious service. As preachers, teachers, and leaders, we need to engage with these texts and do the hard work of understanding them with a more positive portrayal of disability—remembering that disability and differing abilities are a part of the amazing diversity of how God created each of us.

Helpful scriptures on diversity and inclusion include Genesis 1:27a, Matthew 28: 19, and 1 Corinthians 12.

It can also be helpful to think about Christ's healing and wholeness as going beyond our bodies. Christ's healing helps us to be more inclusive, whole, and healed communities. Christ's wholeness includes the miracle of wheelchairs, walkers, assistive technology, ramps, hearing loops, sign language, and other tools for inclusion. Doctors and nurses do amazing things in our communities—but the church has something different to offer. Allowing that story to come through in our lessons and sermons can help people see the church as a place of belonging and welcome.

Especially in preaching, we have the sacred and daunting task of interpreting and sharing the word of God. When we approach preaching and disability we have the responsibility of helping people to understand disability as part of the full diversity of God's creation (J. Swinton, [\*From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability, and Humanness\*](#)).

Some considerations for preaching or teaching are:

- Emphasize the strengths of characters who are healed in the Bible—highlight their tenacity and grit, their amazing friendships, etc. All of these characters have strong, admirable, and powerful attributes. Focus on those while you stay clear of stereotypes—especially those that equate disability with weakness or sin.
- When reading healing stories in the Bible, think about the healing that comes through assistive devices, technology, and inclusive communities.
- When dealing with a healing story, you may want to name the text as out of keeping with our current understanding of disability. Phyllis Trible has helped us learn to read "[texts of terror](#)" by lifting up the misogyny that is revealed in certain narratives. It can be valuable and powerful to name texts that portray disability in a negative light with this same lens.
- Consider using a disability positive passage, like Matthew 25, to interpret the passage that you are preaching or teaching on.

## Messages in Curriculum

Curriculum should be chosen with an eye for good theology and a commitment to inclusion.

### *Adults*

- Consider using a disability awareness lens and eye to inclusion to examine the topics that you choose and the curriculum that you use.

- Adult Christian Education is a wonderful place to address disability directly. Consider a series on disability theology, or faith and disability. Check out [the study guide for the PCUSA statement on disability](#), and see the Resource Roadmap in this toolkit for suggested specific resources.
- In addition to specific materials that connect faith and disability, be sure that disability is included in topics for discussion. If you are looking at race and equity, be sure to include disability as the largest minority group in our country. If you are addressing parenting, look for resources that discuss common disabilities and the ways that parents can support their children.
- In Bible study be sure to name the stereotypes that can emerge in the Bible and be intentional about showing how what may be a disability has strengths.
- Look for curricula that include disability in discussions of equity, parenting, Bible study, etc. Examples are [Follow Me](#)—a new curriculum designed for the whole church—from the PCUSA, [Life with God](#) from Rivers of Grace, and [The FYI on Youth Ministry Podcast](#) from the Fuller Youth Institute.
- When you are considering a curriculum, be on the lookout for stereotypes and language around disability—call it out when you see it—and look for materials that avoid this kind of language and imagery.
- When you are leading a class, be aware of outdated terms and language—when you see it, point it out, and give the correct term. See "Welcoming Language" above and the Resources Roadmap in this toolkit for guidelines.

### *Children & Youth*

- Look for curricula that is written with good writing guides around disability, that portrays disability in a positive light, and that includes suggestions of modifications and supports which promote inclusion and belonging. Three suggestions are the PCUSA's [Big God Big Questions](#), [Follow Me](#), and [Growing in Grace and Gratitude](#).
- Modify the curriculum that you have—change the words, change the phrases, adapt the activity—so that it supports and cares for every child under your care. See "Welcoming Language" above and the Resources Roadmap in this toolkit for guidelines.
- Communicate concerns and needs to publishers. We are all a part of nurturing the faith of our children, and when you find things that need to be changed or are missing, please advocate for children all throughout the church by saying something.
- Consider sometimes using a disability awareness curriculum, but be mindful of how inclusion and disability are portrayed. Here are [Three Tips for Success](#). And here is a [sample lesson](#).
- When planning camp and summer programming, be sure to plan for kids of all abilities. See [8 Tips to make Camp more Inclusive](#).



## Messages in Music and Liturgy

- When looking at lyrics/texts, notice and acknowledge that many of our favorite hymns portray disability as equivalent to sin, distance from God, or weakness. Be mindful of this when choosing. Look for outdated language in hymns, and consider skipping hymns, leaving out verses, or substituting a word. Work with music leaders in your midst to identify new songs or alternative texts. See the resource [Inclusive Hymns, Exclusive Language](#).
- People who use wheelchairs to support mobility have asked worship leaders to use the phrase “You may rise in Body or Spirit” in bulletins when the congregation is to rise. Many people have expressed that using the phrase “Please stand” or “Please stand as you are able” highlights a separation from people whose bodies function differently.
- Proofread sermons, prayers, and liturgy for person first or identity first language.

## Welcoming Communication

In our ministry settings, we have lots of ways to connect with people and to communicate. From stained glass windows to websites, newsletters, word of mouth, signs, and pew racks, we think about the work of connecting with people as essential to sharing God’s message of love and grace. Using these same platforms and resources to communicate about disability and inclusion can be as easy as thinking about established communication routes in new ways.

- The language used in ministry can engage all the senses. For example, as we prepare for communion and baptism, we can allow people see and hear the water and juice by lifting the pitcher high to let them splash. Let people see and hear the bread break. We can also use descriptive words to support the sensory experiences.
- Design slides and websites with accessibility in mind. See these [PowerPoint best practices](#) and [guidelines for web design](#).
- Take a look at digital ministries—are they inclusive? See more [here](#).
- Use the microphone! When you upgrade your sound system, be sure that you are compatible with hearing assistance devices and consider installing a [hearing loop](#). (See more about auditory supports in the Creating Sacred Space for All Quicksheet in this toolkit.)
- Support printed words with icons and images, or *visual cues*. This is helpful for those of all ages and abilities, including nonreaders, across your ministry settings. For example, consider creating an [illustrated worship bulletin](#) that will give people an orientation to what happens in worship. Visual schedules based upon the icons used in your worship bulletin may then be created for all of your church's activities as a great support not only for people who might struggle with processing, but for children, and any newcomer to your church. See a complete discussion of this type of support, including the creation of illustrated worship bulletins, below.



## Using Visual Cues for Communication

Visual schedules and infographics have been used as a support to people of all abilities for years. Speech language pathologists developed the use of icons to enhance communication, to support behavior, and to encourage engagement. For people with limited English or English literacy, for young children, for people with high visual intelligence, and for some people living with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), a visual format is an easier way to take in information.

One strength of inclusion in faith settings is that so many worshiping communities use a predictable format. Making that format more explicit is a valuable support. You can use a simple, consistent set of icons to create a visual schedule that may be incorporated into your worship bulletin and then used across your media platforms and in all your other ministries.

### *Creating an Illustrated Worship Bulletin and Icon Template for all ministries*

- Step 1 - Identify the parts of your worship service (prelude, opening hymn, prayer, etc.)
- Step 2 - Choose icons for each part of worship—pair these with the titles used in worship.
- Step 3 - Use your icon template to create illustrated worship materials.
- Step 4 - Integrate the same icons in your template to create visual schedules for your other ministry settings. Add them to your slide templates for online worship, use them on screens for in-person worship, post them at your fellowship events, pull them into curriculum, employ them in your small group leader and participant guides, use them on youth retreats and mission trips, etc.

Here are some sources of icons and examples of visual schedules: o [Worship Guide](#) o [Visual Schedule](#) and [Disability Support Map](#) from *Growing in Grace and Gratitude* o [Picture Guide](#) with Pull down windows o [Pinterest Visual Support Page](#) o [Christian Worship Icons](#) o [Boardmaker](#) and [SymbolStix](#) are two systems of icons for creating [visual schedules](#), curriculum, websites, slides, bulletins, and other media. Or go more low tech with some adaptation of [this](#).

Employing simple, consistent icons used as visual cues, as well as improving the accessibility of all our media platforms, can be powerful supports for welcoming communication any time we gather together. Likewise, carefully examining scripture, curricula, and music and liturgy for negative messages about disability can help us prevent excluding those we wish to welcome. Finally, committing to language that is ability positive, by attending to our use of person first or identity first phrasing and to our characterization of assistive devices, not only ensures that our words are welcoming, but also undergirds a positive view of ability diversity for all in our faith communities.

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WORSHIP - PRAYER

**Prayers on Disability Inclusion**

Written collaboratively by:

Rev. Dr. Deborah Huggins, Rev. Ryan Althaus, and Rev. Karen Moritz

**Call to Worship**

Leader: In the image of God

**People: God makes us**

L: With the sound of God's voice

**P: God calls us**

L: With the touch of God's hand

**P: God forms us**

Leader: From different nations and cultures

**People: God gathers us**

Leader: Of all abilities and genders

**People: God creates us**

Leader: Children of God.

**People: God makes us. God blesses us. God loves us.**

**All: Amen.**

**Call to Confession**

Loving God, too often, we forget that you formed us as your children- beautiful and complete. Unified through our diversity- each with gifts to share, yet each in need of support. Loving God, forgive us. Let us see your face in each person that we see, hear your voice in all of creation, and feel your touch in every embrace. Help us to see your face in our own, and hear your voice in our song. Amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Be at peace and know that God loves **you** – in your strengths, but also in your vulnerability- that God's grace is for you, that adversity is an opportunity to grow, and that your gifts are to be shared in abundance Amen.

### **Call to Offering**

God of Grace and mercy, we are grateful to join with you in the kingdom work of bringing justice into the world and the kin-dom work of uniting the world in love, grace and mercy. Help us to use our gifts in your service and the humility to see our needs as opportunities to allow others to share theirs. Continue to bless us with abundance and fill us with the assurance needed to share that overflowing cup with all whom we meet

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God of mercy and love, God of grace and belonging, we ask that you bless our gifts- of time, and talent and treasure. Please make them mustard seeds... so that our love might be multiplied and of service to a world in need. Amen.

## WORSHIP – HYMN

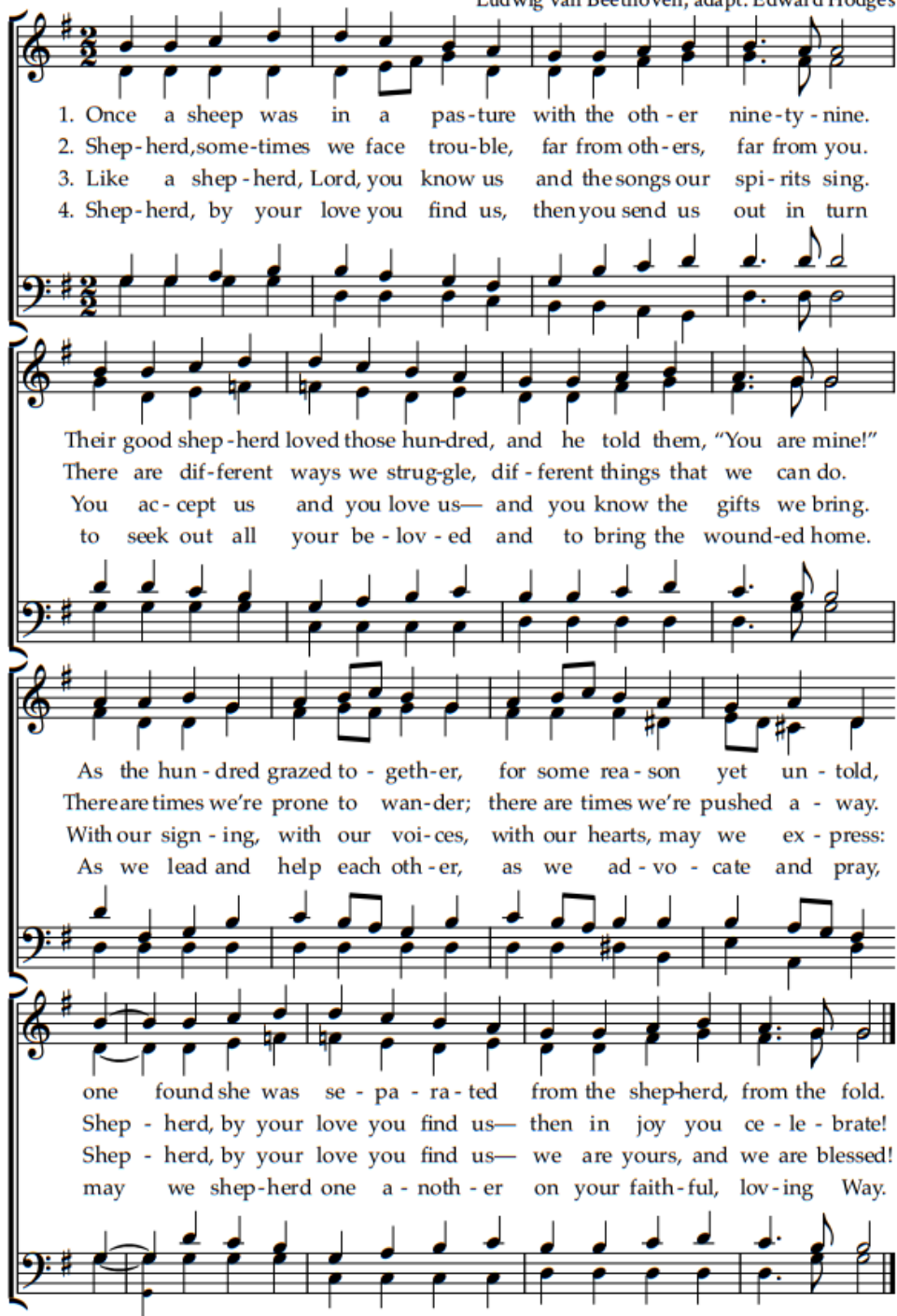
Lyrics and music score (in image format) – [accessible PDF here](#)

# Once a Sheep Was in a Pasture

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, 2022

*Hymn to Joy*

Ludwig van Beethoven, adapt. Edward Hodges



1. Once a sheep was in a pas-ture with the oth - er nine-ty - nine.  
 2. Shep-herd, some-times we face trou-ble, far from oth-ers, far from you.  
 3. Like a shep-herd, Lord, you know us and the songs our spi-rits sing.  
 4. Shep-herd, by your love you find us, then you send us out in turn

Their good shep-herd loved those hun-dred, and he told them, "You are mine!"  
 There are dif-ferent ways we struggle, dif-ferent things that we can do.  
 You ac-cept us and you love us— and you know the gifts we bring.  
 to seek out all your be-lov-ed and to bring the wound-ed home.

As the hun-dred grazed to-geth-er, for some rea-son yet un-told,  
 There are times we're prone to wan-der; there are times we're pushed a-way.  
 With our sign-ing, with our voi-ces, with our hearts, may we ex-press:  
 As we lead and help each oth-er, as we ad-vo-cate and pray,

one found she was se-pa-ra-ted from the shep-herd, from the fold.  
 Shep-herd, by your love you find us— then in joy you ce-le-brate!  
 Shep-herd, by your love you find us— we are yours, and we are blessed!  
 may we shep-herd one a-noth-er on your faith-ful, lov-ing Way.

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*Just lyrics:*

## **Once a Sheep Was in a Pasture**

HYMN TO JOY 8.7.8.7 D ("Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee")

Once a sheep was in a pasture with the other ninety-nine.  
Their good shepherd loved those hundred, and he told them, "You are mine!"

As the hundred grazed together, for some reason yet untold,  
one found she was separated from the shepherd, from the fold.

Shepherd, sometimes we face trouble, far from others, far from you.  
There are different ways we struggle, different things that we can do.  
There are times we're prone to wander; there are times we're pushed away.  
Shepherd, by your love you find us— then in joy you celebrate!

Like a shepherd, Lord, you know us and the songs our spirits sing.  
You accept us and you love us-- and you know the gifts we bring.  
With our signing, with our voices, with our hearts, may we express:  
Shepherd, by your love you find us— we are yours, and we are blessed!

Shepherd, by your love you find us, then you send us out in turn  
to seek out all your beloved and to bring the wounded home.  
As we lead and help each other, as we advocate and pray,  
may we shepherd one another on your faithful, loving Way.

Biblical Text: Luke 15:1-10

Tune: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1824 ("Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee")

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## WORSHIP – MOVIES & SCRIPTURE

### Movie Clips and Scripture

By Rev Dr Joanne Van Sant

Using various media assists us in our ability to discuss new and challenging topics with another lens. Movie clips open up a new story, a new way to understand scripture and its messages.

Below are 2 examples of supporting two messages answering the questions about judgement and exclusion as well as rejoicing for restoration of what is lost. These pieces can be used as a part of worship liturgy, if your worship uses presentation technology; or these can be used as study for adults and/or children.

Luke 15:1-10

#### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

<sup>15</sup> Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

#### **The Parable of the Lost Coin**

<sup>8</sup> 'Or what woman having ten silver coins, <sup>9</sup> if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

#### **DISCUSSION**

**Ask:** Who or what group of people do you personally find difficult to not judge or to reach out to and serve? (Luke 15:1)

**Rational:** The question asks us to think about those we overlook or who make us feel uncomfortable. In Luke 5:1 the Pharisees are complaining about who Jesus welcomes, who he has gathered around him and respond with judgement and ungracious remarks.

**Clip:** To help bring home this point, we suggest **This Is Me** from *The Greatest Showman*. The scene reveals the dignity and push back of the marginalized circus workers as well as the disdain and fear of the public. The clip resolves with some level of acceptance with the crowds in relationship with “sideshow” characters becoming a part of the community. Our discussion from this clip and question is who do we judge? Who makes us uncomfortable and fearful? While it isn’t specifically addressing people with disabilities, it opens the door for our congregations to think about how welcoming we are and how we work toward an environment of inclusion. What steps do we need to take to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities – how broadly can we design our welcome so people find a place.



[This Is Me from \*The Greatest Showman\*](#)

**Ask:** When have you rejoiced when something was lost? (Luke 15:9)



**Rationale:** The question of Luke 15:9 speaks to us of rejoicing when we find something that has been lost to us.

**Clip:** This scene from *How to Train Your Dragon 2* we watch the reconciliation of the character Stoick with his long-lost wife (whom was thought to be dead) Valka. When Valka is found by her husband after those many years, she is ready to hear the rage and accusations. But in his joy, Stoick only sees the woman he fell in love with – he is filled with happiness and rejoicing to be reunited with her.



*How to Train Your Dragon 2 - Stoick finds Valka*

**Ask:** When do we note when someone or something is missing from our lives?

When we realize what is missing and what we gain when it is found, do we rejoice? We know that God rejoices in each of us when we return from perhaps a time we have fallen away. This concept allows us to also reflect on what is missing from our faith communities.

Where is the place for people with disabilities, or from any part of life, in our Kingdom communities?

How do we set the stage for our hospitality to rejoice for those who come to us for a place in our faith community?

How do we rejoice those who have been missing?

WORSHIP – RESPOND & CREATIVE



[image description: vibrant watercolors of purple, red, orange, yellow and green overlap that create colors in between. All coming together to make a beautiful rainbow.]

## Rainbows and Water Colors

By Rev. Ryan Althaus

### Intro:

The rainbow has become a symbol of diversity as well as covenant in our religious culture, but is our approach to it truly inclusive? To answer that, one may well ask themselves what median they would use in creating one. So often we approach the task with markers, meticulously coloring within the lines that separate our reds from our oranges, our blues from our greens, and our blues from our violets. This is true in our dealings with those 'differently-abled' as well. We try so hard to remain attentive to needs and proper labels, so as to not offend or exclude, but in doing so we simply highlight our differences. Instead, this morning, you are encouraged to use watercolors to wash away the lines that separate us from our fellow members of the one universal body of Christ -- to blur the lines that society has established over the years so that our colors might fade together in a beautifully unified bow of diversity.

## Activity:

Following the service, or during the service, have congregants come to the front of the sanctuary where you have either finger-paints or watercolors set up around a large sheet of paper. Instruct each participant to pick a color(s) that they feel best represents their spirit, and add a unique element to the universal image of a rainbow of which you form as a fellowship. The only rule is that each person's color(s) must blend the edge of another's color, so at the end you have a beautifully tie-dyed tapestry of which to remind you of the diversity that you have within your own community.

## For Further Exploration:

The Rev. Ryan Althaus, of sweaty sheep ministries in Santa Cruz, CA recently wrote and co-illustrated a children's book on inclusivity alongside a young man with severe Cerebral Palsy. You can view and share a video of the two of them doing watercolor together and performing a dramatic reading of the book at <http://sweatysheep.com/discover/wally-the-wave/>. In addition you will find an open source PDF of the children's book to share with your congregation as well as a review from the National PCUSA Outlook Magazine.

You may also use this sermon as a resource for diving deeper into the topic of diversity and watercolors as well, which was written by Rev. Althaus in June of 2020.

<https://www.icloud.com/iclouddrive/043vOU5VpUuvLoz8FOQHuDbsQ#unityjune>



WORSHIP – ART

## Images & Image Descriptions To Use For Bulletins

By Rev. Dr. Bethany McKinney-Fox



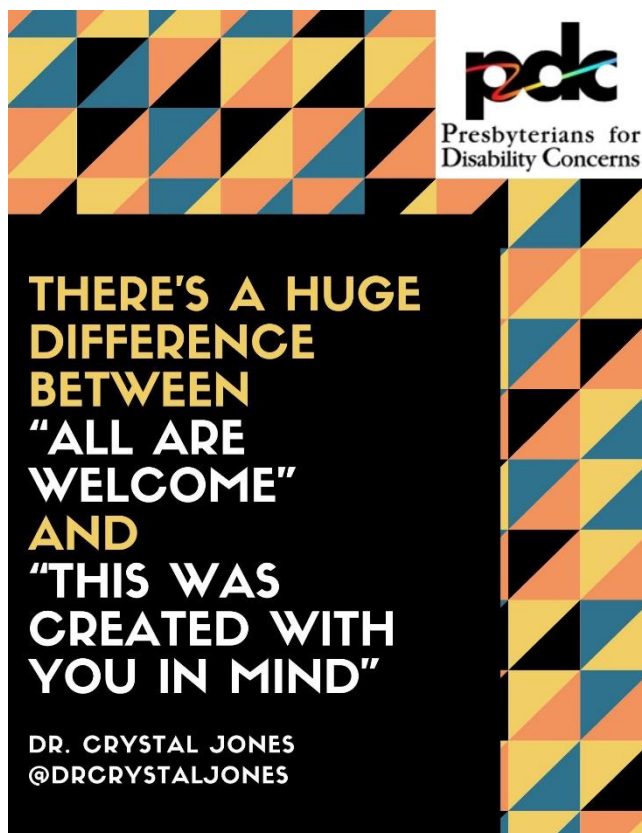
Now to  
**EACH ONE**  
the *manifestation*  
of the Spirit  
is given for the  
**common good.**

1 Corinthians 12:7



Image description: 7 blue accessibility logos at the top of the image (wheelchair user, neurodivergence, blind, uses cane, deaf, ASL, assistance animal) with multicolored drawn flowers and the PDC (Presbyterians for Disability Concerns) logo at the bottom. In the center it says: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7

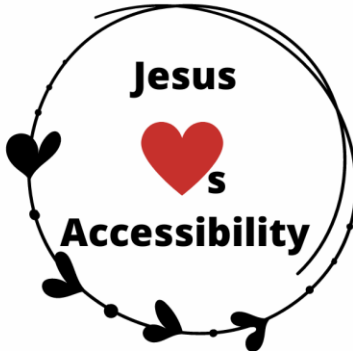

Image description: A background pattern of multicolored triangles with a large black text box with the words: There's a huge difference between "All are welcome" and "This was created with you in mind." Dr. Crystal Jones, @drcrystaljones. The PDC (Presbyterians for Disability Concerns) logo is in the top right corner.



## **PDC Bulletin Insert**

By Rev. Dr. Bethany McKinney-Fox

**Accessible Digital Use Image** (same image as next page, but this is digitally accessible to screen readers and links are functional)



There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

*Presbyterians for Disability Concerns welcomes those who affirm, support, and advocate for the gifts, rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities in the total life of the church.*

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Check out these links for more information & resources:

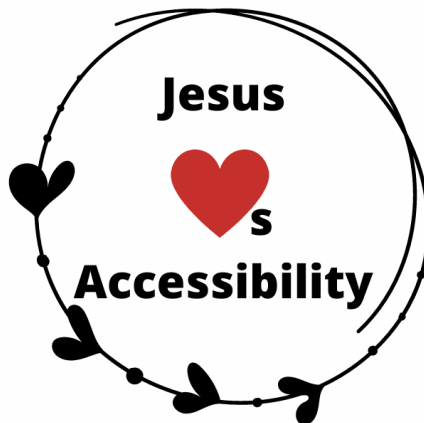
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/phewa/pdc>

<https://presbyteriansfordisabilityconcerns.wordpress.com>

[Image description: PDC logo on top left. The top right says: 'Jesus "hearts" Accessibility' with a decorative circle with hearts around the image.]



**Printable Image** (same as previous, but not accessible digital copy)



There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

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## WORSHIP – SERVICE AND MISSION

# A Just Community: Moving from the Old Story to the New Story

By Milton Tyree

*DEI – Diversity, equity, and inclusion.* Who's going to argue about that? Well... of course, some people *will* argue about that, but such is unlikely for anyone reading this piece. DEI *is* quite the popular idea nowadays. Businesses, universities, faith-based organizations, and others have created DEI jobs for people to do DEI things – aspiring to level the playing field for those facing unjust discrimination.

Interestingly, sometimes businesses, universities, faith-based organizations, and others instituting DEI initiatives need to be reminded that people with disabilities must be included in their DEI efforts. This will be my focus -- addressing unjust life experiences impacting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Moving from *aspirational* to *real*, from the *old story* to the *new story*.

I'll begin by describing an experience on a toasty June Saturday morning in Louisville, Kentucky. Most of the people gathered for the community run, walk or roll were wearing the official event T-shirt. The back of the T-shirt listed requisite corporate sponsors. Printed on the front, "Community is better when everyone is included." The slogan on a nearby banner read, "Real jobs. Real homes. Real friends. Real lives." Both sayings, on T-shirt and banner, seem reasonable enough. Downright ordinary sounding. Nonetheless, these are radical ideas for many people having intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The community organization hosting the toasty June fundraising event provides access to good jobs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, jobs like those of non-disabled people, and access to nice homes that are like non-disabled people's homes. Same with friends and people's lives. In other words, not "special," simulated, approximated jobs, homes, and friends. *Real* jobs. *Real* homes. *Real* friends. *Real* lives. These are expressions of the new story. Radical stuff indeed.

*Real lives* must include attention to people's spiritual side of life, perhaps including participation in faith communities. So, what's the role of our church when it comes to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities having access to real jobs, homes, friends, and lives? What's the role of community service organizations? What's the role of other community members – those who aren't church members or human service workers?

If we're going to address things getting in way of people having access to real jobs, real homes, real friends, and real lives, including real participation in the everyday life of the church, then I'm thinking we need to name some of the ways people with disabilities come to be captured in the old story -- *excluded, isolated, and distanced*. Why is it that belonging, inclusion,



and personal contribution continue to be absent, merely talked about or aspirational for so many people with disabilities?

*Othering.* This is the mindset, sometimes held quite unconsciously, that underlies so many of our social problems. Just turn on the evening news for evidence of othering. It's why we have diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Othering is a regrettable facet of our human condition. Othering makes exceptions. It means that certain universal human needs don't really matter for some. Othering happens for varied reasons. There's cruel othering. The early 20th century spawned the popular eugenics movement in the US, scapegoating people with intellectual disabilities as the root cause of social ills. Institutionalization and involuntary sterilization followed, its legality upheld by the Supreme Court. Nazi Germany adopted our eugenics ideology with increasingly dire and deadly impact. Some decades later we had the horrific institutional exposés of the 60s and 70s. Burton Blatt's startling pictorial essay of publicly funded state institutions, *Christmas in Purgatory*, needled our country's conscience.

Othering denying humanity. Some making exceptions for others. Creating and emphasizing an "us and them." "If it weren't for those people." Like in George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, where Napoleon the pig changed the rule "All animals are equal" so that it read "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

But there's another brand of othering, one that's much more common, everyday-like. This brand of othering is *not* rooted in any sort of bad intentions. No, more often this othering is delivered in kindly ways, or at least with kind intentions. It's more implicit about defining us and them. I call this *kindly othering*. Nonetheless it's a type of othering where there remains a significant cost to be paid – still preventing people with disabilities taking their rightful place in the world -- belonging, participating, contributing.

*Kindly othering* is an expression of the *old story*. The old story includes the old negative stereotypes believed to be true about people with disabilities. And it's common to see people stuck in the old story -- the stuck people being people with and without disabilities.

The old story. Kindly othering. "Jeff doesn't need to work. He gets an SSI check and Medicaid. And his family takes good care of him. Besides he's 23 but has the mind of a 5-year-old. He gets to go to the day program with his friends. They keep him busy and happy. Furthermore, this is what he chooses."

Jeff's experiencing one of the remnants of the old story, rooted in the Stanford – Binet Intelligence Scale and its utterly confusing and useless assignment of mental age and IQ scores. And the cost of this is high. For everyone. Certainly Jeff. But also, his family and community.

What's all the stuff we get from work. Money of course. Perhaps retirement. Dental plans. What about purpose? Contribution? Doing something that matters? Doing things for others? Relationships? Work is important for others, but not for Jeff?

*Specialness* is another common expression of the old story—one that's deeply rooted in our culture. While specialness has a long history, some of its contemporary seeds were likely planted through Public Law 94-142 in 1975 – mandating a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities. *Special education*. I cut my teeth on Public Law 94-142 as one of its early special education teachers. And especially early on, but sometimes still today, it is translated as special schools for students with disabilities, or special rooms within typical schools – setting the stage for ideas around special places for people with disabilities to live, special places to work, even special places of faith formation and practice of one's faith tradition.

Let's explore a close cousin to specialness: *readiness*. Readiness is intended to be a temporary grouping together of people with disabilities. "Let's develop a program, so they can learn how to be part of our group. We can organize some things that are like what we do but simplified. Their group will help them get ready to join us." Seems like a nice idea, but in truth it hasn't worked out as intended. For a slew of reasons about things known related to teaching, learning and role expectations, readiness programs for people with disabilities have a terrible track record for getting people ready for anything – that is, other than continuation in readiness programs.

There's no doubt that specialness and its cousin readiness come from a kind impulse to do something for people sitting on the sidelines of life. And you might be thinking, I know people with disabilities who've benefitted from special programs. I do too. The problem is that grouping people together who are already at a disadvantage for learning, developing oneself, becoming known, and contributing find themselves grouped with others striving for the same things, so that their disadvantage only intensifies, all the while creating yet another dimension of "them." "Those people." Other community members are seeing this and learning to ask: "Isn't there a place for *them* to work? Isn't there a place for *them* to live?" Making it easy to jump to the conclusion that "they" are all pretty much the same and pretty much unlike "us." Kindly othering. You see? So, yes, there have been benefits of special programs for people with disabilities but "them" is a significant cost that's often not figured into the equation. Are there ways to have the benefits we've seen people get from special programs without the downside, the high cost of "them"?

Just one more thing, before we get to the new story, one more important caution of the old story to get our collective antennae up. This caution is *not* about grouping together people with disabilities. Because, it is, of course, quite possible for someone with a disability to be right smack dab in the middle of a group of non-disabled people and very powerfully experience isolation. Just a couple of ways that this happens, again, quite unintentionally, would be: First, the person with a disability is attached to a support person, the support person being a human services person like I am, or perhaps a regular congregational member in a sort of volunteer support role. Regardless, the person with a disability is attached to this support person as though with invisible Velcro, in such a way that others will distance themselves because of the message being communicated, the inadvertent, but powerfully communicated message that this

person is very much unlike me, and I really should have some level of disability expertise before approaching. The invisible Velcro can even lead to the support person being named as one who is in possession of the person with a disability. For instance, “He’s one of Milton’s people.” Yikes! That’s not the message desired at all – but nonetheless it’s what’s being said via the invisible Velcro. Or the next caution: Sue, a 28-year-old woman with an intellectual disability finds herself in the midst of a new situation, something she’s missed out on knowing about due to a lack of typical life experiences. She doesn’t know what to do or how to be involved and this gets blamed on her disability when it’s actually because she’s 28 years old and it’s her first time to go to church.

- So, what about a new story? What would be better? Is it possible to have a different starting point?
- What if, instead of starting with something special for *them*, we began with typical, ordinary, the tried and true, things that have worked through the years for *us*?
- What if, instead of readiness, instead of having people with disabilities do simulations and approximations of the real thing, we instead provided access to the real thing?
- What if, instead of planning *for* a group of people with disabilities, we began planning *with a person* with a disability? One person at a time.
- What if Jeff had another real choice besides the day program? And, instead of testing Jeff for his IQ and “mental age,” we devoted time to know his interests, things he’s good at doing, conditions that need to be in place for him to be at his best and negotiated a mutually beneficial job for him and a local business?

A few years back, I read a story in *Presbyterians Today* about First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. One of the people featured in the story was John, a First Presbyterian member in his mid-to-late-20s. The story described his involvement as a lay leader, youth mentor, serving on the outreach committee, doing mission work on a Navajo reservation in Arizona, and doing rebuilding and landscaping work for Habitat for Humanity. Sounds like one of those congregational members we all seek, people active in living out their faith as devoted church members. While more active than most in a church, there was nothing else that seems especially remarkable. So, why is John featured in this story? The remarkable part of the story, and you may have already guessed this, is that John has a disability. I wish that Down syndrome had not been something remarkable enough to be at the root of this story.

Don't get me wrong. I appreciated the story. I'm glad it was written and published. We need good examples of personal belonging and contribution to move from aspirational to real. I'm just hopeful for the day when new story happenings like this are ordinary.

Perhaps John had a typical pathway growing up in his church, rich with opportunities for belonging and personal contribution. But, what about Sue, the 28-year-old woman who found herself being distanced from others, even though she was right in the middle of everyday church functions because she'd not had typical growing up experiences, or because she and a support person found themselves hitched together with invisible Velcro. From time to time, all of us, and especially people vulnerable to low expectations in a new situation, need what a colleague, Jo Massarelli, calls "a friendly guide in a foreign culture." Just like we'd want if visiting a new country for the first time -- someone familiar with culture, quietly and respectfully, and only when needed, providing information about what's customary, what's respectful, how to fit in to the culture that's new to us. You can see how the mindset and presence of a friendly guide in a foreign culture is very different than that of the Velcro support person.

The new story is not about imposing new things on people with disabilities. Rather it's providing access by making it feasible and safe to learn new things about themselves, meet new people and have kinds of involvement in life never previously considered. Being an ally to someone exploring the new story requires being gentle with ourselves and others while moving forward, keeping our foot on the gas.

The new story is an emerging story. And it can only emerge by recognizing the markers of the old story and the kindly ways it gets perpetuated: kindly othering, specialness, and its cousin readiness.

And the new story does not get everything right. We are, after all, human. But the new story does soften the edges of the aspirational, moving toward a more just reality. *For everyone.*

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July 2022, Milton Tyree, Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC) Intellectual and Developmental Disability Consultant, [pdcmtyree@me.com](mailto:pdcmtyree@me.com)

Adapted from a March 11, 2022 keynote address for the Faith Inclusion Network Conference, Virginia Beach, titled *From Pandemicspeak, Napoleon the Pig, and Kindly Othering to the New Story*

## SUNDAY SCHOOL – CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

### **Bartimaeus Teaches Us All How To Follow Jesus**

Prepared by Rev. Dr. Deborah Huggins and Dr. Evelyn McMullen

#### **Introduction**

##### **Mark 10: 46-52**

The story of Bartimaeus challenges us to address blindness and low vision. As educators, it's important that we carefully consider ways to address disability that are developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and God honoring. We encourage you to partner with people in your church or community with first hand knowledge: Self-advocates, educators, and family members, and to help all children see the strengths and gifts of people with blindness or low vision.

This lesson can be adapted for younger and older children.

**Scripture: Mark 10: 46-52 (NRSV)**



They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>48</sup> Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>49</sup> Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." <sup>50</sup> So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, <sup>[a]</sup> let me see again." <sup>52</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

#### **Teacher Preparation:**

In this story, Bartimaeus turns out that he is the best disciple of them all – completely ready for Jesus, full of faith, and ready to follow him on the path. Think about all the parts of you that are like Bartimaeus – strong, faithful, ready, and how to nurture that strength of spirit.

This lesson includes a visit by a visitor (Juli) with a Seeing Eye dog (Wimble). You can consider lots of sources for visitors to Sunday School including members of your congregation or Presbytery, or members of the community. If you can't arrange for a visitor, you could use a short video such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eDSVF52KnY>

The small group portion of the lesson includes writing "God Sightings" on paper chain links. If this is a new practice for your group, you may want to prepare a short sample paper chain.

## Supplies:

- Paper chain links, sharpies/crayons, staples
- Look at the “Sharing Your Faith Learning Activities” below and choose one or more that fits your group and your available time. These are the supplies you will need:
  - Simon Says: disposable earplugs or noise-canceling headphones
  - Eating with Blindfold on: fruit snack packages, napkins, blindfolds
- A third option for experiencing visual impairment is in Barbara J. Newman’s guide Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities (Faith Alive: Grand Rapids MI. 2001) p. 49-50. Newman suggests giving children a paper pair of glasses, “Jesus glasses.” This is an optional closing activity below.

## LESSON



### Whole Group

**Introduction:** The leader begins by a brief reminder of previous week’s lesson. Leader introduces Juli and Wimble (Visitors to class- in this lesson Juli is a seeing eye dog trainer, and Wimble is a puppy in training) and asks kids to go around the circle and introduce themselves – name and grade.

Ask the kids to think about things they need help with in their lives (class, team, party, etc...) to share AFTER the story.



**Story:** Leader reads the story of Bartimaeus from The Spark Children’s Bible.

**Transition:** It’s been many, many years since Bartimaeus lived. Now there are lots of things that people who are blind do by themselves every day. Juli and Wimble are here to show you what they can do together.

**Guest:** Leader asks Juli to tell about things that she likes to do, and things that Wimble helps her with. They will talk about seeing eye dogs, their training, and how the dogs support people who are blind.

**Questions:** “What kind of things does Wimble know how to do?” “How does he handle distractions?”

**Sending:** Leader shows sequence of small group activities

- Praying Together

- God Sightings
- Sharing Our Faith Learning Activities



### Small Groups (Please adapt these elements to fit the routine of your class)

In our Bible story, Bartimaeus is so strong. He is ready to be a disciple right away. Jesus wants us to be ready to be a disciple in our ordinary lives. Today will practice new ways of doing ordinary things. Are you good at listening? We'll try a different way of listening. Are you good at eating? We'll try a different way of eating. Are you good at talking? We'll try a different way of talking.

**I wonder what we will learn about being strong, faithful, and ready disciples!**

#### PRAYER:



Let the kids get situated. Be sure each person is known by name.

Ask the kids for prayer requests. For older kids, allow them to write these down and tell you if they are to share—or just for you. Take some time to pray for each other, and let the kids pray for you.

**Prayer closure:** “Loving God, teach us to appreciate our gifts and strengths, to look for them in the people we meet, and to use our strengths to serve you. Alleluia, Amen.”

#### DISCUSS & WRITE: God Sightings:

Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life this week? Share this God Sighting with the kids and write it on a paper band. Invite your students to write their own God Sightings (use a sharpie or dark crayon). Allow them to share if they like, and then staple them together to make a paper chain in your classroom, perhaps near a window.



#### DO: Sharing Our Faith

In Mark 10, Bartimaeus is so strong—ready to be a disciple right away. In this part of the lesson we will look at disability in terms of strengths. We have several activities aimed at helping kids explore disability today. (Please note in the introduction the caution of equating their experience with those of people with disabilities.) The questions after each activity focus on what they noticed, what did they need to be successful, and what other senses they needed to pay attention to. Your role is to help your kids understand the strengths and gifts of people with disabilities.





#### Activity: Simon Says with Earplugs

Play a game of Simon Says with earplugs in. Start with the teacher being Simon. If you have time, let others be Simon.

What do the kids notice? What did they need to be successful?

Did they rely on other senses more when it was harder to hear?

What did they notice? Balance, Spatial awareness, etc.?



#### Activity: Eating with a Blindfold on

Each child receives a package of fruit snacks. Have them open the fruit snacks and put them on a napkin. Eat one snack.

Next, each child puts on their blindfold and eats another snack.

What did they notice? Did the fruit snack taste different? Smell different?

Did they need to rely on different senses when they couldn't see?

What have you noticed about your sense of sight today?

## DISCUSS: Sharing Our Faith

- ☐ *If you have a pair of paper glasses for each one, that's great. If not, just use one pair as an illustration.*
- ☐ At the beginning of class today, we asked, "What are some things you need help with?"
- ☐ What was something that Juli needed help with? How did Wimble help her?
- ☐ What is something that you need help with? Who helps you?
- ☐ In our Bible story, who helped Bartimaeus?
- ☐ Now that Bartimaeus knows Jesus, how do you think he can help other people?
- ☐ What do you think he will tell them about Jesus?
- ☐ Some of us need glasses to help us see better.
- ☐ But sometimes we need *Jesus glasses*.
- ☐ Jesus glasses help us see people as Jesus sees them.
- ☐ We can notice them and get to know them as friends.
- ☐ We can ask them if they need help. Or we can ask, "can you help me?"



## Closing Prayer

"Dear God, thank you for our strengths and gifts. Help us to always use them to notice others, to connect with others and to work with others. Alleluia, Amen."

SUNDAY SCHOOL / CHILDREN'S WORSHIP – CHILDREN ALL AGES

## The Found Sheep

Prepared by Evelyn McMullen, D.Ed.Min.

### Luke 15: 1-7

**Main Idea:** Jesus told a story to help us know that each one of us is an important person to God.

Portions of this lesson could be used for a “Children’s Worship Time” or in a Sunday School class. Adapt for younger or older leaders. If you have someone who knows ASL that person could demonstrate the signs for LOST, FOUND, REJOICE. If not, watch the video link: \_\_\_\_\_ and practice with a child who can help lead.

Disabilities are not specifically mentioned, but the learning activities are designed to engage all the senses so that all children can experience the story and practice its application.

In the introduction to the Bible story, Luke 15, verses 1 & 2 are presented by using these phrases:

Pharisees: “people who thought they were Somebody Important to God”

Tax collectors and sinners: “people that the Pharisees thought were Nobody Important to God”

Of course, the original terms can be made understandable to children. I have found for a “stand-alone” lesson, kids identify easily with the “Somebodies and Nobodies” language.

### Learning goals:

1. Students will identify the experience of being lost: separated from the whole; separated from someone who keeps you safe.
2. Students will experience through prayer practice that each person is loved by God and is an important person in God’s whole family.
3. Students will use signs for the words Lost, Found, Rejoice to learn Luke 15:6

*Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.*

### Teacher Preparation:

Depending on your children’s interests, find two objects that are incomplete (not whole).

**Examples:** new, large box of crayons with one missing. Children's puzzle with one piece missing. Guitar with one string missing. Picture of a kids' team (soccer?) and underneath write: you are missing. The lesson below will use the puzzle as an example, but you can improvise. Hide the missing object and have a helper ready to find it and bring it to you.

**For Prayer Practice:** a hand-held mirror and a small bell

If you want to use a song video, try [Baa, Baa, He's the Good Shepherd by Sibling Harmony](#)  
Warning: this song will get stuck in your head!

Watch this retelling of the Luke 15 Lost & Found parables and decide if you will use it in your lesson. Pastor Dave (Crafton Heights United Presbyterian Church. Chup.org) has given PDC permission to share this video. The Found Sheep parable is minutes 0.09-4.11 [Who Counts? Levine & Sasso, read by Pastor Dave Carver](#)

If your group expects or needs a craft, this is a Bible story for which an internet search will yield an abundance of sheep pictures, mazes, etc.

**GATHERING:** Use the usual routines of your group to welcome children and engage each one.

## PREPARING FOR THE WORD

1. Lost and Found. Who likes to make puzzles? I love to make puzzles. Here's one that I made, but I am really upset that I can't find the last piece. I have looked and looked. The last piece is lost. My friend \_\_\_\_\_ said that she would help me look. Did you find the lost piece? Yes? It's found! Let's put it in the puzzle. Now my puzzle is complete. It's whole! How do you feel when you find something that you have lost?
2. Signs: [The Found Sheep ASL Signs Video](#)

**Here's a sign for happy.** (Try it)  
The word Rejoice means BE Happy. We'll use the same sign.

**Here's a sign for lost.** (Try it)

**Here's a sign for found.** (Try it)

Now let's see how we could tell someone about our puzzle story:

The piece was lost. Then \_\_\_\_\_ found the piece. Rejoice! Our puzzle is whole!

Thank you for practicing those signs with me. We'll need them for our Bible story.

## EXPERIENCING THE WORD Luke 15: 1-7

*This story is in the gospel of Luke. Let's remember the kinds of people that Jesus spent time with. Jesus liked to be with old people and children. He liked to be with people who fished and people who were shopkeepers. Jesus liked people who tried to be perfect and people who knew they had made lots of mistakes. Those people who tried to be perfect were called the Pharisees. They felt as if they were Somebody Important to God. They complained that Jesus spent too much time with people that they didn't like. Those people weren't trying to be perfect. The Pharisees said, "Those people are Nobody Important to God." The Pharisees wondered why Jesus paid attention to those Nobodies.*

Jesus told this story to help the Pharisees understand that God's Love is bigger than they thought.

(Read from your Bible or use the story below. The **BOLD** words can be signed)

Jesus said, "Once there was a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. The shepherd cared about his sheep very much and watched over them during the day in the fields. At night he brought them into the sheepfold, where a fence would help keep them safe.

The shepherd would count his sheep every evening as he herded them through the gate of the sheepfold. One night, the shepherd counted only ninety-nine sheep. He quickly counted again only to find that he was right the first time. Only 99. One of his sheep had wandered away from the rest of the flock.

The shepherd loved his sheep so much that he left the 99 in the sheepfold, took his staff, slingshot, and some water and went looking for the one that was **LOST**. He called to the sheep over and over. He wouldn't stop searching until he **FOUND** his **LOST** sheep.

Finally, he **FOUND** the sheep. Maybe it was stuck in some rocks. Maybe it was stuck in a prickly bush. The shepherd picked up the sheep and carried it back on his shoulders. How do you think the shepherd felt? **HAPPY**

When the shepherd arrived back at the sheepfold he called out to all his friends and neighbors: Come **REJOICE** with me, for the sheep that was **LOST** is now **FOUND**.

When Jesus finished the story he said, God **REJOICES** when each person who is separated from God comes back to God's family. Each person is Important to God. Each person makes God's family whole. God's love is big enough so there are no more Nobodies and Somebodies. Everybody is beloved by God.

## RESPONDING TO THE WORD

1. Lost & Found. Feeling Safe. How do we get lost?

Options: verbal & physical gestures (continue to use the LOST & FOUND signs as well)

Let's suppose you are one of the 100 sheep. I wonder how you feel about being out in the fields during the day. I wonder how you feel about being in the sheepfold at night.

*Physical response: How did you feel about being in the field during the day (thumbs up or down)*

*Thumbs up if you felt safe in the sheepfold at night.*

*Thumbs up if you were glad that the shepherd was taking good care of you.)*

What if you were the sheep who got lost. I wonder why you might have gotten lost? How did you get separated from the whole flock?

(If you have time you can refer back to the puzzle piece or the crayon. How do those things get separated from the whole puzzle...from the whole box?)

## 2. You are an Important Person in God's Whole Family

- a. Active learning: Give 5 or 6 children a puzzle piece. Who has a piece that is important to this puzzle? Whose piece helps make this puzzle whole? Put pieces in the puzzle and **REJOICE** as each piece is added.

*If you have the time/group focus for this activity, give each child a piece and assemble it as a group. If some people dominate the activity, ask how the shepherd would take care of their flock...count each sheep as they come into the sheepfold. Let's count together as each person puts their piece into the puzzle frame. (Who else has a piece that might be part of the elephant...who has a piece that might be part of a tree...etc.) If your piece is already in the puzzle, then you are the **REJOICERS**!*

- b. Prayer practice: (depending on numbers of children, you can modify. Smaller group, shorter litany.)

Let's think about the sheep who was **LOST**. It was dark, how do you think that sheep knew that the shepherd was looking for him or her? I wonder if the shepherd called its name. And how would the sheep answer...BAA!

Jesus told this story to let us know that God loves us like this shepherd. And we know that God knows each one of us and loves each one of us. Each one of us is Important to God. And because God loves us, each one of us is Important to each other.

Let's listen and talk to God in our Prayer circle. We'll put the mirror and the bell in the center of our circle. You can pick up one when it's your turn.

Model the prayer with one child:

Sam, would you like to look in the mirror or ring the bell?

Leader: Sam, you are important to God. God Loves You.

Sam: God Loves Me.

Leader: Sam, you Belong to God.

All: **REJOICE!** You are Important to Us!

**CLOSING:**

Jesus said, *Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.*  
You are important to God. Each of us is important to God's Whole Family.  
Think about someone who is important to you. Someone that you love.  
Today, you could show that person that they are important to you. Show them how to REJOICE!  
Tell them that God loves them and you do too!

**VIDEOS USED:**



The Baa Baa Song (He's the Good Shepherd)  
by Kevin Bueltmann



**WHO COUNTS? 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, and 2 Sons**

Retold by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Amy-Jill Levine  
Illustrated by: Margaux Maganck  
Voiced by Dave Carver



**The Found Sheep ASL Signs**

Introductions by Evelyn McMullen and signs presented by Alex Brown



## EXPLORING – PODCAST & BLOG

### **AUTISM AND FAITH by Beyond Belief**

Recommended by Rev. Ryan Althaus



[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

How easy is it for autistic people to believe in God?

The National Autistic Society describe autism as a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people communicate and interact with the world. They say 1 in 100 of us may be autistic and the diagnosis of autism has risen dramatically in recent decades.

How are religious organizations responding to the needs of a growing number of their congregations?

Ernie Rae is joined by a panel of three autistic guests to discuss their experiences: Professor Grant Macaskill, the co-director of the Centre for Autism and Theology at the University of Aberdeen; Samantha Stein, a YouTuber with over seven million views, who set up an atheist summer camp; and Iqra Babar, a digital artist with a strong Muslim faith.

We also hear from TV quizzer Anne Hegarty, who is autistic and a Catholic, about her relationship with faith.

Producer: Rebecca Maxted

Assistant Producer: Josie Le Vay

Editor: Helen Grady

### **RADICAL WHOLENESS:**

### **The spirituality of disabilities where everyone is whole**

By revwholejoy

Recommended by Rev. Ryan Althaus

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** “An ordained Unity minister, I have practiced law and worked in clinical science. Throughout my careers, I have advocated for a level playing field for all, working for respect and civil rights for those with disabilities and other marginalized people.”