Walking the Way of Love:
A journey through the Baptismal Covenant

Session 3:
Bless - Living Liberation

“Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ”
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Session 3: Living Liberation

Introduction
We know our God is loving, life-giving, and liberating, and we are called to share that Good News, and be a blessing to others. The Baptismal Promise to “Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” calls us not only to words but also to action. It is God’s love that liberates all people, and scripture shows us that God has particular care and concern for the poor and oppressed. Liberation Theology explores more deeply this connection between the blessing of liberation and God’s concern for the poor and oppressed. Together, participants will be introduced to basic tenets of Liberation Theology (the centrality of the poor, the crucified people, the need for liberation) and discuss ways they can use these ideas to be a blessing to others.

General Objective
Connect our commitment to “Bless” and to “Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” to our understanding of the “Good News” to be the liberation of the poor.

Specific Objectives
1. Participants will be able to explain the centrality of the poor in liberation theology
2. Participants will be able to describe the need for liberation of the oppressed
3. Participants will develop ideas for incorporating liberation theology into their worship, mission and ministry
Sample Outline
This guide has a variety of materials that you can use (or not use) to facilitate a study of the Way of Love and the Baptismal Covenant. Below is a sample outline of a 90 minute session using the materials provided in this guide. Feel free to use the sample provided, or to develop your own session using the materials in this guide and online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>Opening Prayer</td>
<td>● Open the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Ground the session in our faith and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 min.</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>● Welcome everyone to the space and briefly explain the objective this session</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Make sure everyone is on the same page and in agreement with the objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Preliminary Questions</td>
<td>● Ask participants to separate into pairs and reflect on the preliminary questions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a low-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Share the corresponding Baptismal Covenant Promise and Way of Love step</td>
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<td>o Begin critically reflecting on the subject matter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Apply the subject matter to your personal life</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Bible Study</td>
<td>● Share the Bible verses with participants</td>
<td>Bibles</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a higher-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Have participants respond to the discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between two familiar subjects; the Baptismal Covenant and the Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>● Deliver the presentation on Liberation Theology</td>
<td>Presentation, Computer, Projector, Screen, Bible Passage or Bible</td>
<td>o Introduce human rights as a tool for fulfilling this promise</td>
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<td>o Develop a basic understanding of Liberation Theology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What is Liberation Theology?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Who are the crucified people?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o How do we apply liberation theology?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Connect human rights to a faith commitment</td>
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<td>15 min.</td>
<td>Churches in Action</td>
<td>● Show the video of our churches in action</td>
<td>Churches in Action Video</td>
<td>o Present a concrete example of a church blending this human rights concept with their faith</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Ask the accompanying discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between familiar and new concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Final Discussion</td>
<td>● Continue with final discussion questions</td>
<td>Journal, notebook or paper</td>
<td>o Think of new ways to apply liberation theology concepts in our lives and work</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Closing Prayer</td>
<td>● Close the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Close the session renewing our commitment to our faith</td>
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Baptismal Covenant Promise

Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ

The Way of Love

Bless: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

Preliminary Questions

Ask participants to divide into pairs and answer the following questions. Participants may share with the whole group after discussing in pairs if they like.

1. How do you live out this promise?
2. What does the step “Go” mean?
3. How does our church live out this promise to Go as a community of faith?

Bible Study

Introduce the Bible passage(s) associated with the Baptismal Covenant Promise and ask participants the discussion questions.

Bible Passages

All Bible passages are taken from the NRSV translation except where otherwise noted.

Matthew 10:7

As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Luke 4:16-19

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.

Discussion Questions

Lead a discussion of the Scripture passages. Below are sample discussion questions:

1. What is the Good News of Christ?
2. Why is this important?
3. How do share this Good News in our lives?
4. Why is it important to share the Good News?
Human Rights Lesson

Note to Facilitator: This information is provided for your background. There is not time to cover it all. Use these notes, or the slides to remind you of the topics and summarize.

Begin the presentation by asking if anyone has heard of Liberation Theology and what it is?

The Good News of Christ

As we see throughout the Bible, the Good News of Christ has a special concern for the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, the sick, et cetera. In the previous passage from Luke, Jesus reads from Isaiah about the good news of liberation for the poor, imprisoned and oppressed.

So what does Justice look like in the Bible? It looks like concern for the marginalized. The prophets, psalmists, and even Jesus mention specifically the fatherless and widows, who were historically some of the most marginalized in society, as were “strangers” (immigrants/foreigners). Justice looks like mercy and compassion on one another; not simply punishing others for wrongdoing, but working together with the vulnerable to construct a more just society.

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’”

–Zechariah 7:9-10

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’”

–Matthew 25:34-39

What about liberation in the Bible? God is concerned for His people and laments suffering and oppression. God has promised liberation for the marginalized, the oppressed and the imprisoned.

“The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

–Exodus 4:9-10

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

–Luke 4:16-20
So what does sharing the Good News of Christ look like? It means forming disciples of Christ and sharing this message of justice and liberation. As St. Francis of Asisi suggests, actions speak louder than words. That means that we emphasize the practice of justice, liberation, righteousness, et cetera over simply repeating the words.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

–Matthew 28:19-20

"It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."

“...As for me, I desire this privilege from the Lord, that never may I have any privilege from man, except to do reverence to all, and to convert the world by obedience to the Holy Rule rather by example than by word."

–St. Francis of Asisi

What is liberation theology?
Liberation Theology is a category of theology developed in the Catholic Church of Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century. The Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM according to its Spanish initials) was a group of liberal theologians in Latin America that formed in 1955 and pushed the church in a more social-oriented direction during Vatican II. While not officially a “liberation theology organization,” it’s progressive stances laid the groundwork for liberation theologians to develop a social theology. Liberation theology was criticized by many within the Catholic church for its ties to communist movements in Latin America in the late 20th century, but at conferences like those held in Medellin and Puebla, CELAM has continued to reaffirm a social orientation to the Gospel which is integral to liberation theology.

It is primarily concerned with the liberation of the poor and oppressed. The poor are central to the Christian gospel, and liberation theologians recognize the plight of the oppressed not as divinely ordained, but as the product of human sin. Poverty is human-made, and it can be prevented and even eradicated. Under this understanding, poverty is contrary to the will of God. Therefore, theology cannot be neutral in situations of oppression, but must always take the side of the oppressed. Any theology that supports the oppressors is then considered bad theology.

Since then, theologians have expanded this understanding to apply the same logic to other disenfranchised groups. Black theology, feminist theology and queer theology all find their roots in liberation theology.

Preferential Option for the Poor
“If our preference (as Christians) is for the poor, it is precisely because we have a situation of injustice contrary to the will of God, and therefore, unacceptable to all believers.”
God loves all people. In scripture however, we hear God’s special concern for the poor. Much of the law and Jesus’ teachings involve economic justice: sharing resources, giving of what you have and righting unjust systems. The oppression and violence against the poor, and their resulting suffering is not in accordance to God’s will. To rectify this, liberation theologians call for liberation of the poor. This special concern for the poor is

Liberation in this context is also a liberation from sin. It includes repenting and receiving forgiveness, but goes beyond when we choose to live differently. When we work collectively to reduce the oppression, violence, and injustice in the world, we are liberating ourselves from our sins that prop up oppression and inequality, and also liberating the victims of injustice from our sins.

“Is this not the fast that I choose? To loose the bonds of injustice... to let the oppressed go free... to share your bread with the hungry.”
-Isaiah 58:6-7

“When I was hungry you gave me food, when i was thirsty you gave me something to drink... truly i tell you, just as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.”
-Matthew 25:35-40

“The true condition of the poor has been discovered, documented, and disseminated. Their cry has not only gone up to heaven, but has made itself heard around the earth. Many men and women in Central America and elsewhere in the world are dying the slow death of oppression or the quick death of repression. This is the most basic fact in the world today, and it is a fact utterly in defiance of God’s will.”
-Jon Sobrino

Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross

You can only know human rights through the perspective of the victim

The Crucified People
“The crucified people are the signs of the times.”
-Ignacio Ellacuría

“God does not want this social injustice. Dios clamors for justice. He is saying to the poor, as Christ did to the oppressed, bear your cross you will save the world.”
-Saint Romero

Liberation theologians refer to the poor as “the crucified people,” or “el pueblo crucificado.” The “crucified people” are the victims of the structural sins of the world. In the suffering of the poor, the sins of the times are revealed. Thus, it is necessary to make their suffering visible and ensure that we are all able to speak for ourselves and share our suffering. As long as they remain invisible, there is no hope for change.
Acting Out Liberation Theology
Every generation has an obligation to identify the crucified people of their time. Victims of human rights violations are the crucified people of the past, present and future. Those who suffer from structural violence that is normalized by cultural violence are the victims of human rights violations. These are the crucified people of the times.

Human rights give us a way of understanding how the world ought to be. Christians call this vision of how the world ought to be “The Kingdom of God.” Jesus proclaimed what this kingdom would look like, by his teaching, life, death and resurrection, and gave us a glimpse of it, and strengthens us to work for it.

“Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know, am I my brother’s keeper?’ And the Lord said, ‘What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!’”

-Genesis 4:9-10

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

-John 13:34

We are obligated as Christians to respond to the plight of those who suffer, not as an act of charity, but as a responsibility to our brothers and sisters. Understanding this obligation through the lens of human rights theory, we have a duty to defend the rights of all human beings not out of a desire to save the needy, but as response to the need of fellow human beings. When we understand suffering through the lens of human rights, our own liberation becomes dependent on the liberation of all human beings. If my brother or sister is not liberated, how is my liberation guaranteed? If the simple fact that we are human beings does not protect us, how can any of us be sure our rights are not in danger? Ensuring respect for human rights is not simply an attempt to save others, but a mutual effort in which we must work together.
Spotlight Congregation: Holy Family Episcopal Church’s Migrant Workers Ministry
Share some background about Holy Family’s ministry, and watch the accompanying video. Following the video, lead a discussion linking their work to the Baptismal Covenant and the Way of Love.

Background
“All are welcome at Holy Family Episcopal Church. We are a multicultural, multigenerational community whose mission is to celebrate God through Jesus Christ; proclaiming, living and sharing the Good News in our daily lives. We believe that all people are God’s people.”

-Facebook Description

Holy Family Episcopal is a community of faith in San José, California formed of three merged churches: an English-speaking, Filipino and Latinx congregation. Together, this community does justice work in an intercultural and multigenerational context. One of their ministries involves hosting an annual legal clinic for immigrants to discuss their rights as laborers and immigrants.

Video
https://youtu.be/y60Mo8qIsSw

Questions
1. How does this ministry incorporate human rights into their work?
2. How does Liberation Theology appear in the example?
3. Who are the rights-holders in this example? Who are the duty-bearers?
4. How does this ministry proclaim the Good News of Christ?
5. How does this congregation bless others through their ministry?

Journal Reflection
Take a time of personal reflection, allowing participants to gather their thoughts by journaling, note taking, or thinking.

Prompt
1. What key ideas influenced me?
2. Where do I see these ideas in my own life?

Final Group Discussion Questions
Continue in group discussion with the following questions:
1. How do we understand the connection between this baptismal promise, Scripture and human rights?
2. How can we apply this in our lives?
3. How can we transform our mission and ministry as a community of faith using these concepts?