

The background is a dark blue brick wall. On the left, there is a vertical strip of orange and yellow bricks. In the center, there is a yellow triangle pointing upwards. On the right, there is a pink cross. At the bottom, there is a large pink rectangle and a red triangle pointing upwards.

DISABLING LENT

AN ANTI-ABLEIST LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

UNBOUNDED

This Small Group Discussion Guide Belongs To:

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Manchester UMC 2022 Lenten All Church Study, **Disabling Lent**. We hope that you are excited to embark on this short, but meaningful journey with other members of the beloved community. During this All Church Study, we will use a devotional produced by Justice Unbound called, *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional*. That devotional is available as an 8.5 x 11 print out at the Information Center at Manchester UMC or online at <https://justiceunbound.org/disablinglent/>. There is an audio version available on that webpage as well.

HOW THIS STUDY WORKS

Each week your small group will use both the *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional* booklet AND this *Small Group Discussion Guide*. Your group will meet for 5 weeks. There is no prereading before your group gathers. Once together, follow the instructions in this *Small Group Discussion Guide*.

The *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional* has many more readings than we will use in our small groups. There is a reading for Ash Wednesday, for each day of Holy week, and even Easter. For the purposes of our small group setting, we will only use the weekly readings (1st SUNDAY of Lent, 2nd SUNDAY of Lent, etc.). The Lenten Sermon Series will be preached in conjunction with this All Church Study.

WHERE TO FIND SERMONS

Previous sermons from Manchester UMC can be found on our Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/manchesterumc.stl> or our YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/manchesterumcstl>

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

To help ensure a healthy and successful small group experience for everyone, group members should review and practice these guidelines during your time together.

SAFE GROUP: We will strive to create an environment where everyone can be real, open, and honest with their struggles and victories.

CONFIDENTIALITY: What is said in the group stays in the group.

LISTEN: Let's value one another during the discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to avoid thinking about how you are going to respond, or what you are going to say next.

PAUSE: Allow a pause in conversation after someone shares. Give the person sharing the chance to finish and the group the opportunity to consider what was just shared before responding.

SILENCE: It is important to allow silence in the group as it provides an opportunity for someone to share and for members in the group to process the topic or question being considered.

NO "CROSS TALK": Be considerate of others as they are sharing. No side conversations when someone else is talking.

NO FIXING: We are not here to fix each other. Give encouragement; speak truth, and point to Jesus. Don't try to solve or fix each other.

NO RESCUING: When people are sharing something deeply personal, there can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves by providing immediate condolences. This will often cause them to stop sharing. Resist the temptation to rescue people.

SHARING: Be sensitive about the amount of time you share.

BE SELF-AWARE: Be self-aware of how you are personally effecting the environment through your words, actions and non-verbal communication.

USE "I" STATEMENTS: It's easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want you to focus on yourself. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.

CHECK-IN

Share your name and why you are excited for this Lenten All Church Study.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Genesis 9:8-17 (NRSV)

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹²God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

GOSPEL LESSON

Mark 1:9-15 (NRSV)

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

DEVOTIONAL READING

Read aloud as a group, *1st Sunday of Lent* by Heather Lanier, from *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional*

<https://justiceunbound.org/1st-sunday-of-lent/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) For those who recognize themselves as able-bodied, how does it reshape your sense of identity to think of yourself as “temporarily able-bodied?”
- 2.) Lent is a time when we reflect on the impermanence of our bodies and our lives. What feelings arise when you reflect on your own impermanence?
- 3.) How have you “been taught to value ability, to see bodies in a hierarchy?”
- 4.) When was a time when you were “both very angry at God and still in a relationship with God?”
- 5.) Heather Lanier writes, “I struggled with the redemption narrative of disabled people in the Bible. Namely, Jesus kept healing them. This meant that disabled folks were seen as redeemed only when they became nondisabled.” Is God an ableist?
- 6.) If the corporal healings of Jesus are, “not *the* thing” that Jesus came for, what is *the* thing?
- 7.) Reflect on this quote from Nancy L. Eiesland, “In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God.... [T]he disabled God is also the revealer of a new humanity....[F]ull personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.”
- 8.) Do you believe that “the world is never unredeemable?”

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty and creating God, we confess and come before you today as people who are separated from one another by fear, prejudice, and ignorance. By our language, actions and facilities we declare insiders and outsiders in our lives and in our church. Forgive us and create in us the vision of opening our hearts, minds, and doors as wide as the love of God, so that no one is left outside. Help us to reach beyond ourselves to discover the joy of community. Give us the patience to discover that all people have gifts and abilities to share with our community of faith. We pray in Jesus name. Amen!

Adapted from Southeastern United Methodist Agency for Rehabilitation (SEMAR) 2004

CHECK-IN

Share your name and how you've been doing over the past week.

GOSPEL LESSON

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

DEVOTIONAL READING

Read aloud as a group, *2nd Sunday of Lent* by Erin Raffety, from *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional*

<https://justiceunbound.org/2nd-sunday-of-lent/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) Erin Raffety describes that at her church, her seven-year-old daughter "often can't even get into the sanctuary, she can't get to the bathroom, or come forward up onto the altar for the children's message." In what ways are people with disabilities a part of the life of our church, or not?
- 2.) Does the church ever "hinder people from accessing the grace they need?"
- 3.) How are people with disabilities depicted in our sermons or in the songs that our congregation sings?
- 4.) "Peter wants a Gospel that avoids suffering. He wants a Messiah who avoids discomfort." How are we like Peter?

- 5.) "One of the unlikely promises of returning to the season of Lent year-after-year is that we have new opportunities to listen and to follow God differently along the way." How are you listening to and following God differently during this season of Lent?
- 6.) "Are you willing to follow Jesus if it involves truly listening to those whom the Church has ignored, harmed, and oppressed?" How?

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy One, we thank you for the gift of life in its vast arrays and complexities. We thank you for the gift of friendship. Jesus, we thank you that you modeled a life of service and compassion to the people whom society often forgot or ignored.

Wise Spirit, we need your loving eyes in order to care for those you have put in our midst. We need greater grace in order to serve and be in ministry with everyone.

We ask all of this, so that more people can become part of the great story of your love in action. This is why we pray, Thy Kingdom Come. Amen

Adapted by Reverend Amanda Larsen, 2017

CHECK-IN

Share your name and how you've been doing over the past week.

GOSPEL LESSON

John 2:13-22 (NRSV)

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

DEVOTIONAL READING

Read aloud as a group, *3rd Sunday of Lent* by Tiffany Jones, from *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional*

<https://justiceunbound.org/3rd-sunday-of-lent/>

QUESTIONS

- 1.) Have you ever felt like you were trying to do "just enough" or "the bare minimum" in your faith and religious life? Do you see others who are? Why do you think this happens?
- 2.) "As Christians, called to participate in God's kin-dom, our involvement in the process of disability justice, education, and awareness is both an exercise of spiritual practice and an act of worshipping the same God for whom Jesus travelled to Jerusalem to honor. As such, I think an awful lot about performative allyship and its implications for faithful praxis and living." Define performative allyship in your own words. How do you participate in performative allyship?
- 3.) Read through the five condensed lessons shared by Tiffany Jones and discuss where you have done or will do work in those areas.

CLOSING PRAYER

As we seek to have open hearts, open minds and open doors, help us to move beyond opening the door to welcome only those who can climb the steps to enter.
Help us to move beyond opening our hearts to love only those who look like us.
And help us to move beyond opening our minds to accept only those who think like us.
Help us to create an environment, in our church and in our community, where all are welcome. In your name we pray. Amen.

Adapted from Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Binford, III

CHECK-IN

Share your name and how you've been doing over the past week.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Numbers 21:4-9 (NRSV)

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

GOSPEL LESSON

John 3:14-21 (NRSV)

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

DEVOTIONAL READING

Read aloud as a group, *4th Sunday of Lent* by Kyle Stevenson, from *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional* <https://justiceunbound.org/4th-sunday-of-lent/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) How do you consider yourself sin-sick? How do you consider the world sin-sick?
- 2.) How has your relationship with God changed your relationship with yourself and with others?
- 3.) Like the people of God in the wilderness, name a time when you were physically free but not yet mentally or emotionally free.
- 4.) Reflect on this quote from Kyle Stevenson, "Believing in God's Son is believing that his way, his teaching, and seeking to live the counter-worldly life of love he lived; that is the path to eternal life."
- 5.) What does the statement "we cannot save ourselves" mean to you? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 6.) Reflect on this quote from Pastor Andy, "We tend to get stuck in past seasons, even when those seasons were not particularly healthy, even when those seasons were actually destructive. God calls us into the present moment, asking us to live into everlasting life."

CLOSING PRAYER

You, O God, are a light who shines in darkness. Each of us have faced darkness at times, have stumbled, and have been insensitive to your blessings. We pray that our spiritual senses and our hearts better recognize grace-filled moments and opportunities to be in relationship with not only you, but with others so they too can experience the warmth and spirit of your presence. We pray this in the name of the One who helped us to sense the variety of your creation, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Rev. Leo Yates Jr., Baltimore-Washington Conference Coordinator of Accessibility & Inclusion, 2021

CHECK-IN

Share your name and how you've been doing over the past week.

GOSPEL LESSON

John 12:20-33 (NRSV)

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

DEVOTIONAL READING

Read aloud as a group, *5th Sunday of Lent* by Lisa McKee, from *Disabling Lent: An Anti-Ableist Lenten Devotional* <https://justiceunbound.org/5th-sunday-of-lent/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) How is expansive love, costly?
- 2.) What do you think about the nature of God being a redemptive nature?
- 3.) What does restoration and redemption of the body look like? Of the community? Of creation?
- 4.) Are you afraid of losing your "power?"
- 5.) Did Jesus need to die for the redemptive nature of God to reveal itself?

- 6.) How has the Disabling Lent sermon series, devotional, and small group impacted you and your faith life?
- 7.) What do you think we should do, as a church, to address our ableism and to better serve people with different abilities and disabilities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious and merciful Father, Mother, and Creator,
We come here in our weakness, brokenness, and imperfection
— knowing that we have failed to hear those crying out for help,
to see those whom we choose to ignore, to speak out against injustice,
to understand what is really important in life, or to move forward in your will for us.

We come here with our own share of pain, loss, disappointment, and helplessness
— hemmed in by barriers and obstructions over which, it seems, we have little control.

But we also come in gratitude and in faithful expectation knowing that your love and forgiveness, grace and strength, are abundantly available for all of us and that in you all things ultimately work together for good.

Whatever our physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual condition, help us look beyond differences and recognize humanity in all of your children.

Help us to hear your “still, small voice” comforting and guiding us.

Help us to promote reconciliation and peace in words and in actions.

Help us to comprehend that which is true, right, and good.

And help us to break down barriers and remove obstructions
that we might move towards a fuller, more loving relationship with you and with others.

We ask your blessing upon each of us here and upon the church
that it might grow in its mission and ministry to all your children.

We also ask your blessing upon all those who cannot be here.

We pray for those incapacitated by illness or injury and confined to hospital beds,
nursing homes, or their own homes, that they might find the help and healing they need.

We pray for all caregivers who in serving others serve your Son.

And, finally, we pray for all those who have been wounded in body, mind, and spirit,
that they might get the care, support, and rehabilitation that they deserve.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, in whom we all find our true healing and wholeness. Amen.

Jo D’Archangelis, Fallbrook UMC, California, 2011

In 2022, Manchester Social Justice Ministry will participate in a yearlong accessibility campaign in order to assess and improve church facilities, programs, and culture. We commit to meeting with, receiving feedback from, and collecting ideas from as many members of our community as possible by Easter 2022.

To take the survey, sign up for a feedback session, or get more info at:

www.manchesterumc.org/Access

