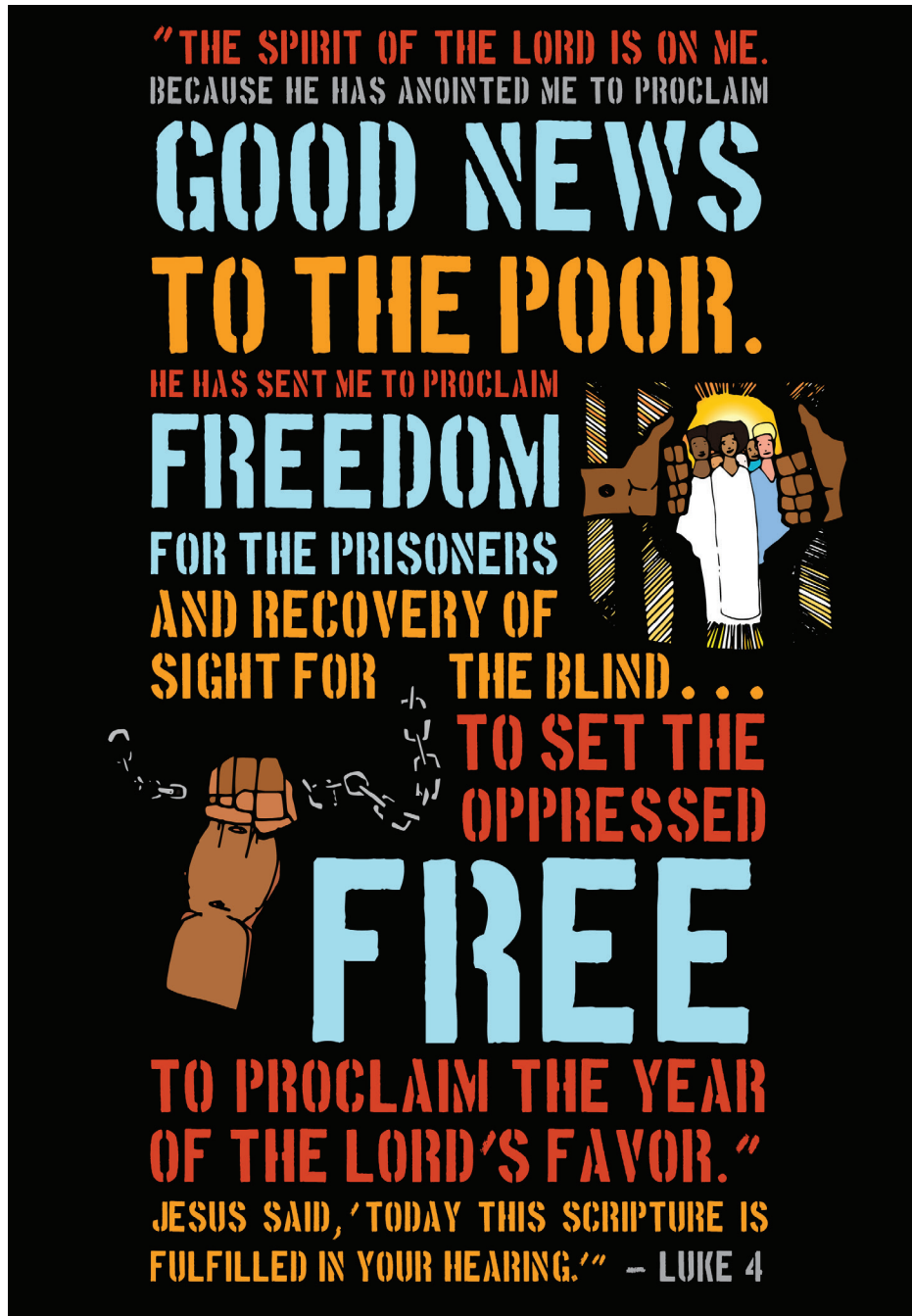


SESSION 1: JESUS BREAKS THE CHAINS OF OPPRESSION

Take a closer look at the art. Reactions to racial injustice are on the left. Hope is on the right. Jesus is in the middle, breaking the chains of oppression.

- *What grabs you in this art?*
- *Have you ever seen Jesus in this way? What do you think about this depiction of Jesus?*



READ JESUS' MISSION STATEMENT AND DISCUSS

The art was inspired by Jesus' first public speech. Let's read it outloud.

- *What do you like about this speech?*

Followers of Jesus believe that Jesus offers hope in the midst of racial injustice and our longing for a better world. Jesus launched his mission by declaring this purpose statement.

- *What if Jesus were setting prisoners and the oppressed free today? Would you want to be involved with this work? Why or why not?*

Jesus came to break the chains of our personal and systemic brokenness through dying and coming back to life. He offers to transform our self-absorption and empower us with new love to join him in his work for justice, if we say yes to him.

- *Where do you long to see justice today? Ask Jesus for encouragement or wisdom in this struggle for justice.*
- *We are forming an honest community that tries to live like Jesus, including his mission of transformation for both the oppressed and oppressors. Are you interested in continuing to investigate Jesus and justice with us?*

LUKE 4:16—21**NOTES**

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me, to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

SESSION 2: JESUS CONFRONTS HIS HOMETOWN

This piece of art we looked at shows responses to racial injustice, and Jesus' claim to be able to break the chains of oppression. In a minute, we are going to be surprised by what happens in Jesus' hometown after he declares his mission in his opening purpose statement:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

At first his listeners love his speech (v.22-24):

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' 'Truly I tell you,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown'.

...but then Jesus the truth-teller calls out their own bias against other ethnic groups, like the Syrians and Sidonese. Watch how they respond when he quotes two historic moments when God favored the Syrians and Sidonese.



"I ASSURE YOU THAT THERE WERE MANY WIDOWS IN ISRAEL IN ELIJAH'S TIME WHEN THE SKY WAS SHUT FOR THREE AND A HALF YEARS AND THERE WAS A SEVERE FAMINE THROUGHOUT THE LAND. YET ELIJAH WAS NOT SENT TO ANY OF THEM, BUT TO A WIDOW IN ZAREPHATH IN THE REGION OF SIDON.



THERE WERE MANY IN ISRAEL WITH LEPROSY IN THE TIME OF ELISHA THE PROPHET, YET NOT ONE OF THEM WAS CLEANSED —ONLY NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.



ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE SYNAGOGUE WERE FURIOUS WHEN THEY HEARD THIS. THEY GOT UP, DROVE HIM OUT OF THE TOWN, AND TOOK HIM TO THE EDGE OF THE HILL ON WHICH THE TOWN WAS BUILT, IN ORDER TO THROW HIM OFF THE CLIFF. BUT HE WALKED RIGHT THROUGH THE CROWD AND WENT ON HIS WAY." — LUKE 4

SEE HOW THEY RESPOND

Jesus intentionally confronts his friends and family with these two stories.

- *What do you think he is trying to expose in his hometown?*
- *God sends messengers to heal and bless Israel's ethnic enemies. What does that tell you about God's priorities? Read the story and discuss.*

Many people want to mold Jesus into a polite moral teacher. Jesus will not conform to our assumptions of him. His hometown wanted Jesus to inspire them, but not confront their racial hatred. Enraged, they tried to lynch* Jesus. But it was not his time.

- *How might Jesus want to confront any racist history or racism in our hometowns, neighborhoods, or even families?*

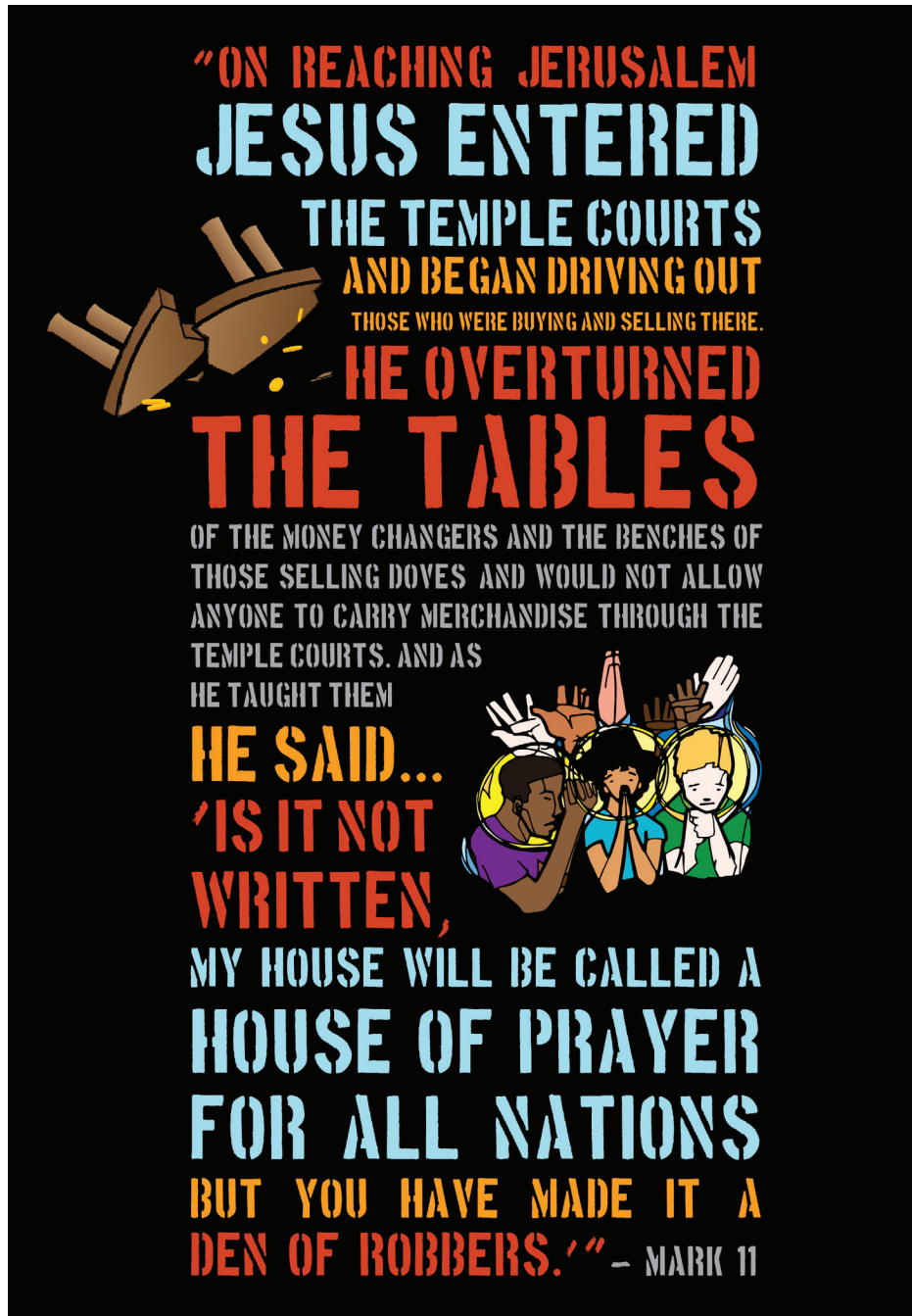
Ultimately Jesus wanted his hometown to join him in his mission of justice to heal both the oppressed and the oppressors. Jesus' invitation to join him in his mission was an act of love. They were deeply offended. It takes courage to face our own racial bias and oppose racism in our families, friends, and communities.

- *How do you want to grow in the kind of courageous love that Jesus has?*
- *Have you ever considered Jesus a trustworthy source of love, courage, and healing for your life? Would you like to ask Jesus for more love, more courage, or healing today?*

*Lynching is most often used to characterize informal public executions by a mob in order to punish an alleged transgressor, punish a convicted transgressor, or intimidate. (The United States has a long history of using lynching as an intimidation spectacle.)

LUKE 4:22–30**NOTES**

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. ²³ Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” ²⁴ “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.



SESSION 3:

JESUS CONFRONTS THE BUSINESS OF RELIGION

This is a surprising moment in Jesus' ministry. When he visits God's temple, he is alarmed by what he sees. The religious businesses have taken over the sacred space set aside for ethnic minority outsiders and foreign visitors to the temple. Read this story out loud, and then discuss.

- *Why does Jesus take action instead of allowing this injustice to persist?*
- *What surprises you about Jesus' reaction to the money changers in the temple?*
- *What do you like about Jesus in this story?*

We want to be a community that reflects Jesus' priority to welcome everyone.

- *How do you want to grow in prioritizing the experiences of people on the margins?*
- *Who else should we invite to join us as we discuss Jesus and justice?*

Jesus welcomes all people to draw close to God. Jesus wants to help remove all barriers today so that you and I can experience the love of God.

- *Would you like to hear from Jesus about his heart for you?*
- *What is one question you have for Jesus so that you can decide if he is worth trusting?*

Optional scripture study page

NOTES

MARK 11:15–17

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

SESSION 4:

JESUS BREAKS THE CHAINS OF THE OPPRESSOR AND THE OPPRESSED

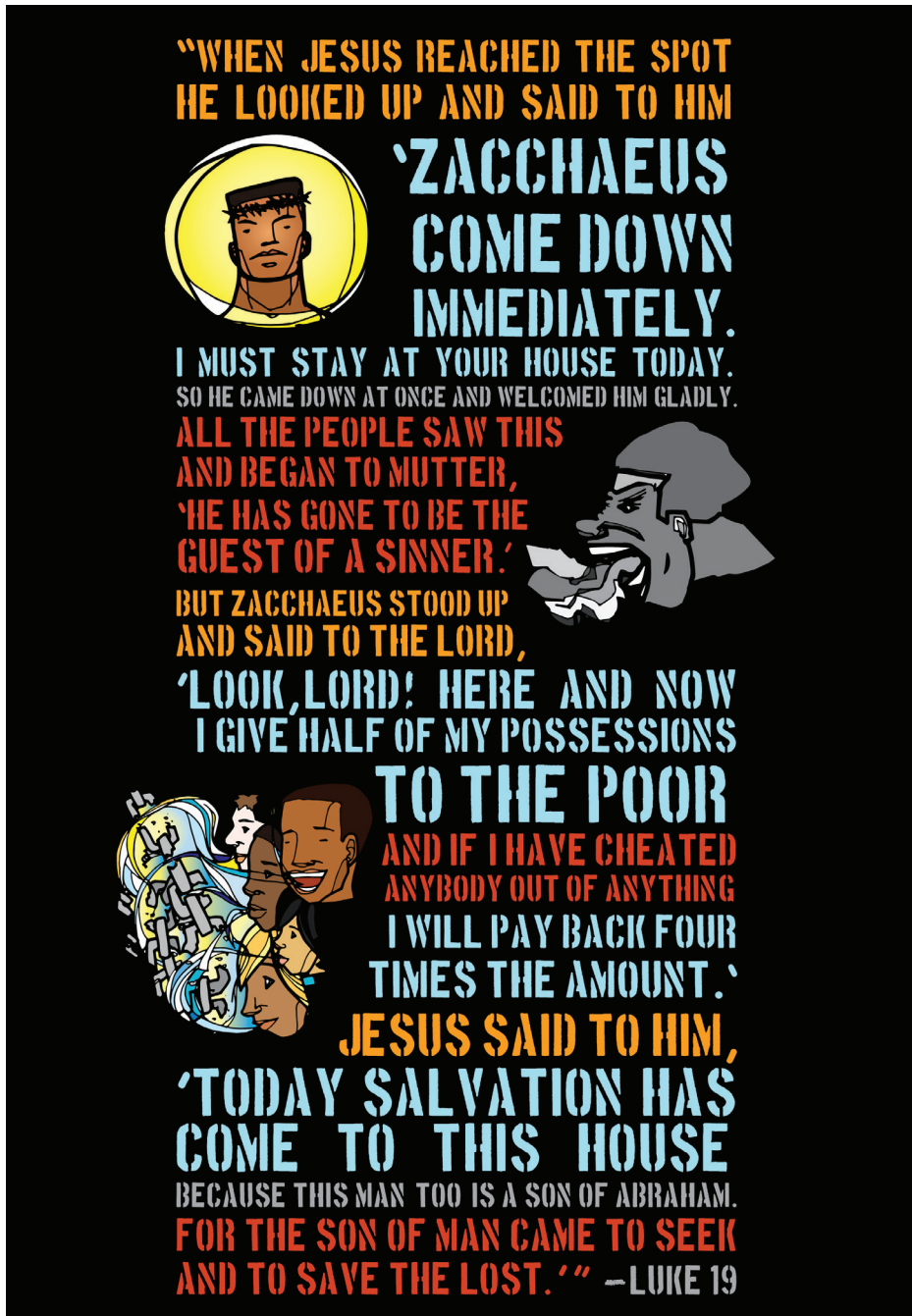
The Roman Empire colonized and ruled the people of Judea with an iron fist. Zacchaeus, a Judean himself, stole from his people and reinforced the system of oppression as a chief tax collector. He was regarded as a traitor and a tool of the oppressor. What does Zacchaeus deserve? What would justice look like? Read and discuss.

Zacchaeus is very curious about Jesus, but Zacchaeus knows that he is not welcome in the crowd. Jesus shocks everyone by starting a conversation with this oppressor, even inviting himself to Zacchaeus' house.

- *Why does Jesus start a conversation with Zacchaeus? How would you expect Jesus to treat a man who actively oppresses his own people?*
- *What do you like about how Jesus treats Zacchaeus?*

Jesus creates a God moment in Zacchaeus' life when he builds trust with Zacchaeus at the tree. This moment blooms into a movement of God when Zacchaeus turns away from his corruption and restores to the people all that he had stolen.

- *Imagine the city of Jericho getting back four times what they had lost. How might the crowd view Jesus after Zacchaeus' change of heart?*



**"WHEN JESUS REACHED THE SPOT
HE LOOKED UP AND SAID TO HIM
'ZACCHAEUS
COME DOWN
IMMEDIATELY.
I MUST STAY AT YOUR HOUSE TODAY.
SO HE CAME DOWN AT ONCE AND WELCOMED HIM GLADLY.
ALL THE PEOPLE SAW THIS
AND BEGAN TO MUTTER,
'HE HAS GONE TO BE THE
GUEST OF A SINNER.'
BUT ZACCHAEUS STOOD UP
AND SAID TO THE LORD,
'LOOK, LORD! HERE AND NOW
I GIVE HALF OF MY POSSESSIONS
TO THE POOR
AND IF I HAVE CHEATED
ANYBODY OUT OF ANYTHING
I WILL PAY BACK FOUR
TIMES THE AMOUNT.'
JESUS SAID TO HIM,
'TODAY SALVATION HAS
COME TO THIS HOUSE
BECAUSE THIS MAN TOO IS A SON OF ABRAHAM.
FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK
AND TO SAVE THE LOST.'" -LUKE 19**

THE GOOD NEWS

We all long for a better world, full of love, that reflects what we were created for- a world without racism, death, and violence. We were made in God's image, full of dignity, to live with God at the center of our relationships and our world. There's a longing today for that kind of right relationship with each other. This is at the heart of the cry for justice!



LOOK AT THE LEFT SIDE OF THE MURAL. SEE THE BROKENNESS OF OUR WORLD TODAY.

God does not leave us alone in the struggle against injustice. Jesus entered the fight himself. He was imprisoned and suffered at the hands of the legal authorities of his day. Jesus gave everything he had to break the chains of oppression. Why? Because Jesus knew that oppression is part of the human condition. Oppression began when we pushed our Creator away, out of the center. Instead, human selfishness became the center. We live in a world with a legacy of oppressive systems that are all too easy to participate in. The pain inside us can even damage others. Our world is hurting.

LOOK AT JESUS CRUSHING THE HEAD OF EVIL IN OUR WORLD.

But God did not abandon us. Jesus came to speak truth and heal both victims and oppressors. He came to set the oppressed free and restore our relationships with each other. And he did it through dying and coming back to life.

LOOK AT HOW JESUS SENDS US TO CREATE BEAUTY ON THE RIGHT.

Jesus took our personal brokenness and our world's brokenness into the grave with him. He defeated and redeemed it by coming back to life. We can have hope for a better world and live into it because Jesus guaranteed it. Once we choose to follow Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus sends us to restore relationships, repair communities, and seek justice. Today, Jesus offers us his spirit and power to live a life of courageous love, joining God's movement of hope and justice. We can live and share this good news!

HOW ABOUT US?

So, we get to make a decision. Will we invite God into the center of our story, or continue to leave God out? Inviting Jesus into the center of your story means following Jesus' leadership for your life. This means we join God's mission to live and share this good news of hope and justice.

- *Are you ready to invite Jesus into the center of your life? Before you answer, let's take a moment of silence and let you interact with God about this important question. Ask Jesus if he is inviting you to follow him today. Let's each share how we are feeling and how we want to respond today.*

SESSION 4: LUKE 19:1—10**NOTES**

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”