



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Session Plan
**Faith Connections: God Is Still Speaking: Was Jesus
Privileged?**
St. Peter United Church of Christ, Lake Zurich, IL,
Stephanie Certain Matz, January 2016

Preliminaries

Opening Reading and Prayer/Candle Lighting

A reading from the Gospel of Luke: 4:17-19

“When the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed him, he unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me;
therefore, he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind
and release to prisoners.
To announce a year of favor from the Lord.’ ”

Let us be in prayer.

Holy One,
You who call us into uncomfortable conversations, you who ask us to stretch ourselves, you who implore us to reach out, in love, toward those who know our deepest selves, and those we hardly understand at all, help us to be an open-hearted vessel. May we experience growing pangs with joy, for we trust you are guiding us closer to you. Amen.

Check-in

(Remember to keep check-in shorter than in the past to allow more time to tackle the more difficult discussions.)

Meditation

Before getting started, ask the group what thoughts they have—now two weeks later—from the discussion on White Privilege. How would they define it now? Have they noticed it more in the news or events around them? If they’ve heard about the water issue in Flint, Michigan, ask them if they can identify whether or not (and where) white privilege might have played a role. Ask them to identify the elements that make up White Privilege. (Some ideas: wealth, birthplace in the “majority,” traditions, hierarchies, symbols, history, infrastructure, exposure to other ways of life, etc.) This should be a substantive discussion. Challenge with “why’s” and “can you explain further?” Then transition as follows:

Theologian Richard Rohr tells us that White Privilege is predominant in Western cultures because whites were the founding or more numerous race/culture and therefore the most influential. But he also says the notion of in-born privilege exists in many non-white countries as well, and usually resides with the dominant or larger “group” that forms the institutions or are traditionally more powerful.

Our faith teaches us that “privilege” can be useful if it is turned to the benefit of the unprivileged. To help us explore this facet of privilege, we’re going to recreate the country of Judaea—with its achievement, failures, traditions, prejudices, status hierarchy, and power structure. Then we’ll see how Jesus fit into this picture.

We’re going to do this by playing the “Was Jesus Privileged?” game. Mostly we’re going to play it from the perspectives of the Jewish people at the time—how they would have seen and experienced privilege.

(outline the beginning instructions, as described below.)

Was Jesus Privileged? The Game. *(instructions for facilitators)*

- Your tabletop is your game board. Before the group session starts, mark with tape three lines—one at each end, and one in the middle. *(see pictures below)*.
- The game pieces represent the following groups (or individuals within groups)
 - Jews in Judea and Galilee
 - Romans
 - Samaritans, Greeks, and other Gentiles
- Within each group, some specific individuals have been identified.
- The pieces correspond to the list attached at the end of this facilitator’s guide. Give each person the whole list, and (in advance) cut up one list, fold the papers, and put them in a “hat” to draw from. Remove the “Jesus of Nazareth” piece from the hat and the board. The main facilitator is responsible for this piece.
- Pass the hat around and ask participants to pick a paper from the hat. Pass the hat as many times as needed until all papers have been picked. Each player is responsible for placing and moving her/his pieces around the board, and defending or agreeing to change its position.

Round One

- **The task: to create a miniature version of what privilege looked like in the first century Judaea, BCE/CE.**
- Remind people that this is a game to identify status, power, and privilege in the first century.
- Set up the game board by asking each person to place their pieces on the board in relationship to the middle line. Those people/pieces placed above the middle have more status and privilege than those placed below it. Pieces should also be placed relative to EACH OTHER (i.e. Pontius Pilate and the Centurion are both Romans, but of different status/privilege).

- One by one, ask each person to identify their piece (i.e. “Roman soldier”) when placing it on the board. They must also say WHY they are placing it where they are. Others can raise questions, bring up additional evidence, etc., but it is up to the “owner” of the piece to decide where it finally belongs. There should be lots of discussion here. If there is not, as facilitators you need to ask questions: why this piece is placed higher than this, etc.
- You have extra, unidentified pieces, allow participants to “name” them from a Bible story and place them on the board if they choose.
- Get consensus agreement from the group that the board looks right. TAKE A PICTURE OF THE BOARD.

Round Two

- Bring out the piece representing Jesus of Nazareth. Move the piece as the group directs you, following the general timeline of Jesus’ life. The point: For people to see how Jesus’ was/was not privileged relative to others in his society, and how he used the privilege he had.
- Participants can move their pieces relative to Jesus as he progresses through the stages of his life—gaining or losing privilege.
- Stages: What was Jesus’ privilege at birth? As a boy? As a working young man? Beginning his ministry? During his ministry? At the time of his death? DISCUSS each stage—the different possibilities. Place the piece on the board at the beginning of the discussion, then during each stage move it relative to what people are saying and relative to other pieces on the board.
- Once the discussion is complete, place the Jesus piece where it was at the height of his ministry and survey the board. TAKE A PICTURE OF THE BOARD.

Round Three

Ask:

- Which pieces on the board do you most identify with in terms of your own privilege? Why? In terms of your blessings/gifts/status, where would YOUR piece be on the board?
- Was Jesus privileged? To what extent? How do you know?
- How did Jesus use any privilege he may have had?
- What does that tell you about what following Jesus means for us?
- What can we do—from our relatively isolated, comfortable lives—to use our privilege to create love?
- What do the different “views” of the board say about how one person can affect the lives of others through the use/abuse of privilege?

Check-out

Next session: the Black Lives Matter movement. Starting tomorrow, go to the UCC website and search for articles, materials, and sermons on the subject. On Facebook or Twitter (if you’re a user), follow Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and explore their website. Also follow Michael Pfleger, Catholic pastor of St. Sabina Church in Chicago. Look at past as well as

current posts on these pages. Some will surprise you. Some will startle you. But you will also begin to step within a different culture and place “on the board.” The goal is to walk around in the shoes of people of color in America—even if for just a little while.

Closing Prayer/Interactive Ritual

“... as a free Jewish man, Jesus rejected cronyism, abandoned his privileged turf, “emptied” himself of his voice/status/power/influence, and used it to take on the flesh of the disempowered and re-order God’s creation. He repeatedly and strategically emptied himself of his status by defending the defenseless, using his platform to draw attention to the voiceless and paying close attention to justice issues that didn’t directly affect him.

Jesus emptied himself for individuals who were considered so unimportant that their names were not even recorded in Scripture. Jesus emptied himself at great risk to his own social status and livelihood. Greg Boyd says that “Love is ascribing worth to others at cost to ourselves.” Jesus the Privileged did this repeatedly and strategically – even to the point of death.” -- Christene Cleveland in “The Privileged Jesus”

Closing Blessing

And so may it be.

Now go in peace. May you leave this place knowing you are good and knowing you are loved. Take your light and your love from this place. Use them to bless the world. And stay safe until we meet again. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Pieces in the “Was Jesus Privileged?” Game

The game pieces indicate the three major groups active in Judaea at the turn of the first century, BCE/CE. Color of the pieces has no significance, other than to indicate groupings, and each piece has a flag with a name in the color of that grouping: Roman are blue, Jews are green, and “outsiders” (Samaritans, Greeks, etc.) are peach.

The Jews are the indigeneous people of the area the Roman occupiers called “Judaea.” In Roman times, the country was divided into Judea, Samaria, the Paralia and Galilee, which comprised the whole northern section of the country, and was the largest of the three regions ruled by Herod.



Pharisee. A member of a Jewish sect (536 BCE-70 CE) noted for strict observance of rites and ceremonies of the written law and for insistence on the validity of their own oral traditions concerning the law. A person who valued the letter of the law over the spirit of the law. Pharisees dominated Jewish life and thought at the turn of the Christian era. (Saul, later known as Paul, was a Pharisee.)

Sadducee. A member of a conservative Jewish sect consisting of the traditional ruling class of priests and rejecting doctrines not in the law. It was centered around the high priest and the Temple and rejected the oral interpretation of the scriptures favored by the Pharisees. As a whole, the sect fulfilled various political, social, and religious roles, including maintaining the Temple.

Scribe (or doctor of the law). Jewish preservers and expounders of the law and faith, in close association with the group of Pharisees, to which many of them belonged. Later, such teachers were described as rabbis. They were distinguished professionals who could exercise functions we would associate with lawyers, government ministers, judges, or even financiers.

Herod Antipas (20 BC–c. AD 40). Client king of the provinces of Galilee and Peraea, called "Herod the Tetrarch" or "Herod" in the New Testament, and described as ordering John the Baptist's death and mocking Jesus.

Pontius Pilate. Prefect of Judaea, he was a member of the Roman Equestrian Order (the lower rank of governors.) His primary function was military, but as the representative of the empire he was responsible for the collection of imperial taxes,^[21] and also had limited judicial functions. Other civil administration lay in the hands of local government: the municipal councils or ethnic governments such as—in the province of Judea and Jerusalem—the Sanhedrin and its president, the High Priest.

Pilate's Wife. She saw visions.

Sanhedrin. An assembly of priests, scribes, and elders appointed and given authority over the people of Israel, particularly in religious matters. It was the supreme court and council of the Jewish authorities of Jerusalem, sanctioned by the Romans to assist their prefect and the client king.

Caiaphas. Chief Priest of the Sanhedrin, appointed by the Roman Legate in Syria (Pilate's boss).

Joseph of Arimathea. A priest of the Sanhedrin either following or open to Jesus' teaching.

Samaritan. Literally a "person from Samaria," one of four provinces of ancient Judaea as divided by the Romans for easier governance. But conflict had preceded Roman occupation. Also descended from the original twelve tribes of Israel, the Samaritans claimed that they were the "true" Israel. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim and claimed that it was the original sanctuary. Both Jewish and Samaritan religious leaders taught that it was wrong to

have any contact with the opposite group, and neither was to enter each other's territories or even to speak to one another.

The House of David. In Jewish tradition, the line of Jewish people from which the Messiah will come. In Christian tradition, Jesus was a member of the House of David through his adoption by Joseph.

Joseph of Nazareth. In the Davidic Line, a carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee, and acknowledged at the time as the father of Jesus.

Mary of Nazareth. A Galilean woman of Nazareth and the mother of Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth. Also known as Jesus, son of Mary; Jesus, son of Joseph; Jesus the carpenter's son; Jesus, Son of David.

Zechariah and Elizabeth. Relations of Mary of Nazareth, from the priestly line of Jews through Aaron. Parents of John the Baptizer.

John the Baptizer, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Peter, James, and John. Apostles of Jesus. During the life and ministry of Jesus in the first century AD, the apostles were his closest followers and became the primary teachers of the gospel message. The word "disciple" is sometimes used interchangeably with "apostle" – for instance the Gospel of John makes no distinction between the two terms. In the original Greek, an apostle is one sent on a mission, whereas a disciple is a student.

Levi. Later known as Matthew, was a tax collector and became a disciple of Jesus.

Tax collectors. They were reviled by the Jews of Jesus' day because of their greed and collaboration with the Roman occupiers. Tax collectors amassed personal wealth by demanding tax payments in excess of what Rome levied and keeping the difference.

Elders. Community leaders, local men of influence or wealth and authority.

Lepers.

The blind, sick, and crippled.

Roman Soldiers.

The Centurion and his servant.

Greek merchants.

Jewish Landowners

Jewish Tenant farmers

Jewish peasants

Jewish Artisans and craftsmen

Jewish Servants

Greek/Roman Servants

Greek Slaves

Jewish Slaves

Mary Magdalene

Joanna and Susanna

Widows

Lazarus

Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus

The Woman at the Well

The Good Samaritan

A Facilitator's Email Following the Session

Hello, all!

At our last Faith Connections meeting on Monday (2/15), we talked a little bit about the "Was Jesus Privileged?" board game that we'd "played" at the prior meeting (on 2/1).

Since not everyone was able to attend the meeting on 2/1, I said I'd share the photos we'd taken while playing the game.

There are four photos attached to this e-mail.

1) The first photo shows the game pieces all set up in one location, divided by groups (Romans, Jews, and "outsiders"), for members to place on the board after they'd drawn their slips of paper to tell them which pieces are theirs.

2) The second photo shows the game board after all pieces EXCEPT Jesus had been placed, and

the group had agreed every piece was placed appropriately. You won't be able to read the names of each piece in the photo, but Herod, Pontius Pilate and the Sanhedrin are the topmost pieces on the board, and women, Jewish slaves, the sick, etc. are at the bottom. We tried to leave a bit of a gap in the middle, based on the knowledge that there really would not have been much of a "middle-class" during this era ... there were the "haves" and the "have nots."

3) The third photo shows where we set Jesus during his ministry ... Jesus is the piece without a label, to the right of the center blue line. However, the Jesus piece moved up, then down, the board, showing his relative privilege at different times in his mission. (The young male from the Davidic line going to lots of banquets, etc. as a rising "star," his decision to abandon the towns for the countryside, often sleeping out of doors, his arrest and death, etc.)

4) The final photo shows where we set Jesus at his crucifixion - at the very bottom of the board.

Note: The pieces are easily made from inexpensive chess sets, with toothpicks taped to the pieces and half-size post-it notes attached to the toothpicks with names/group identification attached.







Faith Connections: God is Still Speaking: Was Jesus Privileged?

Participant Preparation

"I often make the mistake of thinking that the incarnation is exclusively about God bridging the gap between humanity and deity, as if Jesus took one cosmic dive to earth and it all ended there. But if I look carefully at the Gospels, I'm reminded that even after Jesus "emptied" himself of his divine privileges and took on human form (as Paul eloquently describes in [Philippians 2](#)), he didn't stop there. Jesus' incarnation traversed not only the vast status differences between God and man, but also the vast status differences between privileged and oppressed humans.

Incarnation means embodied in flesh or taking on flesh. As a human, Jesus repeatedly took on the flesh of those around him, examined the world from their perspective, bore their burdens, and took up their causes. And he often did so not only across cultural lines, but also across status lines.

JESUS THE PRIVILEGED

As a free Jewish man, Jesus enjoyed an "invisible knapsack" of privileges in the inequitable society of his day. Unlike slaves, he was free to go where he wanted and even build personal wealth. Unlike Samaritans, he wasn't shunned by Jewish people or targeted by their unflattering and oppressive stereotypes of Samaritans. Unlike women, he didn't have to worry that his life was less valuable than a man's or that his testimony was as less legitimate than a man's. Granted, Jesus wasn't the most privileged person in his society. In fact, in some ways he was a target of oppression. But his social position situated him above a good number of other folks – namely, slaves, Samaritans and women."

--From "The Privileged Jesus" by Christena Cleveland. For the whole article, click this link: <http://www.christenacleveland.com/2013/09/jesus-the-privileged/>

In this second part of our discussion on privilege and its affect on our society and ourselves, we will be exploring the life of Jesus in his own time and place. This will help us understand a bit, perhaps, of how Jesus was personally affected by the privilege existing in his own time and how he addressed it in his ministry. Of course, not being Biblical scholars or historians, our factual sources are limited. But there are some; a growing number in fact. So for your prework, you will be skimming the surface of a few of those sources. Aside from the Gospels, all of the attached readings and suggested links are quite short.

Participant Preparation

1. **PRIORITY.** Read the Gospel of Luke. (If you haven't already completed this pre-announced assignment, shift to the Gospel of Mark. (It's shorter!))

2. **PRIORITY.** Read the two short pieces from the study material provided by PBS for its Frontline documentary, “From Jesus to Christ” at these links:
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/socialclass.html>
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/audio.html>
3. Follow this link for an archaeological and sociological view of the birth narrative:
<http://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/jesus-wasand/nt-born-in-a-stable/>
4. Explore the PBS site, “Frontline: From Jesus to Christ” on these links, reading what interests you:
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>. (Main page)
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/>
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/>
5. **SHORTCUT.** And finally, if you want to get a good feel for this subject in just an hour, you can do what the kids do: watch the movie. The program is available right on the link for free streaming and, for purposes of this session, the first hour will do it. Here’s the link: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/>

Questions to Consider While Reading and/or Viewing

1. Who had “privilege” in the time and place of Jesus, and to what degree?
2. Who were not privileged?
3. To what extent was Jesus privileged? What evidence do you have?
4. How did privilege affect Jesus’ ministry?