

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – First Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

The gospel for the First Sunday in Lent (Mark 1: 9-15) reads much like the one we had the First Sunday after Epiphany (Mark 1: 4-11), and the Second Sunday in Lent has the identical lesson as we had two weeks earlier for the Last Sunday after Epiphany! Lent provides us with different lenses, lenses that see the cross in the distance, while reading the same text.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Jesus is Baptized, the Spirit descends on him "like a dove," and he hears the affirmation: "You are my Son, loved, and pleasing to me." It appears that he is affirmed and ready for ministry. Yet, immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he must spend 40 days taming the temptations that come with power. Only then is Jesus equipped to proclaim the good news. And so we too are invited to notice the temptations that are pulling us off course, diverting our energy, and impeding our ability to proclaim the good news.

Theme: Temptation and Prayer

Preparing for Lent: Depending on what is compatible with what is happening in your church, you might want to incorporate an extra activity during Lent. If your church has indicated a special offering for Lent, you will probably want to participate in that effort. Notice that for some people Lent calls for "giving up" something (possibly something that should be given up anyway and possibly something that is not intrinsically bad, but provides a good discipline by abstaining for a time). For some, Lent calls for adding something – extra time at prayer, financial contributions, or outreach activities. You may choose to include an age-appropriate "extra" for the children such as learning one of the prayers said during the Eucharist or memorizing brief portions of Scripture. Some suggestions are made in the body of these lessons.

Lent brings a dynamic change in mood from the festive Christmas/Epiphany season. To the extent you are able to "decorate" in your classroom, you might want to keep this leaner perspective in mind. Put a simple cross in the center of your table, for example. If you have a worship space, a purple cloth covering it would help children notice the change in colors. (A roll of purple crepe paper streamer could do the trick.) A simple wood cross, about 4 feet high could be constructed and the children invited to use sandpaper to smooth the cross. (They can work on

smoothing it all the way through Lent. On Easter, it can hold pictures the children make of the Easter stories they will hear.) If you choose memory work, as they learn the portions, copies of what they have learned could be posted. Today, for example, very young children could learn the last half of the quoted verse at the end of the story. Slightly older children might want to learn the entire sentence.

Also, if your church does anything different for Lent in the way of decorations (purple cloth on the altar?) or anything to simplify the décor (no flowers, for example), be sure to check it out so you can help the children notice.

Before Class: You will need a cross made from rough, unfinished lumber. The cross could be as tall as 4 feet – or smaller if storage is a problem. You will also need a significant supply of sand paper so the children can take turns sanding the cross. You will need white paper, access to a photocopier, paper for the children to draw on (copier paper will work), an assortment of crayons or felt markers, glitter, and glue – or glitter pens. You may choose to make small crosses using twigs and twine or chenille (pipe cleaner) stems. A simple cross could stand on your table, and coverings in purple (cloth or even crepe paper streamers) would help.

Beginning: Greet the children, invite them to observe anything you have added to or taken away from the classroom, and then ask them to be seated. Ask the children if they noticed anything different in the church. Different colors? The children can help you make your classroom look a bit like Lent. If you have brought in a simple wood cross and sandpaper to smooth it, the children can smooth away as you talk.

With your Bible open to today's passage (Mark 1: 11b), read: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Ask the children if they know who the Son might be. And who might be talking to Jesus? Tell them today's story is about God getting Jesus ready to do the work he will need to do.

Praying: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to help us notice just how very much you love each of us. Amen.

The Story: We heard part of this story a few weeks ago when we were just starting Epiphany. Jesus knew it was time to stop helping Joseph make smooth furniture out of the wood in the carpenter shop. It was time for Jesus to go do the work God wanted him to do. He knew that the first thing he needed to do to get ready for his new work was to go find his cousin, John, and ask him to baptize him. So John and Jesus walked into the river and John baptized Jesus. While they were in the water, they heard these words: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

But Jesus had more work to do. He had to go into the desert to figure out what he was going to do and – more importantly— what he was NOT going to do. While he was there he had to think about a lot of things. Shall I get fancy clothes and a fancy horse and live in a fancy house? Don't think so. Shall I do magic tricks so people will like me? Don't think so. Shall I be a big boss and make all the people do just what I tell them to do? Don't think so.

When he had figured out what it was that he was supposed to do, he came out of the desert. This is what he said: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news."

Special Offering: If you are going participate in a special offering, this would be a good time to introduce the materials. The children could illustrate an aspect of the Lenten Offering materials.

Smooth the Cross: If you choose to work on the smoothing of the cross throughout Lent, that activity could begin. As the children sand they could repeat –almost like a mantra – all or part of the phrase: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news."

Making Crosses: Collect sturdy twigs and fashion crosses for the children, fastening the two branches into a cross and tying them with a bit of twine or chenille stems. The crosses tell us that Jesus figured out that his life work would be difficult. Display the crosses throughout Lent.

Art Activity: The children could draw what they heard from the story (Jesus being baptized, Jesus in the desert, Jesus coming back out of the desert.) The children can choose.

Getting Closure: If you have chosen to talk about "giving up" something or "adding" something, talk with the children about what that might be. One little boy decided that during Lent he would not ask to go into toy stores nor ask for a new toy! Perhaps instead of spending money on candy or gum, the money could go into the Lenten offering. Adding something could mean doing chores without being nagged, or doing extra work around the house (setting the table when it is not even your turn, for example).

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to learn how to do his work and show us how to do ours. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – First Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

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Theme for Lent: Getting Equipped for Ministry Today we will see one way in which Jesus did just that.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Jesus is Baptized, the Spirit descends on him "like a dove," and he hears the affirmation: "You are my Son, loved, and pleasing to me." It appears that he is affirmed and ready for ministry. Yet, immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he must spend 40 days taming the temptations that come with power. Only then is Jesus equipped to proclaim the good news. And so we too are invited to notice the temptations that are pulling us off course, diverting our energy, and impeding our ability to proclaim the good news.

Theme: Temptation and Prayer

Preparing for Lent: Depending on what is compatible with what is happening in your church, you might want to incorporate an extra activity during Lent. If your church has indicated a special offering for Lent, you will probably want to participate in that effort. If you are going to do anything to change the décor in your classroom (adding purple, for example, or simplifying things) you will want to either do it before the children arrive, or invite their participation in the change. Think through suggestions you might want to make to help the children choose to "give up" something, if you think that is appropriate and what could be involved if they choose to "add" something.

Before: You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for each child. You will also need copies of The Book of Common Prayer, individual spiral notebooks (fairly small) and/or a class notebook for the prayers the children will compose. You need white paper, pencils with erasers, and colored pencils or crayons or felt markers. Purple cloth to decorate the classroom is optional.

Beginning: Explore what the word "Lent" means to the children in your class. Yes, it is the past tense of "loan." It is also the season of six weeks symbolizing the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert. It is a time of giving up some things to make room for the joy of Easter and baptism. A time of discipline to make us more fit as disciples. Some people give up something for Lent, some take on something. Invite the children to share what they might be thinking about doing. If you are comfortable with it (and if you don't think it will derail conversation), you might share decisions you are making with the children.

Opening Prayer: Thank you for the season of Lent. Help us to use this time to become more like what you want us to be. Amen.

The Story Mark 1:9-15 Invite one child to read verses 9 through 11, the second child verses 12 through 13 and a third child verses 14 through 15. If the children are not comfortable reading, read the passage yourself making sure all the children can see the passage (either by having made photo copies of the passage in advance or by making sure each child has access to a Bible in the same translation as yours). You could invite the children to read with you 11b and 15.

Reflection Questions:

- What does the word "temptation" mean?
- What kind of things might be a temptation to us?
- I wonder what kinds of things could have tempted Jesus?
- Think about the kinds of things powerful people have (fancy cars, huge houses). Do you suppose Jesus might have wanted any of those things? Why? Why not?
- We think he was in the desert for 40 days -- lots of time to struggle with "wants," but instead, Jesus took this time to get ready for his work. I wonder what we could do with this time to get ready for our work during Lent?
- What kinds of things are wasting our time, using up our energy?
- What kinds of things might we do that would help us get ready to be ministers?

Prayer Journal: There are several ways to go about this. One is simply to give each child an inexpensive spiral booklet with lined paper and suggest the child record prayers for their eyes only – to share ONLY if they want to do so. Another option is to create a class prayer book inviting the children to add prayers to share with others – and you add prayers also. A third way is to give each child 5-10 sheets of paper, have them fold them in half, staple them together at the fold and have them decorate the front of it. Then invite them to write some prayers inside.

Outreach Project: If you decide to take on a class outreach project, you could begin to make plans. If the project is going to involve a time or a place outside your class time, begin to secure the necessary permission and involve the children in planning the activity.

Getting Closure: You might close the class with prayer, telling the children that each week another child may volunteer to do this part. The personal or class prayer journal may act as a resource for them. If the class is going to do an outreach project, that could be a focus of prayer.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for showing Jesus how to get ready to do his work. Thank you for showing us what we need to do to get ready. Amen.

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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

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

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – First Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

Background

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Theme: Temptation and Prayer

Before Class: Materials needed for the season will be Bibles (one for each person), copies of The Book of Common Prayer (one for each person), paper, and pencils or pens.

Beginning: Ask for volunteers to suggest what Lent means -- as a season of the church year and as a personal discipline. If your own church has a particular focus for Lent (a particular outreach, for example -- or extra learning opportunities) be sure to include those in the discussion.

If the children are taking on a project such as a missionary offering, be sure the adults understand its scope so they can be encouraging and possibly even participate. You could also consider the two typical ways people approach Lent: as a time of giving up something -- either something that really should be given up anyway or that is to be given up as a discipline. Another approach sees Lent as a time of adding something—an additional church service, time in prayer, devotional readings, or a more vigorous outreach activity. This is not a "show and tell" opportunity, but a time to consider some options.

Creating the Setting: Point out that the next two Sundays have readings we have recently explored, but that since the Scriptures always have new insights, we will get a different perspective on both of these. Then, as we read today's Scripture, ask the class to be holding in mind the theme for the season of Lent: "Getting Equipped for Ministry" and the temptations that get in our way.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (Collect for the First Sunday in Lent, Book of Common Prayer, p. 218)

The Scripture: Mark 1:9-15 Invite people to read small portions, possibly in this fashion: One person read verses 9 through 11, another verses 12 through 13, and a third person the last two verses.

Reflection Questions:

- We are meeting a man who is about 30 years old. And he is just now (apparently) responding to his vocation. A man of 30 in Jesus' time was not a young adult, but a mature man. Why do we think he waited this long? (We have no clue, we can only guess.)
- What is his first act of his new ministry, according to this passage? (He seeks baptism from his cousin, John.)
- What happens next? What could possibly have tempted Jesus?
- The Rev. Richard Rohr, Roman Catholic Franciscan paraphrases the three temptations which are described more fully in Matthew 4: 1-11. Father Rohr says the three temptations are Success, Power, and Righteousness (being sure you are the one with the correct interpretation). How might each of these temptations have posed a risk for Jesus?
- How might these temptations pose a risk for us today?

Getting Closure: As time permits, invite each person to take a sheet of paper and a pen/pencil and write down (for their eyes only,) temptations in each of these areas that are stumbling blocks. Allow enough time for prayerful notations. If anyone WANTS to volunteer to describe an insight that came from this activity, accept their offering.

Closing Prayer: Thank you for the insights into temptations that are getting in our way. Give us courage to confront these temptations and, like Jesus was able to do, put them behind us. We ask this through your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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