

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C—Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Older Children
RCL Old Testament Readings – Track One

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-9

Background: Lent is a reflective season – an opportunity to go deep within ourselves and focus on our relationship with God and with others. The forty days of Lent remind us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert following his baptism, pondering who he was and what he was to do. They also remind us of the forty years that the people of God wandered in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt, learning how to be the community of the people of God. The Hebrew Scripture lessons in year C focus on the covenants or promises that God made with the people of God. Like Jesus, we choose to enter this time of “desert,” in order to remember the promises of God, hear the stories of ways in which they were fulfilled (hint: They didn’t always look the way the people expected!), and the ways in which we are called to participate in those promises in our own time – to discover who we are in God and what we are to do.

A Notation for This Week’s Lesson: It is Palm Sunday! Isaiah 50:4-9 is read in all three lectionary years, regardless of which Gospel account is given. This reflects the long understanding of the Christian church that Jesus is the suffering servant described in Isaiah.

Theme: The Suffering Servant

Before Class: Determine which activity options you will be using and gather the materials needed. You will need the bowl of sand from last week, and a simple cross to place in the sand.

Beginning: Gather the children in your usual manner, perhaps with an opening song or greeting. Ask what they notice in your worship space. See what they remember about the season of Lent. If necessary, remind them that Lent is the time of the church year when we get ready to celebrate the mystery of Easter. It is time for us to focus on things that bring us close to God, and to remember that we are part of God’s family. Have them mark the sign of the cross on their forehead to remember that they are “marked as Christ’s own forever.”

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of Lent, the time we pay special attention to the ways we can come closer to you. Help us to hear your promises, and to remember that we are part of your great family. Amen.

The Story: To start this week, divide your students into two groups. Give the groups 90 seconds to come up with as many words as they can to describe “God’s servant.” When the time is up, have the first group give their answers. Record them on a large piece of paper that everyone can see. Have the second group give their answers and record them in a second column. Give each group one point for each *unique* answer. (So if both groups used “works hard” as part of their description, neither group gets a point for it). The winner (if you need a winner!) is the group that has the most points.

Next, your class will see how Isaiah describes God's servant. Help the children find Isaiah 50 in their Bibles. Isaiah is in the middle section of the Bible, just after the poetic books of Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon. (Feel free to use the Table of Contents that is at the beginning of every Bible to find Isaiah. There is nothing wrong with using this tool!) Remind them that the writing in the book of Isaiah is a different kind of writing than in the narrative stories that we often use in church school. Isaiah is a poet and a prophet. This passage has long been used during Holy Week in the church. Christian people understand the servant that Isaiah describes in verses 4-9 to be Jesus.

You might choose to have this passage printed out on a handout for each student, so they can write on the paper. Have the class follow along as you read Isaiah 50:4-9 aloud. While you are reading, have them circle or highlight words that stand out to them in this description (e.g. "teach" and/or "innocent").

Make a new list of all the words they highlighted, to put next to the lists that the groups created.

Ask the students to work in their original group to come up with an example of each word on the Isaiah list from the life of Jesus. Or, if you want to be more focused, you can give them the gospel text for this week, Luke 22:14-23-56, and ask them to match parts of that narrative to the words from this description.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder which words were on Isaiah's description of God's servant that we did not think of? I wonder why those words were chosen?
- I wonder which part of Isaiah's description you liked best?
- I wonder how the church began to connect this passage with Jesus? With Palm Sunday/Holy Week?
- I wonder how this passage shapes or changes your understanding of Holy Week and Easter?
- I wonder if you like the symbol of the cross for God's servant, or if you can think of a different one?

Activity Options:

1. **Mobile or Story bag:** Each story in the coming weeks lends itself to a symbol, which can be created to hang on a mobile or to fill a story bag that the children can take home at the end of Lent to remember the promises of God. (The symbols will be a star, a red leaf, stones, a portion of a map or a road, and a cross.) *The symbol for this week is a cross.*
 - a. **For the Mobile:** You will need the embroidery hoop hanger that you created the first week of Lent. You will need to be prepared for children who were not here that week, either by helping them create the hanger (directions in week 1), or by having a few hangers prepared for them. For this week's cross, you could work with the children to create a cross out of construction paper, or you can find simple wooden crosses at the craft store. (If a child or your group came up with a different symbol that they preferred to the cross to represent God's servant, feel free to adapt!) Punch a hole in one end of the cross, and tie a length of yarn

through the hole. Attach the other end of the yarn to the embroidery hoop so that it hangs down.

- b. **For the Story bag:** You will need a small cloth bag for each child. (These would be easy to make, or can be found inexpensively at craft stores. Burlap or muslin would be good choices to reflect the colors of the desert.) Prepare the cross as above for the mobile, eliminating the yarn. Add the cross to the story bag.
2. **Journal:** An inexpensive journal can be created for each child to use during Lent. Composition books work well, or you might simply gather several pieces of notebook paper, and make construction paper covers by stapling them together down the sides. Journaling can be in words or pictures, and can be free-form, or follow a prompt. Possible prompts for this week: *I wonder what using the word servant to describe Jesus feels like to you?* Alternatively, the journal could also be a place for exploring possible Lenten disciplines, such as prayer, fasting, or charitable giving.
3. **Congregational Project:** If your congregation takes on a particular project for Lent, consider how to incorporate that into your class time.

Getting Closure: Gather in your story area as you prepare to end class. This can be a good time to share concerns and prayers. To close, you might choose to again remind each child that they are a child of God through the tracing of an invisible cross on their foreheads.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that the season of Lent is coming to a close. Help us to prepare this week for the good news of Easter. Amen.

Isaiah 50:4-9 International Children's Version

The Lord God gave me the ability to teach.
He has taught me what to say to make the weak strong.

Every morning he wakes me.
He teaches me to listen like a student.

The Lord God helps me learn.
And I have not turned against him.
I have not stopped following him.

I offered my back to those who beat me.
I offered my cheeks to those who pulled my beard.
I won't hide my face from them when they make fun of me and spit at me.

The Lord God helps me.
So I will not be ashamed.
I will be determined.
I know I will not be disgraced.

The Lord shows that I am innocent, and he is close to me.
So who can accuse me?
If there is someone, let us go to court together.
If someone wants to prove I have done wrong, he should come and tell me.

It is the Lord God who helps me.
So who can prove me guilty?
All those who try will become useless like old clothes.
Moths will eat them.

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