

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Proper 26
Lesson Plans for Younger Children
Revised Common Lectionary Old Testament Readings – Track One

Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18

Background

Why is it that the journey to go somewhere always feels longer than the return trip on the same road? We are covering the same distance by the same path, but our minds play tricks on us as we trudge towards the finish line. Today we begin the last push of the church year before the renewal of Advent. It is important that we remain alert even as the passage of time might seem slow. It can be easy at this time of year to rush ahead to the holidays that are fast approaching rather than keeping alert in the here and now to experience the important stories that will otherwise go unnoticed.

A Notation for This Week’s Scripture Passage

As we head to our journey’s simultaneous ending and new beginning, Ruth and Naomi set out across the desert on their own path. The journey they are undertaking is the rebranding of their relationship: from mother and daughter-in-law to partners and friends. Ruth’s refusal to leave the side of her mother-in-law was social suicide. Ruth chose family and love over the chance for familiarity and comfort. It is important to note that Ruth is a Moab. In the Hebrew Scriptures there isn’t really a worse thing to be than a Moabite. In Deuteronomy we learn that the Moabites were not allowed to ever convert to Judaism. Marrying a Moabite was out of the question. The author of Ruth states over and over again that Ruth is a Moabite because it is essential to understand that when Ruth returns to Judah with Naomi, she is traveling to a place that despises her because of her heritage. In choosing Naomi, Ruth chooses the God of the Hebrews over the gods of her ancestors. Ruth chooses the unknown and possibly dangerous over the safe and predictable. This section of the text sets us up to begin the journey with these two women over the next couple of weeks and begs the question: would I have the strength to follow if God called me into the unknown?

Theme: We’re In This Together

Before Class: You will need puppets/dolls/ figures for the five characters in the story. Set up a short obstacle journey course that will challenge your students.

Beginning: Invite the children together and have a conversation about what makes a friend a good friend.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, thank you for bringing people into our lives whom we love. Amen.

The Story: Ruth 1:1-18 *For today’s story, find puppets/dolls/figurines that can stand in for each of the five characters in the story. When you talk about each character, refer to their figure to help the children keep track of the different people in the narrative.*

Once, a long, long time ago, there was a woman named Naomi who travel a long way to find a new home for her family. Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, were from Bethlehem. There was not enough food for all of the people there, so Elimelech and Naomi took their two sons and traveled to find a new place to live. After traveling a very long way, Naomi and Elimelech decided to make a home in a country called Moab.

Moab was a nice country, but there were no people there who shared the same faith in God as Naomi and her family had. Naomi's family was happy and healthy. Her sons grew up and were strong and loving men. Naomi's boys met wonderful women in Moab and they each got married. Orpah and Ruth were the women who married Naomi's sons. They were kind and loving women and all together the made a nice family.

Naomi, Elimelech, Orpah, Ruth, and their husbands were very happy. But after many years as a family Elimelech and his two sons all died. Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah were very sad. They missed their husbands and didn't know what to do. Naomi decided that she wanted to go home to Bethlehem, so Orpah and Ruth packed their bags to follow Naomi. When Naomi saw that her daughters-in-law wanted to follow she said,

“Thank you for offering to come to my home country with me. I think it will be better if you stay here in Moab. This is the place where you grew up and the people here believe in the same gods as you do. Stay here, it's okay.”

So Orpah gave Naomi a hug and turned to return to her mom and dad's house. But Ruth would not go. Ruth said to Naomi, “I cannot leave you! I love you very much and you are my family. I will follow you to Bethlehem and make a home for myself there. Your family will be my family and I will believe in your God.”

Naomi could tell that Ruth was not going to leave her. Naomi gave Ruth a hug and they turned to continue on the road to Bethlehem.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder why Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem.
- I wonder how Naomi felt when she told Orpah and Ruth to go back to Moab.
- I wonder how Orpah felt when she turned away from Naomi.
- I wonder how Naomi felt when Ruth stayed with her.
- I wonder if the journey was hard.

Activity: Obstacle Course Journey: pair the children in teams of two. Tell them that we are going on a journey just like Ruth and Naomi. Our journey will not be easy but we will help each other get through the course. Ask the children how they think they can help one another.

Getting Closure: Gather back in the classroom. Ask the students:

- I wonder what makes a good team.
- I wonder what we learned on this journey.
- I wonder what was hard about our journey.
- I wonder what made it easier.

Closing Prayer: Holy God, giver of life, thank you for all of the people you have sent to be on a team with me in life. Amen.

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