

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Third Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

John the Baptist has been calling people's attention to their skewed priorities and baptizing them when they got the message. Now, confined to prison for his preaching that made the authorities uncomfortable, John sends this plaintive question to Jesus: "Are you the one?" How do we answer the question? How do we choose to live out our answer?

Theme: Are You the One?

Before Class: You will need enough Bibles or copies of the scripture for today for everyone.

Beginning: Invite stories of breaking away from the tyranny of our "To Do" lists. What sanctuaries of silence have we encountered? (See First Sunday in Advent for more information.)

Opening Prayer: Loving God, be present with us and guide us as we continue to prepare for the coming of The One. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11 Invite two people to read: The first will read verses 2-4a and second will read verses 4b-11 (which is Jesus speaking.)

Questions:

- Invite the class to pretend they are the religious authorities, and talk among themselves about the threat to the disciplines of their faith that John the Baptist poses. How would the authorities have reacted to John gathering people out on the edge of town, away from the Temple, preaching and baptizing in a muddy river?
- Then, ask the class to pretend they are disciples of John, believing in his message yet afraid that his politically incorrect message is going to land him in jail. What might they have advised him?
- Now, have them picture themselves jailed for the breach of orthodoxy. Imagine the musings of John the Baptist. Did I really break God's law? Are the authorities right and I am wrong? What if I did not get it right, that Jesus is not the ONE? How can I know? How can I find out if Jesus IS the ONE? Then, when John receives the message from Jesus (verses 4b-6) how does he interpret it?

- Then ask them to imagine they have just heard Jesus (verses 7b-11) and are trying to unpack the message. What did they go out in the wilderness to see when they listened to John the Baptist? (Prophets are usually not found in fancy robes in fancy places, but in simple clothes and in simple places.) Who is this prophet? (The last in the long line of Old Testament prophets — no one was greater than this one.)
- What in the world does Jesus mean in verse 11: “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he?” What do we think “the kingdom of heaven” means? (People had thought it was something you had to earn your way into, obeying strict rules, following precise ways of worshipping. Jesus brings the “Kingdom” as a gift. Jesus turns things upside down and downside up).

Getting Closure: Invite the group to discuss what this reading has to do with our lives today. How might we ask Jesus, “Are you the One?” What answers might we hear, see, or experience? (You can do this activity with the whole group or in smaller groups.)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for your prophets and the gift of the kingdom of heaven. Be with us as we seek you and come to know you more deeply as The One. Amen.

Matthew 11:2-11

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’⁴ Jesus answered them,

‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2013 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.