

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Season after Pentecost, Proper 29
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: Luke 23:33-43

In the final 6 weeks of this Lectionary Year C, a firm and hopeful tone soars in Jesus' teachings in a rich symphony of themes. The background music of the Hebrew Scriptures holds the notes of the new covenant — a law written in our hearts rather than codified in legal structures — The Spirit poured out, a vision for the appointed time, God with us, a new heaven and a new earth, and a branch from the tree of David — the remnant gathered. We can believe that Jesus heard this cosmic music as he distilled his huge message to the disciples.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

This Sunday we celebrate Christ the King. We also close the third year of the three-year lectionary cycle. Today we hear a portion of the passion story in which Jesus is hanging on the cross in between two criminals. One is encouraging him to save himself. The other names that Jesus has done nothing wrong and asks that Jesus remember him. Jesus tells him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus' life on earth challenged those in power because it created a new way of life as Jesus talks about liberation from what we normally know as power. Jesus came to "to spread a revolution of love and grace, which entailed identifying and embodying a new kind of power and priority."¹

Theme: Christ the King of Love and Grace

Before: You will need copies of the Bible or the scripture passage for the group.

Beginning: Tell the group that today is the last Sunday in the Church year. We complete the readings from Cycle C and next Sunday will begin Cycle A with the First Sunday in Advent. Today, we read a portion of the passion in which Christ is hanging on the cross between two criminals. Today, we don't focus on the crucifixion, but rather what that crucifixion meant for those around Jesus. How is Christ our King? What does that mean for us?

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for all you that teach us and all that you have given us. Be with us today as we celebrate the love and grace you have given us. Amen.

The Scripture: Luke 23:33-43 Invite one person to read the entire passage. Invite the group to think about what it was like to be one of the criminals hanging there with Jesus.

Questions:

- I wonder what struck you about this story today?
- As Jesus hangs on the cross, he asks for God's forgiveness for those who had crucified him. I wonder what that tells us about Jesus' love for us, for all?
- I wonder what this tells us about the magnitude of forgiveness.

¹ William Loader, "First Thoughts on Year C Gospel Passages from the Lectionary; Christ the King," <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkChristKg.htm> (accessed May 2013)

- As Jesus is being mocked, one criminal is encouraging Jesus to save himself. What would it have been like to be this man next to Jesus?
- What would it have been like to be the other criminal who understood what Jesus was about, and to simply ask Jesus to “remember him” today?
- I wonder what the man’s response was when Jesus told him, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”
- I wonder what would our response be?

Option: Invite the group to think about all the ways in which Jesus confronted the powers that were present when he was on earth. How was Jesus preaching about liberation?

William Loader, in his commentary on the Gospel says, “The songs of the birth narratives are full of it [talk about liberation]. Jesus marches into the synagogue to link his mission to Isaiah 61 in 4:16-20. He announces good news to the poor, hungry, those who wept. He asserts and expresses the value of those considered valueless. He gathers people and announces change. He is not beginning a school of meditation for personal enrichment (though that will have its place); nor is he promising a utopia at another time and another place. Rather he is announcing change and embodying it already in himself and in his community.”²

What does this gospel of liberation mean for us today? How is this “revolution of love and grace” for us? I wonder how we are claiming God’s love and grace? I wonder how we live differently knowing that Christ is King?

Getting Closure: Invite the group to name how they are claiming God’s love and grace. Where do we see God’s love and grace? Where do we see the gospel of liberation being lived out today? What part do we have in this gospel?

Closing Prayer: Loving God, thank you for all you have given us. Thank you for the love, grace, and forgiveness you bestow upon us. Amen.

² *ibid.*

Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

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