

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Matthew (26:36-75) 27:1-54 (55-66)

Lent invites us to step off our mental treadmills, take a breath, and look around. Lent invites us to ask: Where are we demanding solutions? Where can we risk staying in tension? Where are we blind just not noticing? What do we thirst for? Where are we bound or stuck? What will we risk doing during these 40 days of Lent to clear a space in which Easter can break through?

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

As we hear the story of Christ's passion today, how do we hear it anew? Where is this story hitting us differently this year? I wonder what questions you bring to the story and how it relates to your life today.

Theme: The Palm Sunday entry, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus

Ways to Begin: Today is a different sort of day. The Palm Sunday Liturgy reenacts the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the Gospel Lesson is a reading, usually read as a drama of the crucifixion. The very best way to observe this day with children is liturgical...giving them the opportunity to use all their senses in experiencing the central act of our redemption. We are dealing with powerful symbols in these stories and often words fail to tell the full meaning. Gather your class and explain that you all will be walking around and hearing the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his death and his resurrection. Ask them to imagine that they are there.

Gretchen Pritchard in her book OFFERING THE GOSPEL TO CHILDREN describes a reenactment of the Palm Sunday/Easter story. (p. 94 ff.) If you can obtain a copy of this, read it through carefully. If you cannot find Pritchard's book, other suggestions for helping tell the story are: Children of God Storybook Bible by Desmond Tutu OR Book of Bible Stories by Tomie dePaola.

Regardless of which book you use to help you tell the story, have props for the children to interact with the story.

Suggested Supplies to help you tell the story:

- Palm branches for your class to wave
- candles to be blown out at the appropriate moment
- a basin of water and a towel for Pilate (or the children) to wash their hands in
- the sound of a hammer striking a nail...or even letting each child take turns hammering in 4 nails, moving from darkness to light as an experience of Resurrection.

Use your imagination. You need not do all that is in Pritchard's account or even in the same way. But to move about and to hear different pieces of the story with props, sounds, etc. can help each child to experience and to make the story a part of their soul. Whatever you do, make sure the children understand that it is serious business...create the atmosphere that will help them

participate as fully as possible. And with this age child, be sure to include the resurrection in whatever you do.

The Stories: Matthew 26:36-75, 27:1-54 (These are the Propers for today and do not include the resurrection. It might be a good idea to add Matthew 28:1-10 to finish the lesson.)

Activity: If you find you have extra time, provide creative activities such as paint, markers, collage material, crayons, clay etc. and let the children express whatever occurs to them as a way of reflecting on the story.

Closing Prayer: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew (26:36-75) 27:1-54 (55-66)

Lent invites us to step off our mental treadmills, take a breath, and look around. Lent invites us to ask: Where are we demanding solutions? Where can we risk staying in tension? Where are we blind just not noticing? What do we thirst for? Where are we bound or stuck? What will we risk doing during these 40 days of Lent to clear a space in which Easter can break through?

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

As we hear the story of Christ's passion today, how do we hear it anew? Where is this story hitting us differently this year? I wonder what questions you bring to the story and how it relates to your life today.

Theme: The crucifixion

Before: You will need copies of the scripture for today or copies of the Bible. You will need response materials: watercolors, chalk, markers, colored pencils, bits of colored paper and glue sticks, clay. If you choose to play music, make sure you are set up before the children arrive.

Ways to Begin: Gather as usual spending some time together talking.

The Story: Matthew (26:36-75,) 27:1-54 (55-66) This story will be read, usually as a drama during the church service. You may wish to provide an outline on newsprint for your class which would be as follows:

- 1) Jesus enters Jerusalem for Passover on the back of a donkey. He is greeted as the long-awaited Messiah.
- 2) During the week he throws out the Moneychangers in the Temple who are selling animals and birds for guilt offerings. This annoys the Pharisees and other high officials of the Temple.
- 3) On Thursday night he celebrates a meal with his friends telling them that the bread and wine is like his body and blood and in the future, whenever they eat and drink together, to remember this...that he will be with them in the substance of bread and wine.
- 4) After the meal, going out to pray, Jesus is confronted by soldiers, betrayed by Judas and arrested. He is condemned by the Sanhedrin (Jewish leaders) and turned over to Pilate, the Roman Governor.
- 5) Pilate is hesitant to condemn him for lack of evidence but doesn't want to start a riot among the Jews who are calling for Jesus' death. Jesus provides no defense. The people choose to have Pilate release a murderer called Barabbas, and call for Jesus' death.
- 6) Jesus is whipped and condemned to death by crucifixion. His charge is blasphemy.
- 7) Jesus is crucified between two thieves.

Then have someone read or have a volunteer read Matthew 27:33-54.

Questions:

- As you hear this story, what strikes you, moves you, raises questions for you?
- Take a look at the central figures in the story: Judas, Disciples, Pharisees and temple leaders, Pilate, Barabbas, soldiers. What do you imagine was going through their minds as the events proceed from Palm Sunday to the Crucifixion?
- I wonder what their thoughts and feelings were at each point of the story.
- I wonder who you can identify with and why?
- If you had been standing at the foot of the cross, what questions would you have wanted to ask God?
- What questions still linger for you today?

Activity: Invite the children to express their responses to questions below with paint or markers, or poetry or some abstract design.

How do you understand the Holy Week events?

What is their meaning for you personally?

(Provide a variety of mediums...watercolors, chalk, markers, colored pencils, bits of colored paper and glue sticks, clay.)

You may wish to play some music such as a Bach Requiem as they work. Suggest they work very quietly.

Getting Closure: If time allows, invite them to share their creations with one another.

Closing Prayer: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 220.)

Matthew 27:33-54

³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” ³⁸Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴²“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.” ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” ⁴⁴The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. ⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ⁴⁷When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” ⁴⁸At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Palm Sunday
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew (26:36- 27:10) 27:11-54 (27:55-66)

Lent invites us to step off our mental treadmills, take a breath, and look around. Lent invites us to ask: Where are we demanding solutions? Where can we risk staying in tension? Where are we blind just not noticing? What do we thirst for? Where are we bound or stuck? What will we risk doing during these 40 days of Lent to clear a space in which Easter can break through?

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

As we hear the story of Christ's passion today, how do we hear it anew? Where is this story hitting us differently this year? I wonder what questions you bring to the story and how it relates to your life today.

The Theme: The Crucifixion

Ways to Begin: Spend time together talking, then gather in a circle.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 272.)

The Story: Matthew (26:36- 27:10) 27:11-54 (27:55-66) This is long and it will be read during the service, so give everyone a copy of the scripture and invite them to read the 27:1-54 silently.

Questions:

- Consider for a moment the effect this story would have on you if you were reading it for the very first time. What strikes you, moves you, raises questions for you? Share your answers briefly without further conversation.
- Try to put yourself in the role of the characters in the story. Imagine yourself to be Judas. What do you think and feel? If you had been Pilate, what would you have thought and felt? What might the chief priests and elders think and feel? Barabbas? The crowd? The soldiers? The robbers? Discuss each person or group examining their possible thoughts and feelings. With whom can you identify?
- If you had been present at the foot of the cross, what questions might you have wanted to ask God? What questions still linger for you today?

Closing Prayer: Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, p. 272.)

***There will be no Lesson for Easter Sunday.*

Matthew 27:1-54

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.² They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.³ When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.⁴ He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.”⁵ Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.”⁷ After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners.⁸ For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price,¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.”¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?”¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.”²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.²¹ The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”²² Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!”²³ Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”²⁵ Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

²⁶ So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,²⁹ and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”³⁰ They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.³¹ After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.³² As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.³⁵ And when they

had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;³⁶ then they sat down there and kept watch over him.³⁷ Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”³⁸ Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.³⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads⁴⁰ and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying,⁴² “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.”⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’”⁴⁴ The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.⁴⁵ From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.⁴⁶ And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁴⁷ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.”⁴⁸ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

⁵³ After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.⁵⁴ Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

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