

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 3:1-17

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

What color is the wind? What shape is the love of a parent for a child? Some things are easily quantified. In some matters, we simply fall, trustingly, into the arms of faith.

Theme: The Choice to Risk Believing

Before Class: We will have very long passages each of the next five weeks of Lent. If the children are very good at reading, and you choose to read the entire passage, you will want copies of the passage below for each child.

The passages from John in the next four weeks are rich and very abstract making them hard to access for concrete-operational children. These lessons focus on one concrete aspect of the passage, trusting that the children will hear these passages again when they are older and more attuned to abstract thinking.

Beginning: Ask the children what they think of this statement: “Believing is Seeing.” How is it different from what we usually hear? (“Seeing is Believing?”) Can the children think of things they believe but cannot see? (Example: I believe that the Taj Mahal is in India, but I have never seen it. I know my heart is beating, but I cannot see it, etc.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the wonders you have created, both those we can see and those we cannot see. Amen.

The Story: John 3:1-17 (A synopsis of the story)

Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees, a very religious group who worked really hard to follow all the rules. He had heard Jesus speak and was curious, but he was hesitant to come see Jesus. So Nicodemus went to Jesus at night and began asking Jesus questions. Jesus told Nicodemus that he would need to be born from above, which thoroughly confused Nicodemus. Jesus was trying to help Nicodemus understand that it was not about keeping all the rules, but being ready for the God's Spirit. The Spirit, like the wind, blows where it wants to blow, and we cannot see it. God sent Jesus to show people the way. Jesus will be lifted up (in the resurrection). God loves all of us and wants us to love God.

Option: (If you want to read the whole passage)

Invite for three volunteers to read the parts of the narrator, Nicodemus, and Jesus. Be sure to choose a good reader to be Jesus or the teacher may want read this part because he has some long parts.

Questions:

- I wonder what stood out for you in today's story.
- I wonder what we know about Nicodemus from this passage? (He was probably a very devout Jew, a member of the Pharisees, and very respected in his community. He also had a sneaking hunch that Jesus might be more than a teacher sent from God. He probably really wanted to believe what Jesus was saying, but was having trouble with it. He was used to very literal thinking: being born meant something that happened only once and only to tiny babies.)
- What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? (He was trying to help people look at things in a different way. It was not just about getting the right answer.)
- Jesus talks about the wind blowing where it may, and we can hear it but not see it. What are some things we know are happening, but we cannot see? (Our hearts are beating; our skin is renewing itself, so we will have different skin when we come back next week; our hair is growing and so are our fingernails. The stars are shining even though it is daytime, and we cannot see them. The earth is rotating and revolving around the sun. Gravity keeps us from falling off the face of the earth, etc.)
- What are some of the things involved in being in the Spirit that we cannot see, but know are there? (God loves us and hears our prayers. We have the capacity to live together in peace. There is a way other than violence for living in the world.)

Option: A Commercial

Suggest the children, either working all together, or in groups, select one of the gifts we cannot see and create a commercial message selling it to the rest of us. Some options: air, gravity, the Spirit, etc. Tell them that the selling points are that it does not cost anything, but it is very desirable. When they have developed their commercial they can present it to the rest of the class.

Getting Closure: What are some other things we cannot see that we know exist? (The love of our parents for us and our love for them; the love between siblings, the affection between friends, the love God has for us and we for God.)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to show us your ways. Help us to you're your presence and know you are there, even when we cannot see you. Amen.

John 3:1-17

Narrator: Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him,

Nicodemus: ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’

Jesus: ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’

Nicodemus: ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’

Jesus: ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’

Nicodemus: ‘How can these things be?’

Jesus: ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.’

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