

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fifth Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Older Children
Revised Common Lectionary Old Testament Readings – Track One

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14

In the early Church the Easter Vigil was the only time that baptisms were performed. The forty days leading up to Easter was used as a time of reflection, self examination, and instruction for the catechumens, or new converts, in preparation for the new life they would receive at baptism. Lent has always been a teaching season. All the lectionary readings during Lent point towards baptism, either its promises and covenants, or its signs and symbols. Lent is often referred to as a short course in Baptism or a primer of our Christian faith.

Notation for This Week’s Scripture

Living in Babylon during the time of the Exile, Ezekiel’s visions and prophecies gave his fellow Israelites encouragement and support. He put the events of destruction and capture in a theological context, assured the people that God was still with them, and provided hope for return and restoration. The Book of Ezekiel is noted for its thorough chronological notations, vivid imagery, and beautiful prose and poetry. The Lectionary reading of Ezekiel connects to the Baptismal Rite’s forgiveness of sins and new life through baptism. “Heavenly Father we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and raised them to the new life of grace.” [*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 308]

Theme: Prophets Bring Hope

Before Class: Find photos. You can look on internet for pictures of recent hurricanes and rebuilding efforts or urban slums and community gardens. Make copies of Ezekiel choral reading (attached). Photos of devastation and reconstruction, balloons, things to rattle or click together such as pencils, craft sticks, rulers, drums, shakers, or rhythm instruments.

Continuing the Journey of Lent

Lenten Waiting Table

A wonderful visual reminder to the children would be to create a “Waiting Table.” A purple cloth covering a table, a box or even a ledge would provide the display space. At the beginning of the season you could plant grass seed in a basket to produce a “living Easter basket.” Other ideas include fast growing seeds or bulbs, and caterpillars. The message we convey is that growth takes time and nurturing, and although we can’t always see it we can trust that it is taking place.

Lenten Roadmap: A visual tool to help the children mark time is recommended. Some possibilities include a large paper cross with forty spaces marked off, a “road map” with forty spaces leading to Easter, and made or purchased Lenten calendars.

Lenten Giving

A jar or other container to collect Lenten offerings is a visual reminder of sacrificial giving.

Beginning: Announce that it is the Fifth Sunday in Lent, the season that helps us to be ready for Easter. Show the children where you are at on the Lenten calendar or time telling aid from the week before. Collect contributions for your mission project. Hold up a picture of destruction and then show a picture of restoration or rebuilding [ex. Photo of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and then one that shows rebuilding, or a city dump and then its transformation into a community garden.] Explain, "Today we are going to learn how God can fix broken places and people who hurt and make them feel whole and new again. Have you ever seen a paramedic, or a doctor, or even a lifeguard performing CPR on someone? What are they actually doing to the person? [Answer blowing breath or air into them] Breath, it can make the difference between life and death!"

Opening Prayer: Dear God, Breathe your Spirit into us so that we may have a new life with you. Amen.

The Story: God uses very special men and women to get God's message to the people. We call these people prophets. Sometimes God speaks to them through words. Other times God sends the prophet visions or pictures in their imaginations. Ezekiel was one of God's prophets. He had a wonderful imagination so God sent him many unusual pictures to show the story of what God was going to do next.

Ezekiel lived as an exile with the other people of Israel in a country called Babylon. The Israelites' own country had been captured by a foreign army, and their homes and their temple were all destroyed. Being an exile meant that they had to live in this foreign country, and they could not go home again. The people were sad and worried. They wondered if God knew where they were. They wondered if God could hear their prayers so far away from home. They wondered if their prayers counted if they didn't say them in the temple.

Ezekiel was also their priest. He tried to tell the people that God was with them wherever they were. They had been away for a long time. They were losing hope of ever going home again, of ever being a nation again. God sent Ezekiel a vision of a valley full of dry bones. God asked Ezekiel if the bones could live again. Ezekiel answered that only God knew that. God told Ezekiel to order the bones to get up. Ezekiel did as he was told. The bones started to come together, but there was no life in them. Then God asked Ezekiel to command the winds to put the breath of life back into the bones. Ezekiel did as he was told, and the bones stood up and came to life. God made Ezekiel understand that just like this vision, God would put the nation of Israel back to life again. Ezekiel shared this message of hope with the people. Soon they were able to go home again.

Reflection Questions

- I wonder what you liked about the story?
- I wonder if you have ever felt sad or scared, or lost and discouraged, and you didn't know what to do about it?
- Did you ever feel like things were never going to get any better?
- Do you think God would help you if you asked?
- What do you think you would need to do?

Guided Meditation: Where is God?

Ask: “Where do you find God? What is the place where you feel closest to God? Where is the place where you feel you can talk and listen to God best? The ancient Israelites were worried that God wouldn’t find them in a foreign land.” On a board or large sheet of paper, record the children’s responses. Tell them that like Ezekiel they are going to use their religious imaginations to have a meeting with God.

Instructions: Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Do not talk or answer any of my questions out loud.

Breathe slowly. Listen to your breath. Tune out everything around you. In your mind, imagine that special place where you feel closest to God. Take yourself there now. What do you see? What do you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel? Are you sitting somewhere hard or soft? Enjoy this space for a moment. You start to feel a soft, cool breeze blowing around you. In the distance you see a great white light. You keep your eyes on the light as it moves closer. You recognize a face. It is Jesus. Jesus puts an arm around your shoulder and sits down next to you. Jesus says, “I am glad you found me here.” He looks into your eyes and your heart and says, “I sense there is something that is making you sad or troubled. Share it with me.” You take a deep breath. You feel that fresh wind swirling around you again. You decide to trust Jesus and tell him all your worries. Jesus kisses you on the forehead and says, “You are forgiven.” Then He is gone. You see a bright white cloud in the distance. You feel a great lightness inside you. It is as if that fresh wind is now inside you. You skip home with a smile on your face. When you have found your way back to this Sunday School room you may open your eyes.

Invite the children to draw or journal about their experience.

Game: Balloon Toss

Hand out a balloon to each child. Ask them to wait for your instructions. Say to the children, “Prophesy to the balloon to dance through the air.” Have them toss the airless balloons up. Ask what happened.

Now say, “Command your breath of life to come into the balloon, and make the balloon dance in the air.” Children blow into the balloons and release. Note what happened.

Comment, “Without the breath of life in them, they are lifeless and not going anywhere, just like the nation of Israel was during the Exile.” If the children are restless or need a break, they can refill and tie off the balloons to play Balloon Toss. Tell them they have to keep the balloons up in the air to keep the hope of Israel alive.

Closing: Have the children stand and stretch their arms up to the ceiling and then bow to the teacher to say thank you, then to one another, as a way of thanking one another for the time together. Remind them to bring in their Lenten offerings next week.

Closing Prayer: Dear God thank you for this time to learn about you and your prophet Ezekiel. Help us always to welcome your Spirit inside us. Amen.

Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel: The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

Bones: Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We are cut off completely.

Ezekiel: ³He said to me,

God: ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’

Ezekiel: I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ ⁴Then he said to me,

God: ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath* to enter you and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath* in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’

Bones: Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We are cut off completely.

Ezekiel: So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling,

Bones: Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We are cut off completely.

Ezekiel: and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me,

God: ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath:* Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,* and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’

Ezekiel: I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me,

God: ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say,

Bones: Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’”

God: Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

Lent Lesson Plans for Older Children written by Trudy Ardizzone.

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

© 2014 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.