

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fourth Sunday of Easter
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 10:1-10

“I have seen the Lord!” exclaimed Mary Magdalene. At first she does not recognize who is standing beside her. When she realizes it is the risen Jesus she wants to grasp him. He holds her off and tells her to go and share what has happened: He has walked through death and has created a path for us to follow, now and on through our own death.

In these 50 days of Easter, celebrating what Jesus has done for us, we are invited to recognize Jesus standing beside us, as he did with Mary. What is he calling us to do? Perhaps we can train our eyes to look in the direction that this Jesus, standing beside us is looking. What might he be looking at? Do we dare follow where he is leading? Can we notice and honor the various ways Jesus “appears” to people?

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

For the next three Sundays, to help us prepare for Pentecost, we have flashback pre-resurrection passages of Scripture. Today Jesus tells us the story of the Good Shepherd. In the story, instead of looking at ourselves as the sheep where we may be tempted to whine, what if we look at the qualities of an authentic leader? What implications can we find for ourselves?

Theme: Who Will We Follow?

Before Class: If you have a laptop computer you can bring to class, use it to take notes. Otherwise, bring paper and pencils to take notes. You will also need Bibles or copies of the scripture for the children.

Beginning: Ask the children if any of them have ever seen a sheep up close. If any have, ask them to tell us what they have noticed about sheep. Then tell them Jesus told stories about things people were familiar with, and all of his hearers would have had close-up experiences with sheep. Perhaps, if he were telling the story here today, instead of a shepherd and sheep he might have told about a coach and a team.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for stories that help us learn what you want us to know. Amen.

Option: Particularly if the children in your group are unlikely to have seen a sheepfold, tell them that it was usually a place with walls formed from stacking rocks high enough that a sheep could not hop over them but low enough that a shepherd standing inside could see a wolf coming in the distance. The sheepfold would have four walls, with a narrow opening on one side just wide enough for sheep to go through. The shepherd would station himself at the opening to keep sheep from going out and dangerous animals from coming in. Sheep are also not terribly bright. They can easily wander off if no one is watching, and if they fall into even the most shallow hole, they cannot get out by themselves.

The Story: John 10:1-10 Invite children to read: Jesus 1, Narrator, and Jesus 2.

Questions:

- What do you think it was that Jesus was trying to help the people understand that they couldn't? (That an authentic leader loves the people he/she is responsible for. He used this parable because people could identify themselves with and learn from the relationship between sheep and shepherds.)
- What does Jesus mean that he is the gate? (He is showing us the way to live.)
- What is Jesus telling us life will be like if we follow Jesus? (Verse 10b — abundant)
- We could say, "But we are NOT sheep. We are people!" In what ways are we **not** like sheep? (We can figure things out. We could roll over and get up if we fell into a shallow ditch. We can find our own way to school and back. We can read and write, etc.)
- In what ways are we really like sheep? (We tend to follow leaders: good ones and sometimes bad ones.)
- Brainstorm with the children how we decide whether we can trust someone we choose to follow. How do we make choices in our schools, with our friends, with the shows we watch on TV or the sites we explore on the Internet?
- When the younger children in our schools (who probably look up to us as "big kids") watch us, what qualities of leadership would we want them to see in us?

Activity: Since children in school, at church, or in their families who are younger than them look to them as leaders, what advice would they give to younger children to help them make good choices and have life abundant? (Scribe on the laptop, if you brought one, or write on a large piece of paper what they tell you. You might choose to offer to copy the notes onto a computer and make copies for each of the children.) What advice would your group give about dealing with bullies, making good choices about which friends to trust, etc.?

Getting Closure: Ask the children to look at what has been scribed and silently make some choices about the things they think are most important.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that Jesus shows us the way to abundant life. Amen.

John 10:1-10

Jesus 1: ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’

Narrator: Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them,

Jesus 2: ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’

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