

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Season After Pentecost, Proper 8
Lesson Plans for Older Children
Revised Common Lectionary Old Testament Readings – Track One

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

The Season After Pentecost is the longest season of the church year, spanning almost half the calendar year. The weeks after Pentecost are called Ordinary Time coming from the word “ordinal” which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The liturgical color of the season is green. It is often thought of as a season of growth both in our personal faith and in the life of the church. Common themes to focus on throughout the season are:

- Our relationship with God.
- Our relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another through our prayers, the sacraments and life in the body of Christ.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- The Church and its work for God’s mission.

Background For The Teacher

There are many difficult stories in the Bible that are the stories of the relationship with God and a growing self understanding as God’s people. And we read this one with the perception and understanding of the faithful who remembered and told the story throughout the ages. These Biblical truths are not unlike the hard lessons we sometimes learn in fables or morality plays: Life is not always fair. Things are not always easy - even when we do what is right - and God can seem a hard taskmaster or judge. And what the writers of Genesis saw as God’s testing of Abraham is not easy to digest. Adults can often use metaphor to see the lesson for us. For children this is harder. Be sensitive to these issues and shape the lesson for your own context.

The Book of Genesis provides foundational stories of our faith, God’s calling of a people, their often-failed responses to God, and God’s steadfast love throughout. The Abraham saga tells of the formation of Israel, beginning with the faithfulness of its patriarch Abraham. Although disillusioned with the wickedness of human beings, God separates out one family line to bring divine blessing to all subsequent families of the world. Abraham, the model of absolute faithfulness, trust and obedience, is symbolic of Israel’s idealized self. At the request of God Abraham has left his homeland to travel to a promised land. He has entertained angels unaware and trusted God’s promise of an heir even at an advanced age. Now in the ultimate test of faith, God is asking for a sacrifice of his only and beloved son Isaac, Abraham’s only chance at extending his lineage. The sacrifice also calls in to question God’s earlier promise to make of Abraham a great nation, more numerous than the stars.

Theme: This is Only a Test

Before Class

For your altar you will need a cloth, a candle and lighter and a closed metal container, and water. For your Love Collage you will need old magazines.

Prepare a bulletin board that says “God Creates a Great Nation.” Cut out two squares and a triangle. Write Abraham on one square and Isaac on the other. Write Sarah on the triangle. Put them up on the board during the story. [See Attachment One.] Review the story.

Important Note Regarding This Lesson:

There are biblical stories that are not pleasant: stories that, at first, seem to convey a God who is not fair and or kind; stories that are scary and difficult to understand or accept. However, they are in fact part of our scriptural traditions. At the end of all three segments of this lesson, we learn that our God is a loving God who keeps promises.

This is a difficult story and how (and if) you use all of the segments of this lesson is a decision only you as the teacher can make. You know the level of understanding on the part of your children and as well as how prepared their parents are to respond to questions the children may have after leaving class. Choose the parts of this lesson that are appropriate for use in your community.

Beginning: Gather the children together and prepare them for the lesson.

Sometimes tests make people nervous or worried. But tests are a good way of finding things out. If the doctor wants to know how healthy or sick you are, she can test your blood or your temperature. You can take an eye test to find out how well you see and if you need glasses. Scientists make up experiments to test out their ideas so they can discover new things. Your teacher at school needs to know how much you are learning so he or she gives you tests. If you study for the test it can help you learn and remember. Before you can get a driver’s license you have to take a written test to make sure you know the driving rules. Then you have to take a road test to make sure you can be a safe driver.

Tests can measure things and tell us where we stand. Sometimes people test one another to try to find out how much they are loved. Do you ever watch to see whom Mom is giving the biggest piece of cake to? When you have misbehaved have you ever heard Mom or Dad say, “You are testing my patience?” Sometimes we test or challenge someone to make them stronger. This is a story of a test God made for one of God’s people whom he loved very much. Let’s find out whom it is and if he passes the test.

You may need to explain the words “sacrifice” and “offering” to the children using simple examples which relate to their lives. Remind the children that this is a story and stories are used to help us learn and understand new things.

Opening Prayer: Dear God help us to be like Abraham who trusted you and put his love for you above all else. Amen.

The Story: Genesis 22:1-14

In the right context the story can deliver a good message. *Assess your audience and omit or add details as seems appropriate.*

Decide which Bible you will use if you are going to read the story. Otherwise you might find it better to “tell” the story using language that you believe will be comfortable for the children. You may want to use the following resource from www.thebricktestament.com. It is a visual depiction using Lego images that can aid in telling the story.

Link: http://thebricktestament.com/genesis/god_demands_child_sacrifice/01_gn22_01.html

Today’s story comes from the first book of the Bible called Genesis. Genesis means beginnings. It tells the stories of how God made the world. It also tells the stories of how God’s people were trying to get to know God and understand God. Sometimes they got it right and this made God very happy. Sometimes they didn’t understand at all and did some very wrong things as a result. Sometimes they tried to copy the way other people were worshipping different gods and this made God very upset. No matter what the people did, God continued to love and forgive them and over a long period of time the people grew in their understanding of God.

Now there was a man named Abraham who loved and trusted God with all his heart. God appreciated Abraham for his faithfulness and obedience. God chose Abraham to be the father of a new nation called Israel. **[Put Abraham’s square on the board.]** God told Abraham to leave his comfortable home and travel to a new land that God wanted to give to His people. So without questioning, Abraham packed up his wife, his nephew and their servants and traveled to this new land. **[Put Sarah’s triangle on the board.]** Abraham did not know where he was going or what he would find there, but he trusted God and obeyed. He knew God wanted what was good for him. Sometime later God told Abraham that he would make of him a great nation that would serve as a blessing to all the people who would come into the world. Abraham and his wife Sarah did not have any children so Abraham could not understand how this could happen. But Abraham believed that if God said this would happen then it must be so. Abraham and his wife were very, very old, long past the age for having children. When God sent a message to Sarah that she was going to have a baby she laughed. But God kept the promise and Abraham and Sarah had a son. They named him Isaac, which means “God laughs.” **[Put Isaac’s square on the board.]** So God made up a test to challenge Abraham and help him grow even stronger in his faith.

[You may use the version below or read the passage now from the Bible.]

God called Abraham and Abraham answered, “Here I am,” which was the correct way to answer God. God said, “Take your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.” This meant that Abraham would have to kill Isaac. We don’t know for sure, but we can imagine what Abraham must have been thinking. This was a very strange and difficult request. How could Abraham ever become the father of a great nation if his only son was killed? But faithful Abraham did not question God. He must have figured that God had reasons and somehow God would make everything right. So Abraham set out with his son Isaac and some servants to make the journey to Moriah. Isaac carried the wood and Abraham carried the fire and a knife. Isaac questioned his father, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham replied that God himself would

provide the lamb. Abraham's heart must have been very heavy with sadness as they came near the place of the sacrifice. But faithful Abraham built the altar. In obedience to God Abraham tied up Isaac and placed him on the altar. Just as Abraham lifted his knife to kill Isaac he heard the voice of an angel of the Lord call to him from heaven saying, "Abraham, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to harm him. Now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your only son from me." When Abraham looked up he saw a ram stuck in some bushes. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it to God instead of his son. And Abraham named that place "The Lord will provide." From that day forward Abraham's and Isaac's faith were even stronger because they knew the Lord would always provide."

Questions:

- What made Isaac the ultimate sacrifice for Abraham?
- Is it still a sacrifice if you are not giving up something that is important to you?
- I wonder what your response to God would have been?
- I wonder what you would have said if you were Isaac?
- Who has made the ultimate sacrifice for us?

Art Activities

Love Collage

In today's story, we see the love of God, the love of Abraham, and the love of Isaac. We are going to create a Love Collage to show one another what we think love looks like. You can use images and words to the collage.

Using old magazines, have the children cut or tear out pictures of the things they treasure most in life. If they can't find a particular picture they can add the word to the collage. [If you are pressed for time the children can just write a list.]

Altar: Explain that in the Old Testament the people thought that God required burnt offerings to show their love for Him. Jesus taught us that God would rather we show our love through our care and love for one another. Create an altar with a small cloth and a candle. One by one have the children offer up their treasures as a sacrifice to God by putting on the altar.

Closing

Have the children help put all supplies away. Return to the circle. Explain that in the season of Pentecost we focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If you have time, you can invite them to share where they have seen or felt God's love this week.

Closing Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for showing us that You are what matters most in life. Help us to be like Abraham, ever faithful and trusting your will for us. Amen.

Lesson written by Trudy Ardizzone, 2011

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Abramam's Family Tree

