

Lesson Plans That Work
Year A – Season after Pentecost, Proper 21
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

In this season after Pentecost, we hear stories of Jesus’ ministry in the world and our call to engage in that mission. This season is also known as 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 color for this season is green and it is often referred to as the green growing time as we hear stories of what God is calling us to do in the world, we join in that call, and we grow in our faith.

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

Jesus’ journey takes him to the temple for the last time and stays there. During these next three chapters we see Jesus teaching on a variety of topics, not because he set out to do so, but because the high priests, elders and Pharisees are trying to trap him by asking tricky questions and backing him into a corner. As we read these stories, we know that Jesus was not going to play that game.

Jesus is seen by others as having the authority to heal and teach, but in today’s lesson the chief priests and elders question this authority. By answering their question with a question about John the Baptist, Jesus is not stalling them, but rather evoking the prophets that have come before him and identifying himself and John the Baptist with the prophets of the past. When the chief priests and elders respond, they respond not from what they know to be true, but rather from a place of political maneuvering. To save themselves, they say they do not know.

So Jesus presents them with a parable, a story that teaches us about a truth. This is a parable about doing the work God has given us to do, not just saying we are going to do it, but going and doing the work, no matter where we are on our own journey or about what we may or may not have done in the past. God wants us out in the world, doing what we are called to do. As people of God we are to witness, to name our beliefs and be a worker in the field.

Theme: What God has Given Us To Do

Supplies Needed: You will need copies of the scripture for today or Bibles for each person.

Beginning: Welcome them to the room. Once they are gathered ask them to share what they things they have done in the past to serve others.

Prayer: Almighty God, we gather together to listen to your message so we may come to know you and discover how we are called to serve you in this world. Open our hearts and minds that we may explore what you are asking us to do. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 21:23-32

You will be reading the lesson today twice and will need two different readers. Think about having two very different voices read this such as male or female, young or old. Before reading the lesson the first time, invite people to listen for a word or phrase that stood out for them.

Invite the first reader to read the lesson.

After a few moments of silence, invite the group to say what word or phrase stood out for them.

When you feel everyone has shared, invite the group to listen once more and to listen for what Jesus is saying to them. Invite the second reader to read the lesson.

After a few moments of silence, invite the group to say what they heard Jesus saying to them.

After everyone has shared, you can begin the reflection questions.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder why the chief priests and elders were questioning Jesus? (to test him and his authority)
- Why did Jesus answer a question with a question?
- What do you think Jesus was trying to tell us in his story about the two sons?
- I wonder how the first son felt when he decided to go do the work?
- I wonder how the second son felt when he didn't go do the work even though he said he would?
- I wonder if someone has ever asked you to do a task and you have either done it or not done it?
- Where might you find yourself in this lesson today?

Closure: Invite the participants to talk about where they might serve others this week, how they might do God's work in the world.

Gather/Ending: Gracious and Loving God, we thank you for our time together as we explored what it means to serve you and others. Help us to remember that doing your work in the world, seeking and serving others in your name, and being the people you have called us to be is the most important thing we can do. Be with us as we leave this place and bless our acts of service that we might serve others in your name. Amen.

Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Written by The Rev. Shannon Kelly

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.