

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Fourth Sunday of Easter
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: John 10:11-18

Background: Easter - the unearned gift of grace. The reflective season of “going in” that Lent provided (no matter what disciplines we undertook, nor even how well we attended to them) explodes on Easter. Of course, we cannot “figure it out.” How comforting, then, to have these scriptures, showing first how the disciples struggled to grasp what had happened and then stories of Jesus before the crucifixion, which are written in the light of the Resurrection.

As Easter people we know, as Paul said, that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God. We are people who expect life out of death. And so, in Eastertide we celebrate the wonder and prepare ourselves to take the awesome message out into the world on Pentecost.

A Notation for this Week’s Gospel

For the rest of the Easter Season, we have stories Jesus shared before the crucifixion. Now, in the light of the resurrection, they take on a powerful new value. Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd. Even though sheep are not part of our lives like sheep were for the people who first heard these stories, we can resonate to the concept of a shepherd who knows his own and whose own know him. We belong to this shepherd. Yet, if, as Jesus tells us, he has other sheep that are not of this fold that he must bring also, we have work to do – work given to us by the Good Shepherd.

Theme: The Good Shepherd

Before Class: If time and other resources permit, acquire cotton (the cotton that comes in rolls is best, large cotton balls will also work), a package of chenille stems (white, black, or even brown), bright construction paper folded in half, crayons, and glue or glue sticks. You may want to have a lamb stuffed animal. Note: the rest of the stories we have in the Easter season come from before the crucifixion and resurrection. The timeframe will not be important to the children, so you may not even want to mention it.

Beginning: Greet the children by saying: “Peace be with you.” See if any of them remember who also said this to people. Listen for what is going on in the lives of the children: what there is to celebrate, what might be a concern.

Praying: Thank you, God, for this new day. Thank you for the people you send to take care of us. Amen.

The Story: (Before you begin the story, put the lamb stuffed animal or a piece of the cotton in your hand.) Tell the children Jesus wanted the people to know that he loves them and he wants to help take care of them. Lots of the people he was talking to had sheep that they took care of. Have any of you ever patted a sheep? Ever seen one?

Let's pretend that this stuffed animal (or piece of cotton) I am holding is a real sheep. I am holding it – gently – in my hand. I am pretending that I am Jesus and I am loving this little sheep. I will hand our sheep on to the child next to me, and that child can hold it and pretend to be Jesus loving the sheep. We will take turns until each of us gets to hold the sheep.

Jesus told the people that he would not run away and leave the sheep all alone. Jesus said he would protect the sheep from any creature that might hurt the sheep. And Jesus said there were lots of other sheep that needed to come be with Jesus. Jesus told the people that his sheep can recognize his voice when he calls them and he recognizes their voices when they call him.

You can read the story from a Children's bible if you wish.

Lost and Found: Tell the children you are going to play a game of "Lost and Found." They may recognize it as hide and seek. The difference is that the children will hide, pretending that they are lost. One child will pretend to be a lost sheep and go hide. One child will pretend to be Jesus and go find the child. The "sheep" that is hiding needs to keep making very soft sheep sounds ("baa, baa, baa") so Jesus can find the lost sheep. When Jesus finds the sheep, another child gets to be the sheep and another gets to be Jesus. Keep going until each child gets to play both parts. If weather permits, and your grounds comply, it would be good to do this outside.

Easter Activity: Continue the Easter project started on Easter 2. Make sheep to take home and to decorate our Easter tree or Easter mobile.

You can have the children color the sheep or have them create their own. Each sheep will need a piece of cotton and chenille stems (one stem cut in fourths makes four sets of legs - enough for two sheep). Twist one stem length around the cotton to form the neck. Bend both ends of the stem about a quarter of an inch -- to form the feet. Twist another stem length around the cotton to create the back legs. And, bend both ends of the stem to form the back feet. Children's imagination will transform these little lumps into sheep. Allow time for the children to play with the sheep – getting lost, getting found. And be sure to add some of the sheep to your Easter tree or Easter mobile.

Getting Closure: Gather the children into a circle as they hold their sheep. You hold a sheep, too, as you invite the children to comfort the sheep they are holding and tell the sheep that Jesus loves all the sheep and all the children.

Closing Prayer. Thank you, Jesus, for letting us know that we are your sheep and you love us. Amen.

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