

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Fifth Sunday of Easter
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: John 15:1-8

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

We have work to do, but not as lone rangers. We are called to stay connected to the vine, faithfully and courageously reaching out, securely connected to the vine of life. We will probably experience some very painful pruning. Later, often much later, we will experience the fruit. Abiding in that vine, trusting in it, and accepting its confines, we will learn to want the appropriate things and be free to ask for them. The work we are given to do, we will be able to do joyfully to the glory of God.

Theme: I am the Vine, You are the Branches

Before Class: You may want to connect with the teacher of Older Children to find out if they are doing a vine project and if they are, you can choose whether or not to incorporate this into your lesson as well. You will need copies of the Bible for your group.

Beginning: Tell the class that in today’s scripture, the image Jesus uses is the vine. Ask them to reflect for a moment or two on memories of a vine: perhaps a grape arbor in the yard of a grandparent, an ivy vine they finally got to grow in their yard, even a vine dance they may have danced. Invite them to share images that came to them.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the comforting image of a vine. Thank you for reaching out to us to help us stay connected to your vine: Jesus. Amen.

The Scripture: John 15:1-8 Ask for volunteers to read. An option would be to have three different voices for these three sections of John 15: verses 1-3; verses 4-6; and verses 7 and 8.

Reflection Questions:

- It is fairly non-threatening to consider branches being removed that bear no fruit when we are talking about a vine. What other types of branches might Jesus be referring to here?

- Those of us who garden will have pruned a plant. Almost all of us have experienced a pruning or trimming back things in our lives. Ask people to volunteer experiences of pruning and the, perhaps, unexpected benefits they experienced.
- In verse 3 (New Revised Standard Version) Jesus says you have already been “cleansed.” This can be interpreted as “pruned.” In what ways might it make us feel energized as we consider verse 3? (Jesus has already done much of the work for us; we are not doing this alone, etc.)
- How would we define “abide?” (Webster's first definition is “to wait for.”)
- How do we reconcile Jesus’ offer to “abide in him” with our cultural insistence that we excel, succeed, live up to our potential? In what ways can we live up to our potential and still abide in Jesus?
- How do we reconcile verse 7 with our fervent prayers when it appears that our requests have been denied?
- How can we encourage each other to grow into that place of complete abiding where we long for the same things God longs for?

Getting Closure: If the children are planning to share their “vine” with others, describe the project to the adults so they can be thinking about ways to follow the children’s guidance in their project.

Invite the class to stand, hold hands, and look around the circle at all of us who are connected by the vine of Jesus. Ask them to imagine Jesus’ hands in the hands they are holding -- and Jesus hands in their own hands.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending us Jesus to hold up for us the promise of connection and abiding love. Help us to choose to stay connected to you so we can truly abide in you. Amen.

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

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

© 2015 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.