

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

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: To create an image of the “connectedness” that a vine would connote, a ball of very soft yarn is recommended. It could be green or brown, if you want, and it would be good for it to be fairly thick. The word “connected” may not be understood at first, but as you use it in the story, the children will “connect” with its meaning. Construction paper, crayons or felt markers, and glue sticks will be needed.

Beginning: Greet the children with “Peace be with you.” If the children do not all show up at the very same time, invite each child to greet the next child who arrives with the same greeting. See if any of the children remember who said “Peace be with you” first a long time ago. (Jesus.) What do they think it means to say “Peace be with you.” (An answer could be that we want to tell people that Jesus loves us and wants us not to be worried about things.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for being here with us – even though we cannot see you. Thank you for showing us we are all connected to you. Amen.

The Story: Give each child a piece of the yarn -- about 18 inches or so long -- and take a piece yourself. Wad your length of yarn into a little ball. Invite the children to do the same thing. Tell the children that now each of us has a little ball of yarn. But none of these balls of string is connected to any of the others. Each one is all alone. Would you want to be all alone – not connected to anyone?

Jesus wants us to know that we are NOT all alone. We are connected to Jesus. So let's try something different. Let's stand in a circle. (Holding onto the end of a larger ball of yarn, unroll enough to hand the ball to the child next to you.) Let's pass this ball around the circle, so everyone has some yarn and we are all connected. (As the ball of yarn comes around the circle and back to you, hold both ends of the yarn to close the circle. Who else is in the circle? (Our parents, siblings, grandparents -- puppies, whatever is offered) And Jesus is like the yarn -- holding us all together!

Stay connected to me, Jesus tells us. Stay connected, and I will help you do hard stuff, and you will always know that I love you.

Activity: Ask for a volunteer to let go of the yarn, leave the circle, and stand outside the circle. Then ask for another volunteer to leave the circle and go gently bring that child back into the circle. Continue, until each child gets a chance to leave the circle and be brought back into the circle.

Activity: Give each child a piece of construction paper and either give each child a glue stick or tell them each will have a turn with a glue stick. Show the children how to make a circle with their piece of yarn, then make a circle with the glue stick on the paper so they can press the yarn on the paper – in a circle. Then they can draw little circles on the paper around the yarn circle, for themselves, their parents, siblings, friends, etc.

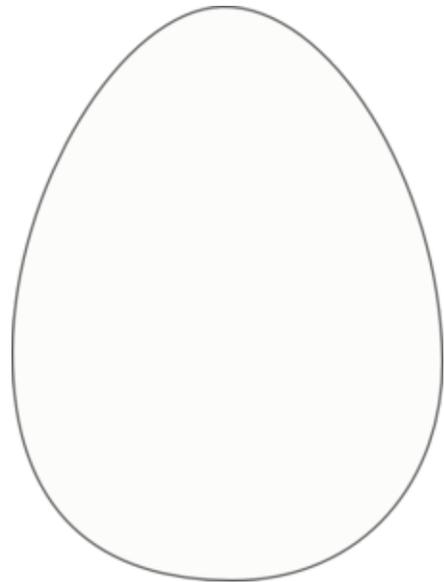
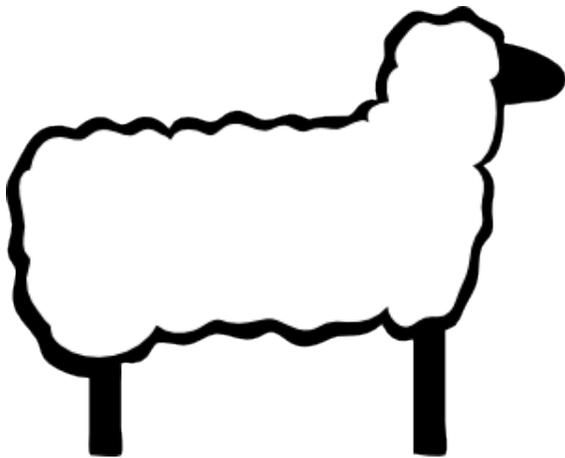
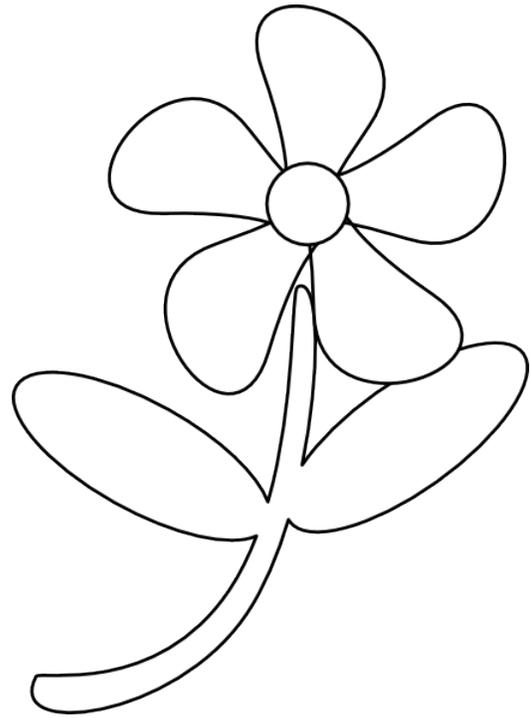
Easter Project: Invite the children to decorate one of the Easter symbols, found below, (from Easter 2) or, using another piece of construction paper, and the yarn piece you cut for yourself, glue a circle and pass the paper around the group so each child can draw themselves on the paper. This finished piece will go under our Easter tree or hang at the bottom of the Easter mobile.

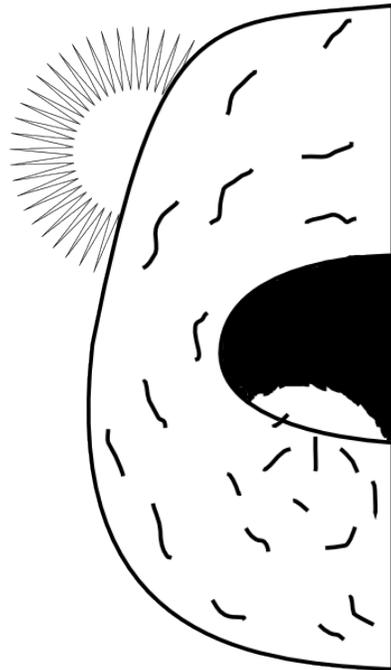
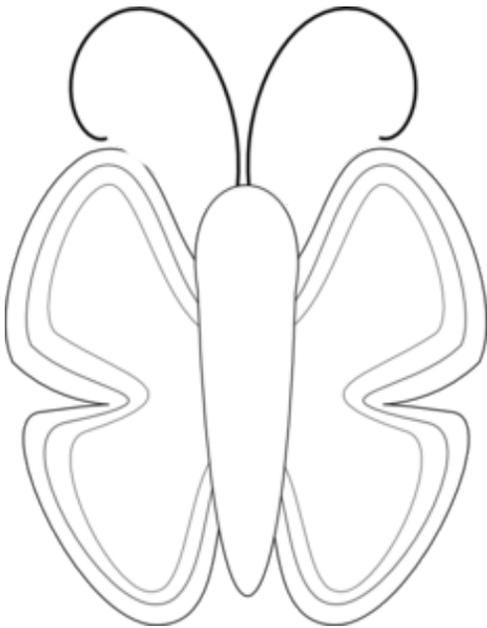
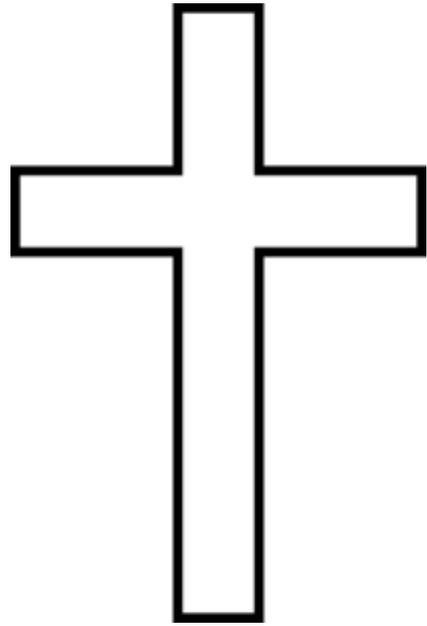
Getting Closure: Ask the children to form a circle and again pass the ball of yarn around so each child is included in the circle. Ask the children, "Who is the yarn?" (As each child grabs hold of the yarn, invite them to say, "Jesus.")

Closing Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for connecting us together and connecting us to you. Thank you, Jesus, for loving us. Amen.

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Year B – Fifth Sunday of Easter
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 15:1-8

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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 will need copies of the scripture or Bibles and of the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP).

Decide how you will “create” a vine that goes all around your space. Using the following sketch as a guide, you could make photocopies of the pattern or show it to the children and invite them to create their own vine. The proposed project invites the children to see the vine as Jesus, and to create a branch for each of their families and friends with a leaf for each person.

Possible materials for this project: brown or green chenille stems and construction paper leaves, floral wire would work. Brown construction paper for lengths of branches and leaves cut from green construction paper would work.

If you have a small enough church to make this a possibility, create the vine where all who come out of church can see it -- cut sufficient branches and leaves for each family in your church -- and have the children in your class help people, after church, place their branches on the church vine. Obviously, you would need to check this out with the leaders of your church before launching the project.



Beginning: Ask the children if they have seen a vine and could describe it to you. (If there are vines growing on or near your church, you could even go out and look at them.) See if any of the children know of a vine growing in their own yard. Tell the children that people who lived when Jesus was telling our story all had not only seen vines, but most of them had vines growing near their houses.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the stories we have from Jesus that help us understand the love you have for us through Jesus. Amen.

The Story: Tell the children that today's Bible story is John 15:1-8 and ask them to find the passage in the Bible. Before asking for volunteers to read, point out some words that they may not be able to define. Say the words, one at a time, see if the children want to define the words, and if not, offer a definition.

Abide: A fancy word for live. You could say, "I abide with my family at my house."

Prune: Yes, a kind of fruit, but it also means cutting away stuff that is no longer producing. We prune the dead branches off our trees so those that are alive will be even healthier. We also prune things that are interfering with the work we have to do. (For example, stop eating junk food and eat stuff that will help us stay healthy.)

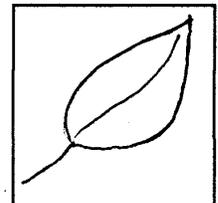
Glorified: Means to be exalted and honored; to be praised.

Ask for volunteers to read the passage.

Reflection Questions:

- What stood out for you in this story?
- Let's see if we can figure out where we are in this passage. If Jesus were here, telling us this story, who would we understand is "the vine?" (Jesus.)
- Who are the branches?
- Who might some other branches be? (Parents, siblings, extended family, friends, community members, teachers, etc.)
- What other branches are on the Jesus vine? (The other members of our community.)

Activity: Show the children the materials you have assembled to make a vine that will either go up around your class space or possibly in a central place in your church. Invite the children to help you create the vine.



Ask each child to create their vine and branches, cutting out a leaf for each person and positioning it on their branch.

Getting Closure: Make sure each child has access to a BCP. Tell the children to turn to page 383 and look at the list at the top of the page. This is the fourth Sunday of this project, so some will notice which intercession we will look at today: “the concerns of the local community.” What ARE the concerns of our community? (Weather-related concerns like drought or floods; people needing jobs, people living alone and lonely.) Accept what the children offer and write them down.

Closing Prayer: Pray for the concerns the children have offered then add “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.

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

Scripture: John 15:1-8

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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

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