

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Fifth Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: John 12:20-33

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Jesus continues the preparation of his followers. The hour has almost arrived for "the Son of Man to be glorified." Whatever could he mean, his disciples wonder? So Jesus selects a concrete image, one they will all have experienced: a grain of wheat – apparently lifeless – yet falling into the earth and dying, bears much fruit. The paradox: those who love their life lose it. Whoever serves Jesus, must follow Jesus. And as Jesus accepts what is to come, the voice again is heard. The crowd thinks it is thunder, the disciples perhaps hear God assuring Jesus that God is being glorified by Jesus. And once again Jesus assures us that when he is lifted up from the earth he will draw all people to himself. The disciples shook their heads. We are still unpacking the power of this message.

Theme: Bearing much Fruit

Before: You will need winter wheat seeds (available from a seed store or a health-food store.) If you are making this a class project you will need one pot, some potting soil, a small handful of seeds and a pitcher with water. If the children are going to take the seeds home, you will need small peat pots a bit more potting soil and more seeds as well as aluminum foil to wrap the pots. Another option is to plant individual pots, and take all of them home with you to be sure they are sufficiently watered, and then bring them back the following week. Write notes to the parents so they can watch with the child the sprouting of the seeds – and be sure the seeds have sufficient water. You will also need a copy of the verse for each child.

Beginning: Tell the children that Jesus has a story that will help the people begin to understand what will happen on Good Friday and Easter. (It is not too early to begin to tell the story of Good Friday and Easter, especially if some of the children in your class are not there every Sunday.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for making seeds. Thank you for the things seeds grow into when they are planted. Amen.

The Story (John 12:20-33): (Have some wheat seeds in your hand as you tell the story) Jesus was talking to his friends and to some people who were trying to figure out just who Jesus was.

Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." No one could figure out what he meant. So he thought a minute and said this: "You have seen seeds, right?" (Show the children the seeds – give each child a seed or two to hold.) "When you look at this seed, it doesn't look like it has any life in it at all, does it? But if the seed dies – if it is planted in the earth – green shoots will come out in a few days."

Planting a Seed: Bring out the pots and the potting soil and let the children plant seeds. In a small pot about a teaspoon of seeds will be plenty; a larger pot might take a few more. Tell the children that we will sprinkle a little soil on top of the seeds. The seeds need to be buried pretty close to the surface. About 1/4 of an inch is best – deeper will take the seeds longer to sprout. What else do the seeds need? Water, of course. If the pots are going home make, sure the parents know to help the child remember to water the soil whenever it feels dry.

Art Activity: Give the children sheets of paper with these words:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Tell the children that we say this in church before we receive the bread and the wine. These few words explain what we believe about Jesus. Invite the children either to learn these words or to illustrate on a sheet of paper to take home.

Getting closure: If the children are going to take the pots home, remind them to water the planted seeds.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for this story about seeds and for what the seeds will become. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Fifth Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 12:20-33

Background

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A Notation for This Week's Gospel

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Theme: Bearing much Fruit

Before: You will need copies of the scripture, paper, pens or pencils, and supplies for planting seeds such as egg crates cut up or plant containers, potting soil, seeds, and water.

Beginning: Tell the children that Jesus is, again, trying to help his disciples understand what Jesus now knows is going to happen. Tell them Jesus has just a little time left to finish training them. Tell them we are going to read today's passage together and then do a TV-type interview.

The Story (John 12:20-33): Ask the children to help you find the passage. Either invite children to read the passage, or you read it as they follow along.

Reflection Questions:

Suggest that the children take parts to act out a conversation between disciples who heard Jesus during this passage and disciples who were not there and are trying to figure out what happened. This is a very abstract passage, so carrying on a conversation may help children get a picture of what we believe about this passage.

To try to figure out what is going on, ask the children to choose who is going to be a disciple who heard and who is going to be one asking questions. (It doesn't matter if there is an unequal

number of disciples and questioners.) The "disciple" children can read the words of Jesus and you can help the others form questions.

Disciples: Verse 12: 23.

Others: What does Jesus mean: "glorified." (None of these people were sure what that might mean. They will after Easter.)

Disciples: Verse 24.

Others: We know what happens when you plant a seed in the ground. (Share experiences of a garden or a project at school with seeds.)

Disciples: Verse 25.

Others: Do we really have to "hate" our life, or could it mean that we choose to follow Jesus and not spend all our time thinking about ourselves?

Disciples: Verse 26

Others: What kinds of things are we doing as "servants" of Jesus? How are we following where Jesus wants us to go?

Disciples: Verse 27.

Others: Is Jesus really okay with what God is asking him to do?

Disciples Verses 28 and 29.

Others: Are you pretty sure it was NOT just thunder? (Help us remember other times we have heard that sound such as at Jesus' baptism and at the top of the mountain.)

Disciples Verse 32.

Others: How is Jesus going to be "lifted up?" (None of the disciples really understands - yet. That will happen on Easter. And, Jesus said he will draw "all people" to himself - what do we think that means?)

Planting Seeds: As an illustration of the "planting a seed in the ground," invite the children to plant seeds and then talk about the difference between a seed and the plant that it grows into.

Intercessory Prayer: If you have been working on types of prayer, today you could consider "intercessory prayer," which means praying for others. When we pray for others we are not doing something magic. We are doing something obedient. God uses our prayers in ways we cannot possibly understand. There is power in our choosing to pray for people. As a class you could look at one of the Forms of Prayers of the People in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 383-392)

or they could consider people they know who are sick, in need, alone -- or in other kinds of need. They might choose to pray for those who lead us in our country and in our church. The children can choose.

Getting Closure: Turn to page 857 in the BCP and look at the question “What is intercession and petition?”

Closing Prayer: Say together the prayer the children have composed. Or pray: “Thank you, Jesus, for saying yes to God. Help us to say yes when God shows us work we can do. Amen.

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Fifth Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: John 12:20-33

Background

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Theme: Bearing much Fruit

Before Class: You will need copies of the scripture or Bibles for each participant.

Beginning: After your group has settled in and caught up with each other, invite them to take a couple of minutes in silence to switch mental gears to hear today's Scripture.

After the brief interval of silence, say the Opening Prayer.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for your acceptance of God's call on your life and for the gift your sacrifice is for each of us. Help us hear the call you have on our lives to be faithful witnesses and to follow you. Amen.

The Scripture: Read John 12: 20-33. Tell the class that you will read this passage and then allow a moment or two of silence. Then invite another class member to read the passage again before you begin with the reflection questions.

Reflection Questions:

- What stood out for you in hearing this passage today?

- Jesus is concluding his public ministry; this is his last chance to teach. What does he mean "the Hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified?" (He knows what death is ahead of him, and that what appears to be the end is truly the beginning.)
- Consider the seed falling into the ground. What is Jesus teaching us here? (He is trying to help us with the sting of death.)
- Do we really think Jesus wants us to "hate" our lives?
- Could this be a perspective issue? What is most important to us?
- Notice what Jesus calls us to do in verse 26. (Interesting that Jesus does not say, "Worship me," but instead says, "Follow me." If we chose to "follow" Jesus, where would we go?)
- Notice the obvious conflict in Jesus' spirit in verse 27. (The struggle will continue until Jesus is in the garden at Gethsemane.)
- When else have the disciples heard the voice in verse 28? (At the baptism of Jesus, and at his Transfiguration.)
- What does the crowd think they are hearing? (Thunder or the voice of an angel.)
- Is there a power shift in verse 31? (Death will not mean defeat for Jesus. Instead of people being at odds with God, Jesus will draw all of them to himself.)
- "And I, when I am lifted up..." Does anyone remember this image from last week? (John 3: 14-21)

Getting Closure: Invite the class to discuss what this passage says to them about their lives today. In what ways do we need to die to be born and bear much fruit?

Closing Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus. As we draw closer to the final days of Lent, help us to open spirits to you. Amen.

John 12:20-33

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