

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Mark 14:1-15 or Mark 15:1-39(40-47)

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

Abundance, not scarcity. The costliest of ointments poured out for Jesus. A man carrying a jar of water – work usually reserved for women – shows the way to the Passover meal. Pilate may have had generosity as one of his motives in offering the crowd Jesus' release, but they choose Barabbas; and so Jesus is crucified. The words pierce us across the centuries. A soldier who had stood guard exclaims: "Truly this man was God's Son." This conviction continues to penetrate our souls, creating a space to house the incredible news of Easter.

Theme: Walk with Jesus

Before Class: Today's Scripture will be too long for young children. The focus of this lesson is Mark 14: 3-9 and 12-16. If time permits, include Mark 14:17-25. The rest of the passage can be briefly summarized. A few props for your story would help the children. Bring a jar of something that smells sweet (bath oil, oil of clove – available from a pharmacy or natural foods store). Also bring a small sandwich roll, some glasses, and a small bottle of grape juice. If you want to teach the children the musical setting for the Sanctus, You will need a Hymnal. In the front of the Hymnal are several variations (S113 - S131), so you can use the one that is most familiar.

If your class meets while the worship service is going on, this Sunday the service may go longer. If it does not go longer, you may wish to use only the last two portions of the story here, omitting Mark 14: 3-9. You will need a copy of the Sanctus for each child.

If you have been including the Church School Missionary Offering Box in your sessions, a note to go home to parents reminding them that the boxes need to come back next Sunday – Easter – would be helpful.

Beginning: Tell the children that today we finish the part of the story of Jesus that will take us to Easter -- next Sunday. If you planted seeds in a pot that stays in the classroom, now would be a good time to see what has happened. If the children took the pots home with them, ask them what has happened in the pots. If you have been preparing a cross, let the children finish their work on it today and find a place to display it where the children can see it.

Praying: Thank you, God, for Jesus who did what you asked him to do. Help us to do what we need to do to follow Jesus. Amen.

The Story: (Mark 14: 3-9) Jesus had been invited to have supper at a friend's house. While Jesus was sitting at the dinner table, a woman came up from behind him, opened a jar with some sweet-smelling oil. Maybe it smelled like this (and share what you have brought). It was very expensive perfume. The people thought what she did was very strange: she gently poured it all over Jesus' head. But Jesus said she was doing a good thing and years later people would still know she had done this. Now, we know it too.

(Mark 14: 12-16) It was time to have a special party for Passover. Passover was the time people celebrated their freedom. Years ago they had been slaves and now they were free so each year they had a special party to help them remember that now they were free. Where shall we have this party? Jesus friends asked him. Here is what Jesus said: Go into town. Look for a man carrying a jar of water. He will take you to the house we will use for the party. It was very easy to find this man. In Jesus time, men almost never carried jars of water -- that was considered women's work. There was only one man who was carrying a jar of water.

(Mark 14:22-25) Jesus' friends came to the party with Jesus. We don't know for sure all they had to eat, but it was a very good meal. After supper, Jesus did something that the friends would never forget. Jesus took a loaf of bread -- maybe it looked like this one I brought in today. Jesus told them this would be the last time they would all have supper together, but he wanted them to remember this night and remember him. So, he broke off pieces of the bread and gave a piece to each of his friends, just like I am doing now. He said: "this is my body." He also told them that whenever they ate bread like this, Jesus would be there with them. Then he took a cup with wine in it. I will give each of you a cup -- with apple juice in it. He told them to drink from the cup and each time we do it, Jesus will be right there with us.

Activity: The passage to learn – or illustrate – today is longer, but the children will hear it anytime they are in church during Eucharist. You could tell them its name is Sanctus which means "Holy.'

Here are the words. You can make copies for each child:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Another Activity: One final sanding of the cross the children have been preparing for Easter.

Options: If the children have been putting coins in a Church School Missionary Offering Box, remind them to be sure and bring the boxes back next Sunday.

Getting Closure: Allow time at the end of your class to tell the children what we will be observing this week. For example, this week is called Holy Week because it is the week we remember what Jesus did. Do you know what sacrifice means? It means giving up something very important – to get something even more important. Jesus was killed. The leaders were sure he was saying things that were not true, and they thought they needed to kill him. So, on the day we call Good Friday, Jesus was killed. And all his friends were so very sad. They were so sad they forgot that he had told them that he would be "lifted up." We call that Resurrection. Remember what happened to the seeds we planted? They became green shoots, didn't they? Now, when people die, they go to be with Jesus. Next week we celebrate that good news and we call next Sunday "Easter."

Closing Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for giving your life and for showing us that you will "lift up" each of us. Amen.

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Year B – Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Older Children

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Theme: Walk with Jesus

Before Class: There is significantly more Scripture appointed for today than the children will be able to absorb. Ways to describe some of the highlights are offered here. You probably will not have sufficient time to use all the stories, so use what you have time to cover.

If you need permission from anyone in order to display children's art work in a place where the congregation can see it, secure that permission before your class meets, then be sure you have many sheets of white paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, and masking tape to secure the work to a wall. If there are more stories than children, invite the children to illustrate more than one story.

Beginning: Tell the children that we are beginning Holy Week, the week we remember the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. More happened than we have time to look at today, so we will choose some of the highlights. And to help people in our church, we can illustrate different highlights and post them where people can see them.

The Story: Make sure each child has access to a Bible. Since the passages appointed are for today entirely too long for the children to read, indicate which portion you are telling them about so they can see some of the words in the Bible but mostly hear the events from you. Then, according to the amount of time you have, choose which of the following to tell the children and invite them to illustrate.

Mark 14. Wait for the children to find this place in their Bibles. Put a stack of paper in the center of the table, along with markers or whatever you have for the children to draw with. Tell the children to be listening for scenes they would like to illustrate.

Mark 14: 1 - 9. It was two days before Passover. Does anyone know what Passover is? (If not, it is the day Jewish people – to this day – celebrate getting out of Egypt where they were slaves.)

Jesus is at a dinner party and something happens that many people thought was very strange. While Jesus was eating dinner, a woman came into the room carrying a beautiful jar with very expensive perfume. She proceeded to pour the perfume all over Jesus' head. "Hey," the people said, "That perfume jar could have been sold and the money given to help poor people and she just wasted it!" No, Jesus assured them, it was not wasted. In verse 8 Jesus says: "She has anointed my body beforehand, for burial." Why do you think he said that? (He knows he is to die.) Anyone want to illustrate the woman gently pouring perfumed oil on Jesus' head?

Mark 14:12-16. Passover is coming. The disciples wondered where they would go to celebrate the feast. To help them find the right place, Jesus sent two of his disciples to find the place. This is how they would know they were in the right place: they would find a man carrying a jar of water.

Does anyone know why that one man would be easy to spot? (Carrying water was considered women's work, since few men would do that work, so this guy would be easy to find.) Who wants to illustrate this portion?

Mark 14:17-21. They are all at supper eating a very excellent meal. They must have been startled to hear Jesus say that one of the people sitting at that very table was going to betray him. They turned to each other and said: "Could I be the one? Whoa, I sure hope not!" But the one who would betray Jesus was sitting right there at the table. Who will illustrate this portion?

Mark 14:22-26. Jesus needed to leave his friends with something that would be with them all their lives and still be here for us today. So, Jesus took a small loaf of bread, broke off a piece for each person and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took the glass of wine and said: "This is my blood of the covenant with is poured out for many." And each person took a sip of the wine. Who will illustrate this portion?

Mark 14:32-42. Jesus and his friends go to a garden with the name Gethsemane. Jesus needs to pray to God and he wants his friends to pray with him. Here Jesus accepts that he is going to have to die. But his exhausted friends cannot keep awake. They keep falling asleep at their prayers. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 14:43-50. Judas shows up. Judas is the one who will betray Jesus. Judas has brought soldiers to have Jesus arrested. Judas comes up to Jesus and kisses him on the cheek. That was the sign he had given the soldiers so they would know whom to arrest. So they arrested Jesus. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 14:53-65. The chief priests need to be sure that what Jesus is saying is really wrong so they can kill him. They ask him many questions and finally convince themselves that what Jesus is saying is blasphemy. Blasphemy means telling lies about God. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 14: 66-72. Peter had been so sure he would stick with Jesus no matter what. Jesus had told Peter that Peter would snap -- that he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Sure enough, before Peter realized what was happening, in his terror, three separate times Peter said he did not know Jesus. Then the cock crowed. Peter was heartbroken. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 15: 1-15. The chief priests decide to hand Jesus over to Pilate. Pilate doesn't really want to kill Jesus, so he gets an idea. It was the custom to release one criminal at Passover. So Pilate asked the crowd: Shall I release this Jesus, or shall I release Barabbas? The crowd wanted Barabbas to be released! So that meant that Jesus would be handed over to be crucified. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 15: 16-32. Jesus is led away to be crucified. A man named Simon came along and carried the cross for Jesus for a while. At nine o'clock in the morning they nailed Jesus to the cross. Who will illustrate this?

Mark 15: 33-39. At noon, as Jesus hung on the cross the skies began to get very dark. By three in the afternoon, Jesus had died. The soldiers who had been standing guard said: "Truly this man was God's Son!" Who will illustrate this?

Mark 15: 42-47. A man named Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus so he could bury him in a tomb. Joseph took a linen cloth to cover the body of Jesus and then carried him to the tomb. He gently laid Jesus body in the tomb and covered the opening with a huge rock. Who will illustrate this?

Everyone thought this was the end of the story. We now know it was not the end of the story. Next week we will celebrate what happened next.

Options: You may choose to post the drawings the children have produced in a place where the rest of your congregation will be able to see them, perhaps where people gather for coffee after church. Or you may choose to post them in your classroom.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to help you make a list of things we are thankful for. You could tell them that it is a funny thing about thank-you prayers: the more we say thank you, the more things we notice we have to be thankful for!

Closing Prayer: Say together the list of things you are thankful for. And add "Amen."

Mark 15:1-39, [40-47]

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way

he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

[There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.]

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**Lesson Plans that Work
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Lesson Plans for Adults**

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Background

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Theme: Walk with Jesus

Before: You will need to make some decisions about how you want to handle this lesson with your group. Much will depend on whether your class meets before or after the worship service. If it meets before, you may choose to help the group see the whole sweep of the story, focusing on those highlights you have time to discuss. If it meets after, you may wish to concentrate more time on fewer aspects of the reading. Much more is provided than you will probably have time to cover, so make your choices from what is available.

You will need copies of the scripture or a Bible for each person. If a schedule of Holy Week services to be offered at your church is available, make copies so that each member of your class may take one home.

Beginning: If you have copies of the schedule of services for the week to come, give them to members of the class. It helps to point out that only in a perfect world would all of us be able to attend all the services. If you have commuters in your parish, you can also encourage them to find churches near their places of work so they might be able to attend some of the midweek services more easily or simply go into the church for prayer during lunch. We will want to attend those services we are able to attend, be gentle with ourselves about the ones we simply cannot attend, and promise ourselves that during the week we can stop for a moment in awe and in gratitude for God's love poured out in Jesus' sacrifice. It would be useful to come up with when those opportunities might occur (as you wake up in the morning, before bed, while stuck in traffic, instead of watching TV, before signing on to social media, etc.)

Creating the Setting: The Scripture appointed for us for today is two entire chapters of Mark. Since Mark writes in such a succinct manner, he is able to cover a huge amount of territory. We will look at what we can in the time we have together.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, as we conclude our Lenten season, help us not be overcome by regret at what we did not get done and focus more on our growing understanding of your love for us, particularly as we observe this Holy Week to come. Amen.

The Scripture and Questions: We will pick and choose from Mark 14 and 15, according to the time we have. Let's open our Bibles to Mark, Chapter 14. When we select a passage, someone can read it and then we will reflect on it.

Mark 14: 1-9. Interesting the reaction of "some" in verse 4 and 5. How do we balance thinking in terms of scarcity and of abundance as we make decisions?

Mark 14: 10-11. Do you think this squandering of the expensive perfume was the last straw for Judas, or do you think he had already made up his mind? Why? Why not? What does this passage say to you?

Mark 14: 12-16. The Passover feast is at hand. How does Jesus tell his disciples to find the room they are to use? What was unique about the man they were to find? (It would have been unique to find a man hauling water – that was work for women.)

Mark 14: 17-21. Try to identify with the terror each of the eleven disciples must have felt: "Could I be the one who will betray Jesus?"

Mark 14: 22-25. Try to imagine how these words must have sounded to the disciples who did not have the experience we have of coming week after week to the Eucharist. Do we think they were shocked? Comforted? Both?

Mark 14: 26-31. The disciples hear that ALL of them will desert Jesus. Notice Peter's response and the clue Jesus gives Peter.

Mark 14: 32-42. Notice the contrast between Jesus' fervent praying and the disciples exhaustion. Can anyone share an experience of being surprised that sleep came when they would have expected grief to keep them awake?

Mark 14: 43-50. Notice the weaving of violence with non-violence. Judas betrays Jesus not with a sword, but a kiss. The soldiers come with swords and clubs to arrest a completely unarmed man. One man slices off the ear of the high priest's slave, and Jesus heals the slave's ear. Jesus allows the soldiers to arrest him.

Mark 14: 51-52. Who is this "certain young man"? (Some sources say that he might have been a young man who had been sleeping in the house where the disciples had met with Jesus. Others wonder if this man could be John Mark.)

Mark 14: 53-65. What was the responsibility of the Chief Priests? (To maintain the purity of the faith and to protect it from those who would blaspheme it.) Notice their struggle to find testimony to prove the accusations against Jesus. What takes it over the top for them? (Jesus answer in verse 62.)

Mark 14: 66-72. Notice the progression in the three questions put to Peter. Notice also his stunned self-conviction in verse 72.

Mark 15: 1-15. The Chief Priests have handed Jesus over to the Roman authorities. Pilate is the man in charge. At first, it appears that the crowd will help him solve his predicament (verses 6-8). Who does the crowd choose to be spared? (Barabbas.) And what does the crowd want Pilate to do about Jesus? (See verse 14b.)

Mark 15: 16-39. You could ask the members of the class to read this portion silently to themselves and then offer thoughts or words that came to them as they read it. Or you could identify one person to read the passage, and after a few moments, of silence invite people to volunteer thoughts or words that came to them.

Mark 15: 40-47. Notice the mood change in this portion of the scripture. (The gentleness of the description of the women who looked on, and the generosity of Joseph of Arimathea.)

Getting Closure: Ask what insights people have had during this Lenten season. How will these insights play out in their life, both personally and in the church community?

Closing Prayer: You may invite the class to take a few moments of silence and then pray: “The centurion realized the truth we cherish: ‘Truly this man was God’s Son.’ Thank you, God, for love so awesome – poured out for us. Amen.”

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