

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Proper 22
Lesson Plans for Older Children
Revised Common Lectionary Old Testament Readings – Track One

Scripture: Lamentations 1:1-6

Background

How is it possible that we are still in the same season of the church year? The Season after Pentecost stretches long through the changes of seasons in our world. Spring made way for summer and now autumn is upon us. Yet, still we walk forward in our churches as the steadfast love of God is proclaimed in the “long green, growing season.” It is impossible, however, not to notice that the long green season is now beginning to compete with the pace of life outside. Each year we lament as stores begin advertising decorations and treats for the upcoming secular holidays even earlier than the year before. Although October has just begun, Halloween and Thanksgiving decorations are all around us. The struggle to remain present in the current day is a challenge that increases with each leaf that falls from the trees outside our windows. And so we use the stability of the church calendar to root ourselves in this day that the Lord has made.

A Notation for This Week’s Scripture

This week our Old Testament passage takes us back in time to a period of tremendous grief and devastation. Lamentations was written following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE as a series of five poems. Lamentations is a sort of survivors’ therapy – the author is working out the horror, sadness, and grief experienced through the trauma of the destruction in beautiful and illustrative **acrostic poetry**. Our portion of the passage today is the very beginning of the poem. The author writes in the third person and uses the image of a woman to portray the city of Jerusalem. The challenge of this scripture when using it in the classroom is to allow the poem to speak honestly to the children without losing the hope we know as Christians.

Theme: Hope in Hopeless Times

Before Class:

Make sure there are enough bibles for each child to have one during the lesson.

Today’s activity will involve writing **acrostic poems**. If there is time, there is an opportunity to make their poems into posters to hang around the classroom. Write the sample poem (found in the activity session) on the board before class.

Materials Needed:

- Writing Paper
- Pencils
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Crayons and Markers
- Soothing music and player

Beginning: Welcome the students to class and ask them each how their week has gone. Allow the children to settle in and find a place around the table before beginning. Tell them that this week they are going to learn about a time when God’s people suffered and their job will be to find the Good News in the midst of the pain.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, we know that you love us always. Help us to find your love even when times are hard. Amen.

The Story: Lamentations 1:1-6 - Pass out the bibles and help all of the children to find Lamentations. You will read the passage twice today. Before the first reading tell the children a little background about the passage. Lamentations was written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It was written after an army of soldiers came into Jerusalem and destroyed the entire city along with the temple. The people who lived there were taken as prisoners and forced to leave their beloved city. Remember, Jerusalem is the city God promised to God's people. The reading we have today was written by someone who survived the destruction about the sad event.

1. For the first reading, ask all of the children to close their eyes and calm their bodies. You will read the passage to them. Ask them to listen closely to the words and feelings in the passage. After they are ready, read the poem slowly and deliberately so they can hear the different parts of it and identify some of the images.

After the reading ask them what they noticed about it:

- I wonder what kind of writing this is.
- I wonder how the author felt when they wrote this.
- I wonder what you noticed about the images in the passage.

2. After a short discussion, you will read the passage again one verse at a time. Ask the children to take turns reading. After each verse take a break and talk, briefly, about the images in each section. Do not force the children to come to the conclusions made in the hints below – but if questions come up these ideas may be useful.

Some Hints:

- Verse 1: The image of Jerusalem as a lonely widow – what is a widow? Why is she sad? From princess to vassal – a vassal is a person or country that is subordinate to another so the comparison is about being a high ranking and important woman who becomes nothing more than a servant.
- Verse 2: This one is more obvious – the lonely widow (Jerusalem) cries because she misses her husband but none of her family members (political allies) come to comfort her.
- Verse 3: This verse recalls the slavery in Egypt when the people of Judah were suffering immensely. Ask the children if they can remember another time when the Jewish people suffered (they may recall the time in the desert following Moses) to help them with this verse.
- Verse 4: Again, this verse is relatively straightforward. The roads Zion, the Holy City of God - Jerusalem, have no visitors. Again, pointing out the loneliness of the abandoned city.
- Verse 5: This verse is challenging because it alludes to the idea that the people of Jerusalem displeased God in some way. Ask the children what they think about this? Do they think God would punish Jerusalem like this? Why or why not?
- Verse 6: This final verse of the section goes back to the royal imagery of the city as a princess whose suitors (political allies) were unable or unwilling to help in her time of need.

Finally, before beginning the activity for the day, invite the kids to look at how many verses are in chapter 1 of Lamentations. (There are 22.) Then, have them check how many verses are in the second chapter. (Again, there are 22.) Ask them if they can think of a reason why there would be 22 verses. Explain that this poem was originally written in Hebrew and there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 verses because this is an acrostic poem. Each verse starts with a different letter in the Hebrew alphabet –

in alphabetical order! That kind of a poem is called an acrostic poem. They might have seen an acrostic poem that has a word written down the side of the paper.

Activity: Now that we know this book of the bible is written as an acrostic poem we are going to have a chance to write our own poems. The author of this poem was very sad and wrote the poem to explain the terrible the destruction of Jerusalem. So, for our turn writing a poem we will write acrostic poems that can help people going through terrible times. Imagine that your poem will be shared with the very sad people of Jerusalem. What would you say to help them feel better and to share the love of God with them? There is one example poem on the board, let's read it together:

Loneliness will not last forever
Only trust in God
Value the memories you have
Everything will be okay

The children can choose any word they would like for their poem. Some suggestions for those who are having trouble thinking of a word: HOPE, FAITH, LOVE, HELP, JOY, STRONG, BELIEVE, etc...

Pass out the paper and pencils and invite the children to work on their poems. Move throughout the room along with your classroom aids to offer assistance as needed. It may be helpful to put on some soothing, instrumental music to help the children focus on the task at hand. You can also have two children work together to create poems as a team.

If there is extra time after the children have written their poems, invite them to mount the poems on a piece of construction paper and to decorate it with a boarder.

Getting Closure: After all of the poems are done, invite the children to share their poems with the class. Lead a short closing discussion about situations in which sharing these types of poems might be helpful. (I wonder if there has been a time when sharing this poem who have been helpful for someone you know. I wonder if you can think of another situation when sending poems to people having trouble would have been a good idea.)

Closing Prayer: God of Hope, thank you for the gift of poetry and for the ways we have to express our feelings. Amen.

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