

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday in Lent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Lent invites us to step off our mental treadmills, take a breath, and look around. Lent invites us to ask: Where are we demanding solutions? Where can we risk staying in tension? Where are we blind just not noticing? What do we thirst for? Where are we bound or stuck? What will we risk doing during these 40 days of Lent to clear a space in which Easter can break through?

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

A good deal of the media around us assures us that if we get it right, wear the latest styles, and gather the most toys we will have arrived. What if there was another way?

Theme: Seeking Another Way

Before Class: Most churches offer additional services or programs during Lent. Find out what your church will be offering, so you can inform your group. You will need copies of the Bible for your group or enough copies of the scripture. You may also offer 3 x 5 cards for people to write on and take with them.

Beginning: Build a common definition of what Lent means to this group (The 40 days for preparation for Easter, a time of internal housekeeping, a time to give up certain types of things, a time to take on certain types of things).

Offer this suggestion for discussion: Could we look at our own complaining, criticisms, and blame (noticing that these could well be projections of stuff we see in ourselves) and seek ways to get our needs met through suggestions, requests, and owning our own blindness?

Opening Prayer: Dear God, your son Jesus stared down the temptations that came to him and chose another way. Help us to stare down the temptations that come our way and lead the life you call us to lead. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 Invite three readers to read one of the sections of our reading today. Split the reading into verses 1-4, 5-7, 8-11.

Questions:

- Why do we think the Spirit would lead Jesus into this series of temptations? (Perhaps the Spirit knew that before you take on a ministry, you need to investigate motives and then get clear about the mission and how you are called to lead.)
- As we discuss what each of the temptations say about the choices Jesus made, let us notice to what extent each of us face similar temptations.

The First Temptation: Verses 3-4

- I wonder what the benefit would have been if Jesus gave into this temptation? (The hungry would be fed.)
- Why did Jesus refuse this? (He understood that it was about success, looking good.)
- What is good for us about success, and what is the problem? (Success can mean financial security for our families — a good thing. Success can become an addiction, a toxic way of measuring our own worth.)

The Second Temptation: Verses 5-7

- I wonder what the benefit would have been if Jesus gave into this temptation? (Sure would have gotten people's attention!)
- So why do we think Jesus refused? (Jesus appears to have understood the downside of power and its ability to corrupt.)
- Where is power a good thing in our lives and where is it toxic? (People with power can get good things done. People with power can prevent others from reaching their full potential. Power also has addictive aspects.)

The Third Temptation: Verse 8-10

- I wonder what the benefit would have been if Jesus gave into this temptation? (Jesus clearly would have been the only person capable of justly ruling the entire world.)
- I wonder why he refused? (Jesus came to show the world another way to be; a way we could choose to follow.)
- If this temptation is about getting it right where is that a good thing in our lives? (We want to do what it says in verse 10b)
- How can insisting on getting it right pose a problem for us? (We may not be as right as we think we are! We may need to be open to a new way of doing things.)

Option. Give each person a 3 x 5 card and invite them to write verse 10b on it:

Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.

Invite the group to consider what we would need to do/change if we were to make this our Rule of Life – something we live by each day?

Invite the group to suggest things that might be helpful to give up this Lent as well as things we might take on. For their eyes only, each person can make notes of what they might consider doing. Some discussion starters for giving up: a chunk of TV time to spend in prayer or even reading to our kids; instead of taking the elevator at the office use the stairs as better exercise and time for a quick prayer, etc. Some discussion starters for taking on: choosing an extra activity at church, getting up ½ hour earlier for time for prayer, etc.

Getting Closure: Tell the group that we are surrounded by sound with little space for silence. So during Lent we will close our time together each week with at least 2 minutes of silence. In that silence, we will simply ignore the noise and make no effort to think lovely thoughts, but simply sit in the space that silence creates.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that you call us to serve only you. Guide us as we begin this journey of Lent, that we may find you in new and surprising ways. Amen.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’⁴But he answered, ‘It is written,

“One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” ’

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you”,
and “On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’

⁷Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ ¹⁰Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

“Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.” ’

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

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