

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

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: The season of Lent is primarily an adult discipline. However, children can grasp that they are setting their own boundaries, practice prayer, and noticing things that are helpful to them. A discussion with them would probably surface that playing outside is probably better than too much TV, some foods are better for you than others. Since children can all too easily get trapped into guilt and feeling bad about themselves, a better discipline for children is to encourage positive acts and noticing things for which to be grateful.

If your church will be offering Mite Boxes/offering boxes for children, you will have some information to share with the children about where the money will go. Instead, or in addition to, Mite Boxes, you might consider creating a Gratitude Box to receive pictures the children draw of things that make them glad. The box can be whatever you have handy (even a facial tissue box covered in colored gift wrap). The children can decorate it, if you choose.

Each week in Lent, you can ask the children what they have noticed that made them glad. You can also draw pictures of things you notice. Since it is suggested that each week the children draw something else for which they are grateful, it would be fun if you could vary the art supplies each week. To the extent budget and time constraints permit, you could bring white paper and crayons one week, tissue paper to tear and glue another week, dark construction paper and light colored crayons, felt markers another time, etc. Whatever strikes both your imagination and budget!

Beginning: Tell the children that we are beginning the season of Lent that will last for 40 days. We will be trying new things, hearing some new stories, and noticing things that make us glad.

Praying: Thank you, God, for the stories we have about Jesus and all the things he did for us. Amen.

The Story. Do you know what the word Tempted means? You get an idea, you think it will be fun, and then you think: "Oops! NOT a good idea. I know I am not supposed to do that!"

Jesus was trying to figure out what God wanted him to do. So, Jesus went off by himself where he could think. While he was thinking and praying, a voice came to Jesus and said, what if I turned some of these stones into bread? Bread would be good for hungry people. (pause) Nah, said Jesus. I don't think so. God does not want me to do magic tricks. God wants me to show people what they can do.

Then he the voice came with another idea: What if I jumped off a tall building to show that God takes care of me?(Pause) Nah. People might try to do that themselves and they would get hurt.

A third time, a voice came to him and said, What if I made myself the boss of everything? I could do a really good job. (Pause) Nah! It is not about being a big boss.

Then Jesus had another thought, and this one was a good one: Worship God and serve God. Yeah! That's it, Jesus said.

Activity: Stretching One way we can serve God is by taking good care of the bodies he gave us. So let's take care of our bodies, now, by stretching them. Let's make a big circle so each one of us can reach our arms out without touching anyone else. Then let's try some stretching exercises. We could start by reaching our arms up as high as we can and pretend we are picking apples off a tall tree. Then we could spread our arms out wide and swing one way and then the other. (Invite the children to suggest other ways we can stretch out bodies: touching our toes, stretching to the right and then to the left, etc.)

Activity: Gratitude Box

Show the children what you have brought to be the Gratitude Box. Invite them to draw pictures of things that make them glad. Tell them that you will be drawing a picture, too. The pictures can then be put in the box.

Getting Closure: Ask the children to be noticing things that make them glad so they can draw a picture of them when we come back next week.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for (include things the children and you have noticed.) Help us to notice you this week in the things that make us glad. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

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: Today's passage includes a lively discussion between Jesus and the Devil. Although it is clear that evil is loose in the world, the dualism implicit in evil as a person (the Devil) is a problem for many. One way to present the concept to the children is to ask them if they have ever had the experience of arguing with themselves: having an idea and then noticing that it is not a good idea after all. If you choose to use the option suggested, you will need copies of the Bible or of the reading for the children, a large piece of paper, and a felt marker to record suggestions the children make.

Beginning: Ask the children what they think Lent is about. (The word, Lent, comes from an old word that meant long; not that Lent was long, but that days were getting longer.) The church uses this time to get ready for Easter by doing some internal housecleaning. Some people give up something (chocolate or desserts maybe.) Others take on something extra (getting up earlier to have time for prayer, reading books to find out more about Jesus, etc.) The Bible passage we have today shows Jesus getting ready for his ministry.

Option: You might want to consider asking the children to brainstorm ways they can get off the consumer wagon. How are decisions about what we think we need influenced by television, media, what we see in computer ads, etc? What might be some alternative responses? (Plain t-shirts rather than designer t-shirts, tap water rather than bottled water, healthy snacks rather than junk food, etc.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for this time to notice things we want to either stop doing or begin doing so we can become closer to you. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 4:1-11

Invite three children to read the parts of the story, Narrator, Tempter, and Jesus. (script is found below)

Questions:

- I wonder why Jesus went out into the wilderness? (He needed a place where he could think and figure out what he was supposed to do with his ministry.)
- What does the fact that Jesus was tempted tell us about the kind of person he was? (He really was a human being. All people are tempted by something.)

First Temptation:

- What would have been good about turning stones into bread? (Lots of hungry people would have benefited.)
- What was the problem with turning stones into bread? (God had not sent Jesus to do magic tricks, but to show people things they could do themselves.)
- What do we think Jesus meant by his answer (verse 4b)? (There is more to life than just getting your fill of food. And it is not just about being a winner.)

Second Temptation:

- What could have been good about the second temptation? (He sure would have gotten everyone's attention.)
- What was not good about this temptation? (It would have made Jesus into a show-off. Jesus did not come to show people how to be big powerful people.)

Third Temptation:

- What could have been good about Jesus getting to be in charge of the whole world? (He would have done a much better job of governing than anyone else has.)
- What was not so good about this? (Jesus came to show people that God is right here and how to take responsibility for ourselves, living the life God has shown us.)

What does this say to us today?

- I wonder if there are things we might do that start out good and then go bad?
- How could wanting to get good grades end up turning out bad? (Cheating to get the grade? Refusing to help another as we spend all our time on our project? Spending all our time studying and not getting any exercise and fresh air?)
- What other situations can the children think of that could start out good and end up bad?

Activity: Modern Day Temptations

If you have sufficient children to break into two or more groups, let each group decide how the temptation would be presented. The setting could be on their school grounds when there are no adults around and how a student would deal with the tempter. Invite the group(s) to pick one of the suggestions listed below (or another of their own) and present the temptation and the way to withstand it.

Possible topics: someone offering drugs, someone offering cigarettes, someone offering to sell the answers to the big test coming up.

When the children have decided how to offer their skit, invite them to present it.

Option: Invite the children to suggest things that could be either given up for Lent or taken on for Lent. Write what they say on a piece of paper that all can see. When you have recorded what they have offered, ask them to be thinking about whether any of these suggestions would be a good idea for them. They can talk it over with God in private prayer.

Ask the children what we can do if we decide on a discipline and then discover that we have blown it. What can we do when we notice? (Oops! Tell God about it.) What do we think God will do? (Forgive us because God loves us.) Remember, we can always start again – that is what forgiveness is about.

Getting Closure: Tell the children we are going to pray, and during that prayer there will be a moment of silence to allow the children to tell God what they are considering doing or not doing during Lent. Tell them they may not be able to decide on anything at this minute, and that is OK, too. God will honor their working this out in their own time.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for showing us that your way is the right way and that you are not far from us. We ask you to bless us as we move through Lent, especially those things we name before you now in silence... (allow for silence for them to offer their silent prayers) Guide us and direct us in all we do. Amen.

Matthew 4:1-11

Narrator: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him,

Tempter: ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’

Narrator: But he answered,

Jesus: ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” ’

Narrator: Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him,

Tempter: ‘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.” ’

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

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

Narrator: Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him,

Tempter: ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” ’

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

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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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