

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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