

Gospel Lesson for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12

In this season after Pentecost, we hear stories of Jesus' ministry in the world and our call to engage in that mission. This season is also known as Ordinary Time coming from the word "ordinal" which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The color for this season is green and it is often referred to as the green growing time as we hear stories of what God is calling us to do in the world, we join in that call, and we grow in our faith.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

We have heard lots of parables and teachings in the last few weeks addressed to the people who were testing Jesus, the religious leaders who were challenging him. Today, however, he outright addresses their behavior. He's letting all those around him (not just Jews, but anyone in authority) that it is not right to order others around and lay your heavy burdens on them while you sit by showing how wonderful you are. Matthew has already touched on this a bit in Chapter 6 when he talks about practicing your piety in front of others. For Matthew, it is our true, actions that speak of who we are and how we follow Christ. It is not about showing others what we do or how we follow, but the action and the following that are important. We also see this in Matthew 20:25-26, "But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...'"

This is a message that will greatly resonate with children, especially older children who have seen people in authority say one thing and do another or order others around while they do nothing.

Theme: Following God Humbly

Before: You will need copies of the Scripture for today, possibly in different translations. You will also need the following supplies for the activity you choose

Being a Disciple – large paper (or copies of the person outline below) cut to the height of your children in class, art supplies, markers, crayons, colored paper

Create a Modern Day Version – costumes, paper, markers, glue, art supplies, various translations of the Bible

Beginning: As the children arrive, welcome them to the room and invite them to your gathering area. As they arrive ask them about their week. If you have time, ask them if they ever show off for people, or if they know people who do. Why do people show off?

Opening Prayer: *Almighty God, thank you for teaching us your ways and guiding us on our journey. Be with us today as we learn your more about you and what you call us to do so we may go into the world and serve you better. Amen.*

The Story: Matthew 23:1-12

In the Bible we hear stories of many people. These people are just like us, they eat and sleep, go to school and work. God has a plan for each of them, and in hearing the stories we learn that God's plan is for each of us too.

Read Matthew 23:1-12.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what Jesus is trying to say to the crowds and disciples?
- I wonder what those around him thought of his message?

- I wonder if you have ever known someone who gives all the hard work to others while sitting by?

Being a Disciple

Do you know what the word disciple means? It means a person who listens in order to learn. Jesus wants us all to be disciples of God, to listen to God in order to learn what God has called us to do, to learn how we can be a servant in the world, and to learn who God has made us to be.

Today, we are going to create pictures of ourselves as disciples. Let's brainstorm what that might look like first. Allow the children time to respond to each of the questions and print it up on a whiteboard or paper.

- What has God called us to do?
- How can we be a servant in the world?
- Who has God made us to be?
- What might a disciple look like?

Now, it's your turn to create a picture of yourself, the disciple. Find a partner and trace outlines of one another.

Instruct the children to lie down on the pieces of paper and have another child trace the outside of them. If you do not have the large paper or if you do not think you will have enough time to trace one another, you can use the small outline below. BUT children usually love to do the big pictures of themselves, so think about giving it a try.

Give them some time to create themselves as a disciple. Challenge them to use both words and pictures. Challenge them to make it 3-D if they can (can they make their heart pop out, can they make their feet big). Challenge them to use every possible part of their body they can (feet to follow, hands to serve, hearts to love, eyes to see others in need) If you have time before they leave, have them get back together and share what they created.

Create a Modern Day Version of this Story

After reading the Scripture passage and reflecting upon it, challenge the children to create a modern day version (or versions) of this story. They can act it out, they can write a news report about it, they can “blog” about it. Whatever they do, encourage them to have the story in both written and visual form (If they are doing a blog or new report, how do they add visuals. If they are doing a skit, how do they add text?)

Note: You may want to have different versions of the Bible handy so they can read different translations.

If you have a big enough group, split them up and let them do this in two or three separate groups and then present it to the others at the end of your time together.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to clean up their space and gather back in a circle. Have them share what they have created.

Closing Prayer: *Gracious God, We thank you for our time together today. As we go out into the world, help us to remember that we are called to be a disciple. Help us to listen so we can learn, and help us follow as you lead. Amen.*

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for

you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father— the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

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