Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Older Children
Proper 21 (A)
New Testament: Matthew 21:23-32

BACKGROUND
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 READING
Jesus' journey takes him to the temple for the last time and stays there. During these next three chapters we see Jesus teaching on a variety of topics, not because he set out to do so, but because the high priests, elders and Pharisees are trying to trap him by asking tricky questions and backing him into a corner. As we read these stories, we know that Jesus was not going to play that game.

Jesus is seen by others as having the authority to heal and teach, but in today's lesson the chief priests and elders question this authority. By answering their question with a question about John the Baptist, Jesus is not stalling them, but rather evoking the prophets that have come before him and identifying himself and John the Baptist with the prophets of the past. When the chief priests and elders respond, they respond not from what they know to be true, but rather from a place of political maneuvering. To save themselves, they say they do not know.

So Jesus presents them with a parable, a story that teaches us about a truth. This is a parable about doing the work God has given us to do, not just saying we are going to do it, but going and doing the work, no matter where we are on our own journey or about what we may or may not have done in the past. God wants us out in the world, doing what we are called to do. As people of God we are to witness, to name our beliefs and be a worker in the field.

THEME
What God has given us to do

BEFORE CLASS
In addition to copies of today's reading, you will need copies of the "tickets" below, paper, scissors, and markers or crayons.

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Make sure you have all the supplies you will need for each activity. You may want to lay them out ahead of time. If you want to make the room reflect the theme for the day, you can put up pictures of people serving others in a variety of ways, or bring in a few gardening tools to represent the two sons that were to go work in the vineyard.

BEGINNING

As the children arrive, welcome them to the room and invite them to your gathering area. Ask them how their week was. If you want to give them a primer for your lesson, you can ask them to share what they were asked to do any work/chores/duties this week by parents or at school. What is it like doing those tasks? Is it easy, difficult, fun, boring, etc?

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we gather together to listen to your message so we may come to know you and discover how we are called to serve you in this world. Open our hearts and minds that we may explore what you are asking us to do. Amen.

THE STORY: MATTHEW 21:23-32

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.

Invite three readers to read the parts of Narrator, Chief Priests and Elders, and Jesus. (a group of 2 or 3 could read the part of Chief Priests and Elders)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- I wonder what Jesus was trying to tell us in his story about the two sons?
- I wonder how the first son felt when he decided to go do the work?
- I wonder how the second son felt when he didn't go do the work even though he said he would?
- I wonder if someone has ever asked you to do a task and you have either done it or not done it?

ACTIVITIES

In the promises that we make at Baptisms in the Baptismal Covenant, we promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves." What do you think "to seek and serve Christ" means? Allow the children to respond. What do you think this means for how we treat one another? Allow the children to respond.

We just heard a story about a father and two sons. In the story, the father asks one son to do the work, he says no, but then later in the day, he decides that he should do the work. The father also asks the second son to go into the field and do the work, he says yes, but then never goes into the field to help. In this story Jesus is reminding us that it is

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important to go and do the work God asks us to do. It does not matter if we say no first, or if we aren't perfect, or if we mess up sometimes. What is important is that we go and do what God has asked of us.

Through our baptismal covenant and by being people of God, we are all called by God to go and do the work.

Let's name some ways that we can "seek and serve Christ in all persons."

Allow the children time to brainstorm. If they are having a hard time starting to brainstorm, you can ask them if certain things would be serving others and then name things like: helping a friend at school, playing with a new student at school, doing work around the house that would help out the others in the house (feeding the dog, cleaning, vacuuming, picking up my stuff, etc.), bring someone to church, help at a soup kitchen, pray for a friend who is having troubles, etc.

Activity: Handprint Pledges
Have each child choose a piece of construction paper and find a partner. Have the partners trace one another's hands on the pieces of construction paper.

Once each child has a piece of construction paper with their traced hand on it, have them write or draw the following:

Inside of the hand: What are the things you can do in your family to do the work of God? (examples: help with chores, pray at meals, be nice to my sister/brother, do something nice for my parents, etc.)

Outside of the hand: What are some things you can do in your community and in the world to do the work of God? (serve at a soup kitchen, visit people in nursing homes, make cards for the sick, raise money for those in need, help people at school, etc.)

When the children are done, give them time to share them with one another. If you are short on time, you can ask them to share one or two things with one another.

Activity: Service Tickets
In this activity, each person will create service tickets for the children to give to others.

Cut strips of paper from the template below or make your own "blank tickets." Have the children write or draw things on there that they think would be the work of God as they seek and serve Christ. There are lots of ideas given in the Intro section if they need help thinking of things. Encourage them to get creative. Would it be the work of God to take your friend to ice cream when they are having a bad day? Would it be seeking and serving Christ if they helped their parents make dinner one night?

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GETTING CLOSURE

Invite the children to share what they created today. Ask them what bit of Christ's work they want to do today.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, we thank you for our time together as we explored what it means to serve you and others. Help us to remember that doing your work in the world, seeking and serving others in your name, and being the people you have called us to be is the most important thing we can do. Be with us as we leave this place and bless our acts of service that we might serve others in your name. Amen.

Written by ***the Rev. Shannon Kelly****.*

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Script for Matthew 21:23-32

Narrator: When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said,

Chief Priests and Elders: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus: "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?"

Narrator: And they argued with one another,

Chief Priests and Elders: "If we say, `From heaven,' he will say to us, `Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, `Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet."

Narrator: So they answered Jesus,

Chief Priests and Elders: "We do not know."

Jesus: "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Narrator: Jesus continues…

Jesus: "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, `Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, `I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, `I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Chief Priests and Elders: "The first."

Jesus: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

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