

Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Adults

Trinity Sunday (B)

New Testament: John 3:1-17

BACKGROUND

We begin the season with two Feast days: Pentecost, followed by Trinity Sunday. Then we move on to the long season known as Ordinary Time, which runs through Christ the King Sunday. As we take this journey, nourished by the scriptures appointed for the season and empowered by our baptisms, we are invited to be on the lookout for all the blessings found in the ordinary – to see God at work here and now. And we are compelled to share our blessings with others. Our theme for this lengthy season is “Blessed is the Ordinary.”

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK’S READING

Learned leaders of the church struggle to communicate the concept of the "Trinity," our God who is three-in-one. A learned leader named Nicodemus went to Jesus in the night to struggle with the concept of "born again." We stretch for a deeper understanding of God's longing for us and with our call to respond, as John 3:16b says that eternal life is for those who believe in God.

THEME

The Trinity

BEFORE CLASS

You will need copies of the Bible or of the scripture for each person. If you are going to read the scripture as a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, there is a script at the end of the lesson.

BEGINNING

Today is Trinity Sunday, and the Trinity is a concept difficult for many to grasp. You may choose to read this poem to the class as a way of looking at the concept: (it would be good to have things to illustrate this as you read)

Three folds of the cloth, yet only one napkin is there,
Three joints in the finger, but still only one finger fair,
Three leaves of the shamrock, yet no more than one shamrock to wear.
Frost, snow-flake and ice, all in water their origin share,
Three Persons in God; to one God alone we make prayer.
- Traditional Gaelic poem

OPENING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for continuing to stretch our minds and our hearts to become the people you know us to be. Amen.

THE STORY: JOHN 3:1-17

You may ask one person to read the passage or you can invite three people (Narrator, Jesus, and Nicodemus) to read the passage as a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. See below for script.

Before the passage is read, be sure people are using the same working definition of a Pharisee (a devout leader of the Jewish people, a member of a court with scores of priests, scribes, and other leaders responsible for keeping the Jewish faith pure.)

After the entire passage is read, allow a moment or two and then have the person who read Jesus' part read verses 5 through 8 again.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- I wonder why Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night?" (He probably wanted to check out Jesus' message and did not want those to whom he reported to know he was doing this.)
- How did Nicodemus understand Jesus' telling him that he had to be "born from above"? (Nicodemus was either taking Jesus at his word: that he must literally crawl back into his mother's womb, or else he was indulging in a common practice – hyperbole.)
- What do we think Jesus was calling Nicodemus to do? (Be born of the Spirit through baptism.)
- Jesus speaks of the wind in verse 8. This conversation occurred, of course, before the crucifixion. What might our hindsight add to the concept of the Spirit as wind in light of Pentecost?
- Martin Luther is reported to have called verse 16 "The Gospel in miniature." Ask someone to read just that verse again. To what extent would we agree with Martin Luther? Why? Why not?

GETTING CLOSURE

Those of us who were baptized before 1979 may not have had the prayer in the liturgy of Holy Baptism at the top of page 308, Book of Common Prayer said for us. To bring all of us under this prayer, we will close today with this prayer, changing the pronoun "them" to "us."

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised us to the new life of grace.

Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning

heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

JOHN 3:1-17

Narrator: Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him,

Nicodemus: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Nicodemus: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus: “How can these things be?”

Jesus: “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”