

Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Background

Our long walk toward the resurrection light is nearing an end! It is often said that we cannot experience the joy of Easter without first experiencing the pain of Good Friday; this is true also of walking through the season of Lent. In Lent we search ourselves and face, head on, the vices that separate us from God. During this season we dedicate ourselves, through discipline and prayer, to growing closer to God and letting go of the things that distract us. In Year B of our Lectionary Cycle, the current lectionary year, we are blessed to experience a journey of covenant with God. Each week in this Lenten season we have explored a text from the Hebrew Scriptures that focuses on an aspect of covenant with God. This week we learn of the New Covenant God made with the people as they came close to the end of their wilderness journey.

A Notation for This Week's Scripture

In our reading from the prophet Jeremiah we return again to the plight of the Israelites in the wilderness. God sent the 10 Commandments to the people who were worshipping golden calves and disrespecting Moses and one another. The people heard the thunder of God's voice and saw the tablets, but they still disobeyed. The people complained tirelessly for lack of food and the length of the journey and God, in God's anger, sent the plight of snakes on the people. The people repented, and God sent the antidote. Here we learn of God seeing the need for a new way forward and God's decision to make a new covenant with the people since the covenant made in taking the people out of Egypt has been broken by the people, themselves. In this covenant there will no longer be outward signs like the rainbow after the flood, the name changes of the patriarch and matriarch, or the tablets upon

which the commandments were written. This new covenant would respond to the very way God made humans – God promised to write the knowledge and love of God onto their very hearts. In doing this, God ensured that the people could never stray too far from the Lord. This new covenant is one of love and mercy and it speaks to the very nature of the Almighty.

Theme: Written on Our Hearts

Before Class:

1. Make sure there are enough bibles and Books of Common Prayer in your classroom for each student to have one. 2. Cut large red paper hearts out of construction paper. You will need one for each student. 3. Everyone will need a black/dark marker. 4. Bring yarn and masking tape to class.

Beginning: This is the last week of Lent. Before beginning with today's lesson, it is a good idea to review the elements of covenant we've learned about this season.

Lent 1: God sends signs, or reminders (the rainbow after the flood,) so we will remember our commitment to each other. Lent 2: God calls us by name which reminds us of God's promise. (God gave Abraham and Sarah new names.) Lent 3: God gives us tangible writings (the Commandments) to teach us how to live. Lent 4: A covenant is mutual – we must both work together to ensure its success.

This week we will learn of a new way that God makes a covenant. A way only God can do.

Opening Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for sticking with us all the way through the wilderness. Amen.*

The Story: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Today you will use a method of Scripture reading known as African Bible Study. You will read the passage 3 times, each time asking yourselves a different question.

1. During the first reading, each person should be listening for a word or phrase that stands out to them.
2. At the second reading, each person should listen for what God is trying to say to them.
3. Finally, on the last reading, each person should listen to the text asking the question: Why does this matter?

Invite a different student to read the passage each of the three times. Before each reading tell the group (using the prompts above) tell the class what they should be listening for in the text. After all each reading invite everyone to share their answer to the question for that reading.

After all of the readings and answers, you may use the reflection questions below for further insight.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder how this covenant is different than the other covenants we've learned about.
- I wonder which covenant is the most important.
- I wonder why God made a new covenant.
- I wonder what this means for us today.

Activity:

Summary: Our activity today is to write on our hearts a covenant God has made with us. We will explore the Baptismal Covenant as it relates to the Old Testament covenants we've learned about and make a "Banner of Hearts" on which we will write, in our own words, the covenant to which we are called by God.

We have learned about several covenants in the last few weeks. Who remembers what a covenant is? Who remembers what the covenants we've learned about are?

In our passage from Jeremiah God says that we will all “know God” because God will write the law on our hearts. God says we won’t need anyone else to teach us about God like the people did a long, long time ago, because we will all feel God in our hearts. Today’s activity is to search our own hearts and ask God what covenant we can make with God.

One way we can learn more about this is to look at our Baptismal Covenant. When we are baptized our parents (or us, if we are old enough) make promises to live in a certain way and to follow God in a certain way. We are going to look at our Baptismal Covenant together to see what promises we have with God. (BCP 304-305)

You can give each student a copy of the Baptismal Covenant (included at the end of this lesson) or invite each child to open a Book of Common Prayer to page 304. The Baptismal Covenant is the list of beliefs and promises we acclaim at our baptism and reaffirm at various services during the church year. The Baptismal Covenant begins with a call and response, question and answer form of the Apostles Creed and continues to a series of questions about the ways we are called to live into our call to Christian discipleship.

Lead the children through the Baptismal Covenant, asking them after each question what they think they each mean and guiding them as appropriate.

***An important thing to note is that we never have to say just “I will” after our promises. We always say, “I will, with God’s Help” because we recognize that we do everything with the love and support of God. We are never in this alone.

The Israelites spent a lot of time in the wilderness complaining about their journey and saying God wasn’t doing enough to help them out. The Israelites weren’t living into their end of the covenant. God, in this passage from Jeremiah, recognizes that the Israelites need a different kind of support – they need God to write on their hearts precisely what God desires from them. The Israelites need an internal connection to God that will be there forever.

Our Baptismal Covenant mirrors this type of covenant. We believe that God puts a seal on our hearts in Baptism and that, through those waters – the same waters that formed the oceans at creation, threatened the world during the flood, sprang from the rock in the wilderness, and in which our Lord was Baptized – we are covenanted and redeemed with and by our God.

After going through the covenant together, give each child one of the red hearts you cut out, as well as a marker. Invite each child to take a moment and to write on the heart a

promise they want to make “with God’s help.” Maybe they want to rewrite one of the promises from the Baptismal Covenant (examples: “I will look for Jesus in the people who I meet.” “I will love people how God loves me.”) They may have other ideas – the most important thing is to help them discern a covenant that is in keeping with the themes of our Scriptures.

Once the children have written on their hearts, tape them onto the yarn and string them up on the ceiling of the classroom (or, maybe there is a space in the Nave or hall where members of the congregation could see them!)

Getting Closure: Looking up at the heart banner hanging overhead, let each child read his or her heart to the class.

Closing Prayer: *Dear God, you promised to write your law on our hearts. Help us to feel your Words inside of us, always. Amen.*

The Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-305)

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Father?

People: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.