

Lesson Plans for Younger 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:

Gather Supplies:

- yarn and masking tape
- Cut large hearts out of white paper. You will need one for each student.
- You will need markers, stickers, crayons, glitter, feathers, sequins, etc...
- Provide glue/glue sticks for each student

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

The people of Israel had been traveling in the wilderness for many, many years. God sent the people the 10 Commandments, but the people still had a hard time following God's Law. God tried talking to the people through Moses, but the people still had a hard time following God's Law. God even tried punishing the people, but the people still had a hard time following God's Law.

God thought and thought about what to do so the people would be able to understand how much God loved them and could follow along with God's plan for them. Then, God had an idea.

God decided to make a new covenant (promise) with the people. God decided to write on their hearts about how much God loved them. God thought if everybody had God's word in their hearts from the time they were born then they would be able to follow God.

God forgave the people for all of the bad things they had done. God wrote on all of their hearts about God's love for them and about the best ways to live. And God promised to love and forgive the people forever.

Reflection Questions:

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

Activity:

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.

Today we are going to make pictures of what our hearts feel like with the love of God filling them up.

First, let's think about how God's love makes us feel.

I wonder how God's love makes you feel. (Give them time to answer and provide some prompting as necessary. Does it make them feel: Warm, special, shiny, happy...)

Think about all of the ways God's love makes us feel and now we will use all of these supplies to decorate our Heart Full of God!

Give each child one of the hearts you cut out, as well as access to the decorating supplies. Give the children time to decorate their hearts as they feel they appear with God's love filling them up.

Once the children have decorated 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 point out his/her heart and tell the class about how God's love makes them feel.

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