

Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9

Background

Lent continues onwards in our long walk toward the resurrection light. 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 explore a text from the Hebrew Scriptures that focuses on an aspect of covenant with God. Through our exploration of the historical covenants with God we will seek to open for the children ways in which God invites us into covenant today.

A Notation for This Week's Scripture

Our Scripture this week challenges us to listen for God's goodness in a passage that is uncomfortable. Some claim that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures was an angry God and when Jesus came God became about Love, but that interpretation denies the eternal benevolence of God. In today's passage we hear more about the Israelites whom God rescued out of slavery and is leading to the Promised Land. Last week God sent the 10 Commandments to help the people get back on track following a series of complaints and missteps. This week, we hear that the Israelites are, once again, complaining about God and feeling as though God is abandoning them. It would be easy to gloss over the arrival of the snakes only to focus on the anti-venom provided – but that does a disservice to the passage. In this passage we learn that the journey is what we make it to be. By

complaining constantly and overlooking each blessing bestowed, the Israelites bring upon themselves more and more difficult hardships. However, God continues to provide the remedy for what ails them. Through this seemingly endless journey through the wilderness, the Israelites are starting to realize that the Promised Land is ahead of them, but might be for the next generation rather than those who started out of Egypt. God has made a covenant with the people – God has promised to take them out of slavery into the Promised Land; until the people trust God and the messengers God sends, they will not arrive. A covenant requires that both sides of the promise live into it, mutually.

Theme: Be Grateful for What You Have

Before Class:

1. Make sure you have enough bibles for each child. 2. Materials for the Activity:

- Play-dough
- Legos (including some Lego people)

Beginning: Welcome all of the children back. Do a short check in. Remind them of our lesson from last week: we learned about God sending the 10 Commandments to the Israelites to help teach them the best way to live. The Israelites were not following God the way they should, so God tried to help by teaching them some rules for how to follow God. Next, ask them if they know anyone who seems to complain a lot; someone for whom nothing is ever quite right. If it's sunny they want it to rain; if it's raining they don't want to get wet. If it's time for reading they'd rather do math; if it's time for math they want to do science. If you buy them a blue toy they'd rather have the red one. It can be hard to be around those people because they don't even seem happy with anything. The Israelites were behaving like that – only 10 times worse! Today we are going to learn about a time when God was very frustrated with the Israelites, but God still decided to help them in the end.

Opening Prayer: *God, sometimes it is hard to understand your ways. Be with us as we seek to know you more. Amen.*

The Story: Numbers 21:4-9

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what you think about this story.
- I wonder if there were any parts you did not like.
- I wonder if there is anything we could leave out of this story without changing its meaning.
- I wonder why this story is important.
- I wonder what this story teaches us.
- I wonder how the Israelites felt.
- I wonder how God felt.

Activity: For the past three weeks we have been learning about God's covenants with the people. Something that is important to remember is that a covenant is an agreement between God and the people. God keeps trying

very hard to keep the covenant, but in complaining and refusing to follow the law, the people are breaking their covenant with God. Today's story is about God's frustration with the people who refuse to be partners with God in the covenant.

Today you will build this story from Lego Blocks and retell it in your own words. Each student need some Legos, play dough, and Lego people to build their own version of this story. You may pair your students up if you think that will facilitate their learning.

The goal of this activity is to give the children a chance to grapple with the themes of this story, to form any questions they may have, and to express the story in their words with the rest of the class.

This activity is meant to be open-ended. Each individual or pair will handle it differently. The students can tell the story as it appears in the bible or they could update the story to modern times. However they find the best way of conveying their learning is a success.

Getting Closure: Allow individuals (or pairs) the opportunity to share their story with the class. After they have shared, let the class ask questions of the presenter and leave space for them to explore the questions without too much adult intervention. It is a good thing to acknowledge that this is a difficult text for adults, too. That is why we study the bible over and over again – there are many layers to every passage.

Closing Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for bringing your people out of Egypt and providing for their needs. Help me to open my eyes to the blessings you send me and to always find gratitude. Amen.*