

Lesson Plans for Younger 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: Say “I’m Sorry”

Before Class:

1. Play-dough to use while telling the story. 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, help us to know when we have done something wrong. Amen.*

The Story: Numbers 21:4-9

The people were following Moses toward the promised land. They had been walking for a very long time and they were tired and hungry and crabby!
*using yellow play dough, make a pancake that will serve as the desert sand.

The people were complaining very loudly about what a bad leader Moses was and how they didn't think God was doing a good job helping them.
*Take several small pieces of play dough and roll them into balls (about 1 inch around)

This hurt Moses' feelings. It hurt God's feelings too. God had given the people food when they asked for it. God helped the people find water when they were thirsty. When the people complained that the Egyptians were mean to them, God helped them get away. God was trying very hard to make the people happy, but nothing seemed to be working. *Make a sad face out of playdough

Then, while the people were traveling, dangerous snakes came and hurt the people. The people went to Moses and apologized for being mean and speaking badly about Moses and God. They asked for help. *turn the small balls into snakes by rolling them with a flat palm against the table

God decided to forgive the people. God told Moses to make a snake out of metal and put the snake on his walking stick. God promised that if a snake hurt one of the people, they could look at Moses' fake snake and it would make them better. *make one snake out of gray or black playdough

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 are going to build this story from play dough and retell it in your own words. Each student need some play dough to build their own version of this story.

Retell the story, as it is broken up above. As you re-tell each bit, invite the children to build that part of the story as they see it in their minds. You could prompt them by asking things like, "What do you look like when you are tired and crabby?" "What do you think the food God gave them looked like?" "What do you think the wilderness looked like that they traveled through"

This activity is meant to be open-ended. Each child will handle it differently. The students can tell the story as it appears in their own minds. However, they find the best way of conveying their learning is a success.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to make one last thing out of play dough: a heart. Tell the children that God desires only our love and our best from us. 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, when we do something wrong, give us the courage to say “I’m sorry.” Amen.*