

Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: Mark 8:31-38

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Just prior to our reading today, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they offer the various responses that they have heard from others. "But who do YOU say that I am?" asks Jesus. Who are you following? Today, Jesus once again teaches those around him who he is, therefore, what is ahead for the Son of God and what that means for the followers of Jesus.

Theme: Take Up Your Cross

Before Class: You will need Bibles or copies of the Scripture for your group, an easel, markers.

Beginning: Today you could begin your discussion around asking people what they may have given up or taken on for Lent. Have them share and you can come back to it later in the lesson as we talk about what Jesus is asking us to give up in order to take on the cross and follow him.

Opening Prayer: *Gracious Lord, we ask you to guide us today as we discover more about who you are and how we are to follow you in our lives each day. Amen.*

The Scripture (Mark 8:31-38): Invite someone to read the passage and ask the participants to write down the action words that they hear. Then invite someone else to read it again and have the participants write down words of instruction that stick out for them.

Invite the participants to share what words they came away with and write them up on the easel.

Reflection Questions:

- Jesus began to teach people openly about what was going to happen to him. What does Jesus say is going to happen to him? (He predicts rejection, then death and resurrection.)
- Why did Peter react so strongly against Jesus' description of what was to come? (Peter, understandably, wanted Jesus to continue to lead them and not get himself killed.)
- Why do we think Jesus was so hard on Peter? (Perhaps the actual wording is a bit hyperbolic, but the message is clear: his disciples must learn a new way of thinking about power and what it means to follow God's Son.)
- What does Jesus mean by the following statement? "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (To unpack this, look at two aspects of the statement: what we deny and what we take up.)
- What kinds of power trips, overblown prestige, and privileged positions does Jesus disdain for himself and therefore for us? What phony glory does much of our culture attempt to seduce us to embrace? What injustices, inequities, and prejudices does Jesus invite us to notice -- and work against?

- How might the causes we have noticed make us vulnerable?
- What responsibilities are we being asked to assume?
- What rights of others are we being called to notice?
- What talents do we have that we are expected to exercise?
- What gifts do we have that can help build up our families, our church, and our community?
- What help and encouragement can we offer each other, the children and youth in our midst, the elderly, sick, or the otherwise alone?

Getting Closure: As we look at all these callings, discuss how we can keep from getting overwhelmed by all that we see ourselves called to do. Discuss how we can support each other, hold each other accountable, and take care of our own selves? How does all of this inform out Lenten disciplines?

Closing Prayer: *“Thank you, God, for calling us to a deeper life in you, and for giving us each other to share this journey. Amen.”*

Mark 8:31-38

³¹*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

³⁴*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for*

their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”