

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Background

Alleluia, Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Easter is nearing a close but we continue to celebrate with the same enthusiasm because Jesus was raised! We've walked with Jesus through the wilderness into Jerusalem and to the grave. Easter is a season of 50 days in which we name and claim our identity in Christ as an Easter People. Easter is a season of baptism and rebirth. Many of the Scripture passages we will hear are about baptism or about Jesus' sacrifice for us. Many churches use this as a season for baptisms and receptions into the church. It is the season when we re-explore our identity as Christians as it is the key to our faith tradition: that Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose to new life again from the grave. In doing so, Jesus has opened the pathway to everlasting life for all of us. Thanks be to God!

A Notation for This Week's Scripture

As we come toward the end of the season of Easter we go back to the beginning of the book of Acts. There is a very good reason for that! Ascension day, or the day Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrected time on earth, was celebrated earlier this week. Because of that, our lectionary preparers have taken us to the passage in Acts immediately following the story of Jesus' Ascension. Our Scripture for today finds Peter standing up among the crowd of all the believers, both men and women (though only men were counted), who had been with Jesus during his teaching ministry, trial, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Now, to fulfill the Scripture, they must elect another disciple to fill the place of Judas, who betrayed Jesus. We hear this week, for the first time in strict numerical fashion, of the dozens of followers in addition to the disciples. This marks

the beginning of the church and introduces us to Peter as that church leader.

Theme: Called and Counted

Before Class:

You will need 10-15 popsicle sticks for today's activity. (You will need at least as many popsicle sticks as you have children.)

On one of the popsicle sticks you should draw a heart. On the other popsicle sticks you will write different actions the children will need to complete. Write things like: Do 10 Jumping Jacks, Meow Like a Cat, Shout Alleluia!, Give a High Five, Jump as high as you can, etc. Make them easy and fun.

Read the instructions for the game in the activity section and familiarize yourself with the rules and objectives before class.

Beginning: Have you ever been in gym class or out on the playground when a group was choosing a team to play a game? How did it feel when you were waiting to see if you would be picked? Do you think God would ever pick a team like that? Today we are going to learn about the way the disciples found a new person to become a disciple with them and we are going to think about all of the different ways there are to follow God.

Celebrant/Teacher: Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

People/Children: The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Opening Prayer: *God of Love and life, thank you for showing me the ways I can follow you, today and always. Amen.*

The Story:

Earlier this week our church celebrated the Ascension of Jesus. Who knows what that means? Jesus went up into heaven 50 days after his resurrection on Easter Sunday. When Jesus went to Heaven, that was when the work of starting the church began. Today our story comes from the time just after

Jesus went up to heaven. The eleven disciples (remember, there are only eleven because Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed Jesus by bringing the soldiers to arrest him) and the disciples have not replaced Judas yet because they have been a little busy since the miracle of Jesus' resurrection!

Now that Jesus has gone from them they need to get to work building the church and sharing the Good News of Jesus with everyone they encounter. But how will they pick?

In today's story we will hear about the many people who have been following Jesus all along, but who we didn't hear about because they weren't part of the 12 disciples. We will hear how the 11 remaining disciples chose one of the other followers to join them in their work building the church.

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood in front of all of Jesus' followers and said, "Friends, the bible says, that we need to pick a new disciple to take the place of Judas who is no longer with us. It is important that the new disciple is one of the people who has been following Jesus during his whole ministry, ever since he was baptized by John. This new disciple will help us to share the Good News about Jesus' resurrection with all the people they meet."

So the followers suggested two men who were followers of Jesus and very faithful. They proposed Justus and Matthias. Then they all prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two men you have chosen to become a new disciple." And they cast lots for them, which is like rolling a dice, and the lot chose Matthias; and he was added to the eleven disciples.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder how Justus and Matthias felt when the disciples were casting lots.
- I wonder what the other 120+ people thought when Peter didn't call their names to become a disciple.

- I wonder what Justus did after he wasn't chosen as a disciple.
- I wonder what God would say to the people who wished they were called by name.

Activity: In today's story it said that God knew everyone's hearts and that is why Justus and Matthias were chosen. But after they were chosen from the crowd, the disciples "cast lots" to see who would be the right choice. Casting lots is like rolling dice and seeing who gets a certain number, or drawing straws to see who gets the short straw. There isn't a way to make the dice go to a certain number or to see which straw will be the different length. You just have to have good luck. So we know that Justus and Matthias were both special in God's eyes, but the final decision of who would become a disciple was luck.

Popsicle Stick Disciple: Today we are going to play a game to try on what it might feel like to be Justus and Matthias. We are going to draw popsicle sticks and see who is "it" after the draw. On most of the popsicle sticks there is an action to complete, but on one popsicle stick there is a picture of a heart. The teacher holds all of the popsicle sticks fanned out with the images facing down. When it is your turn, you draw a popsicle stick from the teacher's hand. If there is an action written on it than you complete the action. If you draw the heart, you are the disciple for that round. The disciple gets to lead the class in a round of follow the leader around the room.

The disciple gets to lead the follow the leader time because in the bible, the disciples spread the Gospel with the hopes that others will follow their actions and come to faith in Jesus. That is the job Mattias was chosen for in today's story.

After someone has been the disciple, *shuffle* all the popsicle sticks back together and go around the circle again.

Getting Closure: After each child has gotten to be the disciple (or after playing as many rounds as time allows) gather the children back together. Ask them:

- What did you like about being the disciple?
- What did you like about someone else being the disciple?
- Did drawing the disciple stick make you better than anyone else in the class?
- What were some fun parts about being a follower?

We are all called to different roles in life. Sometimes we will be leaders and sometimes we will be followers. But if we pay attention we can use the gifts God has given us to be the best we can be at the role we are given.

Closing Prayer: Creator God, thank you for giving us special gifts and for calling us each in unique ways. Amen.

Celebrant/Teacher: Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

People/Children: The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!