

Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 15:9-17

Background: Easter - the unearned gift of grace. The reflective season of “going in” that Lent provided (no matter what disciplines we undertook, nor even how well we attended to them) explodes on Easter. Of course, we cannot “figure it out.” How comforting, then, to have these Scriptures, showing first how the disciples struggled to grasp what had happened and then stories of Jesus before the crucifixion, which are written in the light of the Resurrection.

As Easter people we know, as Paul said, that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God. We are people who expect life out of death. And so, in Eastertide we celebrate the wonder and prepare ourselves to take the awesome message out into the world on Pentecost.

A Notation for this Week's Gospel

God's love: God's love for us, enabling us to love God. God's joy in us making joy complete. We are invited into this vast collaboration of love, invited to be part of God's team, considered friends, no longer servants. God has, so to speak, looked each one of us in the eye and said, “You did not choose me but I chose you.” Chosen, by God, to bear the fruit of love.

Theme: Abide in my Love

Before: You will need paper and pencils for the children and a large sheet of paper with a felt marker or two. Bibles or copies of the Scripture and copies of The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) are also needed.

If the ‘Beginning’ activity does not feel right for your setting, you will simply need to explain the different ways people use the word “love.” The issue is that grade-school children tend to think of “love” as romantic love, kissing,

and all that. So to be told they are called to “love” each other is very uncomfortable. Equally confusing is the idea that they should “love” the bully who beats them up. Add to that the fact that our culture tries to convince us we will “love” a new brand of toothpaste. Perhaps we can help children see that it is possible to “love” the bully at school without feeling guilty that they do not “like” that person, be grateful for the people in their lives they truly love, and delight in their very favorite candy bar and know that it is not “love” at all.

Beginning: Take a large sheet of paper and make three columns. Label the first one: LOVE as in ‘I like this.’ The second column: LOVE as in ‘because God loves this person’; the third column: LOVE as in ‘I REALLY LOVE.’ Then you give three examples that work for you. (For instance: First Column: Latte with whipped cream. Second Column: The person at my work who puts me down. Third Column: my mother.) Ask the children to work with you to define the difference between the three kinds of love. Ask for a volunteer to come up with an example for the first column. Then ask for a volunteer to come up with an example for the second column. Finally, ask for someone to come up with an example for the third column. Do the children agree that each of these items is in the correct column?

Give the children paper and pencils and ask them to make three columns, one for each of the categories you produced. Tell them to write items for each of the columns and take a few minutes to do this. Tell them that they will not need to show you the paper when they are through, and they will only need to volunteer the things they want to share.

When they have had the time to write, ask for a volunteer to write one item for the first column, a second volunteer to write something for the second, and another volunteer to write something in the third column. Then ask for volunteers to write something in any of the three columns. Keep going until each child has been free to add items to the columns. Then invite the children to listen to your opening prayer.

Opening Prayer: *Thank you, God, for showing us what love is. Thank you for loving us even when our behavior is not what it could be. Thank you for telling us to love everyone, even when you know we will not LIKE everyone. Amen.*

The Story: John 15:9-17 The passage is long with lots of words and no “action.” It might be easier to divide it into three sections, with questions after each of the sections. Be sure each child has access to a Bible or a copy of the reading.

Ask the children to be listening for the kinds of love in the first section (verses 9-11) and ask for a volunteer to read the two verses.

Reflection Questions for verses 9-11:

- Who is talking here? (Jesus)
- What kind of love does he describe between him and God the Father?
- What kind of love does he describe between Jesus and the friends he is talking to? (In both cases, true love.)

Ask for a volunteer to read verses 12-14.

Reflection Questions for verses 12-14:

- Who are the “friends” Jesus is talking to here? (The disciples – those who had been with him all this time.)
- What would one of these friends do if he disagreed with one of the others – or even got mad at one of the others? (They would work it out and not stop loving each other.)

Ask for a volunteer to read verses 15-17.

Reflection Questions for verses 15-17:

- What is the difference between being Jesus' friends and Jesus' servants? (The answer is in verse 15.)
- How did these people get to be Jesus' friends? (Verse 16a.)
- What do we think Jesus means when he says that God will give these people "whatever you ask him in my name?" (They need to be sure that what they are asking for is in sync with what they know God wants.)

Getting Closure: Ask the children: "What if this also applies to us?" Ask the children to go back over the passage looking for places it could be referring to us as well. For example, do we think Jesus loves us as much as he loved the disciples? (Why? Why not?) Could he want us to really love each other and make up if we have an argument? Do we think we, too, are "chosen?" Are we friends of Jesus?

Closing Prayer: *The fifth intercession in the Prayers of the People (BCP, p. 383) invites our prayers for those who suffer and those in any trouble. Ask the children for suggestions and offer your own also. Compile the suggestions and make them your closing prayer.*

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed

you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.