Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Adults
Epiphany 1 (B)
New Testament: Mark 1:4-11

BACKGROUND
Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, "with words, if necessary."

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK'S READING
The baby Jesus is now a man; a man beginning his ministry. Perhaps he is still trying to sort out in his mind what he is being called to do. He looks for validation and turns to his cousin, John. John, meanwhile, has been faithfully calling people to prepare, turn around, start over. He is pretty sure he will recognize Jesus, but he has not yet met him. When Jesus shows up, John goes into the water with him to baptize him, and both of them hear a voice from heaven. Jesus now knows he will be able to figure out what it is that he is being called to do.

THEME
Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift

BEFORE CLASS
You will need an easel and easel paper or a whiteboard and markers. For the "Getting Closure" activity, you will need copies of the Book of Common Prayer for everyone.

BEGINNING
Read to the class the overview of the season. Or give copies of it to everyone so they can be thinking about it as we go through the season: noticing gifts, looking for opportunities to give in return.

Mark is the principal gospel for the entire year. If this group has been together since last fall when Matthew was the Gospel, they are probably beginning to notice a distinct difference in voice. Invite the group to make observations on the passage for today: note that Mark is succinct, uses just the facts. Notice how Mark begins the gospel – no stories of the Advent or the birth of Jesus, and no childhood stories.

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Epiphany is the season we have just begun. Ask the group what the word "Epiphany" means to them. (It has at least two meanings: the "ah-ha!" moment when something dawns on you, and a showing forth. On the newsprint write other suggestions people offer.)

OPENING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the clear concise voice of the writer of the Gospel of Mark and for this time together to explore what this book will say to us and what it will invite us to do. We ask you to help us open up the meaning you intend for us. Amen.

THE STORY: MARK 1:4-11

Today's passage sets the tone for the season of Epiphany. Invite four different people to read the distinct portions of the passage. (See below.)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Make two columns on the newsprint, one titled "John the Baptist" and the other "Jesus the Christ." Invite the group to come up with words to describe each.

- What is the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus? (They are cousins.)
- What do we know about him so far? (He's a humble prophet, clear about what he is called to do and what he is NOT called to do.)
- Why do we suppose Jesus came to John to be baptized? (Could be he was struggling with a call and needed someone to discern along with him. He believed in the power of baptism and chose to authenticate it. Jesus thought John might help him get a bit more clear about what God was calling him to do.)
- Who was God's message in 11b for? (Jesus, yes. Could it also be for us?)

GETTING CLOSURE

Make sure each person has access to a Book of Common Prayer. Looking at the Baptism service, focus on pp. 304-305, the promises made at Baptism. Notice what we promise and what it might mean. Brainstorm to come up with ideas about what our church would be like – and our lives together – if we really focused on these promises. (Write ideas on newsprint to honor each contribution.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised us to the new life of grace. Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen. (adapted from the Book of Common prayer, page 308)

Edited by ***the Rev. Shannon Kelly***

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MARK 1:4-11

Narrator: John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed,

John: 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Narrator: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven,

God: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

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