Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Adults
Proper 19 (B)
New Testament: Mark 8:27-38

BACKGROUND
During this "Ordinary Time" our lives may well include exceptionally un-ordinary events, such as births and deaths. As we take this journey, nourished by the scriptures appointed for the season and empowered by our baptisms, we are invited to be on the lookout for all the blessings found in the ordinary – to see God at work here and now. And we are compelled to share our blessings with others.

The Pharisee in each of us wants to "get it right." In the gospel passages for Propers 17-22 from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is concerned that we "get it." So Jesus takes the ordinary things of life, from washing hands to attending to a child, and meets us where we are and helps us to "get it," finding blessings in the ordinary.

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK'S READING
"Who do people say that I am?" Jesus asks his disciples. And they offer the various responses they have heard. "But who do YOU say that I am?" asks Jesus. Ah, the central question. Central for the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Central for us. Who do WE say that Jesus is?

THEME
If You Want to Become My Followers

BEFORE CLASS
You will need Bibles for your group or copies of the scripture found below.

OPENING PRAYER
Loving God, you tell us today, 'Take up your cross and follow me.' Help us to understand what this might mean in our community and in our lives. Amen.

THE STORY: MARK 8:27-38
Read half the passage and stop to discuss it, and then read the second half and discuss.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
- Who are the people guessing who Jesus is, and why do you think they said John the Baptist? (In our days of instant communication, it is hard to imagine a world where word-of-mouth was the main method of communication. Possibly not

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everyone knew – or believed – that John the Baptist had been beheaded. Perhaps they hoped what they were not sure they could believe.)

- Why did they guess Jesus was Elijah? (Hebrew people at that time – and many to this day – believe that Elijah the prophet will return. For passages describing Elijah, see 1 Kings:17-21 and 2 Kings:1-2.)
- What have the disciples concluded? (They believe Jesus is the Messiah, the descendant of King David who will live long and rule gloriously.)
- Why did Jesus demand the disciples tell no one about him? (He knew that if people expected him to be a glorious king, his message would be lost in the publicity.)
- 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.)

Read the second half of the lesson

- 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." Does this mean we must quit our jobs, leave our families, and go around the country dragging a wooden cross? (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. And discuss how we can support each other, hold each other accountable, and take care of our own selves?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for calling us to a deeper life in you, and for giving us each other to share this journey. (Today we especially pray for _____.) Be with us as we leave this place and bless our journeys. Amen.

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MARK 8:27-38

Peter's Declaration about Jesus
Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But 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.'

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. For 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those 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.'

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