Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Adults
Proper 21 (B)
New Testament: Mark 9:38-50

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
Jesus continues to teach, while gently holding a small child on his lap. "Whoever is not against us is for us." Then, do what you have to do to make sure you place no stumbling block before one of these little ones. If your foot causes you to stumble – cut it off! Hyperbole, perhaps, but the point is clear: pay attention. We are called to be salty people and at peace with one another.

THEME
Saltiness

BEFORE CLASS
You will need copies of the scripture for today and sea salt or kosher salt.

BEGINNING
Give each person a few grains of salt. Ask them to take a few minutes to think about salt: its ordinariness, its usefulness, its uniqueness. If the thinking takes you to a "salty" place (like the ocean) cherish that thought. After a few moments of silence, invite responses to the salt.

OPENING PRAYER
God our Creator, thank you for the gift of salt – ordinary and unique. Thank you for the blessings we find when we notice the ordinary. Amen.

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THE STORY: MARK 9:38-50

Ask a volunteer to read the entire passage. Then, after a minute to reflect, ask a different person to read, again, verses 38-41.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- John has a valid concern, how would you characterize it? (The need we so often feel to be sure we are "doing the right thing.")
- Why do you think Jesus offered the response he did? (Perhaps he is telling his disciples that he is not teaching them a rigid cult-type religion.)
- If we applied "whoever is not against us is for us" as our assessment, what problems and what assets do you foresee? (How would we teach our children what we believe if every option were left open? Whom might we be able to include who is not now included?)
- Discuss how verse 41 eases the stress of disagreement with people whose theology is different than that of our own?

Mark 9:42

Ask a volunteer to re-read this verse.

- Who are the "little ones?" (Those beloved of Jesus. His disciples, those just coming to belief, and all the children)
- What kinds of things would be stumbling blocks? (Lives that are not in sync with what we proclaim. Too rigid entrance requirements. Possibly a liturgy that is not accessible to people.)
- Can someone offer a definition of the word "hyperbole" (hy per bole - an exaggeration to make a point. Example: He is driving me crazy. Well. Probably not crazy – but certainly his behavior is highly stressful to me.)
- Do we really think Jesus is advocating surgery, self-taught? And if not, what is Jesus saying? (We need to pay very serious attention to what is taking us so badly off course. Our actions do have consequences – for ourselves and for others and sometimes we have to take drastic measures to turn our lives around.)

Mark 9:49-50

Ask a volunteer to re-read these two verses.

- What is the "fire" all will be salted with? (Think of times 'fire' is used in scripture and what it may symbolize. Fire could be the trials and tribulations that come to all of us, or times when we are touched by the Holy Spirit, or purified – made clean, or a sign of covenant like the burning bush)
- In verse 50a, Jesus is stating the obvious. What else does he mean? (What good are we if we have lost who we are and what makes us special? Take the times when we are salted with fire and make use of them, otherwise we risk losing its significance – its saltiness.)
- What does it mean to "have salt in yourself?" (Be who we are, don't let anyone talk us into being less than we are.)

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- Discuss a more 21st Century way to say: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Note: the older children are crafting such a paraphrase.)

GETTING CLOSURE

Thinking again about the salt we looked at earlier, invite further reflecting on the salt we are and the salt we are to each other in this community.

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you for salt and Jesus' noticing salt as a teaching tool. Help us to be the salt you call us to be. Amen.

MARK 9:38-50

38 John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we
tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' 39 But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him;
for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak
evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you
a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the
reward.

42 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me,
it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were
thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you
to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.
45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame
than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to
stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to
have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is
never quenched.

49 'For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness,
how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

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