Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Older Children
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 reading for today, a small container of sea salt or kosher salt. Bring the crest project (see previous lessons), if you have been working on one and some liquid white glue.

BEGINNING
Show the children the salt you have brought. Ask them to brainstorm with you the uses of salt (on food, of course. What else? A salt lick for deer. Melting ice on roads in the winter.)

OPENING PRAYER
Thank you for the stories we have about Jesus. Help us to notice what Jesus wants us to know. Amen.

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THE STORY: MARK 9:38-50

Tell the children that in this passage we have three teachings and a "p.s." so we will read the passage in sections.

First Section: Mark 9:38-41

Invite two people to read: John (verse 38) Jesus (verses 39-41) (A script that is broken into parts is at the end of the lesson)

Reflection Questions

- What is John concerned about? (People are doing good things, and are not part of Jesus' group.)
- I wonder if we can we think of examples of people doing good things, in Jesus' name, but are not a part of our group? (People in other denominations of the Christian church, for example. People who take care of the sick, or the poor, who may not even be Christians.)

Second Section: Mark 9:42

Invite one person to read this verse.

Reflection Questions

- What is a "stumbling block?" (Anything that keeps people away from Jesus. Rules that are impossible to keep, for example.)
- Who are the "little ones" Jesus is referring to? (His disciples, anyone who is trying to follow Jesus.)
- I wonder why Jesus calls them "little ones?" (Perhaps because he understands that many are trying to keep them from following Jesus. Perhaps because he knows we have so much to learn.)

Third Section: Mark 9:43-48

Invite one person to read these verses – Jesus talking.

Reflection Questions

- Does anyone know the meaning of the word "hyperbole?" (Hy per bo le: An exaggeration to make a point. Example: everyone was there. Well, everyone in the world probably was not there!)
- I wonder what Jesus means in these verses? (It probably would be better to chop off a hand you simply could not control, but surely he is trying to get people's attention. Behavior matters.)
- I wonder if Jesus got people's attention?
- I wonder what they remembered?

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The "P.S." - Mark 9:50
Invite one reader for verses 49-50.

Reflection Questions

- I wonder what Jesus means when he says that everyone will be "salted with fire?" (Everyone will have something really hard to go through in their lives.)
- Verse 50a: Good Question! But why do you think Jesus is asking this question? (If we have let who we are get away from us, what possible good are we?)
- Verse 50b: How do we have "salt in ourselves?" (We choose to be who we are and not try to be someone we are not.)
- Taking what Jesus has been quoted as saying in verse 50, can we restate it in words we would use now? (See what the children can come up with. If they get stumped, you could suggest phrases like: "Don't give up your salt." Or "Stay salted." "Keep the Peace." "Be at peace." Etc.)

Option: *If the children have been making a crest, give them the salt you brought to class and ask them to plan how they will use it on their crest. (Be sure to have liquid glue so they can glue some to their crest, if they want to do so.)*

ACTIVITIES

Figuring out What Jesus Means
Jesus said: "if you are not against us, you are for us." Does anyone here use their right hand to write? Stick up your hand, if you do. Now, does anyone use their left hand to write? Stick up your hand if you do. (And, if you have no "lefties" who do we know that does use their left hand?) More people use their right hand than their left hand. Does this mean that lefties are not doing it the right way? No. If you are not against us, you are for us.

Jesus told his friends to make sure children could come to him. Here in our class, we are hearing stories Jesus told and praying to Jesus. Who else helps us learn about Jesus? Do our parents help us? Does going into our church help us? (Accept what the children respond.)

Saltiness
Let's think of foods that need salt. What do you like to put salt on? Corn on the cob? Baked potato? What else? What happens if we put too much salt on our food? (Yuk.) What would happen if the salt didn't taste like salt? (Boring.)

Jesus says we can be salt! I wonder what you think that means? (We, as individuals and as a group, can add flavor and life to the things in which we are involved. We each add our own flavor and interest to a group.)

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What kinds of things can we do to be like salt? What do we do in our families to make things better? (Help the children see that who they are improves the lives of those around them.)

Give each child a piece of construction paper and have the glue stick handy. As the children to think of things they do and are to make life better for those around them. Tell them to take a salt crystal – or a pinch of salt – and put it on their paper, securing it with a glue stick or a dot of glue. If they are having trouble coming up with things, ask them if they ever make anyone in their family laugh? Do they sing a song they have learned? Do they give their parents a hug? (Etc.) The children can take their salt pictures home.

Give the children another piece of dark-colored construction paper (each piece: one-quartered sheet so as to fit on the poster) and ask them to create a "Salt for Jesus" picture, gluing some salt to the paper and placing it on the poster you are creating.

Option: *If time permits – and the children need some movement – suggest they make up a "Salty Dance." Find a song you all can sing together (a nursery rhyme – even a commercial) and put new words to it. The words could be Jesus says: Be salty, be salty, be salty. Jesus says have salt in you. I've got salt, you've got salt, we all have salt in us. Then figure out motions. The idea is to have fun and move our bodies.*

GETTING CLOSURE

Discuss the phrase your group came up with for salt and peace and find at least one way it will make life harder (for example: times we have to stand for something unpopular). Then think of times it will make life easier (for example: who I am is just fine with God – I don't have to try to be someone else.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for salt and for the salty part that is me. Amen.

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MARK 9:38-50

Part 1

John: 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.'

Jesus: 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.

Part 2

Jesus: 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.

Part 3

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.

The P.S.

Jesus: '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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