

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources



Program 2, 2025-26 (Epiphany to Pentecost)

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

January 11, 2026—May 24, 2026

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Scripture Readings

Text: John 2:1-11

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Secondary Text: Psalm 104:14-16

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth,

¹⁵ and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

¹⁶ The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Mary, Jesus, Steward

Narrator: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him,

Mary: "They have no wine."

Narrator: And Jesus said to her,

Jesus: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

Narrator: His mother said to the servants,

Mary: "Do whatever he tells you."

Narrator: Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them,

Jesus: "Fill the jars with water."

Narrator: And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them,

Jesus: "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward."

Narrator: So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him,

Steward: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

Narrator: Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.



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Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The Lord who sees an “hour” of redemption in our lives will not miss chance to bless our lives as redemption unfolds.

I’ve never understood why this passage is used so often at weddings. Let’s be clear, Jesus doesn’t explicitly bless the anonymous couple or their wedding. He helps a panicked wedding planner who didn’t expect the bar would be hit so hard. More importantly, Jesus doesn’t want to help at all at first. Instead, he protests “my hour has not yet come!” So, what’s really going on in Cana?

To start with the question of time, “the hour” is a powerful symbol in the Gospel of John for the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. In a grander sense, “the hour” symbolizes God’s cosmic plan to redeem us in Jesus. That Jesus is concerned throughout John’s Gospel with the “hour” shows that Jesus’ actions and decisions are always determined by God’s timing and plan, not by ours. So why does Jesus make an exception to God’s timing and perform his first miracle at Cana? While too many explain Jesus’ actions away with a cheap joke about how even Jesus knew to say “Yes, ma’am” to his mother, the

more likely answer is because Jesus doesn’t have an “hour” so that our reasons to rejoice might end. Rather, Jesus has an “hour” because God has a plan for us to have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10). As Gail O’Day and Susan Hylen observed, that may be the great symbolism behind Jesus turning an immense quantity of water into the best of wine; that Jesus has come to give us more of the best blessings than we can handle.

So, what really happened in Cana? Perhaps Jesus didn’t so much bless a simple ceremony, as he demonstrated that the Lord who sees an “hour” of redemption in our lives will not miss a single opportunity to bless our days as the plan unfolds to bless our lives.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

Jesus finds himself at a wedding where the hosts are soon to be disgraced by a shortage of wine. But surely this matter is too trifling for the attention of the great teacher, isn’t it? Don’t be so certain.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God invites you into this holy place,

C: Like guests to a joyous wedding.

L: Come and celebrate in word and meal.

C: We come with glad and open hearts.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: This is the day that you have made; let us rejoice and be glad in it, for you are present in our joys as well as our sorrows, and your desire is the for the blessing of all creation. May our joy spill over into all our interactions with your beautiful world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

As guests at a wedding, we bring to you our gifts, that they might enrich the life of the whole world. Bless them for the sake of the one who brought joy to the wedding at Cana, Jesus Christ, your son, our savior.
Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Lord, you are capable of turning the ordinary into something miraculous. Bolster our faith and give us confidence to do whatever it is that you require, that your glory might be shown through the humblest of acts. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Your creation is a perfect marriage between animal, vegetation, and mineral. Make us to honor its interdependence, which includes ourselves, that we might work for its long-term flourishing. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Sometimes we need encouragement to carry out those things of which you have made us capable. Use us and others to call forth the best and highest purpose in each other, even when we don't feel so inclined. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: You have fed us with the best, and blessed us with life abundant. Bring healing to all who suffer infirmity or lack of any kind, (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Your saints keep constant company around your throne, with joy surpassing any earthly celebration. Encourage our faith through their example, and save us a place at your heavenly table. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who turned water into wine at Cana now invites you to this joyful banquet, where he is fully present in the bread and wine. Come rejoicing with your siblings in Christ, and celebrate the forgiveness of sins and the promise of God's eternal feast. All is prepared.

Litany

- 1: God causes the plants to grow and bring forth food for the people—bread to strengthen the human heart.
- 2: **We accept with gratitude the invitation to holy bread.**
- 1: God causes the grapes to grow and make wine to gladden the human heart.
- 2: **We accept with gratitude the invitation to sacred wine.**
- 1: God strengthens and gladdens the human heart on bread and wine.
- 2: **We accept with gratitude the invitation to God's holy feast, now and forever!**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (junior high or high school age),
Teacher

Props: None

Kid 1: Are you excited for tonight?

Kid 2: Excited but also terrified. This is my first play ever.

Kid 3: Don't worry about it. It's only a little one-act.

Kid 4: Besides, you're good. You're probably the best actor in this play.

Kid 2: Thanks. But I'm really glad I only have a small part in the first scene. Then I get to sit back and enjoy watching everyone else from the wings.

Kid 4: Well, enjoy it now, because I think it's the last time that's going to happen.

Teacher: (*entering*) Oh, thank goodness I found you.

Kid 1: What's up? You look like you've seen a ghost.

Teacher: It's a disaster. A total, complete, unmitigated disaster!

Kid 3: Whoa. Unmitigated. It must be bad if it needs a word that big.

Teacher: I'm serious. We're in big trouble for tonight. Chun just called—they broke their leg and need surgery.

Kid 2: Oh, no! Poor Chun!

Teacher: Yes, poor Chun. But poor us! Chun was the lead in the third play, remember? We open tonight! What are we going to do?

Kid 4: What about Landry? Didn't they understudy the part?

Teacher: Landry has mono.

Kid 4: Ooh. Bummer.

Kid 3: [Kid 2] can do it.

Kid 2 and Teacher simultaneously: What?!?

Kid 3: I'm serious. [Kid 2] is an amazing actor. And they know all the lines.

Kid 2: Hey! How did you...

Kid 4: We all know that, [Kid 2]. We've seen you mouthing the words along with Chun and everyone else at every rehearsal.

Kid 1: Yeah. We figure you could do this as a one-person show.

Teacher: Seriously? You know all the lines?

Kid 2: I...uh...well, yeah. I love this play.

Teacher: Great! Then it's a done deal.

Kid 2: Wait! I'm not ready. This is only my first play.

Kid 3: Well, we know you're destined for theatrical greatness. You can do this little one-act and blow everyone's mind. Then it'll be nothing but serious leads from here on out.

Kid 4: Just say you'll do it, [Kid 2].

Teacher: Yes, please.

Kid 2: (*sighing*) Okay. I guess it's time to stop dragging my feet and go for it.

Teacher: Thanks, for stepping up and saving the one-act festival. I'm so glad you were here!

Kid 2: You're welcome.

Kid 1: Onward and upward!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus' love makes life more joyful.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pitcher of water
- Instant drink mix
- Paper cups

Background

Jesus was at a wedding celebration with his mother shortly after beginning to gather his first disciples. He had not yet done any miracles or teachings.

When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother saw an opportunity for Jesus to perform a miracle, thereby beginning his public ministry.

It is fitting that the event where Jesus' first miracle took place was an event celebrating love (a wedding), which a key theme of Jesus' message. At the wedding, Jesus helped the hosting family honor the guests by serving good wine throughout the entire celebration. Ultimately, Jesus showed the world how God's love was stronger than the hatred of the people in power.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids to imagine they're at a birthday party. Have them describe what it's like in lots of detail. Then tell them that the party's host ran out of juice to drink. Oh no! Wonder about what that would do to the party. How would the guests feel? But wait! They found this drink mix—how could we turn water into party punch? Make the punch and tell the kids that in today's story, Jesus found himself in a similar situation, but did something truly amazing.]

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about how at a wedding in Jesus' time, the feasting went on for days and the people drank lots and lots and *lots* of wine. Wonder with the kids what the people's reaction would be when they realized their hosts had run out of wine. Could they have made the best of it? (*probably*) Wonder together about how having enough wine—like having enough juice at a party—made things more joyful for everyone.

Jesus' love is like that. It can take ordinary things like water and drink mix and turn them into wonderful things. When we add Jesus' love to our lives, simple things become even better.

Wonder with the kids about ways they could invite Jesus into the simple, boring things of their lives, and how that might bring them joy.

Close with a prayer thanking Jesus for giving us joy.

If appropriate, send the kids back to their seats with a cup of juice.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of things that obviously don't belong together, such as a polar bear and a hot desert; a loud banging drum and a person taking a nap; steamed broccoli and ice cream



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Scripture Readings

Text: John 2:13-25

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

²³When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Secondary Text: Psalm 127:1-2

¹Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

²It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jesus, Jews

Narrator: The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves,

Jesus: "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

Narrator: His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him,

Jews: "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Narrator: Jesus answered them,

Jesus: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Narrator: The Jews then said,

Jews: "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"

Narrator: But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.



Jesus Cleanses the Temple, John 2:13-25

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: We find God not in a place, but in a person who promises to never leave us.

Where do you go to find God? An old family church? A nature trail? A ministry site? As faithful Jews, for Jesus and his disciples the answer was simple: the temple. Prior to its destruction in 70CE, the second temple had been the focal point of the Jewish faith. It was the place where one could find forgiveness, could have a personal encounter with God, and where God's spirit was thought to literally dwell among God's people. Yet, as Jesus indicates to the religious leaders, after it was razed to the ground and after Jesus was raised on a cross, Jesus became for Christians what the temple had once been. It isn't some form of Christian supersessionism in which Jesus became some "better" temple, only a different one. Yet, it is still miraculous to think that, in Christ, rather than finding God in a single, fixed location (like that old Church building the congregation can't imagine being church without), we find forgiveness, encounter God, and find God dwelling among us not in any one place but in a person.

That may be the real point of the cleansing of the temple, at least in John's Gospel. Contrary to what

many assume, Jesus cleansing the temple was not an emotional outburst of uncontrolled anger nor was it an attempt to literally expel every single animal and money-changer in the entire outer-court. Instead, Jesus "went away" after making a carefully calculated decision, took time to weave together a whip, and came back to perform a public demonstration by flipping some tables in the gargantuan outer-court, all to make a point: that faith isn't about that old family church, that nature trail, that ministry site, or any place. But by an indescribably beautiful miracle, we find the grace of our God again and again in a person who isn't fixed in place but is coming toward us.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

Cattle, sheep, doves—all for sale. Just another day at the temple. But today, money changers had better be on their guard. Jesus is in town and he's not pleased with what has become of his Father's house.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Come into this holy house, built by love.
C: Our God has built this holy house.
L: Not a church building made by human hands,
C: But this community, the Body of Christ.
L: Come into this place with your siblings in Christ.
C: We come with joy to worship our God.

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
P: God of grace and mercy,
C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.
P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Almighty God,
C: Even Jesus became angry at the sight of injustice being done in your name. Rouse us from our complacency and spur us to action on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow him. In his name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of abundance, you provide all we need each day to live our lives to you. Make us good stewards of your gifts, that with humble hearts we might continue to offer them, as we do today, for your work of justice in the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Merciful God, so often we turn what was meant to be good into something self-serving, distorted, or unjust. Forgive us and lead us back to your right paths. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Your beautiful creation is a temple to your glory, O God. May we treat it accordingly, marvel at its intricate beauty, and give it the care it deserves. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Inspire us by the lives of your servants like Martin Luther King, Jr., who saw a vision of your justice and gave his life to bring it about. Move us by your passion for the disenfranchised, the persecuted, and the misunderstood. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Your sanctuary is a place of prayer, praise, and healing. Grant to all who need it your wholeness and restoration (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Our legacy is with all those who, throughout the ages, saw injustice and didn't rest, but rather fought to restore your good order to the world. Join us with them and give us also their zeal and love for you. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who makes God's house a place of worship makes this table a place of mercy and grace. Come into Jesus' presence and be nourished, forgiven, and strengthened for all that is to come.

Litany

1: Unless God builds this house, it is built in vain.

2: We must ask ourselves, in all honesty,

1: Have we kept this house holy?

2: Is it a place of radical welcome?

1: Is it a place where love is spoken?

2: Or has it become a business?

1: A place where money is exchanged and worship is hollow?

2: God help us to be honest with ourselves,

1: And to commit ourselves to following in the way of Jesus,

2: That all who enter this house might be blessed.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: None

Person 1: Just look at this place.

Person 2: I can't even believe what's happened to it.

Person 1: It used to be somewhere people could go and just be, you know?

Person 2: Connect with nature, and God. It was spiritual.

Person 1: And then the city had to sell it to ParksCorp.

Person 2: It wasn't bad at first. I mean, ParksCorp is...or was...a good company with a good mission. They wanted to keep the park in the best possible condition so it would be around for generations to come.

Person 1: Yeah, but then, all of a sudden, it was about park "improvements."

Person 2: Which cost money.

Person 1: So much for a place for the community to just come and be.

Person 2: Now you have to make reservations and pay through the nose.

Person 1: And those "improvements" have been anything but!

Person 2: I know. Big pavilions for events, a sculpture garden so big it takes up most of the open parkland, that pool...

Person 1: They're all beautiful, I guess. But they don't do anything for that peaceful, spiritual vibe this place used to have.

Person 2: Never mind that the folks from the local community who used to come here can't afford to anymore.

Person 1: Instead of bringing people closer to nature, this place has become a barrier to the people who need it most.

Person 2: And the only people who benefit are ParksCorp and the folks who can afford to support them.

Person 1: Makes me mad, to be honest. I'd love to just drive ParksCorp and all their ilk right out, and return the place to its original state and function.

Person 2: Actually, I recently heard that there are some folks starting a petition to do just that.

Person 1: A petition? I don't think that'll change anything.

Person 2: Well, it's a start. And I don't think it would be a good idea to just come in here and start tearing things up. Even if we'd like to.

Person 1: I guess. Fine, then. Let's find another way to send a message. A strong message. And get this place back to its original purpose.

Person 2: Yes! Something I can be zealous about. Let's do it!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus reminds us what matters.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of things that obviously don't belong together, such as a polar bear and a desert; a loud banging drum and a person taking a nap; steamed broccoli and ice cream

Background

In the Gospel of John, the cleansing of the temple was Jesus' first act once his ministry began. (In the other three gospels, it happened just before his crucifixion.) In John's gospel, Jesus used signs to point toward God, always redirecting people's attention away from himself, and toward God in heaven.

When Jesus overturned the tables, the Jews asked him for a sign to show that he had authority to do what he had done. They didn't realize that Jesus was already beginning to perform signs that God had sent Jesus to reveal God to the people.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the pictures you brought in opposing pairs. Ask the kids if they go well together. Invite them to come up with some other examples of things that don't belong together. Tell them they're going to hear a story about Jesus seeing things that didn't belong together.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids why Jesus got so angry when he saw what was happening in the temple. What is the temple for? What is our church building for? What would be some weird things to find in our church that might take our attention away from God? Jesus reminds us what's important: not just the fun and fancy things we do, but the actual time spent with God.

If you have a little older kids, you can point out that in Jesus' time, what was happening in the temple was actually quite normal. People were supposed to be able to change their money and buy animals to sacrifice. It was what made worship there actually work. But as usual, Jesus was changing the script about God—opening people's eyes to a different way to worship. Wonder with the kids if there are things in their lives that we accept as “just the way things are” that maybe aren't so great. Maybe junk-food vending machines in schools? Or oil drilling and pipelines in or under endangered natural areas or waterways? Point out that when we love God, we are called into seeing what's important, cherishing God's beautiful creation, even if it means going against “the way things are.”

Close with a prayer asking God to help us remember what really matters.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



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Scripture Readings

Text: John 3:1-21

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved

through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 139:13-18

¹³For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

Pronunciation Guide

Nicodemus: nih-ko-DEE-muhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Nicodemus, Jesus

Narrator: Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him,

Nicodemus: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

Narrator: Jesus answered him,

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Narrator: Nicodemus said to him,

Nicodemus: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Narrator: Nicodemus said to him,

Nicodemus: “How can these things be?”

Narrator: Jesus answered him,

Jesus: “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”



Nicodemus, John 3:1-21

Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: It's not on us to judge, only to trust.

Is Nicodemus a hero to emulate or a tragic figure to be wary of? For many the answer is obvious; Nicodemus is a hero. He's a Pharisee who bravely risked his career to see Jesus, later spoke up for Jesus in a debate among the religious leaders (Jn. 7:45-52), and then returned in the final scene to compassionately help bury Jesus' body (Jn. 19:38-42). But do these things make him a hero? Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night; an ominous sign in a Gospel that's obsessed with the symbolism of light and dark. Nicodemus ultimately fails to understand Jesus' teaching about being born again and even stops asking questions after verse 9. He fails to witness to Jesus (as we learned all true disciples do in Jn. 1:35-51) or to make a proper defense when he does speak to the other Pharisees (Jn. 7:45-52). And while he is there for Jesus' death, he is nowhere to be found for the resurrection and takes no part in Christ's new life. So, is Nicodemus a hero to imitate, or a tragic example of someone who failed to be a disciple?

Ultimately, each reader has to make up their own mind about Nicodemus' faith, or lack thereof. Yet, what we can say for certain about Nicodemus's story and about his first meeting with Jesus, is that it

complicates our simplistic us-versus-them view of the religious authorities Jesus encounters and invites us to remember that, in the end, only God can truly judge another's faith. As Nicodemus says when he comes to Christ, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God" indicating he is not the only one of the "villainous" Pharisees who is open to Christ's ministry (Jn. 3:2). And the fact that his witness is not as strong or his presence as prominent as some others does not mean that Nicodemus is not trying with gradual steps to embrace the faith that would have cost him much more than most others. Is he a hero or a failure? In the end, the greatest miracle is that it isn't up to us to judge. Only Christ can know and only Christ can judge. And Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him; including Nicodemus.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

A Jewish leader seeks Jesus under cover of night to ask him the questions which plague his mind, safe from the criticism of his colleagues.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: The God who knit us together calls us now.

C: We come in wonder at God's profound words.

L: Let us hear and wrestle with God's Word together.

C: God, teach us your truth in new ways.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, and make us new creations each day, born again out of your eternal love for us. Invite us deeper into the mystery of your world-transforming presence, that we might follow you more closely. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

All that we have is yours, O God. Accept and use these gifts in ways we cannot begin to imagine, to reach those whom we will never meet, but to whom we are joined by your love for all humanity. For the sake of Jesus. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of revelation, nothing can be hidden from you. Shed light on all the corners of our lives, and make us honest to bring our whole selves to you.
God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, along with your whole creation. Open our eyes to the wonders of this world, and humble us to be taught by all of nature, that we might learn respect and responsibility. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Open the minds and hearts of all who lead to the differing ideas and needs of all people, that they would find creative solutions to difficult problems, for the benefit of all involved. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Give us daily chances to be reborn in you. Bless our lives and our loved ones with your healing presence, (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We are by no means the first to question, to wonder, to misunderstand. Generations have done so before us, and have found their peace in you. Join us with all the saints of every age, in your eternal communion where light shines perpetually. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

We do not need to sneak out to see Jesus in the dead of night. He stands on the mountaintop and proclaims for all to hear, "Come and be fed at this holy table!" Siblings in Christ, this invitation is for you, today and forever.

Litany

1: We have so many questions.

2: **We want answers from Jesus.**

1: Yet the answers we get confuse us,

2: **And just bring up more questions.**

1: Jesus, quiet our hearts and minds,

2: **And assure us of the simplicity of your love.**

1: There is nothing we need to do,

2: **But receive grace upon grace in your name.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: Two chairs

(Person 2 knocks on Person 1's door)

Person 1: I'm coming. Hang on a minute. *(opens door)*
[Person 2]? What are you doing here? It's the middle of the night.

Person 2: I needed to talk to you and it couldn't wait. I can't sleep. I haven't been able to sleep for a few days. I have a lot on my mind that I need to get clarity on.

Person 1: *(gesturing)* Come in, then.

Person 2: Thanks. *(sits in one of the chairs)*

Person 1: So what can I do for you at *(looks at watch)* one-thirty in the morning?

Person 2: Look, I know you're a person of integrity. I've seen your climate justice work and the way you're truly driven to change the world from a place of love.

Person 1: You came here in the middle of the night to flatter me? What do you want, [Person 2]?

Person 2: Okay, so I'm on the board at FossilCorp and I have a stake in keeping things the way they are. But I'm starting to suspect I really need to change. And I don't know how.

Person 1: No offense, but that sounds like a job for a therapist, not an activist.

Person 2: Just...hear me out, okay? I...know some things. I've done some things. You know, in the service of FossilCorp. Things that aren't great.

Person 1: So, come clean about them.

Person 2: Now hold on a minute. That's not something I can just do lightly. I have commitments and responsibilities.

Person 1: Yes, you do. The question is to whom. FossilCorp? Or the world?

Person 2: It's more complicated than that.

Person 1: Come on. You're a chemical engineer with a PhD in biochemistry. And you can't figure out what's going on here?

Person 2: I just want to know how to deal with my guilt. To have the kind of light and peace I see in you.

Person 1: I already told you. Come clean.

Person 2: But—

Person 1: Look, it's quite simple. The truth is out in the open now. You can come into the light with the things you've done, or you can keep quiet. But as long as you keep things hidden, you won't be able to change.

Person 2: It feels like a lose-lose proposition.

Person 1: It's not. If you want to be rid of the shame, you need to get honest. Sure, there might be consequences. Uncomfortable ones. But you'll find that you can live with yourself a lot more easily if you accept them. You might even be able to sleep at night.

Person 2: I don't know. I'm scared. But I know you're right. I want to change...

Person 1: I can't decide for you. But I'll tell you this. I don't hate you. Quite the contrary. I don't do what I do to make you feel awful or punish you. I do what I do because I love this world and everyone in it. You included.

Person 2: That...that's cool. It makes me want to be better. I'll still need to think about all this, though.

Person 1: You do that. But if you want to come by again for another chat, that'd be fine by me. But...maybe not in the middle of the night?

Person 2: Yeah, okay. Thanks, [Person 1]. This was a big help. Good night. *(stands and exits)*



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

It's okay to have questions about God.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

Nicodemus likely came by night so he wouldn't be seen by others. Nighttime also symbolized unbelief, as the light symbolized belief. Nicodemus came with questions and doubts about Jesus, his authority, and his message. Nicodemus's lack of understanding about being "born from above" or "born again" might mirror our own. What does it mean to be born again? Our Christian heritage of baptism can place a layer of understanding, as we understand baptism as giving new life through water and Spirit. But perhaps it is okay to let the ambiguous language hold some mystery.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if anyone knows exactly what God looks like. What about where God lives? What about how God does things? No? Wonder together how it feels to not really understand God. Tell the kids they're not alone. In today's story, we meet someone with lots of questions about God.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

When they were done talking, did Nicodemus understand everything about God? (*No*.) Is it even possible to understand everything about God? (*No*.) Just like Jesus invited Nicodemus into his room to talk about God, God invites us to church and Sunday School and to ask all kinds of questions about God all the time. God invites us into the Bible, too, where we can learn more about God.

We will never be able to understand God completely. But there is one thing we absolutely know: God loves us so, so, so very much. And God sent Jesus to show us that love in a way we could maybe understand a little bit better.

Is it okay to ask questions about God? Yes! It's more than okay! It's what God wants us to do!

Close with a prayer thanking God for inviting us to get to know God better.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A type of fun-sized candy that has two different components (for example, a KitKat® has chocolate and a crispy wafer, or Rollo® candies have chocolate and caramel). Have enough for each kid and be aware of food allergies.



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 4:1-42

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” ²—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— ³he left Judea and started back to Galilee.

⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Text: John 4:1-42, cont'd

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Pronunciation Guide

Sychar: SY-kar

Secondary Text: Psalm 42:1-3

¹As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

³My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Pharisees, Jesus, Woman, Disciples, Believers

Narrator: Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired

out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her,

Jesus: "Give me a drink."

Narrator: (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him,

Woman: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

Narrator: (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her,

Jesus: If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: "Go, call your husband, and come back."

Narrator: The woman answered him,

Woman: "I have no husband."

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “I know that Messiah is coming”

Narrator: (who is called Christ).

Woman: “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Narrator: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

Woman: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

Narrator: They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him,

Disciples: “Rabbi, eat something.”

Narrator: But he said to them,

Jesus: “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

Narrator: So the disciples said to one another,

Disciples: “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”

Narrator: Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Narrator: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony,

Woman: “He told me everything I have ever done.”

Narrator: So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman,

Believers: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”



The Woman at the Well, John 4:1-42

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Christ sees past the rumors and circumstances beyond our control, to see who we can be.

For centuries, most commentators and readers have seen the anonymous woman at the well as one thing: a sinner living with a man who is not her husband. It's true, she is now with a man who is not her husband (as Jesus observes) and she has been shunned by her community for it. Women would typically go to collect water in a group first thing in the morning, yet she goes alone in the scorching noon-day heat. Yet, while the traditional "sinner" label may be true, it is interesting to consider the alternate possibility that the woman may be the tragic victim of circumstances beyond her control.

According to the law, should a man die without having produced an heir, his brother should marry his widow to produce an heir and continue to family line (see Deut. 25:5-10 and Lk. 20:29-32). Yet, if the brother refused, he would be disgraced and the woman likely smeared by association with the scandal. It is at least possible then, that the woman is in her present predicament less because she is a sinner with

loose morals and more because she is the misunderstood victim of a situation beyond her control. If this non-traditional interpretation has a kernel of truth to it, then perhaps the real miracle in this famous story is not Jesus' ability to redeem a sinner, but Jesus' ability to see us as we truly are, past the slander, gossip, and circumstances we were helpless to prevent. More important, is the miracle that Jesus seems far less interested in what others think of her than in what she can be; a witness through whom an entire village can find living water. In contrast to most later readers and commentators, when Christ saw the woman at the well he saw only one thing; a new disciple.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

One thirsty Jewish rabbi on a long journey. One Samaritan woman by a water source. A perfect moment for the God of new life to dissolve age-old divisions.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Our God welcomes us unconditionally.

C: Teach us your truth, O God.

L: Let us set aside all that separates us,

C: And worship God as one beloved family.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: Your son, Jesus Christ, carried your love to all people, often crossing boundaries in a powerful example of radical welcome. Inspire us to follow in his way, and act in love for all our neighbors, without exception. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God, we bring before you these gifts, offered as freely as the blessings you pour out upon us each day. Receive them for the work of breaking down the barriers between us, that all might have life abundantly in your name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy one, you are the life-giving water we seek. Give us this water always, that we may no longer thirst after that which does not satisfy. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Droughts parch one part of the earth, while melting icecaps and flood waters drown another. Show us the folly of our greed and shortsightedness, and make us part of the solution to heal our struggling planet. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Show us the places where we have been blind to your vision, and give us the wisdom and courage to dismantle what divides us from others. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Your life-giving water is exactly what a suffering world needs. Pour it out upon us and all those who require an extra measure of your grace and healing, (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: You have revived your tired servants of all generations and sustained them with your bountiful love. Keep us steadfast until that day when we join our brothers and sisters by the crystal river in your eternal city. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who broke tradition to share a cup with a Samaritan woman also broke the bonds of sin and death by his self-sacrifice. This same Jesus now calls you to share bread and wine with one another, no matter who you are, and promises eternal life in his name. Come with your siblings in Christ and be fed.

Litany

1: As a deer longs for flowing streams, our souls long for God.

2: We come to the well, thirsting for we-know-not-what.

1: Jesus meets us there, and promises living water.

2: We don't know what it is, but we are intrigued.

1: Jesus knows our deepest secrets, our joys and our shames.

2: And gives us this gift anyway.

1: When shall we come and behold the face of God?

2: We shall see it in our neighbors, and share our living water with them.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2 (high school age)

Props: Water bottle

Kid 1: 'Scuse me, can I have some of your water?

Kid 2: Um...are you talking to me?

Kid 1: Yeah. I just got done with practice and I forgot my water bottle. Do you mind sharing?

Kid 2: But you're part of the popular crowd.

Kid 1: (*shrugs*) Does that mean you can't share?

Kid 2: Would you share your water with me if the roles were reversed?

Kid 1: Of course I would. Why wouldn't I?

Kid 2: Because I'm a nerd. Your crowd hates me.

Kid 1: Well, that's about to change.

Kid 2: How so?

Kid 1: The truth is, you're not so different from them. A lot of them like the same things you do. They just won't admit it because they're afraid.

Kid 2: What are you, some kind of guidance counselor? Just because they're all sad and dysfunctional because they're denying who they really are doesn't make it okay when they treat me like you-know-what.

Kid 1: Exactly. Which is why things need to change.

Kid 2: And you're going to change them.

Kid 1: Yep.

Kid 2: How?

Kid 1: Do you know who I am?

Kid 2: Not really. Some popular jock. It's a big school. Do you know who I am?

Kid 1: You're [Kid 2's first and last name.]

Kid 2: Wait. What? How do you...I'm a nobody.

Kid 1: You had that essay on universal anime archetypes and the validity of anime as an art form.

Kid 2: I...I...how did you even see...

Kid 1: Ms. Lakshmi had it on her class bulletin board for a while. I read it. It was good.

Kid 2: Okay, so you know who I am. Who are you?

Kid 1: I'm [Kid 1's first and last name.]

Kid 2: Wait...The one who just got that big award for...like everything? Grades and athletics and community service and stuff?

Kid 1: Yep.

Kid 2: Whoa. Like, literally everyone loves you. From the captain of the basketball team to the last alternate on the chess team. People listen when you talk. I gotta admit...even I was happy to hear you won that award.

Kid 1: Aww, thanks. Anyway, I'm going to make it my mission to break down the barriers between social groups at the school, so everyone can benefit equally from all it has to offer.

Kid 2: Are you sure that's a good idea? Those groups are pretty entrenched around here. You're gonna get murdered. Socially speaking.

Kid 1: Don't worry. I know what I'm doing.

Kid 2: Wow. You know, this school's been waiting for you for a long, long time. I've gotta go tell my friends I actually met you!

Kid 1: So...um...

Kid 2: Oh, yeah. Here. (*hands over the water bottle*) You can return it at lunch. I have fourth lunch in cafeteria C. Later! (*runs off*)

Kid 1: Bye, [Kid 2]. (*exits in opposite direction*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus welcomes everyone.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A type of fun-sized candy that has two different components (for example, a KitKat® has chocolate and a crispy wafer, or Rollo® candies have chocolate and caramel). Have enough for each kid and be aware of food allergies.

Background

Jews and Samaritans were both descendants of Israel, but they had long-standing disagreements that kept them separated. The cultural and religious differences, further exacerbated by the gender differences, made Jesus' encounter with the woman highly unusual. It was even more unlikely that she would become a witness to his prophetic words. This story highlights Jesus' message that God came not only for the Jews, but for all people.

Set the Scene

Show the kids one of the candies. Point out that it has two different parts of it. Ask the kids to choose one part that is their favorite. Separate the kids into two groups based on their choices. (If everyone likes one part, then arbitrarily divide the kids in two and have them pretend.) Have the kids form two lines opposite each other and ask them to declare out loud to the other group that their part is the best. ("The wafer is best!" "The chocolate is best!" etc.) Tell them they have to convince the other side of their opinion. Let it get a little loud. Finally, stop them and ask if anyone changed their mind based on what the other group

said. (*probably not*). Tell them that the relationship between Jesus' people, the Israelites, and the Samaritan people was kind of like this. In today's story, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Bring the kids back to the candy activity. Say, "Now, I'm Jesus, and I have a whole new way of looking at things. It doesn't matter which part of the candy you think is better. Isn't the whole candy just wonderful? What if we all just enjoyed the candy no matter what we prefer?"

Wonder together about ways in which we look at other people as different from us. Like our favorite color or game, or what we look like or where we come from. But we're all God's children, right? And Jesus welcomes everyone no matter what. Jesus reached out to someone who was different and welcomed them into God's love. We can do the same.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us welcome people no matter what.

Send the kids back to their seats with one of the candies to enjoy.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Tissues (enough for each kid)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids’ Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids’ Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 4:46-54 [5:1-18]

⁴⁶Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. ⁵¹As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. ⁵²So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” ⁵³The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. ⁵⁴Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

5 [After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” ⁸Jesus said to

him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. ¹⁷But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.]

Pronunciation Guide

Cana: KAY-nah
Capernaum: ka-PER-num
Judea: joo-DAY-ah
Beth-zatha: beth-ZAY-da



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Psalm 40:1-5

¹ I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
² He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.
⁴ Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
⁵ You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jesus, Official, Servant, [Man, Jews]

Narrator: Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

Narrator: The official said to him,

Official: “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.”

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “Go; your son will live.”

Narrator: The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him,

Servant: “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.”

Narrator: The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

[**Narrator:** After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him,

Jesus: “Do you want to be made well?”

Narrator: The sick man answered him,

Man: “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.”

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured,

Jews: “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.”

Narrator: But he answered them,

Man: “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’”

Narrator: They asked him,

Jews: “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’”

Narrator: Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the

crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him,

Jesus: “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

Narrator: The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them,

Jesus: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”

Narrator: For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.]



Healing Stories , John 4:46-54 [5:1-18]

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Belief doesn't always come in a single moment, but in a long journey of learning to trust.

When does the royal official “believe” in Jesus Christ? Is it verse 53 when the miracle is done “and his whole household believed”? Is it verse 50 when the man “believed” his son would get better? And didn't the man have to believe Jesus could heal his son for him to come to Jesus in the first place? Rather than highlighting a contradiction in the scriptures, the question may point to a problem with our modern mindset. Today, many American Christians think of “belief” as either logical adherence to a set of ideas (like the Nicene Creed) or as a particular feeling (like the sensation of a conversion experience). But this puts us in a quandary. Shouldn't there be one point at which the official logically knows Jesus is Lord and feels it in his heart?

In contrast to our modern assumptions, maybe the best way to understand the royal official's belief is as a form of trust. “To trust” is actually one way to translate the Greek verb *episteúsen* (ἐπίστευσεν) which John uses to tell us the man “believed” (v.50, 53). In

other words, there may be no single moment when the official goes from un-belief to belief or from not knowing to knowing. Instead, the passage tells the story of a desperate man who gradually learned how to trust Jesus more and more; from trusting he could do something for his son, to trusting this was someone who could be depended on, to finally trusting that this really was the Messiah. Perhaps the royal official is here to remind us that sometimes faith comes less from a single moment than from a long journey of learning that this man named Jesus is someone who is not just worth knowing or feeling, but worth trusting with our prayers, our children, and ourselves.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

A royal official begs Jesus to heal his son. When Jesus says it will be done, the official comes to trust Jesus—to believe in him—more with each step toward home, where he learns that, in fact, his son is now well.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God has set our feet on firm ground.

C: Our steps are secure.

L: God has put a new song in our mouths.

C: We will sing our praises to God.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of restoration,

C: Healing and wholeness come from you. Bless the work of all who strive for the healing and wholeness of individuals, communities, nations, human society, and the natural world, that their work might be your work through them, for the sake of all that you have made. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

All of creation came forth from your hand, O God. Accept now these humble offerings out of the incomprehensible abundance you have made and shared with us. Use our gifts to further the work of healing and wholeness for all the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, you have the power to heal and to renew. Mend all that is broken in us and in our world, and bring us to wholeness. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Creation itself groans under the burden of brokenness. Give us hands to mend the wounds of this planet, and eyes to see where our actions hurt and where they heal. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Grant our world's leaders wisdom to lead with justice, courage, humility, gratitude, and mercy, ever lifting up the needs of those who cannot speak or act for themselves. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Like the mindful healing of your son, Jesus, pour healing upon all who are in need today, all who suffer from illness, grief, poverty, addiction, despair, isolation, abuse, neglect, or any other form of suffering, (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Let every voice be heard from every station, position, hierarchy, caste, or class. Level the playing field so that no one suffers at the hands of another. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With all your saints we receive with thankfulness the fullness of your mercy and grace. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who heals all infirmities now invites you to this table of mercy and wholeness, where he meets us in bread and wine, and nourishes us on his very presence. Come and be fed with your siblings in Christ, for all is prepared.

Litany (from Psalm 40)

1: We have waited patiently, O God.

2: In our pain and sorrow, in our grief and fear.

1: You hear our cry, and draw us into your arms.

2: Sing us gentle, healing songs,

1: That we might sing them to the world in your name.

2: Help us to trust in you,

1: So we do not seek after other gods,

2: For no worldly thing can compare with you.



Creative Expression

Healing Stories

Invite a member or two to share a personal story of healing, not just physical healing, but emotional and spiritual healing. Or the healing of a relationship. Keep the focus on the way God heals the whole person. You could also invite a person in your congregation with a disability to share how God has shown up in their lives, bringing wholeness and healing, affirming that disabilities are not defects to be healed, but different ways of being in the world.

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: Laptop for Person 2

Person 1: *(To Person 2)* Excuse me, are you [Person 2]?

Person 2: *(looking up from their laptop)* Yes. What can I do for you?

Person 1: I heard you're the absolute wizard of IT and can fix any computer problem whatsoever.

Person 2: So they say. What's the issue?

Person 1: My computer says it has a virus. But I've done all the protocols I'm supposed to and it doesn't seem to fix anything.

Person 2: *(looking back down at the computer while they talk.)* I see. So you're looking for my help.

Person 1: Everyone tells me you're the only one who could pull it off.

Person 2: *(still typing away)* You're on the executive board, right?

Person 1: I am.

Person 2: *(still typing)* You're used to having everything you want right when you want it, as I understand.

Person 1: That's probably accurate.

Person 2: *(still typing)* And you're used to passing judgement on things and people all the time.

Person 1: Also true. That is our role.

Person 2: *(looking up)* So you probably won't actually believe I can fix the problem until it comes with some big angelic fanfare.

Person 1: Actually, in this case that's not true. Some of my colleagues are skeptical of you—worried you might be getting too popular for your own good. But me? Well, I just believe you know what you're doing, and you're doing it for the right reasons.

Person 2: *(Looking back down at computer and hitting "enter")* Huh.

Person 1: Well?

Person 2: Oh, consider it done.

Person 1: What? You mean you'll come fix my computer?

Person 2: No. I mean consider it done. As in, it's done. Already.

Person 1: You... you just did it now? While we were talking?

Person 2: *(grinning)* I knew what you were about the minute you walked in. But I wondered whether you really believed.

Person 1: You are amazing! Thank you so much!

Person 2: It's all good. I came to fix issues no matter who is having them.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus cares for us when we're sick.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Tissues (enough for each kid)

Background

Jesus' healings were the second sign of seven that Jesus performed in the Gospel of John. After each sign, there was a dialog, and then Jesus explained his sign.

The question that arose with Jesus' healings was about his authority to do so. Jesus explained that his authority came from "the Father," which was itself a blasphemous (offensive against God) statement. Jesus was putting himself on the same plane with God, which was an unthinkable sin.

Set the Scene

Give each kid a tissue. Ask what they're for. Have a conversation about when the kids have been sick. How did it feel? Who took care of them? Tell them that in today's story, Jesus helps some people who are sick.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about how Jesus healed people. What did it mean that Jesus was amazed at the man from Capernaum's faith?

Talk about how when we're sick, we can trust that Jesus is with us, no matter how icky we feel. We can trust that if we take good care of ourselves, we will probably get better in time. God made our amazing bodies and our bodies can do amazing things to make us get better when we're sick.

[Be open to the possibility of a kid bringing up a person who died of illness. Don't be afraid to wonder together about that. Remind the kids that even in that situation, Jesus is right there with the person, loving them, and that even in death, we are with God.]

Close with a prayer thanking God for our amazing bodies, for all the people who take care of us, and for helping us get better when we are sick.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Magic Eye 3D illusion image (you can find them online easily, or there are books out there) (You can read this neat article about them if you like:
<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/622658/when-magic-eye-pictures-ruled-world>)



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Scripture Readings

Text: John 9:1-41

9As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes

he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.



Scripture Readings

Text: John 9:1-41

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 27:1-4

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

Pronunciation Guide

Siloam: sih-LO-uhm

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Disciples, Jesus, Man, Neighbor 1, Neighbor 2, Neighbor 3, Pharisee 1, Pharisee 2, Parents

Narrator: As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him,

Disciples: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Narrator: When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him,

Jesus: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”

Narrator: (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask,

Neighbor 1: “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”

Narrator: Some were saying,

Neighbor 2: “It is he.”

Narrator: Others were saying,

Neighbor 3: “No, but it is someone like him.”

Narrator: He kept saying,

Man: “I am the man.”

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: But they kept asking him,

Neighbor 1: "Then how were your eyes opened?"

Narrator: He answered,

Man: "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."

Narrator: They said to him,

Neighbor 2: "Where is he?"

Narrator: He said,

Man: "I do not know."

Narrator: They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them,

Man: "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

Narrator: Some of the Pharisees said,

Pharisee 1: "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath."

Narrator: But others said,

Pharisee 2: "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?"

Narrator: And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man,

Pharisee 1: "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

Narrator: He said,

Man: "He is a prophet."

Narrator: The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them,

Pharisee 2: "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

Narrator: His parents answered,

Parents: "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

Narrator: His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him,

Pharisee 1: "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."

Narrator: He answered,

Man: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

Narrator: They said to him,

Pharisee 2: "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

Narrator: He answered them,

Man: "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: Then they reviled him, saying,

Pharisee 1: “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

Narrator: The man answered,

Man: “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

Narrator: They answered him,

Pharisee 2: “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?”

Narrator: And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said,

Jesus: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

Narrator: He answered,

Man: “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

Narrator: He said,

Man: “Lord, I believe.”

Narrator: And he worshiped him. Jesus said,

Jesus: “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Narrator: Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him,

Pharisee 1: “Surely we are not blind, are we?”

Narrator: Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”



The Man Born Blind (Transfiguration), John 9:1-41

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The Gospel challenges each of us to wrestle with the mystery of who Jesus is to us.

Who is “the man called Jesus?” That’s the question lurking behind the entire Gospel of John. In many ways, John’s Gospel unfolds like a mystery play that would keep any audience on the edge of their seats. All throughout it, we see Jesus perform miracles and then watch as the characters around him investigate and debate who he could possibly be to do such things. Few places show this better than John 9, where Jesus heals a blind man, walks away, and leaves the man and the Jewish leaders to wrestle with the mystery of who Jesus could be and what this means. And while the judges spend all their time looking for evidence that might suggest this Jesus is nothing more than a traveling teacher or fraud (v.18, v.24), the real thrill of the story is watching the blind man go through all the stages of faith as he slowly thinks through his experience until he makes his own decision about who Jesus is to him. From this being just a stranger with a name (vs. 11), to a prophet (v.

17), to sensing this man must be from God (v. 32-33), the man ultimately comes to realize this is someone worth believing in and worshipping (v. 38).

Yet, the greatest thrill of John’s mysterious Gospel, is that it forces us (the readers) to wrestle with the mystery ourselves and come to our own conclusion. “Who is the man called Jesus to you,” John asks us. A wise teacher who lived a long time ago? A traveling miracle worker? A prophet? Or will you dare to believe he may just be something more?

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

This man, Jesus, has some nerve: claiming authority to heal a blind man, and on the Sabbath, no less! The Pharisees won’t see past their own legalistic view and behold the true miracle. Who, now, is the truly blind one?



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We gather together in Jesus' name.

C: Open our eyes to your presence, dear Jesus.

L: He is here among us now.

C: Open our eyes to see you in one another.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus' presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of radical welcome,

C: Cure us of our inability to see your truth in our lives. Cure us of our inability to see your face in our neighbors. Cure us of our inability to see your presence in the natural world. Open our eyes that we might respond in joyful labor for the sake of all that you have made. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, we have seen and known the truth that you give us our daily bread. In gratitude and joy we return to you this portion of what you have provided to us. Use these gifts that all of creation might see your love in action. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in your power to transform all things, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, you exalt the humble and confound the righteous. Open our eyes to your truth, and wash away all that obscures our vision. In Jesus' name we pray. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With mud and water you restored a blind man's sight. Reveal to us the restorative powers of your created world, all that exists to make us whole and fill us with abundant life. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: Heal the spiritual blindness of all those in power who fail to work for justice, or misuse their power for selfish ends. End corruption in governments worldwide, and redirect our leaders to an attitude of love and service. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: As you stirred up the healing waters of Siloam, so stir your spirit in us that we might also be restored. Bestow your healing hand upon all who need it, (*especially...*) God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Like the saints who now walk in light perpetual, we seek a closer communion with you. Shine brightly through our lives as you did through theirs. God of light,

C: Hear our prayers.

L: With confidence in your mercy, we lift these prayers and those of our hearts into your care, through Jesus Christ our light and our life. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who brings sight to the blind now invites you to open your eyes and see here the feast of life set before you. Come and be fed and nourished on the body and blood of our savior and friend. This meal is for you.

Litany

1: God is our light.

2: **Without light, we cannot see.**

1: Let us seek after God,

2: **That the world might be plain to us.**

1: Let us come into God's presence,

2: **And see the beauty of God in all the earth.**

1: Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness.

2: **Thanks be to the one through whom we see.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-3, Boss

Props: None

Person 1: Did you hear that [Person 3] got that promotion?

Person 2: Seriously? I don't believe it.

Person 1: It's true. I just heard the boss's secretary tell DaNae about it.

Person 2: [Person 3] isn't even qualified.

Person 1: And they certainly don't fit the profile of a top executive.

Person 3: *(entering)* Oh, hey there.

Person 2: So I heard you got the promotion.

Person 3: Yes, I did. And I'm incredibly grateful.

Person 1: But are you qualified?

Person 3: What? Of course I'm qualified.

Person 2: I don't know. You don't have an ivy league degree.

Person 1: Or an extensive publishing history.

Person 3: The boss said those things don't matter. I'm completely qualified.

Person 2: But are you—

Person 3: I'm not having this conversation with you. Go talk to the boss if you have concerns.
(exits)

Person 1: We will.

Boss: *(entering)* What's going on here?

Person 2: We heard you promoted [Person 3].

Boss: I did.

Person 1: I don't see how they're qualified for the position.

Boss: "You don't see" is right. In fact, that's exactly why I promoted them.

Person 1: Huh?

Boss: They bring unique and desirable qualifications to the position.

Person 2: I don't think they're executive material.

Boss: Because you have a narrow definition of that term, and you're stuck in the old "business as usual" mindset that you've always been comfortable with.

Person 2: Is that so wrong?

Boss: It is if you fail to see when things need to change, if you fail to see what people who aren't in your comfort zone can bring to the company.

Person 1: What about [Person 3]'s lack of published materials? Doesn't that look bad for the company?

Boss: Obviously I can keep presenting you with facts about [Person 3]'s qualifications and what they bring but you're not going to see it. And that's too bad. I hope you don't go and make things difficult for them going forward. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a meeting to get to. *(exits)*

Person 2: Difficult? We're not difficult. We just like things a certain way.

Person 1: Yeah. And if [Person 3] can't hack it, maybe they'll just up and leave.

Person 2: We shall see.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus helps us to see him.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Magic Eye 3D illusion image (you can find them online easily, or there are books out there) (You can read this neat article about them if you like:
<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/622658/when-magic-eye-pictures-ruled-world>)

Background

In Jesus' time, people believed that those with disabilities were disabled because of sin—either their own or their parents'. It was unthinkable that a man born in sin could be healed, and that he could attempt to teach them anything about God. When Jesus healed the blind man, it caused confusion among the Pharisees because they were unable or unwilling to consider that what they believed might be wrong. The events following the man's healing exposed the blindness of the Pharisees to see the truth of God and the truth about Jesus. The blind man was brought to sight; the seeing Pharisees were left blind.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the Magic Eye 3D illusion image and ask them what they see. Tell them there's something super strange and wonderful about the picture that maybe they don't see, but you'll talk about it in a minute. First, you're going to read a story about how some people were blind to who Jesus was.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about how in Jesus' time if someone had a disability, they believed it was because they or their parents had done something wrong. Wonder together about whether God punishes people like that. (NO!!!) In the story, Jesus was trying to teach everyone a new way to see things. But some people just didn't want to believe they were wrong—they stayed "blind."

Show them the Magic Eye 3D illusion image again. Tell them that if they relax their eyes and maybe blur them a little, they might see a 3D image in the picture. Give the kids a chance to try. Tell them it's absolutely okay if they can't do it! Ask the congregation if they've ever seen these and whether they find them frustrating. (Tell the kids you'll have the image after worship for them to keep trying if they want.)

Seeing Jesus is way less frustrating. You don't have to make your eyes do anything weird. You just have to open your heart to recognize Jesus in every single person you meet. Look at the person next to you. Jesus is in that person, and Jesus' love is in that person and in you. Jesus' love helps us to see Jesus in one another and in the world.

Close with a prayer thanking Jesus for helping us to see him.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Adult bulletin from Christmas Day with image of shepherd on it. (This image is also available in the "Images" folder of the Clergy Stuff Narrative Lectionary resources package).



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 10:1-18

10“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay

down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jesus

Narrator: Jesus said,

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Narrator: Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will

come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”



The Good Shepherd (Ash Wednesday), John 10:1-18

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Christ is not only the Good Shepherd; he is also the Gate. Combining these to images helps us know how God draws us in through Christ and what a joy it is to repent.

Today's gospel passage and the accompanying psalm evoke one of the most popular appellations for Jesus: Good Shepherd. The reason why is not hard to draw out from these readings. Christ is the Good Shepherd because he lays down his life for us, his sheep and in so doing gathers all flocks into the one-fold of God. It is a powerful image both of the power of God to save and the promise of a new reign of God which will be to come.

Given the power of the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd, you would be forgiven for missing that there is a second image Christ presents of himself in this story, one which garners significantly less attention. I am talking about the image of Christ as the *gate* for the sheep. Though perhaps less poetic, the image of Christ as the gate is worthy of attention. Like the image of Christ the Good Shepherd, the figure of the gate offers a vision of security with God (v.9). However, unlike the image of the Good Shepherd, the image of Christ as the gate helps us understand how we are oriented towards God through Christ. Those who climb the wall are thieves and bandits coming to kill and destroy, whereas the one who passes through the gate is the shepherd leading the sheep safely to pasture and back, that they may have abundance.

The image of Christ as the gate not only offers us a deeper sense of how we are oriented toward God through Christ but of how God imputes righteousness through union with Christ. Our status

before God is not determined through a path of moral self-improvement or spiritual awakening. We are brought into the fold simply by passage through Christ. There is no superiority that accompanies being a part of this fold; we are simply those who were brought through Christ. The potential for the thieves and bandits of this world to become part of this flock is ever present, not requiring a hero's journey or great feat of strength but simply that they repent of scaling the wall and be brought through the gate which was always open to them. The image of going in and out to pasture echoes this well: just as in baptism we daily die to sin and are raised to new life, being brought through Christ is a constant rhythm in which God is constantly active. It connects the dramatic act of Jesus laying down his life for us with the daily act of journeying with us and claiming us as his own.

Here the day of Ash Wednesday comes squarely into focus. Today's liturgy is dramatic—we mark our foreheads with ashes in remembrance of our own mortality and begin a season which culminates in the death and resurrection of God. But it is also a season of repentance, which for the Christian is not an occasional dramatic act but the whole of our lives. Using this passage to open up the daily and mundane character of God's shepherding love will help set us on the right path and guide us into this season with a renewed spirit.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Christ uses shepherding images to distinguish himself and outline the nature of God's love and care.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Jesus calls us to worship.

C: We know his voice.

L: Jesus calls us to worship.

C: We respond with joy.

L: Jesus calls us to worship.

C: We will follow where he leads.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Shepherding God,

C: Lead us each day in your way, caring for our needs, and showing us by your example how to love and care for others. Draw all the world into your loving arms, that all people and creation might flourish. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, in your mercy you provide all that we need to live lives abundantly in your name. With humble gratitude we return to you this portion of your generosity to us. Accept these gifts for the sake of Jesus Christ, and use them according to your loving will. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Guiding God, your voice is gentle, familiar, and trustworthy. Bid us to follow boldly wherever you may lead us. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You love all that you have made, O Lord, and long for us to tend it as carefully as you would yourself. Endow us with your careful, gentle spirit for the work of stewardship with which you entrusted us at creation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Make those in positions of power and influence to lead with a spirit of loving service, that the needs of those they represent might be met. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You restore our souls and anoint our heads with healing oil. Bring all those who long for relief into your secure pasture, and into the wholeness of your family, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Lord, nothing can separate us from you. Not predators, nor dangers, nor death itself. As we remember our own mortality this day, we do so in the sure promise of your ultimate resurrection. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Blessed are those who dwell in your house forever, O God. Draw all your saints together, both living and resurrected, into one great fold, where we hear and know your voice, and where no threat of danger may harm us. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, our good shepherd, has prepared this table before us, and invites all who hear his voice to come and be fed on the bread and wine in which he is present with and for us. Come and dine; this invitation is for you!

Litany

1: Jesus is our good shepherd, we have all we need.

2: Help us to recognize your voice, O God.

1: Our good shepherd restores our soul.

2: Help us bring restoration to a world in pain.

1: Our good shepherd prepares a table before us.

2: Help us to love our enemies and dine gladly with them.

1: Our good shepherd gives goodness and mercy all the days of our lives.

2: Help us live in gratitude for the sake of all that God has made.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid, Mom (or other parent/guardian),
Adults 1-4 (or more)

Kid: (*looking around frantically*) Mom? Mom!
Where are you?

Adult 1: What's the matter? Are you lost?

Kid: (*fearful*) I'm not supposed to talk to
strangers.

Adult 1: Look, kid, I'm just trying to help.

Kid: Maybe. I just turned around for a second
and my mom was gone! I can't find her
anywhere!

Adult 1: Okay. Don't panic. Let's go over to the
customer service counter and they can
make an announcement over the PA for
your mom to come and get you.

Kid: Where's that?

Adult 1: (*point*) See that big sign hanging up? It's
there. Do you want me to take you?

Kid: No, thank you. You're still a stranger. (*bolts
toward the other side of the front*)

Adult 2: How can I help you?

Kid: I lost my mom. Can you call her?

Adult 2: Sure. What's your mom's name?

Kid: Mom.

Adult 2: Okay then. Well, what's your name?

Kid: [Kid]

Adult 2: (*into microphone*) Will the mother of [Kid]
please come to the service counter? The
mother of [Kid], please come to the
service counter. (*to Kid*) Wait over there
please.

(*Kid steps to one side and peers around, worried*)

Adults 1, 3, and 4: (*variously and out of sync, creating a
cacophony of sound*) Did you hear? They're
looking for [Kid]. (*say Kid's name over and
over woven throughout*)

Mom: [Kid]? [Kid], where are you?

Kid: (*finally hearing and recognizing his mom's voice*)
Mom! (*runs over to her and hugs her*)

(*Other voices stop*)

Mom: There you are! You scared me,
disappearing like that!

Kid: I scared me, too. But I heard you calling.

Mom: In this noise? This place is a zoo!

Kid: I always know when it's you, Mom.

Mom: Well, thank goodness. Come on, let's go
home.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus cares for us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Adult bulletin from Christmas Day with image of shepherd on it. (This image is also available in the “Images” folder of the Clergy Stuff Narrative Lectionary resources package).

Background

The image of God as a shepherd is one of the most famous, and most powerful in the Bible (see Psalm 23). In the gospel of John, Jesus proclamation that “I am the good shepherd” is one of his “I AM” statements that point to him being God with us. God cares for us and provides for all our needs: food, safety, shelter, even to laying down God’s life for us (in Jesus).

Set the Scene

Show the kids the picture of the shepherd. Wonder together about who he is and what he does. How does he care for his sheep? What do the sheep need to be healthy and strong and live good lives? What if something were to threaten the sheep (like a wild animal)? Tell the kid that in today’s story, Jesus says he is our shepherd.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about how Jesus cares for us the way a shepherd cares for sheep. What are the things we need to be healthy and strong and safe? Who in our lives provides those things for us.

Talk about how Jesus is present with us all the time, and often works through the people in our lives. All the people who care for us are showing Jesus’ love for us.

Wonder about the extreme Jesus said he would go to in order to keep us safe and protected. Did Jesus actually die for us? (*yes*). Then what happened? (*Jesus rose from the dead*). Jesus is with us always in the people around us, in each other, and in all of creation. Can we trust someone who loves us this much? You bet!

Close with a prayer thanking God for caring for us.

Next Week’s Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Box of tissues or handkerchief



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 11:1-44

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you

had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Text: John 11:1-44, continued

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 104:27-30

²⁷These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Martha, Jesus, Disciples, Thomas, Mary, Jew 1, Jew 2

Narrator: Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,

Martha: “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

Narrator: But when Jesus heard it, he said,

Jesus: “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Narrator: Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples,

Jesus: “Let us go to Judea again.”

Narrator: The disciples said to him,

Disciples: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”

Narrator: After saying this, he told them,

Jesus: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.”

Narrator: The disciples said to him,

Disciples: “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.”

Narrator: Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly,

Jesus: “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples,

Thomas: “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Narrator: When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus,

Martha: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Your brother will rise again.”

Narrator: Martha said to him,

Martha: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Narrator: She said to him,

Martha: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

Narrator: When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately,

Martha: “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

Narrator: And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the

village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him,

Mary: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Narrator: When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said,

Jesus: “Where have you laid him?”

Narrator: They said to him,

Mary: “Lord, come and see.”

Narrator: Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said,

Jew 1: “See how he loved him!”

Narrator: So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said,

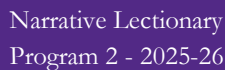
Jesus: “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”

Narrator: When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice,

Jesus: “Lazarus, come out!”

Narrator: The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “Unbind him, and let him go.”



Jesus Raises Lazarus (First Sunday in Lent), John 11:1-44

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Our own resurrection is not only a thing to be expected after death but a life to be lived, here and now.

Any good showman knows that you always save the best for last and never do the same trick twice. Jesus already broke the first rule during the wedding at Cana, and here he appears to be breaking the second. Perhaps in part for this reason, the raising of Lazarus has led to much fussing over the nature of the miracle Christ performs in today's gospel. I know a number of pastors who insist that this should not be considered a resurrection but something else (the term resuscitation was thrown around). The reasoning for this distinction is that the resurrection of Christ needs to be the first instance of true resurrection; otherwise, he would not be the "firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18). They also note that, since Lazarus will (presumably) die again, this is certainly not the same thing as what is promised to us, which is resurrection to eternal life.

What is missing from the above distinction is what the theologian Paul Tillich is getting at when he describes Christ as the "final revelation" of God. What makes Jesus as the Christ the final revelation is not that revelation ceased with Christ but that we understand all revelation through Christ, both what came before him and what came after him, and whatever will come. In the immediate, we only understand the raising of Lazarus as competing with Jesus's own resurrection because of it. The cry of the centurion in Matthew 27:24 ("He saved others; he cannot save himself") still needed an answer. Or to put it differently, the resurrection of Lazarus only means something because we see it through Jesus's resurrection, just as the promise of our own resurrected life is grounded in Christ's resurrection.

But we do not need to go all the way to Tillich to arrive at an understanding of Jesus as the final revelation. We have it here in his encounter with Martha. When Jesus arrives, Martha is angry with him that he delayed, complaining that if he had only been punctual, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again, but she brushes it off as a platitude, believing that resurrection is something that will only come on the last day. Jesus's response to her—"I am the resurrection and the life"—points to the way in which Jesus's resurrection is a truth already felt in this moment. Even though, as a discrete moment in time, he has not yet died and risen, the power of that resurrection is that it touches every moment of time such that he can come to Martha (and soon Lazarus) as the power of that promise of resurrection, even as it has not yet been fulfilled in time.

Our proclamation of the resurrection should be no less bold than this. We are not preaching the fullness of the resurrection of Christ if all it inaugurates is a kingdom/reign of God that is somewhere off in the future, hidden behind a cloud. When we preach Christ crucified and risen for us, we preach a resurrection that is here and now, even as we await the fulfilment of that promise. Today is a day to remind your people that they have already died and been raised in Christ, and that today is already a moment of resurrection living.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus wades through grief and mourning—including his own—to raise Lazarus from the dead.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We gather as we are, some in joy, some in sorrow.

C: We bring our joys and sorrows to God.

L: Our God receives us in love and mercy.

C: We trust in God's promise of eternal life.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of life,

C: All of us have grieved losses in our lives; many are grieving today, here and around the world. Comfort us in our grief and restore our hope in your promise to wipe away the tears from every face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

As Jesus gave Lazarus life, so you give us life each day in your name. In gratitude for all your generosity to us, we return to you these gifts of our labor, our money, and our whole selves. Bless what we offer that it might be a blessing to all creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Beloved Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. Awaken us with the breath of your spirit, and call us forth in faith as your disciples. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Everything gets its life from you, from the moment of its birth until its final breath. So fill us with a love for your world and all that dwells within it, that we dedicate our lives to the care of all that you have made. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Revive the hopes of all who struggle against oppression and injustice around the world. Strengthen the work of community organizers, and advocacy groups so that we might move toward a world where the human rights of all people are met. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God, you answer all who call on you. As you eased the grief of Mary and Martha, so comfort those who have lost someone dear to them. Be with those who face the end of their lives, and bless all who suffer with your healing touch, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With all the saints who dwell in your eternal resurrection, unite us at length, and keep us in communion with your whole church on earth. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who wept at his friend's tomb now cries a joyful invitation to this holy table. Come! Be fed! And rise to new life in Jesus Christ, who meets us here in bread and wine. All is prepared, siblings in Christ. Come!

Litany

1: We look to God to give us all we need.

2: God opens God's hands and fills us with good things.

1: Our bodily lives are limited. We die and return to dust.

2: God sends forth God's Spirit and creates us new.

1: We will not fear death, but will live in trust.

2: Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We will trust in his promise.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1-3

Props: None

Person 1: (*surveying the scene*) Wow. I thought you were supposed to take care of the boss's plants while they were gone.

Person 2: Yeah...um...I was.

Person 1: Great job.

Person 2: I know. I know. I don't have much of a green thumb. I did try to keep them watered, but...well...they just died anyway.

Person 1: Did you let [Person 3] know? They're the most unbelievable gardener I know. They can make anything thrive.

Person 2: I called them a couple days ago to let them know things weren't looking good, but they said they had to finish a project before they could come in.

Person 1: Ooh. That's too bad. Looks to me like it's entirely too late, now.

Person 2: I'm probably going to lose my job over this. What am I gonna do?

Person 3: (*entering*) Hey there! I made it finally.

Person 1: Yeah? Well you probably shouldn't have bothered. If you'd showed up when I called you, you could've saved these plants.

Person 2: And now [Person 1] is going to be in deep trouble with the boss.

Person 3: (*looking around*) Don't be mad at me. I couldn't help the delay. And I'm just as

upset as you. I adore the boss's plants. I'm the one who originally potted them. Just seeing them like this makes me want to cry.

Person 1: It doesn't matter now. I'll just have to let the boss know all their precious plants are gone. You can plant them some new ones, I guess.

Person 3: Hold that thought. I know I can save these plants.

Person 2: Are you nuts? Look at them. They're beyond help.

Person 3: Trust me. I know these little guys can hear me, and they're gonna be just fine. Give me a little time.

Person 1: If you say so.

(*All exit. Wait a few seconds. All enter.*)

Person 2: (*staring around in awe*) You did it. I have no idea how, but you brought these things back to life! Overnight!

Person 1: You're an absolute miracle worker.

Person 3: Maybe. Truth be told, there was a lot of prayer involved. And then some extra tender loving care. And water. And fertilizer. And prayer. I spent some time singing to them. And did I mention the prayer?

Person 2: (*laughing*) A couple times.

Person 1: I'm saved. I can't thank you enough.

Person 3: Oh, don't thank me. Just let that be a lesson to remember that nothing is impossible for God.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We get sad and Jesus got sad, too.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Box of tissues or handkerchief

Background

Mary and Martha were friends and followers of Jesus. Jesus' decision to delay his journey two more days, knowing Lazarus was dying, was to show God's glory. (They believed a person's spirit remained for three days after death, so Lazarus' four days meant he was really, truly dead.) Still, even knowing he was going to raise Lazarus, Jesus was moved to tears. His emotion showed that he (and God, perhaps) is not unmoved by our plight.

Martha and Mary were both upset with Jesus for delaying his return. Both had faith that he could have prevented Lazarus' death, even though neither could have foreseen the miracle of his resurrection. This was the last of seven signs in John's gospel that Jesus performed for God's glory.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the tissues or handkerchief and ask them what they're for (blowing your nose, etc.) Can the also be used to wipe tears when you're sad? Discuss sadness with the kids. Have they ever been sad about something? What are some things that make them sad? When people we love die, we get sad. When we get hurt, we get sad. Jesus got sad, too. Can the kids guess why?

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about how Jesus must have felt when he found out his friend had died. Does Jesus feel sad when anyone dies, even now? (*Yes!*) Jesus feels our sadness with us, and holds us when we are sad. How does it feel to know that Jesus is with us when we are sad, and feels sad, too?

If you want to go there, wonder together why Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but that doesn't happen now. Talk about how Jesus' showed the people around him that he was God. We may not understand why things don't happen the same way today, but we can trust that Jesus—that God in Jesus—cares for us no matter what, and trust in the promise that one day we will all be raised from the dead to be with God.

Close with a prayer asking God to always be with us when we are sad, and to help us be there for others when they are sad.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bowl of water
- Towel



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 13:1-17

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your

Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Secondary Text: Psalm 51:7-12

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Pronunciation Guide

Hyssop: HIIH-suhp



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Peter, Jesus, Disciple

Narrator: Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,

Peter: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Narrator: Peter said to him,

Peter: "You will never wash my feet."

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Narrator: Simon Peter said to him,

Peter: "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

Narrator: For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them,

Jesus: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."



Jesus Washes Feet (Second Sunday in Lent), John 13:1-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: We can rely on the persistent love of God when we fall short and not let our shortcomings stand in the way of rising anew to serve one another.

No doubt you are familiar with the adage, “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” The meaning is simple: when we let someone who has already proved themselves untrustworthy get the better of us, we really have only ourselves to blame. At first, it seems odd that John would go out of his way to make it clear that Jesus already knows that Judas intends to betray him. Is it really a betrayal if he knows it’s going to happen? Why not call him out more directly? Undoubtedly, Jesus’s awareness fits within the larger pattern of how John presents Jesus as always being in the know and willing everything to happen surrounding his crucifixion. But there is still a human Jesus to approach in John’s account, and we are not wrong to wrestle with these questions, even if they feel more at home in the Synoptic.

One approach to this element of the Last Supper in John is to highlight the pastoral dimension of Jesus’s actions in light of his knowledge. Often, we wonder if those who love us only do so because they do not know the real us, and that if we were to be our true selves, we would not be as lovable to others. A constant theme in scripture is our effort to hide our sinfulness from God, ignoring that this has never worked since Adam and Eve first tried hiding from God in the garden of Eden. Here, in this crucial moment of Jesus’s life, he affirms that his decision to serve us through the cross was not one made in ignorance of our sinfulness and outright rejection of God. That Jesus persists in following the servant’s

path, stooping to wash the feet of his betrayer, is a clear declaration that there is nothing about us which will change God’s mind about loving us. The decision to so love the world (John 3:16) is not one made even in spite of our brokenness but because of it.

This is as much a word of comfort as it is a challenge. The consolation that God has chosen to love us to the end (v.1) both clothes us with the righteousness of Christ and strips us of our pretense that our brokenness excuses us from serving one another. Just as Jesus knows he is about to lay down his life for sinners, so too he knows that it us sinners whom he is charging to serve one another. His words, “servants are not greater than their master,” carry a double meaning: that we are both not greater than Jesus and (therefore) also not above the type of service which he shows.

Here we find an invitation apropos to the Lenten season: to lead not from our perfection but our brokenness. What would it look like to encounter the world as broken people rather than better-than? How often has the proclamation of the gospel been stifled by the impression that being a Christian means thinking yourself holier than thou! The humility of service is not a form of piety but a form of confession that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. If we know these things, we are blessed if we do them.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus, knowing of Judas’s betrayal, still washes the feet of the disciples and entrusts them with the servant life he has lived for them.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come as you are into this holy house.

C: We come in need of clean hearts, O God.

L: Our God restores us to the joy of salvation.

C: Wash us, and we shall be clean.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: You have all power, such as to create all that is, yet in Jesus, you humbled yourself and became a finite human and a servant of all. Give us the humility both to recognize our limitations, and to joyfully serve others without expectation of return. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

As Jesus humbly served his disciples, so we humbly offer our gifts in service to you, our neighbors, and all creation. Accept these offerings and make them holy, that they might help to bring your transforming love to bear upon a suffering world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, you took on the role of a servant when you gave everything for our sake. Teach us to humble ourselves for the honorable work of serving others. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We thank you for the awesome power and quiet beauty of the world's waters. Help us to take action to protect and conserve this life-giving resource, for the good of all creation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You have always protected the vulnerable and stood for the voiceless. May we and all those we elect to lead us follow your law in a right spirit, so that all may justly benefit from your blessings, and no one presume themselves to be better than another. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We turn to you still in our lowest moments, in times of need, and when we long to be made whole. Pour out the full measure of your healing upon each of us (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: The life of a saint is a life of humility. May our path follow those who have gone before us to serve you humbly and faithfully. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Our servant savior, Jesus Christ, calls you now to feast in his name. Come to the table where Jesus meets us and nourishes us in bread and wine for the restoration of all. This gift is for you. All is prepared.

Litany

1: We are covered in the clinging dirt of pride,

2: In the sticky muck of self-absorption,

1: In the dust of apathy,

2: In the filth of fear.

1: Wash us clean of all that minimizes us, O God.

2: Restore us to the joy of your salvation.

1: Send us forth with new and joyful hearts,

2: To humbly serve a world in need.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-5

Props: Four chairs, table optional

Person 1: I can't believe it's [Person 3]'s last day already.

Person 2: What are we going to do without them?

Person 1: I don't know. They have completely transformed this company, made it a joy to work for and a force for good in the world.

Person 2: They didn't even want a big retirement party. They wanted the money we would have spent to go to a racial equity organization.

Person 1: At least we get to have dinner with them one last time. Even if it is a pot-luck.

Person 2: Oh, here they come now.

Person 3: Hi there, [Person 1], [Person 2]. You ready to eat?

Person 1: Yes indeed.

(They go sit together, along with Person 4 and Person 5)

Person 3: Thanks for sharing this last meal with me here in the office. Now, I want to do something for each of you.

Person 4: For us? But it's your celebration.

Person 5: We should be doing something for you.

Person 3: Nonsense. You just sit down and I'm going to serve you dinner.

Person 4: Serve us dinner? Are you sure?

Person 3: More than sure. And while I do that, each of you should look under your plates for something special. *(starts miming piling food onto plates)*

(All mime picking up plates and pulling out envelopes, opening them, and reading what's inside.)

Person 1: Whoa.

Person 2: Are you sure about this, [Person 3]?

Person 4: You're donating 25% of your bonus in each of our names?

Person 5: I...your generosity is astonishing.

Person 3: I have an ulterior motive.

Person 1: What's that?

Person 3: I want to instill in you a true spirit of service. I want you to recognize that if I, who have the final say in everything in this company, and whom you have all worked for these past years—if I am willing to serve and take care of you and others, you need to do the same.

Person 2: Yes, [Sir/Ma'am]. You have definitely shown me what matters.

Person 4: It's looking out for each other in this room and out in the world.

Person 5: And doing our very best to be like you.

Person 3: Now that that's settled, let's eat, shall we?

Person 1: Yes, let's!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus teaches us to serve others.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bowl of water
- Towel

Background

It was customary for a servant in a hosting household to wash the feet of traveling guests before a meal. It would have been highly unusual for Jesus to take the role of servant, washing the feet of his disciples. In John's gospel, the foot washing became the central event at Jesus' last supper with his disciples. The meal became much more a teaching event, where the disciples were invited to learn more about their role in the world after Jesus was to leave them.

Peter didn't understand what Jesus was doing and didn't want to take part in this reversal of roles. He did, however, want his share, and was willing to go to any length to get it. Thankfully, Jesus did not need for the disciples to understand fully. He just asked that they participate, listen, and learn.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the bowl of water and a towel. Ask for a volunteer to have his or her feet washed. As you do this, discuss the practice of foot washing in Jesus' time. Explain to them that people's feet would have been very dirty—they wore sandals and everyone walked a lot. Foot washing was done by the lowest of servants; it wasn't a pleasant job.

Reflect Together

Wonder together why Jesus washed his disciples' feet. What did it show them? Have them imagine if a queen knelt on the floor in front of them and washed their feet. How would they feel? This is how the disciples felt. They couldn't imagine why Jesus would be doing this. He wanted to teach them that a blessed life is one of service. He served them and then asked them to serve others.

What are ways we can serve others? Have you ever had to do something that you thought was hard or dirty or icky? Would it be easier to do that kind of job if you thought of it as doing something kind for someone else? Jesus calls us to do whatever work is needed to help each other and all of creation.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us be willing to serve others in whatever way is needed.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A picture of you with your closest friends



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 18:12-27

¹²So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. ¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. ¹⁹Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." ²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You

are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Secondary Text: Psalm 17:1-7

¹Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.

²From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right.

³If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress.

⁴As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.

⁵My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

⁶I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words.

⁷Wondrously show your steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

Pronunciation Guide

Annas: AN-uhs

Caiaphas: KAY-uh-fuhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Woman, Peter, Police, Bystander, Slave

Narrator: So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter,

Woman: "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?"

Narrator: He said,

Peter: "I am not."

Narrator: Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered,

Jesus: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where

all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said."

Narrator: When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying,

Police: "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

Narrator: Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him,

Bystander: "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?"

Narrator: He denied it and said,

Peter: "I am not."

Narrator: One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked,

Slave: "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

Narrator: Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.



Peter's Denial (Third Sunday in Lent), John 18:12-27

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Discipleship is complicated and we will fall short. But God's love does not waver even as our own commitment to God falters and fails.

There are many reasons I am not a fan of horror movies. I have a low tolerance for gore, violence, and suspense for suspense's sake. But more than anything, what I hate about the horror genre is the trope of that moment where the protagonists do something that leaves you screaming, "No! Don't! What are you thinking?!" Splitting up the party, opening the spooky door, deciding to investigate further—whatever it is, that moment of watching someone do the exact opposite of what is so obviously the right thing to do is maddening in a way I simply cannot bear.

The Peter's denial of Jesus evokes similar emotions for me. Like the old man at the gas station warning the teens that the cabin is haunted, Peter had Jesus telling him exactly what would happen. And just like the hubris of the teens to persist sets off their inevitable demise, Peter's confidence that he would not thrice deny Jesus provides the dramatic irony for what we hear in today's gospel.

Let us take a break from our backseat driving to attend to what might complicate our judgment of Peter. First, he is one of only two disciples who did not outright flee following Jesus's arrest. That Peter was in a place to deny Jesus at all was because he followed him. Even as the constant questions about his relationship with Jesus heightened the danger that sticking around entailed, Peter did not leave. Unequivocally, Peter denies Christ here, but those denials exist within the context of a degree of

faithfulness which other disciples did not show.

Taken together, this passage presents a much more realistic picture of discipleship: desiring and trying to follow Jesus, yet inevitably falling short, and hopefully sticking around to try and fail again.

To be clear, Peter's acts of faithfulness do not balance out his denials of Jesus. But it is a pity that we highlight Peter's denials when the greater denial would have been to flee entirely, as so many others did. Highlighting the conflict within Peter's narrative helps us to see why, even in a moment like this, he is a model for our own discipleship. If Peter has a singular virtue, it is that he always acts in accordance with the mantra that it is far better to try and fail than not to try at all, even as his track record shows he is not very successful. If we let the inevitability of our falling short keep us from trying to follow Christ, we imply that our sin is so great that Christ cannot overcome it. Trying to be faithful, even though we know it will lead us to places where we sin and fall short, is itself a testament to a God who has saved and redeemed us, not because we would ever live up to the calling but purely as an act of God's unmerited grace.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Peter denies Jesus three times, fulfilling the prophecy that he would do so before dawn on the night Jesus was arrested.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We call upon our God.

C: We know our God hears and answers.

L: We bring our cares to God.

C: Our God shows us steadfast love.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: You are faithful to us even when we act faithlessly. You call us and claim us even when we live as though we do not know you. Restore us to wholeness, and renew in us a commitment to follow in the way of Jesus each day of our lives. In his name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Steadfast God, we bring before you these gifts out of those gifts you first gave to us—financial resources, the ability to give service, and even our very lives. Whatever we have been able to offer, now accept, bless, and use for the good of others, in your holy name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, your mercy is infinite and your forgiveness sure. Be patient with us when we fail you, and renew your promises within our sorrowful hearts, to the glory of your name. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You have called us to be stewards of creation, yet time and again we deny this responsibility and exploit the world's resources for our own ends. Forgive us our denial, and make us to cherish the natural world as you do. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: In a world that still persecutes those who are different or dare to stand for a radical reordering of society, make us bold to confess the biggest rebel of all—our unwavering savior and sibling, Jesus Christ. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Sometimes we get it wrong, O Lord. Forgive our shortsightedness, pardon our weakness, and heal every infirmity which plagues us. Bestow your tender spirit upon all those in need of your healing, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: What joy to know that one need not be perfect to be counted among your saints. Consider us mercifully when you gather your children around your heavenly throne, clothed in light and crowned with salvation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

This holy table is open to all people without exception. Jesus himself now invites you to this meal of bread and wine in remembrance of him. Come and dine with your siblings at this feast of joy and restoration. All is prepared.

Litany

1: We cannot help but sympathize with Peter.

2: After all, we, too, have denied Jesus.

1: We have found it too hard to follow him.

2: We have followed after worldly things instead.

1: When we realize what we have done, we are heartbroken, as Peter was.

2: But Jesus knows our failings and loves us.

1: Jesus knows our imperfections and loves us.

2: Jesus knows our human weakness and loves us.

1: We do not have to wallow in guilt and shame.

2: We can trust in Jesus' love, be at peace, and try again.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2, and Kid 3 (high school age)

Prop: Cell phone

Kid 1: I can't believe this is happening! How could anyone think I stole someone's wallet? I just found it on the sidewalk. You guys believe me, don't you?

Kid 2: Of course, we believe you!

Kid 3: Even though the wallet was empty.

Kid 2: And someone charged clothes from your favorite store on their credit card.

Kid 3: And all of a sudden you had lots of cash.

Kid 2: But yes, sure, we believe you.

Kid 1: I knew I could count on you. You're my best friends!

Kid 2: That's us. Best friends forever!

Kid 3: Forever and ever!

Kid 2: But. It is kind of weird, isn't it?

Kid 3: Yeah, it's kind of a coincidence, the charging and the money and stuff.

Kid 1: So now you're saying you don't believe me.

Kid 2: Well, [Kid 1]. The more I think about it...

Kid 3: I guess, I'm not 100% sure.

Kid 1: Well that's just wonderful. I have to go down to the police station for questioning, and now I know my friends turned their backs on me.

Kid 2: Well, you can't blame us. Anybody would have their doubts.

Kid 1: But you've known me since we were five!

Kid 3: Who really knows someone? Everyone has their secrets.

Kid 2: Good luck at the police station, though. I'm sure...the right thing will happen.

(Kid 1's cell phone rings)

Kid 1: *(answering)* Yes, officer? Oh, really? Oh, my gosh! That is amazing. Thank you! *(hangs up)*

Kid 2: What did the officer say?

Kid 1: They found the person who did it. She had all the credit cards and some cash too. She confessed.

Kid 2: We knew it wasn't you!

Kid 3: Couldn't have been you!

Kid 2: We didn't mean to accuse you of anything.

Kid 3: We are so sorry.

(silence)

Kid 2: I don't blame you if you never speak to us again.

Kid 3: That's what we deserve.

(silence)

Kid 1: I forgive you. Both of you. You're still my friends.

Kid 2: For real?

Kid 1: For real.

Kid 3: You're the best person ever, [Kid 1]!

Kid 1: No, I'm not. But I think I am a good person, and a good friend.

Kid 2: Of course you are!

Kid 1: Listen, can we change the subject? I haven't eaten breakfast. Can we go over to the diner? I can treat with all the money I have...from the entire weekend I spent babysitting.

Kid 3: The diner sounds great!

Kid 2: Totally!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus always forgives us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A picture of you with your closest friends

Background

In John's gospel, Judas came to arrest Jesus at the garden with a detachment of soldiers and police from the chief priests and Pharisees. Jesus came forward willingly, knowing his time had come. Prepared for a fight, Peter and the other disciples drew their swords. Peter even cut off the ear of the slave of one of the high priests before Jesus calmed the crowd.

Jesus was not as silent in John's gospel as in the others. Instead, he spoke plainly, challenging them to find untruth in his words. They could not, of course. But perhaps they were more afraid of the truth of his words than of lies.

Set the Scene

Show the picture to the kids and tell them about your friends. Share a story of a time when you did something mean to a close friend and what happened.

Tell them that in today's story, Jesus' friends all run away from him when he is arrested. And his friend Peter... well they'll just have to listen to what he did.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together what Peter must have felt when Jesus was arrested. Talk about how afraid he must have been. If he had told them the truth, that he was Jesus' friend, he might have been arrested, too!

Have the kids ever lied to avoid getting in trouble? Tell them it's okay to admit it, but they don't have to. Share a story of your own, if you have one. Wonder about how it feels to do that—how on one hand, it feels terrible to lie, but on the other hand, it feels terrible to get in trouble!

Wonder about whether Jesus forgave Peter (*of course he did!*) Did it help, maybe, that Peter was so, so sorry for what he did? Is it easy for us to forgive others when they are mean to us? Why or why not? What if they show us they are truly sorry? (Not just saying they're sorry, but actually making it up to us)

If Jesus could forgive Peter for this terrible thing, can we forgive others? Assure kids it's okay that forgiveness is hard. And that sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves when we do something wrong. Assure them that Jesus forgives us no matter what.

Close with a prayer thanking God for God's forgiveness.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Two volunteers (prepped in advance)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 18:28-40

²⁸Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." ³¹Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." ³²(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) ³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." ³⁷Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens

to my voice." ³⁸Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Secondary Text: Psalm 145:10-13

¹⁰All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

¹¹They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

¹²to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

Pronunciation Guide

Caiaphas: KAY-uh-fuhs

Barabbas: beh-REH-buhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Pilate, Jews, Jesus

Narrator: Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said,

Pilate: "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

Narrator: They answered,

Jews: "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

Narrator: Pilate said to them,

Pilate: "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law."

Narrator: The Jews replied,

Jews: "We are not permitted to put anyone to death."

Narrator: (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him,

Pilate: "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Narrator: Pilate replied,

Pilate: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Narrator: Pilate asked him,

Pilate: "So you are a king?"

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Narrator: Pilate asked him,

Pilate: "What is truth?"

Narrator: After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them,

Pilate: "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

Narrator: They shouted in reply,

Jews: "Not this man, but Barabbas!"

Narrator: Now Barabbas was a bandit.



Jesus and Pilate (Fourth Sunday in Lent), John 18:28-40

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Jesus disappoints us by declaring that his kingdom is not from this world. But it is a kingdom in the world and for the world, and that is truly good news.

As the child of attorneys, I was enamored with courtroom scenes. From dramas like “Twelve Angry Men” and “The Rainmaker” to comedies like “My Cousin Vinny” and “Legally Blonde,” they let me imagine how exciting it was to be an attorney, even as my parents constantly reminded me that real courtrooms weren’t like that. Though eventually my desire to be an attorney faded (like Luther, I decided to quit dreams of being a lawyer to go into ministry instead), I have always had a soft spot for a good trial-turned-showdown.

Had my first exposure to the genre been a dramatization of the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate, however, I doubt my interest would have been nearly so engaged. This is supposed to be the big dramatic climax of the narrative, and yet when Jesus is put on the stand, he hits us with, “My kingdom is not of this world.” What sort of zinger is that? Clearly, Jesus did not get the memo that you are supposed to turn the dial up to eleven when this moment comes. We want a version of Colonel Jessop’s “You want me on that wall, you need me on that wall,” and yet all we get feels like Jesus pleading the fifth. Pilate tries to get things back on track by trying to catch Jesus with a bit of wordplay—“So you *are* a king!”—but Jesus won’t follow the script. He simply came in to the world to testify to the truth.

It is important that we feel the disappointment with what Jesus has to say here, or clarify why we don’t. For if we are not let down to hear that Jesus’s

kingdom is not of this world, we are probably on the wrong side of things. Those who are on the margins, excluded and oppressed, crushed under the wheel of empire and capital—they are who desperately want Jesus to make a kingdom of this world. If we are not disappointed to learn that Jesus isn’t bringing about a new earthly kingdom, we are probably more on the side of the oppressor than we would be comfortable admitting or confronting.

OK, so we are disappointed, or at least think we should be. What do we do with that disappointment? Is there good news in these words? Absolutely there is, and especially for those suffering from oppression. We begin by realizing that Jesus’s insistence that his kingdom is not of this world must be set alongside the Incarnation, that is, God’s decision to enter into the world in Jesus Christ not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Jesus’s kingdom is not *from* this world, but it *in* this world and *for* this world. It will not be built as the kingdoms of this world are, with bombs, laws, or any other form of state sanctioned violence. It is being built in and among us in a way that no other kingdom can be—through self-giving, resurrected love. Jesus is not rejecting us or creation with these words. He is promising something better than we could have hoped for, for us and for all the world.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus stands trial before Pilate and challenges his assumptions concerning why he came and what his purpose in this world is.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Let us bless our God.

C: Let us speak of God's power and glory.

L: Let us tell the world all that God has done.

C: God is faithful in all God's words and deeds.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: Only you know what is absolute truth.

Remind us that we can only see things from our own limited perspective, and help us to extend compassion and grace to those we might otherwise be quick to judge. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

We offer these gifts, O God, out of what you have first given us. By your power and love, make of them something more than we could imagine, for purposes higher than any we could devise, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Almighty God, your thoughts are well beyond our own. Challenge us to look beyond our narrow assumptions into a wider vision of how the world could be. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Make us always aware of our interdependence with the natural world, that we would be committed to its protection and care, not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Injustice may be found wherever power is ill-gotten or abused. Shed light on scandalous abuses, unchecked greed, and horrific crimes against humanity. Heal the world and restore your suffering children. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You put no condition on your blessings, and offer healing at our most vulnerable, least attractive moments. Surround us with mercy and visit the sick and troubled with your renewing spirit, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Blessed are those who were severely tested and prevailed, choosing your approval rather than that of the world. May we stand at last in their company and share your blessed eternity with our sibling saints. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who came to testify to the truth now invites you to this table with your siblings in his name. Come and be fed on the one true food—the body and blood of Jesus, our savior. Your place at the table is ready.

Litany

1: Pilate demanded that Jesus speak plainly.

2: That he tell the simple truth.

1: Are you, or are you not, a king?

2: But the truth is not simple.

1: I am a king, and not a king.

2: I am the one who testifies to the truth.

1: Pilate is confused. What is truth?

2: Can any human know?

1: We are too limited in our perspective.

2: We cannot comprehend God.

1: And God is truth.

2: Help us, O God, to grow closer to truth.

1: Even though we cannot comprehend it fully,

2: If we follow Jesus, we can begin to see.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1 and Kid 2 (high school age)

Props: None

Kid 1: I just don't get Basharat.

Kid 2: Why do you say that?

Kid 1: Everyone says they're a trouble-maker.

Kid 2: Well, yeah. Because they get in trouble. A lot.

Kid 1: But I'm not sure I understand why.

Kid 2: What do you mean?

Kid 1: I don't know them all that well. But every time I talk to them I feel like they're a really amazing person. Smart and caring. Sure, sometimes they say things that upset some people, but I never feel like it's mean-spirited. Just the opposite, actually.

Kid 2: But didn't Ms. Gustafson complain to the principal just the other day about what Basharat said in her class?

Kid 1: Yeah. I was in that class. And what Basharat said was controversial, but it wasn't disrespectful. It made me think that maybe Ms. Gustafson just doesn't like Basharat.

Kid 2: Well, then Mr. Yang doesn't like them either. Can more than one teacher be wrong?

Kid 1: I think so. Especially when the principal said she didn't want to suspend Basharat.

Kid 2: How did you hear that?

Kid 1: I heard Basharat talking to their friends about it. The principal warned them they needed to watch what they say because it bugs some of the teachers. But apparently Basharat just said they wouldn't give up speaking the truth even if it was uncomfortable.

Kid 2: Whoa. They said that right to the principal? What was her response?

Kid 1: She warned Basharat that different people might have different takes on the truth.

Kid 2: Huh. I think I might have misjudged them. I just chalked them up to being a regular old trouble-maker.

Kid 1: Yeah. But I don't get why they just don't keep their mouth shut, you know? Sooner or later, they are going to get suspended, no matter how much the principal doesn't want to do that.

Kid 2: Well, Basharat is a stronger person than me. I, for one, would just keep my head down and get along rather than get in trouble.

Kid 1: Yeah. They're definitely a different kind of trouble-maker. One maybe I wish I could be more like.

Kid 2: Me, too.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus is a different kind of king.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Two volunteers (prepped in advance)

Background

The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus, but didn't want to get their hands dirty. Instead, they brought him to Pilate, who ruled under Rome, in the hopes that Rome would have some law by which to kill him. Pilate's conversations with Jesus were intended to uncover something that he could use against him.

Although Jesus had plenty of truth to speak to defend himself against the accusations, he knew it was his time to die. He said little, while his accusers continued to speak lies.

Set the Scene

Ask kids to decide which of your volunteers is acting more like a king. Have one volunteer give regal commands. Have the other volunteer say things like, "Can I help you with your work?" and "I need to go help at the food shelf," etc. Talk with kids about which one was more king-like and why. Tell them that in today's story, there's some confusion about whether or not Jesus was a king.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about some of the things Jesus did during his ministry. See how many things the kids can remember. They might include:

- Washed his friends' feet
- Fed hungry people
- Took care of sick people
- Welcomed people who were different
- Died on a cross

Are these things that kings do? Is Jesus a king? Actually, yes! But Jesus was a different kind of king than anything the people in his time had seen before. Instead of leading by bossing people around, Jesus led by sharing God's love with the world, loving, and serving others.

Wonder together what kind of king the kids might want to rule them. One who gives commands, or one who serves? How can we be good leaders in our own lives?

Close with a prayer thanking Jesus for being a different kind of king.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 19:1-16a

1⁹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.
²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face.
⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” ⁷The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” ⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” ¹¹Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.” ¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” ¹⁵They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your

King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”

¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Secondary Text: Psalm 146

¹Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

²I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,

⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free;

⁸the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

⁹The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Pronunciation Guide

Gabbatha: GAB-uh-thuh



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jews, Pilate, Jesus

Narrator: Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying,

Jews: “Hail, King of the Jews!”

Narrator: and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them,

Pilate: “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.”

Narrator: So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them,

Pilate: “Here is the man!”

Narrator: When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted,

Jews: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Narrator: Pilate said to them,

Pilate: “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.”

Narrator: The Jews answered him,

Jews: “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

Narrator: Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus,

Pilate: “Where are you from?”

Narrator: But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him,

Pilate: “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?”

Narrator: Jesus answered him,

Jesus: “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

Narrator: From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out,

Jews: “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

Narrator: When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews,

Pilate: “Here is your King!”

Narrator: They cried out,

Jews: “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!”

Narrator: Pilate asked them,

Pilate: “Shall I crucify your King?”

Narrator: The chief priests answered,

Jews: “We have no king but the emperor.”

Narrator: Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.



Jesus Condemned (Fifth Sunday in Lent), John 19:1-16a

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: We cannot ignore the political implications of Jesus's death while living authentically as his disciples.

Imagine that tomorrow one of our two major political parties announces that they are adopting the Nicene Creed as part of their political platform. In response, the opposing party declares themselves anti-Nicene Creed. What would be the faithful response for the church? Should we stop using the Nicene Creed altogether because it has become politically controversial? You may laugh, but when I proposed this scenario to a congregation, this was an answer given in earnest by more than one person. Few suggested that we should align ourselves fully with the pro-Nicene party, a comforting sign that Christian Nationalism has not completely consumed our churches. All could recognize that the question prodded at something uncomfortable and that neither jettisoning the creed nor embracing partisanism was the appropriate response. And yet it was difficult for all to come to a consensus about how exactly to navigate such a scenario.

As today's gospel passage illuminates, thinking about the intersection of politics and our faith is important, even if it is disquieting for many among us. Here, we are confronted with two truths: first, that the crucifixion of Jesus was motivated primarily, if not entirely, by politics, and second, that these are the same politics of all empires, not merely the Roman one. Jesus did many things to offend the religious sensibilities of both Jew and Gentile in his time, but it is the political implication of his proclaiming a "kingdom" of God that has brought him to this moment. Pilate appears to waver in his commitment to kill Jesus, but he finds his motivation when the crowd questions whether his desire to spare Jesus is a sign of wavering allegiance to the emperor. Even if we accept John's presentation that Pilate really was

reluctant to see Jesus's killed, he ultimately demonstrates that his loyalty is to imperial power (and his place in its hierarchy) over justice or any other truth. So too, on the part of the people, we see what evil is done when the tools of the state are used to advance religious goals. Everything about their religion as presented in this encounter would have prevented Jesus's crucifixion—even if "he ought to die" (v.7), recall, as we heard last week, that they were not permitted to put him to death (John 18:31). In letting the state become the means to a religious end, they end up sacrificing their faith to imperial authority: "We have no king but the emperor" (v.15).

Confronting all of the above may be more than your people are able to handle. A sermon is not often the best place to dig into thorny issues which would be better handled in a forum where dialogue can take place. In service of such conversation, consider how you can use today's passage to provoke the need to have such conversations together. However deeply you go into these topics, be sure to accompany your challenge with the consolation we receive in this passage as well. Jesus confronted all of this for our sake, and when we have hard conversations with one another, we testify that the faith which grounds us is greater than what we disagree over. To be a community in mission for the world and entrusted with the good news that God's grace has overcome the grave—this was never going to be easy or free from conflict. Jesus's tenacity in enduring what we read about today can give us courage to trust that he will see us through the conflicts we need to have and keep us together as one.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus is condemned to die by Pilate at the insistence of the crowd, who will have no king but the emperor.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Come and worship the God who made heaven and earth.
- C: We sing praises to one who brings justice to the oppressed.**
- L: Praise God who upholds the orphan and widow.
- C: We praise our God, who reigns forever!**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Most holy God,
- C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.**
- P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of love,
- C: In this season of Lent, we remember how you walked willingly into the arms of death on a cross. Help us to put our entire lives into your hands in complete surrender, trusting that you will carry us through whatever trials we face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

You are a generous, faithful, and just God, even when we fall short of those expectations of us. Accept these gifts we offer to you today as expressions of our willingness to grow beyond our perceived limits and soar, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God, we would sooner argue to justify ourselves than surrender and discover what treasures there may be in yielding to your will. Make Jesus our model of unwavering faithfulness in the face of threats to our status and safety. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Our natural world is in crisis, ravaged by the inevitable outcome of our thoughtless exploitation of what you have made. Give us the hope and motivation to take action to change our society's ways that we might create a brighter future for our children's children. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Inspire all who lead to work tirelessly for just laws that ensure that all people enjoy basic human rights. Sustain the work of those who labor to change oppressive systems here and around the world. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: For all with no voice, make us advocates, O God. For those who are lonely or feel abandoned, makes us companions. And for all who suffer any illness or trial, make us bringers of a healing word and a steadying hand (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: For all those who stood trials on behalf of your Gospel, and all who gave their lives in service to a larger truth, we give thanks. Join us to saints of old and those among us still, and number us among your redeemed. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Even as the events of Good Friday approach, we are reminded in this moment that Jesus lives forever and invites you now to feast in his name. Come to where he meets us in bread and wine, and be nourished on the promise of eternal life. This promise is for you.

Litany

1: Jesus surrendered to death on the cross.

2: He went willingly to die for our sake.

1: Jesus calls us to surrender ourselves to God.

2: To let go of our egos, our need to control.

1: If we die to worldly things, to material possessions that really possess us,

2: We can live in love and serve our neighbors.

1: It's a terrifying prospect. Is it even possible?

2: With God, all things are possible.

1: Help us to surrender all things to you, O God.

2: And let you live in and through us for the sake of the world.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-4

Props:

Person 1: What am I going to do about Ingrid?

Person 2: Fire her, of course.

Person 1: But on what grounds? I mean, there's no paper trail. No documentation of grievances.

Person 3: She called out Caleb. Said he wasn't really the one in charge of this department. When clearly, he is in charge of this department.

Person 1: But that's just her opinion. Her loyalty is clearly to the boss and not to middle management.

Person 4: When's the last time the boss directly intervened in anything we did?

Person 2: Ingrid's just bitter since our department absorbed hers. She's constantly on about the needs of her colleagues over and against the bottom line of this company.

Person 3: And she completely disrupted our last management meeting, saying we had turned this department into a marketplace at the expense of the employees.

Person 4: I mean, honestly. This *is* a marketplace!

Person 1: But she was right about some of our practices being harmful.

Person 2: Whose side are you on? Ingrid's? Or Caleb's?

Person 3: She needs to be fired for her disruption.

Person 1: But here's what I don't get. Some of you were actually in her department that got absorbed. And she spoke up for you in the past.

Person 4: Things have changed. She's gotten too popular with her colleagues. If we're not careful, she might wind up ousting Caleb and taking over. I hear the boss really likes her.

Person 1: Would that be so bad?

Person 2: Are you nuts? You'd be one of the first to go in the turnover. You've been Caleb's 'yes man' for years!

Person 1: Well why don't *you* fire her, then. Technically you're her supervisor.

Person 2: I can't. The boss said all HR decisions have to go through you.

Person 3: Seriously, [Person 1], you need to do this. Just fire her.

Person 1: But ultimately, the boss is your boss, too.

Person 4: Maybe on paper. But let's be real. We have no boss but Caleb.

Person 1: Fine. I'll fire her. Geez. I just hope this doesn't come back to bite me later.

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus was killed even though he didn't do anything wrong.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

Pilate was still trying to find a reason not to condemn Jesus, but the Jewish authorities were adamant about finding him guilty. Their cruel mocking of him showed the depth of their hatred for Jesus. Jesus' words of truth may have touched some deep shame to make them react so violently against him.

Even when it appeared Pilate held all power over Jesus, Jesus knew who held true power. He knew that Pilate could only harm him if God gave him ability to do so. Such faith may have given him strength to continue down this terrifying path so he could complete his mission.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever gotten into trouble for something they didn't do. Take a story or two, or share one of your own. Wonder together about how it feels to be punished when you're innocent. Yet this is what happened to Jesus in our story today. After Jesus loved and healed and spoke out against the powerful, he was arrested and put on trial.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder about what Jesus was accused of. (*Saying he was God's son*). Why didn't the people like that? Discuss how when people's words or actions disagree with what we believe, we can get very angry. Share an example from your own life of a time when someone questioned your belief about something and how it felt.

Discuss how everything Jesus did pointed to a new way of understanding God. A new way of being in the world. A way of love, and caring for others, and doing service, and standing up for what's right, even if you get into trouble. Wonder how that might have made people feel when they were used to thinking about things just one way.

Did Jesus do anything really wrong? (*No*) But the people didn't like what he taught. So they asked for him to be killed. What does that feel like?

Assure the kids that Jesus loved the people—and us today—so much, that he was willing to die for what was right.

Close with a prayer thanking God for Jesus' love.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 19:16b-22

¹⁶So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 24

¹The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;

²for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

³Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

⁵They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

⁶Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Pronunciation Guide

Golgotha: GAHL-gah-thuh or gahl-GAH-thuh

Bethsaida: behth-SAY-ih-duh

Selah: SEE-luh

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Priests, Pilate

Narrator: So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate,

Priests: “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”

Narrator: Pilate answered,

Pilate: “What I have written I have written.”



Scripture Readings

Optional Text: John 12:12-27

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!” ¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

Dramatic Reading of the Optional Text

Readers: Narrator, Crowd, Pharisees, Greeks, Jesus

Narrator: The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

Crowd: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!”

Narrator: Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another,

Pharisees: “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

Narrator: Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him,

Greeks: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Narrator: Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them,

Jesus: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.”



The Crucified Messiah (Palm/Passion Sunday), John 19:16b-22

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The cross, and what it says about us and God, is crucial to understanding why we have a reason to give thanks and praise.

While today is Palm/Passion Sunday, the Narrative Lectionary conforms the entirety of Lent into one long experience of the Passion. Compared to what one experiences in the Revised Common Lectionary, today's readings are strikingly short (even if you add the optional reading). Whereas the struggle with the former is that the listener is drowned in an excess of scripture, here the opposite challenge presents itself. With so short a reading, it may prove hard to capture the sense in which this moment is a culmination for the narrative your listeners have been experiencing for the past several weeks. Those who missed a week or two might not have seen this coming, not in the sense that they were unaware Christ was crucified but because it can be hard for this moment to land with the necessary gravity. Your sermon will need to find a way to connect the event of the crucifixion to the significance it holds for our understanding of God and lives of faith.

One approach is to lean into the brevity and starkness of today's passage from John. The cross is something we often try to avoid or work our way around. As Paul points out in 1 Corinthians, the cross is a scandal to some and foolishness to others, and until we have wrestled with how it repudiates our sense of strength and wisdom, we will not grasp its significance. And it is the question of the significance of Jesus's crucifixion which is at issue, not only in the church today but in our reading as well. It is not enough for those who crucified Jesus to have accomplished the deed. They need to have control over how to narrate it. The religious leaders are troubled that the governor has described this as the crucifixion of their king and demand that the sign over Jesus make it clear he was

crucified for claiming (in their estimate, falsely) to be their king. Pilate insists that the death of Jesus should serve to shore up imperial authority, broadcasting to all who see him that this is what happens to anyone who dares question the authority of Rome and its Caesar.

You and I know that the ultimate context of Jesus's death is his resurrection, and that the empty tomb is what defines the significance of the crucifixion. But today is a good day to understand that it is easy for us who are "in the know" to take this significance for granted. The importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus needs to be constantly narrated and re-narrated for one another and our world. This is why Paul says that "faith comes through what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

Today is a day to make clear the significance of the cross and bid your listeners to look it straight in the face. Consider what other narratives or significances we use to try to negotiate around it or bend the cross to our own devices, so that you can point the hope of Easter Sunday as the day of ultimate significance, not only for the cross but for us as well. For it is in the death and resurrection of Christ that we come to know who we are by the grace of God and why we matter enough to God that God would take up the cross for us.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus is crucified while those responsible argue with one another over the significance of his death, whether he was killed for being a king or for claiming to be one.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors,

C: That the King of glory may come in.

L: Who is the King of glory?

C: The Lord, strong and mighty in battle.

L: Who is this King of glory?

C: The Lord of hosts is the King of glory.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Eternal and holy God,

C: You reign in our hearts and in all the earth, and creation gives testimony to your glory and power. Yet you are a ruler like none we have experienced, and gave all of yourself for the sake of the world. Teach us the kind of sacrificial love that can transform all things, for the sake of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

O God, who gave everything, not withholding even your own son, we return to you these humble gifts, asking that you bless them for the work of justice for all creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: What appears joyful now will soon turn hostile, O God. The week ahead will not be easy, but we will stay with you until the bitter end. Accompany us as we descend into the days to come. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The earth is yours and all that is in it. Creation cries out in praise to you. Even the branches wave to welcome you. Join our acclamations with all of nature in glorifying its maker. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The crowd is on your side today, although their adoration won't endure. Show us and all our leaders what true leadership looks like, even when the right action is not the popular one. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Humble God, your compassion never wavers. As your popularity surged you never lost sight of those in need. Attend to all who are sick and suffering in body, mind, or spirit, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: You did not turn away from the difficulty of your mission, and neither did your servants over the years. Strengthen us all to continue this work, until we find eternal rest in you. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus Christ, whose reign is forever, invites you as siblings and friends to this sacred feast in his name. Here is bread and wine in remembrance of his sacrifice for us and for all creation. Come to where Jesus meets us in this meal, and be made whole.

Litany

1: Our cries of "Hosanna" become cries of "Crucify him!"

2: He is taken, and we scatter.

1: We are confronted, and we deny him.

2: He is crucified and named our King.

1: We scoff at the inscription. He is not *our* king.

2: What Pilate has written, he has written.

1: And what he has written is truth.

2: Jesus reigns, whether or not we want to admit it.

1: Jesus reigns, whether or not we think we see proof.

2: Jesus reigns. Help us proclaim it by our lives, O God.



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies: A large, wooden cross covered in chicken wire; palms; a sign that says, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

During the Creative Expression portion of worship, invite the congregation to place their palms onto the cross to represent how quickly the crowds went from “Hosanna!” to “Crucify Him!” When the palms are on the cross, invite someone to add Pilate’s sign.

Skit

Characters: Persons 1, 2, 3, and 4

Props:

Person 1: Well, that’s it, then.

Person 2: You fired Ingrid?

Person 3: Yes, they fired Ingrid, but made everything kind of muddy.

Person 4: In the official file, it says she was the head of the department.

Person 2: Are you serious? She wasn’t the head. She only acted like she was.

Person 3: You need to change that in her file, [Person 1]. Other people are going to see it and think we did something unethical.

Person 1: That’s not my problem. I didn’t want to fire her in the first place. What I wrote is what I wrote.

Person 4: Seriously. You don’t think Caleb is going to be angry about this?

Person 1: Caleb isn’t my boss.

Person 2: I beg to differ. He definitely runs this department, and pretty much everything around here.

Person 3: You’re supposed to be answerable to him.

Person 1: Maybe so. But I don’t know. Something about Ingrid... she had integrity. And I don’t see much of that around here.

Person 4: Don’t tell me you’re going to start acting like her.

Person 1: Oh, no. I know my place. I’ll keep doing what Caleb wants. He appointed me to this position after all. But I’m going to do some thinking about the boss and what *they* want for this company.

Person 2: Blah blah blah. Whatever. Ingrid’s out of here so everything can just go back to business as usual.

Person 1: Frankly, I wouldn’t be so sure about that.

Person 3: We’ll see.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus, our King, was killed.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

In John's gospel, Jesus' entry in Jerusalem was brief. The people gathered with palm branches and shouted "Hosanna!" They acknowledged Jesus as "King of Israel," and he arrived on a young donkey to fulfill the scripture concerning the coming Messiah.

This adoration stood in stark contrast to the mocking Jesus received just a few chapters later, where Jesus was crucified with the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." By this time the people had turned on him and didn't even want the inscription to imply that they had ever received him as their king. They no longer accepted him as their king, yet Pilate's refusal to change the inscription wrote into history words that still hold true today. Jesus is truly the King.

Set the Scene

Remind the kids of the Kids' Storytime from March 27, when you talked about how Jesus was a different kind of king. Discuss the ways Jesus' kingship was about loving and caring for all people, no matter what. Yet even though Jesus was a king, he was killed.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about why Pilate put the sign up that said Jesus was the "King of the Jews." Was it to make fun of him? Was it to warn other people who might try to be kings? Why did it bother some people? Was Jesus actually a king? (*Yes, but of all people*)

Wonder together whether Jesus stopped being a king when he died. Why or why not? How could he be a king if he was dead? Tell the kids it's okay not to know. That most people don't really understand. But we trust God that everything—even something as terrible as this!—will be okay.

Close with a prayer asking God to comfort us when we're confused or sad, and to give us trust that Jesus is our king and still cares for us, no matter what.

Maundy Thursday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A will

Good Friday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Spices
- Oils

Easter Sunday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Streamers
- Whistles
- Kazoos



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

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Scripture Readings

Text: John 19:23-30

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." ²⁵And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. ²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Secondary Text: Psalm 26:3

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

Pronunciation Guide

Magdalene: MAG-duh-lehn

Clopas: KLO-pas

Hyssop: HIIH-suhp

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Soldiers, Jesus

Narrator: When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another,

Soldiers: "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it."

Narrator: This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother,

Jesus: "Woman, here is your son."

Narrator: Then he said to the disciple,

Jesus: "Here is your mother."

Narrator: And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture),

Jesus: "I am thirsty."

Narrator: A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said,

Jesus: "It is finished."

Narrator: Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.



Jesus' Last Words (Maundy Thursday), John 19:23-30

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: While the world busied itself with tearing apart, Jesus worked to bring together.

At a time when Israel was occupied by Rome, tensions were high, and trust was low. Not only were there divisions between peoples and cultures, but there were Romans sympathetic to Jews and Jews working with Romans. This opened the possibility that there were divisions even in households concerning allegiances and alliances.

Today's reading begins with a rending. The soldiers responsible for crucifying Jesus finished their terrible work by stealing and then dividing his clothing into four pieces. For his tunic they cast lots, cementing this idea of division by making one soldier winner over the others. From top to bottom, the actors in this story sought to divide—until Jesus.

The first words Jesus spoke from the cross in John's gospel were intended to bring together his grieving mother and closest friend, both of whom were about to experience an unimaginable loss. Even in their darkest moment, Jesus sought to bring unity and strengthen relationships. Even as he breathed his final breaths, Jesus worked to bring God's children together.

Our world is currently experiencing not only divisions between peoples and cultures, but also within families. People across the globe have allied themselves with ideologies that seem to have a stronger pull than family ties. And, it seems, the divide has grown larger over the past decade, even sometimes turning ugly and bloody. Ironically, many are using the Bible to solidify their positions stating that the words of the Bible (as they interpret them) hold so much power as to warrant the restriction of

people's rights and promotion of division along racial, cultural, religious, and gender lines.

Jesus would weep over the misuse of his own words to fortify divisions that lead to misunderstanding, discrimination, and hate. Jesus' words and actions overwhelmingly lean into acceptance, understanding, and love.

Traditionally, Maundy Thursday celebrates the final supper Jesus shared with his disciples before the terrible events of the following day. Breaking bread together is a powerful expression of a willingness to set aside differences and come together for the sake of love for all God's children. Indeed, rarely are we asked or expected to dine with people that we consider enemies. No, sharing a meal is primarily reserved for those who either already enjoy each other's company regardless of differences, or who are willing to engage in conversation that can lead to greater understanding and increased tolerance.

As you celebrate the feast, point out that as you come together to share in the meal first offered by Jesus himself, you do so with a willingness to set aside differences and welcome the family and the strangers that come to the table today. Begin to mend the divisions within your own community by setting down weapons (tangible and verbal) and picking up bread.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

While the soldiers divided Jesus' clothing, Jesus himself sought to unify people, even with his final breaths.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We gather in sorrow to hear his last words.

C: We gather with humble hearts, O God.

L: Open our ears to his words.

C: Open our hearts to his pain.

L: Open our minds to his reality-transforming sacrifice.

C: Have mercy on us, O God.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of grace and mercy,

C: On this night, you gave us a new commandment—that we love one another as you have loved us. Help us to see the depth and breadth of this love, and strengthen us to carry even the small fraction of it we are able to carry into our suffering world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

We know we cannot repay the gifts you have given us, O God. And so in quiet and humble gratitude we bring what we can to your altar. Gather these gifts together with those of all your children, and bless them for use in bringing life to the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray
for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God, you bore your own suffering with dignity
and mercy. Give us a measure of your mercy as
we walk this road of sorrows by your side. God of
mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Creation weeps as you make your way toward the
end, dear savior: an innocent lamb undeserving of
death. Forgive the lack of vision that still destroys
what is good, beautiful, and life-giving. God of
mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: So many in our world suffer the injustices of
oppressive governments and ideologies. Raise up
new leaders here and around the world who are
unafraid to stand up to entrenched regimes for
the benefit of the marginalized. God of mercy and
grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: For those who suffer without complaining, those
who struggle without sharing, and those who
know no relief from pain, we ask your healing and
compassion (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With your mother Mary, your beloved disciple,
and all those who first followed you, we grieve at
the sight of your persecution and death.
Strengthen us in the certain hope of your
resurrection, when you will gather all to yourself.
God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken ad
unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal
care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As Jesus celebrated his last meal before his crucifixion
with the ones he loved, he now invites you, his
beloved siblings, to the banquet of life in his name.
Set aside all things that divide you from one another,
and join with Jesus in this foretaste of the feast that
has no end.

Litany

1: God's steadfast love is before our eyes.

2: We walk in faithfulness to God.

1: In Jesus' last words, we see this love.

2: It does not waver, even in the face of death.

1: His last act is to see to the care of his mother.

2: He is a servant, to the very end.

1: God's steadfast love is before our eyes.

2: We walk in faithfulness to God.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-4, Person 5

Props: A large bed sheet that can be torn

Person 1: I'm right and you're wrong!

Person 2: No, I'm right and you're wrong!

Person 3: You're both wrong. My way of seeing things is the right way.

Person 4: You're all ridiculous. If you don't see things the way I do, you're completely delusional. Or evil.

(Each Person takes one part of the sheet and pulls, tearing it into four pieces. They stand staring at the ripped fabric in their hands.)

Person 1: Well, this isn't what I wanted. I mean, I used to be friends with [Person 3].

Person 2: I thought if I pulled hard enough, I would get the whole sheet and they would just come along with me.

Person 3: Now all I have is this brokenness. It's useless like this.

Person 4: You're all nuts. I'm just going to cling to my piece of the sheet and figure out how to get all the rest of it back to myself.

(Person 5 enters and stands between them. They take a corner of each of the four torn pieces of the sheet and pulls them together so they are touching.)

Person 5: *(turning to Person 1)* You are loved,
[Person 1]. I want you to take care of
[Person 2].

(turning to Person 2) You are loved,

[Person 2]. I want you to take care of
[Person 3]

(turning to Person 3) You are loved,
[Person 3]. I want you to take care of
[Person 4]

(turning to Person 4) You are loved,
[Person 4]. I want you to take care of
[Person 1]

(Persons 1-4 begin braiding the four torn pieces of sheet into one long rope, which they all hold together. Person 5 places their hand on the rope.)

Person 5: From these torn pieces of trust, care, and hope, weave together love, which binds each of us together.

(As each of the next four people speak, turn outward toward the congregation and then rotate so that by the end, the newly made rope surrounds all four speakers.)

Person 1: Love is not a feeling, but an action.

Person 2: When we act in love, we can begin to break down barriers.

Person 3: When we put care for our neighbor over our own fearful desires, we lose our fear.

Person 4: When we listen and respond with love, we transform communities.

Person 5: In the midst of terrible divisions, Jesus' love for us and for all of creation is what binds us together. Let us remember this unifying love in the midst of our observation of Jesus' death for our sake.

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus calls us to care for each other.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A will

Background

Even as he died, Jesus clung to his identity to the very last breath. Hanging on a cross, tortured and despairing, his thoughts were for his mother who was losing her son, and his disciples who were losing their rabbi, teacher, and friend. "Woman, here is your son." To his disciple, "Here is your mother." Jesus knew the work was not finished, and he entrusted his loved ones into the care of one another so that they could console each other, find strength in one another, and continue his work after his departure.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the will document. Ask if anyone knows what a will is for. Discuss how we prepare for our own deaths by giving instructions for what should happen to us and our belongings after we die.

Mention that when kids are involved, parents and guardians include in their wills who will take care of their kids if anything happens to them.

Jesus didn't have an actual will, but he did give some instructions as he was dying.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about Jesus' calling John to take care of his mother. How could he have thought of that even while he was in so much pain? What does it tell us about how important it is to Jesus that we care for each other?

What are some ways we can do what Jesus asks of us? Who can we take care of? What about caring for the earth? We can faithfully carry out Jesus' call to each of us, just as John took care of Mary for the rest of her life.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us care for each other.

Good Friday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Spices
- Oils

Easter Sunday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Streamers
- Whistles
- Kazoos



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Scripture Readings

Text: John 19:31-42

³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Secondary Text: Psalm 31:9-18

⁹Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.”

¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

¹⁷Do not let me be put to shame, O Lord, for I call on you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.

¹⁸Let the lying lips be stilled that speak insolently against the righteous with pride and contempt.

Pronunciation Guide

Arimathea: ehr-uh-muh-THEE-uh

Nicodemus: nih-ko-DEE-muhs

Sheol: SHEE-ol



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

Narrator 2: (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

Narrator 1: After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

Narrator 2: They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



Jesus the Passover Lamb (Good Friday), John 19:31-42

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: While readers of John sought evidence of Jesus' divinity in the prophecies of their scriptures, we can find evidence in the things that we ourselves witness because we follow Christ.

The gospel of John, especially when it comes to the story of Jesus' crucifixion (and resurrection), is intentional in pointing out that at every step, the outcomes of all that happened were consistent with the prophecies of their scriptures. It is as if the gospel writer wanted to make sure hearers of the testimony had ample evidence that Jesus was the promised one, the son of God, even God himself.

We have several benefits that can bolster the testimony of those who witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have the luxury of time to witness the power of Christ working in the world throughout centuries. We have the gift of the written word—the Bible that can testify to the truth as many times as we are willing to read or hear it. But we are not only hearers of a testimony given two centuries ago of a long-finished event. We also have the privilege of being witnesses ourselves of the power of Christ working in the world. The events of Jesus were not only then, but they are also now.

Every time we pray and have the blessing of seeing the outcome of that effort, we are witness to the divinity of an active God. Each time we see a newborn baby, we are witness to the miracle of creation. When we weep over the death of a loved one, we are witness to rebirth and the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life. All around us is evidence of the active work of Christ.

On this Good Friday, as we grieve the loss of Jesus, notice that the grief is not strictly historical, but timely, present. Notice the many ways in which the work of Christ is ongoing in our world. Notice that even in death there is blessing and the promise of eternal life fulfilled.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

There were many who witnessed the fulfillment of the Jews' ancient prophecies in the death of Jesus. People from all walks of life were involved in honoring the man who had given so much to this world and would continue to do so even centuries later.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Two thousand years ago, Jesus died.

C: Our grief is new. Our grief is now.

L: We see death everywhere, all over the world.

C: Our grief is new. Our grief is now.

L: But we trust. We say, "You are our God."

C: Hold us in our grief, God of salvation.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Most holy God,

C: We come to you in need of grace. Time and again we have forgotten your simple and loving call—to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves. We have forgotten your promise to care for us, and in our fear, we have made choices that hurt us, those around us, and even those we don't know. Remind us who we are and whose we are, and show us the way to amend our wrongs, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend.

P: Have no fear, little flock, for God loves you exactly as you are, and desires nothing more than to restore you to wholeness. Know that you are freed from sin and death now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Passover Lamb,

C: You loved creation so much that you willingly endured death that we might not taste its sting. Do not let your death leave us wallowing in grief, but instead let it stand as the ultimate example of the power of sacrificial love to transform the world, and inspire us by that power to love our neighbors as ourselves. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

May these, our humble gifts, bear witness to our gratitude, O God, for all you have first given us. Bless and use them as a sign to all the world of your powerful action to transform lives and communities for the better. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With hope in your promised redemption, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy Jesus, even in death, you are the fulfillment of the prophecy, and the promise of coming redemption. Console us in our grief and do not let our eyes waver from you. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We have thoughtlessly caused deep grief to our natural world through irresponsible and selfish practices. Remind us that we are not separate from creation, but wholly interdependent with it, that we might lovingly work for its restoration. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Hold all victims of state violence in your loving arms, O God, and inspire us to work to overturn unjust laws at every level of our society. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The oils of anointing were poured on your wounded body, just as you pour your blessings out on all in need of healing. Grant a measure of your compassion to all who suffer, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With Joseph and Nicodemus and all your faithful followers we honor this solemn day and await your resurrection, in which we have been promised a share. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Into your hands we place our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and entrust all things to your eternal care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Litany

1: We cannot bear to look.

2: Yet we cannot bear to look away.

1: Our beloved Jesus is dead.

2: The one in whom our hopes had rested.

1: We do not know what comes next.

2: We only know what has come before.

1: And what came before was love.

2: May we bear witness to that love.

1: May we bear witness to its power to transform.

2: May we, even in our grief, bear witness to God's promise of salvation.

Creative Expression

Activity

Weave some of your congregation's funeral traditions into tonight's service.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus died and was buried.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Spices
- Oils

Background

The story in John shows much more action between Jesus' death and resurrection than in the other gospels. It mirrors the theme woven throughout the gospel of John, that Jesus was not the only person acting to make change in the world. Jesus gathered, taught, and equipped his disciples to carry on his work—work that we continue to do today.

Here we see the tenderness of his followers who have loved him so dearly. They could not stand to see Jesus left on the cross or discarded as garbage, despite the horrific and humiliating nature of his death. They took his body, prepared it according to custom, and placed him in a tomb where no one else had ever been laid. To them, Jesus was still their king, and they treated him with the respect a king deserves. While we wait for the turning of this story, we can pause to give Jesus the respect a king deserves.

Set the Scene

Ask if any of the kids has ever been to a funeral. What are some of the customs or traditions we follow when someone dies (coffin, funeral service, flowers, burial, luncheon, etc.) Tell the kids that different people in different times all over the world have different customs when someone dies.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Show the kids some spices (any from your cupboard) and some oils, (like myrrh or olive oil), and talk with the kids about the burial customs in Jesus' time.

It was the Jewish custom to clean the body with oil and water to get it ready for burial. Loved ones did this—there were no funeral homes to call. There were no coffins. Instead, the body was wrapped in a cloth and then laid in a tomb. The whole process usually happened the day the person died.

Discuss how, when Jesus' friends did this for Jesus, it's because they believed they would never see Jesus again. Talk about how we feel when we lose a loved one, and how bad it must have felt to Jesus' friends. We observe Good Friday to remember that Jesus died and how sad that was for everyone.

Close with a prayer asking God to hold us when we are sad about losing Jesus or any other loved one.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Streamers
- Whistles
- Kazoos



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 20:1-18

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

“Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Secondary Text: Psalm 118:21-29

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Pronunciation Guide

Magdalene: MAG-duh-lehn



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Mary, Angels, Jesus

Narrator: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,

Mary: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Narrator: Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her,

Angels: “Woman, why are you weeping?”

Narrator: She said to them,

Mary: “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

Narrator: When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

Narrator: Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,

Mary: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Mary!”

Narrator: She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

Mary: “Rabbouni!”

Narrator: (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Narrator: Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,

Mary: “I have seen the Lord”;

Narrator: and she told them that he had said these things to her.



Resurrection (Easter Sunday), John 20:1-18

A word cloud of Bible verses from Matthew 28:1-10. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with the most frequent words being 'Laid', 'Lying', 'Disciples', 'Tomb', 'Went', 'Saw', 'First', 'Away', 'Day', 'First', 'Tomb', 'Went', 'Saw', 'First', 'Away', 'Day', 'First'. The words are in various sizes and orientations, creating a dynamic and visually engaging composition.



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Several of Jesus' disciples went to the tomb to witness Jesus' absence. Jesus reveals himself to the one who took the time to stay and grieve.

None of Jesus' disciples had any frame of reference for considering that Jesus may have risen from the dead. Such a thing was unheard of. Despite the raising of Lazarus, which was a miracle Jesus performed on another, they never would have considered that Jesus himself could be raised spontaneously and apart from the hands of another miracle-worker.

When the disciples observed the linens, they believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but it still did not enter their minds that the resurrection was literal. Sure, Jesus' body was no longer on this earth. But to have the body return to the earth with life in it? Unthinkable.

John and Peter returned to their homes after what they witnessed, presumably to continue on with whatever it was they had been doing before this unexpected news. But Mary remained. Mary had been assigned the task of preparing his body for burial and she had fully committed to the role of the grieving follower. (Yes, they grieved with intention—a practice modern cultures might do well to adopt.)

It was because of Mary's commitment to taking the time to be still and to grieve that she was at the tomb when the angels arrived and that she was in the garden when Jesus appeared. Mary's willingness to take the appropriate time to contemplate, consider, grieve, be still, sit in the uncomfortable place of grief—all these led to her being the first to witness the resurrected Christ.

We live in a time of immediate gratification. Even 50 short years ago, if we wanted to learn a new piece of

information, it took time to find a library, retrieve a book, and research the answer. Now we can find information on nearly anything within a few seconds on our smartphones. 10 years ago we watched TV in 30- and 60-minute segments. Now we scroll 3-minute videos on social media and even then often scroll past because 3 minutes is too big a commitment.

Besides cultivating a culture of impatience, our stumbling into such a fast-moving culture also prevents us from taking the time to be still and receive the blessings and gifts of this world in the time it takes to be offered them. There are some gifts worth waiting for. A newborn baby requires nine months of waiting and preparing. A wedding can take a year or more to plan. Milestones such as getting a driver's license or having our first legal drink also cannot be rushed. They take the time they take.

What blessings might we receive if we were more often more intentional about waiting, being still, preparing our bodies, minds, and spirits to receive the things that God takes time to offer! Consider on this Easter Sunday (when you likely have visitors that are not necessarily familiar with what the church has to offer) offering the gift of presence. Do a full 3-minute silent prayer or meditation. Alert guests ahead of time that they will be given the gift of quiet and that it will be long. It may be the first 3-minute block of quiet time many have taken for themselves in a long time. That is a gift they will not soon forget.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

While the other disciples came, saw, and left, Mary remained to be still and grieve. It was into this stillness that the angels came, and then Jesus himself appeared.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Christ is risen!

C: He is risen indeed!

L: This is the day that the Lord has made!

C: Let us rejoice and be glad!

L: Give thanks to the Lord our God,

C: Whose steadfast love endures forever!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.

P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Risen God,

C: You call us by name, and the dawning truth of your resurrection breaks through the darkness of our grieving. Slow us down to savor this moment of unexpected wonder, that we might prepare our hearts to carry the good news to the world. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

We rejoice at the fulfillment of your promise, O God, and in gratitude offer here our gifts and our tithes, as a sign of our love and faithfulness. Bless them, that they may be a blessing that reaches beyond our wildest imagining for the good of the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, Good Friday grief has given way to
Easter joy. Cheer our hearts with the good news
of your resurrection, that we might be energized
to proclaim you far and wide. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Flowers, fields and skies are alive with the joy of
new life and renewal, a reflection of your
resurrection from the dead. Join our praise with
all creation and make of us one chorus of earthly
joy. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Breathe new life and inspiration into leaders at
every level, that they might joyfully work to
govern with equity and justice, for the good of
every single interdependent human being on
earth. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: In your resurrection, we are made new, brought
to life from everything that would dampen our joy
and depress our spirits. Revive and heal those
who still long for wholeness, (*especially...*) God of
new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: It is for this day that all your saints gather in
eternal joy around your throne. Keep us ever
mindful that in you we have our lives, and
because of you death has no power. God of new
life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, who is alive and present here with us, invites
you to this festive table. Here is bread and wine in
remembrance of him, prepared for you, his beloved
siblings and friends. Come and be fed, that your joy
may be complete.

Litany

1: We are frantic, searching. We cannot find where
they have laid him.

**2: We are distracted by our busy lives. There is
so much to do.**

1: How are we to anoint his body when there is no
body to anoint?

**2: How are we to recognize the significance of
this day when we do not have time to think?**

1: Jesus calls us by name,

2: And we stop.

[Pause for five full seconds]

1: (*quietly, with wonder*) Jesus is risen.

2: (*quietly, with wonder*) Jesus is risen.

1: (*louder, with realization*) Jesus is risen.

2: (*louder, with realization*) Jesus is risen.

All: (*shouting with joy*) Jesus is risen! Alleluia!



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies: A large, wooden cross covered in chicken wire, draped in black; cut Easter flowers

During the Creative Expression portion of worship, invite the congregation to place flowers onto the cross to show new life out of death.

Skit

Characters: Ms. Mills, Kid 1, Kid 2 (upper elementary kids)

Props: Bucket, rags

Kid 1: I don't even want to go in there.

Kid 2: Me either. I just can't believe Ms. Mills is gone.

Kid 1: She was my favorite teacher ever. I still don't understand why she got fired.

Kid 2: My mom said it was because she stood up for me when I was being bullied by the principal for being gay.

Kid 1: Yeah, well my dad said they're not allowed to fire someone for that.

Kid 2: Well my mom said they're not supposed to, but they did. They found some other stupid reason to fire her, but the real reason was because she stood up for me. My mom's thinking about suing the school. All I'm thinking about is how it's all my fault.

Kid 1: You can't blame yourself. Anyway, we promised Ms. Mills we'd clean her classroom and make sure all her stuff goes to charity. So, let's get busy.

Kid 2: Hey. The door to her classroom is open.

Kid 1: That's weird. The secretary said no one would be here on Saturday. That's why he had to give us a key.

Kid 2: Who do you think is in there?

Kid 1: I'm kind of scared to find out. What if it's the principal?

Kid 2: Ugh. She's the last person I want to see today.

(Kids 1 and 2 creep up to the classroom "door" and peer in)

Kid 1: Oh no!

Kid 2: Her stuff is already all gone!

Kid 1: What if the principal just took it and threw it out?

Kid 2: Ooh! That would make me so mad!

Kid 1: There doesn't seem to be anyone here. Let's just go home.

Kid 2: *(sighing)* Fine. I guess there's nothing for us to do here anyway.

Kids 1 and 2 turn and bump into Mrs. Mills, but don't look up)

Kid 1: Excuse me. We didn't see you.

Kid 2: Yeah. We're just passing through. Nothing to see here. We're not doing anything wrong. Nothing that the principal wouldn't like.

Mrs. Mills: [Kid 1, Kid 2] it's me. Mrs. Mills.

(Kid 1 and 2 step back and look up, jaws dropping open)

Kid 1: Mrs. Mills! But...but you...but how?

Kid 2: *(blurting)* You got fired and it's all my fault!

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Mrs. Mills: Actually, you want to hear a funny story?

Kid 1: Yes!

Mrs. Mills: Mrs. Padilla Sanchez, the school superintendent, was pretty impressed by the way I stood up to the principal. She called an emergency meeting of the school board. The principal has been fired. And guess who the new principal is?

Kid 2: The...the new...are you kidding me? You're the principal now?

Mrs. Mills: (*grinning*) You guessed it. The principal thought she was in charge of everything, but in the end, she didn't have the power she thought she did.

Kid 2: (*starts crying*) I can't...I can't believe it. You're back. You're really back. I thought...it was all my fault.

Kid 1: (*laughing*) You're back! This is the most amazing news ever! Come on, we've gotta go tell everyone! (*runs off*)

Mrs. Mills: (*to Kid 2*) It wasn't your fault, you know. You kids mean everything to me. I would stand up for any one of you for any reason. Even if it got me fired. You know that, right?

Kid 2: Yeah. I'm just so glad you're back. I'd better go with [Kid 1]. You know how overexcited they get.

Mrs. Mills: See you soon, [Kid 2].

(*Kid 2 runs off*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus rose from the dead!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Streamers
- Whistles
- Kazoos

Background

Although Jesus had told them he would return, Mary Magdalene and the disciples had no context for believing that he would be raised from the dead. Such a thing had never happened before. (Even the raising of Lazarus earlier in John's gospel was a miracle performed by the miracle-worker, Jesus. Who was left to perform the miracle for Jesus?) When the disciples "believed," but didn't yet "understand," they may have believed only that the body had been removed.

What a shock it must have been for Mary to recognize Jesus! The story doesn't tell us whether or not the disciples believed her story. Perhaps more important is whether or not we believe it, and if so, who will we tell?

Set the Scene

Streamers! Whistles! Kazoos! Give the kids anything that you can give to make a celebratory noise this morning because it's all about celebration! Shout some Alleluias!

Reflect Together

Discuss what Mary must have felt like that morning before she saw Jesus. Then have the kids use their noisemakers to show how she felt when she saw Jesus.

Ask how the kids feel when they've done something wrong or gotten in trouble. Then have the kids use their noisemakers to show how they felt when they were forgiven.

Jesus died, which was a very sad thing. But then Jesus rose again and we are loved and forgiven forever no matter what! (Respond with noisemakers).

Jesus has Risen! Alleluia!!

Close with a prayer thanking God for bring Jesus back from the dead.

(Remember to take the noisemakers back from the kids before sending them to their seats!)

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his

disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Secondary Text: Psalm 145:13-21

¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

¹⁴The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

¹⁸The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.

²⁰The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jesus, Disciple, Thomas

Narrator: When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

Jesus: “Peace be with you.”

Narrator: After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again,

Jesus: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Narrator: When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,

Jesus: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Narrator: But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him,

Disciples “We have seen the Lord.”

Narrator: But he said to them,

Thomas: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Narrator: A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

Jesus: “Peace be with you.”

Narrator: Then he said to Thomas,

Jesus: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

Narrator: Thomas answered him,

Thomas: “My Lord and my God!”

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Narrator: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Whether by hearing or seeing, those who believe are blessed by Jesus.

Can we stop calling this the story of “doubting Thomas” please? The moniker implies that people who believed without seeing are somehow more blessed than people who believe because they’ve seen or had “proof.” But truly, how many of us would have believed without seeing? Very few, I imagine.

Let’s look at the entire story. The disciples were gathered and hiding from the Jews when Jesus appeared to them. The disciples present all saw Jesus with their own eyes. They felt his breath and heard his voice. Thomas was not with them.

A week later they were again gathered, this time with Thomas. Jesus appeared again. Thomas saw Jesus. He was invited to touch Jesus and he heard his voice. The experienced Jesus with the same evidence as the other disciples. But because he hadn’t believed their story, he has forever been labeled “doubting.”

Jesus then lifted up the people (everyone else for all time who wasn’t them) who would believe without seeing. It’s not a condemnation of those who believed because they saw with their own eyes. It’s an invitation to spread the word, even knowing that others will have a hard time believing without seeing. But making others believe is not the job of these

disciples. Their job was to proclaim it to whoever would hear, and leave the believing bit up to God. The entire exchange was not about belittling the disciples, but about empowering them (all of them) to proclaim boldly, even knowing they would be discounted.

Although we don’t have the luxury of witnessing Jesus’ risen body, that doesn’t mean that some believers haven’t “seen” him. Even today there are a special few that have seen Jesus in ways most of us may not ever get to do. There are some who are so attuned to God’s presence that they can spot God’s hand on a thing when others cannot. Sometimes we lift up these special people. More often than we ought we dismiss them as nuts. Jesus didn’t discriminate. He empowered and encouraged anybody who believed regardless of how they came to believe. What a gift it would be to your community to hear the stories of how people came to believe, and to believe them!

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Thomas was not with the other disciples when they witnessed the risen Jesus. But just a week later, he was blessed to see. Jesus’ invitation was to all: proclaim what you have seen to whoever will listen.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God is near to all who call on God.

C: We call in God in truth.

L: Let us speak God's praise.

C: All creation will bless God's name forever.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.

P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Risen God,

C: You come into our midst and breathe on us your Holy Spirit. Empower us to believe at depth that you are with us, no matter how we experience you in our lives, and make us witnesses to one another of your very real presence among us. In your name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, we offer these gifts out of the abundance you have first given us. Accept them, we pray, and use them to bear witness to your life-changing power, that all might come to love you and their neighbors as themselves. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, in a world where proof is everything and faith often seems foolish, give us courage to proclaim what the Spirit has revealed to us. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We cannot doubt that the waters of this blue planet are steadily rising, and the effects of our abuse and neglect are made plain. Teach us to recognize and heed the warnings while we yet have a chance to be part of the solution in preserving our cosmic home. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Give our leaders faith in the people they serve, that they would listen carefully to the needs of their constituents and craft policies that see to the flourishing of all people. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You are near to all who call on you. Be now with all those who need to feel you close, and long for your healing touch, (*especially...*) God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With Thomas, Mary, the other disciples, and all the witnesses of the resurrection we join in thanksgiving, united in your love and held forever in the power of your eternal life. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who stood among his disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit stands among you here and invites you to experience his presence in this holy meal. Come, be fed and nourished for a life of faith.

Litany

1: Faith requires doubt. If we were certain, it would not be faith.

2: We can doubt even what our eyes perceive. They have played tricks on us.

1: We may experience the real and vital presence of Jesus in our lives as clearly as if we see him,

2: And then still come to doubt that what we experienced was “real.”

1: We are in good company with the one who proclaimed, “My lord and my God!”

2: Open our eyes to see and our ears to hear.

1: Sharpen our senses of touch, taste, and smell.

2: Let us experience you—real and immediate—in the presence of one another in this place.

1: Then give us a deep trust that what we have sensed is, in fact, reality,

2: That in faith we might proclaim, “My lord and my God!”



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (siblings), Parent

Props: None

Kid 1: [Parent] said whoever does the dishes will get a treat!

Kid 2: Did not.

Kid 1: Yes they did! They told me to tell you that.

Kid 2: I don't believe it. If it was true, then why don't you do them?

Kid 1: I can't. I have to go to soccer practice.

Kid 2: Whatever. I'll believe it when [parent] tells me.

Kid 1: Suit yourself. They're gonna be mad if they don't get done.

(Kid 1 leaves. Kid 3 enters.)

Kid 2: Hey, [Kid 3]. [Parent] said whoever does the dishes will get a treat!

Kid 3: No they didn't. You just don't want to have to do them.

Kid 2: Not true. [Kid 1] told me [Parent] said whoever did them would get a treat!

Kid 3: Why don't you do them, then?

Kid 2: I have homework to do.

Kid 3: Sounds like a bunch of baloney to me. I'll believe it when [parent] tells me.

Kid 2: Well, they're gonna be awfully mad if the dishes don't get done!

(Kid 2 leaves. Kid 4 enters.)

Kid 3: Hey, [Kid 4]. [Parent] says whoever does the dishes will get a treat!.

Kid 4: Really?

Kid 3: Yep.

Kid 4: That sounds great! I'll go do them! *(exits)*

(A little while later, all enter together.)

Parent: [Kid 2], did you do the dishes?

Kid 2: Um... Was I supposed to? I thought [Kid 1] was lying, so I told [Kid 3] to do them.

Parent: [Kid 3], did you do the dishes?

Kid 3: Well, I thought [Kid 2] was lying so I told [Kid 4] to do them.

Parent: Kid 4, did you do the dishes?

Kid 4: Yep.

Parent: Thanks, honey. Why don't you and I go to the candy store and pick out a treat.

Parent and Kid 4 leave.

Kid 1: I told you the truth! Why didn't you believe me?

Kid 2: Seeing is believing.

Kid 3: But I guess sometimes it's better to believe even without seeing.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Believing without seeing is called faith.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The disciples were afraid. Jesus had been gone only 3 days. They were without their master, and the authorities were clearly ready to do away with Jesus' followers. They didn't know where to go or what to do. And earlier in the day Mary had told them Jesus' body had been removed from the tomb and that she had seen Jesus alive. Fear and uncertainty would have been understandable under the circumstances.

Jesus' appearance behind locked doors would have come as a shock, despite Mary's account from earlier in the day. It's not surprising that Thomas would be slow to believe the disciples' account, given the high, intense emotions from the events of the weekend all the disciples had endured.

Despite Thomas' doubt, it should be noted that Thomas did not need to touch Jesus, as he indicated he would. Seeing Jesus was all he needed to know his Lord had returned. His eyewitness account, along with the other disciples' accounts, were that start of the spread of the good news that Jesus was alive!

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever been to Mars. Do they believe Mars is a real thing? Even if they've never seen it with their own eyes? Why? Ask the kids what love looks like. Can they see or touch it? Do they believe love is a real thing? Why?

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids about Thomas' response to what the other disciples told him about Jesus. Would the kids have believed Jesus was alive again after he was dead just because someone told them? What did Jesus say to Thomas when they finally saw each other again? (*"Many people will come to believe in me without ever seeing me."*) Have we ever seen Jesus as a person standing in front of us? How can we believe in Jesus even if we haven't seen him? Are there other ways we "see" Jesus? What are they? We see Jesus in everyone and everything around us. We experience Jesus' love in the love of others. Believing without seeing directly is called faith.

Close with a prayer thanking God for giving us faith in Jesus.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- An object that has been made out of a different object that was worn out or thrown away. For example: a patchwork quilt made from old clothes or a grocery bag made out of an old rice sack. You can search online for "upcycled objects" for more ideas.



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Acts 9:1-19a

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord."¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your

saints in Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Secondary Text: Matthew 6:24

²⁴"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Pronunciation Guide

Damascus: duh-MAS-kuhs

Ananias: an-uh-NAI-uhs

Tarsus: TAHR-suhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jesus, Saul, Ananias

Narrator: Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,

Jesus: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Narrator: He asked,

Saul: "Who are you, Lord?"

Narrator: The reply came,

Jesus: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Narrator: The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision,

Jesus: "Ananias."

Narrator: He answered,

Ananias: "Here I am, Lord."

Narrator: The Lord said to him,

Jesus: "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

Narrator: But Ananias answered,

Ananias: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."

Narrator: But the Lord said to him,

Jesus: "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Narrator: So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said,

Ananias: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Narrator: And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.



Paul's Conversion, Acts 9:1-19a

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Saul's conversion was dramatic and epic. Ananias' response to God's invitation was far more understated, but incredibly brave.

Many who attend church regularly may be familiar with the story of Saul's (Paul's) conversion. It details how a man known for murdering believers was accosted by a bodiless voice and berated for his actions against Jesus' people. The encounter was so dramatic and traumatic that Saul went temporarily blind and stopped eating and drinking altogether. The story is so epic, it is hard for us to forget.

The story doesn't end there, though. The Lord then went to a man who was already a believer and directed him to find Saul nearby. There was no blinding light, no epic scene. The Lord came in a vision and Ananias was expected to obey. Most of us would discount the vision as a nightmare and shake it off, resuming our regularly scheduled programming the minute it ended. But Ananias not only recognized it as a vision, he obeyed! With all the courage he could muster, he walked directly into the presence of the man everyone knew would murder him simply for existing. But Saul had already been changed, and Ananias was safe. The two came together, Saul was baptized and ate, and the work of proclamation began.

It's tempting sometimes to place more stock in the events of our lives that are so dramatic that we can never forget them, than in the small, daily happenings that are easy to miss. But both are critical to the furthering of God's work. Not only can we celebrate the pastor who entered ministry because of a defining moment, but we can also celebrate the elderly believer who is rarely seen but has never missed serving a funeral lunch. Or even the kid who simply made it to church one morning without throwing a fit for their parents. Every action that moves us closer to God's will for the world is monumental, even when we are too enamored by the blinding light to see it.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Saul, the vicious persecutor of Jesus' followers, is struck blind on the road to Damascus by Jesus himself, who then tells Saul to wait for further instruction. God then sends Ananias, one of said followers, to confront his persecutor head on, and even worse, to accept that this man has been chosen by Jesus to spread the gospel!



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Our God calls us from our daily tasks.
- C: We come before God with joy.**
- L: Let us honor this sacred time together.
- C: We are listening, O God. Speak to us.**
- L: Let us answer God's call to be community.
- C: We are ready, O God. Nourish us for the work of the Spirit.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Merciful God,
- C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.**
- P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of mystery,
- C: You come to us in obvious and subtle ways, calling us into your work of love and service to you and our neighbors near and far. Help us to recognize you in all those we encounter, that we might know you are near, guiding and equipping us for the work ahead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, Jesus was clear that we cannot serve both you and wealth. Accept these gifts out of our financial possessions as a sign that you are our God and our gifts are to be used in service to you and our neighbor. Bless them for this holy work in Jesus' name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, you choose and use the most unlikely
people for your work. Show us the path you have
prepared for us, and give us all strength and
courage to follow. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As we celebrate Earth Day and Month, we look to
the natural world as our teacher and life-giver.
Guide us in creative and compassionate ways to
preserve the ecosystems with which we are so
closely intertwined. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Turn on their heads the framers and perpetrators
of laws that oppress and cause immeasurable
harm to marginalized communities. Open the eyes
of thoughtless leaders to the consequences of
selfish action, that they might change not only
their own ways, but the direction of societies in
favor of the flourishing of all. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Be with those who minister to the sick and the
dying. Give hope to the suffering, and remind
them that you hold them, suffer with them, and
share their challenging journey, (*especially...*) God
of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Following the trail blazed by the earliest carriers
of the Good News, we take our place in the line
of redeemed saints whose joy it is to praise your
name forever. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who met Saul on the road to Damascus now
meets us in this meal of bread and wine. Come to the
table and be transformed by the saving power of
Jesus' death and resurrection, now and always. All is
prepared for you.

Litany

1: Where is the blinding light? The voice of Jesus?

2: Why can we not be so clearly directed?

1: Even Ananias had a vision, an obvious message.

2: How do we know what God really wants from us?

1: We can listen—open ourselves to see and hear
God in our neighbors.

2: We can pray and meditate—open our minds to receive God's guidance.

1: We can act in love, trusting that God will make
God's self known in our actions.

2: God is always right here with us, calling us in big and small ways.

1: God, help us to hear your call.

2: God, help us to answer your call.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (high school age), Teacher

Kid 1: Did you hear what happened to [Kid 3]?

Kid 2: Yeah. They were in rare form—26 points and six personal fouls. The ref was about to throw them out of the game completely when right in the middle of a play—BAM!—they went down, hard.

Kid 1: I saw that kid jump at the same time and they knocked heads. The ref didn't have to kick [Kid 3] out of the game. They were literally carried out.

Kid 2: I hate to say it but...poetic justice. [Kid 3] is the worst bully in the school. Didn't they steal your lunch money for six months once?

Kid 1: Yeah. And they've stuck I-don't-know-how-many kids in lockers. They have it out completely for anyone who gets good grades and likes the stuff we do.

(Kids 1 and 2 exit. Kid 4 and Teacher enter)

Teacher: I need you to tutor [Kid 3] in math.

Kid 4: *(horrificed)* You can't be serious.

Teacher: I am serious.

Kid 4: You know their reputation, right? They eat kids like me for breakfast.

Teacher: You're the best student in my class. Probably in the whole school. I know you can do this.

Kid 4: How do I know they're not going to turn around and stuff me in a locker as soon as I'm finished helping them?

Teacher: Trust me, okay? I'm pretty sure you're going to find someone a little different than you think when you meet with them.

Kid 4: So when do we start?

Teacher: Right now. They're in room 207.

Kid 4: *(sighing)* If you say so. *(walks across the front to where Kid 3 is sitting)* Hi, [Kid 3]. I'm supposed to tutor you in math. That okay with you?

Kid 3: Yes, please. I need all the help I can get.

Kid 4: I'm only doing this because [Teacher] is making me. I don't really want anything to do with you.

Kid 3: I know. And I don't blame you. I've been a horrible, horrible person for a long time.

Kid 4: So...what, you're saying you've changed?

Kid 3: You probably won't believe me, but yeah. The other day when I had the daylights knocked out of me on the court...well, I kind of had an epiphany.

Kid 4: Epiphany. I didn't think you knew any words that big.

Kid 3: Okay, I deserve that. But seriously. I realized what a colossal jerk I've been. When I woke up in the nurse's office, [Teacher] was there and said they had a job for me.

Kid 4: That makes two of us. What's your job?

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 3: I'm...don't laugh...I'm taking over the anti-bullying campaign for the school.

Kid 4: (*laughs*) Sorry. Seriously?

Kid 3: Yeah. And the weirdest part is...well...I actually want to. And I feel like the message would be a lot more profound coming from me.

Kid 4: You're probably right. Well, let's get going on this math. We have a test in two days.

Kid 3: Thanks for giving me a chance, [Kid 4]

Kid 4: Yeah, well I didn't want to. But [Teacher] told me to, and I trust them completely. So here we go.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus transformed Saul's life.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- An object that has been made out of a different object that was worn out or thrown away. For example: a patchwork quilt made from old clothes or a grocery bag made out of an old rice sack. You can search online for "upcycled objects" for more ideas.

Background

Saul was among the most notorious and ruthless persecutors of Christians at the time following Jesus' death and resurrection. He was both a Jew (a Pharisee) and a Roman citizen, which gave him powerful education and status in the world. He was able to use both while he was persecuting Christians, and also after his conversion when he began preaching the word and planting churches throughout the land.

His conversion was dramatic and abrupt, occurring along the road while he was on a journey to hunt Christians. His conversion required the participation of the Christian, Ananias. Ananias was also called, and both men were asked to trust one another for the conversion to take place. Both fulfilled their callings, and a powerful ministry was started on that day.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the upcycled object and ask them what it is and what it used to be. Talk about how upcycling takes items that are no longer useful or have been worn out and turn them into amazing new things.

Tell the kids that Jesus can do the same thing with our lives!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids about what the old, worn out things in Saul were that needed to be gotten rid of (*his hatred for and persecution of Christians*). What caused Saul to change? What was the new thing that Saul turned into? (*Someone who loves Jesus and shared Jesus' good news with the whole world*). Tell the kids that Saul even changed his name: to Paul!

Are there old, worn out things in our lives that might need to change? Ideas we have that might be wrong? Maybe we've judged someone we don't really know. How can Jesus "upcycle" our attitudes?

Close with the prayer thanking God for helping us change for the better each and every day.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A printed picture of John Lewis such as this one:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis#/media/File:John_Lewis-2006_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis#/media/File:John_Lewis-2006_(cropped).jpg)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Acts 16:16-34

¹⁶One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” ¹⁸She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since

he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Secondary Text: Luke 6:18-19, 22-23

¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.”

Pronunciation Guide

Silas: SAI-luhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Girl, Paul, Market, Jailer

Narrator: One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out,

Girl: “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

Narrator: She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit,

Paul: “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.”

Narrator: And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said,

Market: “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.”

Narrator: The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them

securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice,

Paul: “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

Narrator: The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said,

Jailer: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Narrator: They answered,

Paul: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Narrator: They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.



Paul and Silas, Acts 16:16-34

House Very Stripped Up Come Fortune Men Slave
Telling Earthquake Family Come Annoyed Given Advocating Yourself
Keep Lord Fell Joined Silas Stocks Many Threw Come
Day Beaten Jesus Many Trembling Answered Cry Christ Without Foundations Much Loud Instructions Wounds
Up Jesus Voice Going Order Much Met Doors Turned Violent Adopt Jesus
Girl Food Customs Night Cell Hour Name Slave God Doing Jailer Open Believe Called Going Word Money Household Deal
Observe Fortune Here Rods Owners saved Brought Name House Out One Chains Many Many Washed Household Kept Doors Deal
Sword Marketplace Flogging Everyone Disturbing Saved Himself Woke Seized Divination Annoyed Entire Singing Hope
Met Kept Christ Lord Down Midnight Saw High Doing Name
Supposed Baptized One Set Dragged Proclaim Men Salvation Paul Turned



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The main characters of this story were the ones who were exploited for God's gain.

The story begins with Paul and Silas doing what they do, proclaiming the good news and doing God's work. But on this day they run into a young slave girl gifted with the spirit of divination. She proclaims the truth about Paul and Silas "These men are slaves of the Most High God," but she annoys them so they cast out her divining spirit. When she has been relieved of her gift, her owners are furious because her gift had been lucrative for them. Rarely have I heard preachers notice that what Paul and Silas did to the young woman was quite invasive and unwelcome. Nowhere did it state that the spirit of divination was evil, simply that it was annoying. But this spirit was what made the girl special; it's what afforded her owners and her the opportunity to make a living. She didn't ask for it to be removed, and indeed once removed, she would be useless to her owners. I wonder what kind of life she led after having been violated in such an aggressive way?

It is this young woman that is a pivot point of the story. Because of their action, Paul and Silas are imprisoned, and it is here the story continues. God sends an earthquake to shake the jail open and in the morning the jailer nearly ends his own life because he fears the consequence of letting the prisoners escape. In a twist, the prisoners had not escaped, but instead

used the event to evangelize and convert the jailer to their company. Indeed, it would be useful to have a man in such a position of influence and his family on their side. The poor man really has little autonomy in the story. Ultimately, it comes down to believing in the God of the men who stayed or taking his own life.

As a woman who has sometimes relied upon gifts of the spirit that have intimidated and frightened men in power, this story hits hard. Paul and Silas use the entire scene to their advantage, unashamedly at the expense of the livelihood of the young girl. While we as preachers spend a lot of time and energy interpreting the Bible as an example of how to live, there are many stories like these in which the "heroes" succeeded at the expense of the marginalized (often women). This is hard to preach, but it's likely that your preaching this week will be richer now that you can see the story through the lens of the marginalized who were exploited for God's gain.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Paul and Silas were imprisoned for casting out a spirit of divination against the wishes of the spirit's owners. While there, they used the opportunity to convert the jailer.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: All are welcome in this holy house.

C: We come together in Jesus' name.

L: Blessed are you who have faith even through challenges.

C: Jesus is here, bringing us healing and wholeness.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.

P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of radical welcome,

C: Challenge us to hear your gospel in new and different ways, that our faith might be enriched and deepened as we struggle to find its meaning for us today. In the name of Jesus, who crossed boundaries and ministered to the marginalized, even to his own condemnation, we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious God, you have gifted us with skills and abilities of every kind, along with the means to satisfy our material needs. We offer now a portion of these gifts that you would use them for the work of helping your just and holy reign to break through into our suffering world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: You have seen your servants through every trial.
Stir up today the power of your Gospel to
transform, renew and lead new believers to your
community. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Free us from our bondage to fossil fuels, single-
use plastics, and other practices that cause harm
to your beautiful creation. Sustain the hope and
hard work of those who labor to find new ways to
live in harmony with all that you have made for
the good of those yet to come. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Teach us and our leaders to use our gifts for good
and not for dishonest gain. Make us to focus our
efforts on behalf of those in need instead of
exploiting others for our own benefit. May
honesty, integrity, and love prevail over greed and
manipulation. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Your resurrection gives hope to all who despair of
ever feeling whole again. Strengthen all who are in
recovery, rehabilitation, or chronic treatment, and
show them what hope looks like in the face of
Christ (*especially...*) God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Sometimes we feel unworthy to stand in the
company of great sufferers for the faith. Remind
us that they, like us, were imperfect, yet
empowered by your spirit. Gladden our hearts
with the power we have through you. God of new
life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, who sets prisoners free, also sets a table of
grace and mercy before us in the presence of one
another. Come and be nourished on his body and
blood, that you might be strengthened to carry the
good news into the world. This invitation is for you!

Litany

1: How do we recognize the gifts in one another?

2: Are we proud and boastful of our abilities?

1: Are we jealous of others' talents?

2: Do we hide what we love to do out of fear of
ridicule?

1: Do we downplay our skills so no one asks us to
volunteer them?

2: Do we judge ourselves and others on some
kind of value scale?

1: Give us humility, O God.

2: Remind us we can do nothing apart from you.

1: Make us quick to use what you have given us in
love and service to others.

2: And make us open to the contributions of all,
without assigning value.

1: Break us out of the prison of what society tells us
is valuable, useful, impressive, or successful.

2: Free us to find joy in the talents you have
given us.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-5 (upper elementary age), Teacher

Scene: A school playground. Kid 1 and Kid 2 are quietly talking when three bullies walk up to them (Kids 3, 4, and 5)

Kid 3: Hey, [Kid 1]!

Kid 1: Yeah?

Kid 3: I heard you're the one who ratted on me to Principal Gomez.

Kid 2: *(sticking up for Kid 1)* Well, it wasn't right for you to be stealing the kindergartners' lunch money all the time.

Kid 4: Who asked you?

Kid 5: Yeah. Now we don't have any more money for candy and comic books.

Kid 1: There are other ways to earn money. I had to stick up for the little kids.

Kid 3: Okay, Miss goodie-goodie. So now you're going to pay for messing up the system.

Suddenly there is a loud noise or some sort of commotion off stage.

Kid 5: What was that?!?

Kid 2: Sounds like a fight over by the swings.

Kid 3: This I gotta see. [Kid 4], you watch these guys for a minute. Make sure they don't go anywhere!

Kid 4: You can count on me!

(Kid 3 and Kid 5 go running off to watch the other fight. Kid 4 glowers at Kids 1 and 2, who simply sit and wait.)

Kid 4: *(glancing over her shoulder)* Oh shoot! It's [Teacher]! *(runs off and hides, ditching their post.)*

Teacher: You guys okay over here? I heard there was a fight and thought you might have had some trouble with [Kid 3] after this morning.

Kid 1: We're okay. [Kid 3] is out to get us, but we'll handle it.

Teacher: Well, just yell if you need back-up.

Kid 2: Thanks.

(Teacher continues on and sees Kid 4 cowering behind a bush.)

Teacher: [Kid 4]? Is that you?

Kid 4: Yeah.

Teacher: Why are you hiding in that bush?

Kid 4: [Kid 3] told me to watch [Kid 1] and [Kid 2] and I freaked out when I saw you coming. I figure [Kid 1] and [Kid 2] are half way home by now. [Kid 3] is gonna kill me!

Kid 2: *(calling out)* Don't worry about it [Kid 4]. We're still here.

Kid 4: *(incredulous)* Seriously? *(gets up and runs over to them. Teacher wanders off.)* How come you guys didn't take off?

Kid 1: We didn't do anything wrong this morning. [Kid 3] shouldn't steal money from little kids and you know it.

Kid 2: And they can't scare us into pretending it's not happening.

Kid 4: They scare me.

(continued on next page)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 2: You still always have the choice to do what's right. Here they come now.

(Kid 3 and Kid 5 come running back, looking crabby.)

Kid 5: What a rip-off. Principal Gomez showed up and broke up the fight before anyone got hurt.

Kid 3: I hate when that happens. But we can do our own hurting right here.

Kid 4: Hey, [Kid 3], I think we should just leave these guys alone.

Kid 5: What?!? Are you turning chicken on us?

Kid 4: No. But I don't wanna fight. Let's just get out of here before Principal Gomez shows up.

Kid 3: *(staring hard at Kid 1, Kid 2 and Kid 4)* You won't help us teach these guys a lesson?

Kid 4: No. I really won't.

Kid 1: It would be a fair fight, then. Two against two.

Kid 3: I don't need to fight you to prove you're a jerk. Come on, guys, let's forget these losers.

Kid 4: You guys go. I need to finish something at school.

Kid 5: Suit yourself.

(Kid 3 & Kid 5 exit)

Kid 4: You mind if I hang out with you guys this afternoon? I have a feeling I'll probably get in a lot less trouble doing the right thing.

Kid 2: *(laughing)* You would think so. But it doesn't always work that way.

Kid 4: I'll take my chances.

(Kid 1, Kid 2 and Kid 4 exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can get in “good trouble.”

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A printed picture of John Lewis such as this one:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis#/media/File:John_Lewis-2006_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis#/media/File:John_Lewis-2006_(cropped).jpg)

Background

Paul and Silas traveled, bringing the word of God wherever God sent them. They had spent some time in Philippi, and had converted a business woman named Lydia, who would become one of their financial supporters there. Shortly after her conversion, they encountered the girl with a spirit of divination, which allowed her to see and tell fortunes, for the welfare of her owners.

When Paul cast the spirit out of her, he did so in Jesus' name. Only Roman-approved religions were allowed. Judaism was allowed there, but Christianity was not. Paul and Silas were sentenced to prison. While they were in prison they had the opportunity to convert the jailer and his family, which helped them secure a faithful foundation in Philippi.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the picture of John Lewis and talk about how he worked very hard to fight for equal rights for Black people in the United States, and that it got him in lots of trouble. He called it “good trouble,” which means getting in trouble for doing the right thing.

Jesus' followers got in “good trouble” all the time. Lots of people were afraid of their message of Jesus' love and wanted them to stop talking about Jesus. Here's one story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids whether it's ever okay to get in trouble. Is it possible to get in trouble for doing something that's right? Come up with some examples, such as standing up to a bully.

How can getting in “good trouble” help and change others? Talk about how the jailer was so impressed with Paul and Silas' honesty and faith that he decided to follow Jesus, too!

Close with a prayer asking God to help us stand up for what's right, even if it gets us in trouble.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Christian Bible
- A Hebrew Bible
- A Koran
- Texts from other religious traditions



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Acts 17:16-31

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and

the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Secondary Text: John 1:16-18

¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Pronunciation Guide

Epicurean: eh-pi-KYU-ree-uhn

Stoic: STOH-ik

Areopagus: ehr-ee-AH-puh-guhs

Athenians: ah-THEE-nee-uhnz



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Philosopher 1, Philosopher 2, Paul

Narrator: While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said,

Philosopher 1: “What does this babblor want to say?”

Narrator: Others said,

Philosopher 2: “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.”

Narrator: (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him,

Philosopher 2: “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.”

Narrator: Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said,

Paul: “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”



Paul's Sermon at Athens, Acts 17:16-31

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Paul preached to believers of a variety of religions, teaching about the one Creator of all beings.

When in Athens, Paul took the opportunity to speak and teach about God. Athens was a place of trade of goods and ideas. People from all across the land came to Athens, bringing their cultures, ideologies, and religions. It was one of the early “melting pots.” One of the favorite pastimes was to gather at the Areopagus, a hill in Athens where gatherings and speeches took place. It was there that Paul brought his knowledge of the many other gods and idols to explain that the Jewish God was the God that created all people and all things, even those worshiping other gods.

It was a masterclass in oratory, building upon the knowledge and beliefs of those gathered to make his point instead of arguing why they were wrong. By approaching the debate in this way, he could build up rather than tear down, and eventually bring others to see why their own efforts to sacrifice for their gods and idols was in vain; the Jewish God required nothing from them but loyalty to God. He also suggested that there would soon be a day when God would send a man to judge all people for their righteousness, and he had met that man, Jesus.

It seems to be easy for believers today to skip right over the part where we honor the beliefs of those we engage with and jump right into conversion efforts.

But even Paul knew that approach was not only doomed to fail but also dishonored those he was speaking with. Paul helped others grow in understanding rather than trying to squash what they already believed.

We live in a world where geography doesn't necessarily define one's religious beliefs. We are also living in a melting pot of cultures, ideologies, and religions. Too often we forget the decorum of debate where each perspective has a voice, and each voice also has ears.

Paul's approach can be a helpful model for how we might engage with our neighbors who are not from a Christian background. Instead of approaching conversations as opportunities for conversion, we could come with open eyes and listening ears. Paul first learned about the gods of others before engaging in conversation. How much richer might our own faith be if we allowed ourselves the privilege of looking and hearing the perspectives of others!

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Paul learned about the religions of those in Athens before he engaged in debates at the Areopagus. He brought their perspective to the conversation as he introduced them to Creator God.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: No one has ever seen God.

C: But in Jesus, God is made known to us.

L: God's has given us grace upon grace.

C: Praise God for God's grace and mercy.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.

P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of all,

C: You are present in all places and in all peoples, and the gospel story is spoken in every language. Open our hearts and minds to traditions different than our own, that we might learn from them, grow toward you, and become one unified Body of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious God, you created all things, and out of your fulness, you have showered us with all that we need. Accept now these gifts, returned to you in joy and gratitude. Bless and use them for your holy work, that all the world might know your boundless love. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God, your servant, Paul, is a model for
approaching others and sharing the gospel in a
spirit of generosity and openness. May we follow
his lead and respectfully accompany those whom
we serve. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You are present and alive to us in the natural
world and all that is in it. Make us to care for
creation as for our own selves, with love and
tenderness, that all living things might thrive
together. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As the Greeks listened to Paul with open
curiosity, make our leaders to listen to the ideas of
those different from themselves, that all might
benefit from new ways of addressing challenges.
God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We hold in our hearts today all those in our
community and beyond who are dealing with
challenges to their physical, emotional, and or
spiritual health. Bring hope and healing to all in
need, (*especially...*) God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We are a motley and diverse group, your saints.
Thank you for making us different from one
another, yet united in your love and redeemed by
your salvation. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus Christ, our savior and friend, invites us now to
feast at the table where you are showered with grace
upon grace. Come and meet him in this simple meal
of bread and wine and be made whole. All is
prepared.

Litany

1: We believe in one God, who is in three persons.

**2: We believe in our mother/father God who
created all that is.**

1: We believe that Jesus was God with us, and
destroyed sin and death.

**2: We believe that God's Holy Spirit lives in and
around and through us and creation, guiding,
enlightening, advocating.**

1: Not everyone believes as we believe.

**2: Yet God remains God, and loves and redeems
all God's creation equally.**

1: Open our minds to accept that we do not own
you, O God, nor can we limit you to our own
liking.

**2: Open our eyes to see you in all people and
traditions throughout the world.**

1: Open our hearts to our neighbors of every culture
and faith,

**2: That your redeeming love might be found in
every corner of creation.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-4

Person 1: Ah! Thank you all for joining me. I can't wait to show you the secrets of my success!

Person 2: Thanks for having us. I'm so excited to learn what makes you tick.

Person 3: Yeah. You're such a successful person. Please, share your secrets with us!

Person 4: I'm sure we'll learn a lot from you.

Person 1: So, this is my lucky rabbit's foot. I rub this every morning for fifteen minutes. That's what gives me my motivation.

Person 2: Rabbit's foot. Wow. That's amazing!

Person 3: I need a rabbit's foot!

Person 1: And this is my lucky chair. I sit here and that's what gives me my mental sharpness.

Person 2: Lucky chair. I need one of those.

Person 3: You'll have to tell us where you got it.

Person 1: This here is my lucky plant. It gives off the freshest air and that's what gives me my best ideas.

Person 2: Is that a philodendron? I can get a philodendron.

Person 3: Is there a certain type of philodendron I should get?

Person 4: What's this?

Person 1: That? Oh. I'm not sure. I mean, it's an old vase my grandmother gave me, but I don't know that it does anything in particular for me. I'm sure it does, of course. I'm just not sure what.

Person 4: Well I have a theory.

Person 1: Do tell.

Person 4: It seems to me like you put a lot of stock in these...things...you surround yourself with. Like they have the power that makes you successful. But maybe the most important thing is here in this vase.

Person 2: What's in the vase?

Person 4: Nothing.

Person 3: I don't get it.

Person 4: Motivation and mental sharpness and good ideas don't live in rabbits' feet and chairs and plants. They're gifts from God. You might find it helpful to connect to an object, but the fact of the matter is that the object itself has no power. You don't know what this vase does for you, and I say if it sparks a conversation about what really matters, it's done all for you it needs to.

Person 1: I have no idea what you're saying right now.

Person 2: Me, neither. (*turns to Person 1*) Shall we continue the tour?

Person 1: Of course! I can't wait to show you my lucky carpet!

(*Person 1 and Person 2 exit*)

Person 3: Wow, that was some real food for thought. I'd love to continue chatting with you about this stuff. Shall we grab a cup of coffee?

Person 4: Sounds great. Let me take you to my lucky coffee shop.

Person 3: (*laughs*) Knock it off.

Person 4: Okay, okay.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

There are lots of ways to understand God.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Christian Bible
- A Hebrew Bible
- A Koran
- Texts from other religious traditions

Background

Paul had a solid understanding of the religious beliefs and customs of other nations. When he met with the Athenians, he quotes their own poets to show how they already have a basic understanding of God, even though they may not know God the way he does.

Kids may come in contact with people who believe different things about God, and may have questions about this. Help kids see how we can all learn more about who God is when we are open to listening to the faith traditions of others.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the Bible. Do they know what it is? Do they know what's in it? The Bible helps us to understand who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

Ask if the kids know anyone who has a different way of understanding God. Friends at school? People in the community? Wonder about how different people from different cultures might understand God. Tell them how in Paul's time, it was no different.

Reflect Together

Show the kids the other religious texts. These texts do the same thing for the people who follow those religious traditions. Do the kids know anyone who follows those traditions?

Paul went to Greece and the people there had lots of different gods, which Paul didn't agree with. But he found things in their tradition that pointed to God and by talking and listening, everyone learned more about who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

How can we listen to others who might have different traditions than us and learn more about God? Share a personal story of when something in someone else's religion informed your own. Encourage kids to listen openly to others from different religious traditions and learn from each other about God.

Close with a prayer asking God to open our minds to listen to and learn from people who understand God differently than we do.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Feathers for kids



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Philippians 1:1-18a

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

¹²I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my

imprisonment is for Christ; ¹⁴and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. ¹⁵Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. ¹⁶These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Secondary Text: Luke 9:46-48

⁴⁶An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, ⁴⁸and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest."

Pronunciation Guide

Philippi: fih-LIHP-ai



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Narrator 1: I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Narrator 2: It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

Narrator 1: And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight

to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Narrator 2: I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.



Partnership in the Gospel, Philippians 1:1-18a

[illegible]



Theme and Liturgy

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Paul let frightened Christians know that even in prison he was doing God's work.

Christians were still being persecuted, even though one of their chief persecutors, Paul, was now proclaiming Christ. It was a scary time, and many were imprisoned simply for being believers.

At the time Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was in prison for preaching Christ. He wrote, thanking the community for supporting him in prayer even as he sat in prison. He also encouraged them by teaching that even though he was immobile, the Holy Spirit was not. God was working to convert non-believers through him, including many who were his captors. Through them the community of Christ continued to grow and gain strength.

At the same time, Paul was a firecracker. He didn't like that there were others preaching Christ differently than he preached Christ—people who were still wandering free! I think it hurt his pride a little that his efforts were limited by his confinement. Even so, he managed to eke out a spot of praise for those who were still able to preach freely. "What does it matter?" At least someone was preaching Christ out there!

One of the beautiful things about Paul was that he was not soft or perfect. He was rough around the edges and it showed in his writing and actions. He was impatient and prideful, crass, and sometimes bitter. But he was one of God's most valuable assets for the spreading of the gospel in early Christianity. It's comforting to know that we need not be perfect (or our idea of what a "perfect" Christian must look like) to serve God. We can shine Christ through us when we are rough around the edges, impatient, prideful, and yes, even immobile. God can do the hard work. Sometimes we just need to show up.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Paul continued to write letters to the Christian communities he helped start, even when he was imprisoned.

Call to Worship

- L: We gather in this place to hear God's word.
C: **We are like eager children, ready to learn.**
L: Let us sing and pray and rejoice in God.
C: **We come with the enthusiasm of the young.**
L: Welcome in the name of Jesus.
C: **Welcome, Jesus, into our midst!**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.

- P: Merciful God,
C: **Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.**
P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: You call us into partnership with you, through the Holy Spirit, in carrying the good news of Jesus' saving love to the ends of the earth. Make us bold to proclaim what you have done for us, and compassionate to all who suffer for your sake. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Nothing can contain your generosity to us, O God. In joyful gratitude for the overflowing abundance you have given us, we offer to you our whole selves, the work of our hands, and our material resources. Use them for the work of proclaiming your love through actions of justice and equity here and around the world. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, you grant us wisdom in ways that the world cannot. Open our ears to listen for your call, that your love might overflow through us into a world desperately in need of your grace. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You spoke a word and brought into being this astonishing universe, our fragile world, and all its teeming life. Make us to be grateful for this gift, and committed to its preservation and care. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You work in partnership with us, Holy Spirit, to act in the world for justice and equity for all that you have made. Hold us and our leaders accountable to one another that all might live in harmony. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We pray for all those living with chronic or terminal illness, addiction, grief, or injuries. Aid all medical professionals and caretakers, and bring healing and wholeness to all in need, (*especially...*) God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We thank you, God, whenever we think of your faithful saints who carried your precious gospel throughout the ages. As their witness has blessed us, so make us a blessing to others, and unite us all in your eternal kingdom. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who sets all prisoners free now invites you to this holy table. Come with your siblings in Christ and meet him in this simple meal of bread and wine, where freedom from sin and death are found. This invitation is for you, no matter who you are.

Litany

- 1: Paul did not care if people preached Jesus for the sake of selfish gain.
- 2: **He only cared that Jesus was being preached at all.**
- 1: Times have changed. Christianity is now normative.
- 2: **Jesus *is* preached for selfish gain, and with hateful words, in our nation and the world.**

- 1: Paul would not recognize this hateful, condemning Jesus being preached.
- 2: **And we cannot accept a gospel that is less than the one of life-affirming love that Jesus proclaimed.**
- 1: Paul went to prison because he would not keep silent.
- 2: **What keeps us from speaking truth to power?**
- 1: Let us not be afraid to proclaim a gospel of all-inclusive, boundary-shattering, life-affirming, just and equitable love for each and every human being without condition or exception.
- 2: **Let the world rage at the truth of this love.**
- 1: God empower us to speak boldly our faith in this kind of love.
- 2: **God help us to trust in your truth.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: None

Person 1: How's your grandma?

Person 2: Hanging in there, I guess. She's been in the hospital for three weeks now.

Person 1: Wow. That's a long time. Is she going to be okay?

Person 2: The doctors say the prognosis is good. But she's going to need lots of care for the next several weeks, and they want to keep an eye on her.

Person 1: How is she not going nuts? She's the most active person I've ever known. And for that matter, how is the universe running without her?

Person 2: (*laughing*) I know, right? But don't worry. She writes letters.

Person 1: To you?

Person 2: To anyone and everyone. Mostly to seniors from our church who are shut-ins.

Person 1: She's a senior who's technically a shut in. And she's writing to others?

Person 2: That's grandma. She won't let something like a long-term hospitalization stop her from sharing love and joy with people who need it.

Person 1: What does she say in her letters to you?

Person 2: She tells me how much she loves me and how proud she is of me. And then she tells me to get to work spreading joy.

Person 1: Wow. Are you following her directions?

Person 2: Doing my best. But nothing like her. Do you know she has all the doctors and nurses on the ward working for her now?

Person 1: What does she have them doing?

Person 2: They're writing letters to shut-ins, too.

Person 1: I bet they're not as enthusiastic about it as your grandma.

Person 2: She doesn't care. As long as people are spreading joy to those who need it most, it doesn't matter what their motives are.

Person 1: Well, I hope she feels better soon and is able to go back home.

Person 2: Me, too. For her sake. But I'm completely inspired by her. It doesn't matter your circumstances; you can make a difference to someone else!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Words can lift people up.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Feathers for kids

Background

Paul planted churches throughout his missionary journeys. One of the churches he planted was in Philippi. This letter to the Philippians celebrated their partnership in spreading the gospel through their work in the church.

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter with Timothy. Contrary to what we might expect, Paul was in quite high spirits in prison, having converted a number of the imperial guard, who were elite Roman soldiers charged with protecting the Roman emperor and his family.

Set the Scene

Wonder with the kids what it feels like to get in trouble. When they feel that way, would it be easy to help someone else feel better? Tell them that just like last week, when Paul was in jail with Silas, when he wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, he was in jail again because of what he was teaching the people. But even though he was in jail, he had amazing things to say to others.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder about how Paul was able to “rejoice” when he was in jail. What things made him rejoice?

Wonder with the kids about how Paul’s words to the church in Philippi would have made them feel. Talk about how positive words can lift people up, just like a breath of fresh air. Hold up a feather and blow under it to make it lift into the air. Pass out the feathers and have the kids join you in trying to keep the feathers in the air. Make the connection with the feathers and the idea of being “uplifting.” What are some ways we can help other people feel lifted up with our words or actions?

Was it easy to keep the feathers in the air? Is it sometimes hard work to be uplifting to others? But is it worth it? (*Yes!*)

Close with a prayer asking God to help us lift each other up with our words and actions.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Award
- Trophy
- Blue ribbon



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Philippians 2:1-13

2If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Secondary Text: Luke 6:43-45

⁴³“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Narrator 2: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Narrator 1: who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

Narrator 2: but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

Narrator 1: And being found in human form,
he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Narrator 2: Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

Narrator 1: so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Narrator 2: and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Narrator 1: Therefore, my beloved, just as you have
always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much
more now in my absence, work out your own
salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is
at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work
for his good pleasure.



The Christ Hymn, Philippians 2:1-13

A large word cloud shaped like the letters 'JESUS'. The words are in various sizes and orientations, all in black. The words include: 'JESUS', 'Love', 'Life', 'Name', 'Form', 'Being', 'Born', 'Died', 'Risen', 'Ascended', 'Seated at the right hand of the Father', 'For us', 'And for our redemption', 'Who gave himself for us', 'That he might purify to himself a peculiar people', 'Zealous of good works', 'Who loved his church', 'And himself', 'That he might sanctify and cleanse it', 'By the word of his own water with the word of his own blood', 'That he might present to himself the church', 'A holy church', 'Without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind', 'That he might cleanse to himself a peculiar people', 'Who are zealous of good works', 'Who loved his church', 'And himself', 'That he might sanctify and cleanse it', 'By the word of his own water with the word of his own blood', 'That he might present to himself the church', 'A holy church', 'Without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind', 'That he might cleanse to himself a peculiar people', 'Who are zealous of good works'. Other words include: 'Spirit', 'Holy', 'Ghost', 'Paraclete', 'Comforter', 'Advocate', 'Helper', 'Witness', 'Intercessor', 'Savior', 'Redeemer', 'Healer', 'Teacher', 'Lord', 'Master', 'King', 'God', 'Father', 'Son', 'Savior', 'Redeemer', 'Healer', 'Teacher', 'Lord', 'Master', 'King', 'God', 'Father', 'Son'.



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The Christ Hymn demonstrates how we can be both humble and exalted, and we can honor God in both states.

Paul wrote to the Philippians at a time when the Christian community was coming apart. They were listening to a variety of evangelists that were sometimes proclaiming contradictory ideas about Christ. While Paul was one of the most effective missionaries that we know (and he believed himself to be), he also recognized that the infighting could not be sustained. He crafted what we call the Christ Hymn, an incredible testament to the power of words to uplift, encourage, and inspire.

In it, Paul encouraged people to imagine the essence of Christ and then seek to emulate Christ. The first of these characteristics was humility. Indeed, if the Christian community of Philippi was to survive, it would have to keep its pride in check. Paul wrote that Christ—in the form of God—was not too prideful for humility. He emptied himself, and the very act of becoming human was an exercise in humility. It was unexpected and hard to wrap their heads around the concept that any god, much less Creator God, would allow God's self to be humbled into a human form. Yet here God was doing just that. It was the ultimate expression of humility and love.

In the very act of humbling himself into human form, Jesus then became the very essence of one deserving

of being highly exalted. By being simultaneously humbled and exalted, Jesus showed that we do not need to be wholly anything to be worthy of the title of God's children.

Too often we are taught in the church that there is one right way to be. We should be humble, but not so much that our righteousness becomes a stumbling block for others. We should be joyful, but not too joyful lest we slip into pride. We should be exuberant in our expression of worship and love for God, but also keep it in the closet so we don't look like we boast.

Maybe we just stop it, and recognize that we can be many things and still be worthy of Christ. We can be humble, kind, and strong like Jesus. We can also be rough around the edges, impatient, and jealous like Paul. We can be joyful and grieved, creative and stumped, explosive and mild, loud and quiet, humble and exalted. We are worthy of Christ simply because we already have been made in God's image, and that is enough.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Jesus was both humbled and exalted by God, a living testament to God's unfailing love.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: We come to this place as walking contradictions,
C: Joyful, sorrowful, humble, proud, kind, frustrated.
L: God sees, knows, and loves us as we are.
C: We praise our God for God's loving grace.

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
P: Merciful God,
C: Give us the willingness to be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with you about the ways in which we have caused harm in this world. Give us the openness to see where our actions or failures to act have led to pain in those closest to us and in those far away. Do not let us sink further into self-harm through self-blame and hatred, but give us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to return to you again and again for forgiveness.
P: 'The risen God has raised you to newness of life in Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Exalted God,
C: You set aside your glory and became one of us; not just a human being, but one who chose to live a life of poverty on the margins of society, and who ultimately died by state violence. In so humbling yourself, you destroyed sin and death and utterly transformed all of creation. Keep us ever mindful of your incomprehensible act of love and mercy for the sake of us all. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

No offering can equal your own, O Christ, when you gave yourself completely on our behalf. We humbly ask that you would accept what we can offer out of the gratitude of our hearts. Bless these gifts and our service in your name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: As Christ humbled himself, even though he was
divine, so may we learn humility, O God. Show us
where we are blind to ourselves and ignorant of
the harm we do to others, and make us a blessing
rather than a burden to those we serve. God of
new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: At the name of Jesus, all creation stands in awe.
As a child instinctively knows its parent, so does
all of earth and heaven know its Creator. Make us
to care for creation as our beloved sibling, which
it is. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As creation is united in praise of you, unite our
fractured communities, nations, and world in a
shared commitment to the rights and flourishing
of each and every living thing. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Christ of suffering and pain, of resurrection and
restoration, be close to those who need to know
your healing presence, (*especially...*) God of new
life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: As your saints lived their lives to you, so give us a
purpose to which we would dedicate our own
lives. Hearten us by their steadfast example and
join us in eternal communion when our race is
completed. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, whose name is exalted above all names, humbly
invites you to join him in this simple meal of bread
and wine. With your siblings in his name, come as you
are to be nourished in love. All are welcome at this
table.

Litany

1: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

2: Do not look to your own interests.

1: Have the kind of humility Jesus had.

2: How impossible this sounds!

1: But there is good news for all of us.

2: For it is God who is at work in us.

1: Therefore we can bear good fruit,

2: According to God's will for us.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (junior high or high school age)

Props: None

Coach: Okay, team. It's time to elect a new captain, now that Sage has graduated.

Kid 1: Whoa. No one can follow Sage. They were the best captain this team has ever had.

Kid 2: I don't know. [Kid 3] is the best defensive player on the team.

Kid 3: And [Kid 4] is the best offensive player.

Kid 4: [Kid 1] raised more than anyone at the team fund-raiser last year.

Kid 1: But [Kid 2] organized that charity game, which was so cool for the community.

Kid 2: Coach, why are you grinning like that?

Coach: Because you're all making me so happy right now.

Kid 3: Why? We can't even figure out who should be captain.

Coach: Exactly. None of you is trying to hog the spotlight. You remind me a lot of Sage.

Kid 4: Sage never acted like they were better than anyone else on the team. Even though they were.

Kid 1: A lot better. And they always listened to you, Coach. Even when they didn't agree with the play you'd called.

Kid 2: I mean, it's no wonder they were elected team captain.

Kid 3: And won multiple awards not just for athletics, but for community service and leadership.

Coach: Yep. I'm glad you're all willing to take a page out of Sage's playbook going forward. If we can all work with that spirit of humility and generosity, we'll have another amazing season!

Kid 4: But we still don't have a captain.

Kid 1: How 'bout we just draw a name out of a hat?

Kid 2: Great idea!

Kid 3: I think so, too.

Kid 4: I love this team.

Coach: And I couldn't be prouder of you all.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus was humble.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Award
- Trophy
- Blue ribbon

Background

This Philippians text includes what might be the oldest Christian hymn in existence. The hymn lifted up what it meant to be in the same mind with Christ. These qualities included surrender, humility, and obedience. Because of these things, God exalted Jesus so that all things in heaven and on earth would praise and honor him. By emulating Christ we too, can honor God and be honored by God.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to live into the kind of life described in the hymn so that God would be honored through their work and their lives.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the awards and ask them if they have ever gotten first place at something. It's pretty cool to win, isn't it? Jesus tells us it is even cooler to help others win.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids what it would be like to be the absolute best at something—like winning every race. What if they were a king or queen, like Jesus is the ruler of all creation. Or what if they were God? What would it be like to be that powerful or important? How do they think they would act toward other people?

How did Jesus act? What were some of the things he did? (*healed, served others, washed feet, etc.*) Jesus was all about helping others. He didn't brag about himself. He was humble. To be humble means not seeing yourself as any better or any worse than anyone else. Even though Jesus was God, and the king of all, he loved and served others.

Encourage the kids to think about ways they can help other put other people first: save the best seat or the biggest slice of pizza for someone else, go out of their way to compliment someone for no reason, etc. Every time we think about others first instead of ourselves, we are living in the example of Jesus, and there is no better way to live.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us be humble; to see ourselves as no better or worse than anyone else, and to serve others in all we do.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A birthday cake (be aware of food allergies)
- Knife
- Paper plates, forks, napkins
- Party hats



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Acts 2:1-21

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet

Joel: ¹⁷"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Additional Text: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Secondary Text: John 14:16-17

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.



Scripture Readings

Pronunciation Guide

Parthians: PAHR-thee-uhnz

Medes: MEEDZ

Elamites: EE-luh-maits

Mesopotamia: mehs-o-po-TAY-mih-uh

Judea: dzhou-DEE-uh

Cappadocia: kap-ih-DO-shee-uh

Pontus: PAHN-tus

Phrygia: FRIH-dzhih-uh

Pamphylia: pam-FIHL-ih-uh

Cyrene: sai-REE-neh

Cretans: KREE-tihnz

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jew 1, Jew 2, Peter

Narrator: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked,

Jew 1: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and

residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Narrator: All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another,

Jew 2: “What does this mean?”

Narrator: But others sneered and said,

Jew 1: “They are filled with new wine.”

Narrator: But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them,

Peter: “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”



Pentecost; Rejoice in the Lord, Acts 2:1-21; Philippians 4:4-7

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The first Pentecost was an incredible event of unity in and under Christ.

Jerusalem was a capital that housed and hosted people from all over the land. They brought a variety of cultures and spoke different languages. They had gathered together in one place 50 days following Jesus' resurrection and Christianity was being birthed. When a wind came and filled the house, all those gathered began to understand what was being preached about Christ, even though they spoke different languages. It was perplexing and wondrous.

A tale is told of a time early in humanity's history when people started to become too prideful. They believed they could be just like God if they could build a tower high enough into the heavens to reach God. As punishment for their hubris, God jumbled their tongues and they scattered across the land unable to communicate, therefore unable to finish the tower. This was the Tower of Babel. The muddling of languages is a symbol of how the pridefulness of humanity led to division among the people.

It's fitting then, that the birthing of Christianity would be the place where the unity of humanity is represented by the melding of languages. Communication is the first key to the building of community.

Have you ever noticed that when a rich person speaks two or more languages they are considered cultured and well-traveled, but when a poor person speaks two or more languages, they are considered parasites? Let me be more clear. When a person of means enters the United States, for example, from Germany or France or Spain, speaking English with a thick accent, we consider them exotic. But when a person with little enters the United States from Central or South America speaking English with a thick accent, we consider them migrants preparing to be a drain on the American system.

This Pentecost might be a great opportunity to check our privilege. The melding of languages in this story is a sign that God has empowered us to communicate, and with communication comes understanding, then tolerance, then acceptance, and then love. Take a moment today to honor all those in your midst that come to worship with a different accent and celebrate that God has gifted your community this opportunity to move from basic communication to love.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

The Holy Spirit melded the languages of the people gathered as Christianity was birthed in that moment.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Rejoice in the Lord always!

C: Again, I will say, rejoice!

L: Do not worry about anything,

**C: But in everything by prayer with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.**

L: And the peace of God, which passes all
understanding,

**C: Will guard your hearts and your minds in
Christ Jesus.**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

**C: Give us the willingness to be honest with
ourselves, with one another, and with you
about the ways in which we have caused
harm in this world. Give us the openness to
see where our actions or failures to act have
led to pain in those closest to us and in those
far away. Do not let us sink further into self-
harm through self-blame and hatred, but give
us the courage to set right our wrongs, and to
return to you again and again for forgiveness.**

P: The risen God has raised you to newness of life in
Jesus' name. You are in Christ a new creation, and
God forgives you every wrong. Celebrate with all
of creation a world redeemed, and lavish the love
you have received on all that is. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy Spirit,

**C: You alone are the source of all wisdom and
understanding. By your guidance, open our
minds to learn from our neighbors of every
language and culture around the world, that
in so doing we might find you everywhere we
look, and treat all of creation with the same
lovingkindness we would want to receive
ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, in your boundless generosity, you
provide your children with daily bread. In joyful
gratitude we give back this portion of what you have
given us, that you would use these, our gifts, to shine
your love on all of creation. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With renewed confidence in your power and love,
we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy Spirit, you move within and among your
people. Make us eager to go where you are
sending us and open to being transformed by
your power. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: The giving of the Holy Spirit is a cosmic event,
encompassing not only all people, but all of
creation. Give us a vision as wide as we can
handle, that we never set our sights too small in
carrying out your work of justice and love. God
of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As the church celebrates its birthday, we give
thanks for our worshipping community, for all the
blessings we receive from it, and all the ways we
can contribute to it. Strengthen congregations,
their leaders, synods, church bodies, and all whose
primary work is to magnify your name in all the
earth. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Spirit of life, pour out your healing upon each and
every one of us, those with visible and invisible
ailments, and those too afraid to ask for help,
(*especially...*) God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: For saints of all tongues, tribes, and traditions, we
thank you. For every challenge and every joy that
lies ahead, we bring our gratitude and ask your
protective power. Make us one, O God, as only
you can. God of new life,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and
gather them into your loving arms, for the sake of
our risen savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come, invites
each and every one of you to this table, to share in
this holy meal with your siblings in his name both
here in this community and around the world. Come
take your place among the fellowship of all believers
in this foretaste of the great feast which has no end.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany/Creative Expression

As a creative expression, invite members of your congregation who speak languages other than English to translate portions of the following litany into the other languages they speak. Consider ways to incorporate other aspects of the cultures in which those languages are spoken, such as traditional clothing, musical instruments, decorations, etc. Consider letting the international festivities spill over into your fellowship time with food and other culturally specific activities.

1: Rejoice in God always!

2: We rejoice in our triune God!

1: Again, I say, "Rejoice!"

2: We rejoice in our triune God!

1: Be gentle to all of creation.

2: Our God is always near to us.

1: Do not worry about anything,

2: But let God know what you need.

1: The peace of God is impossible for humans to understand.

2: That peace is ours in Jesus Christ.

1: Happy birthday to the church on earth!

2: Happy birthday to the Body of Christ that is all people!

1: Let us celebrate this festival with joyful praise.

2: Alleluia! Thanks be to God!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Happy birthday to the Church!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Party hats
- A birthday cake (be aware of food allergies)
- Knife
- Paper plates, forks, napkins

Background

Pentecost means “fifty.” Originally, Jews would have gathered fifty days after Passover to celebrate the wheat harvest. Today, Christians celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Easter to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early believers.

The variety of languages to which the Holy Spirit revealed itself, and Peter’s quoting of the prophecy, in which men and women, young and old, slaves and free, all received the word, indicated how widespread the message was about to become.

Set the Scene

Give the kids the party hats and show them the cake. Wonder with the kids whose birthday it might be. Have them guess a few times.

Tell them you’ll give them the answer after you read the story.

Reflect Together

Any more guesses as to whose birthday it is? The clue is in the last sentence that “Many people became followers of Jesus that day.”

It’s the Church’s birthday! Or, at least, lots of people see it that way. Before then, there was no set group of people who followed Jesus other than his closest disciples. But after Pentecost, there was a growing community of people who followed in what was then called “The Way” of Jesus.

And guess what? We’re still following in The Way of Jesus more than 2,000 years later! That’s something worth celebrating!

Lead the kids and congregation in singing “Happy Birthday” to the church. Tell the kids you’ll meet them out back to cut them a piece of cake a little later.

Close with a prayer thanking God for the birthday of the church.

Next Week’s Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



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