

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Fourth Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Luke 15:11b-32

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: Come, let us adore him. (Antiphon for Lent, Book of Common Prayer, page 81.) And what if, during this season of Lent, we sought a deeper understanding of this amazing gospel of grace? Will that image of grace energize us to do the spiritual housekeeping we need to be ready for the "new thing" God is doing in Easter?

A notation for this week's Gospel

Tax collectors, who are sinners, invited to the table? Shocking! So Jesus tells them a story: A son who blows an inheritance and a father who forgives before the son even has a chance to ask. What might we discover about the gospel of grace?

Theme: Amazing grace

Before Class: The elder brother does not make an appearance in the version of the story we suggest for younger children so that they can focus on the concept of unconditional love. However, your experience working with the children you teach may lead to tell the rest of the story. Bring to class a robe or a coat, fancy enough for the children to enjoy, but one you are comfortable sharing. Also bring a costume jewelry ring; it does not matter that it will be large on a child's finger. A handful of coins will help you tell the story. You will also need paper and crayons, and if you have it on hand, gold glitter for the ring. If you have left plants at church, check to be sure they have had sufficient water.

Beginning: Invite the children to help you set up the altar and place the robe in front of it. Put the ring on the altar.

Praying: Thank you, God, that you love us even when we do silly things. Thank you for stories that tell us of your love. Amen.

The Story: Luke 11-24. (Have the coins in hand as you tell the story.) This is a story about a boy who had a plan. He was sure he could go off and live his life all by himself. So he said to his Father, "Dad, I want my allowance because I have something I want to do and I can do it all by myself." Well, the Dad said okay and gave the boy his allowance. Off the boy went, the coins rattling in his pocket. One thing took some of his money (slip a few coins into your other hand and pocket the coins). The next thing took more of his money (keep going until you are empty-handed.) His idea did not work. He couldn't do everything all by himself, and now he was completely out of money. What to do? He decided he would go back to his Dad, tell his Dad that he had really blown it, and he would work to replace the money he had lost. As he was walking slowly and sadly back home, his Dad looked out the window and saw him coming. "Wow!" said the Dad. "He's back! He's safe! I am so happy!" And the Dad raced out to grab his son and give him a huge hug! The boy didn't even have a chance to say that he was sorry, that he made a mistake. (Tell the children you need a volunteer to pretend to be the boy.) He put a beautiful

robe on his son (place robe on child) and a fabulous ring on his finger (place ring). The father said, “Wow, let's have a party. My son is back home!”

Activity: Invite the children to act out this story. Tell them we can do the story enough times for each person to be the child and each person to be the father, if they want. Give them the coins, the robe, and the ring and sit back to be entertained.

Option: Invite the children to wonder with you about the story. I wonder what it was like to be the son? I wonder what it was like to be the father? I wonder who the child could be in this story? I wonder who the father could be in this story?

Reflect with them. Jesus is like the father who will always welcome us home. It doesn't matter how many times we mess up, if we return to God, with our “sorries” on our heart, we will always be welcomed home.

Give the children pieces of paper cut to fit in the basket on your altar. Offer crayons and glitter, if you have it. Ask them to illustrate this story to take home or place in the basket on the altar.

Getting Closure: Gather the children around your altar. Invite them to share what they have drawn or illustrated, paying attention to anything you might want to add to the prayer at the end.

Closing Prayer: Loving God, we thank you for all that you have given us and for always welcoming us back home, even if we mess up. Help us remember you are always there for us. Amen.

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