

Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Third Sunday in Lent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: John 2:13-22

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Events teach. Often the learning comes after the event. Jesus teaches with elements that have immediate impact as well as lingering meaning. And they usually land well outside the expected. So, with Passover looming, Jesus goes into the busy temple and proceeds to clean house. "Take these things out of here!" he demands of the money changers, the animal merchants – even those who sold doves. Then he announces: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." A temple that took 46 years to build? Could he mean the temple God has been building since the beginning of time? What "things" need to be removed from our own personal temples?

Theme: Cleaning the Temple

Before Class: Be sure you have fresh sandpaper if children are going to be sanding the cross. Make copies of the verse for the children to either learn or illustrate.

Beginning: If it is possible, take the children on a short field trip. Telling them to tip-toe and whisper if a service is going on in church as you travel, take the children to the entrance of your church. Ask them to look around and notice – without talking – what they can see. (Coat racks? A table with papers on it? A coffee pot?) Then tip-toe back to your classroom. Ask the children what they saw. If they missed something you saw, offer it.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for our church. Lots of people work to make it possible for us to come here, go to church, have Sunday School, get babies baptized, and people married. Thank you for the people who take care of our church. Amen.

The Story (John 2: 13-16): We saw the way our church looks. This story is about a church that Jesus went to visit. Instead of the things we saw (and remind them of what they have seen) he saw something that was really a mess. Instead of coat racks, there were people selling cows, and goats, and even birds! And other people were going up to tables and handing in their money and getting lots of change. What a mess! A noisy, mess, thought Jesus. All of this mess was getting in the way of worshipping God. So, Jesus decided to clean up the mess and he sent all those noisy people out of the church. "Take these things out of here! They do not belong in a church."

What Goes in a Church: Invite the children to draw the temple as a mess – before Jesus got there or what it looked like after Jesus cleaned it up. Or, they could draw a picture of what our church looked like when we tiptoed to look. You draw along with them and engage them in conversation about what they are drawing. You could ask them what kinds of things go on INSIDE our church (particularly if they are not usually there for a church service.)

Sanding the Cross: Some children may want to take a turn sanding the wood of the cross.

Prayer: If you are choosing to teach the children a new prayer or memorized verse each week, or if you are offering it to them as words to illustrate, here is a suggestion for today:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

You could tell them that we say this a lot in church to get our attention: the leader says the first and the last lines, and the people say the one in the middle. You might also tell the children that Jesus told us that whenever two or three people are together to pray, that Jesus will be right there in the middle of them. These words help us remember that.

Getting Closure: Ask the children what they would like to do with the pictures they drew. Or get comments on the sanding of the cross. Do they want to hang up the pictures in the classroom, take them home, or tell someone in church what they saw?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for our church, for the people who take care of it for us, and for the people who come to this church. Amen.

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