

Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Proper 13 (A)

Old Testament: Genesis 32:22-31

BACKGROUND

The Season After Pentecost is the longest season of the church year, spanning almost half the calendar year. The weeks after Pentecost are called Ordinary Time coming from the word “ordinal” which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The liturgical color of the season is green. It is often thought of as a season of growth both in our personal faith and in the life of the church. Common themes to focus on throughout the season are:

- Our relationship with God.
- Our relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another through our prayers, the sacraments and life in the body of Christ.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- The Church and its work for God’s mission.

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK’S READING

The Book of Genesis provides the foundational stories of our faith, God’s calling of a people, their often failed responses to God, and God’s steadfast love throughout. The Abraham Saga tells of the formation of Israel, beginning with the faithfulness of its patriarch Abraham. Although disillusioned with the wickedness of men, God separates out one family line to bring divine blessing to all subsequent families of the world. Abraham, the model of absolute faithfulness, trust, and obedience is symbolic of Israel’s idealized self. At the request of God, Abraham has left his homeland to travel to a promised land. God promises an heir even though Abraham and his wife Sarah are long past childbearing age. Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Isaac marries Rebekah who gives birth to twins, Esau and Jacob. Jacob has tricked his brother Esau out of his birthright, and blessing. Jacob left home to escape his bother and to find a wife. After working for his uncle Laban for twenty years, Jacob, all his livestock and property, his two wives and 11 children set out to return to his homeland. On the way, Jacob would like to make peace with Esau. Hoping to appease his brother, Jacob sends servants ahead with large gifts of herds. A messenger returns with the news that Esau, accompanied by four hundred men, is coming to meet Jacob. Fearing the worst, Jacob divides his flocks and people into two companies, so that if harm comes to the first, he will at least still have the second. That night Jacob sends his two wives, their maids, all the children and everything he owns across a stream for safety. Jacob waits alone through the night. The place name of Peniel is explained. The injury to Jacob is the reason certain cuts of meat are not eaten. Jacob’s new name signifies a new self. Jacob the supplanter becomes Israel, which probably means God rules. [According to the Oxford Annotated Bible, 1977.]

THEME

Lifelong Faith Journey

BEFORE CLASS

Prepare a square that says Israel for the God Creates a Great Nation chart. (See Attachment One.)

BEGINNING

Gather children together with an invitation to sit in a circle on the floor or around a table. Make sure to welcome newcomers, and introduce them to the group. If it is your parish practice to wear nametags, make sure children participate in that practice as well.

Invite them into discussion. I wonder if you have ever had a fight or an argument with someone you loved? Can you remember how you felt if time passed and you hadn't made peace with each other yet? What if you were the one who had done wrong? What if nighttime came and it was time for sleep and you still had this on your mind? What kind of a night do you think you would have? Remember Jacob and the bad tricks he played on his brother Esau? Today's story begins on the night before Jacob and Esau see each other for the first time in twenty years. I wonder how Jacob is feeling?

OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord, Open our hearts to forgiveness. Help us to ask others for it when we have done wrong and to offer forgiveness freely to those who hurt us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE STORY: GENESIS 32:22-31

Twenty years is a long time. A lot can happen to a person. They can grow up, marry, have children, and work hard. If a person has faith, says their prayers, and keeps their heart open to God, God can help a person grow into a better adult. God had made promises to Jacob and Jacob listened. Jacob's proud heart was softening. He wanted to go home again. He wanted to see his family again. Most of all Jacob wanted to make peace with Esau. Jacob sent messengers to his brother. He also sent gifts of herds of cows, sheep and donkeys. The word came back to Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him, and he would have 400 men with him. What do you think Jacob thought this meant? Jacob prayed to God, reminding God of the promise he had made to Jacob. God had promised to do good for Jacob, and he would make Jacob's children and grandchildren and great grandchildren as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach. (You may read directly from the Bible at this point, but continue to Gen. 33:1-11.)

That night Jacob sent his wives and children and flocks to the other side of the stream for safety. Jacob waited alone.

A strange man came along. He wrestled with Jacob until the sun was about to come up. When the man saw that he would not win against Jacob he hit Jacob on his hip socket so that Jacob's hip was put out of joint as they wrestled. Then the man said, "Let me go for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked, "What is your name?" He answered, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob. You shall be called Israel. Your new name means you have struggled with God and with humans and you have not given up." The man would not tell Jacob his name, but he did give Jacob a blessing before he left. So Jacob called the place Peniel, which means I have seen God face to face and yet my life was spared.

Jacob went off limping to meet his brother Esau. With a humble heart Jacob bowed before Esau. Esau ran towards Jacob and hugged him and kissed him. Jacob introduced Esau to his wives and children. Jacob told Esau that seeing his brother's forgiving face was like seeing the face of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- I wonder how Jacob felt when he was all alone.
- I wonder who the man could have been. (Depending on their answers and level of understanding you might explain that God sends messengers. Some people call them angels.)
- What is a blessing? (Wishing God's very best for someone.)
- Names were very important to the people in the Bible and are important for us too. When God claimed someone for God's own God would change the person's name. Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah and now Jacob becomes Israel. (Put the card for Israel over Jacob on the family chart.) Do you know the story of how you got your name? Perhaps we can ask your parents.

ACTIVITIES

Game: Jacob and the Man

This is a variation of Duck, Duck, Goose. Have the children sit on the floor in a circle. Choose the first child to be "the man". The man goes around the circle tapping each child counting out J, A, C, O. When "the man" gets to B that child gets up. "The man" chases the Jacob child around the circle. If he catches Jacob, the man says "You are no longer Jacob. You have struggled with God and not given up. You are now Israel. Sit with your tribes." The child returns to his place and "the man" gets to go again. If Jacob outruns "the man", then "the man sits in Jacob's place and the Jacob child gets to become the next man who goes around the circle counting out the letters.

Who Am I?

Names are powerful, and say a lot about who a person is. Let's play a game about names. I will describe someone and if you know who it is, say the person's name. The teacher gives an example. [I am wearing sneakers. I have freckles, and red hair. I like to draw. Who am I?] Let the children take turns describing one another. Remind them to be kind, and only say nice things about the other person.

TEACH: THE LORD'S PRAYER

This is the prayer that Jesus taught when people asked Him how to pray. It teaches us to forgive others just like God forgives us. Make sure the children understand the harder words. Use the version that is used in your church.

GETTING CLOSURE

Have the children help put all supplies away and return to the circle.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you for being with us in everything that happens to us. Help us to be strong like Jacob, and forgiving like Jesus. Amen.

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Abraham's Family Tree

