

Gospel Lesson for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-46

In this season after Pentecost, we hear stories of Jesus' ministry in the world and our call to engage in that mission. This season is also known as 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 color for this season is green and it is often referred to as the green growing time as we hear stories of what God is calling us to do in the world, we join in that call, and we grow in our faith.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Today's lesson is found near the end of Matthew as conflict between Jesus and the people around him reaches its height. Those that oppose his ministry are still trying to get him to trip up – to go against the religious or secular laws and Jesus will not fall into that trap. Today's question from them is no different. The Pharisees ask which commandment is the greatest and Jesus responds with Judaism's most fundamental passage known as the Shema: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Deuteronomy 6:5) However he does not leave it at that. He adds that another Scripture is "like it," "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." In putting these two commandments together, Jesus is able to condense the 613 Hebrew Laws and the Ten Commandments into two laws. These two laws encapsulate his ministry on earth and tell all those around him what is important. Those who love God, must love what God has created – ourselves and others. The 613 Hebrew Laws (although that number and which exact laws are included in that is up for dispute) all look at relationship to God, each other, and ourselves. They

describe how we honor and worship God, how we rest on the Sabbath, how we deal with disputes and laws, and how we treat people. All of these laws, in the most broad terms, are encapsulated in The Great Commandments that Jesus outlines in today's lesson.

The question Jesus asks them about whose son the Messiah is a way of engaging them in further conversation about God and God's expansiveness. Jesus wants them to think bigger, wants them to understand that God is more than they can imagine, that the Messiah surpasses the lineage as they know it.

Theme: The Greatest Commandments

Before: You will need copies of the Scripture for each child.

God Stones: medium size rocks, paint, paint brushes, permanent markers, cups of water

Love Chain: strips of paper 1-2 inches wide in a variety of colors, markers or pens, tape or staplers

Prepare:

God Stones: Wash the rocks so there isn't any dirt on them. Make sure you have enough paint to go around. You can use plates to create a paint tray for each child or for two children to share. You will need cups of water for them to rinse their brushes in once they are done with a color.

Love Chain: Cut the strips of paper before the children arrive. Make sure you have plenty of tape and/or staplers to go around so they can work away as they create their chains.

Beginning: Welcome the children into the room and have them sit in your gathering area. Ask them if they have rules that they have to live by at home, school or in other things that they do. Why do we have rules?

Opening Prayer: *Loving God, be with us today as we hear your word. Let your love be engraved in our hearts that we may always love you and love others as you have taught us to do. Help us to experience and feel your love, help us to give and share your love in the world. Amen.*

The Story: Matthew 22:34-46

In the Bible we hear stories of many people. These people are just like us, they eat and sleep, go to school and work. God has a plan for each of them, and in hearing the stories we learn that God's plan is for each of us too.

Invite three children to read the Narrator, Jesus, and the Pharisee. (see script below)

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what you remembered most about this story?
- The Pharisees asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment. I wonder what a commandment is?
- I wonder if you remember the commandments that Jesus told them?
- I wonder why Jesus said that those were the greatest?
- I wonder how we can live out these commandments?

God Stones with Symbols of God

In today's lesson, Jesus gave us the foundational commandments, the greatest commandments that are the foundation of all other commandments. These are the rules given to us by God to lead a life centered in love of God and love of each other. Because these are foundational, we are going to create foundations rocks to help us remember these rules that were given to us by God.

Brainstorm with the children ways that they could depict loving God with heart, soul, and mind and loving their neighbors. Give each child two rocks

to paint. One to remind them to love God with heart, soul and mind. The other to remind them to love others as they love themselves.

If you have time at the end of the lesson, have them share their rocks with one another.

Love chain

In today's lesson, Jesus tells us that the two greatest rules or commandments that we can keep are to love God with our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. There are many ways that we can do that. I wonder in what ways you live out these commandments? Give the children time to respond and write them up on a board.

We are going to create a love chain to help us see ALL of the ways in which we can love God and love each other. We are going to take some time to decorate and write upon these slips of paper. When you are done, attach the ends together to create a circle. Do the next slip and attach it to the other by passing the slip through the circle before you attach the ends together.

Getting Closure: When the children are coming to the end of their time, gather them back together and have them share a few of their ideas of how we can love God and love each other. Attach all of the chains together and hang it up to remind them of this each week.

Closing Prayer: *Gracious God, We thank you for our time together today. Thank you for our time together today. As we leave this place, help us to love you with our mind, heart and soul and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.*

Matthew 22:34-46

Narrator: When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

Pharisee: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Narrator: Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

Jesus: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

Pharisee: "The son of David."

Jesus: "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

Narrator: No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

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