

Gospel Lesson for Younger 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 Lamps: paper, tissue paper, scissors, glue, art supplies, markers, plain plates or white paper bags

Prepare:

God Stones: You will need to wash the rocks off so that there isn't any dirt on them. Make sure you have enough paints 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 Lamps: Have the paper and supplies out and ready to go.

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.

Read Matthew 22:34-46.

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

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 foundation rocks to help us remember these rules that were given to us by God.

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.

Love Lamps

In today's lesson, we hear Jesus talking about the two greatest rules to follow – to love God with our heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In focusing our lives around these two rules, we will be able to see God's light shining in our lives more clearly.

To help us remember these rules and remember God's love for us, we are going to create Love Lamps today.

Each of you will receive a sheet of paper. I invite you to cut out shapes and decorate one side of it in ways that will remind you of these two great commandments – to love God and love one another. When we are done decorating them, we are going to join them in a circle and put them on a plate. When you get home, you and your parents can put a candle in the middle of the paper and light it at meal times to remind you of God's commandments and God's love for you.

NOTE: You can also do this by having them decorate paper bags that will turn into luminaria.

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. Invite them to share their work.

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.*

Written by The Rev. Shannon Kelly