

Gospel Lesson for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

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

This is the culmination of Jesus' teaching in Matthew, (and for us it is also the finale of the church year) and Jesus does not mince words telling those gathered around him about what we are all called to do and what we all can do each and everyday. This is not rocket science. It's about treating each person we meet as if they were Jesus, because they are and therefore should be given all the same respect and honor as our Lord.

Note: This is also the last day in the church year, so Option 2 of the lesson focuses a bit more on that if you wish to help the children prepare for the New Year we begin next Sunday on the First Sunday in Advent.

Theme: Service and Giving Thanks

Before: You will want to look over the wide variety of ideas and narrow them down so you can think through what supplies you may need. Depending on which activity you choose, you will need long lengths of streamers or ribbon for each child in a color they can write upon, Notecards or nice paper, envelopes, strips of paper, markers, crayons, pens, stapler or tape.

Beginning: Welcome the children into the room and have them sit in your gathering area. Ask how their week was and what they had for dinner the night before or breakfast that morning.

Opening Prayer: *Loving God, we thank you for our time together to hear your word and learn more about you. Be with us as we discover more about you and what it means to live with you in our lives. Amen.*

The Story: Matthew 25:31-46

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 25:31-46. Note: A great resource for this story is Archbishop Desmond Tutu's Children of God Storybook Bible.

Reflection Questions

- I wonder what you remember about our story today?
- I wonder what message Jesus was trying to get across?
- I wonder what it meant when Jesus said, "just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Imagine a World

Have the children imagine what the world might look like if we all did as Jesus tells us in our lesson today. Imagine what it would be like if the hungry were fed, the thirsty were given something to drink, the stranger was welcomed, the naked were given clothing, the sick were taken care of and the people in prison were visited.

What would that world look like? How would be different than it is now? Allow the children time to respond

How can we as individuals or how can we as a group make a difference?
How can we live out this call that Jesus gave us today? Allow the children time to respond

Have the children research, brainstorm, and create ways that they can do as Jesus instructs them today. (There is a sheet at the end of this lesson with loads of ideas that you can look at and get inspiration from as you ask these questions.) How can they feed the hungry? How can they give drink to the thirsty? How can they welcome a stranger? How can they give the naked clothing? How can they take care of the sick? How can they visit those in prison?

Have them think about how they can do this as an individual AND as a GROUP? Might your group of children take on a service project for the remainder of the year?

Have the children come up with a game plan for the next few weeks you have together or for the next year? How can we live into this vision that Jesus has for us to all take care of one another as a part of our calling as children of God? (Once the children decide on their action plan, you will need to communicate with their families so they know what you talked about today and what the children want to do to live into this Gospel lesson. Make sure you invite the families to get involved and educate them as to what you will be doing.)

*Today would be a great day to have children and members of the congregation bring with them non-perishable food for a local food pantry or for a Thanksgiving food drive.

It's the End of the Year, For What Do You Give Thanks?

This is the final session of our church year, so it's like our New Year's Eve! Why would that be? Allow the children time to respond

Next Sunday is the First Sunday in Advent, which marks the beginning of the Church Year. So today is our day to think about the people and things that we want to give thanks for as we think back over the last year.

I wonder, what are some people or things you want to give thanks for? Allow the children time to respond, writing their responses up on the whiteboard or paper.

It is sometimes easy to forget all that we are thankful for and all the things that have blessed us in the last year. Today we are going to create something that you can take home and string up in your room, so you will remember and continue to give thanks.

Note: there are many activities here. Choose one or two and let the children have fun thinking about how they want to give thanks.

Streamers of Thanks Give the children a LONG length of streamers or ribbon. Have them write or draw on the full length of the streamer all the people or things they want to give thanks for in their lives. When they are done, have them roll it up around a popsicle stick or something so they can safely transport it home and hang it in their room.

Links of Thanks Give the children strips of paper in a wide variety of colors. Ask them to write or draw something for which they are thankful from this last year, putting only one thing on one strip of paper. Have them staple or tape each strip into a circle and then connect them all to make a paper chain of thanks. Have bags for them to put the links in so they can take them home and hang them in their room as a reminder of all the things they are thankful for in their lives.

Notes of Thanks Give the children some nice paper or even notecards to write or draw thank you notes that they can give to people as a way of appreciating what someone has done for them this past year.

Note: If you would like to show the children a “map” or calendar of the church year, or how it works, this is a great visual from Jenifer Gamber’s site, www.myfaithmylife.org. (Search for “calendar.”)

Getting Closure: Invite the children to clean up their space and gather back together. Invite them to share what they created.

Closing Prayer: *Gracious God, We thank you for our time together today. Help us to remember to serve those around us as just as we would serve you. Be with us as we go into the world and help us see you in each person we meet. Amen.*

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of

these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Written by the Rev. Shannon Kelly

What can you do to...

Feed the Hungry

- serve in a soup kitchen
- adopt a family for the holidays
- serve at a Thanksgiving and Christmas community dinner
- collect food for your local shelter or food pantry
- have a food scavenger hunt at a local grocery store with all the food being donated to a food pantry. Give the children a list of items and a capped amount of money they can spend. They have to get everything on the list, in a set amount of time and not go over in their spending. You can also do this with families as a way of bonding and getting them involved.

Give drink to the thirsty

- raise money for an organization that helps communities get clean water (like Episcopal Relief and Development)
- serve at a soup kitchen
- bring special drinks (juice, milk) to a local shelter

Welcome a stranger

- create welcome kits for your church,
- make welcome cards for those who are new to their school or church
- write letters and send care packages to service men and women

Clothe the naked

- do a clothing drive for a shelter or homeless drop-in center
- raise money or work with a local organization that helps to cloth those in need
- make scarves out of fleece! All you need is fleece that is cut into strips about 5 feet long and 10 inches wide. Have the children cut 1-2 inch fringe at the bottom and you have a scarf! By going to your local fabric store and telling them what you are doing, you may get a discount.

Care for the sick

- write notes to those from your congregation that are sick
- make center pieces, holiday cards, birthday cards, and notes for those in assisted living, children's hospital, or hospice
- set up a time to visit a hospital or assisted living unit and bring the gift of song, cookies, art, or simply your presence.

Visit those in prison

- write notes to those in prison
- create a prayer that they can pray for those who are in prison
- make "hygiene kits" These kits are a great way to get children active and involved. Ask the prison you will deliver them to what kinds of items the prisoners can have and collect them into small baggies or kits for the prisoners.

General Service Project Ideas

- Donate presents for Christmas and birthdays (look into programs like the Angel Tree program that can give you tags with children's Christmas wishes)

- Host a “Penny Harvest” where each child brings in as many penny’s as they can find in their home. Count them up and see how much money you can raise! You can also do fun things like weight them, see how high you can stack them, find your birth year on the coin, etc. Then, when you are done, take them to the bank and have them turned into cash to donate to your local shelter or food pantry.
- Make “hygiene kits” for people who are homeless, in prison or in need of extra help. These kits are a great way to get children active and involved. Ask your local shelter or you look on the Church World Service website (http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=kits_hygiene) they have great ideas and ways of connecting you with people who need the kits.