

Talking about Death with Children and Youth

Since the lectionary passages for November 6 are all concerned in one way or another with questions of life beyond death, this theme is touched on in the lessons for all levels. In preparation for Week 4, teachers may be phoning the families of the children in their class to find out if someone close to that child has died recently. If your child has experienced a loss, please mention this to teachers. The information will not be used to single out children in any way, but rather to help teachers be sensitive to a child's reactions as they lead the session. If you have concerns about what lessons will include, talk with your child's teachers. Lessons have been written in a way which we hope will be comforting to children, affirming that death is not something to fear and that, as Christians, we believe that those who die are secure with God. We hope you will take time at home to talk with your children about what they experienced in church school. It might help to keep in mind:

- Children often approach the subject of death much more openly than adults.
- Young children generally have literal questions to ask, such as: "What happens when someone is buried? Do they get wet from the rain?" Try to keep your answers simple. Don't answer questions they haven't yet asked. Be open to discussion continuing days, even weeks, later. Allow them to ask questions, and get answers, as they are ready.
- If you cannot answer a child's question, simply say that you do not know. Young children need clear and simple answers for their stage of development. Most of all they need to know that death is not something to fear. Be sure to give children the assurance of being with God forever.
- Children may surprise you by talking about the death of someone they didn't know well – a schoolmate's grandparent, a friend's pet. Sometimes parents worry about their children being "exposed" to death at a young age and see this as being troubling to children and should therefore be avoided. Try to see this as an opportunity to talk with your children, and to help them understand that death is a part of life.
- Contrary to popular opinion, grief does not reflect lack of faith. When someone we love dies, we miss them. Even though we may accept that they are with God, we are still filled with sadness and loneliness. It is vitally important that every person, no matter what their age, be allowed to experience grief in their own way without fear or guilt.

THANKSGIVING

Use this prayer at your dinner table on Thanksgiving Day, and at other times:

For food in a world where many are hungry,
for friends in a world where many are alone,
for faith in a world where many are afraid,
we give thanks, O God. Amen.



At Home Leaflet #2 The Whole People of God Unit 2: October 16–November 20, 2016

Telling Stories



October	16	Never Giving Up (World Food Sunday)
	23	Right Relationship (Peace Sabbath)
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November	6	Promised Life (All Saints' Sunday and Remembrance Sunday)
	13	God Our Strength (Restorative Justice Sunday)
	20	Reconciling Power (Reign of Christ/Children's Sabbath)

This unit covers the last 6 weeks of the Season after Pentecost, the longest season of the Christian year (it began in mid-June). The last week of this unit, called Reign of Christ Sunday, is the last Sunday before Advent. The Season after Pentecost ends with a vision of who Christ is and what kind of reign Christ reveals. Themes of discipleship – living our faith as individuals and as a church – continue during this unit. The season's green liturgical color reminds us that it is a season of growth and transformation and that the reign of God is a dynamic, ongoing, historical process in which we all have our different parts to play.

In this unit, there are several Sundays which are important within the liturgical year (e.g. All Saints' and Reign of Christ Sundays). Others are not part of the liturgical calendar but are secular observances that reflect God's dream of justice, harmony, and peace (e.g. Peace Sabbath, Remembrance Sunday and Restorative Justice Sunday). By observing them we are encouraged to ground our worship and reading of scripture within the world of our day-to-day lives.

The logo "Telling Stories" shows several people sitting on a book. One of the people is telling stories. While the book they are sitting on has no title, we can assume it is the Bible, the wonderful book of stories about God and God's love. It is as if the people are a part of God's story; when we are connected to God, we are part of God's story, too. The circle is multi-cultural, reminding us that we are one human family, and the people are under the shelter of trees, reminding us of our connection with creation.

Using this Leaflet: The At Home Leaflet is intended to help members of the congregation follow up at home what has been learned and reflected on in worship and education programs. Children's lessons for each week focus on 1 of the 4 readings. That reading is marked with an asterisk *. If a second passage is used with older children, it is marked with a checkmark ✓.

Week 1 – October 16, 2016

Never Giving Up (World Food Sunday)

Jeremiah 31:27-34
Psalm 119:97-104
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8*



Aim: **To learn about faithful persistence.**

Background: Today is World Food Sunday, which coincides with lessons based on the well-known story in Luke's gospel, the parable of the Widow and the Judge. It is a story of a persistent woman's actions and a reminder to us that if we are ever to get close to the goal of "food for all," persistence will be required. It was very likely that when Jesus told this story it ended with verse 5, and that the rest of the verses may be Luke's attempt to explain and understand the parable. If we were to focus primarily on vs. 1-5 we get a very different picture of God. While we might like to think of God as a mighty judge, Jesus chooses images like the poor but persistent widow for God. It is important to keep such images in mind as we reflect upon the issue of hunger in our world. Sometimes it can seem that nothing changes and that no progress is being made against the powers that control food for profit. Perhaps we are being called to join together to knock on the doors of those who deal with the production and distribution of food in our world and demand that justice be done.

Faith Sharing

1. Some children may make a Sharing Food Bag today. They are encouraged to fill these with non-perishable goods and bring them to church next week. Take time to choose the food you will give, or go grocery shopping and allow children to choose a few items they would like to donate. Talk about how this food will be used to help hungry people in your community.
2. Talk with your children about things in their lives that take persistence such as piano lessons, learning to ride a bike, etc. Affirm them in their learning to be persistent and not giving up. Talk about how God loves us and never gives up on us no matter what we do.
3. More than 40,000 people in our world die every day as a result of simple malnutrition, even though the world currently produces enough food to meet 125% of its needs. One of the ways we can be persistent in our concerns about poverty is to write letters to government. Together write a letter to members of government, encouraging them to continue their efforts to eradicate poverty. Have the children also sign their names to the letter.

Week 6 – November 20, 2016

Reconciling Power (Reign of Christ Sunday)

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Luke 1:68-79
Colossians 1:11-20*
Luke 23:33-43 ✓



Aim: **To see how "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" can reconcile the world.**

Background: Reign of Christ Sunday is the last Sunday of the Season after Pentecost and the last Sunday of the Christian Year. It is a transitional Sunday, leading us into Advent. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the prophets call on the people to act in accordance with God's vision of *shalom* – a dream about the way the world will be when the Reign of God fully comes. Many prophets' visions also included hopes for the perfect leader, a Messiah, who would be appointed and anointed by God to lead the people in God's ways and establish the Reign of God on earth. Jesus' followers believe that he is this Anointed One. What is remarkable about Jesus is that he embodied the reign of God during his lifetime. He was not merely a messenger of God's Reign. Like so many before and since, he did not describe it as a distant ideal, passively awaited and unattainable within this unjust world. He preached it. He lived it. He acted on it. The lectionary readings encourage us to explore the theme of reconciliation as an integral part of the reign of God. Forgiveness is explored as a crucial ingredient in God's work of making all things new. Jesus is our example of God's intention for our lives.

Faith Sharing

1. November 27, 2016, marks the beginning of Advent and a new Christian Year. Have a "Happy New Year" celebration on Saturday night. Purchase paper Christmas crackers; celebrate the end of the Christian year with an old-fashioned count down and wish each other "Happy New Year!" If your crackers contain tissue paper crowns, have family members write on these some things that are part of God's reign (love, justice, caring, etc.). Wear your crowns to supper.
2. Say the Lord's Prayer together. What does it mean to pray "Thy kingdom come"? Discuss what God's kingdom or reign is like. What have you seen or experienced this week that reminds you of God's reign? What does the prayer say about forgiveness?
3. Talk about the season of Advent that is about to begin. How will what you do together as a family, as you prepare for Jesus' birth, help to bring God's reign closer? (e.g. setting spending limits for gift exchanging, including someone who is alone for Christmas dinner, spending time together as a family, etc.) Consider a special family Advent activity that helps you focus on the real meaning of the season.

Week 5 – November 13, 2016
God Our Strength (Restorative Justice Sunday)

Isaiah 65:17-25
Isaiah 12*
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19 ✓



Aim: To explore how we are supported in troubled times.

Background: Today's passage from Luke's gospel reflects the kind of persecution which the early church was experiencing at the time when this gospel was being written. Since the risen Christ was so clearly present in the midst of this troubled time, it is not surprising that Luke and the other gospel writers wrote their gospels in an effort to reassure their congregations that Jesus himself had known such things would happen. It is good to hear stories of how our ancestors experienced God's support in times of trouble, because sometimes it can feel like we are facing hard times alone. We hear the assurance in these passages that Christ who was with the church from the very beginning will be with us, too. This Sunday marks the beginning of Restorative Justice Week. Founded in England in 1975, this is a week of education and consciousness raising aimed at breaking down stereotypes that affect our responses to prisoners and their families, as well as increasing people's sensitivity to the victims of crime within the larger community. These passages offer all of us the assurance that God never abandons us in troubled times.

Faith Sharing

1. Children explore the idea of God being with us in our troubled times by reflecting on an experience many children have had – of feeling afraid during a storm. Talk together about some of the things that are changing in your family and community. Are any of these changes scary or uncertain? Say a special prayer thanking God for being with you.
2. Print the words "God is always with me" on an old pillowcase. Invite children to use felt markers or fabric crayons/paints to draw a comforting image. If using fabric paint, allow this to dry overnight before sleeping on it.
3. Write today's key verse on a slip of paper. Carry it around with you everywhere you go this week, or hide slips of paper with this verse all over the house, in pockets, lunch bags, etc.
4. Light a candle and say a prayer to remember people who are in prison, their families, people who work with prisoners, and those responsible for administering justice in your community.

Key verse for November 13:
Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.

Isaiah 12:2a



Week 2 – October 23, 2016
Right Relationship (Peace Sabbath)

Joel 2:23-32
Psalm 65
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14*



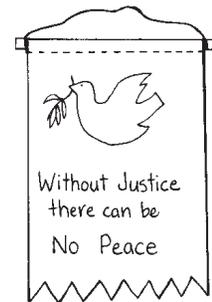
Aim: To learn to live in peace and harmony with self, God, and world.

Background: Today's lessons focus on another of Jesus' parables where the outcome is what we least expect. A Pharisee and tax collector are praying in the temple. Pharisees were well-respected religious leaders. This Pharisee knew the religion and strove to live it out in his life. He saw himself in right relationship with God, and truly gave thanks for God's blessing and approval. Tax collectors made their money collecting taxes for the Romans, who occupied Palestine. They collected extra money in order to make a profit for themselves. The opportunities for cheating made them very unpopular. This man asked God's help to change. Jesus surprises his listeners by telling them that it is the tax collector who left the temple in "right relationship" with God. The parable reveals that it is God alone who restores us to right relationship. Our relationship with God is about more than simply doing the right things or praying the right prayers. It is about seeing the world the way God sees it, and responding with our whole selves. On Peace Sabbath we are reminded that peace is not simply the absence of violence, but the presence of justice and harmony in our relationships with God, world and self.

Faith Sharing

1. Plan a family day where everything is done cooperatively: chores, meals, games and fun. Reflect on how cooperation promotes harmonious relationships in the family.
2. Peacemaking starts at home. Teaching peace is an important role of parents. As a family, talk about peace and what it means, and war and what it does. Discuss what is happening in your own lives as well as on the international scene that involves conflict. Talking about it is a way we learn to solve our problems in peaceful ways.
3. At the end of a meal, join hands and have each person say "Peace be with you" to the person on either side. Have the following prayer printed for the family to say together:

God bless us with peace.
God fill us with love.
God help us to share
these gifts with others. Amen.



Changing Perception

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
 Psalm 119:137-144
 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12
 Luke 19:1-10*



Aim: **To learn about transformation from the story of Zacchaeus.**

Background: The lessons and the theme conversation today have to do with Jesus helping us to see things differently. If we pay attention to how Jesus treated Zacchaeus, we may get some ideas about how to go about creating transformation in our own lives and community. Let's note, for example, that Jesus called out to someone who was not expecting to be included; that Jesus spent time and attention on someone who was perceived by the general population to be a sinner; that Jesus' actions affected the perceptions of the community.

Faith Sharing:

1. Have a conversation with someone who is of a different height than you but change the height relationship by having the shorter person stand on a chair or stool facing the taller person who is standing on the ground. After your conversation talk about what that was like. How did you see one another differently? Did you feel different?
2. Read the story of Zacchaeus in *The Family Story Bible* pg 234-235. Imagine Jesus walking into your town. Who would be the last ones the community would expect Jesus to choose to dine and stay with? Put up a "Zacchaeus List" and add to it as the week goes on. Keep these people in your prayers this week.
3. Together fill a small plastic container 3/4 full of water. Slowly drop some blue food coloring into it. Without disturbing the water, add drops of yellow. Wait a while and see what happens. Freeze it solid and then empty the ice into your bathwater. Watch it as it melts. Talk about "transformation" and all the ways that the water was changed. How is this like Jesus and Zacchaeus and the town?

Zacchaeus Song

(tune: Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star)

Small Zacchaeus, no one likes. (*Shake head.*)
 Wants to see Jesus, off he hikes. (*Walk.*)
 But the people push and shove. (*Pretend to push.*)
 The way to see is from above. (*Hand above eyes, trying to see.*)
 Small Zacchaeus up a tree. (*Climb a tree.*)
 Jesus says, "Come eat with me." (*Signal "come" with arm.*)

Promised Life (All Saints' Sunday and Remembrance Sunday)

Haggai 1:15b-2:9
 Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21or Psalm 98
 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
 Luke 20:27-38*



Aim: **To encourage reflection about death and new life.**

Background: Belief in life after death was a fairly new thing in the Judaism of Jesus' day, and Jewish scholars did not agree about it. In today's gospel passage we see the sort of debate that must have occurred often. The Sadducees raise the same questions many today wonder about. What is resurrected life like? What happens to the relationships we make in this life? Although we cannot say in detail what resurrected life will be like, we can trust God to make sure that it is a new thing, unlike what we have known before, and better in ways we cannot now imagine.

In the early church there was debate about whether they were living at the end of time. Many believed that Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the end, and that Jesus would return to earth within weeks for the final judgment. The letter to the Thessalonians makes it clear that this "Day of the Lord" is not coming soon, that it will be preceded by troubling things, and the church needs to be prepared to live in the midst of those times. For these readers, then, promised life refers both to life beyond death and life in the present. Promised life is found in the community of the believers, and the author gives thanks for their faithfulness and the encouragement it provides. When we are facing difficult times, we too can find "promised life" in our faith community, in the scriptures, and through the care and concern of others. And we say together in confidence and hope "In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. God is with us. Thanks be to God."

Faith Sharing

1. Today children talked about experiences of death through the story of "Alex's Grandma" Encourage the children to share their feelings about the story.
2. Children may have made cards to send to someone who is grieving, or for pastoral care workers to give to people. Affirm these as important ways of caring for others who have experienced a loss. If you know of someone who has experienced the death of someone close to them, think of a way you can care for them (e.g. phone to talk, make a casserole, color a picture). Make this caring action together as a family
3. Look at pictures in your photo album and talk about people shown there that have since died. Share your memories of that person. Talk about this Sunday being All Saints' Day – a time when we remember people who have lived faithfully and died and gone to be with God. And we give thanks for their lives.
4. Read the article on the back cover entitled "Talking about Death with Children and Youth."