

LENTEN STEWARDSHIP TEACHING SERIES - 1

First Sunday in Lent - Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

Fruits of Abundance - Children's Activity

OBJECTIVE: Students will identify gifts in their own lives and others that have been entrusted to them by God even as young Christians. Students will relate how recognizing these fruitful gifts and learning how to use them is a cause for celebrating God's abundance to us.

LEVELS: Pre-K through Grade 6.

CONCEPTS: Dwelling on our limitations often keeps us from recognizing what gifts we have received from God and from learning to use them as God intended. Sometimes we have trouble recognizing what our own gifts are. As part of our baptismal covenant, each of us promises to help the newly baptized (and all baptized) strengthen their faith and recognize their gifts for use to the glory of God.

SKILLS: Observing, Identifying Attributes, Concept Forming, Comparing and Contrasting.

MATERIALS: Drawing paper, poster board (optional), crayons or markers, pencils, and glue. Photos of children are optional. *Optional: Fruit snacks.*

TIME CONSIDERATIONS:

Preparation: 5 minutes (*up to 20, if digital photographs are taken.*)

Activity: 30-45 minutes

ASSESSMENT:

Students will respond to the following questions:

What gifts are entrusted to us and how do we use those gifts?

How do we recognize and celebrate the gifts we have received?

BACKGROUND (*Parallel with Adult Teaching Series*)

During this season of Lent the Church joins together to go on retreat for the new life that will be celebrated on Easter. Those anticipating baptism make their final preparations and those already baptized reflect on the meaning of baptism in their own lives. The Church will not only receive new members but the composition and character of the Church will be forever changed due to the blessedness and giftedness of those new members. Whether we anticipate baptism and reception at Easter or have been baptized for a long time, Lent invites us to reflect on our blessedness and renew our commitment to the baptismal covenant.

The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his public ministry. This ministry will be a series of steps towards death. This recalls Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous line in *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." This walk toward death is not a morbid journey but rather a series of Jesus handing himself over to the will of God.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

OPENING JOKE:

*Why didn't the two worms go into Noah's ark in an apple?
Because everyone had to go in PEARS (pairs)!*

INTRODUCTION:

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus does something that is immediately recognized as pleasing to God. Then the same Holy Spirit drives Jesus out to the wilderness to face all sorts of dangers and temptations, but even there God's angels were with him. God's way is not always the easy way, but as we realize through our baptismal covenant, we will never be alone. Not only is God with us, but others in our Christian family are called with their gifts to be with us along our Christian journeys. This is a wonderful cause for celebration!

GOSPEL READING: *Mark 1:9-15 (NIV)* **Jesus Is Baptized**

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

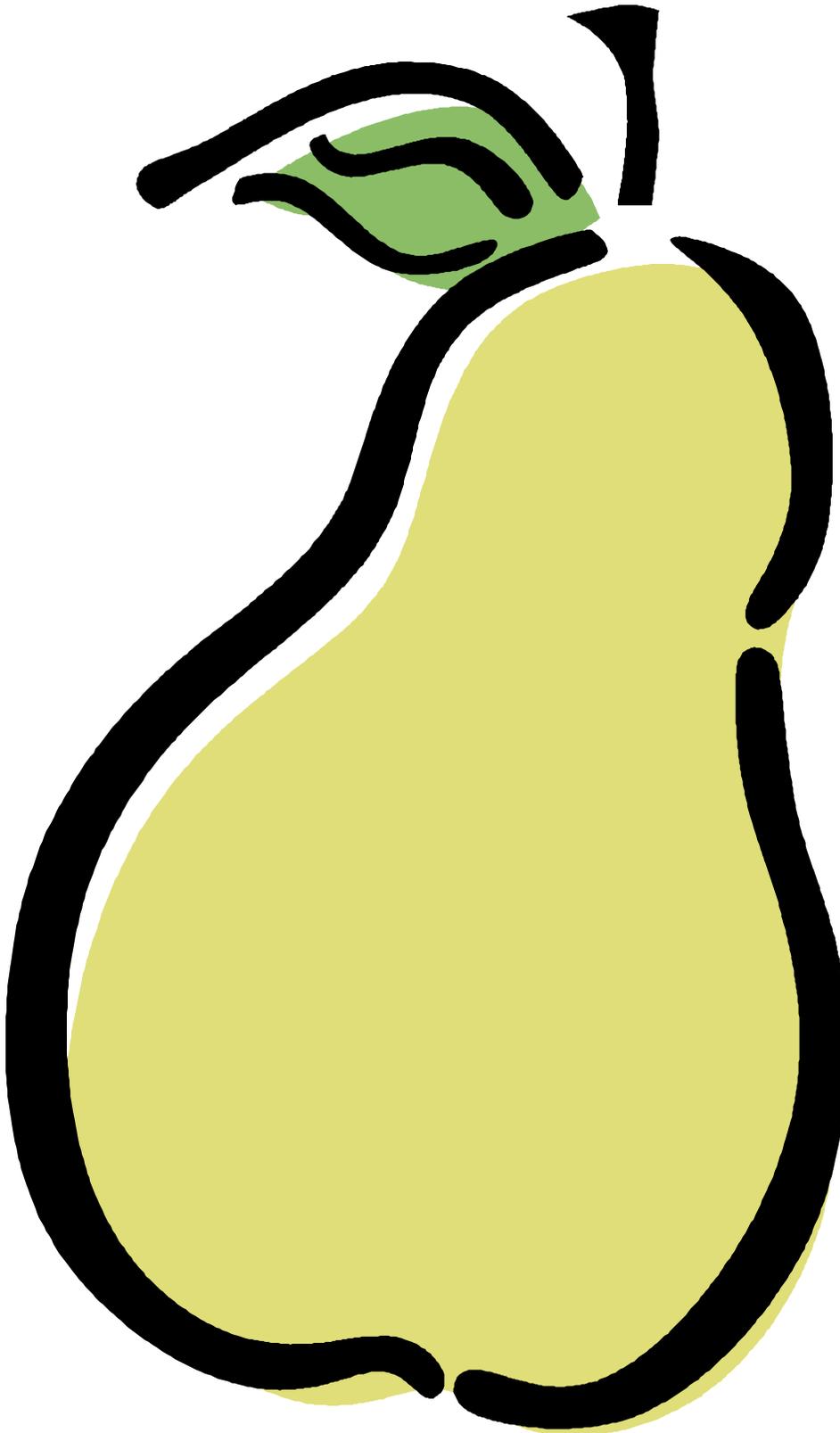
DISCUSSION:

1. Have students say what they think is their great "gift" from God that they can offer to themselves and others in the church.
2. Make a list on the board of ways they might use their gifts for God.
3. Ask if they think culture places as much value as the church on these gifts. Why or why not?
4. Compare and contrast what culture says is good and what the Gospel says is good when it comes to gifts? Which type of gifts has more lasting value – bears more abundant fruit?
5. Ask students for some ways they could celebrate or be good stewards of these gifts from God? (*Use them to help others, keep developing the gifts, teach others less gifted in those areas, and GIVE THANKS.*)

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

1. Match the children up in PAIRS. (If your numbers are odd, match one child with the teacher or make one group of three.)
2. Ask each child to think about something they recognize as a gift IN THE OTHER CHILD that has helped him/her to be a better follower of Jesus. Take turns sharing each other's gifts and end with celebratory "way to go", "high-five" (or toast, if refreshments are served!)
3. Hand out construction/drawing paper and trace/cut out outline of a pear (can photocopy template found in this lesson.)

4. Paste a small picture of the child's partner on the smaller end of pear, if available, and/or write that child's name. (Digital photos, or faces cut from copies of church directory can be used.)
5. Have each child write/dictate a "fruitful" gift he/she recognized in the partner on the bottom part of the pear that is worth celebrating.
6. Decorate the pear posters as time permits – *be creative!*



CLOSING PRAYER:

Gather the children with their posters. Go around the group and ask each to thank God for their partner and name his/her gift from the pear, and then give the poster to the partner to take home.

Close by praying:

Dear Lord, during this season of Lent we are following your travels to the cross. Today we remember that your life was not the easy or appealing way. But through your life and death on the cross, you gave us the fruit of greatest abundance -- life everlasting. Help us to recognize the many fruits we receive in our lives from following the lessons we learn about you; help us always to appreciate and be good stewards, to take care of these gifts that we receive from you. AMEN.