

LENTEN STEWARDSHIP TEACHING SERIES - 5

Fifth Sunday in Lent - Gospel: John 12:20-33

Fruits of Abundance - Children's Activity

OBJECTIVE: Students will identify the gift God gave them when he gave up his Son to death on the cross. Students will recognize how they are called in their own lives to bear abundant fruit by continuing to work out God's victory over death. They can do this by drawing support from other Christians and supporting them in their work, continuing to learn and celebrating God's gift of abundant life to us.

LEVELS: Pre-K through Grade 6.

CONCEPTS: God's love for all people is clearly shown in Jesus' obedience to God, even to death on the cross. Because it is available for all people, we are also called to trust in God and share his love with others. In order to do this we need God and we need one another. Acknowledging this need helps us reach out to others and let others reach out to us.

SKILLS: Evaluating, Discussing, Principle Forming.

MATERIALS: Drawing paper, copies of student page, pencils, markers, and masking tape.
Optional: Fruit snacks.

TIME CONSIDERATIONS:

Preparation: 15 minutes

Activity: 30-45 minutes

ASSESSMENT:

Students will respond to the following questions:

What promises does Jesus make to the disciples and to us?

How have you experienced God's promise as you realize your own love of God?

What are ways we live out God's promise with all people in the world?

BACKGROUND (*Parallel with Adult Teaching Series*)

This Gospel passage begins with a discussion about faith and trust in Jesus' words to Philip and Andrew: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Obviously, the grain of wheat does not literally, so we ask ourselves what Jesus means by this. Here's one way to look at it. The grain is buried (like a dead person) in the ground. We no longer see it. We do not know what is happening to it. Quite possibly, we may not even remember where we buried it. Once it "dies," we have no control over that grain of wheat. But it sure isn't going to do anything sitting in a bag in the shed, where we do have control over it. Only when we give up our illusory efforts at control, can our seeds bear fruit. When we bury our seeds in the ground, we are trusting (there's that word again) that God is going to coax those seeds to sprout and push up through the soil and become stalks, bushes, flowers, trees. The same is true with our lives. One way of describing hating your life (as John puts it) is keeping yourself from being the center of your own life.

The Greek word translated “life” here is not *zoe*, which is the normal word for “life.” Instead, it is *psuche* (whence comes “psychology”), a more intense word that means something closer to “breath” or “life - force” or “that which animates the body.” *Psuche*, thus, comprehends not just our physical bodies but also our emotions, motivations, and the reasons we are alive, as well. When we “hate” our lives, then, we remove from ourselves the spectacle of self - aggrandizement and the delusion of self - sufficiency. We were never created to be alone. We need God. And we need one another. Acknowledging this need helps us reach out to others and let others reach out to us.

Relationship is, of course, the key word here. Remember that some Greeks come to see Philip, who in turn goes to see Andrew. Then they both go to see Jesus on behalf of the Greeks. There is something hierarchical implied in this arrangement: Philip is a gatekeeper of sorts and Andrew a middleman or chief - of - staff. For our purposes, we can ignore the hierarchical nature and focus on the human distance the Greeks are from Jesus. Put another way, these verses, in the context of narration, show one reality of our relationship with God - that often we ask others to mediate our relationships with God.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

OPENING JOKE:

*Why aren't grapes ever lonely?
Because they come in bunches!*

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus faces the fact that he will have to turn himself over to suffering and death in a very short time and accepts his destiny because his mission on earth only bears fruit through his death. In the same way Christians can only bear abundant fruit by separating ourselves from what we hear about in society, and loving and serving God and loving and serving others in God's name.

GOSPEL READING: *John 12:20-33 (NIV)* **Jesus Faces his Crucifixion**

²⁰ *Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.*

²¹ *They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'* ²² *Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.* ²³ *Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷' Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.'* Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹ *The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.'*

³⁰ *Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.*

³²*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'*

³³*He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*

DISCUSSION:

1. Review what we know is about to happen to Jesus. Review the events of Holy Week through Ascension, if necessary.
2. Have children say why they think Jesus died.
3. Have children say what God's promise was to us. (*When God is lifted up in glory, he will draw all people to him.*)
4. Have students name ways they need God.
5. Ask students for some ways they can keep themselves in a good relationship with God and can be good stewards of this gift of abundant life from God? (*Pray, ask for guidance from other Christians, like parents, teachers, and priest, help others learn about God, and GIVE THANKS.*)

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

1. Write NORTH, SOUTH, EAST and WEST on pieces of paper and tape them in the four corners of the room. If weather and/or space permits, this activity can be moved to the Parish Hall or even outside. Try to make the "corners" equidistant from each other and the center of the room.
2. Hand out a copy of the student page and a pencil to each child. Write their NAMES at the top.
3. When all the questions have been answered, push the tables aside, if necessary and have the children stand in the middle of the room.
4. As you read the first question, ask the children to move to the corner labeled with the direction that matches their choice – e.g. Vanilla chasers would go to the "N" corner, labeled "NORTH."
5. Repeat this with all 7 questions, then pull the chairs into the center of the room and prepare for closing prayer.

NORTH, SOUTH, EAST or WEST We're a Bunch of "GRAPE" People in God's World

1. What flavor of ice cream do you prefer?
 - N – Vanilla
 - S – Chocolate
 - E – Strawberry
 - W – I don't like ice cream

2. What color do you prefer?
 - N – Red
 - S – Blue
 - E – Green
 - W – Some other color

3. What snack do you prefer?
 - N – Cookies
 - S – Potato chips
 - E – Ice cream
 - W – Some other snack

4. What holiday do you like celebrating the best?
 - N – Your Birthday
 - S – Christmas
 - E – Easter
 - W – Some other holiday

5. What activity do you like best?
 - N – Riding bikes or skateboarding
 - S – Reading
 - E – Playing sports
 - W – Some other activity

6. What type of vacation do you like best?
 - N – Camping
 - S – Going to the beach
 - E – Staying home
 - W – Some other kind of vacation

7. What school subject do you like best?
 - N – Math
 - S – Reading
 - E – Science
 - W – Some other subject or I don't go to school

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gather the children and begin asking questions about the activity they just did. See if they noticed if they seemed to agree on most things with the other children, if some choices were overwhelming popular, and, if they were ever standing alone in a corner, how they felt about that. Remind them that God's love for us sometimes calls us to make choices that may not be so popular, like going to church, taking time to pray, and helping new or different people. But we are never alone if we are doing God's work and no matter where we go: north, south, east, or west, God is there and loves us for doing his work.

Conclude by singing this familiar song, singing as many verses as time permits or just sing first and last verses. Even hesitant singers should be able to follow along by the second verse.

*He's got the whole wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

*He's got the tiny little baby, in his hands, x3
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

*He's got you and me brother, in his hands, x3
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

*He's got you and me sister, in his hands, x3
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

*He's got ev'rybody here, in his hands, x3
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

(You could also adapt to the lesson ie. He's got the cookie lovers in His hands, He's got the potato chip lovers in His hands, He's got the ice cream lovers in His hands, He's got the whole world in His hands, etc.)

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.