

Scriptures

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:7

John 12:20-33

Jesus Lifted Up**Jesus makes possible our covenant relationship with God.**

- ◆ Today's scriptures together focus on God's love for God's people, clearly shown in Jesus' willing obedience, even to the point of death.
- ◆ We do not withhold cross images from young children, because the culture is filled with them. If they are to perceive them as symbols of love, we must provide that context, as in today's story and activities.
- ◆ In today's session we also continue to explore the season of Lent.

Question of the Week

How was Jesus like a seed? How are we like seeds?

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started (*plain wooden cross*)
- ◆ Gospel Story: Jesus Is Sad
- ◆ Action Rhyme: Jesus Our Savior (*stuffed animals or handkerchief dolls*)
- ◆ Praying Together (*purple cloths, Bible; optional: flowers, bells, picture of Jesus*)

Enrichment

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Craft: Heart Print Mural (*plastic trash bags, butcher paper, sponges, black felt markers, paint smocks, red tempera paint, pie plates*)
- ◆ Interviews: Who Does Jesus Love? (*microphone or paper towel tube*)
- ◆ Info: Story Figures
- ◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
- ◆ Seeing Salvation, Part 1: The Word Made Flesh Is Now Made Visible
- ◆ The World of the Bible: "Amen, Amen"

✓ Getting Started (10-15 minutes)

Children share what they feel and think when they see a cross. With young children, we recommend that you use a plain cross, without a body on it. The one exception would be the folk art crosses that show bright, colorful pictures of the risen Jesus.

Gather the children together in the storytelling area. Lay a cross on the floor in front of them. Say:

- ◆ This is called a cross.
- ◆ I wonder what you think when you see this cross.

Allow time for the children to respond. Accept the children's ideas with such phrases as "So you think that..." or "You feel that..."

After the children have shared their ideas, share your own ideas, too. You might say:

- ◆ When I see this cross, I think of Jesus, who loves us so much.
- ◆ Jesus died on a cross. When I see this cross, I think of Jesus.
- ◆ Jesus is not dead now. God gave new life that never ends to Jesus. When I see this cross, I think of Jesus.

✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Jesus Is Sad

Story Focus: Sometimes three-dimensional figures feel especially right for acting out an emotionally intense children's story. Today's story, in which Jesus talks about his coming death, is a perfect example. See the Tip on page 4 for simple story figures you can gather or make.

Jesus cried. Jesus said, "I'm sad. I'm afraid."

"Why are you sad, Jesus?" said the people. "Why are you afraid?"

"The time is coming for me to die," said Jesus.

"Oh, no!" said the people. "Do you want to die?"

"No," said Jesus. "I don't want to die. But when I die, people everywhere will come to God. God will give them new hearts to love with, and God will give me new life."

"Oh, no! Don't die, Jesus," said the people.

"Yes," said Jesus. "I love each one of you, so I will die. But remember—God will give me new life."

✓ Action Rhyme (5-15 minutes)

Jesus Our Savior

Stand in a circle with the children. Teach them the words and movements to this rhymed version of today's story:

Jesus bowed his head and cried,
(*Kneel. Put hands on face, as if crying.*)

"I'm scared because I'm going to die."
(*Stretch out arms in cross shape.*)

"But God will give new life to me,
(*Stand.*)

And all God's people will be free."
(*Raise arms and join hands with neighbors.*)

Now Jesus lives, so happy be!
(*Drop hands, hug self and spin in place.*)

Because he loves both you and me.
(*Point to self, then neighbor.*)

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Remind children that we are in Lent, a time of purple—and prayer. As in the 1st through 4th Sundays in Lent, invite children to make a prayer corner. Help them decorate the corner with purple cloths and an open Bible. Children can also add such items as flowers, bells or pictures. Place a cross where children can see and touch it.

Say:

- ◆ Sometimes when we pray, we just tell Jesus what we are thinking and feeling.
- ◆ What would you like to tell Jesus as you look at the cross again?

Allow time for the children to respond. Be sure to respond with your own brief, spontaneous prayer.

Close by praying:

- ◆ God, thank you for sending Jesus to love each one of us. Thank you for giving Jesus new life. *Amen.*

Note: Distribute this week's *Discover the Good News* to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.

□ Discover the Good News

(5-10 minutes)

In today's *Discover the Good News* you'll find an illustrated version of the Action Rhyme on page 2.

You'll also find a fill-in-the-blanks activity for children to do one-on-one with an older helper. Children can cut out the completed heart-shaped tags. Use loops of masking tape to attach the tags to children's clothing or to a poster on the wall titled *Jesus Loves...* Also see the Craft activity below.

□ Singing Together (5-10 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News* you and the children can sing together:

- ◆ "Blessed Is He" (p. 34 of the songbook)
- ◆ "Easter Lullaby" (p. 35 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Spring-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*.

□ Craft (15-20 minutes)

Heart Print Mural

Children write their names on butcher paper, then use sponges to print hearts onto a mural.

Before the session tape trash bags to a wall or table and then tape butcher paper over them. This will protect the wall from paint that might soak through the paper. Remember to hang the paper low enough for the children. Write the title *Jesus Loves...* in large letters across the top of the mural.

Cut sponges into hearts about 3" x 3½". You will find a simple *Heart-Shape Template* attached to this document.

In the session, dress children in smocks. Explain:

- ◆ Use a felt marker to draw a picture of yourself or write your name on the mural.

As children work, put a small amount of paint into a styrofoam meat tray. Make sure the sponges are damp. Help the children press the sponges into the paint and then on the butcher paper.

Invite children to finish the sentence on top of the mural. Read aloud "Jesus loves..." and then point to one of the pictures or names of a child. Repeat again and again to affirm the love of Jesus for each child in the group.

□ Interviews (10-20 minutes)

Who Does Jesus Love?

Children record interviews of people whom Jesus loves—the children themselves.

Sit facing the children. Ask children to seat themselves as if they were an audience. Use a real microphone or a cardboard tube from paper towels as a make-believe microphone. Say:

- ◆ Let's find out about someone Jesus loves. Who would like to be first?

Interview a volunteer with these or similar questions:

- ◆ What is your name?
- ◆ How old are you?
- ◆ What color do you like best?
- ◆ What food do you like best?
- ◆ What food do you hate the most?
- ◆ What is your favorite thing to do in the morning?

Repeat some of each child's responses with such phrases as "Jesus loves this child named (*name*)," or "Jesus loves (*name*), whose favorite food is (*name of food*)."

If possible, record these interviews, allowing the children to replay them. The children may want you to continue interviewing or may want to take turns as interviewers themselves.

Be flexible in responding to the mood of the group, but be try to keep the focus of *Someone Jesus Loves* throughout the activity.

INFO Story Figures

Sometimes three-dimensional figures feel especially right for acting out an emotionally intense children's story. Today's story, in which Jesus talks about his coming death, is a perfect example.

Some leaders like to use stuffed animals to act out such stories. Stuffed animals lessen the emotional impact of scary or angry moments. Furthermore, stuffed animals have no characteristics of age, sex or race with which to reinforce stereotypes.

Other leaders, who prefer using humans as models for children's feelings, rely on dolls for storytelling. Expensive sets of multiracial dolls can also combat some stereotypes, but not necessarily those of age or gender.

One good solution is a set of simple handkerchief dolls. Preschoolers and kindergartners can use their imaginations to turn these dolls into people of every age, gender and race. All you need are clean handkerchiefs and bandannas, wads of cotton or unspun wool and yarn. *Directions:*

- ◆ Put a wad of wool or cotton in the center of a handkerchief.
- ◆ Fold the handkerchief in half to make a large triangle.
- ◆ Wind yarn around the base of the "head."
- ◆ Knot the two corners of the triangles to make hands.

INFO Young Children and the Gospel

Today's story weaves together themes from several scriptures to tell how Jesus looked with sorrow and hope to his own death.

For preschool and kindergarten children we acknowledge that Jesus was scared to know that he would die. However, we also affirm that Jesus trusted God's love and power, to give new life to him and new hearts to us. Jesus was willing to die because he loved each one of us so much.

INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - A shareable story script of today's *Gospel Story: Jesus Is Sad*.
 - An handout titled *Easter Tree Ornaments II*, which continues the Easter Tree activity started in the session for the 4th Sunday of Lent.
 - A *Heart-Shape Template* for use in today's Craft activity.
 - This week's *At Home with the Good News*, to distribute or email to group members after the session.
- ◆ Open your Spring-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Spring-B's *Models of the Faith*.
 - For catechists and/or families, an article titled *Season of Lent*.
 - For catechists and/or families, an article titled *The Gospel According to John*.

More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings explore our covenant relationship to God through Jesus. Jeremiah tells us that God looks forward to a new relationship with God's people—a relationship of intimacy, forgiveness and faithfulness. The author of Hebrews describes God's action that makes this relationship possible: through his suffering and submission, Jesus becomes the source of our salvation. In the gospel, the final chapter in Jesus' suffering and submission begins as Jesus faces his crucifixion.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry to Judah about 627 BC and ended it around 580 BC. He thus spans the period leading up to Judah's final defeat by the Babylonians (587 BC), the destruction of the temple and the exile of much

"It is a work of love to have chosen to suffer—and to suffer shamefully—for the salvation of some. It is a work of love not only to die but also to take again the life that was laid down in order to destroy death and to take away sorrow from corruption."

—*St. Cyril of Alexandria*

of the population.

Today's reading comes from a section, chapters 30–31, called the "book of consolation." In it are gathered Jeremiah's oracles of hope for an eventual renewal and restoration for Israel.

In today's passage, Jeremiah looks forward to a "new covenant"

(v. 31). Unlike the old, this one will be written on the heart, which in Hebrew thought is the seat not of the emotions but of the will. This covenant is not new in content, for the *Torah*, the written law, is not replaced.

It is new, however, in the means of its realization. The internalization of the covenant will enable people to keep it. The will of the individual shall become one with the will of God. There will be no need of teachers, for all will know the Lord, not just in intellectual terms but in the Hebrew sense of a close, intense and intimate personal relationship.

Hebrews 5:7-9

The letter to the Hebrews is a tightly-woven theological essay that stresses that Christianity has fulfilled the promises of Judaism. The author's purpose is to show the superiority of Jesus to the prophets, the

angels and Moses (1:3–4:13), Jesus' priesthood to the Levitical priesthood (4:14–7:28) and Jesus' sacrifice to Levitical sacrifices (8:1–10:18).

According to Jewish tradition, Jesus could not be a priest because he was from the tribe of Judah not Levi. But the author of Hebrews argues that in fact Jesus is the real High Priest because he, like Aaron and Melchizedek, was chosen by God for his priestly ministry on our behalf.

The quotation from Psalm 2:7 (v. 5) affirms that Jesus was chosen by God, not self-appointed. His unique priesthood is modeled upon that of Melchizedek, whom the author later claims to be superior to Abraham and thus to Abraham's descendant Levi and the Levitical priests.

For his lifelong submission to God, Jesus was saved not from death but through death. Whereas human beings learn to be obedient because they suffer for disobedience, Jesus, through his suffering, learned that obedience itself exacts a price in human life. Through his obedient suffering, Jesus is "made perfect" (v. 9) and becomes our source of salvation.

John 12:20-33

The appearance of "some Greeks" (v. 20, probably "God-fearers," that is, those who were attracted to Judaism but did not fully keep the law) indicates that Jesus' public ministry is now complete. Ironically, the complaint of the Pharisees in 12:19 is indeed shown to be true.

Jesus' response is to announce that his "hour has come" (v. 23), the time for his glorification in death, resurrection and ascension. As Jesus' mission bore fruit only through his death, so Christians bear fruit only through death to self.

The term *hate* (v. 25) would reinforce the challenge to separate oneself from what this life requires. It does not express an emotion so much as an action requiring separation.

Jesus freely accepts his destiny in a plea that God's plan be carried out as the expression of God's name, that is, of God's essential character. The victory over Satan is won through Jesus' "lifting up" (v. 32, a term for both his crucifixion and his exaltation), but its working out in this life is the ongoing task of Christians.

Reflection

What happens in today's gospel is not unusual. It continues today. Two moms became friends and discovered that their oldest sons both skied. The next, natural step was taking the boys skiing together. The two became friends, and one's name was—truly—Andrew. He began to meet the other boy's friends, and became part of a group from another high school, not easy in adolescent society.

During college, the boys skied, kayaked and mountain biked together. Later, they attended each other's weddings. When Andrew died suddenly of a staph infection, the friends flew from around the country for his funeral. Each then planted a pine seedling and a packet of wildflowers, signs of hope.

They probably didn't say it as they scattered seed, but once again, a grain fell to the ground and died, bearing much fruit. The boys couldn't ski without remembering Andrew; they consciously tried to bring his fierce delight to all their days.

The ripple effect also worked for Jesus. Greeks drawn to him approached him through his friends. He saw his coming passion through the metaphor of seed. How could the company of friends, now including us, not try to act like him?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today's readings remind us that God's desire for a covenant community according to God's guidelines was finally inaugurated in Jesus. He described this as the Kingdom of God. Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant is fulfilled in the community of disciples that Jesus gathers (*CCC*, #62–64, 1965–74). This community will carry on the prophetic, priestly and kingly work that Jesus began while on earth (*CCC*, #897–913). The community of disciples shares in the mission of Jesus to draw all creation back into right relationship with God (*CCC*, #774–76, 849–56).

Seeing Salvation, Part 1

The Word Made Flesh Is Now Made Visible

Our Christian tradition is rich in images of God moving among us—especially in the person, life and ministry of Jesus. John's gospel lyrically declares: “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Seeing God's Glory

Artists, of course, try to transform the words of the gospels to make God's glory visible for all of us who were not able to see Jesus in the flesh. The Hebrew tradition (and later the Muslims) prohibited images that depicted God and emphasized rather God's word as the most important form of God's presence with us—hence the emphasis on texts, their interpretation and their transmission.

But there was also a long-standing tradition of God's glory as the visible sign of God's invisible reality. This glory could suddenly flash out of persons, things and events so that people would know that God was present with them.

Jesus, the Human Face of God

But all this changed with Jesus. Christians, unlike the Jews and later the Muslims, believed that they had not just heard but seen their God in the human form of Jesus. He was divinity enfleshed and so the visible embodiment of God's glory. As Jesus said to Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Because of this incarnation of God in human form, it was possible for artists to express their beliefs about Jesus in theologically-charged portraits of him. In this way, Christianity became more than a religion of the word. It became a religion of the image.

The World of the Bible

“Amen, Amen”

Amen is a Hebrew word that affirms what has been said—“It is true!” It appears often throughout the Bible both in normal speech and in prayer whenever people want to signal their acceptance and affirmation.

In the gospels, Jesus often begins his teaching with the phrase “Amen, I say to you” to emphasize the importance of what follows. And in John's gospel, when Jesus wants to really stress the importance of what he is about to say, he uses the curious double “Amen, amen” to invite his audience to pay close attention to his message.