Question of the Week

Do you think what happens in today’s gospel is fair? Why or why not?

Jesus invites us to become more generous as God is.

- In today’s gospel, Jesus tells the story of a vineyard owner who pays workers who come late just as much as the ones who work all day long.
- For young children, we tell Jesus’ story as an affirmation that God loves the first, the last and all those in the middle.
- We explore today’s gospel story through games, art and even folktales.

Core Session

- Getting Started (3 stuffed animals)
- Gospel Story: First and Last (optional: 14 miniature baskets, 3 dimes or nickels)
- Story-Review Game: Follow the Leader
- Praying Together

Enrichment

- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Tip: Size and Order Concepts
- Craft: Picture Books (stapler or hole punch and yarn)
- Art: Burch’s Harmony under the Sky (mural paper, colored yarn)
- 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
- Tips for Creative Drama
- The World of the Bible: The Lord is Gracious and Merciful

Scripture

Matthew 20:1-16a

Unexpected Generosity
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

Children work with both toys and one another to review the meaning of the words *first*, *middle* and *last*. This game also helps children review names, important in these first sessions of Fall. Sit in a circle with the children. Place three stuffed animals in the center of the circle. Ask the children to line up the toys. Then ask, “Which toy is first? Which toy is last? Which toy is in the middle?”

Now ask three children to stand in line. Ask the other children, “Who is first? last? in the middle?” Ask the three children to mix themselves up and repeat the three questions. Repeat until every child has had a turn. Close by saying:
◆ Jesus once told a story about first and last—and that’s the story I want to tell you today.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

**First and Last**

*Story Focus:* Use the stuffed animals or dolls used in today’s Getting Started as a visual focus for today’s story. You can also use 14 miniature baskets and 3 dimes.

A man goes into his vineyard. The grapes are sweet and ripe. “My grapes are ready to pick,” the man says. “I need help.” He goes to the first worker. “Will you help me pick my grapes?” the man asks. “I will pay you a silver coin.”

“Yes!” says the first worker. He goes to the vineyard and picks grapes.

But there are so many grapes! “I need more help,” said the man. He goes to the second worker. “Will you help me pick my ripe grapes?” the man asks. “I will pay you, too.”

“Yes!” says the second worker. He goes to the vineyard and picks grapes.

But there are still so many grapes. “I want more help,” says the man. He goes to the third worker. “Will you help me pick my delicious grapes?” the man asks. “I will pay you, too.”

“Yes!” says the third worker. He goes to the vineyard and picks grapes. Soon the workday is done.

“I picked three baskets of grapes,” says the second worker.

“I picked only one basket,” says the third worker.

“I will pay you all,” says the man. He gives the worker who picked only one basket one silver coin. He gives the worker who picked three baskets one silver coin. He gives the worker who picked 10 baskets one silver coin.

“That’s not fair!” says the first worker. “I was first. I picked the most. I want the most money.”

But the man says,
◆ I love the last, the middle, the first.
◆ Each gets one coin, from my purse.”

“I want to give the last worker as much as the first worker,” says the man. And so he does.

**Story-Review Game** (10-20 minutes)

**Follow the Leader**

Use this traditional children’s game to help children play with the concepts of *first* and *last*.

Help the children form a line. Children copy the actions—clapping, hopping, turning, etc.—of the first person in line. (Unless you have plenty of outdoor space, we recommend that you limit the leader’s pace to walking.) Frequently switch leaders by inviting the last child in line to become the first. Affirm, “Jesus loves the first, the middle, the last.”

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Stand in a circle with the children. For each child in the circle pray:
◆ God loves *(child’s name)*.

Help the children respond:
◆ Thank you, God, for *(Child’s name)*.

Repeat for each child in the circle. Then close by praying:
◆ Thank you, God, for loving all of us, first, last and in the middle. Amen.

**Note:** Distribute this week’s *At Home with 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)

On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News, you’ll find a simple version of today’s gospel story.

On page 2, children use playful bugs to extend Jesus’ teaching: Jesus loves the smallest, the tallest and those in the middle!

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)

From Singing the Good News, sing together:

◆ “Live in Harmony” (songbook p. 4, also available as an MP3)
◆ “Picking Grapes” (songbook p. 10, also available as an MP3)

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

As background music for one of today’s art activities, play the “Andante” Haydn’s Symphony No. 94. (Open your Fall-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) You can explain that there is a surprise in today’s story: all the workers get paid the same! Invite children to listen for the surprise in the music (sudden loud chords). When children spot the surprise, reread the surprise in the ending of today’s story: all the workers get paid the same.

Craft (10-25 minutes)

Picture Books

Children make picture books that affirm God’s generous love.

Write the words God loves across the top of one sheet of paper per child. On the other side of each paper, use the children’s names to write titles on the books.

Example:

Jan’s Book

Give a blank sheet of paper to each child. Make available felt pens or crayons. Ask each child to draw a picture of his or her family.

As each child is finished, sit next to him or her with a prepared sheet of paper. Ask the child to name the people in his or her picture. Write these names under the words God loves.

Some children may be too shy to name family members. For these children, simply write, for example:

God loves Jan’s family.

Help the children use a stapler or a hole punch and yarn to join the two sheets of paper into a book.

If you enjoy telling stories, you can use this folktale to enrich today’s session. Collect three stuffed bears—small, medium and big. You might also collect such props as a set of three bowls (for the porridge), a set of three chairs and a set of three pillows.

Use these props to tell the story of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” to the children. (You need not use Goldilocks; one traditional version of the story, told by Joseph Jacobs in English Fairy Tales, uses an old woman instead of a golden-haired little girl.)

Follow this story with the activities and questions suggested in the Getting Started activity and a retelling of the Gospel Story.

Tip — Size and Order Concepts

In today’s Getting Started activity, children may confuse size with place in line, calling the biggest toy “first” and the smallest toy “last.” For the purposes of today’s story, this confusion is unimportant, but you can clarify your use of the words by making such simple statements as:

◆ The biggest toy is last in this line.
◆ The smallest toy is in the middle.

Preschoolers are able to put limited sets—three or fewer items—in order according to size. Traditional folktales, such as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” capitalize on this ordering capacity.
Art (15-25 minutes)

Burch's Harmony under the Sky
Gather children around Laurel Burch's painting *Harmony under the Sky* found in the Preschool/Kindergarten Poster Packet. Ask children to talk about what they see in the painting. What colors do they see? What are the people in the painting doing?

Explain that all the people in the painting are choosing to stand together in peace. They aren’t fighting about who goes first. They aren’t fighting about who gets most.

Invite children to make a mural of themselves holding hands. Ask each child to lie down on a sheet of newsprint or other large mural paper. Trace an outline around each child. Help the child cut out his or her image.

Then ask the children to use crayons, markers and colored yarn to decorate their cut-outs. Use tape to arrange the cutouts on a wall, arranging the figures so that they are “holding hands.” Affirm that God loves each child shown on the wall: first, middle or last.

Young Children and the Gospel
As in last week’s gospel story, today’s parable about a munificent vineyard owner paints a picture of God’s generosity. “The last will be first,” concludes Jesus, pointing out that God can choose to reward the least of us as much as the greatest of Jesus’ saints. Preschoolers and kindergartners readily agree with the workers in today’s story that the first (or the tallest or the biggest) should get the most. Our emphasis in today’s session is that God’s love is given to all—those who come first or last and those who come in the middle.

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.
  - Today’s Gospel Story, to distribute or e-mail to children and their families.
  - Instructions for an alternate story-review activity titled First, Middle, Last Game.
  - Instructions for an optional Who is Marching By Today? Game.
  - Burch’s Harmony under the Sky, to be used in today’s Art activity.
  - Today’s At Home with the Good News, to distribute or e-mail to families after the session.
- Open your Fall-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Fall-A’s Models of the Faith.
  - A reproducible handout for parents titled Nurturing Your Child’s Spirituality.
  - An article further exploring parables titled Jesus’ Parables.
  - An article exploring Using the Arts in Faith Formation.
  - A printable overview of The Lectionary and the Church Year.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings explore the depth and breadth of God’s gracious generosity. Isaiah finds comfort in God’s mysterious grace. In Philippians, Paul acknowledges that Christ is all to him, both in life and in death. Jesus tells the parable of the early laborers, who envy the landowner’s generosity toward latecomers.

Isaiah 55:6-9

Although scholars debate the single authorship of the book of Isaiah, no one disputes its grandeur or its prominence in biblical revelation. It is quoted in the New Testament 20 times and introduces or develops numerous key ideas about God’s nature and relationship with humanity.

Chapter 55 sums up many of the themes treated in chapters 40–54 and repeats the main emphases of chapter 40. Today’s passage calls God’s people to revive their passion for God and encourages them to accept God’s free offer of reconciliation. The search for God involves repentance. To seek God is to cease seeking the way of self and to confess the need for mercy.

Verses 8-9 recapture the understanding of God’s transcendence as expressed in 40:12-28. Unlike humankind, God generously forgives. Human beings cannot measure God by their own expectations or limitations because God’s thoughts and ways are unfathomable. The spatial language (55:9) symbolizes the limitless greatness and utter holiness of God’s nature.

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

The church in Philippi was Paul’s first congregation formed on European soil, and his relationship with it remained consistently warm and close. Because of Paul’s references to being imprisoned and to the imperial guard (1:13), it was traditionally assumed that this letter was written from Rome about AD 62. Some scholars now believe that the letter was written earlier from Ephesus, where the praetorian guard was also stationed.

In today’s selection, Paul meditates upon the possibility of imminent execution. For Paul, both life and death are under the rule of Christ. Though life means communion with Christ, death will bring even fuller communion. Life, however, includes the opportunity to serve Christ further.

Matthew 20:1-16a

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is found only in Matthew. The owner’s action in hiring workers at the last hour may indicate the need to get the harvest in before the rains or his concern for the unemployed. A denarius was the standard day’s wage for a laborer.

The point of the parable lies in the landowner’s actions and is thus sometimes called the parable of the generous employer. The question “Are you envious because I am generous?” (v. 15) may be more literally translated “Is your eye evil because I am good?” An “evil eye” indicates a jealous, ungenerous, envious attitude.

Matthew has chosen to set the parable before the Zebedee brothers’ question on precedence (20:20-27). Thus it stands as a reminder to disciples in the Church that the first may again become last if they grumble at the reward the Lord gives to others, even to latecomers.

The strength of Jesus’ message is found in his words about God’s generosity. God, as supreme Judge, has the right to say “I grant mercy to whom I will.”

Reflection

Our first response to this gospel is the same as the hot, exhausted, murmuring workers. We want to vent like a raging four-year old: “But that’s not fair!”

But as we reflect deeper, we see how perfectly this parable fits the divine pattern. Remember Judas, who spent several years in close proximity to Jesus? It didn’t seem to matter: after his terrible betrayal, he committed suicide. And the good thief? After a few minutes’ conversation with Jesus, he wins the lottery: a free ride into paradise. God’s justice is altogether different from ours.

The householder, like God, may have responded to the need of the latecomers, who wouldn’t have waited so long at the marketplace if they hadn’t been desperate for money, perhaps to feed their families.

If we’d been there, at our best, we would’ve rejoiced at the good fortune of the late worker who must’ve left work that day bursting with exuberance. We would’ve

“Jesus is in the world as masked, and the work of the Christian is to strip off the masks of the world to find him, and, finding him, to stay with him and to do his work.”

—William Hamilton

theologian
been grateful for a glimpse of a God whose generosity far surpasses our most extravagant hopes for justice. Secretly, we might have been thrilled that when we're the late ones, God will overlook our flaws and amply reward us anyway.

The Scriptures and the Catechism
We are challenged to become a community who knows God (CCC, #31–43) as the great benefactor, the giver of all good gifts (CCC, #218–21, 295, 1996–2005). As the parable in today's gospel makes clear, God does not choose to relate to us simply out of justice or what is "owed" to us, but out of mercy by bestowing gifts on us because of love. We are special to God not for what we do, but for who we are.

Tips for Creative Drama
by Elizabeth M. Ring
To use drama in religious education, you need nothing more than the wonderful imaginations of your participants. To that, add an area defined as a stage, some fabric to wrap into costumes, a few simple props like a shepherd's crook, a few bowls, some small boxes, a broom, a small table and a couple of chairs. If you want to move to fuller production, you might want to add a curtain, some fabric for backdrops and a couple of spotlights (these can be as simple as ceramic ceiling fixtures inside coffee cans).

Creating dramatic versions of scripture stories is a first cousin to the Jewish practice of midrash, the retelling of a story to expand and elucidate it. Your best script writers will be group members themselves. Start with passages that have a lot of dialogue. Invite participants to identify with someone in the story and bring that person to life. Ask them to think about how the person felt, what kind of a day it was and other questions that help evoke a picture of what was happening during the incident described.

Ignatius Loyola invited us to enter into biblical stories and identify a character with whom we resonate. This is the beginning of scripture reflection and of a dramatic script. What are the smells? What are the colors? What can you hear? Who else is there? What are your emotions? These questions engage scripture for reflection and connection. They are also questions to help bring a story to life as drama. They allow you to put words into the mouths of the characters and explore the relationships of the people both in their historical context and as they might be today.

The World of the Bible
The Lord is Gracious and Merciful
In the Old Testament, gracious and merciful are characteristics of God's special covenant love (Hebrew, hesed) that binds God to us. God's attitude of love or attachment to the covenant community includes aspects of loyalty, dependability, trustworthiness and an eagerness to help when situations turn bad.

“God sees the truth but waits. God waits on us to open our eyes and ears to justice and charity. Let us be part of God's justice, whose property it is always to have mercy and to spare.”

—Dorothy Day

Like the Father/Patron of a family, God is an especially generous benefactor who lavishes gifts (Greek: charis, Latin: gratia) on them.

These are not distributed on the basis of the people's merits, but strictly our of God's favor or mercy. Mercy is not just the response felt toward those who are suffering, but even more the fierce attachment of God to be with us and save us.

“Creativity arises out of the tension between spontaneity and limitations, the latter (like the river banks) forcing the spontaneity into the various forms which are essential to the work of art or poem.”

—Rollo May

Living the Good News | Preschool/Kindergarten | 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – A

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