God calls us to faith shown in obedience.

- In today’s gospel, Jesus tells the story of two sons. One son changes his mind and obeys his father; the other only says he will obey.
- Young children are learning how to change their minds and their behaviors every day. We support this growth by giving them room to freely choose between healthy alternatives.
- Today’s session explores the gospel story through puppet play, story-review games and collage art.

Question of the Week
If you were the father in today’s gospel, how would you feel about your sons?

Core Session
- Getting Started (bag of appearance-changing props [hats, glasses, wigs, clothing items])
- Gospel Story: A Boy Who Changed His Mind (2 socks)
- Puppet Play: I Changed My Mind! (2 socks)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Story-Review Games
- Craft: Choice Collage (optional: collage materials, such as ribbon, trim, sequins, yarn, scraps, etc.)
- Book Corner
- Info: Closing Prayer Ritual
- 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
- Using Creative Drama in Faith Formation
- The World of the Bible: God the Savior and Redeemer
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)
Place the props in a paper bag. Stand in front of the group, with the prop bag nearby. Ask the children to look at you closely, because you are about to change something about yourself. After they look, turn around and make some change. Then face the group and ask the children to guess the change.

Your first change might be obvious—putting on a hat or pair of sun glasses. Your next changes can be more subtle—taking off your shoes, making a funny face or tapping a foot.

Invite a child to come forward. Let the group look at the child and then ask the child to make a change. Be ready to help the child think of a change, if the child asks for help. Give every child who wants to come forward a turn.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)
A Boy Who Changed His Mind
Story Focus: As a visual focus for today’s story, put socks on your hands to make simple puppets. Begin with one hand behind your back. Explain that you will tell a story that Jesus told.

Once there was a man who had two sons. One day the man went to talk to the older son. (At this point, address one puppet.)

“Reuben,” the man said, “go out and pick grapes today.”

(Use puppet when son talks.) The son answered, “I don’t want to!”

But later, Reuben changed his mind. “My father needs help,” he said. “I will go out and pick the grapes.” Reuben went to the vineyard. He worked hard to pick the grapes. (Move puppet away to make grape-picking motion.)

Then the father went to the other son. (Bring out the second puppet and address it.)

“Jesse,” the father said, “go out and pick grapes today.”

(Use puppet when son talks.) Jesse replied, “Yes, sir.” But Jesse did not really go. (Make puppet shake its head “no.”)

(Puppet #1: Will you share your cookies with me? Puppet #2: No!…Well, all right. I changed my mind.

Here is one more scene to try:

Puppet #1: I’m tired of television. Let’s go outside and play.
Puppet #2: No! ...Oh, I guess I will. I changed my mind.

Allow time for children to try these and invent other puppet conversations.

Praying Together (5 minutes)
Sit in a circle with the children. Ask:
◆ How are we changing?

Invite children to notice such changes as growing taller or being able to do something we could not do last year. Invite children to thank God for changes they like. Close by praying:
◆ Thank you, God, for giving us power to make changes. 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 an illustrated version of today’s story.

On page 2, you’ll also find pictures of young children choosing to make positive changes. Use these pictures to engage children in a simple discussion of how we change as we grow older.

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.

Story-Review Games (10-25 minutes)
The Vineyard:
Invite small groups of children to take turns playing The Vineyard Game attached to this document. This colorful, noncompetitive game, based on the biblical image of a vineyard, can also be used in the session for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Everybody, Nod Your Head:
This active game gives children a chance to demonstrate changing their minds.

Ask children to stand in a circle. Teach this song to the tune of “London Bridge”:

Everybody, nod your head.
No, I won’t! No, I won’t!
Everybody, nod your head.
Yes, I’ll do it!

Accompany “no, I won’t” with vigorous head shaking and “yes, I’ll do it” with enthusiastic nods.

Repeat with different motions; encourage children to suggest their own ideas. Examples:
- tap your toe
- clap your hands
- smile a smile
- turn around
- give a hop

Craft (10-15 minutes)
Choice Collage
(Open your Fall-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Children experience their power to make individual choices and changes in this collage project. Give each child a shape. Children turn the shapes into collages by following these directions:
- Choose a sheet of construction paper in a color you like.
- Glue your shape onto your paper.
- Change your shape into a collage picture.
- You can use crayons or felt pens to change your shape into a collage picture.
- You can glue materials (show collage materials) to change your shape into a collage picture, too.

Encourage children to explore individual possibilities. Ask volunteers to talk about their choices with these or similar questions:
- How did you change your shape?
- What did you choose to do with your picture?

Invite children to take the finished pictures home.

Book Corner (5-15 minutes)
Share books with children on themes related to the day’s stories. Today’s story about a boy who says, “No!” suggests books that deal tenderly with the children’s own feelings of recalcitrance.

In Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus by Mo Williams (New York: Hyperion, 2003) a bus driver tells the children (to whom you are reading the book) not to let an irresponsible pigeon drive the bus. The pigeon becomes more and more outrageous as he tries to get the children to go along with his bad behavior. Children love being the reasonable, responsible caretakers shouting out “No!” to a bird whose behavior is far more outlandish than theirs!
Closing Prayer Ritual

Note that rituals help establish a sense of community in the room. Closing prayer is one important time for ritual. Even as simple a ritual as lighting a candle in the center of the circle each time helps establish a sense of belonging for the children.

We suggest keeping a box with a small, beautiful cloth (napkins work very well), candles and a Bible in it. You can add such other items as small bells, dried flowers, a cross or “found” natural items—a seashell, pine cone or interesting rock.

At “prayer time” invite one or two children to use items in the box to decorate a designated corner or table as the prayer space. (If your box is large enough, you can simply turn over the box for a prayer corner.)

After the leader lights the candles, the group shares a quiet moment before beginning their prayer. No matter what the theme of the day, the leader asks the children if they have anything special they want to talk to God about—someone sick or something they were thinking about.

After the final prayer, one leader invites the children to enact their favorite ritual when she says, “One, two, three…blow,” and they all blow out the candles.

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 game titled No, No, Yes!
  - Instructions for an alternate story-review game titled Change for Me.
  - 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.
  - An article further exploring parables titled Jesus’ Parables.
  - An article titled 18 Ways to Support Leaders, which you can use to support other leaders and helpers in your faith-formation program.
  - An article further exploring ways to use drama in faith formation titled Creative Drama.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s gospel affirms our ability and our opportunity to grow by changing our minds. This is an important skill for young children, who more frequently practice saying, “No!” while the adults in their lives insist “Yes!”

We help children develop this skill when we provide opportunities for them to make free choices in a stable environment. Hold story time at the same time and in the same place each week—but make provision for the child who is too tired to sit still even for a short story. We can keep the children’s choices within reasonable boundaries by offering them limited choices: “Would you like to hear today’s story in the circle or would you like to look at books in the book corner today?”
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings call us to committed obedience. Ezekiel describes the Lord's justice, which urges us to turn from sin and persist in righteousness. Paul invites his readers to imitate Christ, who humbled himself, freely becoming a servant of God. In the gospel, Jesus’ parable illustrates repentance, a change of heart with a corresponding faithful action.

Ezekiel 18:25-28
Chapter 18 centers on the question of individual responsibility, as raised by the proverb, “The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (18:2; Jeremiah 31:29-30).

This saying recalls the ancient doctrine of corporate guilt that focused upon the destiny of the community rather than that of the individual. By the time of the exile and the destruction of the community’s solidarity, the note of solemn praise in Exodus 20:5 had degenerated into hopelessness and sullen rebelliousness.

In response, Ezekiel speaks as a concerned theologian to defend God’s honor and righteousness and as a pastor to offer comfort and hope to the exiles. He draws upon the slowly emerging concept of individual responsibility, as formulated in the call to a personal examination of conscience in the liturgical rite for access to the temple and in the prophetic warnings.

Israel’s own injustice blinds its understanding of God’s ways. Yet God is free to promise life even to the wicked if they repent. They are called to a renewal of covenant with the Lord and a new life. Only God’s purposes define true fairness.

Philippians 2:1-11
Paul follows his exhortation to steadfastness with an exhortation to harmony and humility among believers.

Verses 6-11 of today’s passage are considered to be a pre-Pauline hymn to Christ that Paul adopted to make his own point. It is poetic in rhythm and structure and contains an outline of Christ’s salvation journey: divine preexistence (v. 6), incarnation (v. 7), death (v. 8), resurrection and celestial exaltation (v. 9), heavenly adoration (v. 10) and Jesus’ new title (v. 11).

The first stanza (vv. 6-8) recounts Jesus’ own action. His “equality with God” is not a prize “to be exploited” for his own advantage. As God’s equal (divine), Jesus owes no service to anyone, but in his humanity, Jesus freely becomes a servant to God, obedient to God the Father for the purpose of salvation.

The second stanza of the hymn (vv. 9-11) stresses God’s response to Jesus’ obedience. The name God has bestowed on Jesus is Lord, (Greek, Kyrios), the circumlocution used by Jews as a substitute for speaking God’s personal name, YHWH. This name is now given to Jesus, and the honor due to God is now due him.

Matthew 21:18-32
The parable of the two sons is found only in Matthew and is the first of three parables on the judgment of Israel. Jesus insists that actions, not words, are the ultimate signs of obedience. Here Jesus defends his ministry of inviting into God’s kingdom those outcast from Jewish society.

Even though tax collectors and prostitutes live outside the law, they repent when the gospel of the kingdom is offered to them. They push into the kingdom of God “ahead of” (v. 31; or even “instead of”) the leaders who have sworn obedience to the law, but who will not accept the work of faith in the new law of Jesus.

John came to show “the way of righteousness” (v. 32) through repentance, but the leaders of the people did not heed him. They will accept the authority of neither John nor Jesus.

Reflection

We’ve all had the generous impulse. The shout, “Sure, I’ll do it!” often comes when onlookers can appreciate our nobility. We bask in approval for a while. And then…

Other distractions arise. Or it gets too late in the day. Or something more important takes priority. Or we are so tired! The valid excuses swamp the original intent. Somehow, the thing doesn't get done.

In a bad mood, we snarl, “No!” We shove the request to the bottom of the pile, ignore the phone call, or make some excuse. But it continues to nibble at us.

“Oh, alright!” we groan later. Maybe we have more time, resources or energy than we thought originally. A sudden cancellation of one event enables us to attend another. A window of time opens. Suddenly we’re digging through the pile, trying to retrieve the message or e-mail, desperate to help. No one may ever know
about the change of heart or the painstaking process of arriving there. But we act, finally, as we knew we should have all along.

Have we recognized ourselves in either scenario above? Then we know, from the inside out, the parable of two sons proclaimed this weekend.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Our kingdom community is characterized by unity and responsible action (CCC, #1701–13). Lip service to the doctrines of our faith is not enough to demonstrate our conversion (CCC, #1430–39). Each member of the community is called to share in the work of building up the unity of the community through faithful service to God and to others (CCC, #811–22).

Using Creative Drama in Faith Formation

by Elizabeth M. Ring

To start exploring drama as a tool for faith formation, start with a story that has at least three people and some action. Spend some time entering that story yourself, imagining what it was like then and where you might have encountered a similar situation.

The parable of two sons is a fine example of a story that comes to life in drama. When you are comfortable with your own reflections on the story, see what the group finds in it. If the energy is high, work out a script. Have a narrator describe the place and conditions in which the action is taking place. Then stage your play.

If drama is a tool that you and your group enjoy and find powerful in helping you open up biblical stories, you can move to more formal productions for the wider church audience. Public productions can range from a “dramatic reading” style in which the actors sit on stools and move minimally as they interact with each other, to full blown productions with scenery, lights and costumes.

If you want to do elaborate productions, you need to work closely with the church leadership around details like how much electricity you can draw before you blow fuses. Production is another essay for which there is not space here.

One most memorable experience was a production of T. S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral that was done as a chancel drama in a beautiful stone church with an exquisite wrought iron rood screen and several levels between the floor of the nave, the choir, the chancel and the sanctuary.

That ready-made set was perfect. Theatre lights added discreetly behind pillars highlighted different areas. The most elaborate part of the production was the costumes, which included robes, puffy sleeves, armor and vestments. I learned more history and more about Thomas à Becket in one evening than I had in any classroom. It was a magical evening for all generations.

The World of the Bible

God the Savior and Redeemer

Before it became a Christian theological term, savior meant one who rescued someone from a difficult situation. Thus is was commonly attributed to the king or emperor or general who saved the nation by winning a war.

For the Jews, God was their primary Savior because God rescued them from their oppression in Egypt, restored them after the exile, and sustained their covenant community.

For Christians, Jesus is the Savior because he rescued us from our broken relationship with God and offered us a new relationship under God’s kingdom rule. In John’s gospel, Jesus’ salvation work also overcomes the hostile forces (which he calls the world) that actively resist God’s reordering of creation and human society.

A redeemer was a particular type of savior who paid for the release of a family member or relative who had either been jailed or enslaved.

Although it included both the notion of liberation and release by payment, when applied to God’s saving action to free the Hebrews from their oppression to become God’s covenant community, there is no assumption that God is obliged in any way to pay anything to effect their freedom.

“O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, ay we know Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly: For ever and ever.”

—Richard of Chichester

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