We are called to turn from sin and bear fruit for God.

- Jesus draws on prophetic imagery to compare God’s people to a vineyard that God has planted and tended.
- Young children in healthy families can take loving care for granted, as unremarkable as air and water. We help them recognize the goodness that undergirds their daily lives.
- Today's session explores the gospel image of a vineyard through art, games, fingerplay and books.

Question of the Week
What different endings could we invent for this week's gospel story?
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

Cover a work surface with newspapers. Dress the children in smocks. Set out corks and stamp pads made from paper towels soaked in purple tempera paint and placed in pie plates. Tape a length of newsprint to a wall. Use markers to draw a vine pattern on the newsprint.

Show how to press the end of a cork in paint and then stamp it on the border to make a print of a grape. Ask the children to print clusters of grapes all along the vine.

Invite the children to walk along the length of the border when they have finished working. Point out that the green portion is called a grapevine; grapes grow on a vine. Discuss:

♦ How are vines different from trees? from flowers?
♦ How are vines like trees? like flowers?

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

Grapes in the Vineyard

*Story Focus: Use the border made in today’s Getting Started activity as a visual focus for today’s story.*

A man says, “I want to grow grapes in my vineyard. I want thick, healthy vines, big green leaves and sweet ripe grapes.”

The man helps the grapes grow. First the man digs into the dirt and picks out the stones. Carefully he plants young grape plants. He puts a fence all around his vineyard to keep out wild animals. The man says, “I love the sweet, ripe grapes. I love my vineyard very much.”

God says, “I want people. I want old people, boys and girls, babies, grownups and teenagers. I want many, many people.”

God helps the people grow. God gives food, air and water to the people. God gives families and friends to the people. God even sends Jesus to help people grow happy and strong.

God says, “I love all the different people. (Name each child.) I love my people very much.”

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

The Vineyard has a Vine

Ask the children to stand in a circle. Ask a volunteer to stand in the center of the circle. Teach the following words and actions to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell”:

1. *The vineyard has a vine.*
   *The vineyard has a vine.*
   Hi, ho, the derry-o.
   *The vineyard has a vine.*
   (Child stands in the center as children circle first left, then right.)

2. *God helps the vineyard grow.*
   *God helps the vineyard grow.*
   Hi, ho, the derry-o.
   *God helps the vineyard grow.*
   (Child in center chooses two more children to join him or her.)

3. *God loves the vines that grow.*
   *God loves the vines that grow.*
   Hi, ho, the derry-o.
   *God loves the vines that grow.*
   (Children still in the circle step in and put arms around each other’s shoulders and gently sway, rocking the “vines” in the middle.)

Repeat the song until each child has had a turn to stand in the center.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Say:

♦ God takes care of the vineyard.
♦ God takes care of us, too.
♦ How does God take care of you?
♦ For what would you like to thank God today?

Allow plenty of time for children to choose whether or not to respond. Close by praying:

♦ God, thank you for taking care of us. Help us to grow with you forever. 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 fingerplay children can use to retell today's story.

On page 2 you'll also find pictures of people caring for children—and a green, growing plant. Helping young children tell stories using these pictures makes a good introduction to the play and plant activities below.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
- “Picking Grapes” (songbook p. 10, also available as an MP3)
- “Sing a New Song” (songbook p. 5, 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.

Game (10-20 minutes)
The Vineyard
Invite small groups of children to take turns playing The Vineyard Game, attached to this document. This colorful, noncompetitive game is based on the biblical image of a vineyard.

Snack (5-10 minutes)
Fruits of the Vineyard
Children taste some of the products that come from vineyards.

Invite volunteers to distribute napkins, cups, raisins and grapes. Other volunteers can pour juice from a small pitcher. Encourage the children to talk about the sweet tastes. You can remark that vineyards can grow good things to eat.

Most preschoolers and kindergartners want a mid-morning snack—something as simple as a box of graham crackers will do. Consider posting a sign-up sheet on the room door asking parents to supply juice, crackers, cups and napkins each week.

Be careful of food allergies! Check with the parents of each child to find out if their child has any special food guidelines you need to follow.

Fingerplay (5-15 minutes)
Thank You, God
Teach children this story-review fingerplay.

Thank you, God,
For the bright sunshine.
Put fingers together to make a circular sun. Raise the sun over your head.

Thanks for the garden
That's yours and mine.
Fold hands, then point away from self and to self.

Thank you, God,
For the vines that grow...
Join your hands, palm to palm. Slowly raise, like a growing vine.

...Up from the earth,
Sure and slow.
Keep raising hands until arms are stretched above head, then spread open at shoulder level.

Thank you, God,
For grapes to eat,
Pretend to eat grapes.

For work to share,
And friends to greet.
Shake hands with one another.

Book Corner (5-15 minutes)
Share books with children on themes related to the day's stories. A classic book, available in many editions, about caring for a growing thing is The Carrot Seed by Ruth Krauss, illustrated by Crockett Johnson (New York: Harper, 1944). A small boy tends a carrot seed, patiently waiting for a carrot that everyone else assures him will never grow. Whose Garden Is It? by Mary Hoberman and illustrated by Jane Dyer (New York: Gulliver Books, 2004) asks the question, but an array of animals, sun and rain clouds all claim to be the answer. This appealing book for preschoolers helps children understand how many things work together to care for God's wonderful world.
Community-Building Challenges

Changing group members presents a special community-building challenge to the contemporary leader. Job mobility, time pressures and social changes may mean that one child comes only once a month and another child comes for three weeks, and then never again.

So how do we build community? One educator suggests paying attention to these details:

◆ Stability for the community can be located in people—that is, the leader. Imagine one preschool child saying, “I like my leader! She is always there when I get to the room. She always knows my name, too! She does not make me play with the other children if I am feeling sad or shy.”

◆ Stability for the community can be located in the setting. Imagine another preschooler: “In our room we always hang our pictures up where everyone can see them. There is our hideaway corner—a table with a blanket over it. This is the messy space. We can paint or even bang nails into wood, but only over here, where it is easy for us to clean up.”

◆ Stability for the community can be located in room rituals. “We always start with a song. We always end with prayer. We always sit here for stories. We always have crackers for a snack.”

Young Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel, a man plants a vineyard, arranges for its care, and is angry that his workers do not “produce the proper fruits.” The story further tells us that his workers kill his messengers and even his son. The story draws on imagery from the psalms, prophets and other readings of the Old Testament in which God’s people are compared to a vineyard.

Because the anger in both passages may threaten us, we can easily miss the source of the anger—God’s great, loving desire for our growth and productivity. In these passages, the owner—like God—feels great love toward the vineyard, cares for it tenderly and wants it to grow well. For 4- and 5-year-olds, we focus not on the anger, but on God’s loving care. We explore how we are God’s vineyard; we are like little vines that God plants and tends, hoping that we will grow well.

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.
  — Suggestions for creating a Plant Play Center in your session room.
  — Suggestions for exploring Our Parish.
  — 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:
  — A printable article titled First Impressions, which offers practical helps for the use of fine art in your classroom.
  — A reproducible handout for parents titled Parents as Primary Religious Educators.
  — An article further exploring parables titled Jesus’ Parables.
  — An article looking more deeply in this year’s gospel titled The Gospel of Matthew.
More about Today’s Scriptures

In today’s readings, fruitfulness is examined as the result of our relationship to God through Christ. Isaiah sings a lament about Israel, God’s vineyard, which failed to yield fruit. Paul proposes to the Philippians a life of gratitude and excellence through prayer and discipline. Jesus issues a call to repentance through the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants.

Isaiah 5:1-7
This prophetic parable, the song of the vineyard, celebrates the expectation of the harvest. The song invites the audience to pass judgment on the vineyard, a frequent image for Israel. The grapes are more than merely wild. A more literal translation would be “rotten grapes.” The vine grower devoted his best efforts only to reap decay.

Only in verse 7 does Isaiah’s audience discover it has judged itself. The last part of verse 7 uses a wordplay to heighten its effect: “He expected judgment (Hebrew, mishpat), but saw bloodshed (Hebrew, mispah); righteousness (Hebrew, sedakah), but heard a cry (Hebrew, se’akah)!” Judgment and justice grow out of the covenant bond between God and the people.

Philippians 4:6-9
Chapter 3 discusses Paul’s opponents in Philippi. Part of their belief seems to have been the necessity for Christians to keep the Jewish law, especially circumcision. Using a commercial metaphor, Paul responds to this by drawing up a profit-and-loss statement.

What once he counted as assets—his Hebrew genealogy, his upbringing and his strict observance of the law—he now counts as loss in comparison to the “value of knowing Christ” (v. 8). Paul, once religiously affluent, has been bankrupted by Jesus. He experienced the annulment of all his former values. Righteousness, a relationship of intimacy with God, is humbly received as a gift.

The knowledge of Christ that Paul now seeks is not a special or secret knowledge such as the followers of the Greek mystery cults claimed would bring initiates to perfection. Rather, it is the Hebraic Old Testament “knowing,” which comes from a close personal relationship.

This knowledge comes only through the experience of sharing in Christ’s suffering and death, both in baptism and in daily life. Paul stresses that the resurrection is still in the future. What he possesses now is not the end, but the beginning of his salvation.

Matthew 21:33-43
The parable of the wicked tenants is rooted in the economic life of Galilee. Landowners were often absentee foreigners, resented by the local peasantry. The estate of such a foreigner was regarded as ownerless if he died without an heir, and the occupants would then have first claim upon the property. Thus, in the parable when the son arrives, the tenants may assume that the father has died and hope to claim the vineyard after killing the son.

Matthew strengthens the allegorical references in the parable. The slaves clearly stand for the prophets, for the landowner (Matthew’s metaphor for God in 20:1) sends two groups of slaves, reproducing the Jewish distinction between the former and latter prophets. The fate of the slaves is that of the prophets.

Matthew puts the condemnation of the tenants who have abused their trust into the mouth of the audience, the leaders of Israel. It is the leaders’ faithlessness that will result in the removal of the kingdom from Israel. Since Israel has not rendered its fruit of right living to God in due season, the kingdom will be given to “a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (v. 43). The “people” refers to the Gentiles rather than to the chosen people of Israel.
Reflection

The situation described in today’s parable was quite common in the Galilee of Jesus’ day. As one commentator points out, only the absence of the landlord (“in another country”) could give the farmers the stupid hope that their murders would go unnoticed.

While scholars debate about the allegorical nature of this reading, more personal questions might concern us. What have we made the cornerstone of our lives? While we might glibly answer “Christ,” how is that borne out in our decisions? our priorities? our use of time, talents and money? our actions?

How terrible it would be to reach the end of life and find we had based it on the wrong cornerstone, which we hoped would keep the whole building standing. As Thomas Merton said, “We can spend our whole lives erecting a ladder, only to discover we’ve placed it against the wrong wall.”

Perhaps there is a special risk for churchgoers, the people likely to read these reflections. Do we assume we’ve got it made, when in fact, the “rejected” stone, a person who may not even attend church, has the genuine grounding for the shining edifice of a holy life?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Our kingdom community, like the vineyard, is holy because God continues to work to transform us into the kind of community God desires (CCC, #823–29). Being God’s kingdom community is never easy. It will always cost us something. Those who reject God’s kingdom ideal for one of their own will find ways to persecute us. Following Jesus will always mean following him through suffering to resurrection (CCC, #675, 769, 1816).

The World of the Bible

The Law

The Law (Hebrew Torah, instruction) consisted of the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). They tell of God’s search for an appropriate covenant partner. Jewish scholars combed these books to discover all of the specific commands given by God and found 613 of them.

These commands summarize God’s directives or basic guidelines for the Hebrew covenant community’s life with one another. They identify the basic attitudes and actions that must be followed to fulfill God’s desires.

“The law is not thrust upon man; it rests deep within him, to waken when the call comes.”

—Martin Buber

The Law became the foundation of their life in community. Although difficult to keep in their entirety, these laws were not considered a burden (as we so often think), but rather as a precious gift because the people knew what God wanted and no longer had to guess what to do in order to please God.