Scripture
Matthew 25:14-15, 19-21

Way of Abundance

After entrusting his servants with varying sums of money, a householder praises one for risk-taking.

- Jesus tells the story about a worker who uses the master’s money wisely.
- Young children delight in their growing power to use the gifts God gives in their own strength and skill.
- Today’s session celebrates the gifts given to young children through art, games and simple discussion.

Question of the Week
What gifts or talents do we have? Where do we use them?

Core Session
◆ Getting Started
◆ Gospel Story: God’s Gifts (10 pennies)
◆ Story-Review Mural: Look at Me! (strip of mural paper)
◆ Praying Together

Enrichment
◆ Discover the Good News
◆ Singing Together
◆ Story-Review Game: God Gives
◆ Craft: Thanks God! Cards
◆ Snack: Learn a Table Grace (snack materials, plates, table knives or plastic knives)
◆ 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
◆ Snapshots of the Soul
◆ The World of the Bible: Parable
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)
Children talk about the many things they can do. Ask:
- What can we do with our legs and feet? *(run, hop, gallop, jump, etc.)*
- What can we do with our arms and hands? *(wave, shake hands, make a sandwich)*
- What can we do with our mouths? *(sing, talk, yell, etc.)*
- What can you do now that you could not do when you were 3 years old?

Invite children to act out their answers, too. Close by saying:
- God gives us many good things that we can do.

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

**Story Focus:** Use 10 pennies as a visual focus for today's story.

**God’s Gifts**

Once there were two men. One man said to the other, “Here. I give you five pennies.” *(Set out a pile of five pennies.)*

This man took the five pennies. He used the five pennies to earn five more pennies. *(Add a second set of five to the first set.)*

“Here,” he said. “Here are the five pennies you gave me and five more than I earned.”

“Good job!” the first man said. “I am happy to see how you used my gift.”

Here is a woman and a child. God says, “Woman, I give you the gift of telling stories.”

God says, “Child, I give you the gift of running and jumping.”

All day long the child runs and jumps. “I love to run and jump,” says the child.

That night, at bedtime, the woman tells the child a story. “Thank you for the story,” says the child.

“I love to tell you stories,” says the woman.

“Good job!” says God. “I am happy to see you run, child. I am happy to hear your stories, woman. I am happy to see how you use my gifts.”

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

**Look at Me!**
Children make a mural showing the many things they can do.

As in the Getting Started activity, ask:
- What can we do with our legs and feet? *(run, hop, gallop, jump, etc.)*
- What can we do with our arms and hands? *(wave, shake hands, make a sandwich)*
- What can we do with our mouths? *(sing, talk, yell, etc.)*
- What can you do now that you could not do when you were 3 years old?

Tape a strip of shelf or butcher paper to the wall at the children's level. *Directions to the children:*
- Draw a picture of yourself on the mural.
- Show yourself doing something you really like to do.

Invite volunteers to tell about their drawings. Say:
- God gives us bodies—legs, feet, arms, hands and mouths.
- When we run fast, we use the legs God gives us.
- When we sing, we use the mouth God gives us.
- What do you like to do? *(Affirm each child’s choice as using a gift God gives.)*

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Invite the children to say “Thank you” to God for different gifts. Close by praying:
- Thank you, God, for all you give us. Thank you for all we can do. 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)
As the feast of Thanksgiving approaches, we tie today’s story to giving thanks to God. On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News, you’ll find a simple table grace. Ask children to name the items shown for which we can thank God. For what else can we thank God?

On page 2 you’ll find pictures of activities that children can do. Help children describe these activities and add ideas of their own.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Sing a New Song” (songbook p. 5, also available as an MP3)
◆ “Happy Are Those” (songbook p. 12)

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 Game (10-25 minutes)
God Gives
Children play a circle game that names gifts from God. Ask the children to sit in a circle. Ask each one to think of a gift that God gives, but not to name the gift aloud.

Then teach this chant:

God gives good gifts,
God gives good gifts,
God gives (name of gift).

Ask a volunteer to stand in the center of the circle. While the group says the chant the child in the center spins slowly around with eyes closed and, at the end of the chant, points to someone in the circle.

The person to whom the child in the center points then calls out a gift that God gives. (Encourage children to help a child who is having difficulty giving an answer.)

Repeat, asking a different child to be the spinner every few chants. The children may also enjoy clapping in time with the chant.

Craft (10-15 minutes)
Thanks God! Cards
Children make and decorate cards that thank God for God’s gifts.

Invite children to name gifts they have from God. Children can name parts of their bodies, such as arms and legs, or activities they like to do, such as running and singing.

Gather children around the image of Paliekara’s Suffering Servant, attached to this document, which shows a portrait of Jesus. Ask children to name the person shown. What would they want to say to Jesus today? What would they want to do with Jesus today? Explain that Jesus himself is a wonderful gift given to us by God.

Ask each child to make a card thanking God for one or more gifts. Each child first draws a picture of a gift on a sheet of paper. The child then folds the sheet in half to make a card, keeping the picture on the inside of the card.

Show children how to use a stencil to decorate the outside of their cards. Encourage the children to make hearts in any pattern on the paper, overlapping them to create more visual interest.

Children can offer these thank-you cards in the collection during worship.
Snack (10-15 minutes)

Learn a Table Grace

Children learn a table grace to use during today’s snack.

When you have a snack, you can take that opportunity to teach children a blessing that they can say at home. Use the same simple blessing every time so that the children will remember it.

Volunteers may also enjoy leading the group in other blessings that they say with their families.

Invite children to make sandwiches for snacks. Ask children to cut the sandwiches into quarters. Use four quarters to teach children this table grace; touch a different quarter as you say each line of the grace:

Thank you for the world so sweet.
Thank you for the food we eat.
Thank you for the birds that sing.
Thank you, God, for everything. Amen.

When the children can say the grace together with you—more or less!—enjoy your snack together.

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 exploring Our Parish.
  — Instructions for an alternative Giant Book Table Grace Activity.
  — Paliekara’s Suffering Servant, to be used in today’s Craft 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 printable article titled First Impressions, which offers practical helps for the use of fine arts in your classroom.
  — A helpful article on Using the Arts in Faith Formation.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s parable suggests that God’s gifts come with the responsibility to use them wisely. Our session focuses on gifts that are real and immediate to young children, such as our bodies and the ways we can use them.

If you celebrate the USA holiday of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November, you will find that today’s session offers a natural tie-in to activities that prepare the children for this celebration. For example, children can decorate grocery bags to take home for a food collection. You might want to make copies of this list of groceries for children to staple to their bags:

◆ 1 can of corn
◆ 1 can of green beans
◆ 2 cans tomato soup
◆ 1 lb. box of oatmeal
◆ 1 can of tuna
◆ 1 can of applesauce
◆ 1 lb. bag of rice
◆ 1 lb. bag of dried beans or 1 can of cooked beans
◆ 1 box of crackers
◆ 1 bag of cookies or candy
More about Today’s Scriptures

In today’s readings, God asks us to make appropriate use of our gifts and talents. The writer of Proverbs praises the ambitious and compassionate woman. Paul urges the Thessalonians to quit worrying about the time of Jesus’ return, and instead to live fully, now, as children of light. Jesus’ parable describes two slaves who wisely invest the talents entrusted to them, while a third slave cowers in fear.

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
Proverbs, a collection of concise statements and poetic instructions, is attributed in part to Solomon and to anonymous authors. Many scholars see 31:10-31 as an epilogue composed by a later editor who wished to represent the idealized feminine figure of Wisdom found in chapters 1–9. Like Wisdom, the ideal wife is of more value than any earthly treasure and is a constant blessing to her family.

The description of the wise woman comes to a climax with the summary of verses 30-31. Her activities and attitudes spring from her relationship with God. The author thus describes for us the daily life of a woman who has mastered the practical wisdom described in the rest of the book.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Paul responds to another of the Thessalonians’ concerns, the desire to know the “times and the seasons” (v. 1), the persistent human wish to have an end-times timetable. Paul replies that such knowledge is not needful for Christians.

The “day of the Lord” (v. 2), now identified with Jesus’ second coming, will happen as unexpectedly as a thief’s entry. False assurances leave people unprepared for “sudden destruction” (v. 3), final separation from God.

Matthew 25:14-30
The second of Matthew’s three end-time parables concerns the gift of talents and how they are used. As so often with Matthew’s parables, the emphasis is on the serious demand for a decision about how to act. Here the demand is to use one’s gifts in order to participate fully in the reality of God’s coming kingdom. The focus is on the last slave who does not put to use what he has been given.

The question is not uncertainty about the date of the return, but about what reckoning will be required. According to rabbinical law, a man who buried property entrusted to him had taken the safest course and was not liable for its loss. Whereas the first two servants take the risk of losing their talents, the last servant shows that his primary interest is in his own security. The master, however, expects fruitfulness from his servants no matter how long his return is delayed.

The parable is now directed at the Christian community. Gifts given either grow with use or wither with disuse. The Lord expects of the individual not a vindication of his or her own righteousness, but a devotion to God and others that takes risks in their service. The reward for such faithfulness is further responsibility.

Reflection
Let’s start on a positive note: the joy of the master in today’s parable. He is not punitive, but genuinely delighted with the servants’ work. Quick to reward those with five and two talents, he is equally clear about punishing the one who hid his talent. Hiding money was common practice in Jesus’ day, but it was a stupid, wasteful practice. In the parable, the servant with one talent is fearful and lazy. He teaches us that even if we think we’re not as talented as others, we have unique gifts. If we’re still not convinced, it may be time for reflection.

We are made in the image of a God whose creativity sparkles in the Genesis accounts. To deny that is to take the role of the one-talent servant, who blames his master for his own failure.

Enough of comparisons with other people. Let’s take stock of what tools we’ve been given to serve God’s people and build God’s reign. An honest assessment isn’t proud posturing: in fact, it pays tribute to God’s infinite variety and care.

“Give to everyone that asks you, and do not refuse, for God’s will is that we give to all from the gifts we have received.”

— The Didache
(The Teaching of the 12 Apostles, 2nd century)
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today’s parable reveals that God has entrusted gifts to each of us that we must not neglect but use in the service of God and others (CCC, #799–802, 951, 1830–32, 2003–05). We try to use our wisdom in order to live fully in harmony with God’s guidelines for successful living (CCC, #283, 1303, 1950–60, 2500). The kingdom community is enhanced by the diversity of gifts that people offer (CCC, #733–41).

Snapshots of the Soul
by Mary Lee Wile

Two exercises can involve participants in co-creating with God in a visual, tactile sense. They need not be “artists” to do either. The first is two-dimensional. Provide everyone with an 8½” by 11” piece of paper with a large circle centered on it. Invite group members to fill the circle with images: a “snapshot of the soul” at that moment in time. (Some might know it as a “mandala.”) Provide markers or colored pencils, and give the group 15 to 20 minutes of quiet time. Play quiet, wordless music in the background if that feels appropriate.

Beforehand, consider reading the following excerpt from Paul Murray’s “The Canticle of the Void”:

Smaller than the small
I am that still centre
within you.…
I am the seed
of all that is known
and unknown

This exercise invites people to trust what is within, to allow that seed to blossom. I’ve used this exercise at pre-ordination retreats to help the participants literally “see” where they are, and with teenagers to give them something concrete to use as a way of opening a discussion. One woman has since told me that she fills a circle every day as part of her meditation practice.

The second exercise, appropriate for grief counseling and the classroom, uses clay. Cover surfaces so the clay doesn’t make a mess. Provide the clay. Suggestions of what to shape with the clay will depend on where you are in your shared journey. Some possibilities:

◆ What is the shape of your soul?
◆ What is the shape of grief?
◆ What is the shape of God?
◆ Shape your image of peace.
◆ Shape your image of God’s love.

Because participants will have something tangible that they’ve created, they can “clutch” it as they enter into conversation. Before they begin, consider using background music. This time, learn a chant (I’m especially partial to Taizé) that they can sing repetitively while they work. Singing or chanting engages the body and mind, freeing the soul to shape the clay. The resulting objects may not be aesthetically beautiful, but they are often profoundly meaningful.

The World of the Bible

Parable

A parable (from the Greek to “throw together” things for comparison or illustration) is a short realistic story intended to encourage reflection by connecting the parable to our own life. Since one can connect the parable to various aspects of one’s life or that of one’s family or community, parables are always open-ended in their application.

Parables were a common teaching device of the Jewish rabbis and important to Jesus in his teaching because the only way we have to talk about what is unfamiliar to us (God’s ruling presence or “kingdom”) is in terms that are familiar to us (our everyday life and world).

Thus they challenge the audience to think about their meaning and change their lives because of what they discover.

“At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”

—C.H. Dodd

The Parables of the Kingdom

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