Freedom from Condemnation

Jesus offers generous love to an endangered woman.
* In today’s gospel, Jesus saves the lives of a woman accused of adultery.
* While the details of today’s scriptures may puzzle children, most of them can understand the gift offered in Jesus’ compassion to a woman in trouble.
* In today’s core session, we continue to explore the season of Lent, together with the gospel story of Jesus’ love for God’s people.

Question of the Week
When are you most tempted to judge other people? How do you avoid judging?

Core Session
- Getting Started
- Gospel Story: God Sends Us Jesus (optional: basin, jar of scented oil)
- God Sends Us Game
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Art: Qi’s The Risen Lord
- Washing Feet (dish pan of water, towels)
- Info: Lent and Easter with Children
- 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
- The World of the Bible: Scribes and Pharisees

Scripture
John 8:1-11
Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Explain:
◆ Today is the 5th Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season of the Church year that helps us get ready for Easter.
◆ During Lent, we try to spend extra time praying, listening to God’s word and helping people as Jesus taught us.
◆ During Lent, we hear and tell special stories, too.
◆ What do we need to do when we listen to stories? (examples: keep our bodies still, listen to the words, look at the story [if figures are used] or the storyteller)

Invite children to practice these skills with a short line from today’s story, asking children to repeat with you, several times, the story verse:
◆ God sends us Jesus.

Divide the group into two groups that sit facing each other. Ask one group to be the storytellers. Ask the second group to be the story-listeners.

First help the story-listeners get ready to listen: Bodies still, eyes and ears on the storytellers. Then help the storytellers tell their one-line story: “God sends us Jesus.” Praise each group for its practice of the skills. Switch roles and repeat.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

God Sends Us Jesus.

Story Focus: You might use stuffed animals to tell today’s story. If you do, after the story you can let children use the animals to reenact the story.

A crowd of angry men push a woman right in front of Jesus. “Jesus, look at this woman!” the men yell. “She’s been bad! What are you going to do about it?”

Jesus doesn’t answer. The woman looks sad. The men yell loudly, “Do something, Jesus!”

Jesus looks at the men. “If you’ve been good—done all you should—then you could punish her,” says Jesus. “Or you could do something new.” Then Jesus is quiet again.

The men stand still. The loud men stop yelling. The angry men think.

Then one by one they walk away. They do not punish the woman. They try something new.

Jesus looks at the woman and says, “I won’t punish you either. Now go and do good things, not bad things. You go do something new, too.”

God Sends Us Game (5-15 minutes)

Teach children to sing this game song to the tune of “Go Tell Aunt Rhody.” (If you don’t know the tune, children can simply chant the words.)

God sends us Jesus.
God sends us Jesus.
God sends us Jesus.
So we can follow him.

Seat the children in a circle. Ask a volunteer to play the part of Jesus. The children sing the game song as Jesus walks around the outside of the circle. When the song ends, Jesus touches one child who gets up and follows Jesus.

Sing the song again as the two children walk around the circle. At the end of this verse, the child following Jesus adds another child to the line. Continue the singing and choosing until all the children follow Jesus in a line.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather the children in a circle. Ask the children to go around the circle, each child telling the next:
◆ God sends us Jesus.

Close by praying:
◆ Thank you, God, for sending us helpers, especially your own dear Son, Jesus. Amen.

Note: If you use At Home with the Good News, either distribute this week’s papers to the children before they leave or e-mail the papers to their families.
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 foot-washing activity found below.

On page 2 there are story-starting pictures that children can use to invent their own stories about forgiveness, a theme appropriate to Lent. You’ll also find a To Parents activity for families to use at home.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “God Is Before Me” (songbook p. 44, also available as an MP3)
◆ “God’s Love Is Forever” (songbook p. 45, also available as an MP3)

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

Art (5-15 minutes)
Qi’s The Risen Lord
In several sessions of Spring we offer activities based on the work The Risen Lord by artist He Qi (pronounced huh chee). The flat perspective and bright details of He Qi, reminiscent of folk art, are deeply appealing to young children. Use the poster in this session as a way to emphasize putting Jesus in the center of our lives.

Display the painting of The Risen Lord, attached to this document.

Invite the children to talk about what they see in the image:
◆ What colors do you see?
◆ Can you find straight lines in the picture?
◆ Can you find curved lines in the picture?

Ask children to find Jesus in the picture. Tell the children that Jesus is right in the middle of the picture. The artist has made Jesus big because Jesus is the most important part of the picture. God wants people to keep Jesus as the most important part of their lives, just as Mary, Martha and Lazarus made Jesus the most important part of their lives.

Washing Feet (5-15 minutes)
In many congregations, we observe Maundy Thursday by washing one another’s feet. We suggest you enact this ritual today to help children understand its significance as an act of loving service. Tell children that Mary used perfume to wash the feet of Jesus. In another Bible story, Jesus used water to wash the feet of each of his friends.

Invite the children to take turns washing and drying each other’s feet. Let the children wash your feet, too! If possible, do the foot-washing next to a sink so that you can fill and empty a dish pan for each person. If foot-washing is done on Maundy Thursday in your congregation, invite children to remember foot-washing they may have seen done in worship.

Invite children to make a poster of Jesus in the middle of the children. Ask a volunteer to draw a big picture of Jesus in the middle of a sheet of poster board. Invite the children to fill the poster with drawings of themselves and other people they love. Encourage the children to fill their drawings with bright colors.

Note: To learn more about Qi and view additional paintings visit http://www.heqigallery.com.
Lent and Easter with Children

As the weeks of Advent prepare us for Christ, so the weeks of Lent and the rites of Holy Week prepare us for Easter. However, the themes of the seasons can seem somber to young children. Jesus did not call children to repentance, but adults; thus, children can feel daunted or frightened by emphasis on our sins or Jesus’ death. Emphasizing these themes is not proclaiming the good news of Jesus in a way that children are ready to understand.

However the seasons also offer traditions that children find appealing. The liturgical color changes to a rich and mysterious purple. Ashes on the forehead, palms to wave, the washing of feet—these liturgical acts offer young children ways to engage the liturgy through movement. We recommend you focus on these liturgical details throughout the season of Lent, knowing that children have years to come in which to engage the fuller understandings of the liturgy of our Church.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s readings celebrate the new life God grants through Christ. Isaiah speaks of the “new thing” God will do—life-giving, restorative, renewing. In today’s gospel, Jesus meets accusations of sin with compassion, forgiveness and an urgent message to reform—that is, with the call to new life!

For young children, we focus on the theme of staying close to Jesus, the source of new life for all Christians.

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 version of today’s Old Testament reading titled Come Home, God’s People.
  - The instructions for two optional games related to today’s Old Testament reading, titled Coming-Home Games.
  - A handout of today’s Gospel Story, to distribute or e-mail to children and families.
  - This week’s At Home with the Good News to distribute to children or e-mail to their families.
  - He Qi’s The Risen Lord, to be used in today’s Art activity.
- Open your Spring-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Spring-C’s Models of the Faith.
  - An article for catechists titled The Gospel of John.
  - An article for catechists titled Using Visual Arts.
  - A helpful guide to viewing and responding to art titled First Impressions.
  - An article for catechists titled The Sacrament of Baptism.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings celebrate the new life God grants through Christ. Isaiah speaks of the “new thing” God will do—life-giving, restorative, renewing. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul asserts that all his personal achievements are worthless compared to the new life to be gained in Christ. In today’s gospel, Jesus meets accusations of sin with compassion, forgiveness and an urgent message to reform—that is, with the call to new life!

Isaiah 43:16-21
Isaiah proclaims Israel’s coming restoration to its homeland. The Lord will lead the people in a new exodus across the desert. Just as once God opened the way through the Red Sea, so God will now prepare the way in the wilderness.

The desert will be transformed from a place of death into a place of life; the animals that signify its desolation will honor the Lord. As in the first exodus, water will spring forth as a sign of God’s revelation. In response to God’s saving acts, the people of Israel will fulfill the purpose of their existence by praising God.

Philippians 3:8-14
Paul’s opponents in Philippi considered it necessary for Christians to keep the Jewish law, including circumcision. Paul refutes this by drawing up a personal profit and loss statement. What once he counted as assets—his Hebrew genealogy, his upbringing and his strict observance of the law—he now estimates as loss.

Paul has experienced a complete transformation of all his former values. The knowledge of Christ that he seeks is not, however, a special or secret kind of knowledge. Rather, it is the experience of sharing in Christ’s death, both in baptism and in daily life, not cognitive but personal in nature, based in “righteousness from God,” not moral superiority.

John 8:1-11
The scribes and Pharisees approach Jesus for an opinion about the woman caught in the act of adultery. They may have hoped that Jesus’ response would either incite the crowd to stone the woman (a civil offense in the eyes of Rome) or else appear to condone the sin (a religious offense in the eyes of the Jews). In either case, they were attempting to discredit Jesus in front of the people.

According to the law of Moses, stoning was clearly the penalty for adultery. In effect, Jesus tells the accusers to stone the woman, but only if they have never sinned. As they drift away, Jesus links his compassion for the woman with an exhortation to change her behavior. Jesus sees her potential and offers her a second chance. He neither denies the sin nor offers an easy forgiveness; he challenges her to sin no more.
Reflection
In today’s gospel, two different views of morality clash. The Pharisees who collect around the woman demonstrate the “herd” mentality: “God gave us rules, especially governing sexuality. You broke them. Now you pay!”

Jesus, on the other hand, had little to say about sex. He was much harsher towards sins of the spirit such as greed and pride. Casually unconcerned about the righteous indignation of the religious leaders, he turned from their accusations to write in the dust.

As John Sanford points out in The Kingdom Within, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970, 144) Christians today seem to have changed little from the Pharisees in their collective attitude towards sin. They still list the big sins as those of passion: adultery and premarital sex, with bitter debates over homosexuality. Would Jesus turn from our concerns with the same disregard he showed so long ago?

The gospel points towards understanding and accepting ourselves rather than striving to meet only external demands. (One wonders what projections of themselves the Pharisees wanted to stone.) As Sanford says, Jesus calls us to an “ethic of creativity rather than an ethic of obedience.” We are left with a clear teaching today: Only God knows what is in our hearts. Only God knows the woman’s motives. No human being is in any position to condemn another.

The Scriptures and the Catechism
God’s work in our world through Jesus prepares for something new and unexpected. For Paul, this means reevaluating everything in the light of Jesus. For John, it is illustrated by Jesus’ unexpected pardon of the woman caught in adultery (CCC, #2380–81), a violation of the sixth commandment (CCC, #2331–50). Like God, we must be ready to forgive rather than condemn (CCC, #1825), even though we have found others guilty (CCC, 2838–45).

The World of the Bible
Scribes and Pharisees
The scribes were the Jewish biblical scholars (often called Rabbi or teacher) who were experts especially in interpreting the meaning of the Law (Torah).

The Pharisees were a lay group, not priests, characterized by their zeal for the Jewish law. In Jesus’ time, they were influential among the ordinary people because they were living examples of what every Jew was called upon to do. They believed that since the law was God’s revealed guideline for them, it should be followed as perfectly as possible in every detail of ordinary life. They recognized as authoritative not only the written law (found in the first five books of the Bible or Pentateuch) but also the many interpretations of this written law given by generations of scholarly commentators.