Scripture
Matthew 4:12-23

Chosen to Follow

Jesus calls us to “fish for people.”
◆ Walking by the sea, Jesus calls out to Peter, Andrew, James and John. They leave their fishing to follow Jesus.
◆ Young children love to follow the people they love best.
◆ In today’s session, we affirm that Jesus loves each child and invites them all to follow him.

Question of the Week
How does Jesus call us today? How do you answer?

Core Session
◆ Getting Started (old magazines, length of blue cloth, cheesecloth)
◆ Gospel Story: Jesus Calls Four Fishers
◆ Story-Review Game
◆ Praying Together

Enrichment
◆ Discover the Good News
◆ Singing Together
◆ Following Jesus Poster (stickers)
◆ Art: Benoit’s Fishing Scene
◆ Free-Play Center: Fishers’ Boat (sheet, child-sized table and chairs; optional: colored cloths, beanbags, wood scraps or blocks)
◆ Info: “Tu Has Venido a la Orilla”
◆ 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 Sung Praise of Israel: Memory and Proclamation
◆ The World of the Bible: Discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Children make and play a fishing game. Cut paper or cardboard into fish shapes, making at least one per child. Set up a work table with the fish shapes, magazines, glue sticks and scissors.

Ask the children to find, tear and glue pictures of people onto the fish shapes. As the children work, set up a simple fishing “net.” Spread a length of cheesecloth or other loose netting over a floor. (You can spread this netting over a blue cloth, if you like.) When everyone has finished making one or more fish, gather in the story area. Children will play the fishing game after the story.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Jesus Calls Four Fishers

Use these simple actions to enact today’s story with the children. Use a length of cheesecloth or other loose netting as the net.

Jesus says, “It’s time for me to tell everyone about God’s love.” So Jesus goes walking.
(Pretend to walk in place.)

“I need friends to help me,” says Jesus. “I need friends to follow me.”
(Shade eyes with hand.)

He walks along the shore of a lake.
(Walk in place.)

Then Jesus sees Andrew and Simon fishing.
(Shade eyes with hand.)

Jesus says, “Come with me, Andrew and Simon.
(Motion for two children to come to you.)

“I’ll teach you to catch people for God.”
(Spread ‘net.”)

They all walk on together.
(Walk in place with two children.)

Jesus sees James and John fishing.
(Shade eyes with hand.)

Jesus says, “Come with me, James and John.
(Motion for two more children to come to you.)

“I’ll teach you to catch people for God.”
(Spread “net.”)

They all walk on together.
(Walk in place with four children.)

“No more catching fish,” says Jesus.
(Lay net aside.)

“Now I’ll teach you to catch people for God.”
(Walk with four children to all other children. Help children take any child still sitting by the hand, until all the children are walking together.)

Story-Review Game (5-15 minutes)

In various places in your room, hide the “people fish” that the children made in today’s Getting Started activity. If you have a helper, this could be done while you are telling the story.

Ask children to stand in a circle around the cheesecloth net, pretending to fish. Give each child a turn to go find a “people fish,” bring it back to the net and say:
◆ I fish for people.

The game continues until everyone has had a turn. If you have a large group, play with small groups of six to eight children or send out several fishermen at a time.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Call on a child by saying, “(Child’s name), come and follow Jesus.”

If the child answers yes, help the child take the first place in line. Ask this child to call another child to follow Jesus. Let children freely choose whether or not to join the parade.

Continue until all the children who answer yes stand in line. Then march around the room singing a song from today’s Music or a traditional favorite of children, such as “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.”

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to group members as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News  
(5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a sung version of today’s story. You can use this song to play a circle game with the children.

Ask one child to stand in the center of the circle as Jesus. When the children sing, “Follow me,” Jesus points to a child to join him. In the next verse, both of them point to children to join them. Continue singing and adding children until everyone is in the center of the circle.

You’ll also find a simple story-review drawing activity that children can do together.

Singing Together  (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
◆ “Follow, Follow” (p. 4 of the songbook, also available as an MP3)

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

Following Jesus Poster  
(5-15 minutes)
Several sessions in Winter-A, including today’s, invite us to follow Jesus. You can continue the Following Jesus activity begun in the session for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, using the Following Jesus Poster attached to this document.

In today’s activity, we invite children to bring friends as they follow Jesus, just as two friends in today’s story followed Jesus.

Gather children around the Following Jesus poster. Point to the second picture in the four-part poster. Invite children to talk about the children following Jesus. Ask:
◆ Can you show me friends who are following Jesus?
◆ Who are some of our friends? Can we name our friends? (Encourage children to name as many friends as possible.)

Explain:
◆ We can pretend that we are following Jesus on this road.
◆ Jesus wants us to make friends, too, and bring our friends with us.
◆ Let’s name our friends again as we add our stickers to the poster.

Help each child choose a sticker to add to the poster. Save the finished poster to use in future sessions.

Art  (10-15 minutes)
Benoit’s Fishing Scene
Gather children around Rigaud Benoit’s painting Fishing Scene, attached to this document. Invite children to find the fishers—like the fishers in today’s story. What are the fishers trying to do? What is hard about their work?

Invite the children to imagine Jesus in the picture:
◆ Where would Jesus be?
◆ What would Jesus do and say?

Distribute crayons or paint and paper. Invite children to imagine Jesus is with them today:
◆ Where will they be with Jesus?
◆ What will they do with Jesus?

Encourage children to draw or paint pictures of themselves with Jesus.

Notes:
◆ Rigaud V. Benoit (1911–1986) was a Haitian artist. A former cab driver, he became one of the most sought-after painters from Haiti. He was known for meticulous detail and precise work, sometimes only producing two works of art in an entire year. His vibrant mural of the Nativity adorns the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Port-au-Prince.
Free-Play Center (5-20 minutes)
Fishers’ Boat
Activity Soundtrack: Play “Tu Has Venido a la Orilla.”
(Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Spanish priest Cesáreo Gabaráin wrote this hymn in 1979 after standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and recalling the story in today’s gospel. See the lyrics at the end of this activity.

The same materials that made last week’s house can make this week’s boat. Turn a small table upside down, or lay chairs on their back. Drape a sheet to make a boat.

As you work, talk with the children about the boat in today’s story. Who was in the boat? What did Jesus say to the fishers in the boat? Then invite two to three children at a time to play in this fisher’s boat.

“Tu Has Venido a la Orilla”

Below are the lyrics (first verse and refrain only) for “Tu Has Venido a la Orilla.” (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Tú has Venido a la orilla,
No has buscado Ni a sabios, ni a ricos,
Tan sólo quieres Que yo te siga.
Estribillo:
Jesús, me has mirado a los ojos;
Sonriendo, has dicho mi nombre;
En las arena he dejado mi barca;
Junto a ti buscaré otro mar.

You have come down to the lakeshore
Seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
But only asking for me to follow.

Refrain:

Jesus, you have looked into my eyes;
Kindly smiling, you’ve called out my name.
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.

Young Children and the Gospel

This week’s session is based on the metaphor of “catching” people for God. Although young children will not understand this abstract way of referring to evangelism, they can begin to understand that they, too, are called to follow Jesus. They can also begin to understand that they, too, are part of God’s family. We help children enter into both God’s family and that family’s vocation when we offer activities that make religious education a welcoming time and place.

Since today’s session builds on the theme of following Jesus, previously encountered in the session for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, several activities from that session would work well today, too:

◆ Getting Started: playing a variation of Simon Says called Follow Me
◆ Story-Review Game: playing a game in which children line up behind Jesus
◆ Craft: playing a following game with a game harness or cross
◆ Fingerplay: making gestures to accompany a rhyme about following Jesus

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 child-friendly version of the story told in today’s Core Session—Jesus Calls Four Fishers. A template titled Fish Shapes for use in today’s Getting Started activity.
  — An alternative story-review game called Fisher Tag.
  — The Following Jesus Poster, to be used in the activity of the same name.
  — Benoit’s Fishing Scene, to be used in today’s Art activity.
  — A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.

◆ Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Winter-A’s Models of the Faith.
  — A printable article for catechists taking a closer look at Paul’s Corinthian Letters.
  — A printable article on faith and the environment titled Global Village.
  — A printable article on The Catholic Church as a Prophet of Justice.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s themes of urgency and repentance culminate in Matthew’s description of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Isaiah proclaims a new time of restoration. Paul pleads that Christ’s followers set aside differences for the sake of their common calling. In the gospel Jesus begins his public ministry preaching repentance, calling disciples and healing the sick.

Isaiah 8:23–9:3 (NAB) or 9:1-4 (NRSV)

In today’s reading, the prophet refers to “the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” (v. 1), the land allocated to these two tribes of Israel in the region called Galilee. Because of its distance from the temple in Jerusalem and its proximity to foreign cultures, many Israelites regarded it as more susceptible to pagan influences. A scorned land, it also bore the brunt of enemy attacks from the north. It was situated near the large inland lake called the Sea of Galilee or later the Sea of Tiberius.

Here Isaiah describes God’s grand reversal of human situations: the most despised will receive the greatest privilege; those living in spiritual darkness will enjoy the first glimmers of light. The results of God’s glorious scheme will include freedom from enemies and the end of war.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Paul takes up the first item on his agenda: the dissension in the Corinthian community and its manifestation in cliques. He appeals to the Corinthians to be of one mind and judgment, rather than divided into groups, each with its own label.

Many suggestions have been made about the nature of the groups Paul mentions. Possibly Paul’s followers were the poorer members and Apollos’s, the more educated. Cephas (also known as Peter) probably had not been to Corinth, but Jewish Christians might consider him their patron. The “Christ” party is most difficult to identify; they may have been those who claimed to have a special mystical relationship to Christ, or to possess special knowledge.

Paul tactfully centers his criticisms on his own partisans. They have not been baptized in the name of Paul but in the name of Jesus Christ, to which name Paul has already appealed as the grounds for unity.

Matthew 4:12-23

Matthew’s account of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry includes Jesus’ journey into Galilee, a statement of the meaning of Jesus’ ministry, the call of the first disciples and a summary of Jesus’ activity.

The Isaiah citation (v. 15-16) was originally written in a context of messianic hope as Galilee faced conquest by the Assyrians in 732 BCE. This defeat for Israel meant that the native Israelites were exiled and foreign populations resettled there, thus allowing the region to be described as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (v. 4). In Jesus’ time it was heavily influenced by non-Jewish culture and religion.

Here Jesus announces that the long period of expectation is completed. The reign of God is a present reality but will only be realized fully in the age to come. The response he expects is repentance, literally turning around, and so a description of the entire reorientation of one’s whole being as illustrated by the call of the first disciples.

Reflection

Why does John’s arrest signal the beginning of Jesus’ ministry? Did Jesus have a sense that the time was ripe for him now, because the good news must continue? While John’s call to repent was fine, Jesus’ was infinitely more. People who lamented John’s silencing didn’t suspect: something better was coming.

Capernaum was a busy commercial town, less dominated by priests, and its location by the sea opened it to broader interchanges of thought than the more provincial Nazareth. That small, isolated place might have been perfect for the shelter and nurture of a young boy, but the adult Jesus needed a larger stage: something better was coming.

The fishermen were busy casting nets, perhaps never dreaming that they yearned for greater depths than even the sea’s. Jesus must touch some unresolved longing in them, because they respond so quickly. No dithering, no excuses; they follow immediately. Why? A hint of something better coming.

Teaching, preaching, healing—Jesus’ essential work continues today in schools, prisons, hospitals, soup kitchens, counseling centers. “You will do greater things than I have,” he promised (John 14:12). So we follow in his footsteps, yearning for something more, suspecting that something better is coming.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we hear Jesus issue the challenge to follow him and so change our lives. The demands of discipleship commitment are now made plain (CCC, #1–3, 542–43). We are called to follow not only as individuals but also as members of his kingdom community. Paul reminds us of the unity of the community of disciples, which is based on their commitment to Christ (CCC, #813–22).

The Sung Praise of Israel

Memory and Proclamation

by Kathy McGovern

When we fill our religious education programs with music and singing we are remembering—with the kind of memory the Jews have employed at every Passover meal in their history, the kind of memory that makes a past event really present through the reliving of the event—the very root of our faith. In the beginning, when God sang the world into being, the human heart was formed for praise, with music its messenger.

 Apparently this instinct for praise isn’t simply the joy of living creatures. When the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God and sing hosannas as Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Luke 19:37), some of the Pharisees asked Jesus to order them to stop. But he replied, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out” (Luke 19:40). Jesus, that great psalm-singer, must have been remembering the first verse of Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” Of course the stones will sing; they know to whom they belong.

 Or perhaps he was thinking of Psalm 98, with its exhortation for all the earth to join in song: “Let the sea roar, and all that fills it... Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth” (7-9a).

The World of the Bible

Discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel

Matthew shapes his gospel by portraying Jesus as the Master, a teacher and compassionate healer, who guides his followers (and us) through a process of becoming Christian disciples. Matthew’s Jesus often describes the disciples as having “little faith” (6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20).

 They respond to Jesus’ call and then tag along with him—listening to his words and observing his wondrous deeds. They grow in faith as they learn about Jesus and the challenge of discipleship. Becoming his disciple means not just knowing about what Jesus said and did, but putting his demands into action (7:21).

 Peter serves as Matthew’s example of both the positive and negative possibilities of our discipleship. The first to be called (4:18-22), Peter responds eagerly and becomes the leader of the disciples (10:2, 15:15, 17:1-8, 24-27). He responds so correctly to the question of Jesus’ identity that Jesus recognizes that this profession of faith is the kind on which a church can be built (16:13-20).

 Despite this great privilege, Peter is still a person of “little faith” who needs to grow. He can be the founding rock or a stumbling block. He is challenged to have faith enough to follow Jesus across water (14:20-33), to avoid being an obstacle to the passion (16:21-23), and to be a leader whose forgiveness is unlimited (18:21-35).

 Even Peter’s failure during the passion does not keep him from being a leader. He shows the ups and downs of the discipleship challenge. Always a learner, Peter is a model for us who know that we are far from perfect in our following of Jesus.

 The risen Christ tells the disciples that their task in the world is to “make disciples of all nations” (28:18-20). Being a disciple means carrying on the ministry of Jesus, becoming a master of the Christian way and sharing this with others so that they can become disciples too. Matthew shaped his gospel to help others teach the way of discipleship as Jesus had taught them.