## God’s Care for All

### Scripture

John 3:14-21

### Core Session

- Getting Started
- Gospel Story: Jesus and Nicodemus
- Art: God's Love Mural
- Praying Together

### Enrichment

- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Story-Review Game: Alphabet Grid
- Art and Storytelling: Lawrence's "Eight Studies from the Book of Genesis, #3"
- Info: The Primary-Age Child
- Info: Children and the Gospel
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### Helps for Catechists

- More about Today's Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Liturgy Link: Common Prayer
- The World of the Bible: "God Is Rich in Mercy"

### Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us.

- Today's gospel, like the Old Testament stories used in the 1st-3rd Sundays in Lent, proclaims God's love for all God's people.
- We echo the appealing gospel image of people gathered around Jesus, the teacher, when we offer concrete activities that gather children around the story.
- In today's session we explore the story through a mural, a whole-body story-review game and an art-based storytelling activity.

### Question of the Week

If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)
Review the Ten Commandments from the session for the 3rd Sunday of Lent to prepare for this week's story:
◆ What rules did God give?
◆ Who else gives us rules?
◆ What rules are good rules?
◆ Good rules help people take care of us. What other ways do people help care for us?

Invite children to listen to a story about Jesus’ taking care of people.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)
Jesus and Nicodemus

Late one night, a man named Nicodemus moved quietly through the streets of Jerusalem. As he walked he thought about what he had seen and heard that morning. Jesus had been teaching in the temple. “God loves you,” Jesus had said. “So love one another, too.” When Nicodemus heard that, he knew he wanted Jesus to teach him more. But he was afraid to ask in the temple, where many people were angry with Jesus. So now, Nicodemus was walking at night, looking for Jesus.

Nicodemus crossed the street and entered the house where Jesus was staying. “Peace be with you,” said Jesus. Nicodemus returned his greeting. There was silence for a moment, then Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, you must be a teacher sent by God.”

Jesus looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then said, “Everyone who believes in me may have eternal life, life that lasts forever.”

Nicodemus was puzzled. What did Jesus mean? “Everyone? Surely God won’t give eternal life to people who don’t even know the law of Israel.”

But Jesus shook his head and said, “God loves everyone, everyone in the whole world.”

Nicodemus was still puzzled. “Everyone? Even robbers or criminals who hurt people?”

Jesus said, “Everyone. God loves the world so much, that God wants everyone to have eternal life.”

Then Nicodemus asked, “But what work do you do for God?”

Jesus said, “God sent me to help all people everywhere because God loves them.”

Nicodemus sat down next to Jesus. Was God really like this? Nicodemus looked at Jesus and said, “Rabbi, teach me more.” And Jesus did.

Art (10-20 minutes)
God’s Love Mural
Activity Soundtrack: Play John L. Bell’s “The Summons.” (Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) This contemporary hymn asks us, as Jesus asked Nicodemus:

Will you come and follow me,
If I but call your name?

Children make a mural depicting today’s story. Ask:
◆ Who did Jesus say that God loves? (Everyone or the whole world.)
◆ How many different kinds of people that God loves can you name? (children, women, men, people of different countries and races, people with Alzheimer’s disease, people with disabilities, etc.)

Together make a mural showing many different kinds of people that God loves. Tape paper to the floor, allowing 18” per child. Children use drawings and cutouts to show many different kinds of people. Invite children to include themselves in the mural.

Praying Together (5 minutes)
Remind children that we are in Lent, a time of deeper prayer. Explain that one way we can pray is to pray with others, as we do in church. Invite children to choose and pray together a prayer from your church’s liturgy, using the appropriate words and gestures. For example, you might demonstrate the “Sign of Peace”:
◆ Turn to one child.
◆ Hold the child’s hands and say, “Peace be with you.”
◆ Help the child respond, “And also with you.”
◆ Encourage the children to take turns passing this peace to one another.

Close by asking children to turn outward from the circle, lifting their arms as they call out to all people everywhere, “Peace be with you.”

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to children after the session.
Welcome the Good News (10-15 minutes)
On page 1 of today's Welcome the Good News you'll find an illustrated version of the old gospel tune “He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.” (We've changed the wording slightly.) You can invite children to sing the song together with you.

We extend this theme on page 2 with a discussion starter activity called Talk This Over. Help children understand that we all share in God's work of caring for all people. Children will also find a With Your Family activity they can lead at home or practice in the group.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Friends with God” (p. 32 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

(Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News to access both the songbook and the MP3s.)

Story-Review Game (10-15 minutes)
Alphabet Grid
Children use an alphabet grid to review today's story.

Invite children to use short strips of masking tape to form letters on the floor. Work with the children to make a letter grid. Find a template attached to this document.

Review today's story by asking the questions listed below. Volunteers take turns spelling out the answers by hopping from letter to letter on the grid. Encourage children to help one another by calling out the letters but not the answers.

Sample story-review questions:
- Who was the teacher in today's story? (Jesus)
- Who came to see Jesus in today's story? (Nicodemus)
- At what time did Nicodemus come to see Jesus? (night)

Art and Storytelling (10-20 minutes)
Lawrence's Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis
Gather children around Jacob Lawrence's painting Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, #3, attached to this document. This colorful poster shows an animated, modern version of preaching. We will use this poster several times in Spring to help children enter into the experience of sharing our stories of God and God's people.

Ask children to talk about what they see in the picture. What are the people doing? Explain:
- Some people in the picture are listening to stories about God.
- One person in the picture is telling stories about God. That person is a preacher.
- Imagine the preacher is talking about today's story.
- Let's imagine we're that preacher. How could we tell today's story?
- What will we tell people to do if they want to be like Jesus?
- Imagine we're one of the people listening to the preacher.
- Imagine it's time to leave. Which door will you choose to use?
- Where will you go after you leave?
- How can you help someone in the place where you go?
The Primary-Age Child

If children could describe themselves, here are some things they might tell us. (Keep in mind that these are just characteristics of many children in Primary groups. The six-year-olds who can read Black Beauty, or the eight-year-olds who can’t yet write a sentence aren’t necessarily gifted or slow—they’re just on their own developmental timetables.)

Who am I?
◆ I don’t believe in very many magical things any more. When I hear a story, I might ask, “Is that true?”
◆ I can know something, but I can’t always find words to say what I know.
◆ I love jokes and riddles! “How do you know when a dinosaur is under your bed? Easy—when your nose touches the ceiling!”
◆ I have friends now. Sometimes I just like a friend because of the toys she has, but some of my friends I like because I’m happy to be with them.
◆ I’m learning to make up with friends and start over. Sometimes we need a grownup to help us figure out a way to do that. It’s important to me that grownups are fair!
◆ I’ve learned how to go to school now, but bigger kids sometimes make me scared there. I like to feel “big” myself.
◆ Every week we start with a song. Every week we end with a prayer. I like knowing what will happen every week.

My Brain and Body
◆ I like to play with other kids—games with goals, like Hop Scotch and Tag.
◆ I want to move around a lot. I can skip now and probably turn cartwheels, too. I like climbing trees and jumping rope.
◆ Now that I understand games, I don’t usually cry if I lose. I’m starting to like board games too.
◆ I’m learning to read and write, but it might not be easy for me unless I’m in third grade. It takes me a very long time to write a sentence. I can draw most anything you want, though—even illustrate a Bible story like Palm Sunday.
◆ If you ask me what Eucharist is, I may not be able to tell you in words, but I can draw it for you. I’m getting better at cutting, pasting, painting and modeling with clay, too.

Children and the Gospel

Christian prayer and ministry are founded on belief in a loving God, who nurtures all people at all times. The most important role of Christian educators is to model this love for the children we teach. In today’s gospel, Jesus proclaims God’s love for God’s people as the foundation of Jesus’ own ministry.

Primary children explore the gospel story and theme of God’s love for all people.

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 shareable story script of today’s Gospel Story: Jesus and Nicodemus.
   — A template for the Alphabet Grid used in today’s Story-Review Game.
   — Lawrence’s Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, #3, to be used in today’s Art activity.
   — An optional activity titled Catholic Basics.
   — This week’s At Home with the Good News, to distribute or email to group members after the session.
◆ Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
   — Information on Spring-B’s Models of the Faith.
   — For catechists and/or families, an article titled Season of Lent.
   — For catechists and/or families, an article titled The Gospel According to John.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings celebrate God’s mercy. The reading from 2 Chronicles explains how God, moved with compassion, restores the people of Israel despite their unfaithfulness. Paul announces to the Ephesians that God has graciously done it all, lifting us out of sin’s grave and preparing us to do good works. In the gospel, John tells us that Jesus is God’s gift to us, the ultimate expression of God’s mercy and love.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23
The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were composed in the late 5th century BC by one or more court-appointed historians. This chronicler wrote with the concerns of the restored Jewish community in view. After the return from exile, they struggled to figure out the meaning of the destruction of their temple, the exile and the end of the Davidic monarchy. At stake was the faithfulness of God to the covenant with David.

The great tenderness of the Lord has had mercy on you and your family, and will strengthen you and lay your foundations in his glory. You, however, do not get careless, but take heart and strengthen your family. For just as the smith hammering at this work prevails over the object as he wishes, so too the righteous word spoken daily prevails over all evil.”
——The Shepherd of Hermas
(c. 95-100)

The chronicler sees the rebuilding of the temple as the primary sign of God’s continuing relationship with Israel. The role of the monarchy is subjugated in importance to the law and the temple service. The chronicler thus works to present a pattern for the religious life of his own time.

Today’s reading is based upon 2 Kings 25:1-21, but the events described are put into theological perspective. Whereas 2 Kings primarily blames the kings for Jerusalem’s downfall, the chronicler holds the priesthood and the people likewise accountable. In accordance with Jeremiah’s prophecies, the land will lie desolate and keep sabbath rest. Nevertheless, there is an expectation of restoration.

Ephesians 2:4-10
This letter was probably first circulated as an encyclical letter to a number of churches in Asia Minor. Chapter 1 centers upon the privileges of the believer’s new life in Christ. Today’s reading focuses on the process of restoration. God alone takes the initiative.

In verses 8-10, there is a double aspect to salvation. It begins with “grace” (v. 5) and results in “good works” (v. 10). Faith is here a gift from God, not something we do. Works are required, but not as a prerequisite. The living out of the Christian life is not the cause of salvation, but its effect. Faith must always lead to good works.

John 3:14-21
Today’s reading is taken from the first of John’s lengthy expositions of Jesus’ teachings. This discourse as a whole (3:1-21) moves from the work of the Spirit (3:3-8) to that of the Son (3:11-15) to that of the Father (3:16-21). Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night because of his interest in the signs Jesus has performed. Jesus seeks to draw him past these outward manifestations to a recognition of their inward significance.

The lifting up of the Son of Man points to his exaltation on the cross and in the resurrection and ascension; for John, these are one single act of glorification, offering believers eternal life by participation in God’s life.

Verse 16, one of the most familiar verses of scripture, succinctly describes God’s goal—to offer eternal life; God’s motivation—love for the world; and God’s strategy—giving the Son. Jesus has become the watershed for life, both now and in the future. Those who reject Jesus face condemnation in the day of judgment, and they live now in darkness and fear. Those who believe “in the name of the only Son of God” (v. 18) have escaped future condemnation, enjoy the promise and reality of eternal life, and live in light and truth.

Reflection
Nicodemus gets a bad rap. He’s criticized for coming to Jesus “by night.” But consider the references to him after today’s gospel. Courageously, he defends Jesus against his angry peers, asking whether their law judges a man who has not had a fair hearing (John 7:50-51). After the crucifixion, he helps embalm and bury Jesus’ body (19:39).

He is an honest seeker, who won’t settle for tried-and-true beliefs. His colleagues quickly dismiss anyone with a different angle. Nicodemus, however, explores the new teaching carefully. He questions honestly, and...
Jesus doesn’t reject him. Instead, Jesus welcomes their discussion and reveals himself magnificently.

Jesus even seems to tease Nicodemus as a teacher who doesn’t “get it” (v. 10). Some scholars think the gospel author slides into anti-Jewish polemic here, but verse 16 contains one of scripture’s most loved passages. Nicodemus must be overwhelmed: he doesn’t respond.

Or maybe he answers through his life. After an avalanche of ideas, he sifts through them and applies them to daily events. Apparently Jesus’ teaching withstands that reality check; Nicodemus becomes an admirable follower.

Do we act like him, or do we wallow in unexamined prejudices and stale beliefs? Are we open to the Spirit’s unsettling winds?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

We enter into the new covenant people by our baptism. In the early Church, baptism was especially important as the sign of entry into the community. Going down into the waters of baptism symbolized entering into the death of Jesus by our own “drowning.” Coming up from the water symbolized our being born again into a new life with Christ (CCC, #1213–28, 1262–66).

All Christians are born again, in Nicodemus’s words, at our baptism. But just as in our natural life we do not stay infants forever but need to grow up, so also being born again is just the first moment in our long process of conversion (CCC, #2006–11). Our Lenten journey confronts us with the Christian challenge to grow up in our relationship with God and others.

Liturgy Link

Common Prayer

As Christians, our prayer is common not just because we come together and pray using the same words. It is common because we share experiences and beliefs and traditions that lead into shared prayer, in the liturgy and alone, at home or at work.

Our liturgical Prayers of the Day are common because they express our common hopes and common desires.

Our thanksgivings and confessions and petitions are common because we share a belief in a God who, though transcendent and sovereign, has come near to us in tender love through Jesus Christ and has saved us.

We can celebrate the wisdom of our Catholic roots that insists on Christian prayer as the highest common denominator and great equalizer of Christian community.

In prayer we join with our Jewish fathers and mothers of faith who taught us about the one true God.

In prayer we join with the brave early believers, who witnessed to the One who lived his prayer—his communion with God—in a way that reaches us to be open to the richest experiences of God’s love.

In prayer we join with all the saints, great and small, who have ever taken to heart the Lord’s Prayer, who have ever struggled to pray in times of despair, who have ever prayed fumbling, stumbling words of hope, who have always and everywhere come together to pray in a common faith and hope.

The World of the Bible

“God Is Rich in Mercy”

In the Old Testament, mercy usually identifies a complex Hebrew idea that describes God’s special covenant love (Hebrew, ḥesed) that binds God to us. God’s attitude of love or attachment to the covenant community includes aspects of loyalty, dependability, trustworthiness and an eagerness to help when situations turn bad.

Like a Father/Patron of a family, God is an especially generous benefactor who lavishes gifts (Greek: charis, Latin: gratia) on the community. These are not distributed because of the people’s merits, but strictly out of God’s free favor or mercy. Thus mercy is not just the response felt toward those who are suffering, but even more describes the fierce attachment of God to be with us and save us.

Paul echoes this fierce fidelity by describing God’s eagerness to rescue or save us when we were alienated by sin. God’s desire to be in relationship with us keeps God alert to our cries for help and eager to deliver us from what separates us from God.