Jesus makes possible our covenant relationship with God.

- Today’s scriptures together focus on God’s love for God’s people, clearly shown in Jesus’ willing obedience, even to the point of death.
- We do not withhold cross images from children, because the culture is filled with them. If they are to perceive them as symbols of love, we must provide that context, as in today’s story and activities.
- In today’s session we explore today’s story through art and several story-review games.

**Question of the Week**
How was Jesus like a seed? How are we like seeds?

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**Core Session**
- Getting Started (*plain wooden cross*)
- Gospel Story: Cross and Heart
- Praying Together

**Enrichment**
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Story-Review Games: Ten Hearts Up and Cross, Cross, Heart
- Art: Cross and Heart Pendants (*cornstarch, baking soda, rolling pins or dowels*)
- Info: 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: “Amen, Amen”
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)
Children share what they feel and think when they see a cross. With young children, we recommend that you use a plain cross, without a body on it. The one exception would be the folk art crosses that show bright, colorful pictures of the risen Jesus.

Gather the children together in the storytelling area. Lay a cross on the floor in front of them. Say:
◆ This is called a cross.
◆ I wonder what you think when you see this cross.

Allow time for the children to respond. Accept the children's ideas with such phrases as “So you think that...” or “You feel that...”

After the children have shared their ideas, share your own ideas, too. You might say:
◆ When I see this cross, I think of Jesus, who loves us so much.
◆ Jesus died on a cross. When I see this cross, I think of Jesus.
◆ Jesus is not dead now. God gave new life that never ends to Jesus. When I see this cross, I think of Jesus.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)
Cross and Heart
Story Focus: Use the cross from today's Getting Started activity and a heart shape you make yourself.

I see a heart (touch the heart shape) and I think of a promise made by God.

God said, “I will give my people new hearts to love with. I will be their God and they will be my people.

“All of them, from the oldest to the youngest, the richest to the poorest, the smartest to the simplest, will know me and love me. And they will know that I love them.”

I see a cross (touch the heart shape) and I think of what Jesus once said, “The hour is coming when I will die on the cross.”

Jesus cried. Jesus prayed. “I am so troubled, God. What shall I say? Shall I say, ‘Don’t let this happen, God?’ But if I die on the cross, your promise will come true. All people will be God’s people.

“All of them, from the oldest to the youngest, the richest to the poorest, the smartest to the simplest will know God and love God. And they will know that God loves them.”

Jesus cried. Jesus prayed. “God, save me, even if I die.”

And God answered Jesus and said, “I will.”

I see a cross and a heart together (rest your hand on or between the two shapes) and I think of love.

Jesus died on the cross, but God loved Jesus. God did not leave Jesus to death. God gave Jesus new life, life that will never end.

And then God gave us new hearts (lay your hand over your heart), full of love. Now all of us are God’s people. Now each of us, whether old or young, rich or poor, smart or simple can know God and love God. And now we can know—God loves us.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Explain that one way we can pray is to think about and pray for people we love. Give each child a slip of paper.

Ask each child to use the slips of paper to list people he or she loves. Children can draw simple pictures of the people or write their names. Explain that these slips will be kept private.

Ask children to take turns putting the slips of paper into a basket you pass around. As the children add their slips to the basket they can offer simple spontaneous prayers, such as, “God, please bless the people I love.” Place the basket near the plain cross you used in today’s Getting Started.

Close by praying:
◆ Thank you, God, for giving us people we love and people who love us. Thank you for sending Jesus to love us, too. 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.
Welcome the Good News
(5-10 minutes)
On page 1 of today's Welcome the Good News, you'll find an illustrated version of today's story.

We extend this theme on page 2 with the scripture skills activity Welcome God's Word. 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:
◆ “Blessed Is He” (p. 34 of the songbook)
◆ “Easter Lullaby” (p. 35 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 Games (15-30 minutes)
Ten Hearts Up
Challenge the children to a noncompetitive story-review game.

Ask the first story-review question listed below. (Encourage children to help one another with answers.) If a child answers correctly, ask him or her to draw a heart on the board or newsprint.

Continue play until all the questions have been correctly answered. Encourage children to try to draw all 10 hearts on the board or newsprint.

Story-review questions:
◆ In today’s story, who made a promise? (God)
◆ What did God promise to give people? (new hearts)
◆ Which people did God want to be God's people? (all people)
◆ In today’s story, who cried? (Jesus)
◆ Why was Jesus sad? (He was afraid to die.)
◆ Where did Jesus die? (on the cross)
◆ Why did Jesus die? (So God's promise could come true.)
◆ What did God do when Jesus died? (God gave Jesus new life.)
◆ How long will Jesus' new life last? (forever)
◆ What did God give to us? (new hearts)

Cross, Cross, Heart
Children use cross and heart symbols to play a variation of Duck, Duck, Goose.

Ask children to sit in a circle. Teach them to say this game signal, “God gives us new hearts in Jesus.” Ask one child to be It. Give It a heart shape.

Directions for play:
◆ When the children in the circle finish chanting the game signal, It walks with the heart around the backs of the children.
◆ It touches each child’s head, saying “cross” or drops the heart into one child’s lap, saying “heart.”
◆ When It touches your head and says, “cross,” cross your arms over your chest.
◆ When It drops the heart in your lap and says, “heart,” jump up and chase It.
◆ If It gets to the empty space in the circle first, the child with the heart becomes the new It.
◆ If the child with the heart tags It, then It circles the children again.
◆ Each new It begins circling when the children in the circle say, “God gives us new hearts in Jesus.”

For younger children, drop the use of the game signal, “God gives us new hearts in Jesus.”
**Art** (10-20 minutes)

**Cross and Heart Pendants**

Children make cross and heart pendants as reminders of today’s story.

Make cornstarch clay **before the session**. Mix the cornstarch, baking soda and water in a saucepan. Bring the mixture to a bubbling stage over medium heat. It will look a bit like mashed potatoes. Cool and knead the clay before storing it in containers. **(Note:** You can also use commercially available, self-hardening modeling clay for this activity.)

In the session help each child roll a piece of clay into a ¼” thick slab. **Directions to the children:**

- Use a plastic knife to cut a heart shape from the clay.
- Make your heart big enough to wear, about the size of the palm of your hand.
- Use a pencil to cut a cross decoration into one side of your clay heart.
- On the other side, carve your initials or your first name.
- Use the pencil to poke a hole into the top of your heart.

For today’s Bible Skills, Third Graders can use pencils to inscribe words from Jeremiah 31:33 on the initialed sides of their hearts. The pendants may be air-dried or baked in a warm oven until hard. Save the pendants to string in Passion (Palm) Sunday.

**Children and the Gospel**

Today’s scriptures touch on two themes: God’s love for us (shown in the promise of a new covenant and the fulfillment of that covenant through Jesus’ death and resurrection) and Jesus’ human fears about his coming death. In today’s session, the children explore these scriptural themes woven around the symbols of the heart and the cross.

One way to help children make sense of the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection is through the powerful liturgies of the Church. If possible, help prepare children for the liturgies of Holy Week, such as the procession of palms for Palm Sunday or the foot-washing of Maundy Thursday.

**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*.
  - The first in a series of Easter Tree activities, titled *Craft: Easter Tree*.
  - A shareable story script of today’s *Gospel Story: Cross and Heart*.
  - A *Cornstarch-Clay Recipe* for use in today’s Art activity.
  - Some *Special Needs Bibliography* from our publication *Rhythms of Grace*—a worship formation resource for children and families with autism.
  - 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’s *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 explore our covenant relationship to God through Jesus. Jeremiah tells us that God looks forward to a new relationship with God’s people—a relationship of intimacy, forgiveness and faithfulness. The author of Hebrews describes God’s action that makes this relationship possible: through his suffering and submission, Jesus becomes the source of our salvation. In the gospel, the final chapter in Jesus’ suffering and submission begins as Jesus faces his crucifixion.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry to Judah about 627 BC and ended it around 580 BC. He thus spans the period leading up to Judah’s final defeat by the Babylonians (587 BC), the destruction of the temple and the exile of much of the population.

Today’s reading comes from a section, chapters 30–31, called the “book of consolation.” In it are gathered Jeremiah’s oracles of hope for an eventual renewal and restoration for Israel. In today’s passage, Jeremiah looks forward to a “new covenant” (v. 31). Unlike the old, this one will be written on the heart, which in Hebrew thought is the seat not of the emotions but of the will. This covenant is not new in content, for the Torah, the written law, is not replaced. It is new, however, in the means of its realization. The internalization of the covenant will enable people to keep it. The will of the individual shall become one with the will of God. There will be no need of teachers, for all will know the Lord, not just in intellectual terms but in the Hebrew sense of a close, intense and intimate personal relationship.

Hebrews 5:7-9

The letter to the Hebrews is a tightly-woven theological essay that stresses that Christianity has fulfilled the promises of Judaism. The author’s purpose is to show the superiority of Jesus to the prophets, the angels and Moses (1:3–4:13), Jesus’ priesthood to the Levitical priesthood (4:14–7:28) and Jesus’ sacrifice to Levitical sacrifices (8:1–10:18).

According to Jewish tradition, Jesus could not be a priest because he was from the tribe of Judah not Levi. But the author of Hebrews argues that in fact Jesus is the real High Priest because he, like Aaron and Melchizedek, was chosen by God for his priestly ministry on our behalf.

The quotation from Psalm 2:7 (v. 5) affirms that Jesus was chosen by God, not self-appointed. His unique priesthood is modeled upon that of Melchizedek, whom the author later claims to be superior to Abraham and thus to Abraham’s descendant Levi and the Levitical priests.

For his lifelong submission to God, Jesus was saved not from death but through death. Whereas human beings learn to be obedient because they suffer for disobedience, Jesus, through his suffering, learned that obedience itself exacts a price in human life. Through his obedient suffering, Jesus is “made perfect” (v. 9) and becomes our source of salvation.

John 12:20-33

The appearance of “some Greeks” (v. 20, probably “God-fearers,” that is, those who were attracted to Judaism but did not fully keep the law) indicates that Jesus’ public ministry is now complete. Ironically, the complaint of the Pharisees in 12:19 is indeed shown to be true.

Jesus’ response is to announce that his “hour has come” (v. 23), the time for his glorification in death, resurrection and ascension. As Jesus’ mission bore fruit only through his death, so Christians bear fruit only through death to self.

The term hate (v. 25) would reinforce the challenge to separate oneself from what this life requires. It does not express an emotion so much as an action requiring separation.

Jesus freely accepts his destiny in a plea that God’s plan be carried out as the expression of God’s name, that is, of God’s essential character. The victory over Satan is won through Jesus’ “lifting up” (v. 32, a term for both his crucifixion and his exaltation), but its working out in this life is the ongoing task of Christians.
Reflection
What happens in today’s gospel is not unusual. It continues today. Two moms became friends and discovered that their oldest sons both skied. The next, natural step was taking the boys skiing together. The two became friends, and one’s name was—truly—Andrew. He began to meet the other boy’s friends, and became part of a group from another high school, not easy in adolescent society.

During college, the boys skied, kayaked and mountain biked together. Later, they attended each other’s weddings. When Andrew died suddenly of a staph infection, the friends flew from around the country for his funeral. Each then planted a pine seedling and a packet of wildflowers, signs of hope.

They probably didn’t say it as they scattered seed, but once again, a grain fell to the ground and died, bearing much fruit. The boys couldn’t ski without remembering Andrew; they consciously tried to bring his fierce delight to all their days.

The ripple effect also worked for Jesus. Greeks drawn to him approached him through his friends. He saw his coming passion through the metaphor of seed. How could the company of friends, now including us, not try to act like him?

The Scriptures and the Catechism
Today’s readings remind us that God’s desire for a covenant community according to God’s guidelines was finally inaugurated in Jesus. He described this as the Kingdom of God. Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant is fulfilled in the community of disciples that Jesus gathers (CCC, #62–64, 1965–74). This community will carry on the prophetic, priestly and kingly work that Jesus began while on earth (CCC, #897–913). The community of disciples shares in the mission of Jesus to draw all creation back into right relationship with God (CCC, #774–76, 849–56).

Seeing Salvation, Part 1
The Word Made Flesh Is Now Made Visible
Our Christian tradition is rich in images of God moving among us—especially in the person, life and ministry of Jesus. John’s gospel lyrically declares: “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Seeing God’s Glory
Artists, of course, try to transform the words of the gospels to make God’s glory visible for all of us who were not able to see Jesus in the flesh. The Hebrew tradition (and later the Muslims) prohibited images that depicted God and emphasized rather God’s word as the most important form of God’s presence with us—hence the emphasis on texts, their interpretation and their transmission.

But there was also a long-standing tradition of God’s glory as the visible sign of God’s invisible reality. This glory could suddenly flash out of persons, things and events so that people would know that God was present with them.

Jesus, the Human Face of God
But all this changed with Jesus. Christians, unlike the Jews and later the Muslims, believed that they had not just heard but seen their God in the human form of Jesus. He was divinity enfolded and so the visible embodiment of God’s glory. As Jesus said to Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Because of this incarnation of God in human form, it was possible for artists to express their beliefs about Jesus in theologically-charged portraits of him. In this way, Christianity became more than a religion of the word. It became a religion of the image.

The World of the Bible
“Amen, Amen”
Amen is a Hebrew word that affirms what has been said—“It is true!” It appears often throughout the Bible both in normal speech and in prayer whenever people want to signal their acceptance and affirmation.

In the gospels, Jesus often begins his teaching with the phrase “Amen, I say to you” to emphasize the importance of what follows. And in John’s gospel, when Jesus wants to really stress the importance of what he is about to say, he uses the curious double “Amen, amen” to invite his audience to pay close attention to his message.