

Year C
Third Sunday in Lent
Luke 13: 1-9

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: Come, let us adore him. (Antiphon for Lent, Book of Common Prayer, page 81.) And what if, during this season of Lent, we sought a deeper understanding of this amazing gospel of grace. Will that image of grace energize us to do the spiritual housekeeping we need to be ready for the "new thing" God is doing in Easter?

A notation for this week's Gospel

The age-old question: why are some people killed in bizarre accidents — and others amazingly spared? It is not about good guys or bad guys. Our responsibility is to notice when we need to repent. Part II: A hopeful gardener spares a fruitless fig tree. Perhaps a bit of fertilizer will help the barren tree produce fruit. What "fertilizer" might help us be more fruitful?

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Theme: Called to repentance

Before Class: The story for today includes a little tree, which is the portion of Scripture we will use. Consider a couple of options. One option is to bring to class sufficient little plants in pots that the children could care for and that could go home with the children the Sunday before Easter (or even Easter, if you wanted, in which case you would need to have a few extra on hand for children that will show up on Easter). Someone in your church should monitor the plants during the week to be sure they do not get too dry.

If this seems unwieldy, consider either a plant that could be planted in your churchyard when weather permits, or simply bring a plant from your own home for a visit this one Sunday. Also bring a pitcher to water the plant(s) and a bit of plant food. If the hen and chicks went home with you for safe keeping last week, be sure to bring them back along with containers (little boxes if you have them or lunch bags with paper toweling to wrap the chicks). You will also need paper, crayons, and the leftover clay, in case you have a new child this Sunday.

Beginning: Help the children find their hens and chicks, play with them a bit, if they want, and then pack them gently so they can go home with the children today. If, by any chance, a new child has appeared, let them make their own hen and chicks to be wrapped ever so carefully to go home today also. Ask the children to arrange the set you made for the altar and help you set up the altar, if you have not already done so.

Praying: "Thank you, God, for our hens and chicks and the story Jesus told us. Thank you that we have another story from Jesus today. Amen."

The Story: Luke 13: 6-9. Jesus had another story to tell people to help them understand what God wants us to do. This story was about a little tree. It was supposed to produce lots of figs, a kind of fruit that the people in Jesus' country really liked to eat. But this tree had not produced even one little fig. The owner of the fig tree said, "Cut that silly tree down. It is wasting the soil it is planted in if it doesn't produce any fruit." The gardener loved the little tree and was sad. "Tell you what," he said to the man. "Give it one more chance. I will loosen up the soil around it and give it some plant food and then let's see what happens. Give it one more chance."

Activity: If you have brought individual plants, show the children how to ever so gently dig with their finger a little ditch in a circle around the stem of the little plant; a very shallow little ditch. Then show them how to mix the plant food with the water, and pour just a little bit into the ditch. If water starts to run out of the bottom of the pots, the plant has enough water. If you have brought just the one plant, have the children work together to fashion a ditch for the plant and then gently pour the water with plant food in on the plant. Tell the children your plan for the plants (they will go home with the children on a certain day, or the plant will be planted in the church yard when the weather permits; or that the plant will go back home with you.)

Activity: Give the children paper and crayons and ask them to draw the plant and color it as they wish, so we will have these pictures to put in the basket on our altar.

Getting Closure: Get the chicks ready to go home with the children. Gather the children around the altar, lighting the candle if you choose. Read the prayer you composed together on the first Sunday in Lent and ask the children if there is anything else they want to add to the prayer or change about it.

Closing Prayer: Close using the prayer you and the children have created.