

# THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

## AGAIN & AGAIN, GOD MEETS US

MARK 1:9-15 | GENESIS 9:8-17

**Engage:** *Begin with a story about something new you've started doing recently that's had some challenges, such as training for a 5K, learning to knit, planting a garden, or starting a new job. You might bring some objects that correspond to your story. Alternatively, you might tell the children what practices you plan to start or give up for Lent. Ask, "Have you ever tried something new that was hard at first? ... Did anyone help you as you were learning? ... Did they expect you to be perfect from the beginning?"*

**Explain:** Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season when we think about what we can do to be better people and follow Jesus. Sometimes we even give something up or start doing something new that will help us to follow Jesus more closely.

Starting something new can be scary or hard, but we don't do it alone. God is with us! God doesn't wait for us to be perfect and get it all right, but meets us right where we are. When Jesus started telling the good news that heaven was near, God was there from the beginning. God was there when Jesus was

baptized, God was there when Jesus was in the wilderness, and God was there when Jesus started his ministry. And God is with us too, no matter where we are in our lives.

**Pray:** Dear God, thank you for meeting me exactly where I am. I know that you are always with me no matter where I go. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Play:** Write a poem together. Start each line with, "God is with me..." and take turns finishing the sentence. While poems don't have to have a meter or rhyme, this is a good opportunity to practice counting syllables, chanting rhythms, and rhyming. (*Example: "God is with me in my home, God is with me on my own. God is with me in the car, God is with me near or far. God is with me here or there, God is with me everywhere."*) You might also write the poem down together.

## **THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**

### **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE CALLED TO LISTEN**

**MARK 8:31-9:8 | PSALM 22:23-31**

Engage: Start speaking in an inaudible whisper (or leave your mute button on if you're on Zoom!). You might say something like, "I'm so glad you're here to play and learn today!" Or something silly like, "I bought a pet shark yesterday." When a child says they can't hear you (or after a short sentence if pre-recording a video), say, "Oh, you couldn't hear me? What did you think I might be saying?" (Possible answers: "Hello" "How are you" etc.) "Why do you think I might say that?" ("Because that's what you usually say" "That's how you start a conversation" etc.) Ask, "Are there times when you know what a friend or family member is going to say because they've said it before? Are there times when your family members or teachers tell you to listen

because they don't want you to miss something important?"

Explain: The disciples weren't always the best listeners, and sometimes Jesus had to repeat himself over and over when they weren't listening. In today's Bible story, God finally had to tell them outright, "This is my Son, the Beloved—listen to him!" Sometimes we don't listen as closely as we should because we're excited about something else. Sometimes we don't listen because we think we know what the person is going to say. Sometimes we don't want to hear what they're going to say. Sometimes we just aren't paying attention. But when we don't listen to important people in our lives, whether they're our family or teachers or friends, we miss out. They might be telling us exciting news or giving us good instructions. And we also need to listen to God's word, to the things Jesus said and the things God spoke through the prophets and the things that the Holy Spirit is still speaking to us in our hearts.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for all the ways you speak to us through other people,

through your Word, and through our own hearts. Help us to listen carefully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Play:** For an extension activity, children can play the game of "Telephone," whispering a message in a chain, from one child to the other, to see how the original message changes if we aren't careful listeners. For one child and one adult, or for a Zoom-friendly activity, you might try the following adaptation: Say a sentence on mute (or silently mouth a sentence) and see if the child(ren) can guess what you said.

## **THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

### **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE SHOWN THE WAY**

**JOHN 2:13-22 | 1 CORINTHIANS 1: 18-25**

**Engage:** Show a Sankofa image or several, such as this one by Ramel Jasir or this one selected as the symbol of the 224th General Assembly of the PCUSA. Ask, "What do you see in this picture? What do you think

it's about?" Accept their answers and thank them for sharing. Say, "This is a symbol called Sankofa. Let's say that together: San... ko... fa. Very good!" (Note: you might also print out the word "SANKOFA" in a large font to point at the syllables.) Say, "In the Akan Twi language, 'San' means to go back, 'ko' means to go, and 'fa' means to look and take. So together, this word Sankofa means to go back and take what you need to move forward. And the Akan people of Ghana represent that with this image of a bird reaching back to take an egg from its back."

Explain: In the Bible, we read that some people would ask Jesus for proof that he was God's son, the Messiah that was sent to help them. But so many prophets and people like John the Baptist had already told them who the Messiah would be. Sometimes we need to go back and remember what we've already been given before we ask for something new. We might find that we already have what we need. God shows us the way we're supposed to live. The prophet Micah says, "God has shown you what is

good: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” (Micah 6:8, paraphrased.) But sometimes we forget. Many of the things that are wrong in the world today have happened before because we forgot how to treat each other kindly. But we always have the Bible and our pastors and teachers and family to help remind us.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for the people who taught us how to be kind and showed us the way you want us to live. Help us to remember those lessons always. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Play: For an extension activity, children can paint, sculpt, or draw their own Sankofa with whatever materials they enjoy using. For younger children, you might create a simple outline to start. You might also print this detailed Sankofa coloring page for older children, teens, or adults.

# **THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

## **AGAIN & AGAIN, GOD LOVES FIRST**

**JOHN 3:14-21 | EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

Engage: Read Love written by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Loren Long, which includes diverse portrayals of family, home, and unconditional love. (And make sure everyone has tissues, especially grown-ups!) A read-aloud video is available on YouTube for families at home or Zoom gatherings. Unfortunately, using the video in a worship video may result in a copyright strike from YouTube. However, reading the book aloud yourself on video is permissible by fair use copyright laws.

Explain: I hope you know how much you are loved. God made you out of love so you can share love with others in everything you do. There is nothing you can do that will make God love you any more or any less, because God has loved you from the very beginning. Isn't that a wonderful gift?

Pray: Dear God, thank you for loving me from the very beginning. Help me to start with love in everything I do and say. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Play: For an extension activity, gather everyone for a game of “I love you because...” where children (and adults!) take turns saying what they love about each other. Have one child start by randomly selecting another person. In person, you might spin a bottle, draw a popsicle stick with names written on them, or use the printables and instructions included in this blog post where we got the inspiration for this activity. Online, you might use a random name generator like this one. The child then says “I love you because...” and states a reason they love the person. (Hint: you can always finish the sentence with “... you are a child of God!”) Whoever is chosen goes next.

## **THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

### **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE REFORMED**

JOHN 12:20-33 | JEREMIAH 31:31-34

Engage: Hold some playdough.

Alternatively you could use clay or Lego bricks and adjust the script. Ask, “Do you like to play with playdough? ... What kinds of things do you like to make? ... Once you’ve made something, what do you do with it? (Do you let it dry? Do you put it back in the container? Do you make something new?) ... What I love about playdough is that you can always turn it into something new. It doesn’t have to stay that way permanently. If you leave it out, it will get hard and difficult to mold, but we keep it fresh because it’s so fun to make something new again and again.”

Explain: God also makes us new again and again. We aren’t just growing and changing our bodies. We also change our hearts and minds over time as we learn new things and

have new experiences. (You might share a personal example here of something that has changed for you.) Sometimes changing is hard, maybe because we're set in our ways and the playdough of our hearts got a little dried out. Maybe because we're happy where we are and we're scared of messing up. But God is always helping us change and grow into the best person that God wants us to be.

**Pray:** Dear God, you are my sculptor. Thank you for changing my heart, mind, and body into the person you want me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Play:** For an extension activity, use playdough, clay, or Lego bricks to create and recreate sculptures, emphasizing that the materials can change shape over and over. You might use a random prompt generator, such as this one, and a timer to turn it into a game of re-sculpting the same playdough, clay, or Lego bricks into something new.



# **PALM/PASSION SUNDAY**

## **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE DRAW ON COURAGE**

JOHN 12:1-19

Engage: Read Sheila Rae the Brave by Kevin Henkes. A read-aloud video is available on YouTube for families at home or Zoom gatherings. Unfortunately, using the video in a worship video may result in a copyright strike from YouTube. However, reading the book aloud yourself on video is permissible by fair use copyright laws.

Explain: This is a long, hard week for Jesus. Today we remember the protest parade he led. On Thursday we'll remember the dinner Jesus had with his friends and how one of those friends betrayed him. On Friday, we'll remember how Jesus was arrested and sentenced to die even though he didn't do anything wrong. Jesus knew this is how the week would end, and so he had to be very brave. Sometimes God needs us to do hard things, but the good news is that God also gives us courage. And when we don't have

enough courage ourselves, we can borrow it from others, just like Sheila Rae had to borrow some courage from Louise when she was scared. That's why whenever we protest like Jesus to stand up for what's right, we do it together. We help each other to be brave when we have to do something hard.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for the courage to do hard things. Help me to be brave even when I am scared. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Play: For an extension activity, have children act out scenarios where they might need courage. Begin by asking children to tell you some situations they (or friends/siblings) find scary or difficult, then write those on slips of paper to draw out of a basket. Some examples might be visiting the dentist or doctor, flying on a plane, standing up to friends, or sleeping over at a friend's house. Have children take turns acting out how they can be courageous when faced with that situation, whether that's facing the fear directly or removing themselves from the situation. (If they've read or seen the Harry Potter series, you might compare this exercise to defeating a boggart!) Tell them

that if they need a friend, they can ask for help. Remember to assure children that they are in a safe space and can take a break if they are feeling overwhelmed, and remind children that courage sometimes looks like walking toward fear, and sometimes it means walking away.

## **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

### **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE HELD TOGETHER**

JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

Engage: Ask, “Who are some of your favorite people that you know? ... How have you kept in touch with them this past year when we had to stay home so much?” (Zoom, outside playdates, I live with them, etc.) “What do you do to show them you love them?” (Send them messages, give them gifts, help them with things, etc.)

Explain: Tonight we remember the Last Supper. Jesus knew things were about to get really hard for all of them, and that he was

about to die. And so the last thing he did was have dinner with everyone. Not only that, he washed their feet! That was usually a job for servants, but he wanted to do something really nice for them as they were about to face some hard times. Jesus wanted them to have a big meal together to remember that they were all connected through him, even when he was gone. That's why he gave them the commandments to remember him when they eat and drink and to wash each other's feet. Jesus knew that even though he wouldn't be around forever, his followers could still be held together in his love.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for holding all of us together even when we're apart. Help me to show the people I love how much they mean to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# **GOOD FRIDAY**

## **AGAIN & AGAIN, WE FIND OURSELVES HERE**

JOHN 19:1-30

Engage: Say, “Have you seen the movie Inside Out? There’s one scene I really like where Bing Bong is very sad because Riley doesn’t seem to need an imaginary friend anymore. Joy tries to cheer him up with tickles and silly faces, but it doesn’t help. Do you remember what does help?”

(Sadness sits with Bing Bong, empathizes with his loss, and helps him remember the good times he and Riley had together.) Note: If you are not live streaming this children’s lesson, you might play the actual clip from Disney/Pixar’s Inside Out. Unfortunately, using the video in a worship video may result in a copyright strike from YouTube. You might instead show a screenshot of the scene with proper attribution.

Explain: Sometimes when other people are sad, we want to cheer them up. We don’t want them to cry or hurt. But it’s okay to be

sad, especially when it's about something as big as losing a dear friend. And when we're sad like that, we often just need someone to listen. Today is Good Friday, when we remember how sad it was when Jesus died. And since we know the end of the story, it's tempting to skip over the sadness and go straight to the joy of Easter morning. But sadness has a place, too. God is with you even when you're sad. And like Sadness in the movie Inside Out, God sits with us and listens and loves us and helps us feel better, not by pretending that everything is okay, but by being a good friend and a good listener.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for being with me, even when I'm sad. Help me to be a good friend and a good listener when other people are sad. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# **EASTER SUNDAY**

## **AGAIN & AGAIN, THE SUN RISES**

**MARK 16:1-8**

Engage: Ask, “Have you ever gotten a present you didn’t understand? Maybe you opened it and thought, ‘What do I do with this? What is it? What is the weirdest present you have ever received?’” Accept children’s answers and thank them for sharing. Ask, “Did you say thank you for that weird present, even if you didn’t know what it was for?”

Explain: On the first Easter morning, the women disciples got a really weird present that they didn’t know what to do with, either. Remember, on Friday they had watched Jesus die and were very, very sad. On Saturday, they couldn’t have the funeral because it was the Sabbath day. So first thing on Sunday, as soon as they could, they went to the tomb expecting to take care of Jesus’ body and prepare him for his funeral. But what happened when they got there? ...

Jesus wasn't there! How weird! That's not at all what they expected. And then on top of that, there's a strange man sitting where Jesus should be telling them wild stories about Jesus being alive, even though the women saw him die with their own eyes. The Bible says they were afraid—I would be, too. We don't always understand the gifts God gives us, but thanks be to God for strange miracles like the risen Christ who brings us new life.

Pray: Dear God, thank you for miracles we don't always understand. Help us to be on the lookout for new life in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Play: For an extension activity, have a puzzle Easter egg hunt. Put each piece of a puzzle in an Easter egg and hide them around the room, playground, house, or backyard. (Don't let on that there's something different inside these eggs!) Encourage children to go on an egg hunt and collect all the eggs. When they open their eggs, ask whether they are puzzled by what's inside, just like the first disciples were puzzled when Jesus wasn't in the

tomb. Ask them to guess what picture the puzzle will form when all of the pieces are placed together. Then help them assemble the puzzle. You can purchase puzzles at dollar stores, create your own using recycled cereal boxes and craft materials, or order a custom printed puzzle of your family or church at websites like GotPrint, Vistaprint, Shutterfly, or Snapfish.

#### ADDITIONAL EASTER BOOK SUGGESTIONS FOR CHILDREN:

You might like to share one of these books on Easter morning with children to celebrate the resurrection:

Petook: An Easter Story written by Caryll Houselander and illustrated by Tomie dePaola

Unfortunately, this book is out of print, but you can watch a read aloud on YouTube if you have difficulty finding the book secondhand.

The Story of the Easter Robin written by Dandi Daley Mackall and illustrated by Anna Voitech

Purchase a copy or watch a read aloud on

YouTube. There is also another version with a different illustrator under the title “The Legend of the Easter Robin”.

That Grand Easter Day! written by Jill Roman Lord and illustrated by Alessia Trunfio

Purchase a copy or watch a read aloud on YouTube. Contains lots of repetition for little ones.