

Sunday, April 20, 2008

Easter 5

Preparation:

Read the Scripture passage for the day over –Acts 7:55-60 - it can be found online at <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/AEaster/aEaster5.htm#acts> Pay attention to the words or phrases that jump out at you. To get a fuller sense of the story of Stephen you might want to read all of Acts 6 & 7 – you can find this online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%206%20-%207;&version=31;>

Read over the lesson so that you are familiar with what is intended to happen. Gather the materials that you will need for each section of the lesson. If you can, print up the picture for the week from the website. For deeper thinking or for ways to extend the lesson take a look at the following websites:

<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/eastera5.htm>

<http://msssbible.com/newtestament/earlychurchcharacters.htm>

<http://gardenofpraise.com/bibl55s.htm>

<http://www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/19971201/SAINTS/STSTEVN.HTM>

This Sunday is also the Sunday before Earth Day and you may want to look at the following websites for more information on how to connect the two together.

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/EarthDay/index.html>

<http://eenonline.org/action/earthday.htm>

<http://www.elcic.ca/Stewardship/Stewardship-of-Creation/default.cfm>

Gathering:

Materials needed:

Small table or end of one table

White candle

Bible & Bookmark

White cloth (optional)

Yellow streamers (one per person) with Alleluia printed on them

One good sized stone per child

Bubble container (from previous week)

Piece of cracker (from previous week)

Gather around the small table or at the end of one table. If you have the white cloth put it down and place the candle on it. Put the Bible and the bubble container and the cracker near the candle (you may want to let the children help with this). Give everyone an “Alleluia streamer” and show them the word printed on it.

Light the candle.

Explain that every time they say “Alleluia” in the prayer they are to wave their streamer around. Pray the following prayer together:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thank you God for Jesus. Alleluia!

Thank you God for new life. Alleluia!

Thank you God for all that you have done. Alleluia!

Amen.

Blow out the candle. Have the children put their streamers back on the table. Give each child a stone. Ask them what stones can be used for (*some answers may be: building, throwing, playing with, etc. – hopefully they will give you both positive and negative uses for the stones*). Explain that in the story they will hear about some people who used stones in a wrong way.

Story Time:*Materials needed:*

A comfortable place to tell the story – on the floor with cushions or around a table

Let the children continue to hold their stones during the story. This story might bring forth some strong emotions so be prepared for them.

There was a man named Stephen. He loved Jesus so much. He wanted to share Jesus' love with everyone that he met.

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem saw this love. They saw how much he cared for others. They decided that they would make him a special person in the church. They called him and six others together. The leaders laid hands on them and blessed them. They called on the Holy Spirit to bless them and give them strength. They called these people deacons.

The deacons had a special place in the church. They were to care for those who were hungry. They were to care for those who were sick. They were to care for those who were lonely. They were to make sure that the church leaders knew what was needed by the most vulnerable people in the community. They had very important work to do.

Stephen was so happy to take on this work. It was just the right opportunity to share Jesus' love with everyone that he met. He grew and grew in this work.

Some of the people who were in charge in the city of Jerusalem started to get worried about the things that Stephen was doing and saying. They decided that they should arrest him. They thought he was causing trouble with the people in the city. The whole church was worried what would happen to Stephen.

Stephen spoke and spoke to the people in charge. He went through the whole of the Scriptures right from Abraham to Moses to the prophets. Stephen told them that the people of Israel have always wronged those that God has sent to them.

Stephen was not surprised that the people in charge were worried about what the church was doing in Jerusalem. People often get scared when they hear about how much God loves everyone. People often get scared when they see others taking care of those who have nothing. People often get scared when they see Jesus working in those who love him.

When the people in charge heard Stephen talk about how the people of Israel had always wronged the leaders from God they got very angry at Stephen. They dragged him out to a public square. They told everyone that they met that Stephen was speaking against God. They told everyone that they met that Stephen had to be put to death.

Stephen feeling full of the Holy Spirit spoke to those who were gathering around him: "Look up! I can see God with Jesus. It is so glorious."

Those who were listening got angrier and angrier. They were more and more scared of what Stephen was saying. They all picked up stones. They threw Stephen to the ground. They started throwing stones at Stephen.

Stephen lay on the ground. He looked up and said, "Jesus please take my spirit. God please forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

After he said this Stephen died. *(Take a few moments with the children. Explain that Stephen is considered a martyr of the church – someone who gives up their lives for their belief in Jesus. Have the children put their stones down where they are sitting.)*

Response:

Idea #1: Prayer Stones

As a way of redeeming the stones used to put Stephen to death create prayer stones with the children that they can use to pray for those in need in the world.

Materials needed: stones from the story, tempera paint, paintbrushes, newspapers, water in plastic containers

Instructions: Lay out newspapers over the work area. Place the paints, water containers and paintbrushes within reach of everybody. Encourage the children to choose a stone. Explain that one of the jobs of deacons is to lead the church in prayer for the world – especially those parts of the world that is hurting or in need. Let the children look at their stones and think about the story for a while. Then encourage the children to paint the rocks with whatever symbols or colours that comes to mind. As they are painting tell the children of situations that you know are in need of prayer (local, national and global ones). When they are done painting spend some time praying together for the situations named earlier. Invite the children to use the prayer stones at home to pray for God's world.

Idea #2: Recycled Art

In this project the children can use as art materials from recycled materials to show their care for the world as Stephen showed care for his community by being amongst them.

Materials needed: clean tin cans (make sure edges are safe), paper tubes of various lengths, cardboard boxes, clean plastic containers of various sizes, any other recyclables that could be used, markers, scissors, glue, strong tape, and a stapler

Instructions: Place the recyclable materials where everyone can see them. Explain that like Stephen was called by God to care for God's people in his city we are called by God to care for our piece of the world. One of the ways that we can answer that call is to recycle as much as we are able to do. Invite the children to look at the materials laid out for them and think about how they can use them to encourage others to get involved in caring for the earth. Give help as needed. When the children are finished making their creations invite them to tell each other about what they have made and how it will encourage others to care for the earth.

Idea #3: Earth Day Poster

This idea will connect with the caring of others which was key to Stephen's ministry and includes the caring of the creation we have been given by God.

Materials needed: poster board, nature pictures from magazines and/or calendars, markers, construction paper, scissors, and glue

Instructions: Print as a title **WE ALL CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION** across the top of the poster board. Lay out the nature pictures for the children to see. Ask if they can think of caring words that describe actions that people can do to care for the earth. As they think of the words write them up so that everyone can see them. Ask the children to choose an action to show on the poster. They can depict them using the nature pictures, the actions described, and by cutting out symbols using the construction paper. Work together to create a poster to share with others.

Closing:

Gather with the children around the worship table again. Place the bubble container on the table. Put a piece of cracker on the table. Put a stone on the table. Relight the candle. Say the prayer line by line and encourage the children to repeat it after you:

Thank you God for our time together.

Thank you God for Jesus.

Thank you God for loving us.

Amen.