

GATHERING TO GO

A Word on Creative License: One leader's curriculum is another leader's disaster waiting to happen. Therefore, please feel free to change this lesson plan as much as you would like in order to make it work for your group and your setting. The goal of this lesson is to help one another understand our experience in New Orleans as an experience of the incarnate Christ drawing us into deeper relationships with him and with one another. I hope this lesson will help you do that.

Before You Begin

We strongly encourage you to find ways to utilize this time as way to spread the word about your group's Jesus Justice Jazz experience. Invite the leaders of your congregation to attend this session – your pastor(s), your church council, your youth committee, parents, etc. The more people who catch this vision with your youth, the more likely your faith community will be able to live it out together.

Materials

You will need the following for this lesson:

- the lesson plan
- a Bible
- large sheets of paper, crayons and/or markers
- the DVD and something to show it on
- tree(s) to plant, all necessary tools
- a copy of the litany for each person.

Ritual

Your group created and used a specific ritual to begin your time together as part of the Getting Ready Materials. Use that same ritual to start today's lesson. If your group has not established one, you might consider initiating one or asking to group to develop one. It can be a song, a prayer, silence, or some type of greeting that marks the beginning of your time together as holy time.

Check-in

Ask each person to check in by sharing one way they think they have grown in their faith over the summer.



Introduction

Tell your group that this lesson is designed to help the group reflect on their experience in New Orleans as they attempt to try to better understand what happened, why it happened and what it might mean for them as they move forward.

Video and Discussion

Introduction

Start by showing the video in its entirety. The complete video will be shown in segments throughout the lesson but it is a good idea to allow the group to see it as a whole as well. After viewing the video ask the group to share their thoughts and emotions.

What does this video make them think about? Remember? Regret?

What are some of the things that happened on the trip that you don't want to ever forget?

What were you expecting out of the gathering on the first day? Were those expectations met or not? Why or why not?

First Impressions (Chapter 1)

Play Chapter 1 then discuss the group's initial reactions to New Orleans and the damage when they first encountered it.

What were you expecting to see in New Orleans?

How was what you saw similar or different from what you were expecting?

What were you thinking and feeling as we arrived on-site for our service project?

Service Experience (Chapter 2)

Play Chapter 2 and then spend a few minutes talking about the service that your group did.

Spend some time remembering your ServantLife project in New Orleans.

Do you think it was meaningful work? Why or why not?

Who do you think benefited the most from your service project?

How was Christ at work among your group during your service project?

Read Kirsten's comment (05:35- 05:42) to the group.

"We just have to remember that there are people here. Not necessarily just broken houses and homes."

How do our perspective of service and our approach to service change when we start to consider PEOPLE over PROJECTS?

How might you continue to work in the same service area (i.e., housing, wealth and poverty, health and wellness, literacy, environment, arts and culture) here at home?

Taking it Home (Chapter 3)

Play Chapter 3 then spend some time discussing how your group wants to move forward from their experience in New Orleans.

Do you think you changed from your involvement with the gathering? Why or why not? If so, how?

How were your specific gifts used in New Orleans?

What inspired you and made you hopeful in New Orleans?

Read Katharine's comment (05:56-06:34) to your group.

"You need to treat every day like a mission trip and you need to find that person in your everyday life that you can help. And then I turn into a hypocrite because it doesn't happen and you forget about that until the next summer when it comes. And so I just think it can't. It can't fall."

Who are the people in your everyday life that you can help? Who we can help? How can you/ we help them?

How do you think Christ would respond to Katharine's concern?

Read Rachel's comment (07:20) to your group.

"These feelings can't just stop here for me. I can't just have this experience and just be like 'That's great. I had fun but its time to come home now'. For me, this is only the beginning."

Why do you think it is important to Rachel that these feelings don't stop here? How was New Orleans "only the beginning" for you? For our group?

Read Kirsten's comment (08:05) to your group.

"I wanted to come here and listen to the stories and just get to know people. But I think I also have to go home and get to know people better to. Its not just New Orleans, its everywhere. We all have to take care of each other and listen to each other."

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 as a group and see if it gives your group a better way to understand what Kirsten is saying.

According to the Ephesians text, why do we need to take care of each other and listen to each other?

Bible Study

Reading and Visualizing Jeremiah 17:5-8.

Ask your group to close their eyes and visualize what you are about to read to them. Tell them that you will read it twice so they will have more time for their imagination to do the visualizing. (Some of your students might be more comfortable moving around as they listen to you read. That is fine. Simply ask them to do so in silence so all participants can focus on the task.) This passage has some hard words to swallow. Many of your youth may have very real experiences of feeling like a cursed shrub in the desert. Be ready for them to share these experiences.

Discussion

After you have read it, discuss the following:

What did you visualize? (Allow them adequate time to describe what they saw.)

What did you hear in this text that you think is important? Why?

What do you think this text has to do with serving others?

Imaging Jeremiah 17:5-8

Split your group into small groups of 3 or 4 or whatever size you think is appropriate. Assign Jeremiah 17:5-6 to half of the groups and Jeremiah 17:7-8 to half of the groups. Give each group a copy of their assigned text, a large sheet of paper, and crayons or markers. Ask them to create an image that represents their assigned text BUT imagine that these texts are about your group rather than trees and shrubs.

If we are the shrub in the desert, then what might be the relief? Why might we not see it? What might be the parched places of the wilderness? The uninhabited salt land?

If we are the tree planted by water, then what might be the stream? What might be the roots and how are they sent out? What might be the heat and why is there no fear? What are the green leaves? What is the drought? What might be the fruit?

Discussion

Have each group share their image with the whole group. Then discuss these questions.

What do you think it means, as a Christian, to be a shrub in the desert? When have you felt this way?

What brings relief to you in these times? What prevents you from seeing the relief when it comes?

What do you think it means, as a Christian, to be a tree near the stream? When have you felt this way? How have those experiences produced fruit? What kind of fruit was produced?

What is the stream and how do we send our roots into it? After you've discussed this question, share with them a little bit about the Means of Grace (see the leader's guide). We believe that Christ comes to us through Word, Sacrament and Community. This is how we experience the stream. Remind them of Bishop Hanson's words when he welcomed us in New Orleans: "Jesus is already in New Orleans. And Jesus is here ready to meet you exactly where he has promised; in Word and Bread and Wine. But Jesus is going to meet you these days in some unexpected places and some surprising faces. So be open to seeing Jesus as you serve and strive for justice."

Moving Forward

Now do some brainstorming. Use these questions to help generate two lists of ideas.

Living Water

How did we experience Christ in these ways as Living Water in New Orleans?

How do you experience this Living Water here?

How can we, as a community, help one another stay planted by this Living Water in this place?

Bearing Fruit

What kind of fruit did you notice us bearing in New Orleans?

What kind of fruit might we continue to bear here?

Tree Planting and Litany

Make all necessary arrangements for your group to plant a small tree (or trees) somewhere on your church's property. If this is absolutely impossible, then find a small tree (or trees or other plants) that can be potted indoors. Get creative!

Gather with your group in the spot where the tree will be planted. Inform them that they will be planting this tree as a practice of prayer – thanking Jesus for his Living Water and asking for the courage to continue to bear fruit. Give each person a chance to dig part of the hole. As they remove their scoop of dirt they will say one way in which they experience Christ's Living Water. Once the hole is dug and the tree is set in the hole, each person will then place a scoop of dirt into the hole and say one way in which they hope to continue to bear fruit. Once the hole is filled, pass out the litany and pray it responsively taking time to close with your own group prayer.

After the Lesson

Again, we would love for your group to find ways to share your experiences and learnings with others. Hopefully you invited others from your congregation to take part in this lesson. Maybe you can take the ideas generated by your group in this lesson and share them with a neighboring congregation(s). Together your congregations could begin to engage your communities in new ways. The ELCA office of Youth Ministry would also love to hear your story. Maybe one or two youth could write a letter summarizing your group's experience and how you hope to move forward together in ministry. The goal is to keep moving into our future trusting in Christ's presence and activity and telling the stories of these times when our lives have been deeply touched.

A Litany for Living Water and Bearing Fruit

First, have Group A read all of their parts straight through. This is Jeremiah 17:7-8. Next, Have Group B read all of their parts straight through. This is Ephesians 2:8-10. Then, have each group read their parts responsively. They do not need to read the text citation in parentheses.

Group A: Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. (Jeremiah 17:7)

Group B: For by grace you have been saved through faith, (Ephesians 2:8a)

Group A: They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. (Jeremiah 17:8a)

Group B: and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8b)

Group A: It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; (Jeremiah 17:8b)

Group B: For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, (Ephesians 2:10a)

Group A: in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17:8c)

Group B: which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:10b)

All: Amen.