

Focus: The Lord is kind and merciful.

Materials:

Prayer Altar: Cross, Candle, Chasuble on stand (priest's vestment) and Altar Cloth
CD-Toddlers 20 Favorite Bible Songs
Gospel Reading: The Children's Bible in 365 Stories
Glass jar, paper strips and paper cross

Gathering (have children sit on the floor-“Criss-Cross Applesauce”)

Say: *Good Morning everyone, my name is _____. Last week we talked about listening to Jesus and how important it is to show the light of Jesus in the world by doing good deeds. Sometimes we make the wrong choice and don't follow God's rules. Today's Gospel story tells us about God's love and forgiveness.*

Opening Prayer

Together we make the Sign of the Cross (do in reverse so children can mirror).

Say: *Now let's put our hands together and bow our heads.*

Let us pray.

Merciful God, thank you for your kindness and mercy.

Help us to be kind and forgiving of others. In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Song/Movement

Just Praise the Lord (To the tune of the People on the Bus), track: 7, from Toddler 20 Favorite Bible Songs

Play music, encourage children to stretch or move to the music (clapping, stamp feet march in place to the beat), turn to each other and shake hands, saying hello, etc.)

The people on the bus say Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord.

The people on the bus say Praise the Lord, all through the town.

The driver on the bus says Go to church, Go to church, Go to church.

The driver on the bus says Go to church, all through the town.

The mommy on the bus says God loves you, God loves you, God loves you.

The mommy on the bus says God loves you, all through the town.

The daddy on the bus says Pray every day, Pray every day, Pray every day.

The daddy on the bus says Pray every day, all through the town.

The baby on the bus says Wah-wah-wah, Wah-wah-wah, Wah-wah-wah.

The baby on the bus says Wah-wah-wah, all through the town.

The people on the bus say Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord.

The people on the bus say Praise the Lord, all through the town.

Memory Verse

Say: *Now let's take a moment together to learn a verse from the bible.*

The people didn't want to change their ways.

Have the children repeat the verse after you a couple of times.

Say: *God loves us and wants us to live as his children forever. We live like God's children when we make the right choice and do what Jesus taught us. Jesus taught us to be kind, be friends to others, and share what we have. When we choose to follow Jesus, we turn our hearts to God.*

Gospel Story

Say: *Today we are reading from the Gospel of Luke.*

Have children make sign of the cross on their forehead, mouth and heart saying. *"Lord, open my mind, my lips and my heart so that I may learn it, speak it and love it."*

Read: The Children's Bible in 365 Stories, pp. 351, *The Fig Tree Without Any Figs*

After the reading say: *The Gospel of the Lord*

Children respond: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ*

Discussion Starters:

- *In the story that Jesus told, was there fruit on the fig tree?*
- *What did the man want to do to the tree?*
- *Why did the man give the fig tree another chance to bear fruit?*
- *Why did Jesus tell this story?*
- *How do you thank God for being kind and merciful and giving us another chance?*
- *How do you ask God for forgiveness?*
- *Is God always forgiving?*
- *Why do we need forgiveness?*

Reflection on Reading:

The fig tree praises God by bearing figs for people and animals to eat. People praise God by loving him and loving one another. The tree was not doing what a fig tree should do. Sometimes, we don't love as God wants us to love, either. We can be like that fig tree. Like the man who planted the tree in the story some people would cut down the tree because it wasn't doing what it should.

In the same way, we often give up on people who don't act how we think they should. God is not like that. God is like the gardener in the parable. He keeps caring for us, working with us, pouring his love into us and waiting patiently for us to respond to his love with love of our own. God is kind and merciful, always ready to give a second chance.

Jesus taught us to be kind to one another, to forgive one another, to be patient with one another and to love one another, just as Jesus loves us.

Gospel Activity

Activity 1:

Dance of the Fruit Trees:

Divide the group into 2 lines facing one another a few feet apart. (Or 2 sets of 2 lines, depending on the number of kids)

Explain that good deeds are like good fruit and bad deeds are like bad, damaged fruit. In this dance, the children will step forward when you say something that is a good deed and backwards when you mention a bad deed.

Clap your hands to keep a slow steady rhythm or use track 11 from 20 Toddler Songs (Roll Away) and instruct the children to march in place. They are to keep marching in place, stepping forward (toward each other) or backward in response to the deeds mentioned. Practice a couple of times without the music to let them get the hang of it.

Some examples are: Good Deeds—praying, sharing, helping others, being kind, playing fairly, forgiving others, loving God, loving others and telling the truth.

Bad fruit—bullying, name-calling, being selfish, being rude, saying mean things, hitting, lying, not playing fairly and hurting others.

Activity 2:

God cleans up our sins:

Do: Take a clear jar and show it to the children.

Say: *See how clean and pretty this jar is? This jar is like us before sin.*

Do: Take dark strips of paper, put them in the jar.

Say: *See this dark colored paper? This represents our sins (when we make the wrong choice). Whenever we know what is right, but choose to do what is wrong, we sin, (turn away from God). The more we sin, the less clear the jar becomes. (The harder it is to see God).*

Do: Close the lid.

Say: *Now the sins are locked inside and they can't come out. (If the children suggest taking the lid off, tell them we can't do that with our sins, we can't clean it up ourselves).*

This is sad. It would be very sad if we had to live this way all the time.

Do: Get really excited.

Say: *But!!!! There is GOOD NEWS!! God can clean us up!! God can clean us up because of Jesus. God sent Jesus to give us a second chance, just like the gardener and the fig tree.*

Do: Point to the cross on the prayer table.

Say: *Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and died for our sins on the cross and rose from the tomb, so that God could forgive our sins and clean our hearts.*

Do: Open the lid and take out the dark paper.

Say: *Because of Jesus, God can and will forgive our sins, give us another chance to follow Jesus and keep our eyes on heaven. When Jesus comes into our hearts, sin goes out. Then our lives are different and new, because Jesus comes to live in our hearts.*

Do: Put the paper cross inside the jar.

Say: *God forgives our sins and He will never let our sins get in the way of his love again. When God looks at us, [Lift the jar] he only sees Jesus in us!!!*

Complete the weekly bulletin as a group-let the children color them if there is extra time

Closing Prayer

(Children respond: "I Believe!")

Ask: *Do you believe in God, who loves us and gives us another chance to follow him?
Do you believe in Jesus, who shows us the way to change our lives and turn toward God?
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who lives in our hearts and gives us a life with God forever?*

Sending Forth

Say: *Remember that God forgives us and also wants us to forgive others that say they are sorry. If someone does something and makes you sad, give them a chance to say they are sorry and then start over again.*

Lining Up/Closing Song

Play "The Lord is My Shepherd" track 5 from Toddler 20 Favorite Songs while children put away any materials and lineup. Hand out weekly bulletins. Remind them it is important that they return to their family quietly so that we may all listen and pray together in church.