



The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem Creative Christian Education



This series is focused on select parables of Jesus who taught people with images related to their daily lives. To understand the parables, it is helpful to know the geography and some cultural norms.

This Christian Education template is designed to assist leaders and teachers, lay and ordained, to bring the Bible alive by sharing local knowledge of the times of Jesus and Christians in the Land today. This is a special offering of the Diocese of Jerusalem which covers Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. The Christians of this region are an historic Arabic speaking Christian population carrying the traditions of the early Christians listed in the New Testament story of the Pentecost. Through the centuries, Christians in this region have maintained insights into cultural traditions, images, and geographical contexts of Biblical references from the times of Jesus. Often called the 'Living Stones', the Arabic Speaking Christians are our living connection with the people whom Jesus taught and healed.

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability... Amazed and astonished, they asked 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in our own native language?' ... Cretans and Arabs, in our own languages, we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." Acts 2: 4-11

FORMAT: Lessons in this series are aimed at 45minutes but will depend on the teacher, and the number, ages, and abilities of the children involved. It is set in one form for a multi-age group found in the majority of churches. The lesson is set for mid-elementary school children which can be easily simplified for younger children or expanded for older children. Given the expected mixed ages and abilities, it is suggested that the older children be asked to prepare materials for the younger children, assisting them where needed so every child can finish the craft without time left with nothing to do. When desired, older children can be set off in a separate part of the room to prepare a skit demonstrating the story while the younger children start or make the craft.

The individual teachers will select the opening song appropriate for the children in their care. It is best to choose a song that is regionally and age appropriate which has relevance to the theme and/or has a unifying quality.

The readings, lessons, craft ideas, and closing prayer are provided. The leader will need a Bible and materials listed for each lesson.

Additional Christian Education materials and supplemental information about the ministries of the Diocese, including pictures, may be found under "Resources" on the diocesan website www.j-diocese.org.

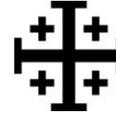
Salaam; Peace be with you.

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1st Lesson – Parable of the Growing Seed

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem spread through Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. Christians, who are descendants of the early Arabic Speaking Christians mentioned in the biblical account about the first Pentecost, still live in the Land of Jesus today. These Christian Arabs, living as a tiny minority among the Jewish and Muslim majorities in the region, are the vital roots of Christianity at its place of origin and are often called the ‘Living Stones’ of our faith. Today, the Christians of the Diocese of Jerusalem offer this story and understanding for you.

SONG AND/OR GAME: We encourage you to pick one song for the whole series that is familiar in your area.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Growing Seed: Read the Gospel of Mark 4:26-29

LEARNING/STORY: The land which Jesus walked is in the Diocese of Jerusalem today. North and west of Jerusalem, the land is mostly fertile with springs of fresh water easily available in many places. It is likely that Jesus told this story during his time in the Galilee, north of Jerusalem, or just across the Jordan River, in what is Jordan today, where crops grow with ease. We can imagine Jesus standing on a hillside, overlooking the green valleys around the Sea of Galilee. He likens it to the Kingdom of God. We can visualize the abundance that gardeners and farmers reap from hard work and the unseen forces of nature. God is also unseen. However, when we work together with God, great goodness comes to many around us who share in the harvest of our partnership with God. We each start as a seed, a baby with potential. If we work together with the unseen God, we can bring a good harvest to ourselves and those around us. What are you going to work on with God so you will have something to share with others?

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Outdoor garden space or spacious plant container with dirt

Locally available grass seed (Set aside some seeds for weeks 2 & 3)

Light and water, with arrangements to water as needed for growth

Pictures of plants which get harvested: vegetable gardens, farms with wheat and corn stalks

CRAFT ACTIVITY:

Have children each take a pinch of grass seed and sprinkle it on the dirt, set aside to watch growth. Water as needed.

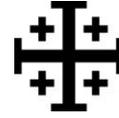
Cutting or tearing pictures, have children make a collage of plants that grow from seeds and get harvested for food.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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2nd Lesson – Parable of the Mustard Seed

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Arabic Speaking Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem spread through Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. Christians, who are descendants of the early Arabic Speaking Christians mentioned in the biblical account about the first Pentecost, still live in the Land of Jesus today. Today, the Christians of the Diocese of Jerusalem offer this story and understanding for you.

SONG AND/OR GAME: We encourage choosing the same song to sing through the series.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Mustard Seed: Read the Gospel of Mark 4:30-32

LEARNING/STORY: Continue the theme of the growing seed from last week. Look at pictures of Israel, Jordan, and Palestine to see the desert to the east and south of Jerusalem and the fertile land to the west and north. Picture Jesus walking this land, teaching the people who gathered around him as he used images familiar to their lives. In the area around the Sea of Galilee, there were many more trees and shrubs than are there today. Without modern equipment, these larger plants would seem very hard to remove. With deep roots, trees and shrubs were dependable shelter frames and protection during violent storms which could spring up suddenly from the Sea of Galilee in a deep valley surrounded by mountains. Jesus is choosing an image of a plant which starts with the tiniest seed to show how great is the Kingdom of God which can make shelter for creatures. The image reminds us that, though we are as tiny seeds in the world, we can grow in the Kingdom of God to be as great as the mustard tree.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Maps and pictures of the “Holy Land” from books or websites. Diocesan maps and pictures are on www.j-diocese.org.
Seeds from Week 1; Pipe cleaners; Clear adhesive tape
Small branches, sticks, leaves fallen from trees
Old cans, plastic containers, or cups filled with sand or dirt

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Study the map. Begin to appreciate the landscape. Imagine how hot weather can make people want to hide in the shade. Apply what you see to the story.

Give each child a container filled with dirt. Ask each child to put a seed in the container. Then put a branch or stick in the container to represent the grown tree. Tape leaves on the tree. Make people from pipe cleaners and put them in the container under the tree. Talk about the great things that come from little beginnings. Keep the ‘trees’ in the classroom for lesson 5 or save one bigger ‘tree’ as a reminder for the class.

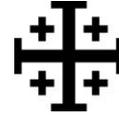
END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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3rd Lesson – Parable of the Sower

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Arabic Speaking Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem spread through Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine.

SONG AND/OR GAME: We encourage using the same song to sing throughout the series.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Sower: Read the Gospel of Matthew 13:1-9 (Optional 13:18-23) and/or the Gospel of Luke 8:4-8 (& 11-15 optional)

LEARNING/STORY: Review the landscape of the ‘Holy Land’ from last week. Look at pictures of Israel, Jordan, and Palestine to see the desert to the east and south of Jerusalem and the fertile land to the west and north. Look at the area around the Sea of Galilee where Jesus tells this story. Imagine what happens to a seed that falls near the Sea of Galilee with plenty of water to feed it. What would happen if it was too close and got flooded? What would happen if the seed was farther away and waited for the rain? What about when the rain stops? What would happen if it fell on a rock or the hard desert ground to the south? How are we like those seeds? When are we like those seeds?

What about the ‘sower,’ the one who spreads the seeds? Is this story about spreading the news about God as much as it is about listening and learning? Does the sower have responsibility for preparing the ground or choosing where and when to spread the seeds so they have the best chance to grow? Who is the sower? How do we share the good news from God? How do we share God’s love? When do we talk about it and when do we live it as we teach others? In the Diocese of Jerusalem, where Arab Christians are a small minority, it is important to live faith rather than talk about it, reaching out to our neighbors in helpfulness and respect.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Dirt samples: rock, sand, garden dirt, etc. Option: Ask children to gather samples around the church or building.
Seeds from week 1; cardboard box or large plastic tray to hold all samples.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Study the map. Look again at the landscape around the Sea of Galilee and then down the Jordan River to the desert. Using the dirt available, arrange different kinds of dirt in the box or tray to copy the landscape of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River area down to the desert. Have children take turns placing a seed in the landscape you made and ask the group “What will happen to that seed? Will it grow?” Talk about why we learn about God. Talk about the stories of the Bible as the seeds just planted in the landscape and how important it is to be like the good soil where the seeds sink in and grow. Remind them of the stories of the last two Sundays/parables.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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4th Lesson – Parable of the Yeast

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

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SONG AND/OR GAME: We encourage choosing the same song to sing through the series.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Yeast: Read the Gospel of Matthew 13:33

LEARNING/STORY: Bread is a staple of the Middle Eastern diet in the ‘Holy Land’ even today. Small loaves of ‘pita’ bread are made in great quantity in every village, town, and city. These are made from flat round batches of dough which separate to form ‘pockets’ when cooked in special ovens. Today, as in Jesus’ time, families scattered in the hillsides make their own flat bread which is tossed much like a pizza then cooked as very thin dough over an outside round burner that looks like an upside down metal bowl sitting over a fire.

Yeast is necessary for bread making. In Jesus day, and with many Bedouin families in the region today, live yeast is grown and a portion used for each bread batch. If your yeast dried out, if it got too hot or spoiled and died, that family would have no bread. That family would go hungry unless another family, a neighbor, gave them some of their yeast to get them started again. Everyone in Jesus time knew the importance of yeast for feeding hungry people.

The people of Jesus’ time used pieces of bread to scoop what they wanted to eat. The yeast makes bread light and bendable. The yeast makes it grow to two times the original size of the dough mix. Talk about the Kingdom of Heaven through the unseen Holy Spirit as being the yeast in our lives. Being able to talk to God when we are lonely or afraid gives us comfort and strength. Living and working with God makes life much better than feeling alone and scared.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Made or bought pizza dough; Pita bread or flat bread (tortillas, wraps, etc.); Humus

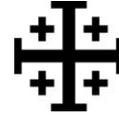
CRAFT ACTIVITY: Warm the dough while reading the story. Have the children notice the size of the dough before and after. Lay out the dough on a clean surface. Rip golf ball size pieces off for the children to feel and shape. Have the children put their pieces on a cooking sheet. (Make a diagram or find a way to track whose piece is whose.) Keep children away from the oven by offering them a snack of humus with pita or flat bread, the same kind of food Jesus may have eaten, still important in the region today. (CHECK FOR CHILDREN WITH ALLERGIES. Provide alternative snack.) *Check on the cooking breads (pizza dough). When cooked, show the children how their shapes grew and changed. Talk again about how the Holy Spirit changes our lives. Cool and put the bread in plastic bags to take home.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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5th Lesson – Parable of the Treasure

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

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SONG AND/OR GAME: See resource list. We encourage choosing the same song to sing through the series.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Treasure: Read the Gospel of Matthew 13:44-47

LEARNING/STORY: The Kingdom of Heaven is an image that Jesus uses a lot. He is not talking about a place with a king and a queen. He is not talking about a place you can go or a place you can see. He is not talking about a far away place in space. In the region where Jesus lived, there were many towns with a lot of land between them and each had a leader. In spite of armies that came through and ruled like the Greeks or the Romans, the local leaders were obeyed and respected as the social authority in the lives of the people of each tribe or extended family. There were many little ‘kingdoms’ of tribes with a grandfather or great-grandfather as the ‘big boss’. Life in each place depended a lot on what kind of person was in charge of these family groups. So, why do you think Matthew describes living with the unseen God as the ‘kingdom of heaven’? What kind of leader is God?

Perhaps, as Jesus described to people what it would be like to live with God as your ‘big boss’ and your leader, he chose the image that was most familiar to the people, that of a ‘kingdom’. We must remember the Kingdom of Heaven is an image, something unseen and spiritual. It could be a big religious family of people who follow the same leader, God. If we all learn to follow God as Jesus tells us, we will all find the ‘treasure’ that is the ‘kingdom of heaven’. We will see how wonderful our lives are with God and we will focus everything we have on that wonderful life. How can we help God make the ‘kingdom of heaven’ on earth? Can you imagine a place where everyone is nice, respectful, and caring to everyone else? Can we make our homes like that? Can we make our circle of friends like that? Can we make our churches like that?

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Items for a treasure hunt which remind children about living with God. Items can be as simple as finding little hearts for love, crosses for forgiveness, seeds for growing, or bible quotes attached to stickers or little candies.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Hide the items in the room, outside, or another room where the children can be sent to hunt for treasure. If bible quotes are used in the hunt, gathered quotes can be taped to the ‘trees’ made in lesson 2. Other items can be taken home.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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6th Lesson – Parable of the Good Samaritan

FOCUS AREA/THEME: Jesus spoke in parables – “With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Matthew 4:33-34 NRSV Bible

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem spread through Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine.

SONG AND/OR GAME: Continue with song chosen for the series.

SHORT BIBLE READING: Parable of the Good Samaritan: Read the Gospel of Luke 10:30-37

LEARNING/STORY: Looking back at the stories about seeds and soil, and remembering the lessons about growing and working with God, this story takes us further into what Jesus meant by being a person of God, a member of the Kingdom of Heaven. The road between Jerusalem and Jericho is a winding path, now a paved highway, through desert hills and valleys to the hot city of Jericho which is settled in a hot, dry landscape between the desert hills and the Jordan River. The sand is hard and rocky. The heat and the barren hills are unforgiving. Countless caves and twists in the hills provide ample hiding for robbers laying in wait for innocent passing travelers. Occasionally, a shepherd with his sheep and goats are seen wandering in search of sprigs of edible growth.

Jesus and many others had walked that road. They knew the vulnerability of the single traveler. They lived by ‘desert hospitality’, a tradition of offering food and drink to anyone who asks. They lived that way because they depended on the same hospitality when they traveled to see relatives. However, a Samaritan was not included in that hospitality in Jesus’ time. Samaritans were the people that others thought dirty, different, and bad. In this story, Jesus shows us that the Samaritans, and other groups who are different, are equal with us, perhaps even more kind and thoughtful than us. Jesus shows us that, to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to do as the Samaritan did. We need to help people in need and treat each other as equals, as good neighbors.

Today, many people are nervous about Arabs, even Christian Arabs. They speak a different language, live in houses that look different, eat different food, and sometimes wear different clothes. Yet, these Christians continue to be like the Good Samaritan. The Diocese of Jerusalem has over 30 Arabic schools, hospitals, clinics, vocational and rehabilitation centers for people regardless of faith. They reach out to be good neighbors to everyone around them. They offer free care to people in need, just like the man in Jesus’ story.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Baked plain cookies and cupcakes, frosting, icing, and sprinkles for decorating

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Ask the children to decorate the cookies and cakes to sell at Coffee Hour, or some select time, to raise money for the Diocese of Jerusalem to help them give free care to people in need. Be a Good Samaritan. Be a neighbor to your Arab brothers and sisters in Christ in the troubled land of Jesus today.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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