

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD

CURRICULUM



Adult



Welcome to *Feasting on the Word Curriculum!*

You have accepted the call to teach God's people. Teaching is an important calling and ministry. *Feasting on the Word* resources will help you fulfill your calling. You can expect these resources to help you:

- ✧ Introduce biblical stories in new and creative ways.
- ✧ Gather your community with age-appropriate learning activities.
- ✧ Challenge your learners to put their faith into action and grow in their self-understanding as Christians.
- ✧ Prepare your learners for the worship and service of God.

About Adults

Adults see the world through the filter of life experience and life transitions. Adults enter Bible study and worship bringing with them this variety of views. *Feasting on the Word* materials will engage adults in a deeper exploration of biblical texts. Christian faith will be enhanced when the Scriptures read and proclaimed in worship are reinforced and expanded on what they have been considering in their educational time. Education and worship can be mutually supportive in helping God's word in Scripture come alive in the Sunday morning experience.

Session Flow

Each session of the *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* provides you with a plan for teaching the focus scripture in age-appropriate ways. Each session assumes a 45-minute period. For a 60-minute session, use more options from Responding.

Focus on Your Teaching makes connections between the focus scripture and the age group.

Leading the Session begins with Gathering, a brief worship time and an activity to make the bridge from participants' lives to the theme of the focus passage.

Preparing for the Session offers excerpts from the *Feasting on the Word* commentary series, giving a brief but rich background for your own learning.

Exploring addresses two questions: "What is important to know about this passage?" and "Where is God in these words?"

Closing suggests a prayer and an opportunity for the participants to recall what they discovered and what they are called to do.

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SEPTEMBER 4, 2011 Proper 18

Exod. 12:1–14
Ps. 149
Rom. 13:8–14
Matt. 18:15–20

The Rule of Christ

Goal for the Session Adults will explore the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness in the shared life of the church.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 18:15–20

WHAT is important to know?
 ...from *Theological Perspective*, "Charles H. Johnson
 Even though this passage is primarily concerned with matters of church discipline, the emphasis throughout is not to punish him or her; this is made clear by the content in which Matthew has placed these verses. Preceding this passage is the parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10–14), with its emphasis on the joy that comes from recovering one who has gone astray; following it is Jesus' saying about forgiveness and the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (18:21–35), which emphasizes the need for unconditional forgiveness.

WHERE is God in these words?
 ...from *Theological Perspective*, "Charles H. Johnson
 Jesus' saying in verse 18 is susceptible to multiple interpretations. In light of his teaching on life in the church as the locus of God's mission in the world, and this verse's echo of the Lord's Prayer (God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven"), Jesus could mean this: if we in the church do not forgive and heal, who else earth is going to do it? If the church—no matter how small, even just two or three believers—will agree in Christ and seek prayerfully to do the will of God, then God will respond. The church will really be the church because Jesus will be present.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?
 ...from *Theological Perspective*, "John P. Anderson
 In this passage, Jesus seems to assume that there will be conflict among his followers. What makes us Christian is not whether or not we fight, disagree, or correct one another, but how we go about addressing and resolving these issues. When we enter into membership in Christian community, we bind ourselves to one another with Christ as our head. We are not free from each other; we are free in each other. In other words, we are united Christ as our head. We are not free from each other; we are free in each other. In other words, we are united Christ as our head. We are not free from each other; we are free in each other. In other words, we are united Christ as our head. We are not free from each other; we are free in each other. In other words, we are united Christ as our head.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?
 ...from *Theological Perspective*, "John P. Anderson
 Scholars remind us that these verses have been called the Rule of Christ because they redefine the goal of Christian community as the pursuit of reconciliation and forgiveness. This is not a goal of individual piety or of institutional perfection, but of a community that seeks to restore and forgive. In Christ, it is conditioned by more than the sense of call and sacrifice in ministry to the world. Being in Christ involves living into the difficult discipline of discipleship of fellowship. We seek to care for one another even when injured or offended, which requires discipline in binding and loosing ourselves to repent and to forgive, all sustained in Christ.

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FEASTING on the WORD CURRICULUM The Rule of Christ

Focus on Your Teaching

Conflict within communities is a fact of life. The good news is that the God calls us to face this conflict so that relationships can be restored and the community can be unified. As you prepare to teach this lesson, be sensitive to any conflicts in the life of your congregation and its members, even though it may be in the past. Also recognize that some participants may be involved in conflict in other parts of their lives at this moment.

Leading God, grant that I may be open to forgiveness and reconciliation in my own life as I teach others your gentle rule of restoration for the church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce new people to one or two other participants. When it is time to begin, inform the group that each week they will focus on one text from the lectionary, the Bible readings assigned for worship, using the *Feasting on the Word* educational resources.

If this is the first time this group is meeting, have the participants say their names and one brief fact about themselves. They pray the following prayer or one of your own:

Gracious God, we give you thanks for bringing us together to study your Word. Guide us by your Holy Spirit that through our study we may be led into deeper discipleship as we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

To help the group enter into the theme for this session, ask:

- When was a recent time that you verbally forgave someone?
- When were you recently forgiven by someone else?

After the group has offered a few examples, explain that this session is about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness.

EXPLORING

To help provide the participants with a framework for the focus scripture, have them review Matthew 18. Form groups of two or three. Have each group turn to Matthew 18 and look for five general ways that Jesus would have the church be together in community. Suggest that participants focus on these sections of the passage: verses 1–5, 6–8, 10–14, 15–20, and

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21–25. Invite the groups to report by asking one group to give their summary statement for the first section, another group for the second section, and so forth. If there are ten or more in your total group, assign one section to each of five groups. Invite each group to report. After the groups have reported, note that Matthew 18 is dedicated to the maintenance of community through humility and forgiveness.

Now, center on the focus scripture. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the lectionary text, Matthew 18:15–20. Ask:

- What steps does Jesus outline for handling conflict?

As the group names the steps, write them on newsprint or board. Then distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Matthew 18:15–20) and have the group read the excerpts under "What?" and "Where?" silently. After a few moments, ask:

- What in these excerpts added to your understanding of Jesus' 18:15–20?

In this discussion, some participants may wonder about Jesus' use of the Gentile and tax collector as examples for handling the repentant person. If so, have volunteers read aloud Matthew 9:9–11; 11:16–19; and 20:16–20. In the first-century Jewish worldview, Gentiles or pagans or idolaters were not considered to be the same thing. They were seen as sinners because of their lack of obedience to God's word. Jesus, however, welcomed those who were considered outsiders. They were a part of his mission. Some study Bibles may have additional commentary on Matthew 18:17. Talk together about what Jesus use really says about the treatment of Gentiles and tax collectors, based on his other statements about them.

Conclude this section with the following question to prepare the group for Responding:

- What does this teaching from Jesus suggest for your own actions or for the church?

To further prepare for the Responding option that follows, ask two volunteers to read aloud the "So What?" and "Now What?" excerpts on Resource Sheet 1.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

- Conflict in a Congregation** Nearly every congregation has a conflict, present or long past, that could be discussed. However, a neutral situation may yield a deeper consideration of how to apply Jesus' teachings today. Use the following description as a way for the participants to try out Matthew 18:15–20.

The carpet in the sanctuary was threadbare and safety demanded that it be replaced. The building committee planned to replace it with the same or a similar color. Thinking people for a new color for the carpet. The session decided that the decision was to use the building committee. Upon hearing this, the person who wanted a new color made some unflattering comments about the fate of the chair of the building committee at another church meeting.

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Display the newsprint with the steps from Matthew 18 outlined in Exploring. Lead the group in discussing the issues of the conflict so everyone is clear about the conflict and new color for the carpet. Together, decide how the five steps could be used to resolve the conflict.

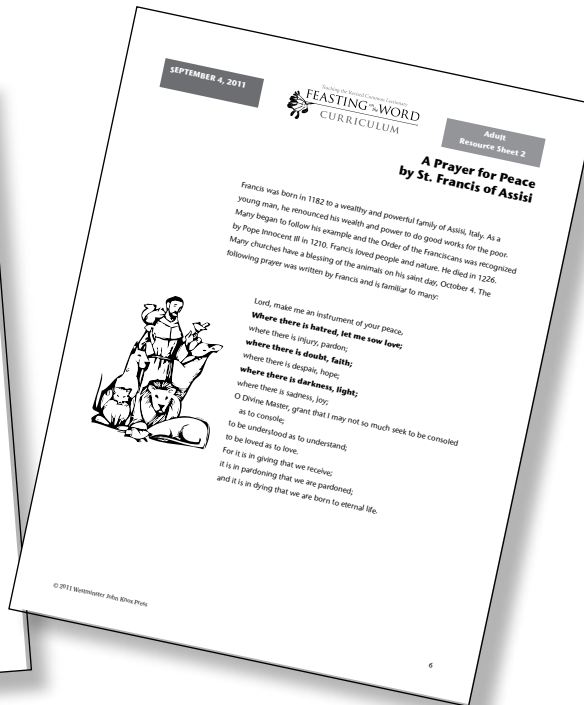
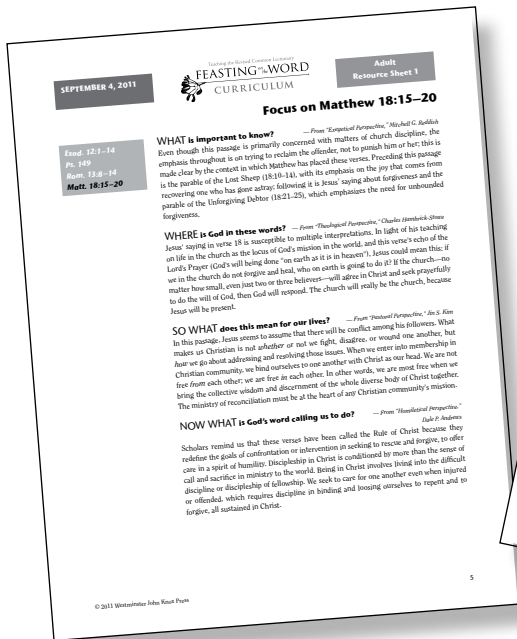
- Prayer of St. Francis** Christians always have a responsibility to pray for peace, someone to read the paragraph about Francis aloud. Then form two groups to read it together, with one group reading the plan text and the other the bold text. After a moment of silence, ask:
 - What has been your experience with this prayer?
 - In what ways does this prayer relate to Matthew 18:15–20?
 - How does this prayer give guidance for the Christian life?
 Close this activity by asking the participants to select a line from the prayer that has special meaning for them and to meditate quietly on that line for a moment.
- Approach to Unity** Scholars have speculated that Matthew 18:15–20 was included in Matthew because the young church was embroiled in conflict and needed the church today (and the nation) seems to be in a similar situation. A call to civility "Now What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Discuss these questions:
 - Why is reconciliation important in the church (in the community)?
 - Think of a conflict in the church or nation. What steps do you see as necessary for bringing about reconciliation today?
 - How might you or your congregation help to bring about reconciliation?
 - There may be no resolution to this discussion, but such a discussion may lead to action.

CLOSING

Invite the group to summarize in their own words the main ideas of the session. Then suggest that they think quietly about how this will affect their practice of the Christian faith during the coming week.

Pray the prayer of St. Francis on Resource Sheet 2, having one person read it for the whole group read in unison.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Matthew 18:15–20) for September 11, 2011, scripture and the resource sheet during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and the resource sheet during the week.



Two reproducible resource sheets

Preparing to Teach

- ☞ Read the focus scripture and the *Feasting on the Word* commentary excerpts.
- ☞ Read Focus on Your Teaching and pray for your group and your leadership.
- ☞ Look over the session plan. Select the activities you will use and gather necessary supplies.

Ways of Learning and Teaching

In any group, whether children, youth, or adults, many learning styles will be present. You too have preferred ways of learning something new. The session plans include a variety of learning methods so varieties of learner styles are included during each season. We tend to teach with the methods that are most familiar to or comfortable for us. From time to time, include activities that challenge you so you are including learners who prefer to learn in that way. If you find that you tend to lead the group in verbal activities, for example, try introducing musical, bodily, and other activities suggested by the session plan.

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