



Sunday, September 27, 2026
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Year A

Authority and Actions

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

First Reading:

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Second Reading:

Philippians 2:1-13

Key Verse:

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

– Matthew 21:31

The Point:

Jesus challenges those who think they are righteous.

Liturgical Color:

Green



Activities & Supplies

Into the Word

Sorry, God

Recognize our mistakes.

5 min.

- Groupings Guide
- Materials for chosen intergenerational grouping
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils

Seasons of the Word

Growing Pains

Hear about difficult lessons learned.

10 min.

- Guest speaker

Learning the Word

Speaking in Riddles

Understand Jesus' confusing lessons.

15 min.

- Bibles
- Internet-connected devices
- Optional: riddle books

The Word in the World

Uncomfortable Sin

Repentance relieves discomfort.

10 min.

- Completed index cards from Into the Story activity
- Garbage can



Beyond the Gospel

The Nature of Jesus Discover ways to be like Jesus.	10 min.	• Bibles • White board or mural paper • Markers
Additional Activities		
Left or Right Play a confusing game..	5 min.	• None
Random Acts Review Share the results of random acts of kindness.	10 min.	• None
Be Like Jesus Make a small group poster.	15 min.	• Mural paper or poster board • Markers or crayons • Optional: magazines, glue sticks, scissors, paper
Sending		
	5 min.	• The Word @ Home take-home sheet





Cross+generational, or intergenerational, ministry has at its core the concept that faith is formed through meaningful relationships. When we connect with people of a different generation, we are able to learn from them and share our own experiences, no matter what age we are. We find our place in God's story best by exploring that story as community.

Effective cross+generational experiences are:

- *Experiential*
- *Interactive*
- *Engaging*
- *Story-centered*
- *Home-based*
- *Equalizing*

all of which promote an **encounter with God**. All of the activities included in this leader guide are intended to engage these principles, through intentional intergenerational interaction and active, creative activities that bring the Bible story to life in our lives.

We pass on the faith through every action, experience, or relationship that nurtures a transformative relationship of trust with God and shapes the way we see and interact with God's world. When we do this in meaningful, intergenerational relationships, our faith is enriched from the diversity of the experiences we share with each other. Our communities are strengthened, and we have confidence in our sense of belonging to God and with each other.



Background for Leaders

As Jesus' popularity with the people increases, he begins to challenge religious leaders with his stories. They realize that they are in a difficult position and begin to plot how best to deal with this challenge.

Gospel Summary: Matthew 21:23-32

Authority and Actions

Today's Gospel text includes two stories in which Jesus challenges the religious leaders. The first question challenges Jesus' authority. Regardless of what the religious leaders say, they feel that their authority is being compromised. The second story involved a father and two sons. One son is asked to work by his father and after an initial refusal, changes his mind and goes. The second son says that he will go and does not. Jesus then asks: is it more important to say you will do something and not do it, or to say you will not do something and change your mind and do it? Which is more important: words or actions?

First Reading Summary: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God calls the people to turn from their sinful ways and start living God's way. As in the Gospel lesson, your future actions are more important than where you start from.

Second Reading Summary: Philippians 2:1-13

Paul challenges the Philippian church to act as one body with compassion and tenderness. He calls them to be imitators of Christ by acting with humility.

The Point:

Jesus challenges those who think they are righteous. The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders continues to increase as Jesus' popularity grows. These two stories in Matthew 21 call out the hypocrisy of the leaders, whose words emphasize their righteousness, but whose actions show something different. Jesus challenges all people to act in a way that is consistent with their words.

Festivals & Seasons: Green

Today is the 18th Sunday after Pentecost. Green is used to indicate our growth in faith, and this season after Pentecost is a time in which we focus on Jesus' teachings and ministry. During this time of growth, today's readings focus on the growth that we experience through repentance.

Prayer of Preparation:

Lord, sometimes we act like we have it all together, and think that we are better than others. Help us to act in humility, knowing that all that we do should be done to point to you and not to make ourselves look better. Amen.

Lesson Plan

Into the Word

Sorry, God

5 min.

Recognize our mistakes.

Supplies:

- Groupings Guide
- Materials for chosen intergenerational grouping
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils

Preparation:

1. Determine how you would like to group participants intergenerationally at their tables using the Groupings Guide.
2. Prepare the materials indicated in the Guide.

Instructions:

1. Welcome the class and instruct them to group themselves intergenerationally according to the method you have selected from the Groupings Guide.
2. **If someone is sitting alone, please introduce yourself and invite them to join you. Young children who are not comfortable leaving their families should sit at a table with someone in their family.**
3. **Today we are going to talk about repentance. Who can tell me what “repentance” means?** Allow responses. **Repentance is when we feel badly about something, and change our behavior because of it.**



4. So instead of opening our time together by talking about the topic, we are going to take a few moments to think quietly about it. Think about something that you have done that you feel badly about. It might be something big, or just a small thing that has been bothering you. After you have thought for a few moments, take an index card and write or draw the thing that makes you feel sad or regretful about, and what you can do to resolve the your regret. When you have it written down, fold up the index card and put it in your shoe.
5. Allow participants time to think and write or draw.



Seasons of the Word

Growing Pains

10 min.

Hear about difficult lessons learned.

Supplies:

- Guest speaker

Preparation:

1. Invite a guest speaker whose faith has been strengthened during a difficult time.

Instructions:

1. **We are in the season of Pentecost, which is a time of growth. Sometimes, some of the times of greatest growth in our lives comes when we go through the most difficult times. I have invited a special guest to share with us their story of growth in faith during a difficult time.**
2. Introduce the speaker. If the speaker is comfortable, allow time for questions at the end.



Learning the Word

Speaking in Riddles

15 min.

Understand Jesus' confusing lessons.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Internet-connected devices
- Optional: riddle books

Preparation:

1. If you choose to use Internet-connected devices, verify that participants will have access to a reliable Internet connection.
2. If you will not be using Internet searches, bring in riddle books, or look up riddles online prior to class.

Instructions:

1. **How many of you enjoy riddles? Today we are going to take some time to share some riddles in our small groups.** Allow participants to search for riddles online, share their favorite riddles, use the riddle books provided, or guess the answers to the riddles that you read. **When we are done, each small group will share their favorite riddle from their table.**
2. Allow groups time to share riddles.
3. **Sometimes when we read the Bible, it can feel like Jesus is speaking in riddles. Our text today—especially the first half—is one of those passages. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 21:23.**
4. Read Matthew 21:23-27 to the group, or invite volunteers to read.
5. **Does this passage seem confusing to anyone besides me? What can we do when we come upon a passage like this?** *[We can talk to church leaders, look to Bible resources such as a*



commentaries, research the text online, etc.] Sometimes it is more important to focus on the larger picture in the text. In this story, we see how the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders continues to grow. The second half of the text drives that point home even more.

6. Read Matthew 21:28-32.
7. **This part of the lesson is a little more straight-forward. Talk in your small groups about what you are hearing in the second half of the text. Once you have decided what the second half of the lesson is really saying, work together to come up with a modern example of the story of the two sons. We will share our modern stories when everyone is ready.**
8. Allow groups to work together to create a modern example of the two sons.
9. **Sometimes the Bible can be difficult, but when we focus on the big picture it helps us to see the bigger picture of Jesus' story.**



The Word in the World

Uncomfortable Sin

10 min.

Repentance relieves discomfort.

Supplies:

- Completed index cards from Into the Story
- Garbage can

Instructions:

1. We started our time together by thinking of those things for which we were sorry, and writing them on an index card. Then we folded that card up and placed it in our shoe. What an odd thing to do! Did you wonder why we did that?
2. Have you been aware of that lump of paper in your shoe? What do you think would happen if we left it in there for days? What if we had to walk a lot or run a race with that clump of paper rubbing against our foot? Eventually, that little nuisance would become painful, and we would not be able to focus on anything else.
3. It is the same way with sin. We try to fold up and hide the little things that we feel guilty about, but they rub against us and end up hurting. The only way that we can relieve that pain is by getting rid of the thing that is causing it. We do this by repenting—by asking Jesus to forgive us.
4. We are going to remove the index card with our regrets from our shoe now and throw it in the garbage where it belongs. It will be good to get rid of it! Allow participants time to remove the index card from their shoe and throw it away.
5. Let's pray together:

Lord, we do things wrong and we regret them, but sometimes we try to pretend that they are not there. Then they seem to grow and hurt and get gross. Thank you for the ability to throw away those regrets, and for giving us a fresh start. Amen.

6. As we leave here today, we can leave knowing that we have been forgiven. Jesus calls us to turn from our disobedience and to do what is right.



Beyond the Gospel

The Nature of Jesus

10 min.

Discover ways to be like Jesus.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- White board or mural paper
- Markers

Instructions:

1. In your small groups, read **Philippians 2:1-13**. You can take turns reading, or invite one person to read the entire passage. Pause to allow participants to read.
2. In this lesson from **Philippians** today, Paul challenges us to be like Jesus. But what does that look like? Let's write some of the words from the Bible on the white board or mural paper.
3. What are some of the words that Paul uses to describe the "mindset of Christ"? Allow participants to respond, and write these words in one column on the board.
4. Some of these words are difficult to understand. What are other words that mean the same thing?
5. Add a second column with these words.
6. Finally, what does this say about how we act? Add a third column of actions that would be like Jesus.



Additional Activities

Left or Right

5 min.

Play a confusing game.

Supplies:

- None

Preparation:

1. Depending on the size of your group, you may choose to do this activity in small groups or as one large group.

Instructions:

1. **We are going to do an activity based on the story of the two sons. I need one person in each group to be the parent in this story.** Allow volunteers from each group.
2. **Everyone else will line up facing the parent. Parent, decide which side of you will be the vineyard—to your left or to your right, and tell the group.** Allow groups time to decide the location of their vineyard.
3. **The parent will say to each of you in turn, “Go and work in the vineyard.” Then you will respond with “I will” and go away from the vineyard, or “I will not” and go toward the vineyard. Because your words will not match your actions, this will get confusing. See how quickly you can make it through the line.**
4. Allow groups time to try the activity.
5. **What did you think—was that activity difficult or easy?** Allow responses. **It can get confusing when our words do not match our actions. This story helps us understand that it is important to do the right thing.**



Additional Activities

Random Acts Review

10 min.

Share the results of random acts of kindness.

Supplies:

- None

Instructions:

1. Last week, we talked about grace, and we talked about random acts of kindness as little moments of grace. They are not something that people are expecting or that they might feel they deserve. They are a surprising, grace-filled moment. We made plans to surprise someone with those random acts, and I said we would check back in this week.
2. Allow participants to share their experiences. For those who were not present last week, challenge them to incorporate this idea into the upcoming week.



Additional Activities

Be Like Jesus

15 min.

Make a small group poster.

Supplies:

- Mural paper or poster board
- Markers or crayons
- Optional: magazines, glue sticks, scissors, paper

Preparation:

1. Place a set of supplies out for each small group.

Instructions:

1. **We talked about what it means to be like Jesus. Now we are going to do some artwork to show what that looks like. What were some of the words that we came up with earlier?** Review the words from the white board or mural paper completed in Beyond the Gospel.
2. **What do those things look like when they are acted out? On your mural paper, you are going to draw a graffiti-style poster about the things that people do to be like Jesus. Maybe it is helping a friend, or feeding someone who is hungry or caring for an animal. There are many, many things that we can do to be like Jesus.**
3. Optional: Small groups can make a collage out of magazine clippings or pictures that group members draw and cut out of paper.
4. Allow groups to work. When they are done, invite them to share and explain their creation.



Sending

Pray together in your small groups for the will to do what Jesus asks. Invite each person to share one thing that they would like to do more, such as being patient or understanding. After each person shares, respond with “Lord, help us be like you.”

Remember to send “The Word @ Home” take-home with participants before dismissing them.





The Word @ Home

Pentecost 18

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

The Point

Jesus challenges those who think they are righteous.

Key Verse

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”
—Matthew 21:31

Scripture Summaries

Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

Authority and Actions

Jesus challenges the religious leaders. Their first question challenges Jesus’ authority. Regardless of what the religious leaders say, they feel that their authority is being compromised. The second story involves a father and two sons. One son is asked to work for his father and after an initial refusal, changes his mind and goes. The second son says that he will go and does not. Jesus then asks: is it more important to say you will do something and not do it or to say you will not do something and change your mind and do it?

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God calls the people to turn from their sinful ways and start living God’s way. As in the Gospel lesson, your future actions are more important than where you start from.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-13

Paul challenges the Philippian church to act as one body with compassion and tenderness. He calls them to be imitators of Christ by acting with humility.

Seasons & Festivals

Today is the 18th Sunday after Pentecost. Green is used to indicate our growth in faith, and this season after Pentecost is a time in which we focus on Jesus’ teachings and ministry. During this time of growth, today’s readings focus on the growth that we experience through repentance.

Discussion Starters

- What Bible stories are the most confusing for you?
- Why is it hard to be honest about our mistakes?
- What is one way that you would like to be more like Jesus?

Prayer of the Week

Jesus, help me to be more like you. And when I make a mistake or bad decision, forgive me. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

As you hear and study these stories each week, consider what God has to say to you. What is God's message to us? How should we respond?

Sunday

Read Matthew 21:23-32 The Pharisees challenge Jesus.
Do something to help your family or friends without being asked.

Monday

Read Philippians 1:3-14 Paul prays for the Philippians.
Take turns saying things for which you are thankful. Keep going until you run out of ideas.

Tuesday

Read Philippians 1:15-21 Paul teaches from prison.
Pray together for prison ministries in your area.

Wednesday

Read Matthew 9:2-8 Jesus heals a man who is paralyzed.
Which is more difficult: forgiving someone or healing someone? Why?

Thursday

Read Exodus 23:1-9 God's law is explained to Moses.
Write your own laws of justice and mercy.

Friday

Read Exodus 23:14-19 Three annual festivals are commanded.
Create a special celebration for today. Celebrate it together.

Saturday

Read Exodus 23:10-13 The Sabbath explained.
Write your own laws about the importance of rest on the sabbath.



Blessing for the Week

Share this blessing while tracing a cross on each person's forehead or hand with their permission:
Jesus loves and forgives you always.