

Semicontinuous
Jer. 23:1–6
Luke 1:68–79

Complementary
Jer. 23:1–6
Ps. 46

Col. 1:11–20
Luke 23:33–43

Shepherd-leaders

Goal for the Session Children, after hearing Jeremiah’s message, will consider the characteristics of shepherd-leaders.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Jeremiah 23:1–6

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Jack R. Lundbom

In the days of this future king, a united Judah and Israel, such as existed under David, will experience deliverance (from enemies) and a secure existence. The concluding line of Oracle IV (v. 6b) states that the future Davidic king will be named “YHWH is our righteousness,” a wordplay with reversal on the name of Judah’s reigning king, Zedekiah, which means “My righteousness is YHWH.” This future king will be a complete turnaround from the present king—what Zedekiah should have been, but was not. The seeds of later messianism are here, as they are also in Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:1–9; Amos 9:11; Micah 5:2.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Nelson Rivera

It is no wonder that these verses have been cherished by generations of believers for their messianic utterance, particularly on Reign of Christ Sunday. No doubt this passage (especially vv. 5–6) has messianic implications, but this should not be understood merely as end-of-the-world indictment, or exclusively as future eschatology. The truth is that, at one and the same time, this passage speaks powerfully both to what God will do in the future and to what God is doing in the here and now. Such is the dynamic life of the word of God wherever it is uttered. It speaks to the possibilities of the present, as well as to the hopes of the future. God is able to do all of that under one and the same word of promise.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Mary Eleanor Johns

The reign of Christ is the reign of peace. The perennial question for the church is, how do we live faithfully under this reign? As Christians, do we stand by and let national leaders direct us into war, or do we stand up, moving the prism around until we discover a just and equitable approach to handling the impasse at hand? Whether the crisis in our region, nation, or world is war, natural disaster, young people dying violently, lack of work, racism, sexism, trade policies, or migration, we are called to look to the underlying issues that play into the brokenness. At times, we are even called to upset the applecart in order to empower all people as children of God.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Martha Sterne

There are significant moments in human history when a renewed and powerful cry for justice does in fact serve as a vehicle for the power of God to change the course of human events. Certainly this reading has been and will be helpful in rallying a community that has been weakened and scattered through bad leadership. A prophetic voice speaking truth to power is surely the heart of the liberation of God’s oppressed people down through the ages. Perhaps it is the same prophetic cry that reverberates century after century.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 23:1–6

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- candle and matches or battery-operated candle
- Bible
- offering basket
- Discipleship Tree and leaves from previous sessions
- construction paper, scissors (optional)
- marker
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017; CD player
- Color Pack 24, 25, 27, 28
- construction paper
- newspaper headlines
- Resource Sheet 1

For Responding

- option 1: mural or banner paper, newsprint, sheets of paper, markers, white glue, envelopes, confetti
- option 2: Color Pack 25
- option 3: Resource Sheet 1, card stock or poster board, pencils, markers, glitter glue, hole punch, key chains or heavy twine
- option 4: copies of Resource Sheet 2, scissors

Focus on Your Teaching

Think about the children in your group. Which ones seem to be natural leaders? Look for a glimmer of leadership ability in each one, from taking charge when something needs to be done to quietly including a child who is shy. Leadership takes many forms, but the type of leader they will encounter in Jeremiah’s description is one who stands for peace and justice. A leader who is fair...which is important to children.

Shepherd God, as I lead these children, may I be aware of how I model a leader who stands for peace and justice. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, display the Discipleship Tree near the worship table. If you need more leaves, cut some from construction paper. Cut headlines, both good and bad news, from newspapers and mount them on individual pieces of construction paper. For option 1 in Responding, print *PEACE* in balloon or block capital letters on mural or banner paper or tape three or four pieces of newsprint taped together. For option 3 in Responding, cut card stock or poster board into 3" squares, one for each child. For option 4 in Responding, cut apart Resource Sheet 1 (Jeremiah’s Bad News and Good News).

Greet the children as they arrive. Invite them to set up the worship table with the white cloth, candle, offering basket, and a Bible.

When everything is ready, gather at the worship table. Draw attention to the white cloth on the worship table, indicating that the Season of Common or Ordinary Time is over. Explain that today is the last Sunday of the church year, and it is called Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday. Next Sunday begins a new church year with the first Sunday of Advent.

Light the candle, a reminder of the light of Jesus.

Review the signs for *glory*, *God*, and *highest* on Color Pack 27. Sing “Glory to God” (Color Pack 27 and track 9 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017), signing those three words as they are sung.

Pray, inviting the children to echo each phrase after you:

Dear God / be our guide / as we seek / to learn more about you / and how to follow / in the ways of Jesus. / Amen.

All: Amen! (Clap twice.)

Glory to God

Glory to God,
Glory to God,
Glory to God in the highest!

Repeat three times

When the focus scripture changes from one testament to the other, provide some explanation for the children.

Show the group the headlines you mounted on paper, one at a time. Ask a volunteer to read each one and have the group decide whether it is good news or bad news. After the last headline, explain that today's Bible story has good news and bad news.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and turn to the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. Help the child use the table of contents to find this book. Note that this is a book about a prophet of God. There are many books about God's prophets in the Old Testament. This prophet lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Jeremiah's Bad News and Good News). Show Color Pack 24. Ask:

- ✧ Which person do you think is Jeremiah?
- ✧ Who are the other people?
- ✧ Which people might be working for the ruler?
- ✧ What do you think Jeremiah is saying?

Talk together about the ruler being a bad or good shepherd. Show Color Pack 25. Although this is a contemporary photo, the work of shepherds is much the same as in Jeremiah's day. Ask:

- ✧ What do good shepherds do?
- ✧ What do good rulers or leaders do?

Jeremiah said God would send the people a good king, a ruler who acted like a good shepherd. On this Christ the King Sunday, Christians think of Jesus as that good shepherd-king. Ask:

- ✧ What do you know about Jesus that sounds like a shepherd-king?

The Responding options will help children think more about God's good leaders.

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One option can be more challenging for children who can work on their own.

EASY
PREP

1. **Confetti Words Banner** Jeremiah announced that the new ruler would be a king of peace. Talk together about what kinds of actions make for peace. List learners' ideas on newsprint. Show the banner with *peace* written on it. Give each child a quarter-sheet of paper and markers to draw an action that would bring peace. When they have finished, glue their drawings to the banner. Give each child an envelope with confetti. Squiggle a line of white glue inside each letter of *peace* and have the children place confetti on the glue. When the glue is dry, hang the banner in the learning area.

2. **Shepherd-king Game** This game will help children celebrate the goodness of a shepherd-king. Move to a large, open area. Look at Color Pack 25 and invite children to imagine themselves as sheep, all belonging to the same flock. They need a good shepherd. Select one child to be “It.” “It” will chase the sheep to tag them. When a sheep is tagged, it joins hands with “It.” Occasionally, a leader calls out “Scatter!” or “Gather!” On “Scatter,” all the sheep attached to “It” call out “Jesus is King” and run away from “It.” On “Gather,” the sheep all run to join hands with “It.” The last sheep to join the flock is the new “It.” The new “It” names one way that Jesus is like a good shepherd and play continues.
3. **Shepherd-king Backpack Tags** Children will create backpack tags as a reminder of the promise of a shepherd-king. The symbol for a shepherd is a shepherd’s crook, and a crown is a symbol for a king. Show children the border of shepherd’s crooks and crowns on Resource Sheet 1 (Jeremiah’s Bad News and Good News). Provide 3" squares of card stock or poster board and pencils for children to create a design with a crook and a crown. Suggest that they plan their designs in pencil. Set out markers, glitter glue, and other art supplies for decorating the backpack tags. Punch a hole in one corner of each tag and add a key chain or a length of heavy twine for attaching the reminder to a backpack.
4. **Stories about Leaders** Children will consider what it takes to be a shepherd-leader based on two contemporary photos. Form two groups. Give each group one illustration cut from Resource Sheet 2 (Contemporary Shepherd-leaders). Then explain these instructions: Create a story about the children in your illustration that suggests how what they are doing is part of being a shepherd-leader. Include how they could be helping others be shepherd-leaders, too. Invite the groups to tell their stories. Conclude by talking together about opportunities they have to be shepherd-leaders.

This option is particularly appropriate for the older children in your group, who are ready to consider how they can be shepherd-leaders.

CLOSING

Gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 28 and track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017).

Invite children to name characteristics of a shepherd-leader. Print some of their ideas on leaves to place on the Discipleship Tree.

Close with this benediction:

Go out into this week, looking for and trying to be shepherd-leaders, following the example of Jesus. Amen.

I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

I’m gonna *live* so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I’m gonna *live* so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

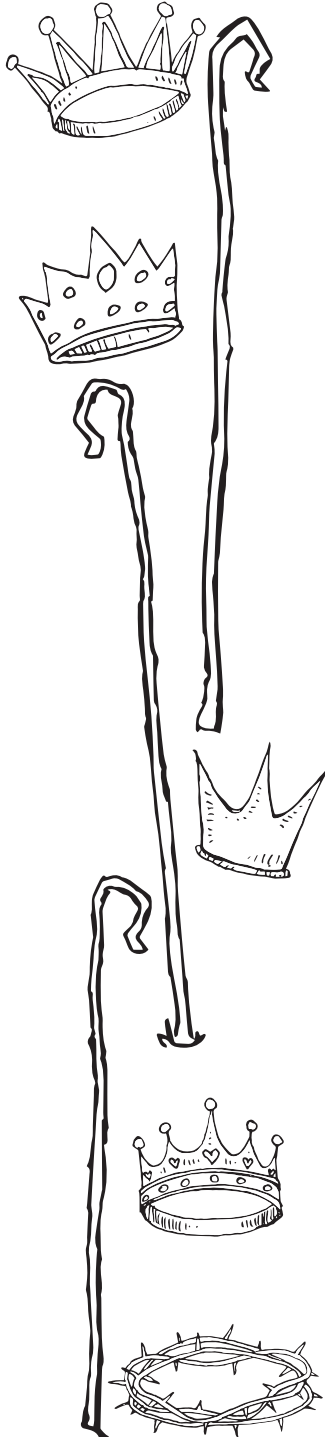
I’m gonna *work* . . .

I’m gonna *share* . . .

I’m gonna *care* . . .

Jeremiah's Bad News and Good News

based on Jeremiah 23:1-6



When Jeremiah was a young man, God said to him, "You are to be my prophet to all countries."

"Not me," said Jeremiah. "I'm young. I don't know how to speak before crowds of people."

But God didn't take that for an excuse. "I will be with you, Jeremiah," God said. "I will put my words in your mouth."

Jeremiah was God's prophet for many years. God did give him words to say, but sometimes they were words that the people, especially the rulers, didn't like.

Some bad rulers had been in charge of Judah and Israel, the two nations of God's people. They paid little attention to the people and cared only for themselves. The people were afraid God had forgotten them. Here is the message from God that Jeremiah had for the rulers and for the people:

Watch out, you rulers and kings who act like bad shepherds! You hurt my people so they have been scattered all over. You say you are caring for my people, but you are not! You have not taken care of them at all! I will take care of you! I will gather the few people who are left and bring them back to my country like a shepherd gathers the flock. They will increase in number. I will give them leaders and kings who treat them like good shepherds treat their flocks. My people will not be afraid any more, declares God!

A time will come, says God, when I will give my people a fair and just ruler from the family of King David. When this ruler is in charge, the countries of Judah and Israel will live in safety. This ruler will be called the King of Fairness and Justice!

How do you think the rulers looked when they heard these words from God through Jeremiah?

Contemporary Shepherd-leaders

