

Fifth Sunday of Easter – year A

Preparation

Read [Acts 7:55-60](#). Pay attention to the words or phrases that jump at you. To get a fuller sense of the story of Stephen, you might want to read all of [Acts 6 – 7](#). Read over the lesson so that you are familiar with what is intended to happen. Gather the materials that you will need for each section of the lesson. For deeper thinking or for ways to extend the lesson take a look at the following websites:

<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/eastera5.htm>

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/109452_43915_ENG_HTM.htm

http://www.cyberfaith.com/proclaiming_faith.cfm?id=193

<http://www.msscrafter.com/newtestament/earlychurchcharacters.htm>

<http://www.ebibleteacher.com/children/lessons/Acts/stephen.htm>

<http://www.sundayschoollessons.com/stephen.htm>

<http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/a/5Easter-a/FR-5Easter-a.html>

<http://children.calvarychapel.com/site/pdf/New/curr250.pdf>

<http://www.efree.mb.ca/lectionarypuzzles/in-awss.htm#e5>

Gathering

Materials needed

- Small table or end of one table
- White candle and candle lighter
- Bible and bookmark
- White cloth
- Yellow streamers (one per person) with *Alleluia* printed on them
- One good sized stone per child

Print up the prayer on the newsprint so that the readers can say the prayer with you. Gather around the small table or at the end of one table. With the children place the cloth on the table. Have them help you place the candle and the Bible on the cloth. Give everyone an “Alleluia streamer” and invite them to say ‘Alleluia’ while waving their streamers around. Light the candle. Pray the following prayer together:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thank you God for Jesus. Alleluia!

Thank you God for new life. Alleluia!

Thank you God for all that you have done. Alleluia! Amen.

Blow out the candle. Have the children put their streamers back on the table. Give each child a stone. Ask them what stones can be used for (some answers may be: building, throwing, playing with, etc. – hopefully they will give you both positive and negative uses for the stones). Explain that in the story they will hear about some people who used stones in a wrong way.

Story Time

Materials needed

- Stones from the Gathering section

Instructions

- Let the children continue to hold their stones during the story.
The story might bring forth some strong emotions, so be prepared for them.
- Get comfortable with the children to tell the story.

There was a man named Stephen. He loved Jesus so much. He wanted to share Jesus' love with everyone that he met.

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem saw this love. They saw how much he cared for others. They decided that they would make him a special person in the church. They called him and six others together. The leaders laid hands on them and blessed them. They called on the Holy Spirit to bless them and give them strength. They called these people deacons.

The deacons had a special place in the church. They were to care for those who were hungry. They were to care for those who were sick. They were to care for those who were lonely. They were to make sure that the church leaders knew what was needed by the most vulnerable people in the community. They had very important work to do.

Stephen was so happy to take on this work. It was just the right opportunity to share Jesus' love with everyone that he met. He grew and grew in this work. Some of the people who were in charge in the city of Jerusalem started to get worried about the things that Stephen was doing and saying. They decided that they should arrest him. They thought he was causing trouble with the people in the city. The whole church was worried what would happen to Stephen.

Stephen spoke and spoke to the people in charge. He went through the whole of the Scriptures right from Abraham to Moses to the prophets. Stephen told them that the people of Israel have always wronged those that God has sent to them.

Stephen was not surprised that the people in charge were worried about what the church was doing in Jerusalem. People often get scared when they hear about how much God loves everyone. People often get scared when they see others taking care of those who have nothing. People often get scared when they see Jesus working in those who love him.

When the people in charge heard Stephen talk about how the people of Israel had always wronged the leaders from God they got very angry at Stephen. They dragged him out to a public square. They told everyone that they met that Stephen was speaking against God. They told everyone that they met that Stephen had to be put to death.

Stephen feeling full of the Holy Spirit spoke to those who were gathering around him: "Look up! I can see God with Jesus. It is so glorious."

Those who were listening got angrier and angrier. They were more and more scared of what Stephen was saying. They all picked up stones. They threw Stephen to the ground. They started throwing stones at Stephen. Stephen lay on the ground. He looked up and said, "Jesus please take my spirit. God please forgive them. They do not know what they are doing." After he said this Stephen died.

Take a few moments with the children. Explain that Stephen is considered a martyr of the church – someone who gives up their lives for their belief in Jesus. Have the children put their stones down where they are sitting.

Response

Project Idea 1: Prayer Stones

As a way of redeeming the stones used to put Stephen to death create prayer stones with the children that they can use to pray for those in need in the world.

Materials needed

- stones from the story
- tempera paint
- paint brushes
- newspaper
- water in plastic containers

Instructions

Lay out newspapers over the work area. Place the paints, water containers and paintbrushes within reach of everybody. Encourage the children to choose a stone. Explain that one of the jobs of deacons is to lead the church in prayer for the world – especially those parts of the world that is hurting or in need. Let the children look at their stones and think about the story for a while. Then encourage the children to paint the rocks with whatever symbols or colours that comes to mind. As they are painting tell the children of situations that you know are in need of prayer (local, national and global ones). When they are done painting spend some time praying together for the situations named earlier. Invite the children to use the prayer stones at home to pray for God's world.

Project Idea 2: Recycled Art

In this project the children can use as art materials from recycled materials to show their care for the world as Stephen showed care for his community by being amongst them.

Materials needed

- clean tin cans (make sure edges are safe)
- paper tubes of various lengths
- cardboard boxes
- clean plastic containers of various sizes
- any other recyclables that could be used
- markers, scissors, glue, strong tape, and a stapler

Instructions

Place the recyclable materials where everyone can see them. Explain that like Stephen was called by God to care for God's people in his city we are called by God to care for our piece of the world. One of the ways that we can answer that call is to recycle as much as we are able to do. Invite the children to look at the materials laid out for them and think about how they can use them to encourage others to get involved in caring for the earth. Give help as needed. When the children are finished making their creations invite them to tell each other about what they have made and how it will encourage others to care for the earth.

Project Idea 3: Church Poster

This response will be one that the children can do together to show how deacons and others continue to share in God's mission in the world.

Materials needed

- church image from end of lesson
- poster board
- old magazines
- markers
- scissors
- glue

Instructions

Copy the church image and cut it out. Glue in to the centre of the poster board and print above it the following with a marker: '**God's Church Cares for the World**'. Show the children the prepared poster. Ask them to think about how the church cares for the world and then invite them to look through the magazines for pictures that show this. Have them cut the pictures out and glue them to the poster. As the children are working explain that the deacons of the church call us all to remember to look after God's world and the people in it, just like Stephen did for the early church. If they want have them print a word with the marker to describe the action being shown in the picture – such as caring, loving or outreach. With the children decide where the poster can be put up to share with others.

Closing

Gather with the children around the worship table again. Relight the candle. Say the prayer line by line and encourage the children to repeat it after you:

Alleluia! God loves us!

Alleluia! Jesus teaches us!

Alleluia! Holy Spirit guides us! Amen.

Image of a Church

