

## ***Making Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter Webinar Handout***

### **How to Read the Book**

*Make Room* interweaves the story of Jesus with the reflections of a child experiencing the season of Lent. These intertwined storylines help children connect their own choices and actions with the life and work of Jesus.

They also open up different possibilities for reading, either at home or in a church or a classroom setting:

- Read the whole book aloud from start-to-finish, perhaps at the beginning of Lent, as an overview of the whole season. Read it again during Holy Week.
- Separate the two narratives and read the story of Jesus as a single story. Guide the children in wondering about what they hear. Where do they find themselves in the story?
- Read one section of the book at a time. When you finish one portion (e.g. *Making Room*), spend some time talking about how to put the theme into practice. What ideas are suggested by the story? How do they connect with the story of Jesus?
- Adapt the book for use in liturgy. Last year I received a note from a woman who had created an Intergenerational Shrove Tuesday service based on *Make Room*. She combined passages from the book with symbolic actions and simple responses.
- However you choose to read the book, you can always use wondering questions to encourage children to connect their own lives with the story. Wondering questions are open-ended. Their purpose is not to provide right answers, but to stir the imagination to new possibilities and insights. For instance, “I wonder why Jesus went into the desert by himself? I wonder how he felt there?” “I wonder where you go or what you do when you need to make important choices?” “I wonder how Jesus knew when God was close to him? I wonder how you know?” “I wonder why so many people wanted to come close to Jesus?” “If Jesus came to your school or church, I wonder who he would talk to and what he would say?”

### **How to Use the Book**

*Make Room* is not a how-to activity guide, but it does suggest many possibilities, and may (I hope) inspire you to think of more. Depending upon the ages and interests of the children with whom you are working, you may wish to choose a few activities or practices (e.g. a new form of prayer) and use them throughout the whole Lenten season. Or you may prefer to follow the themes set out in the book and try a few different activities each week.

As a whole, *Make Room* is about creating openings for God—windows where the Spirit can enter and transform us, and through us, the world.

However, each section of the book has a particular emphasis. There are three main sections. Each of these is reframing of one of three traditional Lenten disciplines: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving.

In my interpretation, Prayer becomes *Making Time*. Fasting becomes *Making Space*. Almsgiving become *Making Room*. I am going to introduce each section briefly and offer a few ideas for putting the theme into practice.

### **Making Time: Slowing Down**

The *Making Time* section of the book is an invitation to take a break from some of those things that distract and drain us. This is a chance to experiment with everything from your physical environment to how you spend your time.

How can you help children slow down and savor the delights of stillness:

- Try to simplify your physical space. Remove some artwork or ornaments from your living space or your liturgical space. Invite children to take down the posters in their rooms for a few weeks. Notice and talk about how the change feels.
- Create a simple focal point for prayer or meditation. It could be a small table with a Lenten symbol (e.g. a pottery bowl filled with earth, some stones, a plain cross, a bare branch in a vase) or an empty corner in a room.
- If you are in the habit of watching television during mealtimes, try switching it off, or move it into another room. This is not a punishment, but an experiment to see how life feels with a bit less noise and distraction.
- Practice mindful breathing or simple guided meditation with your children for ten minutes every day. Create your own breath prayers, with simple phrases for the in-breaths and out-breaths (e.g. “I am breathing in peace, I am breathing out kindness.”)
- Go to a yoga class, or borrow a book and learn some postures together.
- Try having a few electronic-free evenings (or even days). Be sure to include the adults in your household as well as children. No texting under the table! Check in with each other about how it feels. What did you do with the time this opened up?
- Read aloud as a family or with the children in your congregation.
- Try a new form of prayer. Draw your prayers (see *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God* by Sybil MacBeth), move your body (see *Praying With the Body: Bringing the Psalms to Life* by Roy DeLeon) or write a letter to God (see *Writing to God: Kids' Edition* by Rachel Hackenburg).

- Explore intercessory prayer with a book like my own *How Do I Pray for Grandpa?* (CopperHouse, 2014). Invite children to come up with their own images for God and for prayer.
- Introduce your children to the ancient practice of centering prayer, which involves intentionally letting go of thoughts and feelings. A helpful guide is *Journey to the Heart: Centering Prayer for Children* by Frank X. Jelenek (Paraclete Press, 2013).
- Try this child-friendly adaptation of the Ignatian practice of the daily *examen*. You will need a large glass jar and two smaller bowls filled with green and purple marbles or glass stones. Explain to your children that the green stones are a reminder of those moments in the day when God felt very close, while the purple stones represents times when God felt farther away. At the end of the day, give the children (or every member of the family) a purple and a green stone. As they hold the stones, encourage them to remember the events of the day and share aloud (if they wish) a moment when God felt close, or far away. Then they can place their stones in the large glass jar. As the jar fills up throughout Lent, children will develop the habit of paying attention to the presence and activity of God throughout the day. The fact that all the stones are gathered in the large jar reminds us all that our experiences and feelings—good and bad—are ultimately held together in the loving embrace of God.

### **Making Space: Clearing the Clutter**

We try to help children feel the lightness that comes with letting go of clutter and excess:

- Challenge children to go through their rooms and play spaces, identifying toys, games, books and clothes they have not used in the past year. These items can go in a box and be donated to a local shelter. You could do something similar for the church nursery.
- Enlist the help of your children in cleaning out the pantry or kitchen cupboards, or even the fridge.
- Make a game out of creating meals from food you already have. See how many meals you can dream up without having to buy more groceries!
- As a family or church group, sign up to volunteer at a food bank or community dinner for people who need a meal.
- Create a jar for collecting coins. As a family, make a plan for when to put money in the jar (e.g. every time you buy something you do not really need, every time you go out for a meal in the restaurant, every time you see a movie). At the end of the season, donate the money to a local organization that supports people in need.

- Try eating meatless meals one night a week. Or find a simple soup recipe and make a batch to share.

### **Making Room: Opening the Circle**

The *Making Room* section of the book encourages children to open their hearts to people outside their own familiar circles of family and friends. This can be done through practical acts of hospitality, but it can also happen through art and literature. Good stories can help children imagine what they have not experienced, stretching their minds and hearts to take in new people and situations around the world.

- As a way of symbolizing how our acts of kindness fill the heart of God with joy, create a large felt heart with an opening at the top, and a basket full of many smaller stuffed hearts. Each time one of your children does something kind for someone else, invite him or her to put one of the smaller hearts in the big heart. As the weeks pass, they will enjoy seeing the larger heart swell with these many small signs of love and caring.
- Invite neighbors into your home for tea or a meal. Or better yet, invite someone you have never had a chance to get to know, perhaps someone new to the community, or new to your church.
- As a family, you could make and deliver a meal to someone who cannot easily get out (e.g. an older person or a family with a new baby).
- Organize a neighborhood or church pot-luck. A simple menu of soup, bread and fruit is easy for everyone.
- Create a collection of prayer cards with photos of people from all around the world. If you wish, you can print wondering questions on the back (e.g. I wonder what this person is feeling right now? I wonder what happened right before this photo was taken? I wonder how this person would be welcomed if he or she came to my school? My church? I wonder what I would say if I met this person? I wonder what this person might say to me?). Invite the children to do their own wondering, then ask God to be close to the person in the photograph.
- Watch a movie or read a book about children whose lives are very different from those of your own children (e.g. *The Breadwinner Trilogy* by Deborah Ellis).
- Learn more about the experience of displaced people around the world. Invite someone who has been a refugee, or who works with refugees, to come to your church and share their stories with the children.
- Ask your local librarian for help finding age-appropriate books about children who have had to leave their homes and move to new places (e.g. *Four Feet, Two Sandals* and *My*

*Name is Sangoel* by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed). Or check out some websites like: [www.storypath.upsem.edu](http://www.storypath.upsem.edu) or [www.picturebooktheology.blogspot.ca](http://www.picturebooktheology.blogspot.ca)

- Write letters to organizations which support refugees or raise funds to support a local project in aid of newcomers to your community.

-Laura Alary