

Semicontinuous
**Exod. 20:1–4, 7–9,
12–20**
Ps. 19

Complementary
Isa. 5:1–7
Ps. 80:7–15
Phil. 3:4b–14
Matt. 21:33–46

A Story about a Vineyard

Goal for the Session

Children will hear the parable of the farm workers and draw a message about God's acceptance from it.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 21:33–46

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Susan Grove Eastman

What shall we make of this judgment on Israel's religious leaders? We note that here Jesus does not reject the whole people of Israel; his conflict with the chief priests is preceded and triggered by his healings of the blind and the lame, who come to him within the temple precincts (21:14). The suffering, impoverished, and illiterate common people rightly acclaim him; the educated leaders do not. Thus the accusations against Israel in Isaiah 5:8–30 echo in the background of Jesus' teaching here: the outcast and the poor suffer, while the wealthy continually enrich only themselves.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Andrew Purves

Calvin has a second point: whatever the contrivances of those who actively reject or betray Jesus, seeking to destroy him, the cornerstone remains secure, holding up the building. The attack on Jesus Christ is ultimately fruitless. Jesus, says Calvin, suffers no loss or diminution when he is rejected or betrayed. In spite of betrayal, he retains the place given to him from the Father. Whatever the honor given to and apparent success of those who attack Christ, the authority and purpose of God will prevail. "This was the Lord's doing" (v. 42).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Richard E. Spalding

Our weathering of the challenges to our ethics and convictions posed by responsible stewardship—of the "vineyard" of this earth, of the values we live by, of the soundness of our relationships—begins with the realization that God will maintain at least sufficient distance to enable us to determine our own fruitfulness or to make our own mistakes. Though, of course, God is not an absentee landlord, mature faith means practicing sound values and sound devotion on our own, even when God seems distant.

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

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Marvin A. McMickle

Another way in which we reject God occurs when we reject some of God's people for reasons of our own. Human beings are capable of doing terrible things to other people whom they are somehow able to define as less worthy, less human, less valuable than themselves. If we can manage to turn another human being into the "other," there is no limit to what we will do or will allow to be done to them. We can be as brutal to one another as were the men who beat, stoned, and killed people in Matthew 21:35–37. When we reject some of God's people, we are rejecting the God who made them.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:33–46

Focus on Your Teaching

Much as parents and others would wish that children were spared experiences of rejection, it happens. A kindergartner comes home in tears because a child chose to play with someone else. A third-grader slams the door because a best friend sat with someone else at lunch. A sixth-grader tries to hide the hurt when a classmate asks someone else to work on a class project. Children know the feeling of rejection. But we pray that they more often experience acceptance from others in their lives so they are ready to hear of God's acceptance of them.

Loving God, I want to show acceptance for each child in my group so they know your acceptance through me. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- votive candle and matches or battery-operated candle
- Bible
- offering basket
- newsprint, marker
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 8, 9
- copies of Resource Sheet 2

For Responding

- option 1: paper, marker, tape
- option 2: foam ball
- option 3: card stock, pens, markers
- option 4: Color Pack 29; *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print the opening lines from Gathering on poster board if you have not done so, and save to use in future weeks. Print the response for Closing on newsprint. For option 1 in Responding, make two signs: *Accept* and *Reject*. For option 3 in Responding, cut sheets of card stock in half crosswise.

As the children arrive, play “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands” (track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Invite them to help set up the worship table with the green cloth, candle, Bible, and offering basket. When everyone is present, explain that the green cloth indicates that the church is in Common Time or Ordinary Time. In this case, it is the weeks after Pentecost until Advent.

Light the candle, and lead the following:

Leader: *During these weeks, we gather to praise God and study God’s Word.*

Children: *We want to be faithful followers of God’s Word and of Jesus.*

Everyone: *Loving God, thank you for our group and our church. May your Spirit show us the way. Amen.*

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle.

Show Color Pack 8. Invite the children to tell what they see. If they do not identify the photograph as a vineyard, explain that grapes are grown in rows as shown on Color Pack 8. A field of grapevines is called a vineyard. Jesus told a story about a vineyard.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the Gospel of Matthew. Remind the group that the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) at the beginning of the New Testament tell the story of Jesus' life. Help the children recall Jesus' teachings from Matthew that they heard earlier in this season. The word pages for *reconcile* and *forgive* may help them remember. Ask a child to hold the Bible open to Matthew and another child to hold Color Pack 8 so everyone can see it. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (The Greedy Farm Workers). After the story, show Color Pack 9 and ask:

- ✪ Which part of the story is shown in this picture?
- ✪ What happened before this in the story?
- ✪ What happened after it?

When working with a difficult story for children to grasp, it is better to simply tell and work with the story than to provide interpretations that are beyond their mental capacities.

Provide an opportunity for the children to participate in telling the story themselves. Explain that there are five reading parts and everyone else will be the chorus. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Dramatic Reading) to the five readers. Assign parts and ask those children to rehearse their parts so they can read them with expression. Rehearse the lines from the reading with the chorus. Enjoy the reading; make it melodramatic.

To move to Responding, say something like: We don't want to be like the greedy farm workers. What can you do to accept others and show God's love to them?

RESPONDING

If possible, provide at least two options so the children have a choice. Make one activity more challenging for children who can work on their own.

**EASY
PREP**

1. Accept/Reject Situations This option provides a moment for the children to consider decisions before they face them. Have the children stand in the middle of an open space. Tape the *Accept* sign at one side of the space and the *Reject* sign opposite it. Explain that you will read several short stories. After each one, they will decide whether the story is about accepting or rejecting someone. When they decide, they move to the sign that reflects their choice. After each story, talk together about it and their choices. Include some stories based on what you know about the children in your group.

- ✪ Ramon is using crutches because he broke his ankle. George suggests that all the boys play kickball at recess.
- ✪ This is Sally's first day in her new school. Betty invites Sally to sit with her and her friends at lunch.
- ✪ Ben is crying because he lost his favorite game. Anna helps him look for it.
- ✪ Jamal moved into the house next to Jerry last week. Jerry refuses to go with his mother to meet the new neighbors.
- ✪ Shirley's mother just had a baby. When her mother asked her to fold the laundry, Shirley ignores her and goes to her room.

2. **Game** As the children play the Grapes of Love game, they will identify ways to show God's love and acceptance. Have them stand in a straight line, about two feet apart. Designate the child at one end of the line to be the basket, forming a circle with her or his arms. Give the child at the opposite end of the line a foam ball, representing a bunch of grapes. That child names one way to show love and acceptance, and tosses the ball to the next child. The ball is tossed from child to child until the last child tosses it through the basket. The child who was the basket goes to the other end of the line and the last child becomes the new basket. Continue playing until each child has been the basket. Challenge the children to see how many times they can do this in three minutes. Play the game again to see how many new ways to show love and acceptance they can name and whether they can beat the number of times they did the first time.
3. **Mission** People who are in hospitals or care centers may feel rejected if they seldom have visitors. The children can make prayer tents for these people to sit on their bedside tables or dressers. Fold a half sheet of card stock in half so it will stand like a tent. Together, write a one- or two-sentence prayer that the children will copy on one side of the tent. On the other side, they can write a message to the person from the church school group.
4. **Music** The stanzas of "Circle of Love" (track 4 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) describe situations where people are seeking acceptance and love. Sing the refrain together. Read the first stanza (Color Pack 29). Ask:
✿ Why might the girl need you? What could you do?

Sing the chorus together. Read and discuss the other stanzas, singing after each stanza.

Circle of Love

Refrain:

The circle of love goes
around, around,
The circle of love goes
around.

Stop, reach out, (*your sister,
your brother, someone*)
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

CLOSING

Play "Let Us Love One Another" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 4) as the children gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

Read the response for the litany from the newsprint together (*God, help us show your love and acceptance*). Lead the group in the litany, cueing them for the response:

When we hear someone ask for help, Response

When someone new enters our school or group, Response

When we are tempted to pretend our help is not needed, Response

When we forget that we are part of the church, Response

Amen.

As the children leave, say to each one: "(Name), God loves you. Show God's love to others this week."

The Greedy Farm Workers

based on **Matthew 21:33–46**

When Jesus was in Jerusalem, he taught in the temple. The chief priests and the elders, the religious leaders of the Jews, came to him. After talking with Jesus, Jesus told them this story:

A farmer planted a vineyard, a field of grapevines. He built a fence around this field and a tall tower to watch over his vineyard. He rented the vineyard to some farm workers and set off on a trip.



When it was time to pick the grapes, the farmer sent some of his servants to the vineyard to get his share of the grapes. But the farm workers beat the servants and even killed some of them.

When his servants didn't return with the grapes, the farmer decided to send more servants, and a bigger number of them than before, to get the grapes that belonged to him.

The farm workers beat and killed them, too.

Now what was the farmer going to do? He thought to himself, The farm workers have shown no respect for me or my servants. I will send my son, for surely they will respect him.

So the farmer's son went to the vineyard. Before he got there, the farm workers in the tall tower saw him coming. These cruel farm workers said to one another, "Here comes the farmer's son. If we kill him, the farmer won't send anyone else for the grapes and this vineyard will be ours."

That is just what the farm workers did. Now what do you think the farmer will do to the farm workers?

The religious leaders of the Jews answered, "The farmer will get rid of those cruel, greedy farm workers and get new honest, kind workers."

"Yes," said Jesus, "God's kingdom will be taken away from you and given to a different people."

Then the religious leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them.

October 4, 2020
A Story about a Vineyard

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING *on the* **WORD**
CURRICULUM

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Dramatic Reading
based on **Matthew 21:33-46**

Instruct the children to copy any motions or sound effects that you make as you tell the story of the vineyard.



Once there was a farmer who planted a vineyard. (*Plant seedlings.*) He built a fence around the vineyard and a tall tower in the middle of it. (*Hammer, saying, "Bang, bang."*)

When he finished, he left for a long trip (*walk in place*) and left his farm workers in charge. (*Wave and say "Good-bye."*)

When the grapes were ripe, the farm workers picked them. (*Pick grapes from vines.*)

The farmer sent some servants to get his share of the grapes, but the farm workers beat them. (*Pound fist into hand.*)

When the servants didn't return with his grapes, the farmer wondered what had happened. (*Scratch head.*)

So he sent a bigger group of servants to get his grapes. They got the same treatment from the farm workers. (*Pound fist into hand.*)

They did not return with the grapes and the farmer wondered what was going on. (*Shake head and look puzzled.*)

Finally, the farmer decided he had to send his son. (*Put pointer finger in air and say "Aha."*)

The farm workers were excited when they saw the farmer's son coming down the road. (*Jump up and down.*)

"If we get rid of him, this vineyard will be ours!" they said. (*Strut proudly.*)

This is the sad and shocking story of the vineyard and the greedy farm workers.

