

Taking Care of God's Creation

by *The Rev. Kerith Harding, Christ and Holy Trinity Church School, Westport, CT*



Storybook: Wangari's Trees of Peace: A true story from Africa

Summary: Seeing that people where she lived were cutting down too many trees and not taking good care of the Earth, Wangari starts to try and make a difference; others see her example and join in. Together they make a big difference and transform their world.

Scripture Lessons: John 3:16 & Genesis 1 and 2

-John 3:13 Theme: God so loved the *world*, that God sent us his only son to communicate that love.

-Genesis 1 & 2 Theme: God created the whole world and everything in it. God saw it all and said it was good. People are supposed to take care of the world; that is one way of

praising God.

-Others if helpful: Psalm 96:10-13, Romans 1:19-20, Luke 16:2, 10, 13

Bible needed: Any NRSV or the Kid's study bible; The kids study bible is suitable for reading a condensed form of Genesis 1 and contemporary translation of John.

Condensed Class Outline:

Bible story or passage(s)

Wangari's Trees of Peace

Activity

Major themes and Teaching points:

(These aren't ALL the themes in today's stories, but are three to drive home!)

God's love for God's creation: God created us and loves us. God saw God's people and the earth after God created us and God smiled (Genesis 1). Later, God sent God's son, Jesus, to the earth to teach us about how much God loves us and to teach us how to love each other and to love the earth.. Many of stories about Jesus' love for us are in the bible (ex. John 3:16a)

Taking care of the Earth/Stewardship: God created the Earth and created everything on the earth- plants, animals, people, *everything* (Genesis 1). God gave us dominion over the earth; translation- God told us we were in charge of taking good care of the earth. (Genesis 2)

We can each make a big difference; together, we can make an even *bigger* difference: Wangari started off by herself planting a few trees. She didn't let the "government men" who made fun of her spoil her determination to work hard and take care of the earth. When other women saw what Wangari was doing, they started joining her. Together, they made their country beautiful again with many many trees. Trees are important for lots of reasons: they make shade, they are houses for birds and other animals, and they help us keep clean air.

Tips for today's class:

1. As kids trickle in from church, have crayons and coloring pages or pieces of paper available for them to doodle on before you start. If you have another opening routine you prefer, go for it.

Within five minutes of the first arrival, draw their attention to story time. Ask them: "Did you know that the Bible is full of stories about God and things God has done? It also talks about the earth and about people and the way we should live. Let's read some parts of the Bible that talk about the earth and the trees and what God thinks about them." Amend the above depending on what scripture passage(s) you have chosen. The easiest for the youngest kids will be Genesis 1 and John 3:16a (leaving out the part about "not dying" for now since we aren't focusing on that theology at the moment). Engage the kids in the biblical passage(s), drawing them in with a question or two ("What do you think it means when it says God saw the world and said it was 'good'?" or "So, if God loves the world, what exactly is included in the world?... Is that just you and me or are there other things in the world?"). **When you finish the story (or multiple passages), drive home points 1 and 2 above.**

Say, "Now, let's read a story about a young woman who found an important way to take care of the earth in the community where she lived." As you read, occasionally, you may want to clarify or simplify some parts, depending on your age group (Ex. Why do you think the men were making fun of Wangari? They didn't think she could make a difference, did they?") Draw them into the story. **When you finish the book, emphasize theme 3 from above, and reiterate themes 1 and 2.**

Activity options (choose one appropriate for your age group or create your own!). *create a "Seeds of Change" bulletin board for your classroom. Using pre-cut shapes, have the kids brainstorm on what they can do to be good stewards of (take care of) God's creation. Write the idea (or have them write it) on the shapes and pin them on the bulletin board. Be sure their name is on the front side so you can follow up in a subsequent class. The pre-cut shapes can be placed on a pre-existing tree that you have put on the board (so they would be birds, flowers, leaves, a nest, etc) or they can be full trees that then become a grove when the kids put them on the board.

*create "God is Love" Cross Magnets, available from Oriental Trading. Remember "God so loved the WORLD" that God sent Jesus to show us that love; we must do our best to take care of God's creation.

*Make the "God so loved the world" foam kit project available from Oriental Trading. Note: although this is rated for ages 5 and up, some glueing will need to be done in advance to make this work (at minimum, the globe shape)... it took an adult 15 minutes to complete.

