

Step It Up – Walking to Easter

Children's Session

By Mariette Martineau

Time: 60-90 minutes

Session Objective:

To “step it up” – the living of our faith – during the season of Lent by focusing on a key challenge found in the Gospel readings of each week



Catechism Connections:

- #540
- #1438

Supplies and Preparation:

- Prayer Table - candle, Bible, foot print symbols and/or shoes
- Bible with child-friendly text to read all of the passages needed for each learning activity
- Powerpoint or PDF with feet images for learning activities
- For the first learning activity : work boots, foot print of work boots
- For the second learning activity: slippers, foot print of slippers, and a small cross for each child which can be fastened to shoe laces, or strung with thread to wear as a necklace
- For the third learning activity: hiking boots, pictures of the wonders of the world (either printed or via power point/electronics). It would be helpful if the students were given a bookmark-size printout of one of the wonders to carry with them throughout Lent or to put in a special place (e.g., their prayer corner) to remind them of the majesty of God
- For the fourth learning activity: flip flops or cheap sandals, and a copy of the book *Malala Day is Every Day*, computer/projector for projecting the brief video found in this activity
- For the fifth learning activity: nursing shoes or shoes encased in blue hospital booties, pencils, crayons
- For the sixth learning activity: muddy boots, markers and flip chart paper to make a Life List
- For the seventh learning activity: print of donkey hoof prints



Activity Plan

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome the children and get them settled. When settled, begin the session with these or similar words:

Do you ever walk through mud or snow or wet sand then look back to see the footprints you left behind? If yes, what do you like about doing that? I like the shapes my shoes and feet make. I like my bare footprints in the sand, the patterns of my snow boots on the snow. And when I move from mud to concrete, I like to see how long I can walk on the sidewalk and still see my footprints before the mud wears off my boots or shoes!

So, what do foot prints have to do with Lent? We are going to be exploring together the season of Lent. Lent is our time as a Church community to prepare for Easter, a time to remember who we are called to be as God's children. This session is called "Step It Up" as we are going to make some connections between footprints and foot wear and the challenges that Jesus calls us to live out each week of Lent. So, let's step it up!

Tell participants:

(Facilitator Note: learners will be taking steps forward and backward, so make sure there is space for this.)

We are going to begin our learning time with a brief prayer. As we are learning about the steps to take during Lent, we are going to pray with our feet today!

We begin our prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God, you bless us with love for others. We step forward in our journey with you as we support others on their journey!

God, you bless us with eyes to see what others need. We step forward in our journey with you as we serve others!

God, sometimes we make mistakes and make unloving choices. We step backwards in our journey with you when we do not love!

God, you always invite us to forgiveness and reconciliation. We step forward in our journey with you as we are forgiven and we forgive!

God, you give us many gifts to share with others. We step forward in our journey with you as we share our gifts with others.

God, you are always with us. We step together in community as we pray to you in the words that Jesus gave us, Our Father...

We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Facilitator Notes:

These learning activities may be used as a whole catechetical session for children, or may be better suited as weekly additions to children's catechesis. Each activity fits with a week of Lent. In essence, they may be used as an overview to Lent or as a weekly introduction to Lent as you journey through it with the children.

Choose what you will use for each foot symbol. Actual shoes will make the biggest impression, but the Powerpoint/PDF images or footprints can also be effective.

Ash Wednesday – Humbly We Fast, Pray, and Bring Our Gifts to the World (10 minutes)

Symbol: Work boots, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the boot onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for Ash Wednesday: Mt 6:1-6, 16-18. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the work boots and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

What do you think this reading is calling us to do? Be?

Why do you think I chose work boots as a tool to help us remember this passage?

After gathering some responses, continue:

I chose work boots because people around us are busy working all the time, doing their jobs as best as they can, doing their work without bringing a lot of attention to themselves. They just do it; they share their gifts to the best of their ability and don't look for a lot of praise or recognition.

That is what we are called to do too as we move through Lent. We are called to "step up" our praying, our sharing, our helping others. We are to do this without bringing attention to ourselves.

Have you ever participated in "Secret Santa"? It is a way during Advent that we do special things for someone without them knowing who is doing it for them. During this Lent, I am inviting us to be "secret servants" – we are going to serve others, pray for others, help others out without bringing attention to ourselves.

Let us brainstorm together about who we could help, and how we could help them. Then as we see each other over Lent, we can share how much fun we are having by being good to others without them knowing who did it!

Alone But Not Lonely: First Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: Slippers, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the slipper onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the First Sunday: Mark 1:12-13. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the slippers and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

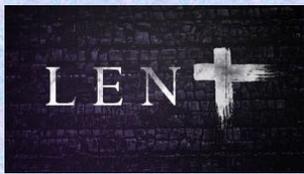
This passage tells us that Jesus went into the desert to pray alone for 40 days. What do you think this reading is calling us to do? Be? Are we supposed to go into a desert for 40 days?

Why do you think I chose slippers as a tool to help us remember this passage?

I chose slippers for this week's "shoe" because slippers remind me about being alone. I come home from work, slip on my slippers, and sit in my favorite chair by myself for a few minutes before my family catches up to me. Slippers are safe and comfortable and cozy. That is like when we take time to pray with God – God is always a safe place for us, God always loves us and wraps his love around us, God is always there in our aloneness.

To remind ourselves to take these moments to pray, we are going to either tie a small cross onto our shoe, or we are going to keep the cross in our pocket to remind us to take a few minutes each day to pray and be alone in our slippers with God!

Pass out a small cross to each child and help those who want to fasten it to through their shoelaces. Provide others with cord to wear it as a necklace if that is what they prefer, or have them simply place it in their pocket.



*Walking
with Jesus*

Stepping It Up
Walking to Easter

Ash Wednesday



**First Sunday
of Lent**



**Second Sunday
of Lent**



**Third Sunday
of Lent**



**Fourth
Sunday
of Lent**



Walking with Jesus this Lent: A Gospel Journey, Year B Facilitator Background

By Jim Merhaut

Engage

Consider the following words as seven steps for a Lenten walk with Jesus: humble, deserted, connected, zealous, healing, dying, and victorious. Make a note in each of the footprints below to indicate your initial thoughts and/or feelings about each word as a step on your own Lenten walk with Jesus.



Reflect

How would you apply each of the Lenten steps above to Jesus?

Who comes to mind as you ponder each of the words that represent the seven steps?

Carry with you these reflections as you read through the seven steps outlined below. Revisit them as part of your own meditation on each step. Make adjustments to them as you gain new insights during your reading.

Explore

Spiritual writers often discuss Lent as a journey with Easter as the destination. Spiritual practices such as Stations of the Cross are also journey-oriented. This essay proposes a Gospel journey through Lent which can be divided into seven meaningful steps that disciples are called to walk with Jesus.

The first step of the journey is Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is followed by five additional steps called the Sundays of Lent. The seventh step is Palm Sunday. Each step has a distinctive character, but they are all woven together by the thread of the Lenten theme of transformation. This essay will focus on the Year B Gospel readings from Ash Wednesday through the procession of palms on Palm Sunday.

All disciples are welcomed to begin wherever they are on Ash Wednesday. The journey does not begin with judgment; rather, it begins with your life exactly as it is at this moment. We are all sinners in need of Gospel transformation. It doesn't matter what kind of sinner you are; it only matters that you are willing to move from where you are to a place that is closer to God. Then we are called to walk through the seven steps and be transformed into something new by Palm Sunday.

This extended Lenten retreat is a prelude to the central truth of Christianity: the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus celebrated in the Triduum that immediately follows Lent. The walk with Jesus during Lent sets us up to celebrate our transformation as we sing glory to God for the paradigmatic transformation that happened to Jesus on the first Easter Sunday.

Step 1: Ash Wednesday - The Humble Step

The reading for Ash Wednesday is Mt 6:1-6, 16-18.

Every Ash Wednesday is a call to joyful, not gloomy, repentance. It's a call to become more authentic and less showy. It is a step into humility. The Gospel reading reminds us not to parade our faith practices in front of others in order to be noticed. The Lenten journey is not characterized by a proud and triumphant march. It is more like the earthy, deliberate, bare-footed steps of a gardener careful not to trample the tender plants emerging from the soil. Gardeners who bring focus to the plants rather than to themselves reap rich harvests. "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)

We are also taught to be generous, primarily because it is our call and our identity. There is nothing superhuman about generosity. It is simply who we are. Being generous makes us more human... more down-to-earth... more humble. Generous giving is not a

way to measure social status; rather, it is a way to participate in the life of God who is generous beyond measure. (James 1:5)

Wealthy individuals or families who make large donations to organizations or even charitable causes are often rewarded with great social recognition. While it is possible to do this with integrity, there are clear warnings from Jesus to be vigilant about the desire for social praise. "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:2-4)

Even prayer is not good or helpful when our hearts are in the wrong place. "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:5-6)

Jesus speaks often about rewards in the Ash Wednesday Gospel. Rewards are important and a necessary part of life. Human beings are wired to respond to rewards. This in itself is a humble recognition. We are more like our brothers and sisters in the animal kingdom who respond instinctively to positive reinforcement than we care to admit. To acknowledge our primal need for rewards is both honest and humble. The important question for Jesus seems to revolve around the kinds of rewards a person seeks. The Ash Wednesday Gospel suggests that the prideful person seeks the reward of recognition. The humble person seeks the reward of joy.

Humility and joy are partners. They work together to build an authentic Christian expression of faith. "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." (Luke 1:47-48) Jesus instructs us to walk with humility and rewards us with joy, empowering us to avoid a "dismal" look, even as we humble ourselves with fasting and the other disciplines of Lent.

Step 2: First Sunday of Lent - The Deserted Step

The reading for the first Sunday of Lent is Mark 1:12-15.

Jesus is driven by the Spirit to a deserted place at the beginning of Lent. "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." (Mark 1:12-13) He will again be deserted at the end of Lent but it will be a different kind of desertion. This early desert experience is willful, purposeful and designed to build

his spiritual strength. The desertion at the end of Lent when his friends flee from his side is not something he would have chosen. It was an experience of isolation that was thrust upon him as a result of weakness and sin on the part of his disciples.

Being alone and being lonely are very different experiences. One can be empowering while the other is physically and spiritually draining. The deserted step on this first Sunday of Lent is a necessary time of soul searching. It is the time, hopefully daily even if only for a few minutes, when we make sense of our busy-ness and our many interactions with others. The deserted step is a step of integration and empowerment. We reflect upon our lives in solitude to put the pieces together with the silent guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are then empowered to move back into the hustle and bustle of daily life with a new perspective and a refreshed spirit.

If we nurture a place in our spirit for solitude, then we have an ever-present retreat place where we can go to gather our thoughts and feelings at any given moment. For example, someone does something or says something that triggers anger in me. If I have no experience of the desert, no place for solitude, then my only option is to remain engaged in the encounter with my anger as the context. I will fight! But if I can retreat from the encounter, even for a moment, and let the energy of the anger drive me into the desert, then I can return to the encounter when I am ready with a more deliberate response, one that I won't regret.

Step 3: Second Sunday of Lent – The Connected Step

The reading for the second Sunday of Lent is Mark 9:2-10.

This step reminds us that we never need to feel lonely even if we are alone. The Communion of Saints is perhaps the most consoling tenet of Catholic faith. Christians are a deeply connected people. We are a unified body in Christ. We are in communion with those who are living and with those who are dead. We commune with divinity in the Eucharistic celebration. We draw our deepest strength from our connectedness. Our most important teaching is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. It is a teaching about staying connected.

The Gospel turning point for Mark is the highly connected experience of the transfiguration. Jesus, at this point in Mark's Gospel, begins to move more deliberately toward the cross empowered by intimate communion with his closest friends (Peter, James and John), two key Old Testament figures (Moses & Elijah) and his heavenly father:

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on