

PARABLE

THE GREATEST PARABLE (THE PRESENTATION WITH WORDS, PART 3)

THE MINISTRY IN JUDEA

LESSON NOTES:

**FOCUS: GOD'S ELUSIVE PRESENCE IN THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS
(SCRIPTURE REFERENCES FOUND WITHIN THE TEXT OF THE LESSON)**

● **CORE PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: NEW TESTAMENT SHELF**
- **PIECES: 13 TRIANGLE-SHAPED PLAQUES WITH ILLUSTRATIONS ON ONE SIDE AND COLORS ON THE OTHER, GOLD TRIANGULAR BOX WITH PURPLE JERUSALEM CROSS ON THE COVER**
- **UNDERLAY: BORROWED FROM THE CIRCLE OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST, THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD OR ANOTHER APPROPRIATE LESSON. (SINCE THE WHOLE ROOM EMBODIES THE CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE SYSTEM THAT FLOWS FROM JESUS' LIFE THERE ARE MANY MORE POSSIBILITIES FOR POSSIBLE UNDERLAYS THAN THE TWO MENTIONED ABOVE.)**

This is the fourth lesson in a series of four lessons on the Greatest Parable—the third presentation that has words. These four lessons present Jesus' public ministry and the relation of his presence to the whole Christian language system.

This is a *parable*, because Jesus is not a window through which God can be glimpsed passing by. Rather, Jesus is an embodiment of God in the frailty and finitude of a human being. Like a parable, Jesus' life hides as well as reveals. It hides and reveals both the divinity and humanity of Jesus, but also with grace, and to a lesser degree, the divinity and humanity in our lives as well.

This is the *greatest* parable because Jesus is the source of parables. He is the "Parable Maker" out of whose life comes our sacred stories, liturgy, and contemplative silence, as well as parables. This lesson, therefore, needs to draw to itself and express the whole Christian language system as represented in the Godly Play room.

The goal of this presentation is to allow the inexhaustible meaning and linguistic complexity of Jesus to shine through with a kind of deep simplicity that it is open to people of all ages and stages of faith development.

BACKGROUND

The background to this presentation is our whole history as Christian People. We have followed the elusive presence of God from the creation itself to the journey's culmination in Jesus, and then on to the present. This long story of our origins includes both the stability of this revelation and an open door for the journey to continue—all with the same creativity we began with.

As Samuel Terrien writes in *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (1978): “When presence is ‘guaranteed’ to human senses or reason, it is no longer real presence. The proprietary sight of the glory destroys the vision, whether in the temple of Zion or in the Eucharistic body. . . . In biblical faith, presence eludes but does not delude (476).” Our longing for God is both a yearning for the stability of a rock and the flowing of a living spring in the desert, as the psalms so vividly express. It is the ever-changing reality of a trusted relationship.

The guarantee against turning Jesus into an idol or cliché is that we have four Gospels rather than just one. The creative mix of the first four interpretations of Jesus' life, death and resurrection continues to generate new meaning and insight about the stable yet elusive presence of our redemptive companion for the journey.

This lesson provides a framework for continued reflection and creative insight about Jesus' elusive presence. Its complexity is focused on a simple framework within which the children (and adults) can deepen their relationship with Jesus in an expanding way, rather than reducing it to something superficial that lacks respect for both children and for Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

This lesson can stand alone, but it is not intended to just tell the story of Jesus' public ministry. It is also intended *to show*—in the context of a Godly Play room—how Jesus is the source of the Christian language system, which is both our way for making personal, existential meaning and our way for living together in community.

Present this lesson when the curiosity of the children pushes for it or when you, as the storyteller, feel especially called to invite them to become involved in it. Since Jesus comes, called or uncalled, this approach to timing can be disruptive to schedules and long-range plans, which is appropriate.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

The 13 triangle-shaped images fit together in two hexagons to tell the story of Jesus' public ministry. The triangles are arranged in three groups. The first group is gold on the back and shows the beginning, middle and ending of the story by evoking the Annunciation, the Transfiguration and the Resurrection. These three events in Jesus' life integrate the stories of his ministry in Galilee and Judea, which form the two hexagons. The gold triangles of the Annunciation and the Resurrection complete the hexagons and the Transfiguration joins them into one story.

The colors on the backs of the triangles are significant. The gold on the first three triangles marks three key moments in Jesus' life when God's presence was especially evident. The blue on the first

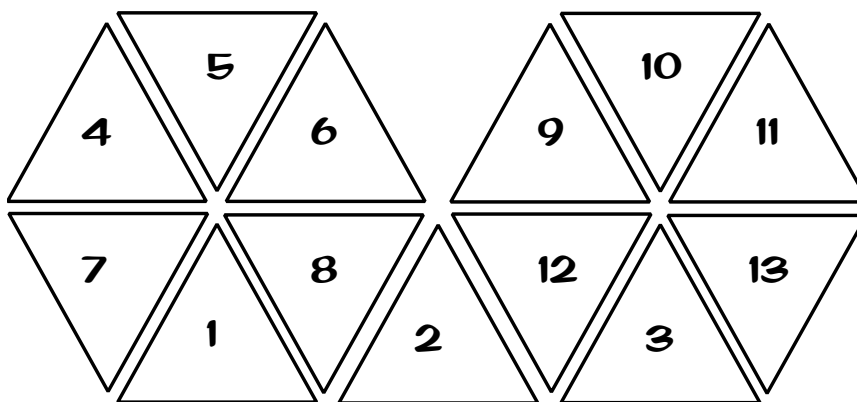
five triangles signifies one of the traditional colors for Mary and the blue water of the Sea of Galilee for Jesus' Galilean ministry. The gray on the second set of five triangles suggests the walls of Jerusalem and the great stone, which shut Jesus in the tomb that could not hold him.

The gold, triangular box, which contains the 13 triangles, stands up on its base to suggest its relation to the sacred stories and its key position in the Godly Play room. The gold color and lid to the box link it to the parables. The purple cross on the container's top links the lesson to the Liturgical Action materials, especially the Faces of Easter, which is presented during the season of Lent. The relation to contemplative silence is evident during the silent part of the presentation, which uses the color side of the 13 triangles rather than the picture side.

The 13 story triangles are only a little larger than the 15, gold "I-Am" triangles in the Parable Synthesis 2 lesson. This suggests the implicit link between Jesus' self-identity statements and this presentation, which is only one of many other connections to the lessons in the Godly Play room. Everything is connected to everything else, because the room, as a whole, evokes the entire Christian language system that flows out of and returns to Jesus.

STORYTELLING TIP

Before presenting this lesson, please check the material to be sure the triangle plaques are in the proper order so you will not be searching for the right plaque during the presentation.



1. The Annunciation 2. The Transfiguration 3. The Resurrection

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| 4. Rejection at Home: Blindness | 9. The Healing of Bartimaeus: Blindness |
| 5. The Twelve Disciples: Calling Followers | 10. Blessing the Children: Calling Followers |
| 6. The Sermon on the Mount: Teaching/Blessing | 11. The Summary of the Law: Teaching |
| 7. Feeding the 5000: Communion with Followers | 12. The Meal with Zaccaeus: Communion with Sinners |
| 8. Walking in the Fields of Grain: Sabbath Rest | 13. The Anointing of Jesus in Bethany: Sabbath Rest |

THE 13 TRIANGULAR IMAGES FOR THE GREATEST PARABLE LESSONS IN THEIR ORDER OF PRESENTATION AND FINAL CONFIGURURATION (FROM THE CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE).