

"When there is darkness, be the Light"*

A synthesis lesson for these (and other) times



Last Sunday in our meeting's children's program, we talked about what it means to be a refugee and seek asylum, and how we're called to love our neighbor and welcome "the stranger." We read the book *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz and looked at photos of the thousands of asylum seekers from Central America at the Mexico-US border with verses from scripture added as captions.

This week, I took inspiration from a story I found by a Godly Play storyteller in Canada, called "Love is Stronger than Fear" but in the end I needed to create my own synthesis lesson. This is a description of what that included. As a Godly Play/Faith & Play storyteller and trainer, the words of the stories I used are in my memory; finding what parts to use in this context came from my heart.

I was clear that I needed to start with the piece of the desert we have in our classroom, because so many important stories happened there. I used the language from Godly Play sacred stories (Old Testament) that the desert can be a dangerous place that people don't go to, unless they have to. I expanded on that -- deserts aren't always just the hot, dry, places we think of being full of sand. Long journeys, even difficult times in our lives, can feel like walking in the desert; when you don't have what you need, or can easily lose your way.

I used some of the materials and Godly Play language for the Great Family story about Sarah and Abraham. When you leave your home, will God be in the new place? All of God, turns out, is in every place. (I only used one river, one altar, and the blocks for Ur and Haran — these all proved to be very important to some of the children during the wondering.) On the other side of the desert, I added Exodus and used more people than I normally would judiciously measure out to tell that whole story. The crowd felt important. The people had to leave their home because there was no rain and the grain would not grow so they could not feed their children. The walk was long and hard. The people were enslaved by the king called a Pharaoh and sought their freedom. Moses came so close to God that he knew what to do, and he led them to freedom as they were chased by Pharaoh's army. I also put Mary and Joseph in the front of the desert box after walking them a short way across the front. They had to leave home and go to another town to be counted by the government of the people who ruled in their land. Mary was going to have a baby, and it was a hard journey. (TBC: we will have the Advent story in a few weeks.)

*Madeleine L'Engle, *A Ring of Endless Light*

The next part focused on the idea that a central image of hope for many people of different faiths and cultures is light (lit the big candle). In several celebrations this time of year, light is used to represent hope and other important ideas (laid out the four wooden cards with images on them for Diwali, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa). I appreciated being able to reference the miracle of the oil that lasted eight nights in the temple in Jerusalem (thinking about Jewish neighbors and the Tree of Life synagogue tragedy). With the card for Kwanzaa, it felt connected to indicate the Exodus materials again and say that another group of people were unjustly enslaved and sought/fought for their freedom here in the US. The descendants of these people remember their ancestors and the places they were taken from in Africa when they light the candles of the kinara to celebrate African heritage, unity, and culture.

Then we wondered about the story — what part did they like best, and where were they in the story or what part was about them? With this second wondering, I invited them to add a person to the story. We passed around the basket of people of God (I have lots because of training materials) and they carefully did this in silence. One of the children asked if they



could please share why they put their people where they did -- I invited this, with the caveat that you only needed to if you were led to share. All the children did, and it was very powerful sharing. In most cases, the figure was them and they had very thoughtful, authentic reasons for their choices. In other cases, the person was more of a commentary on the story or someone in the story who they decided to represent in some way.

Then I lit a smaller candle for each of the children, one at a time. I used language from the Godly Play baptism story and an adaptation I've used for Friends. *"(Child's name), the Light within you goes everywhere you go, all places and at all times."* They were very still with anticipation of their turn, and I let the children put their candles along the edges of the story after I lit them. One child asked me to light one for his parent, who was there assisting.



Finally we "changed the light" with my candle snuffer. (I did the big candle and let the children snuff their own smaller candles.) I spoke about the mystery that the Light changes, and it isn't just in this one place anymore but goes everywhere (the language about changing the light is in Godly Play Advent and Baptism stories). It gets thinner, but it's always there, around us -- and in us. All of God is in every place, even in the difficult places and journeys. Let's walk together.