

Sermon Ideas

People with disabilities are trying to be included in the life of the faith community. They, too, want recognition of their values as children of God worthy of unconditional love and acceptance.

Hunger, more specifically malnutrition, is the number one cause of disabilities worldwide. Accidents and disease are the leading causes of disabilities in the parts of the world where hunger is not a factor.

However, even if we are fortunate enough to live without material deprivation and with outstanding medical care, all of us face the toll that aging takes. Eyesight, hearing, mobility, memory – these disabilities await most all of us. Disabilities do not know boundaries of age, race, sex or social status. And yet disabilities are the biggest barrier to full participation in our churches. Someone has pointed out that a person in a wheelchair is not disabled in a community or building that has wide doors, slight ramps in place of stairs, and furniture that is wheelchair accessible.

Genesis tells us that we are created in the image of God. Yet we are all different – skin color, personalities, mental and physical capabilities. This passage, then, must refer to something besides the physical. God is spirit, and to be created in the image of God is to have a spirit that is in God's image.

And yet we – like Jesus – are incarnate. It is with our bodies and our minds that we live out our lives. So to have a mind or body that is different is not a judgment on our relationship with God, but is a statement about our humanity.

As we read the Bible, it is clear from beginning to end that God wants to be in a relationship with each and every one of God's creatures. Therefore, it becomes clear that our God is a God of

accessibility – to all – and that we therefore must make our churches, and our hearts, accessible to all.

If it were possible to gather all the people with disabilities into one nation, that nation would number over 650 million women, men and children. That nation would be the world's third largest country, after China and India. (World Health Organization statistic)

That nation would have the least access to education. Many people with disabilities receive little or no education, especially in developing countries. That nation would have the highest unemployment rate in the world and be the poorest nation on earth. It would have the least access to any sort of transportation. And, it would be the least evangelized nation with the lowest proportion involved in a church.

Try to interpret for your church the status of the people with disabilities in the United States and beyond. Go to www.icdri.org/Statistics/mainstats.html. This site gives an extensive look at statistics and public policy regarding people with disabilities. It will be an important tool for you as you prepare for Disability Awareness Sunday, and it will be important for your congregation as well.

Children's Sermon Ideas

Children's Story-Puzzle

Preparation: Put a small jigsaw puzzle together. Apply masking tape to the back to hold the pieces together so that the entire picture shows. Remove an important piece or two, leaving holes in the picture.

Story: Explain how the puzzle was put together, whether it was hard or difficult, how many people it took. Once it was done, you realized there were important pieces missing, pieces that helped to make the picture whole. Explain that as you worked to put the puzzle together, it struck you as to how the church is like a jigsaw puzzle. We have to put the church together – piece by piece. It’s hard. It takes time. It takes many pieces working together. If a piece is left out, the picture is not clear. And there are times when we don’t know if all the pieces are going to fit together. With each piece, the picture becomes clearer. Ask, “Have you ever put together a puzzle, only to find there were pieces missing?” Explain that at times people who are different from ourselves for many reasons – disability, color of their skin, the clothes they wear, how much money they have, or where they live –are the missing piece of life’s puzzle. They are often not seen as a piece of the whole picture, and only when we accept everyone for the gifts and graces they bring, can the picture be complete.

God's Toolbox

Theme: The church, EVERYONE’s service to God.

Object: A tool box full of tools

Scripture: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6 (NLT)

I have a tool box full of tools. I imagine you have a toolbox like this around your house, don't you? Why do you suppose we need so many tools? It is because each of these tools has a different purpose. There is no one tool that can do everything. If I needed to drive a nail into a board, what tool do you think I would need? Right! I would need a hammer. Here's my hammer. If I were putting together a bookshelf and needed to put in a screw to hold it together, what tool do you think I would need? You are right again! I'd need a screwdriver, and here it is! Let's see, suppose I needed to measure something, what tool do you think I would need. Of course, I'd need a tape measure. I wonder if I have a tape measure in here? Yep, here it is. What if I needed to drill a hole? Sure, I would need my drill. It is important to have the right tool for the job.

The Church is like God’s tool box. God has a lot of jobs to do and he has given the people in His Church different gifts and talents to help Him to do those jobs. We are His tools! To some he has given musical talent to help lead others in worship. To some He has given the talent of teaching so that they can help others to learn more about Him. There is no one person in the church that can do everything, is there?

Listen to what the Bible says, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us."

If I needed to tighten a screw in my glasses, would this hammer help? Would this great big screwdriver help? No, I would need this little tiny screwdriver. You see, it doesn't matter what your talent is and it doesn't matter if you are big or small. What does matter is that when God has a job for you to do, you need to be right there in His toolbox, ready and willing for Him to use you.

Look around you. See this house of worship? It is God's toolbox. Look at all the people in this room. They are God's tools. Each one ready and willing for God to use them to do his work in this community.

Lord, we thank you that you have given each of us special abilities to do things for you. We pray that when you need us, we will be ready and willing to do what you need for us to do. Amen.

#6 Pokey, the Little Burro

Text: based on Matthew 21:1-11

Props: Use the song written by Judy Raizer, "Pokey Was His Name-O" to teach to the children. It is sung to the tune of B-I-N-G-O.

Summary: Jesus was humble on Palm Sunday when he was presented as Israel's Messiah. We should be humble and not make fun of others less fortunate than ourselves. This sermon helps young children learn to accept the mentally disabled.

A long, long time ago in the land of Israel far away, there lived a man who loved God, called Zechariah. He was a prophet, which means he spoke important words that God told him to speak, to the people where he lived. One day he told of a day when Jesus the Savior would ride into Jerusalem with these words:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon a burro, and upon a colt, the foal of a burro.

Now about 500 years later, Jesus was about to go up to a city called Jerusalem. He was going to the temple (a very big church). Many people loved Jesus so much that they thought he ought to be their King. They were tired of the Roman soldiers that lived in their land and refused to obey God. They were tired of being treated so badly by strangers who were cruel and mean.

Meanwhile, in the nearby town of Bethphage, there lived a little burro with his mother. He was not as fast as the other little burros. When he brayed he did not sound a "hee haw" like the other burros. He just sort of said "haw" and that was all. The other little burros used to make fun of him. In fact, they called him Pokey because he was SO SLOW. The other burros jumped and bounced around whenever their owner tried to put things on their backs to carry down the road. But not Pokey, he was meek (that means gentle) and he would carry the burdens of his owner quietly without making even a peep of a bray.

"Momma," Pokey said, "why do the other burros have to be so mean to me. I'm trying as hard as I can." "I know you are, son," said his mother, "and I love you very much, just the way you are."

Now one day as Pokey and his mother were eating straw, two of Jesus' friends came and untied them and started to take them away. "Stop!" said the owner. "Where are you taking my burros?" he asked. "The Lord has need of them," they replied. "Oh, very well," said the owner, "take them right away."

Soon they came to a man in a long white robe. It was JESUS! One of the people who knew Jesus knelt down and whispered in Pokey's long soft ear: "Hello, little burro. You see all these people standing here? Some of them think Jesus should ride into Jerusalem today on a big white horse like the military soldiers do. But he needs to show them how to be like you: humble and gentle, and willing to share other people's burdens."

"Oh, Momma!" said Pokey. "Did you hear that?" "Yes, son," she replied, "I am so proud of you." Then they put garments on Pokey's back and Jesus sat on Pokey. Then Pokey followed beside his mother as Jesus held on. They walked slowly up the hill. The people cut palm tree branches and laid them along the path and shouted: Blessing and honor to the son of David; Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Blessing and honor in the highest.

Now some of you boys and girls may see some children that are not as fast as others at school. They may talk differently or even look a little different, but they are trying just as hard as you. They are SPECIAL to God and show us how to be gentle and patient and willing to help others. Now I do not want you to make fun of them. Instead, remember the story of Pokey the little burro, and understand that God has made a special purpose for each one of us.

The Children's Message

Things to think about...

...children are curious. Encourage them to ask questions. Give them honest answers. More often than not people with disabilities would rather be asked about their disability than have a curious child stare at them and wonder.

...have a child with a disability help with the children's message. Not as the center of attention, but as an expert on the subject.

...ask a child with a disability what they wish people without disabilities knew about them or their disability.

...ask the sibling of a child with a disability what they wish the world knew about their brother or sister.