

Semicontinuous  
**1 Sam. 8:4–11,**  
**16–20**  
**Ps. 138**

Complementary  
**Gen. 3:8–15**  
**Ps. 130**  
**2 Cor. 4:13–5:1**  
**Mark 3:20–35**

# All Are Welcome

**Goal for the Session**      *Children will join the crowd around Jesus and celebrate that they are welcomed as Jesus' family.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Mark 3:20–35

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Judith Hoch Wray

Jesus’ family serves as a literary tool to introduce several key themes. The antecedent of the pronoun translated as “people” (v. 21) in the NRSV is unclear, and probably indicates Jesus’ family as the ones who were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” “Out of his mind” is literally, “he has stood outside.” (Compare today’s idiom, “he is really out of it,” or the RSV “beside himself.”) The question of who is *outside* arises again and again. In verse 31 the family is standing outside, in contrast to their saying in verse 21 that he “has gone outside,” that is, out of his mind.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Wendy Farley

If we transpose this theological vision into our own time, instead of lepers and demoniacs crowding around Jesus, we might see the strange bodies of the disabled. The only ones not in the picture, the ones not pressing in at the doors and windows, desperate and aching to be near Jesus, are the ones who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like. Jesus, infinitely patient with the crowd, blasts away at these people. Everyone will be forgiven, except people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The inability to tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the demonic is an *unforgivable sin*.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Don E. Saliers

For us, however, the issue is how we now understand the relationship between discipleship and Christology. More than simply “understand” intellectually, it seems crucial for the churches today to seek to live out that understanding. Living out the form of discipleship Christ bids us follow means a new solidarity with all of humanity. It requires that we learn with him to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. It asks us to live into the densities of human joy and suffering. It calls us to find ourselves precisely in our willingness to give up our self-absorption. This is a demanding task, requiring a willingness to follow him into a new solidarity with God’s whole family.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nibs Stroupe

We should look for the reality signified by the name “Satan.” Satan does not necessarily mean a personality with horns and a red tail, but it does name a demonic power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God. This is the reality that Jesus names here, and whether we believe in a person named “Satan” is not as important as hearing about our captivity to the powers of evil signified by “Satan,” powers that continue to seek our allegiance.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Mark 3:20–35**

**YOU WILL NEED**

- green cloth
- Christ candle, matches
- offering basket
- Bible
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 27, 31
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- heavy cardboard or clear adhesive plastic
- construction paper
- pencils
- scissors
- sticky notes
- pen

For Responding

- option 2: sturdy white paper plates; stapler; jingle bells; hole punch; self-adhesive stickers; pens; crayons; scissors; narrow ribbon; Color Pack 32; *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, scissors, markers, thread, hole punch, small branch, container, sand, basket
- option 4: paper hearts, pens, markers, small stickers

## Focus on Your Teaching

Children want to feel welcomed and know that they are accepted just as they are. Therefore, it is vital that the children experience a warm welcome from their church family each week. You can help by intentionally welcoming each learner as a valued member of the group. Addressing the children by name, asking about their week, making eye contact, and giving them your full attention when they speak all help to convey the message that you value their presence and are glad they came.

*Jesus, thank you that I am welcomed into your family. As I prepare to receive the children in your name, help me to open my heart and convey your love. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, mount Color Pack 2 on heavy cardboard or cover it with clear adhesive plastic for use in each session. For option 3 in Responding, fill a container with sand and insert the tree branch.

Invite the first children to arrive to arrange the green cloth, Christ candle, offering basket, and Bible on the worship table. Display Color Pack 2 nearby. Welcome the children by name and ask about their week. Help them trace around one foot on construction paper, cut it out, print their name on it, and decorate as desired.

When it is time to begin, gather children around the worship table. Ask a volunteer to light the candle. Have the children, in turn, say their names and place their footprints on the worship table. Sing the first stanza of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Receive the offering and pray:

*God of stories, thank you for bringing us together to hear the stories of Jesus. Teach us to follow in his way and bring your love to the world. Amen.*

Point to the green cloth on the worship table. Explain that this signifies the season of Ordinary Time following Pentecost, a time when the church concentrates on learning how to follow Jesus. Show Color Pack 1 and invite a volunteer to read the word. Ask:

- ✠ What does the word *welcome* mean to you?
- ✠ How does it feel to be welcomed?

Comment that in today’s Bible story Jesus helps some people feel welcome.

### God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of hope  
anew;  
Light this candle, light the  
way,  
Bring hope into our hearts  
today.  
Jesus, near us as we pray,  
Let hope be in our hearts  
today.

When telling the story,  
maintain eye contact  
with children as much  
as possible. Use your  
voice, facial expressions,  
and body movements  
to make the story come  
alive.

### EXPLORING

Ask a volunteer to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the Gospel of Mark. Explain that for the next few weeks the stories will come from the Gospel of Mark. Many people think that this author was the first person to write down stories about Jesus. Note that this gospel tells the story of Jesus and his disciples as they slowly make their way through the countryside toward Jerusalem. Show Color Pack 2 and observe that this is how one artist imagined Jesus. Ask:

✪ What do you think Jesus is saying?

Accept all answers and, if no one else says it, suggest that he might be saying, “Come and follow me.” Invite the group to use its imagination to join Jesus and his disciples on their travels. Turn to Mark 3:20 and place the Bible next to Color Pack 2. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (A Crowded House). Ask:

✪ Why did so many people want to be with Jesus?

Show Color Pack 3 and invite children to imagine that these people are in the crowd around Jesus. Ask:

✪ How did Jesus help them to feel welcome?

✪ What might they be saying to each other?

✪ Who is welcomed to Jesus’ family?

Play “Celebration Music” (track 24 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) and invite the children to dance around the learning area. Pause the music and have everyone say the phrase, “Jesus welcomes you” and shake hands with as many people as possible before the music starts again. Repeat until the music has ended. Gather in a circle and say, “We are all welcomed by Jesus.” Celebrate with a group high five.

Invite children to name some people that Jesus welcomes. Print their suggestions on sticky notes and place them around the edge of Color Pack 3. Ensure that every child is named. Ask:

✪ How does it feel to know Jesus welcomes you?

✪ How might we celebrate?

### RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

**1. Game Freeze Tag** In this active game children will affirm and welcome each other in Jesus’ name. Choose someone as “It.” The rest of the group scatters around the game area. On your signal, It chases them. Players who are tagged must stand still until another player touches them and says, “(Name), Jesus welcomes you.” After playing for several minutes, choose another It.

EASY  
PREP

### Give Me Joy in My Heart

Give me joy in my heart,  
keep me singing,  
Give me joy in my heart,  
I pray—hallelujah!  
Give me joy in my heart,  
keep me singing,  
Keep me singing till the  
break of day.

Sing hosanna, sing  
hosanna, sing hosanna  
to the King of kings!  
Sing hosanna, sing  
hosanna, sing hosanna  
to the king.

*Repeat three times*

These names might include characters from the children's favorite Bible stories, people they know at church, as well as family members and friends.

### This Is My Commandment

This is my commandment  
that you love one  
another,  
That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment  
that you love one  
another,  
That your joy may be full.

That your joy may be full,  
That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment  
that you love one  
another,  
That your joy may be full.

*Repeat*

- Tambourine** Children will celebrate with joyful music. Staple two paper plates together, tops facing each other. Before you finish stapling, slip a few jingle bells inside. Punch holes around the edges of plates. Help children thread lengths of ribbon through the holes. Print "Jesus welcomes me" on one side of tambourine. Decorate the other side with self-adhesive stickers and bright colors. Play "Give Me Joy in My Heart" (Color Pack 32; track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*) and encourage children to sing and accompany the song with their tambourines.
- Welcome Tree** Children will be affirmed that Jesus welcomes them by making a welcome tree. Give each child two figures and a heart from Resource Sheet 2 (Family Tree). Invite children to print their name on one figure and decorate as desired. Punch a hole at the top of each figure and hang them on the tree. Ask: Who else does Jesus welcome? Label the other figures and hearts with these names, decorate, and add to the tree. Display the tree where others will see it. Leave a basket of prepared figures and hearts with an invitation for others to add their names. For younger children, cut out the figures and hearts in advance.
- Surprise Messages** Children will celebrate that Jesus welcomes them by spreading that message throughout the church. Distribute colored heart shapes, markers, and stickers. Help children print "Jesus Welcomes You" on the hearts and decorate them. Reserve one heart for each child. Recruit volunteers to help you place the rest of the messages in prayer books or hymnals as a surprise the next time the congregation gathers. Mail a heart to each child during the week.

## CLOSING

Gather children around the worship table and light the candle.

Sing "This Is My Commandment" (Color Pack 31; track 20 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*).

Pray:

*Loving God, thank you for stories that help us to learn about you, about Jesus, and about what it means to be his follower. Help us as we go out to show your love in the world. Amen.*

Close with a circle blessing. In turn, each one will turn to the person on her or his right and say: "(Name), remember that you are important to Jesus and to us." The person will respond, "Amen."

Have a quick word with each child as she or he leaves. Thank them for coming and affirm positive contributions. Remind them that you will be praying for them throughout the coming week. Save the children's footprints to use in future sessions.

June 6, 2021  
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Multi-Age  
Resource Sheet 1

## **A Crowded House** based on Mark 3:20-35

Large crowds followed Jesus as he walked through the countryside. They heard that he was healing those who were sick and telling amazing stories about God's love. People came from far and wide just to catch a glimpse of him.

One day Jesus went into a house. As usual, people gathered. Even Jewish leaders from Jerusalem, experts in the Law, who weren't sure they liked what Jesus was teaching, came. Everyone wanted to be inside where Jesus was. They squeezed and pushed until there was not an inch of space left.

Jesus began to teach about the Holy Spirit and God's forgiveness. He talked about good and evil. He told stories to help people understand who he was.

While Jesus was teaching, his family arrived. They wanted to see Jesus, but they couldn't get inside the house. They called, "Jesus! Where are you? Come out and talk to us."

It was no use. There were too many people and Jesus couldn't hear them. They sent a messenger inside to tell Jesus that his family was outside. The messenger pushed through the crowd until he stood before Jesus.

"Jesus," he gasped. "Your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside. They want to speak with you."

Jesus looked at the people crowded into the room and those who were looking in the windows. Many of them wanted to hear and see him and know that he welcomed them.

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Jesus asked. He pointed to the people squished around him and said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. Whoever follows in God's loving ways is my brother, sister, and mother."

This story is found in the third chapter of the Gospel of Mark, early in the story of Jesus. Right from the start, Jesus wanted people to know something important: Everyone was welcome. Everyone belonged. They were all part of his family. They were all God's children.



June 6, 2021  
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Multi-Age  
Resource Sheet 2

**Family Tree**

