



Children's Sermon

Scripture: "Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind" (Psalm 107:8, NRSV).

Text theme : God's steadfast love.

Objective:

Demonstrate God's steadfast love for us by showing how God meets our most specific, basic needs.

Prepare: One Great Hour of Sharing is March 18, 2012. Prepare your class for the One Great Hour Sharing offering at least four weeks in advance.

Materials:

Have on-hand sample contents of an UMCOR school kit for demonstration purposes:

- **1 pair blunt scissors**
- **3 pads of paper** (spiral or top bound pads)
- **1 hand-held pencil sharpener**
- **1 30-centimeter ruler**
- **6 unsharpened pencils**
- **1 2 ½" eraser**
- **1 24-count box of crayons**
- **1 14" x 16" cloth bag**

Separately, a map of Africa and small paper gift bags to collect coins

Place all items into the cloth school bag (except map and gift bags) and place on a table before the children.

Say: "Did you know that in some countries, children don't have books or school supplies?"

Many countries throughout the world have no classrooms, like this one, where children your age can gather together to learn. Sometimes, classes are held in half-destroyed buildings, tents, under an open sky, or under a tree. Let's take a look at some of these school supplies that most children your age don't have access to."

Begin to pull out the items from the schoolbag one item at a time, asking the students to identify the items as you pull them out of the bag. For example, pull out note paper and say,

"Class, what do I have here?"

Reply: "Paper!"

Say: "That's right." "How many of you have access to paper like this here at church or in your home?"

Reply: Children may raise hands, etc.

Next, pull out the pencils:

Say: “Do you know what these are used for?”

Reply: “Writing!”

Say: “Yes. That’s right, writing and erasing.”

Continue to pull out items until all the contents of the kit are laid before the children.

Say: “In parts of Africa (direct students’ attention to a map of Africa) like Zimbabwe, located here, these school supplies may be the only educational resources children in this country may have. The people who live in Zimbabwe also lack access to fresh water and food. But, God is faithful to meet our every need.”

Read Scripture: “Psalm 107, verse 8 says, ‘Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.’”

Say: “God’s love is steadfast. Do you know what that means?”

Reply: Wait for children’s reply

Say: “Steadfast means fixed in one direction, like when you ride your bike to the park; making no stops along the way. Steadfast can also mean, constant, reliable, never failing. You can trust in God’s steadfast love for you! And, because of this, God knows what each of us needs – even down to this simple pencil (hold up pencil). God uses organizations like UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) to bring supplies like these to those who need them most. Let me share with you a story about children in Zimbabwe who received school supplies just like these. Listen for their reaction!”

Read story: “Cheers for Pencils” on the following page, altering any text to convey the message to the children.

Closing:

Say: “Did you learn how excited and grateful these children were to receive pencils? Let us thank God that we have school supplies like these so readily available to us.”

Prayer

Dear God, help us to find ways to help other people this week. Show us how we can help others in our school, our church, our family, and even people in faraway places like Zimbabwe. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Say: “I’m going to pass around these small gift bags where you can collect coins for the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. In four weeks, the whole church will collect this offering during worship, and you can bring your gift bag with your offering, too.”

(Note: If your church decides to assemble school kits, then invite children to participate in the assembling of school kits.)

Cheers for Pencils!

By Melissa Crutchfield, Assistant General Secretary for International Disaster Response, UMCOR

While most of my friends and family were enjoying hotdogs and fireworks this 4th of July, I was helping to pass out school kits to more than 400 children in the rural Mutumbami area of eastern Zimbabwe. I had already been in the country about a week to follow up on a variety of UMCOR relief activities, and finally had the opportunity to accompany a pastor from the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe to distribute the UMCOR school kits to children who lacked these necessary supplies. Driving several hours outside of Mutare along dirt roads, passing a few baboons and countless small villages along the way, we bumped along in a pickup truck carrying dozens of boxes of the highly prized school kits.

Zimbabwe was going through one of the worst times in its history, and resources had become scarce and expensive, particularly for those in remote areas. This left many of the most vulnerable communities without access to basic necessities such as food or clean water, much less the “luxury” of such items as paper or a ruler. Often seen as a privilege, access to education and educational materials is much appreciated by all, providing a foundation of hope for the future.

When we finally arrived, we found several communities already waiting for the exciting distribution event. My Zimbabwean friend began to describe the contents of the school kits to the crowd: Notebooks (smiles, clapping), scissors (smiles, clapping), an eraser, a ruler, crayons (more smiles and clapping), pencils (**LOUD CHEERS!!!!!!!!**), and a pencil sharpener (back to smiles and clapping). Never have I seen so much excitement about six pencils!! In that moment, I suddenly and humbly realized that something most Americans consider so common was really valued in this place... It actually brought tears to my eyes to know that I am part of an organization that is responsible for bringing so much joy and hope into people’s lives.

While part of me may have missed eating hotdogs or seeing fireworks, I can’t say I was sorry to be away from home... because I got to spend America’s birthday by giving the gift of hope.