

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Book of Common Prayer, page 378)

Accept the light we have received and shine it forth! It is not about shining the light in other's faces, blinding them, but holding the light in open hands.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

We make it so complicated. The prophet Micah told us: "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Jesus invites us to follow him and describes the attributes of those who follow. Where does Jesus go? What does he value?

Theme: Life-giving Attitudes

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible.

Beginning: Tell the group that today we have the Core Values of Jesus that are called the Beatitudes, which we could think of as the Be Attitudes.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God for this rich passage and your patience with us as we unpack it. Help us to hear what you are calling us to do and who you are calling us to be. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 5: 1 – 12 Invite the group to share in reading the scripture today. One person will start, and after each phrase, invite them to pause before the next person begins. Continue in this manner until all 12 verses have been read. Allow a moment or two of silence when all verses have been read.

Then invite the group to re-read these verses to themselves, and then whoever wants to can speak about which verse spoke to them – either in consolation or not being able to make sense of it. You may not have sufficient time to unpack every one of the verses, so stay with the ones your group needs to stay with.

Following are some clues for each verse.

Verse 3 "poor in spirit" – what might the opposite be? (I am way too stressed out with my too busy life to waste time listening for God. I have what I need. I did the Sunday School thing when I was a kid, now I need to live my own life.) How might the positive look for us? (We are open to what the Spirit is saying to us. We want to grow in our faith.)

Verse 4 "mourn" and "comfort" – To mourn is to be vulnerable to the loss, death of a loved one, of course, but what other losses confront us? (Family alienations, people we love moving away,

financial losses, health losses, all the things we have to “let go.”) If “comfort” does not mean all the pain goes away, what can we say it means? (Awareness that we do not do this alone. Accepting the reaching out of others. Etc.)

Verse 5 “meek” – Contrast “meek” with “wimp.” Consider “meek” as comfortable with yourself, not seeking more ways to control or become more apparently powerful. How might that make us more grounded?

Verse 6 “righteousness” – How might this be a call to get ourselves right with God and open to new insights about God instead of worrying about whether others are sufficiently “righteous?” Consider how it has been our experience that when we focused more of our energies seeking God, that we have noticed being fed by God.

Verse 7 “merciful” – Could it be that choosing mercy for another creates a larger place in ourselves to receive mercy? (We probably have noticed that the more we love, the more capable we are of love. Could this be a similar phenomenon?) Would it make it any easier to have mercy for someone who has offended, if we recall times we received mercy we did not expect? And how have times we have not received the mercy we expected hardened our hearts so we are less merciful to others? How could we break the cycle?

Verse 8 “pure in heart.” – Could this mean getting what we do to be in sync with who we are? How do we balance the competitive nature of much of our work life with what we believe is the right and moral way to be?

Verse 9 “peacemakers” – What can each of us do to create spaces where cooperation and collaboration help us find middle ground? Are there times we can accommodate “both/and” instead of “either/or?”

Verse 10 “persecuted” – Few of us will be hauled out to the edge of town and stoned for our faith, but many of us have felt the sting of some form of prejudice – even that we are silly Christians. And if we have not personally experienced significant “persecution” how might we have (even unwittingly) been part of the persecution of others? (People whose faith is radically different from our own, skin color or origin different and threatening to us; people whose financial situation or physical challenges appall us?)

Verse 11 “reviled” – Again, little in our lives may parallel what Jesus knew would come to the early believers. Little was available that would classify as “therapy” which is available and valuable to people who have been “reviled.” How can we balance standing up for what we believe is true without “reviling” those with whom we differ?

Verse 12 “rejoice and be glad” – The mood has clearly shifted. If this is not about insuring a secure place “in Heaven,” what could this discipline Jesus has laid out do to enhance the quality of our life now? What are some differences between “rejoice and be glad” and the world’s understanding of “happy?”

Getting Closure: Invite one person to read Matthew 5: 3 – 12.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for these verses that can help us stay in sync with your call to each of us. Be with us so we can better see and hear your call. Amen.

Matthew 5: 1 – 12

The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2013 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.