

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

Scripture: Matthew 5:21-37

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

God is growing us beyond rules established in previous times. We can not only forego murder but even our rage. The kingdom of heaven is here now, and we can access the power to choose self-control.

Theme: New Ways for a New Kingdom

Before Class: You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for the group.

Beginning: Invite the group to listen for more clues about the kingdom of heaven.

Opening Prayer: Help us, God, to hear your word so we may find the Kingdom of Heaven in our midst. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 5: 21 – 37 Invite one person to read the scripture all the way through. Then, invite other readers to read just the sections of the scripture right before you discuss it.

Questions:

Verses 21-26 Invite someone to read these verses.

- Was Jesus was saying that nothing should cause anger? What about blatant injustice or discrimination?
- What would we say is the difference between getting angry and “being angry?”
- What else, in addition to “being” angry, is Jesus cautioning us against? (Insults, name calling, putting people down.)
- What is the dual responsibility when there has been a rupture in a relationship in verse 23? (Not just the wronged one has a responsibility to try to reconcile, but the person who notices someone has something against them.)
- When, in the course of the Holy Eucharist service, is there a mechanism for reconciliation? (At the passing of the Peace.)
- We live in a society even more litigious than Jesus' time. What might we learn from verse 25? (Many communities have people equipped to facilitate mediation instead of litigation. Can anyone in the group share an experience when they – or someone they know – benefited from this service?)
- What else might Jesus be warning the people in verse 26? (Jesus had not come to abolish the law – but to fulfill it. The law still stood.)

Verses 27 – 32 Invite someone to read these verses.

- Picture the crowd. No big surprise: adultery is a no, no. But what must have been the response of the crowd to verse 28. What is our response?
- Ask the group to come up with a definition of hyperbole. (An intentional overstatement to make a point. Example: My friend is the smartest woman in the whole wide world.)
- Why might Jesus have singled out adultery, when he could have talked about stealing, or other prohibitions in the Ten Commandments? (The fabric of a community is so badly torn when adultery occurs. Or could have been a controversial issue of the day.)
- Other than the obvious - that Jesus believed that the marriage covenant was, just that, a covenant - why do we think he spoke so harshly about divorce? (Women had no rights - none. A man could divorce his wife, plunging her into poverty and any children would be equally destitute.)
- What mitigating factors make modern divorce a more acceptable event? (Women have rights and can get jobs. Child support and even alimony pertain for some. The recognition that some marriages can be simply toxic for at least one of the partners.)

Verses 33-37 Invite someone to read these verses.

- What is the apparent “lull” between verse 33 and 34? (Swearing falsely – not telling the truth – was obviously not acceptable.)
- Now, Jesus says they are not to swear at all! What does Jesus mean? (A vow is not strengthened by embellishment.)
- What outlandish embellishments do we hear today? (i.e. He swore on a stack of Bibles)
- What example of this remains today of swearing upon something? (The President of the United States and others in public service such as Congress and Judges take the oath of office while placing one hand on a Bible.)
- What is Jesus proclaiming in verse 37? (One’s word must be trustworthy.)

Option: With Bibles open to notice the earlier portions of Chapter 5, what aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus is calling us to live out are still woefully lacking in our society? (The Ten Commandments would provide great ground rules, but are mostly worked around. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are still largely hungry and thirsty, etc.)

What examples could we provide that many people still seek and struggle to live into the Kingdom? (The various full-time humanitarian organizations that pour into any disaster. The entire system of hospitals, catastrophic care facilities, nursing homes, hospice – none of which existed in Jesus time. The improvement in the lives of women. Children are less likely to have to be put to work, etc.)

Getting Closure: Notice instances where our community has followed the call to be the Kingdom of God. What might we be called to do in new ways?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that you are here with us as we work with your word. Be with us and guide us as we strive to live out the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

Matthew 5:21-37

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

‘It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

‘Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.” But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

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