

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 5:21-26 [27-32] 33-37

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: Those who put together the Lectionary did not have grade school children in mind. Therefore, today, we will be focusing on verses 21-16 and 33-37 which are concepts children should be familiar with. The issue of self-control may well be closer to what Jesus was teaching. As a way of introducing the concept of "hyperbole" (pronounced by **per'** bo lē), which was so common in biblical times and that Jesus also used in his teaching, consider this idea: identify a sports figure the children will know. You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for the group.

Beginning: Pose this statement to the students (using the sports figure you have selected) "If I said that _____ is the fastest person alive, would you say this is absolutely true, or that it could be a bit of an exaggeration?" Tell them that another word for this kind of exaggeration is hyperbole.

Opening Prayer: Help us, God, to hear what you want us to hear in the passage we have today. Help us to live in your ways. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 5: 21 – 37 Tell the children that the entire passage is Jesus talking. Invite two readers. The first will read verses 21-26, the second 33-37.

Questions:

Verses 21-26

- I wonder how the people listening to Jesus would have known that it was not okay to murder people? (The Ten Commandments.)
- I wonder if there is a difference between getting angry and staying angry?
- Is it possible NEVER to have anything make you angry?
- I wonder if there are things it is okay to get angry about? (Someone is being discriminated against or otherwise being treated unfairly.)

- What kind of anger do we think Jesus is talking about here? (Refusing to give a friend another chance; holding a grudge after it is time to give up the anger, etc.)
- I wonder how friends might help two people who are angry with one another? (Listen, first. Ask if you can help, etc.)
- Ask the children if they have heard the saying: “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me?” Ask them if they think that it is correct that words can never hurt? What can we do when we notice that we have hurt someone with our words? Do the children think it is possible to hurt someone with our words – and not even notice we have done it? How can friends help here?
- Ask the children to try to imagine a situation where a person would “remember that a friend has something against him or her” and how they could patch up that situation. What if the person did not even know he or she had hurt the other? What is the responsibility of the person who was hurt?
- I wonder what Jesus is telling us in verse 25? (Instead of suing each other, what if we tried to work things out?)

Verses 33 – 37

- Which of the commandments is Jesus amplifying here? (Number 9: No lies.)
- What kinds of things have we heard people say when they are making a vow? “I swear by...” (A stack of Bibles, is often heard. What else have the children heard?)
- How might we paraphrase Verse 37? (An option would be: If I say yes, I mean yes. If I say no, I mean no.)

Option: Visual Guide

As a way to help the children remember what Jesus is saying to do and not do, have the children put all of the “don’ts” on the inside of the sign and all of the “do’s” on the outside of the sign. They can use words, pictures, etc.

Option: A skit. Ask the children to put on a skit by acting out one of the teachings we have looked at - perhaps two people having a huge argument and then getting a grip and figuring out a way to make up and be friends. If you have several children, another pair could act out being on the way to the altar and remembering that a friend has something against them and showing what to do about it. Enjoy the skits when they are produced.

Getting Closure: Previously we had noticed that the kingdom of heaven includes adding healthy habits to our lives. What would we add from today’s scripture? (forgiveness, being a person of our word, etc.)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for showing us how to choose 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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