

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

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48

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

An eye for an eye not only doubles the grief, but also the blindness. Could it be that one of the reasons Jesus came was to help us see the futility of violence?

Theme: Choosing Peace

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

Beginning: Tell the group to be noticing alternatives to getting even.

Opening Prayer: Loving God, as we walk through life and difficult issues arise, help us to deal with them as you teach us. Remind us that we are all made in your image, and that we all need your love. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 5: 38-48 It is suggested that the group read the first portion, discuss it, and then read the second portion.

Matthew 5: 38 – 42 Invite one volunteer can read these verses.

Questions:

- Does anyone know where the rule, in verse 38, commonly accepted in Jesus time, originated? (Part of the instructions Moses had for the band of people wandering in the desert, fleeing Egypt.)
- Why do we think this seemed to “work” in a band of people committed to a common cause? (It appeared to dissuade people if they realized the fate they inflicted could also be theirs.)
- If it was good enough for Moses, why do we think Jesus was asking the people to go beyond it? (What if Jesus was trying to help people see there could be something more life-giving than just getting even?)
- Note: (verse 39b) the group may not know that in Jesus time, to strike someone on the right cheek was a huge insult requiring a response.
- (Verse 41) Roman soldiers had the right to command a person to carry the soldier's heavy pack for one complete mile.
- It would have been well understood that in the event of danger people had only two choices: fight or flee. What would we say is a third option Jesus is describing in these verses? (Hang in there, negotiate, work it out, forgive, give people another chance, etc.)

Matthew 5: 43-48 Invite a second volunteer to read these verses.

Questions:

- Ask the group to brainstorm categories of enemies. For example, people who could inflict physical harm; people whose values threaten ours; people who might be mirroring something we loathe in ourselves, etc.
- If we do not think Jesus is telling us we should let predators roam our school grounds while we simply pray for them, what might Jesus be calling us to do? (Probably continuing to protect our selves and our children while continuing to pray for these people.)
- What might our response be to people whose values threaten ours? (Continue to be people of light, living out our values so our children and others in our community can see the health in our ways.)
- How might we respond to those who are mirroring something we have not looked at in ourselves? (Risk looking at what we might be projecting onto these “enemies” that we need to be dealing with in ourselves.)
- As we pray for our enemies we may be a part of healing for ourselves as well as for them.)
- We know that prayer is not magic so why would we choose to pray for those who persecute us? (When we intercede we enter into the mystery of the power of prayer.)

Discuss Verse 46: Consider this prayer and what it tells us about the person praying it: “God bless me, my wife, and our two children. Us four. No more.”

- What is the risk of reaching out to people we do not believe will return our love? (Rejection, ridicule, etc.)
- What might be the benefit? (Potential change in ourselves and even in the person we reach out to.)
- In what ways does our church community tend to stick with “our own” and not reach out to others? What might we be able to do to as a community, as individuals, to improve this?
- In what ways do we see our church community improving in this area?

Discuss Verse 48: If Jesus is not calling us to be perfectionists what do we think he means by being perfect? (Being the completely “me” each of us is.)

What might some attributes be of a person being truly himself/herself? (Taking personal responsibility, being willing to forgive others as well as herself/himself, etc.)

Getting Closure: Invite the group to sit in silence for a few minutes and consider what you will be saying:

As we picture God right here in our midst, helping us, let us picture one of the situations we discussed that resonates with us. Perhaps it is our urge to get even. A hurt we are nursing. A really difficult person in our life. Or something in ourselves we project onto an enemy. Then. Let us picture God taking some of the heaviness, not leaving us to carry it alone. (Allow a moment or two of silence.)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for reminding us of how we should act and that we are not alone as we work and live with those around us. Help us to see one another as you see us. Amen.

Matthew 5:38-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

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

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