

Lesson Plans That Work
Year A – Season after Pentecost, Proper 19
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

In this season after Pentecost, we hear stories of Jesus' ministry in the world and our call to engage in that mission. This season is also known as Ordinary Time coming from the word "ordinal" which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The color for this season is green and it is often referred to as the green growing time as we hear stories of what God is calling us to do in the world, we join in that call, and we grow in our faith.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

This week's lesson follows on the heels of Jesus teaching on how we are all to humble ourselves as children in order to enter the Kingdom of God, on how we are to look for the lost sheep if there is one lost and how we are to solve conflicts in our communities. This section of Matthew deals with how Jesus calls us to live together in community in this new way which leads to a good number of questions about what this means.

Peter asks Jesus how many times we are to forgive someone who has sinned against us or has done us wrong. Jesus responds with the parable known as the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Throughout the ages as people have interpreted Jesus' answer of 77 times to mean never. We are never to stop forgiving and the parable leads us to see that as well. The servant who comes before the king owes him an outrageous amount. The king's first reaction is to sell him and his family. Out of fear, the servant begs for mercy, and he is forgiven his debt. However, when the servant requires another person to repay him a rather small amount of money and does not forgive that person of his debt, the king shows no mercy. When the king sees that the servant is unwilling to forgive this small debt, he lets the servant know that he has had enough and hands him over to be tortured until he can pay his debt.

We are to show mercy and forgiveness to others just as God shows us mercy. The king's willingness to forgive the debt completely at first is an example of how much God is willing to forgive us. It is only when we see the burden of our own debts that we can see the magnitude of God's mercy in our lives.

Theme: Forgiveness

Before: You will need a Bible and something heavy for each person to carry as soon as they arrive (bag of bird seed, bag of play dough or clay, large rock, etc.)

Prepare:

- **Weighed Down and Forgiven:** make sure you have something heavy to give each person as they walk in. They don't all have to be the same thing, but you want to make sure that it is heavy enough that they will be burdened by carrying it around.

Beginning: As people enter the room, give them their item to carry around with them as soon as they arrive. You don't need to explain why, but just tell them they must carry it or have it with them at all times and they can't put it on the floor.

Opening Prayer: Merciful and loving God, as we prepare to hear your word today, we thank you for your continued loving presence and your generous forgiveness. May your words and message touch our hearts, minds and soul that we may live as you have taught us to live. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 18:21-35

Invite someone to read Matthew 18:21.

Reflection Questions:

- What was something that stuck out for you from the reading?
- If you have heard this story before, did you hear anything new today?
- Who you think the King might be in this story?
- I wonder how the servant felt when he was forgiven his debt?
- How do you think the servant felt when he was caught not forgiving another persons debt?
- I wonder what you think this might mean for God's forgiveness for us?

Weighed Down and Forgiven

The items I gave you are supposed to symbolize grudges that we carry around. When someone has done something wrong to us or when they have hurt us in some way and we get angry and carry those feelings around with us, they begin to weight us down. They begin to make us slower and more frustrated and they get in the way of us living our lives. When we forgive someone or when someone forgives us, the weight of carrying that around is lifted and we can be free to love that person again.

When we forgive someone, there is a weight lifted from us and from the person we forgave. That is one of the reasons that Jesus wanted us to forgive, so we can more easily love one another. Love and forgiveness go hand in hand.

Closure: If you have time you can invite them to share their own experiences in forgiveness or stories they have heard about forgiveness.

- Has there been a time when you have forgiven someone and felt the weight lifted off of you?
- Has there been a time when carrying that grudge around has burdened you?

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, We thank you for our time together today. Help us to remember to forgive and to love others as you love us. Be with us as we go into the world to do your work. Amen.

Matthew 18:21-35

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

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