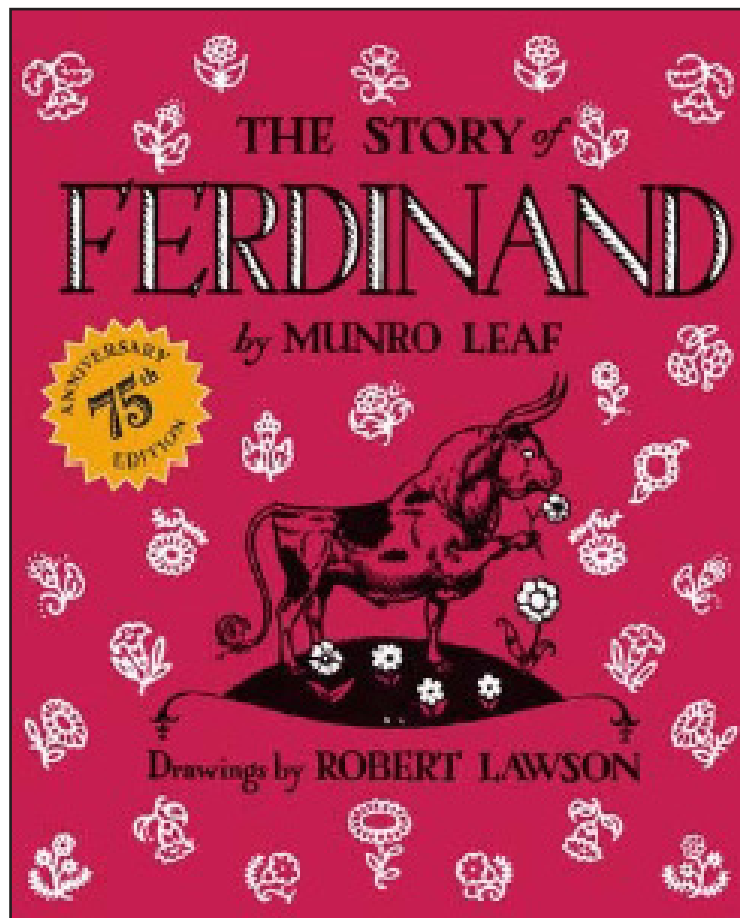


Living Grace

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
CYCLE C

“FINDING GOD’S PEACE IN ALL THINGS”



*The **Story of Ferdinand** is a true classic with a timeless message! All the other bulls run, jump, and butt their heads together in fights. Ferdinand, on the other hand, would rather sit and smell the flowers. So what will happen when he is picked for the bullfights in Madrid? Ferdinand decides to be true to himself, and this becomes his path to safety. Ferdinand's choice shows us how to be true, and how to raise our heads toward the God who made us. Through all his trials and tribulations, Ferdinand finally found his way home. "And for all we know he is sitting there still, under his favorite cork tree, smelling the flowers just quietly. He is very happy."*

Art & Faith

EXPLORING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE I AM FREE!

Drawing on paper, artist unknown ~ 2010

Lingnan University ~ Hong Kong, China

EXPLORING THE ART:

TRUE FREEDOM

Let us begin by pointing out that graffiti-style, bubble letters, drawn on a piece of torn-out sketch book paper isn't what we usually visualize when we think of "Sacred Art"!

Little is known about this image, but we can envision certain things about its creator and message. We can see and feel the excitement of the message. Through the colors, size, shape, and style used, the words practically leap off the paper. We can also assume that the artist is a young student due to the university setting and modern, graffiti-style lettering, and we can assume certain things are happening in the society due to the documented date and location.

After more than 150 years under British rule, the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred to communist China in 1997. The citizens of Hong Kong feared that the Chinese government would not keep its promise of autonomy, and by 2010 there were both political and economic problems.

In this setting, as well as in all times of trials and tribulations, we can be inspired by the message expressed so poignantly in this image - that no matter what kind of oppression, suffering, or adversity that may be surrounding us, we must remember that through God's unconditional love, we can find inner strength and freedom to be true to the person that God created us to be.

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

THE STORY OF FERDINAND

Written by Munro Leaf and Illustrated by Robert Lawson

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 21:25-28,34-36

Jesus said to his disciples:

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars,
and on earth nations will be in dismay,
perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People will die of fright
in anticipation of what is coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
And then they will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

**But when these signs begin to happen,
stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.**

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy
from carousing and drunkenness
and the anxieties of daily life,
and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.

For that day will assault everyone
who lives on the face of the earth.

Be vigilant at all times
and pray that you have the strength
to escape the tribulations that are imminent
and to stand before the Son of Man."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

BEING TRUE TO GOD - AND THE UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL THAT GOD CREATED EACH OF US TO BE - WILL LEAD US ON A SAFE PATH THROUGH ALL OF LIFE'S TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS.

This Gospel sounds alarming to those who are invested in the ways of the world, but those who are about the kingdom of God will hear reassurance. The point of this Gospel is not to instill fear - but to explain that as followers of Jesus, we are to expect the unexpected, and to be prepared. We can only do this through standing tall, proud, and strong in faith, love, and truth.

In the story of *Ferdinand*, we have another example of how God's ways are not the world's ways - seeking status, reward, applause, money - everything that the bulls and bullfighters are willing to fight and die for. The trick in this story is on both the bulls AND the bullfighters! Their pursuit of glory and reward would lead to death for either the bullfighter or the bull - what a trap! What good is a reward then? Ferdinand does what Jesus exhorts us to do in the Sunday Gospel reading - he gets through his trials and tribulations by being true to his own authentic nature, even under adversity and fear. This is Ferdinand's path to safety, freedom, peace, and ultimately, joy and love.

In this story we are inspired to stand (or sit!) by remaining true to our own unique, God-given nature even in the midst of fear, adversity, or humiliation. By recognizing our own nature, instilled in each of us by God, and by being true to that nature, we will find the freedom and rewards the Lord promises us. May we, like Ferdinand, discover God's way through all tribulations in our lives, both now and at the world's end. May we stand confidently in the strength of the God who created us.

God's grace is the peace and strength that comes from within, and no trial, person, or tribulation can ever take it from us. This is the freedom that Jesus wants all his followers to know, in and through all things.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What is your favorite thing to do? Is it the same as your siblings and friends? What makes each one of you unique and different? Are there people at your school or in your family that seem to want you to be something you aren't sometimes? Is being true to yourself a hard or easy thing to do? Where do you find the peace and strength to be true? Who can help you?

THE CHILDRENS' STORY: What was important to the bulls and bullfighters? Where did it lead them? What was different about Ferdinand? Ferdinand finds the path that sets him free. How does he do this? Ferdinand found safety and freedom by just being himself. What might that look like for you, your friends, and your family?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Does this Gospel sound strange and scary? The point of this Gospel is not to instill fear - but to explain that as followers of Jesus, we are to be prepared for the unexpected, and we do this by standing tall, proud, and strong in faith and truth. What is redemption? What does it mean that our redemption is at hand? What did it mean for Ferdinand?

Jesus calls his listeners to be reassured that although the signs in the world will cause fear, those who are focused on the Kingdom of God need not be afraid. Be ready, stand tall, stay proud and strong - your redemption, your freedom, is at hand.

Biblical Background

LUKE 21:25-28, 34-36

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: In the Gospel reading this week we meet Jesus in the middle of his “apocalyptic discourse”, the section of the Gospel that begins when Jesus boldly predicts that the Temple will be torn down within the lifetime of those listening. He is standing in the temple area in Jerusalem, speaking to the crowds. “Not a single stone will be left upon another.” This shocking and time specific prophecy comes to pass in 70 C.E. when the Roman army, under the command of the general (and future Roman Emperor) Titus leads an army that breaches the defenses of the city and razes the Temple to its foundation, never to be rebuilt again. The Temple symbolized all that Judaism represented in that historical period. The Temple in Jerusalem, in addition to being called the House of God, was known far and wide as the financial and cultural strength of the Jewish people two thousand years ago.

TERMS: **Signs of the sun, moon, and stars** In this Gospel Jesus uses apocalyptic language when he speaks of these signs in describing events on the earth that will cause general panic and dismay. People will “die of fright” because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. This kind of apocalyptic language is common to this genre and is meant to be read and interpreted in a “literary” rather than in a “literal” sense. Remember there was no mass media at the time, and it was believed that the stars and their movements held messages. These celestial points of reference indicated that current political factions and reigns of secular leaders will come to an end. Recall that the wise men from the east followed a “star” that had appeared in the heavens.

Stand erect and raise your heads Jesus warns the disciples that when they see this predictive prophecy come to fulfillment, they should “stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” In each potential scenario, the historical events that lead to the taking of Jerusalem and to the destruction of the Temple do in fact come to pass. One person will respond in fear and another in faith. To stand and raise hands indicates trust, freedom, and true faith. Early Christians were often depicted as standing with their arms raised to connote freedom and fearlessness.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: When all that is prophesied comes to pass, those who listened that day will remember this predictive prophecy. This will result in the realization that the Son of Man (a title of the Messiah that Jesus appropriates for himself) will be honored as a figure of great power and one worthy of honor. The boldness of the prediction, and the unlikely nature of its being fulfilled in any number of lifetimes, would shock the world and bring glory to the Son of Man, the Messiah. Christians will not cower at the end of the Temple as they hear the news of its destruction. They will lift up their heads, and be prepared, filled with trust in God.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: Two personal responses to times of tribulation are imagined. The first is terror. People actually dying of fright as they anticipate what is coming upon the world. Their world was smaller than ours. It was comprised of the ten provinces that made up the Roman Empire. Still, the thought of armies advancing across Israel to lay siege on Jerusalem was enough to shake the Israelites “heavens and earth” in anticipation of the destruction that army might unleash upon the holy city and its civilian population.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Ferdinand found safety and freedom to go home by just being himself. What might that look like for you, your friends, and your family?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: FREE TO BE ME
TRUST FROM WITHIN

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Create "hope candles" for Advent that reflect OUR TRUE SELVES. 1) Give each person a clear votive candle holder. 2) Have them choose stickers that reflect who they are, what they love, and what is important to them. 3) Decorate the outside of the candle holder with the stickers. 4) On the candle, with a marker write, "Hope in Christ Jesus". 5) On the bottom of the candle tape the statement, "Hope is...".

Talk about how the light of Christ is alive and present in us and in all things. If we keep hope alive, it will carry us through and give us peace in serious trials and tribulations. The best thing we can do is to bring our true selves to every situation. That will give us peace, and in that peace, we will find strength for our journey toward inner freedom and eventually joy!