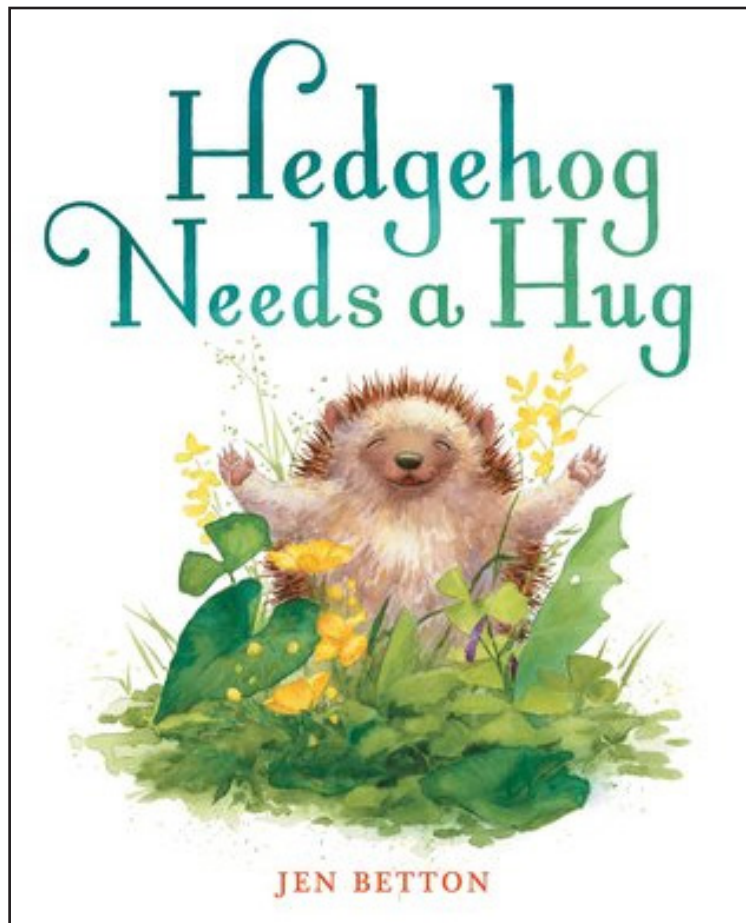


Living Grace

CYCLE C 8TH SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

“CLEAR ALL OBSTACLES TO GRACE & GROWTH”



*In **Hedgehog Needs a Hug**, poor Hedgehog needs a hug in the worst way. He wakes up in a sad state and knows that a hug will make him feel so much better. He approaches forest animals and asks for hugs. No one wants to hug Hedgehog. They are afraid of his prickles, but they give him excuses why they can't hug him. Rabbit, Raccoon, and Turtle turn him down, but Fox agrees to hug him, but Hedgehog realizes Fox wants to eat him, so he scurries away! Finally, Hedgehog finds Skunk, who also experiences a life of rejection for the way he was made, and they become fast friends as they share a nice big hug!*



REVERENDFUN.COM

Editorial Cartoon by Richard Germain ~ 2008
Harper Collins Christian Publishing

EXPLORING THE ART:

An editorial cartoon is drawing and text that illustrates the artist's opinion or commentary on a specific topic. The artist typically combines artistic skill, hyperbole, satire, and humor in order to question authority and draw attention to corruption, hypocrisy, or other ills of society. *Hyperbole* is the exaggeration statements or claims not meant to be taken literally. *Satire* is the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize something, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and current "hot topic" issues. *Humor* is the power to evoke laughter or to express what is amusing, comical, or absurd. Editorial cartoonists use visual metaphors and caricatures to address complicated situations, and therefore sum up a current event with a humorous or emotional picture. The humor in an editorial cartoon can reduce people's anger towards and event or issue, and therefore serves a useful purpose to increase awareness and understanding of an issue, and to open a door to awareness and consideration of opposing viewpoints. Not all editorial cartoons are meant to be funny. Some of the most effective editorial cartoons are not humorous at all. Editorial cartoons provide a window into history by showing us what people were thinking and talking about at a given time and place. Today's editorial cartoons will provide the same record of our own time.

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:

HEDGEHOG NEEDS A HUG

Written by & Illustrated by Jen Betton

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 6:39-45

Jesus told his disciples a parable,
"Can a blind person guide a blind person?
Will not both fall into a pit?
No disciple is superior to the teacher;
but when fully trained,
every disciple will be like his teacher.
Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye,
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?
**How can you say to your brother,
'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,'
when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye?**
You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first;
then you will see clearly
to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.

"A good tree does not bear rotten fruit,
nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.
For every tree is known by its own fruit.
For people do not pick figs from thornbushes,
nor do they gather grapes from brambles.
A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good,
but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil;
for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

SEEING WITH A COMPASSIONATE HEART FREES US FOR ABUNDANCE.

Could there be a more perfect character to help us understand what Jesus is teaching in this Gospel? Hedgehog, who is covered in spiny prickles, teach us about the blessings and challenges of splinters. He wakes up hungry, and not just hungry for food, but with a hungry heart. He needs a hug, but Rabbit is too preoccupied, Raccoon doesn't want Hedgehog near him, Turtle is snoozing his way through the day in his own little shell, Fox has an ulterior motive. All the animals have a splinter in their own eye, as so many of us do when we are too busy, preoccupied, checked-out, or greedy, and we can't see the needs of others. We can't even see our own true needs. Hedgehog finally finds the solution to his dilemma in Skunk, who also experiences a life of pain and rejection for the way he was made.

In this Gospel, Jesus teaches that we must take the big beam out of our own eye, before we attempt to take the tiny splinter out of our brother's eye. As usual, he is teaching indirectly to the religious leaders of the day and chastising them for their blindness. How can a teacher or leader train someone in the ways of God, if they relate to their student with superior status, as if they themselves are God? The whole point of discipleship (i.e. training another in the way of the kingdom of God) is for the teacher to have the humility to grow the disciple beyond the teacher. Jesus continues by saying that if religious leaders "lord" their knowledge and status over their students (the "weaker ones"), then the leaders are blind. The blind leading the blind will not grow the kingdom of God. A teacher who holds their status and position over their own student is blind and missing the point. The kingdom of God is all about becoming fruitful, and abusing power and authority gets in the way of good fruit. The kingdom of God doesn't value status, but values human growth.

How can we learn to remove the beam from our eye before we remove the splinter from our brother's? In the journey of Hedgehog, we see how a little guy with a lot of splinters breaks through his dilemma and fulfills the needs of his heart. His needs are shared by all of us, those with splinters and those without. Imagine living with the pain of not being accepted and loved because of the way you were made? Everyone is made in the image of God, no matter what race, abilities, appearance, or earning power we have. To not "see" another's inherent dignity as a human, is to have a beam in our own eye. Hedgehog and Skunk can both see the inherent dignity in each other. They are both humiliated (and therefore, made humble) by their own pokey-ness and stinky-ness. It is only in their humility that they feel free to express their need for a hug. Their hearts are full and free. They see the presence of God in all. If Rabbit, Raccoon, Turtle, and Fox understood this beautiful exchange, they would learn how to break out of their own shells and complacency to be able to give and receive love freely. They would be able to admit that they need hugs, and that they have love to give away, too. These are the kind of breakthroughs in "sight" that Jesus is calling forth in all of us. There will always be time to take one more nap, but an unexpected hug (to or from) could be a moment that stays with us forever. This is the point Jesus makes. Who are our real teachers? Where do the riches of the kingdom of God really reside? The "hedgehogs and skunks" of this world are the ones who truly understand what the kingdom of God is all about.

This Gospel ends with the example of a tree bearing good fruit or rotten fruit, and this metaphor would have been familiar to the Jewish people that Jesus was speaking to. Jesus is operating on a "human growth model of discipleship", not a "status model of governance", in which the student will always be subject to the teacher. Then, the entire kingdom of God will grow in vast breadth and scope, like a large, bountiful tree. Jesus often refers to the dynamics of the kingdom of God as a restoration of the lush growth in the Garden of Eden, where humanity dwelt in union with God, where there was no shame and all needs were provided for.

Jesus shows us that his way will grow our hearts so that we can grow into fruitful trees. Skunk and Hedgehog filled each others' hearts, and anyone who saw their big hug would be moved to "see". How can we remove the beams from our own eyes, so that we can see and (hug!) the seemingly unlovable in our own lives?

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Have you ever seen a hedgehog or a skunk? Would you be likely to go up and ask them for a hug? Sometimes are there kids on the playground who might be different than you? How does that make you feel? Do you think they would welcome a hug from you? Do they have any obstacles? What are your obstacles?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What were the obstacles for Rabbit, Raccoon, Fox, and Turtle? Why did Hedgehog and Skunk not have any obstacles? Do you think if the other animals saw their hug, they would get over their obstacles and want to join in the hug?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How does Jesus tell us to get over our own obstacles so that we can see the inherent dignity and potential for love in each and every person? How might we admit that we have obstacles? With courage from the Holy Spirit, how can we help others to remove their obstacles?

Who lives in your community with hungry hearts - homeless, disabled, sick, immigrant, or otherwise vulnerable people? Like Hedgehog, the ability to be humble and open in our need for God and for love, is what gives us true "sight." How can we "hug" people that others are afraid of? Could that free other people of their blindness to share love as well? How does this make all of us into trees that bear good fruit?

Biblical Background

LUKE 6:39-45

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This week we return to Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. The mount is on a slope rising up from the sea of Galilee. It is a beautiful and restful setting which offered the Jesus' listeners a nice place to settle into as they struggle with these difficult teachings. Here is where he begins to speak in parables. Parables are creative stories or images that tell a story with the intent of shocking the listening audience with some unusual aspect of the tale. The shock element arrests the listener and leaves the mind in doubt as to the precise meaning of the parable. The parables of Jesus reveal his genius. His ability to create parables on the spot, and use them to challenge his listening audience, is what drives the message home. No one had ever taught like this before, or ever would again. Teaching in parables is a style unique to Jesus.

TERMS: Hypocrites Jesus calls some of the religious leaders hypocrites when he wants to shame them in public. The word hypocrite (in Greek) loosely defines the role of an actor - someone who projects to others another person while performing on a stage. The parabolic image of a pair of "blind guides" trying to lead one another, or anyone else for that matter, is quite comical. You could pull this off easily (and without risk of bodily harm) if the scene was imagined on a local stage.

Beam in the eye Another scene imagined on a stage is suggested in the parable about the beam and the splinter. On stage, it would be comical for a person blinded by a beam (think of a two-by-four) in his own eye, to be confident that he would be able to remove a small splinter of wood from the eye of his brother. Jesus uses these two parabolic images to show how foolish both situations would be in real life. The blind cannot lead the blind. Anyone with a beam in their own eye, would not be able to see well enough to extract a splinter from the eye of anyone else, no matter how hard they try.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Where did Jesus acquire this knowledge about actors on the stage? He grew up in the rural ridgetop village of Nazareth, so he probably didn't attend a theatre there, but there was a Roman theatre in the resort city of Sepphoris, which was known as the "jewel city" of Galilee. This opulent Roman enclave was constructed during the lifetime of Jesus, and its theatre may have been the source of work for a young Jesus and his father, Joseph. We can easily imagine Jesus, on a break from construction work, watching actors rehearse on the Sepphoris stage, pretending behind masks, to be persons other than themselves. Could this experience have been the genesis of his callous distaste for the hypocrites, the religious actors on the stage of life, who were masked and blind themselves but still felt they could direct the lives of others? We may never know, but we do know that in the earliest centuries of the church, the profession of acting (along with being an innkeeper or prostitute!) was forbidden for Christians. Jesus' criticism of the "hypocrites" among the religious leaders in his day might be best explained by his exposure to the theatre in Sepphoris. The use of parables in the Gospel of Luke reveal Jesus' unique ability to engage and hold the attention of an audience that he intends to teach and transform. The parables worked for him then, and properly understood, will work for us now.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Jesus also wanted his disciples to know that a tree is known by its fruit. A fig tree cannot produce dates, and a date palm cannot produce figs. What spiritual fruit is most evident in your life? Jesus teaches that words matter, and it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. In the New Testament, the heart is the seat of emotively infused thought. You think with your heart in the Middle Eastern world of the Jesus; the brain and the heart work in tandem. Thinking with your heart translates to thinking with your mind in the Western world. The words that we speak, and the way that we speak them, reveal what is going on in our minds. Words spoken cannot be taken back. Words can be used to bless or curse. Jesus wants us to know that the words we speak, and the manner in which we speak them, reveal our inner character.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How does a compassionate person truly “see”? How could Hedgehog and Skunk “see” each other? How can we grow good fruit in our families and communities with compassionate hearts?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: **SEEING WITH THE HEART**
HUMILITY & INTEGRITY

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Learn about the many causes of physical blindness. Discover what kind of services are available in your community for those who are blind and for others with disabilities. What do you think creates spiritual blindness? Why is it that often those with disabilities are free to “see with their hearts”? How does having a compassionate heart help us to see? As a family, brainstorm how you might reach out to those in your community with disabilities, and find ways you can learn from them how to truly “see”.