

Living Grace

CYCLE C 7TH SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

“FOR-GIVING MAKES ROOM FOR MORE”



*In **My Little Gifts**, we learn there are many types of gifts. You can give a big, shiny, wrapped gift on Christmas morning, but you can also give the gifts of your help or your time. You can bake a cake for your parents or share what you learned in school with your little sister. You can help a friend unravel a knotty bracelet or smile at a stranger who looks sad. With a spirit of generosity, you'll find you have many gifts to give to the world—and that giving can be even more fulfilling than receiving! It does not matter if a gift is big or small, fancy or plain, only that it comes from the heart.*



THE RECOGNITION OF JOSEPH BY HIS BROTHERS

Painted Fresco by Peter von Cornelius ~ 1816-1817

Deutsche Akademie Villa Massimo ~ Rome, Italy

EXPLORING THE ART:

Unresolved anger leads to bitterness, hostility, and revenge. Forgiveness leads to freedom and reconciliation. No character in the drama of the Old Testament better illustrates the fundamentals of forgiveness than Joseph. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because their father loved Joseph best. They sold him into slavery and told their father that he had been eaten by a wild animal, and after years of suffering in slavery and prison, we would think that Joseph would have every right to be angry & bitter! Joseph could have been so angry with God for allowing him to be in such a terrible situation, but he recognized that God was with him in his sufferings and that the loving hand of the sovereign God was at work in these events. He was even able to forgive his brothers for betraying him and for the cruelty and harm they caused him!

Peter von Cornelius was part of a group of young German artists, called the Nazarenes, who aimed to revive honesty and spirituality in Christian art. "Fresco" is a distinctive style of art using a technique of mural painting that is done upon freshly laid, wet plaster. Water is added to dry-powder pigment which merges with the wet plaster. With the setting of the plaster, the painting becomes enmeshed in the wall.

ULTIMATE FORGIVENESS

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:

MY LITTLE GIFTS

Written by Jo Witek & Illustrated by Christine Roussey

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples:

"To you who hear I say,

love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

To the person who strikes you on one cheek,

offer the other one as well,

and from the person who takes your cloak,

do not withhold even your tunic.

Give to everyone who asks of you,

and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

For if you love those who love you,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners do the same.

If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners,

and get back the same amount.

But rather, love your enemies and do good to them,

and lend expecting nothing back;

then your reward will be great

and you will be children of the Most High,

for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged.

Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Give, and gifts will be given to you;

a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing,

will be poured into your lap.

For the measure with which you measure

will in return be measured out to you."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS OPEN THE FLOW TO GOD'S GIFTS THAT POUR FORTH ENDLESSLY INTO OUR LAPS.

Can you imagine being one of Jesus' disciples hearing this message? It is important to note here that Jesus is talking to his disciples - the people who have already committed to following his teachings. To people who had not already begun to follow Jesus, these words would have seemed as preposterous as they do to us today! To be a disciple, both then and now, means that we first have an encounter with Jesus, and then if we feel compelled to, we listen and follow him. This is how we can understand more clearly what his message and teaching is all about. After taking some time to do this part, we then decide to change our way of life and go in a completely new direction, just like the apostles who dropped their nets and followed Jesus. To be a disciple means that we have "dropped our nets". Our whole life and orientation seeks to walk in the way of Jesus. To walk in the way of Jesus, is to learn the way of the heavenly Father. To be a disciple is to grow in the character of God. Christians then, as disciples of Jesus, are able to be God-like in the world today.

In the beginning of the gospel, Jesus says if someone strikes you, turn the other cheek and let them strike you again. Can you imagine?! How could a person ever do that? Our children's story, *My Little Gifts*, helps us understand what Jesus is inviting us to do. The big sister is all excited about her new red suitcase, but the little sister runs over, wants to take part in the joy of the new gift, and takes the suitcase. Of course, a fight ensues. This is HER suitcase, and if the little sister takes it, she will be left without something she loves. The father explains that she doesn't have to give it away, but she can invite her sister into her joy by sharing and including her. She won't lose out, instead we will gain more by sharing. When we understand this concept of giving and sharing, we step into God's flow of endless love and life.

Let's look at an example in nature to understand how God works. Nature (like human beings) is God's work of art. Farmers plant wheat with the faith that it will grow and bring forth food, but who makes the wheat grow? A loving and caring Creator who wants to give us all that we need. We have to do some of the work, but the life and the grace to grow things comes from God. We must rely on God for this growth. We are all cared for by a loving Father who provides fruits from the earth to nourish us - both saints and sinners alike. God wants us to love each other and to give with the same non-judgmental generosity, because that is the nature of God, to love and to give. And to forgive.

To understand what happens to us when we don't forgive, we might imagine this wheat field in winter when the ground is frozen. When someone hurts us, our first response is usually to want to get even. In the time of Jesus, people believed in "an eye for an eye" - if your eye got plucked out in a fight, then you take out the other guy's eye. Jesus completely turns this idea upside down. He tells us that if we do not forgive and offer mercy to the person that harms us, we stop the growth, not just for the person that hurt us, but for ourselves as well. God does not want this to happen. Instead, he wants his love and grace to flow abundantly throughout the world. This is the secret to bringing heaven, the kingdom of God, to earth. When we choose to not forgive, our hearts become like the frozen ground in the wheat field, and sometimes we stay in winter for many years. When we forgive, the ground softens, and life can grow again. We will be fed and so will the person who hurt us, along with all the other people around us. The most amazing thing is that this wheat then grows and grows and grows, forever and ever. We then have so much wheat, we can't ever use it all ourselves. It flows and flows into our laps a hundredfold. The gifts from God pour forth into everyone we meet, along with the person who hurt us, and everyone that they love and are close to, and beyond. Like the siblings in our story, we must keep our hearts soft, open, and receptive to giving and receiving. Then, the spirit and joy of Christmas moves from under the tree to recess, cakes, best friends, learning, kisses, friendship, and creating.

In this Gospel we hear about what the character of God is like, and we are invited to follow Jesus with our whole hearts, lives, and being. Jesus tells us that when we give like God, so much more will come back to us. It will be beyond measure, more than what our hearts and laps can hold. Wow!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What was a favorite gift you received this Christmas? Did you want to share it? Did any fights break out between siblings? How were they resolved? How do you respond when someone hurts you?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What does the father in the story teach us about sharing? What are the results of learning to care and share for the children in the story? For the kids in the story, what joys does giving and sharing bring them?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How does Jesus tell his disciples that they should respond when someone hurts them? Does that sound crazy? What does Jesus promise if we love our enemies? In what ways is Jesus asking us to love the way God loves, and to give the way God gives? If we don't forgive what happens to us? How are we like God when we do forgive? When we forgive like God does, what are the results? How does it make a difference, not just for us and the person that hurt us, but for all the people in both our lives?

Jesus says that God's gifts and love are limitless. "Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap". Forgiveness starts the flow. What joys do forgiving, giving, and sharing bring to you and your family?

Biblical Background

LUKE 6:27-38

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus was a healer, preacher, and teacher. He used healing as a way to draw large crowds. Once they gathered, he engaged them as a preacher, stirring their hearts toward a deeper commitment to himself and his message to prepare them for what life would be like as his students in the new kingdom of God. Jesus “the healer and “the preacher” transitions to Jesus “the teacher” in this section of the Sermon on the Plain. The plain is a big open area in Galilee where large crowds can gather and stay for a time. Jesus begins to open up some of his more difficult teachings as the crowd will have more time and space to stay awhile and process his teaching. This section is being taught to those who have already committed to following him as disciples. As disciples, they are now learning what it means to become like Jesus and walk in the ways of his Father. Jesus reveals his skill as a preacher as he uses powerful statements of challenge to draw potential disciples into a deeper relationship.

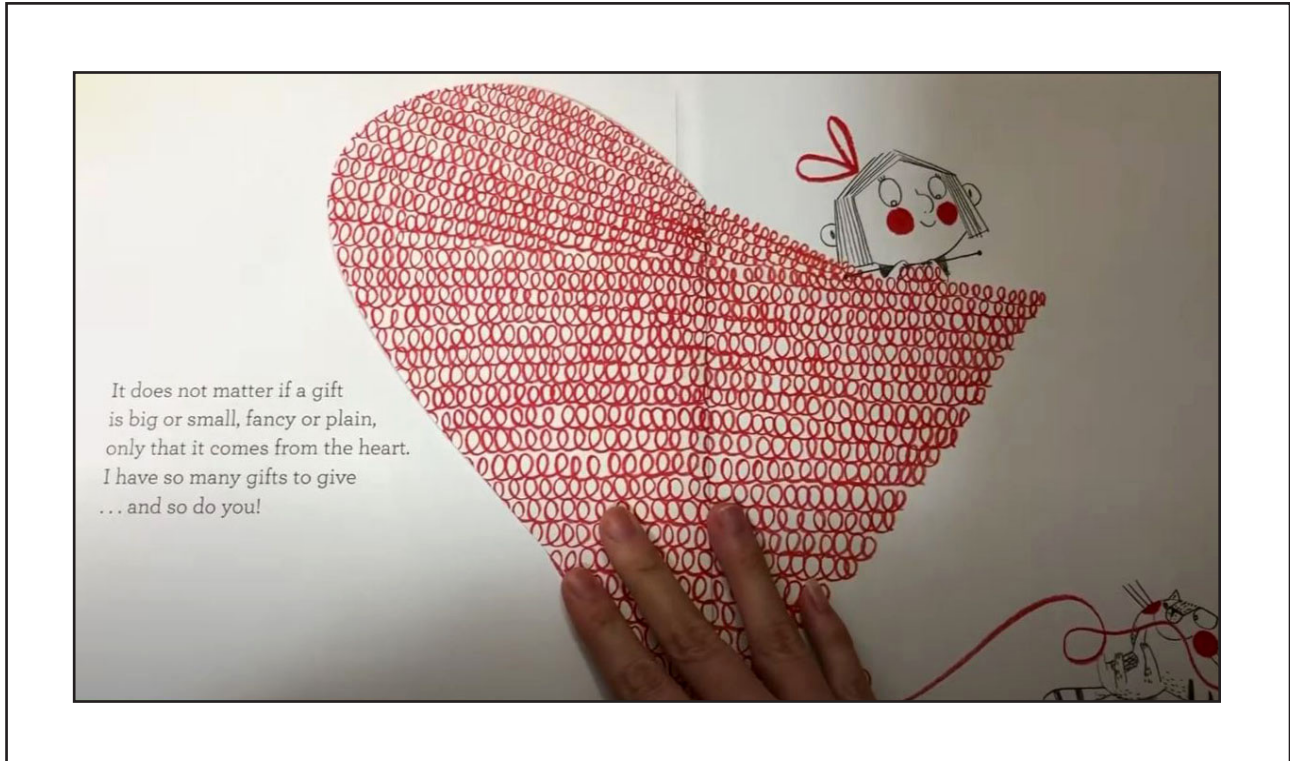
TERMS: Love/Hate Jesus “the teacher” begins by laying down his command that if they were going to be his disciples, then they were going to have to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them. He expects his disciples to bless those who curse them and pray for those who mistreat them. The Biblical idea of love differs from our modern and western understanding of the same word. In the Bible, love is demonstrated by remaining attached to and in relationship with others, typically to members of the family group. Conversely, when someone hates in the Biblical world, they have detached themselves from an interpersonal relationship. To “love” means to be and stay connected, while “hate” means to break that connection. Recall the challenging teaching of Jesus, that to be his disciples, we will have to love him and hate our parents. (Luke 14:26) On the surface this seems absurd. The true meaning of this teaching is an invitation is to detach ourselves (hate) from parental provision, and attach ourselves (love) to Jesus as our teacher.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Jesus says that when someone strikes us on the cheek, turn the other cheek to him; don't retaliate; allow time for another person to intervene; keep the peace. If someone takes your cloak, give him your tunic as well. If anyone takes what is yours, do not demand it back. These are the very high expectations Jesus envisions for those who want to follow him? Jesus is most likely referring to members of the Roman military who ruled ancient Israel with an iron fist. Roman soldiers could strike anyone at any time, and the people were not allowed to fight back. The soldiers could demand someone to give them their cloak, and they would have to do it. Jesus teaches that if this does happen, embarrass the bullies by offering your tunic as well. The Roman soldiers could force people out of their way. If they demand this for one mile, to go two miles. Double down. Be a witness to the gratuitous love of God at all times. Then Jesus teaches the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do unto you.” Jesus reminds his disciples that even sinners love other sinners, so how would that make the his followers any different? Why should Jesus' disciples feel honorable if they only love those who already love them back? Jesus wants his followers to love their enemies, even if they are Roman military overlords, who act as agents of aggression and oppression. His disciples are to do good to the very enemies that hate them. Wow. This is a high calling. It is a challenge issued by Jesus to men and women who have experienced Jesus as healer and preacher. Now they know him as a teacher and one who teaches with a unique authority.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Stop judging and stop condemning, and you will not be judged and condemned yourself. Forgive and you will be forgiven. These teachings have been an ongoing challenge for Christians throughout the course of history. It seems that the early church needed continual reminding that Jesus came into the world to embrace sinners and to chastise the righteous. We still need this reminding. All the time. It is so easy to fall into a habit of judgment and condemnation. When we judge and condemn, we shut out the Holy Spirit and deprive God to break through old barriers and shine a new light in the world. In Christ, our onetime enemies can become our new brothers, sisters, and friends. The Gospel ends with an admonition to give to others, knowing that when we give generously to others, God will be inclined to give generously to us. Get rid of the judging, so forgiveness, grace, and growth can flow!

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: As a family, talk about a time that someone hurt you and how you reacted? What does Jesus ask of his disciples? Why? When we forgive and give like God does, what is the result? Talk about examples when you have seen results of "good measure pouring forth" into people's lives?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: **MERCY**
EXTREME GENEROSITY

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) As a family, learn more about sheep and how they give their wool over and over again to keep us warm. How do they give like God gives? Look for more animals and other examples in nature that give gifts to human beings so that we can be taken care of. How do they act like God? 2) Listen to the song, Blessings, by Chance the Rapper. What are his thoughts on how to keep the flow of blessings alive? Write your own song or poem of blessings together as a family!