

Living Grace

Cycle C 24th Sunday
Ordinary Time

“LOVE OVERRULES”



*In **Bella's Rules**, Bella knows her family's rules by heart, but she much prefers her own - candy for breakfast, no hair-washing, and no such thing as bedtime. And then . . . Bella, the wild child, gets a new pet! At first, Bella and Puppy are the very best of friends. But when it turns out that Puppy doesn't like the family rules either (including the rule not to gnaw off Bella's teddy bear's arm), well... it's time for a little puppy training. And Bella might just learn a thing or two herself!*



MONUMENTO LA ROGATIVA

*Bronze Sculpture by Lindsay Daen ~ 1971
San Juan, Puerto Rico, United States*

EXPLORING THE ART:

LOVE CONQUERS ALL - EVEN WEAPONS

La Rogativa is a famous bronze statue located in San Juan, Puerto Rico, which was commissioned for the 450th anniversary of the founding of the city. A Rogativa is a large procession of people making a plea to God for help.

In 1797, Puerto Rico was still under Spanish rule, and the city of San Juan was attacked by the British army. The Spanish army entrenched strongly along the beach, bravely defending this area of the capital. The confrontation lasted for several months. Both sides of the battle began to falter. According to a very popular legend, when the Spanish army was about to surrender, the women of the city formed a Rogativa, or prayer procession, to marching through the streets with their Bishop praying for the deliverance of the City, while carrying torches and candles.

British generals saw the procession from a distance at sea. In the dark of night they could only see the lights of the torches and candles, and the first thing they thought was that those torches were a new contingent of Spanish troops that came to reinforce the army defending the beach. With this idea, the British decided to withdraw their troops, believing that it would be impossible to win the battle with all those new reinforcements that had reached San Juan. A most unusual "norm" creates peace for the people of San Juan.

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:

BELLA'S RULES

Written by Elissa Haden Guest & Illustrated by Abigail Halpin

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 15:1-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them he addressed this parable.

"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?

And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy

and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'

I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

"Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it?

And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.'

In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

RULES GUIDE US, BUT GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY PREVAIL!

This week we examine three stories that demonstrate how Love Overrides. A misbehaving little girl, a lost sheep, and a lost coin. In two of the stories Jesus tells how to deal with the lost, as he is being challenged by the religious leaders (the rule makers of his day). Jesus tells these stories to challenge the rule makers as to who is really lost, and to demonstrate the appropriate response for leaders in the Kingdom of God. Jesus points to love and mercy as the "new norm", and that their current "norm" is broken. To leave one lost is a "broken norm". Wholeness is restored when the lost are found and safely restored.

Jesus introduces a new norm, that of love and mercy. The good shepherd leaves no one behind, the widow looks for what is lost immediately and at the most inappropriate time. The shepherd seemingly unwisely, leaves his entire flock to find one lost sheep. In the parable, when the lost sheep is found, the whole community experiences the joy of the shepherd. When the sheep is restored, and the community's hearts are full, love is restored and grows. Jesus wants the Pharisees to see that this is how the kingdom of God rules, and grows.

The widow turns her whole household upside down to find just one lost coin, even at night which is the time for sleep and rest. Sometimes we must go through chaos and inconvenience to right what has gone wrong. Only then will we be able to rejoice - when true and lasting order is restored, provision will be restored as well.

In our children's story, Bella wants to live by her own rules, creating havoc for her babysitter and parents. Bella's parents teach about the importance of rules, and the utmost importance of mercy, by getting her a new puppy. Bella originally wants to withdraw her love when Puppy won't live by her rules. But she eventually learns that rules bring order, but the greatest rule of all is the Law of Love.

Joy is the fruit of all things being restored. God's rule of love is that all shall be restored. When mercy is the path to the heart for those that are lost, then the fruits of true peace and joy will be restored - that is God's "norm"!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Does your family have "family rules"? Do family members ever break some of the family rules? What is the result? Have you ever broken the rules? What have been the results? What is the difference of a "rule" and a "norm"?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: Have you ever tried to train a puppy? Did you set rules for the puppy? What if they break the rules? What "norms" do we share as a culture regarding the treatment of animals? How might people break the norm in the treatment of animals? How might people love their pets in a way that goes beyond the norm?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What is Jesus calling the religious leaders to? Do they live by the rules but break the norm in loving the way God does? How might that happen? What does Jesus teach them (and us!) in the stories of the lost sheep and lost coin? How as Christian people are we called to go beyond the norm? Offer concrete suggestions as to what that might look like.

Jesus calls the "new norm" the Kingdom of God. Share examples of the "new norm" Jesus is talking about when love and mercy are the rule.

Biblical Background

LUKE 15:1-32

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus is being hosted in the home of a well-known “sinner” in the community, most likely in the region of Galilee. He is probably being hosted by a tax collector (the Gospel author Matthew) who has also invited other guests who were considered sinners by the religious leaders in the community.

TERMS: Parable Teaching in parables is unique to Jesus. A parable is a story that depends on an understanding of the culture and common life of the Middle East nearly two thousand years ago. The parables of Jesus shock the listening audience with the intent of leaving the mind in doubt as to its precise meaning. Just like the listeners in the time of Jesus, you and I are required to make application of this teaching in our own times. Did we understand correctly? Do we get it? That is our challenge as disciples - then and now.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Table fellowship was an intimate affair. Food was served on common plates that were shared by everyone around the table. There was a risk of ritual defilement if a person was “unclean” and shared the same dipping bowl with others in proximity. This is what the religious leaders feared, that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them”. If they are defiled and unclean, then Jesus would be defiled and unclean also. Certainly, a Rabbi as well-known and respected as Jesus would understand this situation.

Also, in the Middle East the concept of personal responsibility differs from our understanding in the Western world. In the Middle East no one is responsible for anything. In the parable, the listeners would think that shepherd of the flock did not lose the sheep - the sheep got itself lost. Therefore, the shepherd would not feel a responsibility to seek the lost animal and return it to the flock. It would eventually be easy to find that lost sheep as it would become “cast down”, and the weight of its coat would prevent the animal from standing. It would languish on its back bleating for help. The shepherd would be able to hear the cry, but so too would any local predator. It would be dangerous for the shepherd to seek and save such an animal. No normal shepherd would risk his own life for a single member of a flock that numbers nearly 100 animals.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Every parable has a shock element built into the story. In this parable the shock is that the shepherd risks everything to go and find the lost sheep, and there the work only begins. He would also have to restore the sheep so that it would be able to walk, and then he would have to lead that animal back to the village. In the parable, he is a celebrated hero, because so few (if any) shepherds would risk so much for a single animal.

Similarly, the woman with the lost coin does the irregular thing at the irregular time. She is doing business at night by the light of the lamp. That is not the proper time of day to be doing business, much less to drop everything to search the house at night to find a single coin. It would make more sense to do such things in the light of day. In both parables, Jesus is making the point that sometimes we need to stop everything to return what is lost, to bring all to right order and care. Even when it is inconvenient at the time, don't wait. Risk everything - even your own life - to restore the lost - to be “righted” like the sheep to healthy living and safety. For Jesus, Love Rules. He teaches us - that doing something that is customarily “unwise” (like eating with sinners) - is to bring the lost to God's light and to new life!!

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Jesus calls the “new norm” the kingdom of God? What are examples of the new norm Jesus is talking about when love and mercy are the rule?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: **LOVING KINDNESS
TO LIFT SOMEONE UP**

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: As a family, identify groups and individuals that are isolated, in need, or cut off. Do the rules of your community include them or ignore their needs? Brainstorm ways to change their situation. How might the rules better serve those in need by creating “new norms” that reflect the values Jesus teaches of the Kingdom of God? Pray for this “new norm” as a family, and decide to take one step to advocate for those that need a lift.