

FAITH @ HOME

Week of February 24

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Luke 6:27-38

REFLECT: Children do not have many enemies. It may even be hard for adults to name those that stir hate in them, but everyone has bumped into someone who is having a bad day where nothing seems to be going right. Think of Alexander and his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

RESPOND: The ‘golden rule’ is not an easy concept even for adults, but compassion can be taught at any age. There’s a familiar refrain that reminds us that you never know what burden another person is carrying. This week, seek to embody that wisdom. Look for opportunities to offer compassion to yourself, your child, other parents and caregivers, or even the grocery store clerk. Wonder aloud with your child about what might be upsetting that person. Don’t hesitate to include yourself and your child in this realm of compassion. Dare to name aloud what angers or frustrates you or your child. Share, as well, what may have led to a temper tantrum. Maybe baby didn’t sleep enough or you are worried about something you heard on the news. Pray together that tomorrow is a better day.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ELSA ANDERS COOK



Elsa Anders Cook is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ who has served churches in New York, Maine, Washington and Pennsylvania. She volunteers at church now while supporting her husband in his service as a Major in the United States Army. Together, they have a toddler and a baby on the way. She blogs at cookingwithelsa.org.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Luke 6:27-38

REFLECT: There are a lot of reasons Jesus wants us to do this, and some of which we may not ever understand, but we listen and do as he says because we have faith in Jesus and in the way of love he teaches us. One of the reasons Jesus wants us to love our enemies, though, is because Jesus wants to heal the broken in our world, and Jesus wants us to help him to do that. And if a relationship is broken, it can't be healed with anger or revenge – it can only be healed with love. The Civil Rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., another follower of Jesus, said to his own followers who were being treated very poorly, that “Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Jesus tells us some ways that we can love our enemies, too. He says that we can do good to them, which might mean being nice and kind to someone, even if they are not always nice or kind to us. Jesus says that we should bless them, so we might give them a compliment or tell them something we like about them. Praying for people is another way we can love them. If someone is being ugly or mean to you or anyone else around them, there may be something hurt or broken in their own lives, and they might need our prayers.

But Jesus also tells us that we should “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” So when it feels really hard to love someone, we can think about how we would want to be treated, especially in the times when we are not being our best selves, and then should treat others the same way. This is how we help Jesus to heal that which is broken.

RESPOND: Identify someone who may not be very nice to you or those around them. Think of one thing you can do to love them – it can be doing an act of good toward them (maybe sharing something that's yours), blessing them by giving them a compliment or saying something nice to them, or pray for them with someone else in your life who likes to pray for people.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: APRIL CABALLERO



April is a young-ish adult with a passion for curating relevant and meaningful experiences of Christ through liturgy and creative expression. April is the Executive Assistant for the Office of the Bishop at the Diocese of Olympia, serving the Episcopal Church in Western Washington state from the foothills of the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

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ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Luke 6:27-38

REFLECT: We live in an age of social media and technology. Youth are constantly connected to each other: via texting, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or whatever new app is the current trend. Living in this age also means that it is easy to hide behind masks of technology and make our opinions known in anonymous ways that are damaging and hurtful to others. Cyberbullying and shaming is a real problem that young people face. Gossip, sharing false information, and name-calling in comments sections of videos or articles harms others. It is a lot harder to “love your enemies” when it’s easy to argue with them over a digital platform.

RESPOND: Take a few moments to “love your neighbor” over a digital space. Sit down and pray together for a friend or follower list on a social media site (including those people with whom you may not agree). Then, send an encouraging text, tweet, or message to people on your list, showing them God’s love. Make an effort to reach out to those people with whom you may not usually communicate in a positive way.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: VICTORIA HOPPES



Victoria Hoppes is the Camp Director at Waycross Camp and Conference Center and the Youth Ministry Coordinator for the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis. She has ministry experience with youth, family, and camping programs at both the parish and diocesan levels. She holds degrees from Texas Lutheran University and Luther Seminary. She also holds a certificate in Youth and Family Ministry from Forma's Faith Formation Academy. You can follow Victoria on her website, www.ministryincontext.com, or on social media (@vlhoppes).

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Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Luke 6:27-38

REFLECT: Today's Bible reading teaches that stumbling blocks will come. However, the Bible cautions us about being the person who causes our brothers and sisters-in-Christ to sin. It would be better for a person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around her neck than to cause "...one of these little ones to stumble." Further, Jesus told His disciples to rebuke other believers who sin, but to forgive them if they repent. And if they sin against you seven times in a day but say they repent, forgive them. How often have we caused other Christians to stumble? How often have we not been the example of faith that we should have been? We need to be careful about offending other Christians, especially those who are new to the faith.

Moreover, we need to practice forgiveness when people sin against us, remembering we have sinned against others as well. Applying today's Scriptures to our lives will help us walk in love, faith, and unity toward other Christians. And that's something God wants us to do.

RESPOND: Think back to a time when you sinned against another Christian. Did you repent quickly or make excuses? Now, think back to a time when another Christian sinned against you. Did you forgive them or find their behavior unforgivable? Pray for both the person who sinned against you and the person against whom you sinned.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ARETHA L. GRANT



Aretha Grant serves her local church as a Bible teacher and elder. She loves writing and is the author of *Overcomer: 25 Keys to Walking Victoriously*. Aretha resides in Hagerstown, MD with her husband and two youngest children. You can read Aretha's blog at www.arethagrant.com.

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