

FAITH @ HOME

Week of August 2, 2020

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Matthew 14:13-21

REFLECT: Jesus is tired. He's been preaching, teaching, and healing huge crowds of people, and now he wants to be alone. He gets into a boat and steers it toward an empty place on the side of a mountain where he can have quiet time. Except, the people don't want Jesus to be alone. They want to hear more from Jesus. They want him to keep preaching, teaching, and healing. This enormous crowd of people walks all the way around the water so that they can catch up with him. When Jesus sees them, he has compassion on them and cures their sicknesses. He gives up his quiet time and gives the people what they want.

We tend to focus on the feeding of the five thousand when this story comes up in the lectionary each year. What if this year, we instead focused on the first half of the text? Often, it's difficult for children to relate to Jesus or understand how he's feeling, but this story offers an ideal opportunity for connection. When in our own lives have we found ourselves like Jesus in the first verse, just wanting to be left alone? When have you sought out quiet time? Sometimes we can be around people, but still feel lonely. Has this ever happened to you at school or somewhere else?

RESPOND: Even though Jesus wants to be alone, the crowds of people follow him to his quiet place. He doesn't get angry though; he feels compassion for them. He gives up his quiet time and instead gives the people what they want. Like Jesus wanting to be alone, children want things all the time, from sugary sweets to magical pets, from play dates to nap-free afternoons. As a parent, more often than not, I express contrary wants and then ask my children to acquiesce to them. This is a time to ask young children how it feels when someone they love wants something different than them. How do we decide who gets what they want?

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ALLISON LILES



The Rev. Allison Sandlin Liles is a wife, mother, peacemaker, and priest learning to navigate life in the suburban wilds of Dallas, Texas. After working as Episcopal Peace Fellowship's Executive Director for six years, Allison has re-entered parish ministry in the Diocese of Fort Worth. She currently serves as the Priest-in-Charge of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Hurst, Texas and the editor of *Grow Christians*, a ministry of Forward Movement.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Genesis 32:22-31

REFLECT: The night that Jacob wrestles with God is certainly not the first nor the last time Jacob wrestles with someone or some aspect of his life. Starting in Genesis 25, we learn that Jacob grapples with his twin Esau before birth. Jacob wrestles with his brother, his parents and his place in the world as a second son. Escaping from these complications, he then wrestles with his father-in-law in a reality-TV-worthy existence that gains him two wives, their maids, eleven children and flocks of animals. Who he also wrestles with. As Jacob attempts to return to make amends with his wronged brother, he sends his large family ahead, and retires for the night. Alone, as is so often the case when we face our fears, frustrations, and failures, Jacob does not sleep but wrestles with an unidentified being until morning. Even as Jacob is injured, he holds on tight and demands that his wrestling partner bless him. The wrestler is actually God in disguise, and God grants Jacob a blessing. Like Jacob, God does not expect us to be perfect. God knows we may struggle with our families, our circumstances, or our futures. We may struggle with God even as we clutch on to God. God is right there with us in every struggle. Like Jacob's damaged hip, our struggles may leave us marked. Wrestling may change us. But holding on to God, dawn comes and our struggles cease. Through God's goodness, God is still with us, God blesses us.

RESPOND: Talk about what each member of your family wrestles with. Children may wrestle to master a new skill, family members may wrestle with one another, and everyone wrestles with their fears. We all wrestle. As a family or as an individual practice, create a list of what you wrestle with and incorporate it into a prayer, such as: "Dear God be with me when I wrestle. Today I wrestle with... I will hold tight to you as I wrestle with... and I ask that you bless me and help me hold on to you until I feel your goodness and your blessing and the morning comes. Amen."

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: LISA BROWN



Lisa Brown is the Director of Digital Ministry for Membership Vision. She is passionate about enriching the spiritual lives of people of all ages, facilitating immersive learning opportunities, collaborative art installations, and digital engagement. Her book, *The Best VBS Workbook Ever!* was published in 2017 and she is also a contributing writer to John Roberto's book, "Faith Formation with a New Generation" and 2020 InsideOut camp curriculum. Lisa continues to grow in personal faith and understanding through her participation in Education for Ministry (EfM), and earned a Certification in Leadership in Lifelong Faith Formation from Virginia Theological Seminary and Forma. A native of Pittsburgh, Lisa enjoys hiking the woods of Western Pennsylvania.

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ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Matthew 14: 13-21

REFLECT: “Oh! Oh! Oh! How good is the Lord, Oh! Oh! Oh! How good is the Lord, Oh! Oh! Oh! How good is the Lord, I will never forget what he has done for me.” – Anonymous

I am sure we all like to travel. I recall going to the Union of Black Episcopalians Conference in Los Angeles last summer. As I travelled from the airport to downtown, tents, garbage, and cars were noticed along the roadways. It was like a scene one would see in the movies, but this time around I saw not via television, but face to face. I asked the Uber driver, “Why are there so many homeless people?” His response opened my eyes: “the cost of living is just too high.” What if we found ourselves in that situation? What if we had to make our residence on side the road?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus broke bread and shared fish. What can we share with someone who does not have the luxury that we are able to afford, of which we at times become wasteful? Can we, like those who received a miracle, also shed light on someone’s darkness?

RESPOND: Often, we become so wasteful of our resources. We may be fortunate to receive an allowance. Can we save some of our allowance and offer a meal or clothing to someone who cannot afford it? Why not go and meet these people and, while you’re at it, write down their names, and pray for them.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: TREVAUGHN TODMAN



Trevaughn Todman is the Diocesan Youth Representative for the Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands. Trevaughn loves playing and listening to music and spending time with colleagues and family. His life is based around God, music, and youth. He describes his calling with these lyrics from Charles Wesley: “To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; O may it all my powers engage to do the Master’s will.”

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ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22

REFLECT: The words of this Psalm are like a balm to the troubled and busy mind. We spend much of our days racing around, focused on what we need to check off our to do lists, where we need to go, feeling guilty for not doing or being enough. But God is not concerned with our productivity rate. God is always good, always loving, full of compassion regardless of our ability to do it all. Forgot to return that call? God still loves you. Haven't cleaned out your glovebox in six months? God is compassionate. The psalmist tells us that God is near if we call. So, ask God to show up in your messy and imperfect life and God will be there offering you peace. Praise be to the one who loves us and offers goodness whether or not we get things done.

RESPOND: Read this Psalm aloud to yourself slowly and with great intention. As you read each verse pause and take a deep breath when you come to the asterisk. This may seem awkward at first but it is a helpful way to slow yourself down. Reading this way allows you to dwell with the words a little longer. To think more about what you are saying and how God is speaking to you through the words. It might be worth reading it a couple of times this way. Afterwards, consider how God's goodness is present in your life today and how you might respond to this with praise.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: SAMANTHA CLARE



Samantha Clare serves as the Director of Christian Formation at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, AR. She has a passion for spreading Jesus' call for social justice and she helps people to make connections between their daily and spiritual lives so that they can bring their whole and authentic selves to the world. You can find more of her writing at samanthaclare.me.

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