

FAITH @ HOME

Week of July 19, 2020

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

REFLECT: Jesus tells a parable about one person sneaking into another person's wheat field in the middle of the night to plant weeds without anyone seeing him. It's a really mean trick. The owner of the field knows that these weeds cannot be pulled out of the ground right away, because the wheat he wants to grow might be pulled up on accident.

The first time I planted a garden, I spent one morning weeding a section of vegetables. When I finished, I discovered instead of only pulling weeds, I also pulled all the green leaves of carrots that were trying to grow beneath the soil. I couldn't tell the difference between the sprouting greens of carrots and the weeds growing around them. I should have waited until the carrots grew a bit more before weeding the garden.

Good and bad exist together in gardens and in our world. They even exist together in the same people! Sometimes we might want to describe someone as a bad person, but Jesus tells us today that this is not our job. God can tell the difference between good and bad much better than we can and promises to make all things right in the end.

RESPOND: Take a walk and talk about the different flowers you see. Do you consider them to be bad weeds or good plants? Dandelions are great for this activity because adults and children usually have different opinions. Their bright yellow heads are delightful and are fabulous food sources for bees, but they can also take over yards. And what child doesn't love spreading the wind-borne seeds with a hearty blow?

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 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23

REFLECT: Sometimes it's easy to see the presence of God. God's majesty is in a sky full of stars. When we look to the ocean, or to mountain tops, or to the vast ocean, it's easy to imagine the wonder of God. When we gather in church, and with our family and friends, we feel God's presence in the warmth of our relationships. But what about when we are somewhere and we aren't feeling awe, or wonder, or warmth? What about those times when we are crabby and annoyed? Is God there, in line at the grocery store? On a crowded bus or subway? Visiting the dentist? Can we see God then? In our Genesis reading, Jacob awakes after a vivid dream and realizes "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" Jacob marks this place as a special spot, but what gives us hope is the realization that EVERY place is a special spot because God is THERE no matter where we are! As the Psalm explains, whether we are journeying or resting, whether sitting down or rising, God knows our words, ways, and thoughts. God is behind us and before us, all around us. There is no place where we can be that we are apart from the presence of God.

RESPOND: When you find yourself in a situation where you are irritated or cranky, take a deep breath and look around. Remind yourself "Surely the Lord is in this place!" and identify where you see God. Is God in the faces of those around you? In the way people engage with one another? Name how you find the hope and promise that God is with you and everyone around you in this moment, in this place, no matter how annoyed you might be!

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: Genesis 28:10-19a

REFLECT: Isn't God AWESOME? Often times we are unaware of God's presence. As we journey through our school years or through an unexpected period, we may wonder: where is God? Or, we may not even be looking for God, but: bam! God appears. I remember when I was in high school, there were days when the student body could be rather disruptive. Sometimes the people I kept around me were disruptive or family members were disruptive, among all the unstable activities. One wondered: where is God in the midst of it? I found myself most times going to an empty classroom to quietly sit and read Scripture or meditations. It was in those moments I realized, WOW! God is in the midst of it all and I never realized it. Are we so consumed by our situation that seeing God in our daily lives becomes difficult?

Jacob was on a journey, and he had an idea of his mission. We might not be sure what our journey may be like, but perhaps from Jacob's story we can learn to trust, even when we don't see, God.

RESPOND: Is there a place you can call Bethel? Find a quiet spot (it can be anywhere, even outside your home). Being in the presence of God brings great sense of safety. Or, you can take a silent walk and look around. See the wonders that God has made. Find a quiet spot in nature and just be still.

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: Romans 8:12-25

REFLECT: The author of this letter invites us to reframe our understanding of humanity's relationship to God. God is not our master, but our Father. We do not have the sort of relationship with God that a slave has with their master. One which is defined by ownership and transaction. God is not like a king that rules over us, a boss who employs us, or a judge who condemns us. Rather, our relationship with God is like that of the ideal parent and child. God's love for us nurtures and encourages growth. God takes delight in our lives, celebrates our successes and comforts us in our struggles. Our relationship with God is intimate and tender. It is the nature of this relationship that allows us to live with hope in faith rather than by faith in fear. A hope that there is glory for us to come, so great that we cannot even comprehend it. Because a parent is meant to share all that they have and all that they are with their child. And that is just what God has planned for us.

RESPOND: Some of us have positive associations with our relationships to our parents, others relationships are more complicated. When our relationship to our own parents was not reliably unconditionally loving this can sometimes make it difficult to frame God as father, mother, caregiver, and parent. Set aside any baggage you may be carrying around this for a moment. Can you imagine what it means for your life to have a parent in God who loves you fully? Share or write down one success that God celebrates with you this week and one struggle for which God provides you comfort.

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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