Jesus guides us into relationship with God and our neighbor.

- We are reminded that conflict and resentments are impediments to our relationship with others, and with God.
- Children practice all the building blocks of harmonious relationships: turn taking, communication, sharing and assertive expression.
- Preschool and Kindergarten age children learn about loving their neighbor.

**Question of the Week**

What do I most need to change in my life in order to better follow Jesus’ guidelines?
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Children play a ball game to learn a new meaning for the word neighbor.

Seat children in a circle on the floor. Begin by rolling the ball to one child and saying, “(Child’s name) is my neighbor.”

That child will catch the ball, then roll the ball to someone else in the circle, repeating your phrase with the new child’s name. Continue until all the children have been named as neighbors.

After the game, ask:
♦ Who are neighbors in our class? (Encourage children to name each other.)
♦ People we play with every day are our neighbors. Can you name neighbors who play with you?

Close by saying:
♦ Today’s story is about two neighbors who get mad.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Two Neighbors

Note: If you’d like, act out today’s story using two story figures; at the conclusion of the story, children can use the figures to talk about making peace. You can also put the figures at a free-play center and invite children to make up games. We recommend any sock puppets, plain dolls, stuffed animals or other simple figures you have available. Alternately, you can use the Story Figures, attached to this document.

Micah and Susanna were neighbors. Micah and Susanna were friends. They were going to God’s temple when they got into a fight.

“I don’t like you any more,” yelled Micah.

“I don’t like you either,” yelled Susanna.

Micah and Susanna were angry.

“I don’t want to be friends with you any more,” said Susanna.

“I don’t want to be your friend either,” said Micah.

When Micah got to the temple, he felt sad. He wanted Susanna to be there, too.

When Susanna got to the temple she felt lonely. She liked to be with Micah.

Susanna went running to look for Micah. Micah was looking for Susanna.

“I was angry, but now I want to be friends again,” said Micah.

“I felt really mad, but I want to be your friend, too,” said Susanna.

And Susanna and Micah, two neighbors, two friends, went to God’s temple together.

Game (5-10 minutes)

Beanbag Toss

Children play a game that encourages cooperation between neighbors.

Divide children into two groups. Each group forms a straight line. The lines face each other. The first child in each line faces the other. The first child throws the beanbag to the neighbor facing him or her. Then the thrower goes to the end of the opposite line.

The child with the beanbag now throws it to the neighbor facing him or her in the opposite line. Then that child goes to the end of the opposite line. The game continues until the two children who were first in line are back at the head of the lines.

Encourage children to help their neighbors with careful throws and good catches!

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Stand in a circle with children. Walk behind children and gently touch each child, one at a time, while praying:
♦ Thank you, God, for our neighbor (child’s name).

Encourage children to join in your thanksgivings as you move around the circle. Close by praying:
♦ Thank you, God, for making us neighbors. Thank you for loving us when we’re happy and when we’re sad. Thank you for loving us when we’re angry and when we’re mad. Amen.

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to group members as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find an illustration and the words from today’s story. Invite parents to share the story with their children and then talk about it. You’ll also find additional storytelling prompts to help parents reinforce the lessons in today’s session.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News sing:
◆ “The Light of God” (p. 26 of the songbook)
◆ “You Are a Temple” (p. 28 of the songbook)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

You can also sing “Have You Ever Been Angry?” to the tune of “The Bear Went Over the Mountain.”

Lyrics:

Sometimes we’re mad and we’re angry.
Sometimes we’re mad and we’re angry.
Sometimes we’re mad and we’re angry.
God says, “Here’s what to do.”

Oh, go make peace with your neighbor.
Oh, go make peace with your neighbor.
Oh, go make peace with your neighbor.
God says, “That’s what to do.”

Go tell your friend why you’re angry.
Go tell your friend why you’re angry.
Go tell your friend why you’re angry.
God says, “That’s what to do.”

Art (15 minutes)

Chalk Painting to Music
For this art activity, choose background music that expresses emotion. We recommend:
◆ Mozart’s “Alleluia” from Exsultate
◆ Bizet’s “Farandole” from L’Arlésienne

(Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Invite children to paint with colored chalk as you play music that expresses strong feelings.

Dress children in smocks. Set up a work surface with paper, colored chalk, and water in which the chalk is dipped. (Adding a small amount of sugar to the water will make the chalk colors pop and sparkle.) Invite each child to paint a picture as you play music. Encourage children to show the feelings of the music they hear in their pictures.

You can spray each finished picture with hair spray to help prevent the chalk from flaking.

Game (5 minutes)

Neighbors Switch
Children hold hands with neighbors to play this lively game.

Each child has a partner; call these partners neighbors. (You may need to be a partner if there is an uneven number of children present.) The neighbors hold hands.

Call out actions for each child to do while holding hands with his or her neighbor. Invent your own actions or start with these:
◆ Neighbors hop.
◆ Neighbors dance.
◆ Neighbors march.
◆ Neighbors walk.
◆ Neighbors skip.

After three or four actions, call out, “Neighbors switch.” Each child finds a new partner or neighbor. As soon as children understand the game, let them take turns as leaders.
**Communication Skills**

Preschoolers have a hard time talking with children who have wronged them; however, you can help children develop such basic and necessary communication skills.

During a game or free-play time, when someone does something hurtful, be prepared for, “Teacher. Stephanie hit me!” Ask, “Have you talked with Stephanie about it?” Then bring the two children together and help them discuss the situation.

Useful guidelines for these talks are:

- Use words—no hitting or hurting
- No names
- Tell your neighbor what you feel and what you want done

This method is easier to implement with more than one teacher; one adult keeps the lesson moving while the other helps to two angry children talk. If you are the only teacher, the other children can work at learning centers or have a free-play period. Teaching children how to handle their anger well is a worthwhile use of Sunday school time.

This approach will take great patience on your part until the children realize that talking about a situation will help relieve their anger and resolve the conflict. As the children get into the habit of “talking,” you may notice fewer unhappy situations.

**Young Children and the Gospel**

Today’s gospel offers us a teaching from Jesus that guides us into relationship with God and our neighbor. Jesus tells us how to make peace.

We need to remember that to a young child, the word neighbor probably means someone who lives nearby. Our lesson today suggests that neighbors include the entire human family—all of God’s children.

The preschool and kindergarten age child’s world is centered almost entirely within the family. As children begin to have social experiences away from home, their world expands to include caregivers, extended family, friends and people at church.

As children experience acceptance and love in these wider settings, they can begin to understand that God’s love, and thus ours, is meant for everyone around us.

**Where You’ll Find Everything Else**

- Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  - A child-friendly version of the story told in today’s Core Session—Two Neighbors.
  - Printable Story Figures for use in today’s Gospel Story.
  - Resources for using the Models of Faith in faith formation, including Using the Models of the Faith, Models of the Faith Activities and Using the Models of the Faith for Inspiration.
  - A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.

- Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Winter-A’s Models of the Faith.
  - A printable article titled First Impressions, which offers practical helps for the use of fine art in your classroom.
  - A printable article further exploring the Psalms, titled The Sung Praise of Israel.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings challenge us to reorient our lives according to God’s ways and become more responsible for our actions. Sirach recognizes that, while God invites obedience and faithfulness, humans are responsible for their own actions. Paul encourages the Corinthians to discover the unique divine wisdom that the Holy Spirit bestows. Jesus calls his followers to deal with sin in a radically new way.

Sirach 15:15-20
The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (formerly called Ecclesiasticus), was written about 180 BCE. Ben Sirach (50:27) seems to have been a teacher, the head of an academy in Jerusalem (51:23). In today’s reading, Sirach addresses the question of free will and the responsibility for sin. His interest is not in how humanity as a whole came to be sinful (as in Genesis), but rather in the actions of individuals.

His intent is to exonerate God from complicity in human sin (James 1:13), in contrast to the idea that God is the primary cause of all activity. Although innocent of human sin, God is not ignorant or indifferent to it. Rather, a clear choice is presented, and God longs to pour out blessing (Deuteronomy. 30:15-20).

1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Despite the negative meanings of wisdom that Paul has argued against—that is, wisdom as oratorical technique (1:20, 2:4) or as human standards of judgment (1:21-26)—he can speak of a wisdom for the “mature” or perfect. This wisdom is the full significance of “Christ…the wisdom of God” (1:24) in the plan of salvation hidden for ages but not revealed.

This knowledge was hidden from “the rulers of this age,” perhaps the political authorities, but more likely spiritual forces. This wisdom is not an esoteric teaching reserved for the few, for it is made known to all who possess the Spirit (2:12-13, 6:11, 12:13). The process of coming to maturity is a lifelong one, but the Corinthians’ behavior shows that they are still mere infants in the Christian way.

Matthew 5:17-37
Today’s gospel reading and next Sunday’s are drawn from the section called “the six antitheses” (5:21-48), so named from the repeated phrase “it was said…but I say.” They also illustrate the way in which Jesus fulfills the law (5:17). He does not pit his teaching against the law, but against the rabbinic interpretations and traditions and reveals the spirit of the law with a new standard of right behavior.

These antitheses reach back past the Mosaic law to the original or “creation will” of God. This means that in some cases (murder, adultery, love of enemy) the law has been strengthened; Jesus’ command is “not only…but also.” Attention is shifted from external action to internal intention. In other cases (divorce, oaths, retaliation), the law as practiced is abrogated and external performance is altered.

Reflection
Q. When does the good news sound like bad news?
A. In today’s readings.

If this section of Matthew’s gospel had a sub-title, it might be “Embracing the Difficult.” Most of us admire the person who has overcome a handicap or persisted against overwhelming odds. The Olympic athletes who undergo rigorous training to perfect a sport have earned the admiration of millions. Jesus challenges us to make an analogy to the spiritual realm.

In this life, the stakes are too perilously high to be won with limp gestures. Therefore, Jesus cannot condone lukewarm efforts or half-hearted attempts. He asks for all of us, given wholeheartedly, without counting the cost. Common sense may protest that we are fallible creatures, who despite our good intentions fail frequently and miserably. Giving us higher ideals, as Jesus does, just heightens our inadequacy.

The last element essential to interpreting these passages is the presence of grace. Jesus knows that what he asks may be humanly impossible. But he also knows the power of his death and resurrection, which enable us to surpass our limitations. With God’s grace, the desert can flower, the weak human can become Christ-like, the difficult can be embraced. St. Francis of Assisi reached the point where he could describe a great challenge: “The Lord himself led me amongst them, and I showed mercy to them, and when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of body and soul.”

Q. So where is the good news?
A. Hidden in what seems bad.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Jesus continues to challenge us as disciples by heightening our sensitivity to the motives for our moral actions. Sirach reminds us of the importance of our freedom of choice in keeping the commandments (CCC, #1730–48). Jesus further demands that we purify our hearts and thus our intentions. Although Christians might do the same actions as others, their motives must be genuinely Christian (CCC, #385). It is not enough merely not to kill or commit adultery, but the disciple must strive to eliminate anger and lust besides (CCC, #2380–81).

The Sung Praise of Israel

A Gift from God

by Kathy McGovern

Just as we believe that the written scriptures are inspired, the Hebrews viewed their music as also directly given by God. This instinct to put their life stories—with their laments, coronations, pilgrim processions and thanksgivings—into instrumental music and song goes all the way back to that triumphant song at the sea in Exodus 15, when the pure ecstasy of salvation from certain death compelled Moses and Miriam (the prophet) to burst into song and tambourine playing.

The book of Judith gives us her song as she is praised by all the people for her courageous beheading of Holofernes. After she recounts how God gave her strength to ravish the enemy, she says, “I will sing to my God a new song” (16:13a). That is the most basic response to God’s action in her life, it seems. She wants to sing the story anew, again and again.

Judith and Miriam are representative of the important musical role that women held in Israelite liturgy, at least in the earlier period. They were skilled mourners: “All the…singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day” (2 Chronicles 35:25), and Psalm 68 says they were the designated percussionists: “Your solemn processions are seen, O God…the singers in front, the musicians last, between them girls playing tambourines” (24, 25). Ezra says that two hundred of the returning exiles were singers, divided into male and female (2:64).

In fact, according to the chronicler, the whole temple liturgy was dominated by music and musicians, divided into 24 groups of 12 each, including cymbals, lyres and harps. On festal occasions they all played together, reinforced by no less than 120 priestly trumpeters, whose music was so stirring that the temple filled with a cloud of God’s presence, so much so that the “priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (2 Chronicles 5:14).

That, of course, is the dream orchestra and choir of all musicians! When we fill our sessions with song, instruments and dancing, it’s easy to remember the salvation story. It’s in the DNA of the story itself. So feel good about putting these songs in the hearts and mouths of your group members. Psalm 40:3 says it was God who put it there in the first place: “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”

The World of the Bible

Wisdom

For the Jews, wisdom was the practical understanding of how the world and society worked, and so it helped people cope with the complexities of everyday life, especially sickness and suffering, death and disaster. Since wisdom did not rely on divine revelation but rather on practical human experience and observation of nature, it summarized the most helpful advice for responsible living that the Jews shared with many ancient Near Eastern peoples. The Jews, though, sought to merge this secular tradition with the religious guidelines of their covenant instruction (Torah). Thus wisdom joined the pursuit of knowledge to the ordering of life in relation to God.