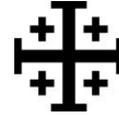




The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

FAITH IN ACTION AND THE GOOD FRIDAY OFFERING



FOCUS AREA/THEME: “Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” James 1:22 NRSV Bible
“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Matthew 23:39b NRSV Bible

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem. These Arabic Speaking Christians, living as a tiny minority among the Jewish and Muslim majorities in the region, are the vital roots of Christianity at its place of origin and are often called the ‘Living Stones’ of our faith.

SONG/GAME: Choose a regionally appropriate song to sing through this series.

READING FOR LESSON 1: James 1:22-27

LEARNING/STORY: There are many messages in this short passage. What does ‘word’ mean in this context? For youth and adults, this can be related to the beginning of John’s Gospel, addressed in our series ‘Trusting God’, lesson 1. For younger children, talk about the importance of doing nice things for family and friends. If we make promises (words) and don’t follow through on those promises, then our promises, our words, will mean nothing. Later in the passage, James talks about bridling their tongues. What is a bridle? What is it for – to control the movements of an animal (horse, donkey, mule, dog). This image reminds us that our words lead our thoughts. We must control our words to direct our thoughts in God’s direction so we do not ‘deceive’ our hearts.

Also in today’s passage, we explore the image of looking in the mirror. What happens when we look in a mirror? Who are we focused on? What happens when we leave? How much do we remember? Perhaps fixing ourselves up in the mirror makes us feel good (or bad) for the moment, but what long term change does it make? Is anyone’s life made better? We have also learned that we are all made in the image of God, so when we look in the mirror are we also looking at everyone? Do we see equality? Do we see the beauty in everyone? Do we forget that as soon as we leave the mirror?

But if we don’t just look at the words, or be hearers only, and take action from what we learn about God from Jesus, we will be doers who make a difference in someone’s life, we “will be blessed” in our doing. So, what do we do? We “care for orphans and widows in their distress, and keep oneself unstained from the world.” The second portion of that comment from James merits further discussion with youth and adults. The first portion is quite simple: do something for someone else. In this regard, we invite you to look at the attached supplement which includes descriptions of some of the ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem which do care for widows and orphans specifically.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cardboard, tinfoil wrap, tape. Shoe box (or small box), paper, pen/pencils.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Cut a piece of cardboard and ample tinfoil for each child. Wrap the tinfoil as smoothly as possible around the cardboard and tape it in place. Have the children try to see themselves in the cardboard. Use this as a reminder of this lesson. Now, have each child take a piece of paper and write something nice they can do for someone today, or everyday this week. Do not put names on the papers. Have them put them in the box.

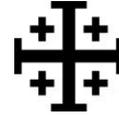
END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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Today, the Christians of the Diocese of Jerusalem offer this story and understanding for you.

SONG/GAME: Song chosen for the series by the leader, same as session 1.

LESSON 2 READING: James 2:1-5 (6-7 optional for youth, adults)

LEARNING/STORY: Last week, we learned about not focusing on ourselves, but doing things for others. Take the ‘good deeds’ ideas from last week and review them with the children. This week, we explore who those others are and how we treat them. Discuss how we each pick favorites. Be open about how we are all distracted by money, comfort, extra toys, fancy clothes, etc. We all try to be friends with people we think we want to be like or to like us. We love to be with people who make us feel good. We usually ignore, exclude or hurt people who we think would make us look bad, less desirable, and who make us uncomfortable. We forget these people have the same hearts, minds, and dreams as we do.

If we are all made in the image of God, if we are all equal, we need to behave with equal respect to all people. It may be that a richer person is so distracted ‘looking in the mirror’ (week 1) that he/she is not a good friend at all. And, it may be that a poorer person would love to have their clothes cleaned and look nice and be so thankful that he/she is the best friend a person could have. Why would James say “Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?”

Unfortunately, Christian Arabs, like the ones in the Diocese of Jerusalem, are often mistreated or excluded just because they come from a place that is not well understood.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Wall paper for banner, glue, and scissors.

Print stories and pictures of Arab Christians from the Diocese of Jerusalem website – www.j-diocese.org .

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Cut and paste pictures of Christian Arabs who are putting their faith in action in the churches, schools and hospitals of the Diocese. Cut out quotes from the stories about the healthcare provided by the Diocese regardless of faith or ability to pay. Have each child cut and paste quotes and pictures. Design the group banner with appropriate quotes to show that Christian Arabs are very faithful people taking care of their neighbors, rich and poor. Put the banner in your church or hall to show people what you are learning during Lent. Ask your minister to tell people about the poster during the notices so everyone can learn. Arrange to provide refreshments after the service next week.

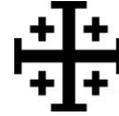
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SONG/GAME: See resource list. We encourage choosing one song to repeat long enough for the children to learn it and feel comfortable with it before adding a new song. Theme songs are also helpful.

LESSON 3 READING: James 2: 14-19

LEARNING/STORY: In this passage, James reminds us that faith must be lived to be real. It is not enough to sit around and talk about people who need help or how to help them. We must take time and energy from our other activities to put that awareness in action. We must follow through. Everyone can see that there are tremendous needs in the world. Christians are called to do something to help those in need.

In the Diocese of Jerusalem, the place where Christ and Christianity began, faith in action is part of the identity of the Diocese. Parishes throughout the five countries of the Diocese are engaged in ecumenical outreach with leaders and youth, sponsoring kindergartens or schools for vulnerable children, hosting clinics or providing pastoral care in hospitals where interfaith neighbors are served with respect. In addition to parish activities, the Diocese operates many schools, vocational centers, rehabilitation and medical institutions and continually strives to expand and offer more. The Diocese of Jerusalem demonstrates that faith in action breathes life into the faithful as much as those who are served.

What can you do in your neighborhood that would safely help someone in need? Do you have clothes to share with the poor who are cold? Can you buy extra food at the store to give to the hungry? Can you have a sale with friends to raise money for people who lost their homes in floods around the world? Try it and see how you feel. Faith put in action benefits everyone. Why don't we do it more often?

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Kettle for hot water, bowls, cake cases, spoons and a cake tray. Chocolate and Rice Krispies or Corn Flakes.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Make chocolate crispy cakes. Set aside to harden. Set up refreshments and donation bowl for after church. Supervise and assist children in serving refreshments and selling the crispy cakes. Donate the money to the Diocese for the ministries the children have learned about. For information, contact info@j-diocese.org.

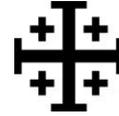
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SONG/GAME: See resource list. We encourage choosing one song to repeat long enough for the children to learn it and feel comfortable with it before adding a new song. Theme songs are also helpful.

LESSON 4 READING: James 3: 1-5 (optional 6-12)

LEARNING/STORY: Taming the tongue. Look again at the images used in this passage, “bits into the mouths of horses” and large ships guided by small rudders. Think of the image of the ‘tongue’ as the part of the body that forms our words. If we have bad thoughts but do not speak them, those thoughts have done no harm to anyone else. The thoughts may still stain our attitudes, but putting those thoughts in words gives them power to hurt while pulling our thoughts in the direction of the words we used. Talk about the things people say to each other. Which words are helpful and which are hurtful? What are the consequences of what we say?

Our tongues form words. In the lesson series about our relationship with God, we learn about the “Word” that was in the beginning, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) How does this passage relate to the passage we are studying about the importance of controlling our tongues? Words have great creative force. If you call someone by name, that person reacts. If you focus on saying nice things to or about people, you will find yourself focusing on the best parts of them. If you focus on finding mean things to say to or about people, you will find yourself living in a negative world and hurting them in the process. Is this what God wants for the world? Does this add Love or build peace? Would you rather live in a world where people focused on what is best in you or the negative world we often create?

The passage says: we are not all made to be teachers. Why are teachers judged by higher standards? It takes a lot of prayer, effort, discipline, and desire to tame a tongue and make sure what we say is of a positive and spiritual nature. It is better if none of us boasts of being a teacher in this regard, but rather look to Jesus to be our teacher. As we read what Jesus said and did, we have an example to follow. All things are possible with God.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Choose a current news article with a lot of information that will interest the children.

ACTIVITY: Read the article to the children and ask them to go write what the story was about. Talk about the differences. Then, Play Chinese Whispers with children sitting in a circle. Take a phrase from the lesson if desired. Have an adult whisper a phrase to the first child with each child whispering the phrase they heard to the next child. See how the phrase is different at the end. Pay close attention to the children’s reactions and call their attention to how the words they use affect other people.

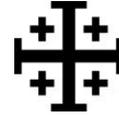
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SONG/GAME: See resource list. We encourage choosing one song to repeat long enough for the children to learn it and feel comfortable with it before adding a new song. Theme songs are also helpful.

LESSON 5 READING: James 3: 13-18

LEARNING/STORY: Wisdom. The biblical use of this word “wisdom” means smart actions as in making good choices and doing helpful things. We see many people who seem to do nice things but we don’t know if they do them with love or selfishness. Sometimes we get hurt or hurt others ourselves by pretending to be nice for selfish reasons.

The Bible teaches us to be honest with ourselves, to know if we are being nice to someone else just because they have money or a swimming pool or friends we want. We need to do things in a godly way, to show by our “good life” that our actions are done with kindness and gentleness, not greed and self-serving need. If we do need to show a kindness to fulfill a need, we should be honest about it and not lie to ourselves that we are kind people. Those actions fulfill human needs and are not from ‘above’, God, the Holy Spirit. They are not pure actions. They are not born of Love.

If we look around ourselves, we can see that the problems in our lives, the “disorder and wickedness of every kind”, come from human emotions of envy, selfishness, ambition and other un-holy motivations. We can make peace, harmony and happiness in our lives by living with active wisdom “from above”, as the Bible says is “pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.” (v 17) James tells us that the reward for our wise actions is “a harvest of righteousness ... sown in peace for those who make peace.” (v 18)

Talk about the idea of wisdom shown in smart actions. How do we get such wisdom from prayer and being quiet with God? Apply the lesson we all learn for street crossing. “Stop, look, listen.” How will stopping, looking, and listening help us practice active wisdom? How will it help us see who others really are so we respond in God’s way?

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Card/cardboard, tape, colored cellophane, and scissors.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Have each child cut a large hole in a card (or cardboard). Cover the hole with colored cellophane. Tape it in place. Have the children look at their classmates and objects in the room first without the special window and then through the special window. Talk about what is different. If we stop, look and listen to God, how will we see things differently? How will that change our actions?

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God’s way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus too.*

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