

God Looks On the Heart

by The Rev. Kerith Harding, Christ and Holy Trinity Church School, Westport, CT



Storybook: It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr

Theme: All people are different!

Story from Scripture/Memory Verse:

"The Lord does not see as humans see... the Lord looks on the heart" 1 Sam 16:7a
(note: explain to young children that "The Lord" is another name for "God".)

Additional readings to share (optional):

"God shows no partiality." Romans 2:11 (God doesn't favor one person over another)

"So God created humankind in God's image... God saw everything God had made

and indeed, it was very good." Genesis 1:27a;31

Bible needed: Any NRSV bible.

Lesson: God created all people and we are all different. God looks at what we have going on INSIDE of us (in our heads and in our hearts), and God is most concerned with how we treat each other and the rest of God's creation (Oceans, Animals, etc)

Condensed Class Outline:

Bible verse and discussion

Book and discussion

Activity

Major themes and Teaching points:

(These aren't ALL the themes in today's stories, but are four to emphasize!)

What is God like?: God looks at what is on the inside, not what is on the outside. God created all of us and loves us equally ("the same") and without partiality ("God doesn't have a favorite person; we are ALL God's favorites.").

The way we treat each other is important: That's what it means when the Bible says, "God does not see as humans see... God looks on the heart." God's love for us never goes away, even when God is disappointed with our behavior.

Celebrating and accepting diversity: God created us so that none of us look or act exactly the same. So, when people look or seem different from us, that's ok. It's nice to have so many different kinds of people in the world! Wouldn't it be boring if we were all the same?

Tips for today's class:

1. As kids trickle in from church, have crayons and coloring pages or pieces of paper available for them to doodle on before you start. If you have another opening routine you prefer, go for it.
2. **Within five minutes of the first arrival, draw their attention to the Bible.** Tell the children, "I want to read to you a very important message from the Bible. Who can tell me what the Bible is? (pause for their comments) Yes, that's right, the Bible is a book about God and the people who God loves. It tells us a lot about God and a lot about how we should treat each other. There's one special sentence I want to read from here today that tells us something about God..." Opening the book, turn to 1 Sam 16:7 (it's important that kids see you reading from the actual Bible, not just these notes or the verse written elsewhere). "Ok, here it is, it says, 'The Lord does not see as humans see... the Lord looks on the heart.' What do you think that means? Do you know who the Lord is? Yes, the Lord is another name for God." Continue with this conversation for a minute or two and see how it goes. Consider then asking, "Or how about this other verse from the Bible where it says, 'God shows no partiality.' What does that mean? We sure don't hear the word partiality used very often, but really, it means that God doesn't play favorites. God created us all different and God likes us the way we are. Then, transition into the reading of the book saying something like, "Let's read a story about differences" or "Well, let's read another book and see if this can give us any more of an idea about what these verses from the Bible mean." **When you are done, drive home Themes 1 & 2 from above.**

Show them the book. Some of them may have read it. Affirm their comments as appropriate and then ask them to put their eyes on you so that everyone can hear you read: Todd Parr's "It's Okay to Be Different". As you read, pause every other page or so and ask questions or make your own comments. For example, you might read, "It's okay to have wheels." And then, depending on the age group, you could ask either, "What is that boy riding in?" –a wheelchair- or "Do you know anyone who uses a wheelchair?"

Important: Try and avoid words that might subconsciously diminish the characters in the picture. For example, don't say, "This poor boy has to use a wheelchair." Rather, say, "This boy uses a wheelchair to get from place to place. What are other ways that some people get from place to place?" **When you finish the book, drive home Theme 3 from above, and bring back in Themes 1 & 2 as you transition to the activity.**

Activity options (choose one appropriate for your age group or create your own!).

*Show the kids two different painted maracas (blank maracas available from Oriental Trading). Emphasize that both the maracas are made from the same material (wood with beans inside to make noise), but that they are different, just the same way that people are all made with the same materials but are different. Let the kids decorate their own special maracas. For younger kids, you could also consider spraying theirs with sticky glue and letting them drop glitter on it if their fine motor skills aren't tuned yet.

*This would work with other items, too (they can decorate boxes, flowers, etc).