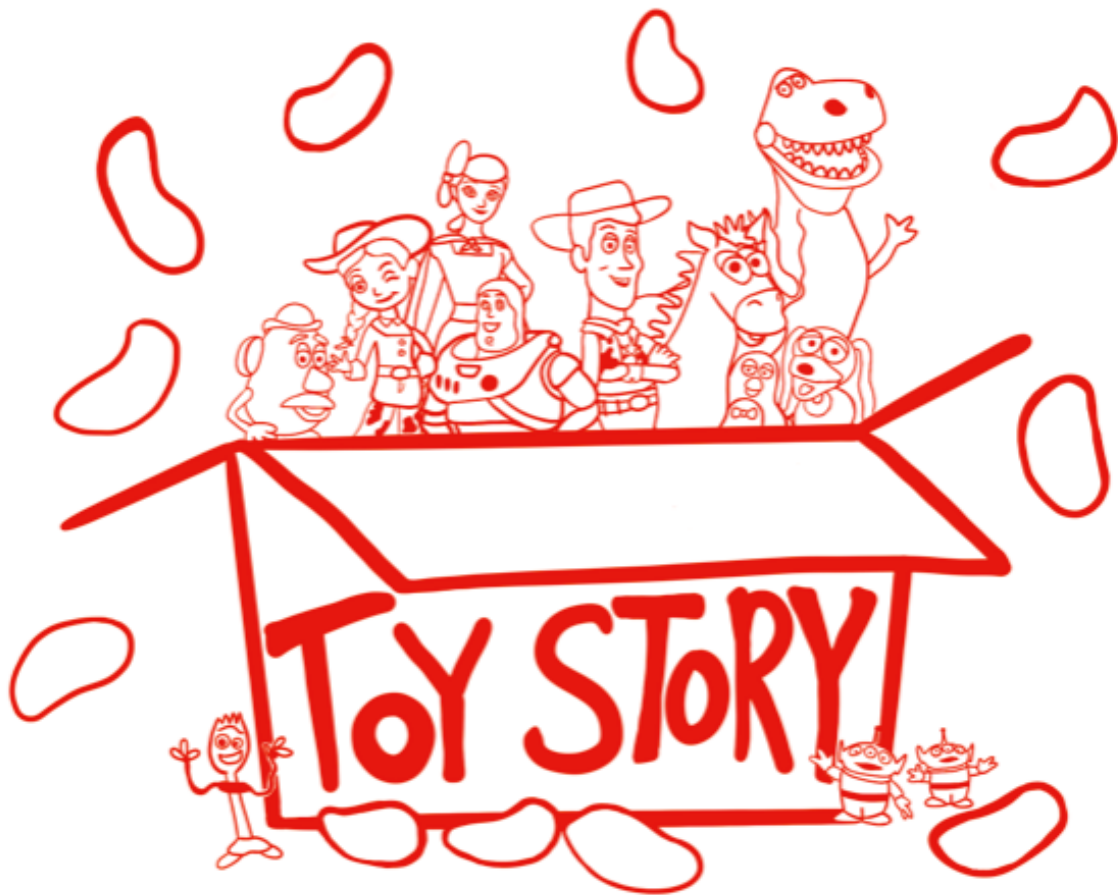


Holy Cross Episcopal Church

Presents:



Vacation Bible School 2022

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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Monday *Faithful*

And away we go...FINALLY off on another weeklong romp in God's love. What a perfect way to spend a summer week! This year we will use everyone's favorite, Toys, to tell the story of how much God loves us and wishes for us a life filled with peace, justice, and holy living.

We can count on one thing in this life: God is faithful. God will always love us and will be with us at all times. (Mt 28.20) When I consider faithfulness and toys, I immediately think of Woody and Buzz and the toys in Andy's room. When life throws curveballs, they personify the love and "hang-in-there" qualities we all need.

The faithful toys in Andy's room are always ready to be played with and loved. Then, to their dismay, Andy heads off to college and no longer needs them. Life throws the toys a curveball, an unexpected, unwanted event. Yet just as the toys are there for Andy, we can count on God being there for us.

One of my favorite, most comforting passages in Scripture is 1Corinthians 10.13. Paul reassures us that the troubles we experience are typical and many have experienced them, yet, if we hang in there, say our prayers, and look for those sacred moments, we will see God is with us. My experience has taught me that if I can keep my eyes on serving God and God's people in love, these troubling times will eventually resolve. We are in this together, and God is always with us!

Our crafts on Monday all reflect aspects of our faith journey. In what we call Tent Time¹, we decorated our banner and named our group. The banner is carried into the church daily and is our group's color—Yellow for pre-school, Green for K-1, Blue for 2-3, and Red for 4,5,6+.

¹The name Tent Time goes back to the days that our VBS groups were small enough we actually spent the first part of the morning in tents. But before long, we could not find tents large enough, so we transitioned to our current "corrals."

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The banners also play a functional role, enabling our family to find us in a colored-coded group in the packed church at the end of the day! ☺

Our first craft today was building and decorating Yo-Yos. They remind us that our Christian journey is full of ups and downs, highs and lows. These are normal and don't last forever; we just need to wait for the next swing.

Our second craft was to create a "Ham" piggy bank. We can use it to save up our dimes and spend them on food to be placed in the Community food cupboard. Our gifts can then help other children and families from going hungry.

Today, our last craft was a toy of yesteryear that is still here today—the paddleball. We begin life created in the image and love of God, and it takes practice to hone the skills for sharing peace and seeking justice for all people. This is not instinctual behavior for us. So, just like mastering the paddleball, we need to practice sharing God's love!

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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Tuesday *Community*

Our theme for today is all about community! This sense of being together to care for each other is personified in every Toy Story movie. It is the glue that holds Andy's toys together in a relationship. And just like the toys in Andy's room, we can count on God to be there in the community surrounding us like a great crowd of witnesses. (Hebrews 12.1) Always faithful...like Woody, Buzz, and the gang of toys for Andy!

Community is the heart of the Christian Church. The name of the Church in the first century was called "The Way." (Acts 9.2). They were followers of the 'way' of Jesus Christ—to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. (Micah 6.8) We are called to lean on each other as we care for the world, working cooperatively to share the love of God with all we meet.

One of the least celebrated major feasts of the Church is the Ascension of the Lord. At this feast, the Church celebrates the 40th day of Easter, when Christ ascends to God and transfers authority for ministry to the disciples. Throughout his ministry, Jesus cared for all he met, including his faithful followers. At the ascension, this mantle of caring is passed on to the disciples. We now are charged with caring for Jesus! And how do we do that? Christ told us himself: whenever we see the hungry, the thirsty, those in need of clothes, those alone and in prison, a stranger, we are to see the face of Christ, and we are to welcome them and care for them (Mt 25.35ff). This can seem like hard work, which is why we have each other to lean on for support and strength.

Throughout the Toy Story movies, Andy's toys constantly work together to solve a problem or rectify injustice. It is a good lesson for us, we have each other, and no one needs to go it alone. Together, we can transform the world by sharing God's love with the world!

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Today, our crafts were inspired by the theme of community, Acts 9.31: “Meanwhile the church had peace and was built up.” The tired and beleaguered people of our world flock to peacemakers like the followers of Christ—those who share the Love of God. Our crafts were about celebrating our working together in cooperation and trust.

Our first craft was to create a Heart Box that contained two of the Toy Story figures. They remind us of what faithful friends they were to each other and how they were always ready to express their love by service and care for each other. This servant expression was wonderfully portrayed by the gaggle of Toy Soldiers in Andy’s room. These little guys in the movies were constantly working like a well-oiled machine to serve those who called on them. As a kid, I played with toy soldiers like these, role-playing their trust and heroics; and as an adult, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to watch US Marines deploy their faithful service when I served them as a Navy Chaplain. It is all about trusting each other and working together for a common cause. When we employ these values in the Church to share God’s love, the world is transformed around us!

Our second craft today was to decorate a barrel of monkeys. They, too, epitomize the sense of working together and are a reminder that we need each other. The Church is called together to celebrate and hang onto each other in times of great joy like a wedding; and in times of great distress, like the loss of a loved one. We are here for each other, all together like a barrel of monkeys!

Our final craft of the day was a large Potato Head character. It reminds that our faces can be extremely expressive. We can frown at the world or smile. Potato heads remind us to use our smiles and see if the world smiles back. I bet it does more than we think!

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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Wednesday *Sheriff*

Of all the toys in Andy's room, Buzz and Woody most embody Justice! They seek to serve and stand for 'right.' Sheriff Woody and the intergalactic warrior for truth and justice, Buzz Lightyear, are good examples of our Christian walk. They are concerned with the *now*, what is happening to God's people, or toys, as the case may be. I believe this is good Christian theology.

I have never been much of what I call a "destination Christian"—primarily concerned with where we will end up, or Heaven or Hell in popular parlance. Consequently, I have never been too preoccupied with where I am going after "shuffling off this mortal coil." I am busy enough with this life, right here and now, to spend much energy concerned about what comes next! I am more concerned with the 'hells' people live in right now and encouraging opportunities for folks to share in the experience of the divine, the 'heaven' that is available to us right now; as the Gospel of Mark puts it, "The Kingdom of God has come near!" (Mk 1.15)

I believe our "end of day" theology, or eschatology, forms our "daily working" theology. Am I worried about where I am going, or the heavens and hells of today? I believe Woody and Buzz are like me, their primary energy spent on the latter, looking for that slice of heaven right now, and seeking to contend with the injustices of our world.

This is the general thrust of our Wednesday crafts. We seek to serve all of God's people and make no peace with injustice. Good sheriff-y things!

Our Tent time craft was a sheriff's badge—a sheriff's mark of authority and labor. It is a reminder of the cross marked on our foreheads in Baptism—called Chrismation. This is when a priest marks the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized, proclaiming, "You are marked as Christ's own forever."

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Our first two crafts were inspired by 1 Thessalonians 5-8b: “Put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” When I think of Sheriff Woody, the first image that comes to my mind is his hat! So today, we decorated our sheriff hats to remind us that we are to seek justice and share God’s love in a hurting world.

We also decorated a cowpoke’s scarf. A scarf is a wonderful piece of clothing. We can wet it with water to help keep us cool on hot days, or wear it to keep our neck and face warm on cold days. For the last couple of years, a face covering has been one of our constant companions. We have worn masks to help control the spread of Covid. Our scarves remind us of how we expressed love to our neighbors by wearing our face covering to protect all.

Our last craft was a throwback to my childhood. One of our favorite family restaurants was The Nut Tree's eatery just off interstate 80 in Vacaville. Not only did it have a great restaurant and train, but also a fabulous toy store, which sold the last of today’s crafts—a popper. Our staff created our version of the popper, which we assembled and decorated today. We invited the campers to remember that when we see injustice and God’s people not being treated fairly in the world, we need to sound off! Or, in this case, to pop off! ☺ The first step in transforming the world into a community of peace and justice in God’s love is recognizing the issues and speaking out. Our poppers remind us not to be silent.



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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Thursday

Called to Love, capable of selfishness!

We are created in the loving image of God and called into life for a purpose—to share the creative love with all we meet. Indeed, we were marked as God's own even before we were born! (Jeremiah 1.5) This is our heritage and our work in the world “because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5.5b)

This is our calling, but our human nature gets in the way. Our hurts and fears encourage us to act in ways other than how we are created. Indeed, this internal struggle is what the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 7. He laments that although he *desires* to follow in the ways of God, *knows* what he is supposed to do, he ends up acting otherwise. Into what seems like a “Gordian knot” shines the answer: Jesus. Some theologians talk about Jesus' gift of himself as a sacrifice offered in love for the sin of the world or *substitution atonement*. I believe this concept misses the mark. God did not need a substitute; WE needed Jesus to realign our relationship with God because we have been in a fallen state since the “garden.” I think a more accurate term would be at-one-ment—the work of Jesus' sacrifice realigns us with God: all we have to do is to become aware of this great gift.

Our theme for Thursday is called to love, capable of selfishness.

Our tent time craft was decorating a pair of praying hands. This craft reminds us to pray that God will give us courage and patience to practice justice in our schools and neighborhoods. It also invites us to remember to give thanks for the sharing of God's love we accomplished the preceding day.

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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Our parents created us in love and named us to be shining examples of God's children. My name Mark, for example, means strong defender (it also means war-like, as some of my friends have noted ☺) So, we decorated wooden blocks with our name on them to remind us that we are called into the world in love to share this great gift.

The pink bear named *Lots-O'-Huggin'* (voiced by Ned Beatty—classic!) embodies the iconic human struggle Paul talks about. He knows what to do and wants to do it but he keeps reverting to old ways. So today, we created a beanbag bear to remind us that when we resort to anger, fear, or hurt and do not treat the world as we were created to (sin¹), we need to repent and return to our journey with God.

Our third craft today was a top. A top reminds us that balance and the energy to spin is an infinitely renewable resource. When the top stops spinning, it waits to be loaded up and ready to go for another spin. Tops remind us to keep trying to seek justice and share God's love. If one time it does not go as we wanted, no worries, just like the tops, we can have another go! God's love and faithfulness are infinite, too, just like the energy in our tops.

¹The New Testament Greek word for 'sin' is most often translated *hamartia*, which means to miss the mark as in a target or take the wrong path. Very different meaning than one being "evil."

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Still called to play and share God's Love...

Friday
To Infinity and Beyond!

The last promise of the gospel of Matthew is "I am with you always!" (MT 28:20) This enduring message of connection and faith is what Andy's toys show for him and each other throughout all the Toy Story movies. So too, God promises to be with us at all times and in all situations! The problem is that we sometimes find ourselves in a place or situation where we feel all alone, and God seems far away. The reality is that God is *not* far away, even when it sure does feel like God has forgotten us. This is the heart of the meaning of the poem "Footsteps in the Sand."

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints is when I carried you."

God does carry us, even when it does not *feel* like God is with us. Our final message for our Toys VBS was simply that God WILL be with us. We can go forth to seek to do justice and share God's love with all we meet because God is with us.

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Our tent time craft was to decorate a **mini-barrel** of monkeys! Like their big counterpart, they remind us to work together, and that even the small things we do to share God's love and justice in the world are really important.

On Friday we have two crafts. The first was decorating a kite. Kites ride on the wind. In scripture, the word for Holy Spirt is breath or wind. Therefore, we decorated our kites to remind us the Holy Spirit will empower us to seek justice and share God's love.

Our final craft for Friday was to create our very own Forky! This little hand-made toy had so many lessons to share with us in Toy Story 4. Let me share just one. Forky was created to be a companion. Not only was he a great companion to a little girl on her first day in school, but he became a trusted companion to Woody too! Our Forky can sit on our desk at home to remind us God is our companion wherever we go, every hour of every day!

The final gift of our Toy Story VBS to our campers was a tiny alien guy from the Pizza planet machine. Their hope in life is to be chosen! Our lunchtime gift to our campers is a reminder that God has indeed chosen them to seek justice and share God's love with all they meet!

As we close our FIRST 2022 VBS offering, we hope the VBS theme song will ring in your hearts for all your days...

"I love you, and God loves you, and that's the way it should be!"