



## Crucifixion/Habits

### 18th Confirmation Class Lesson

---

**Supplies Needed:** Notebooks; Handout; a decent amount of yarn or string; pair of scissors; a chair without armrests; sturdy gloves that cover the wrists; ¼" plastic tubing (about 3 feet long); 20 oz bottle filled all the way to the top with water; a see-through bowl or plastic container half-way filled with water (the water should be at least 2 inches deep)

### **OPENING Activity: All Tied up**

#### **TELL**

- Quick review: The Greek term for sin is an archery term that means "To miss the mark."
- Sin means to be separated from God.
- So sin is something we live in: To live in separation of God is a state of being.
- Most of us don't do this on purpose.
- We don't wake up and say, "Today, I choose to live separate from God."
- Some of us maybe don't think about God very much at all as we get ready for our day, move through our day, etc.
- Only in a crisis situation, then maybe we might say something like, "God, I'll read the Bible everyday if you just let me pass this science test that I forgot all about."
- But, let's say you do pass that test. And you're someone who follows through with what you say.
- Will it be easy to read that Bible every day?
- Why or why not?
- When we do choose to start paying attention to God, there is often resistance that we face within ourselves.
- The demonstration we're going to do helps us to see why that might be.

#### **EXPLAIN** demonstration

- I need a volunteer who thinks they are strong and possesses great determination.
- [have volunteer join you, standing up at front of class or sitting in the armrest-less chair]
- I'm going to have you put these gloves on
- Now put your hands out, around stomach level
- Have your palms facing each other
- Have your hands about 10 inches from each other.
- I have some string here.
- I'm going to wrap one loop of string around your gloved wrists and tie that loop closed.
- Now, can you break that string by pulling your hands apart?
- [let them try until they succeed]
- OK, very good!
- This is what happens when you first do an action. It's not very ingrained in our brains, its not even a habit and so it is very easy to not do it again, it's very easy to break out of the loop.

- Now hold your hands out again.
- This time I'm going to put two loops of string around your wrists.
- Can you break that string?
- [let them try until they succeed]
- Ok, very good!
- But it was just a little bit harder, yeah?
- So, when we do an action twice, it gets a little bit more ingrained in our brain and it's a little bit harder to get out of the loop.
- How about three loops?
- How about four loops?
- [Continue until the volunteer can't break the loops of string anymore]

## TELL

- This is how habits occur.
- They sneak up on us one repeated behavior at a time until we no longer control our behavior and instead, our *behavior* controls *us*.
- If we are seeking to create God-led behaviors, then this can be a really good and helpful thing.
- But if we're not paying attention to God and if we're living separated from God and then we say, "Oh wait, I want to pay attention to God and do activities that help me be more aware of God," then guess what? Our hands are still bound by the old ways.
- This understanding can help us as we pay attention today to the story of Jesus' Crucifixion.
- But first...

## OPENING PRAYER

## CHALLENGE OF THE WEEK REVIEW

We were to...

Pay attention to your friends, small groups in school, in extra-curricular activities, etc to see how it is that they make decisions and what it is that brings them together – or if they're really "together" at all.

So. What did you see?

## REVIEW

- Themes and concepts of the stories we've talked about recently in class:
  - With the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem (what we call Palm Sunday) and cleaning out the temple, we talked about how following Jesus is disruptive. That disruptive quality of following Jesus can be unexpected and scary.
  - The Last Supper happens on the night Jesus is arrested. The Last Supper is the Passover meal, and Jesus equates his body and blood with the lambs of the Passover story. Jesus during this meal demonstrates the "take, bless, break, give" pattern that if lived out/practiced will bring communion to a community.
  - Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane asking that God "remove this cup." God does not remove the cup. Therefore Jesus allows himself to be arrested by the Jewish

authorities and brought to the *house* of the high priest. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, abandoned by the disciples and denied by Peter. Everything's falling apart. At this point in the story, Jesus' obedience to God's call is detrimental to his well-being.

- Jesus is found *not* guilty by both Pilate and by Herod, but they still order him beaten and mocked. However, due to fears of the crowd, Pilate sentences Jesus to death. We discussed two perspectives of why Jesus was crucified: 1. He died *for* our sins. 2. He died *because* of our sins [i.e. The way of the crowd and the Pharisees kills the way of God].

## TELL

- During these past few weeks and next number of weeks, we are focusing on the last week of Jesus' life and ministry. We started with what we know as "Palm Sunday." Today, we're going to read and talk about Jesus' Crucifixion. But first we have to start with some background. So we'll start with Moses and the Israelites in the book of Numbers.

## READ

**Numbers 21:4** The Israelites set out from Mount Hor along the Red Sea Road, a detour around the land of Edom. The people became irritable and cross as they traveled. 5 They spoke out against God and Moses: "Why did you drag us out of Egypt to die in this godforsaken wilderness? No decent food; no water - we can't stomach this stuff any longer." 6 So God sent poisonous snakes among the people; they bit them and many in Israel died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke out against God and you. Pray to God; ask him to take these snakes from us." Moses prayed for the people. 8 God said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it on a flagpole: Whoever is bitten and looks at it will live." 9 So Moses made a snake of fiery copper and put it on top of a flagpole. Anyone bitten by a snake who then looked at the copper snake lived.

## TELL

Now we're going to jump to the Gospel of John, where Jesus is talking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Jesus refers to himself in reference to the story we just read.

## READ

**John 3:14:** In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up 15 and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

## TELL

Now, let's read how it is that Jesus came to be lifted up.

## READ

**Mark 15:15-34; 37-39 – The Message**

15 Pilate gave the crowd what it wanted, set Barabbas free and turned Jesus over for whipping and crucifixion. 16 The soldiers took Jesus into the palace (called Praetorium) and called together the entire brigade. 17 They dressed him up in purple and put a crown plaited from a thorn bush on his head. 18

Then they began their mockery: "Bravo, King of the Jews!" 19 They banged on his head with a club, spit on him, and knelt down in mock worship. 20 After they had had their fun, they took off the purple cape and put his own clothes back on him. Then they marched out to nail him to the cross. 21 There was a man walking by, coming from work, Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. They made him carry Jesus' cross.

22 The soldiers brought Jesus to Golgotha, meaning "Skull Hill." 23 They offered him a mild painkiller (wine mixed with myrrh), but he wouldn't take it. 24 And they nailed him to the cross. They divided up his clothes and threw dice to see who would get them. 25 They nailed him up at nine o'clock in the morning. 26 The charge against him - the king of the jews - was printed on a poster. 27 Along with him, they crucified two criminals, one to his right, the other to his left. 29 People passing along the road jeered, shaking their heads in mock lament: "You bragged that you could tear down the Temple and then rebuild it in three days - 30 so show us your stuff! Save yourself! If you're really God's Son, come down from that cross!"

31 The high priests, along with the religion scholars, were right there mixing it up with the rest of them, having a great time poking fun at him: "He saved others - but he can't save himself! 32 Messiah, is he? King of Israel? Then let him climb down from that cross. We'll all become believers then!" Even the men crucified alongside him joined in the mockery. 33 At noon the sky became extremely dark. 34 The darkness lasted three hours. At three o'clock, Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

37 Then Jesus, with a loud cry, gave his last breath. 38 At that moment the Temple curtain ripped right down the middle. 39 When the Roman captain standing guard in front of him saw that Jesus had quit breathing, he said, "This has to be the Son of God!"

## **ASK/TELL**

We'll go passage by passage here:

### **Numbers Passage:**

- In verse 5 the people complain about being taken out of Egypt. Do you remember why the Israelites were in Egypt/what their condition was in Egypt? (they had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years)
- Does this, then, seem like a strange complaint to you? To complain about being freed from slavery?
- So it says that God sent poisonous snakes into their midst. Before we get all mad at God for being reactionary and heavy-handed, can you tell me another story that has a snake in it (note: It is not a story we have talked about in this Confirmation class)? (The story of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil)
- And in that story, what role does the snake play? (it tells Eve that God isn't being completely truthful. That the fruit is good to eat. It is the voice of temptation, the voice of the devil)
- When the Israelites complain in this Numbers story, they are making an assumption that they know what's better for them, that they know more than God does. And the voice that gives them this message is the same voice that is symbolized by the serpent in the Garden of Eden story. And what kind of snake is a serpent? (a deadly, venomous, poisonous one!)
- What kind of snake bites the Israelites? (a deadly, venomous, poisonous one!)
- So the story is telling us that the Israelites brought this poison into their community themselves by paying attention to the wrong voice. But does God give up on them? (No.)

- What does God do instead? (gives instructions that takes a symbol of death and turns it into a symbol of life and freedom)
- Sound familiar? (like the Cross)

### John Passage:

- The John passage offers the same message: Just because we're tied to our old ways doesn't mean there's no hope.
- In the John passage, Jesus is talking to Nicodemus. And Jesus is drawing a parallel between himself and the Numbers story.
- He's saying that if people focus on him, then they will live and live free, despite the poison that is in and around them.

### Mark Passage:

- Putting Verse 34 in the Mark story in context. Let's review all that's happened to Jesus in the last 18 hours or so: Last Supper, Judas' betrayal, being arrested, his disciples flee. He's brought to the High Priest's house where he's beaten and Peter denies knowing him. Then he's taken to Pilate, then Herod, throughout this time he is beaten. Then even though Pilate finds Jesus not guilty, Jesus is still sentenced to crucifixion. He's beaten some more and now as he hangs on the cross, the crowd and even the criminals next to him continue to mock him. This is the cup that Jesus wanted taken away from him in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was not taken away. Is it any wonder that Jesus says, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"
- Let's compare/contrast the Numbers and Mark story:
  - A similarity: The Israelites are resistant to God's voice and listen to voices that could be or are symbolized by the serpent.
  - A difference: But in the crucifixion story, the poison does not kill the community, just one person.
  - A similarity: The symbol of life that's offered in both stories is a symbol that would usually connote death: A serpent and a cross.
  - A difference: The people in Numbers look up to the serpent for salvation. The people in the crucifixion look up to Jesus to mock him.
  - A similarity: The people in both stories are looking up.
- Are there other differences or similarities that you see in the two stories?
- To summarize the compare/contrast of these two scripture readings:
  - The habit of listening to the voice of the serpent must die in us in order for us to live God's way to live. – Israelite story
  - If we do not kill or let die the habit of listening to the voice of the serpent, then our ability to live God's way dies. – crucifixion story
- Verse 39 in the Mark story: The captain would not have seen the curtain tear in the temple. He only saw how Jesus died. And in Jesus' death, the Roman soldier saw something that he probably hadn't seen before. The story doesn't tell us *what* he saw, but the captain, having probably seen tens of thousands of these deaths before (because crucifixion was a Roman pastime) would have a pretty practiced eye. So, he obviously saw something that was different, something of God in how Jesus died. He watched the Son of Man be lifted up and die, and in so doing, he saw *something* that told him that Jesus was filled with God's Holy Spirit.

- So, here's something to ponder and you're welcome to share with the class: What do *you* see when you see Jesus lifted up?
- [Give time for thinking and answering – maybe close to 3 minutes of silence before dismissing for snack]

## SNACK

### TELL

Last week we talked about two perspectives about why Jesus died. Do you remember them?

- Jesus died *for* our sins (it's the Passover celebration and Jesus is saying at their last supper that his blood will be salvation for others – he's drawing on imagery of the lamb's blood saving the eldest son and freeing the Israelites from slavery – the lamb died so that others may live and live free from slavery). This is a perspective that helps us think about why God directed Jesus to allow himself to be arrested and then crucified.
- The second perspective is that Jesus died *because* of our sins (the way we live without God as illustrated by the Pharisees, Pilate and the Crowd will kill the way God intended us to live as illustrated by Jesus – every time). This perspective helps us think about why the people killed Jesus.
- Going back to the string activity: Let's say since your youngest of days, you've had some of those strings wrapped around your wrists.
- And because you've had them so long, they have shaped parts of your life.
- For instance, let's say some of the strings mean that...
  - Maybe it's important to you that you always be on time
  - Maybe it's important to you that you always have a certain look about you
  - Maybe it's important to you that you never show that you actually care about something
  - Maybe it's important to you that you win at what you do
  - Maybe it's important to you that you receive affirmation – and will do anything to get it.
- Let's say someone comes up and says, "Oh, you don't need those strings"
- Are you then able to just break the strings? (No)
- So what needs to happen to the strings?
  - The strings need to be destroyed. They need to be killed. They need to be replaced by another set of habits.
  - But how does this happen?
  - By following Jesus and doing what Jesus does. And if you do these things, you'll end up at the cross. Not literally, but figuratively. If you're filling your life with the way Jesus lives, then there are other parts of your life that will be pushed out, like the voice of temptation.
  - Here's another demonstration to show how this works

### DO VOLUME DEMONSTRATION with WATER and AIR

- I have here a bottle of water filled all the way to the top with water.
- I also have a clear container filled half-way with water.
- What's the Biblical symbol of water stand for? (chaos, right!)
- I am now putting my hand over the top of the bottle filled with chaos.
- I am now turning the water bottle upside-down and placing the bottle in the container with water.

- Now that the bottle is upside-down in the water container, I no longer have to cover the top of it. The water stays in the bottle.
- I am now taking some plastic tubing and putting one end into the mouth of the water bottle.
- Can I get a volunteer to come up here and blow air into the other end of the plastic tube?
- What happened when air goes into the water bottle? (air goes in and the water goes out)
- As long as the air stays in the water bottle, can water go where the air is? (No)
- Now what happens if we blow more air into the water bottle? (more water goes out)
- Where would the air go if we pour more water into the bottle? (out of the bottle)
- This demonstration points out how only one thing can occupy space in us at one time.
- If we choose to live God's way, then the old habits that bind us will be cut and replaced. It will feel like a death. It'll be like a crucifixion. But we will, eventually, no longer be filled with chaos.
- If we choose to continue to live our old way, then we'll be on the wrong side of the cross. As the stories of these past few weeks show us, if we're not living way of Jesus, then we'll be with either the Pharisees or the crowd, both of whom contribute to make their community uninhabitable for the way Jesus lives.

## **CHALLENGE OF THE WEEK**

What habits bind your hands that you want to stop but can't? What spiritual discipline would you like to become a new habit to replace the old habit(s) that you want to stop?

**CLOSING PRAYER** – ask for prayer requests and give time during prayer for students to pray.