

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 1: Session 6 – Lent (according to the Gospel of John)

Class 16: John 11:17-50, 53 – *Lazarus*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Make distinction between “resuscitation” and “resurrection”
- Use movie clip to help illustrate how emotions and stress can cause confusion and even blame – apply this to how the characters in the story mildly (and incorrectly) blame Jesus
- Use activity to help students understand why the Pharisees and chief priests respond to the news about Lazarus’ resuscitation by plotting Jesus’ death

Materials needed

- Video clip from “Anchorman 2” (can be seen on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the video clip
- A pack of notecards with 5 various colors represented in the pack (you will need about 45 or so cards if you have less than 12 students; if you have more than 12 students, plan to have 90 or more cards)
- Printed out goals for each team for the activity (located at end of lesson)
- A table/flat surface for the teams to place their notecards on

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* Have you ever been to a funeral/memorial service? If yes, what is something that you remember about it?

INTRO / Transition to VIDEO

- When someone dies, the sadness we feel, or that others feel, might cause things to get confused or confusing in our minds or in the situations that we’re dealing with
- We will definitely see that in today’s scripture story

- And we will definitely see that in today's video clip which takes place at a memorial service
- The clip is from Anchorman 2. Let's see what happens!

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK/TELL

- Who had (supposedly) died? (Brick)
- Did you catch how they thought Brick had died? (He saw a bird in the water and swam out to pet it)
- Who did most of the speaking at Brick's memorial service? (Brick)
- Does Brick seem to know what's going on? (No, not really)
- But is he upset? (Yes, quite)
- What helps him become less unconfused? (his friends)
- Does he become less confused right away? (No, it takes some time)
- In today's scripture story, we will see a similar mixture of emotions, confusion, words and eventual clarity at a funeral for Jesus' friend, Lazarus.
- Let's see what happens

READ John 11:17-50 *(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers)*

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him,

and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."

53 So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

ASK – Part 1 (*this "ask" section is broken into two sections so that if there are two teachers, one teacher can be assigned to each section and therefore reduce the monotony of an otherwise long section of questions*)

- Verse 17 – How long had Lazarus been dead? (for 4 days)
- Verse 18 – What town does this happen in? (Bethany)
- Verse 20 – Who greets Jesus before he even makes it to Bethany? (Martha)
- In verse 21 it sounds like Martha is saying "Too little, too late, Jesus" in a polite sort of way. Then, when Jesus responds in verse 23 that Lazarus "will rise again" – how does Martha respond to Jesus in verse 24? (She says she knows that Lazarus will rise again on the resurrection of the last day)
 - NOTE: The resurrection of the last day was how the Jews understood the afterlife. They didn't (and mostly still don't) believe in a "heaven." Once you died, you were dead. Like a long, peaceful sleep. But then there would be a "last day" where everyone who had ever lived would be raised up and be NORMAL (not like half-decayed zombies). There would then be a "judgment" by God that determined who would get to live some more (on earth) and who would cease living (basically return to how they were before the last day).
- In verse 25, Jesus responds to Martha's comment by saying he is "the resurrection and the life." In verse 27 and 28, how does Martha respond to Jesus' statement? (She doesn't really know what to make of what he's saying and then goes home)
- What do *you* think Jesus means by this? (Best way for us to think about this statement for today: It's like the three friends telling Brick that he's alive, but Brick doesn't understand what they are saying. It takes time and development of later actions for the disciples to understand what Jesus is talking about when he says things like "I am the resurrection and the life." Like the actual raising of Lazarus)

ASK – Part 2

- Verse 32, Mary says the same thing to Jesus as Martha did. But she says it a little bit differently, right? She says it while she is kneeling in front of him and weeping. So how does Jesus respond to Mary in verse 33 and in general in verse 35? (he was "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" and "he wept")
- Verse 37 – This is the third time, now, that we've heard that if Jesus had just shown up on time, then Lazarus would still be alive. The repetition of the statement means that the author wants us to pay attention to it. So what do you think about this comment that Jesus could've healed Lazarus if he had just shown up on time? (Some thoughts to consider, if the students don't raise them: 1. It is a pretty ego-centric statement – as if Jesus is meant to serve just their community and their needs. 2. When things don't go the way we want them to go, we tend to blame someone or something – in

this case, Jesus gets the blame. 3. It is interesting to see how the people think Jesus could heal Lazarus, but once Lazarus was dead, they then think that all hope/chance for a recovery is gone – their “belief” in Jesus only goes so far.)

- Verse 38 – Jesus is again greatly disturbed. So three times, we’re told of Jesus’ emotional state. Again, the repetition is the author’s way of saying, “Pay attention to this.” So, what do you think about Jesus crying and having strong emotions about Lazarus’ death? Does it surprise you? Why or why not?
- Verse 39 – what is Martha’s response to Jesus’ command to roll away the stone? (resistance to doing it – gives excuses/reasons to not do it – too smelly! The King James version says it best, when it has Martha say, “He’ll stinketh!”)
- Verse 41 – what is Jesus doing here (he’s praying; it’s a bit of an odd prayer, but what we’re being shown is that Jesus does not do this act on his own. He raises Lazarus from the dead within the context of prayer, meaning that he’s raising Lazarus with God’s direction and help)
- Verse 44 – A mummy! If you were there, would this have freaked you out? Would you have gone and unbound Lazarus – or maybe taken a step or two away from him?
- A number of people believed, but not the Chief Priests and Pharisees. In verse 53, what is their plan of action? (to put Jesus to death)
- In verse 47-50, they give reasons for their conclusion to plan to kill Jesus – what are their reasons? (To save their country. In other words, nationalism kills Jesus)

TELL

- There are a million things that we could talk about here!
- But we’re going to focus on two things.
- The first thing is this: The Lazarus story is not a resurrection story, but a resuscitation story. Lazarus is brought back to life, mostly unchanged (if not a bit smellier).
- But **resurrection** is more than just being brought back to life. Resurrection is about a *transformation* that happens in the being brought back to life. We’ll talk more about this idea in other classes. But for now, just keep in mind that the Lazarus story is *not* a resurrection story, but a resuscitation story.
- The second thing we want to focus on is this: How this story helps us think about the type of resistance Jesus faced that eventually led to his crucifixion
 - First, Jesus gets blamed by his friends for not showing up on time. This doesn’t specifically have anything to do with Jesus’ crucifixion, but it does give us a hint for how easily people can get confused and start blaming each other once things get stressful and sad (just like Brick got confused...at his *own* funeral).
 - Second, just like his friends blamed him because of stress and lots of emotion, so too do the Pharisees blame Jesus in their stress and their resulting emotions – some of which is because of Jesus.
 - Remember a few lessons ago when Simeon blessed baby Jesus and said Jesus would reveal the thoughts of many? That’s what’s happening in this story. We see that the Pharisees are more concerned about what *Rome might do* because of Jesus rather than being excited about what *God was actually doing* through Jesus.
 - What’s less clear in this story, but can be heard in the line “everyone will believe in him” is that the Pharisees are threatened by and jealous of Jesus’ success.

- In other words, Jesus is better at his job than the religious leaders are at their jobs (which are similar jobs right? Religious leaders *should be* helping the people know God better like what Jesus is doing).
- So to help us think a little bit more about why this combination of jealousy and threat in the Pharisees gets associated with Jesus, let's do the following activity.
- I think you'll see that it will help us better understand why the Pharisees respond the way that they do to the news about what Jesus has done,

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- Our activity, as a class, will be to build a wall (on a table – and it will be a 2-dimensional/flat wall).
- There will be three teams that will participate in the building of this wall.
- Each team will be given 15 notecards of various colors. Think of the cards as “bricks”
- The wall will begin at this end of the table (think of this end of the table as “the ground”) and we will build the wall “up” towards this end of the table (point to the opposite end of the table).
- The wall must have at least 5 columns that are 5 cards high (or higher) and have at least 5 rows that are 5 cards long (or longer)
- The three teams must build the wall in NINE rounds.
- A round consists of each team placing a card on the wall (one team at a time).
- Round 1 will be in the order of Team 1, 2 and 3. Round 2 will be in the order of Team 2, 3, 1 and Round 3 will be in the order of Team 3, 1, 2. Then the order will start over again.
- Each team will also be given two team goals to achieve while building the wall – those goals will be passed out soon.
- When it is a team's turn to place a card/brick, they must state where they are going to place the card and what color the card is that they are going to place before they actually do it.
- After the team states what they are going to do, the other two teams get to agree or disagree with the move
- If **both** of the other two teams disagree with the original team's move, then original team cannot do the move that they were planning to do.
- (HINT: If you disagree with a plan, it'd be really good if you told the team what you WOULD vote “yes” for)
- If both of the other teams vote “No” then the original team must change their move and state the new move to the group.
- If their second move also gets voted down (again, both teams have to vote “no” to block a move), then the original team must either use a veto (see next bullet point) or lose their turn.
- Each team gets two vetoes.
 - A veto allows a team to over-ride the “no” votes by the other two teams.
 - You only get two vetoes, so use them wisely.
- Any questions?

SUMMARY (Optional)

- You have two types of goals: The overall group goal and your team's goals
- As a class/group, you must build a “wall” that has at least 5 columns that are 5 cards high (or higher) and has at least 5 rows that are 5 cards long (or longer)
- You must do it in 9 rounds

- Your team goals will be written on a piece of paper that I'm passing out to each of the teams.
- To make a move, you must say it outloud and at least one of the other teams must agree with your move.
- If both of the other teams say no, then your proposed move cannot happen and you must propose a 2nd/different move.
- If that's also voted down then you lose your turn unless you issue a veto.
- If you issue a veto, you can then override *either* of the no votes and make one of your team's two proposed move from that turn.
- Use your vetoes carefully -- each team only has two vetoes.

MAKE 3 TEAMS (Note: You probably don't want to go over 4 students per team – if you DO have 4 students per team or more, consider splitting the class so that there are two *sets* of three teams. Each set of teams would then be focused on building their own wall)

PASS OUT GOALS (see end of lesson for goals to print, cut out, and then pass out)

PASS OUT cards (pass out 10 to 15 notecards of assorted colors to each team)

DO WALL BUILDING ACTIVITY

ASK

- Was there lots of arguing?
- Was there lots of confusion?
- Did you argue more with your teammates or other teams?
- Did you accomplish the overall goal of building a wall that had at least 5 columns that were 5 cards high (or higher) and at least 5 rows that were 5 cards long (or longer)?
- Did you accomplish your own team goal as well?
- Did you find it difficult to accomplish both tasks? Why?
- Did you find the other teams to be difficult to deal with? Why?

TELL

- It might seem strange to you that Jesus could raise someone from the dead and that would make people go, "You know what? We should kill this guy!"
- One reason this happens is when a smaller group's plan becomes more important than the larger group's plan.
- So the Israelites are a group that are supposed to be paying attention to God, receiving and living God's better way so that they can then show and share that better way to the world.
- But then what happens is that within that group, there are all these teams with their own goals that start to take over, just like your team goals started to take over the larger group's goal of building the wall.

- So the Pharisees, in today's scripture story, profess greater concern for their country than they do about knowing and living God's way which leads to quite a bit of hardship for Jesus while he is alive and definitely makes for a violent end to Jesus' career/ministry.
- And one reason for this happening to Jesus is because he's paying attention to God's goals, while the Pharisees' are paying attention to their own goals.
- So even if we may not like that it happened (I certainly don't!) – this activity might help us to see *why* it happens instead of just thinking that the Pharisees are “bad people.”
- Next week, we'll see one of the ways that Jesus teaches his disciples to practice paying attention to God's goals like Jesus does so that they don't end up doing the same thing that the Pharisees do.

CLOSING PRAYER

ACTIVITY TEAM GOALS

FOR PRINTING, CUTTING OUT, and PASSING OUT

Team 1 goals – don't tell or show your goals to the other teams

- Build a wall where at least 5 columns are 5 cards high (or higher) and at least 5 rows are at 5 cards long (or longer).
- In at least three rows, make sure that a green card sits NEXT to a red card
- In three different columns, make sure at least one blue card sits directly above a red card

Team 2 goals – don't tell or show your goals to the other teams

- Build a wall where at least 5 columns are 5 cards high (or higher) and at least 5 rows are at 5 cards long (or longer).
- In at least three rows, make sure no red card sits NEXT to a green card
- In three different columns, make sure at least one yellow card sits ABOVE of a red card

Team 3 goals – don't tell or show your goals to the other teams

- Build a wall where at least 5 columns are 5 cards high (or higher) and at least 5 rows are at 5 cards long (or longer).
- In at least three rows, make sure that a yellow card sits NEXT to a red card
- In three different columns, make sure that no blue cards sit directly ABOVE any red cards