

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 3: Session 7 – Holy Week

Class 20: MT 27:11-26 – Jesus’ Roman Trial

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Focus on how stress usually changes how we respond to others
- Read the scripture story and explain what’s happening in the story using the concept of “stress” as an analysis tool.
- Note how the crowd and the Pharisees “work” together to contribute to Jesus’ death

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Despicable Me 2*)
- One die (as in *dice*, but singular)
- One pencil with a somewhat dull point. Might even want to consider a ballpoint pen, instead.
- One table that the class can fit around – one chair per person in the class
- One piece of paper per person in the class

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, one of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer; the teacher asking the question will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers 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:** *What is something that stresses you out?*

TELL

- We started a new session of stories last lesson that looks at three stories from Holy Week.
- In the previous class, Jesus told a story to the Pharisees about the Pharisees that explained why they want to, and eventually do, kill Jesus: Because they are acting like thieves by not acknowledging that what they’ve been given is ultimately provided by God, not them.
- When Jesus pointed this out to them, they really didn’t like it.

- In today's story, we'll look at the trial of Jesus and some of the reasons/factors that lead to his death sentence.
- To get us started with today's lesson, we'll begin with a simple activity.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY (Roll-a-Six)

- We're going to do an activity called "Roll-a-six"
- Each person gets a piece of paper.
- As a group, we'll share this one pencil and one die/dice.
- We'll get in a circle around this table and then one of us starts the game by rolling the dice.
- Each person gets one roll and then that person passes the dice to his/her right.
- We're trying to roll a six.
- Once someone rolls a six, that person takes the pencil and starts to number on their piece of paper from 1 to 50
- The numbers must be written one at a time, in ones, in consecutive order, and must be legible.
- The person who is writing the numbers must **also count out loud** as they write their numbers down so that the group knows where they are in their number writing.
- While the person writes to 50, the dice continues to be rolled and passed around the circle (The person who is writing gets skipped)
- Once someone else gets a six, then the pencil is passed and *that* person starts to write on their paper from 1 to 50 and counting out loud as they write.
- Then, if that first person who was writing rolls a six again, then they take the pencil back and continue writing to 50 from where they last stopped.
- For example, if you had to give up the pencil at number 15 and then you roll a six next time around, then you grab the pencil (again), and the next number you would write would be 16.
- In summary, every time you roll a six, you grab the pencil and start writing to 50 from where you last left off while the rest of the group keeps rolling the dice so that they can get the pencil.
- Any questions?

DO "Roll a Six" Activity

[*Teacher Note:* Depending on how well-mannered your students are, you might need to/want to demonstrate some "rudeness" during the game (by grabbing the pencil or die instead of asking for it, for example, when *you* roll a six) to encourage the "acting out" that comes with the stress of the game. Also, since it's a fun game, the class might want to play it again. In that instance, it's always good to hold that out as "a possibility if we make it through today's lesson."]

ASK

- As individuals drew closer to 50, did the intensity level of the game change?
- Did the stress of other people getting closer to 50 change how we acted?
 - If yes, in what ways?
- How easy was it to get the pencil when it was your turn to write?
- Did you wait patiently for the pencil or want to pull it away from the other person when it was your turn?
- Would you agree that as the game grew closer to ending, that how we treated others and how we were treated was less....polite?

TELL

- This activity helps to highlight how we often put ourselves first and others second when we start to feel strong amounts of stress.
- In this case, the pressure that we felt came from the competitive and stressful nature of the activity.

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- But, any situation that is stressful (like the ones we mentioned in our opening question) can have this type of effect on us.
- In today's scripture story, for example, there is quite a bit of stress being felt and applied by a number of the characters in the story.
- As we read the story, listen for what types of stresses are being felt and being applied.

TRANSITION TO SCRIPTURE READING

- But before we read today's story, here's what has happened leading up to the story we're going to read: Jesus on Thursday night was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane by the Pharisees (with Roman soldier help).
- Jesus was then brought to the High Priest's house and a trial before a kangaroo court was held throughout the night, where the Pharisees falsely accused Jesus and then "found" Jesus guilty of blasphemy – which was a religious crime of "taking God's name in vain."
 - *Optional to share*
 - The trial is portrayed in the Gospels as rigged and incompetent.
 - Those familiar with Jewish laws at that time would immediately see how illegal the trial was.
 - The Pharisees broke many of their laws in order to have the trial that they did to proclaim Jesus guilty. (such as holding a meeting at night and holding it at the High Priest's house; also the witnesses do not agree with each other)
- The story we're going to read today happens the next morning, Friday morning.
- In it, the Pharisees are bringing Jesus to Pilate for another, different trial.
- The Jewish leaders have (corruptly) found Jesus guilty of breaking their rules, but by Roman rule, they can't kill him. They need the Romans to do it for them. So they are bringing Jesus to Pontius Pilate to have a second trial where Pilate will consider the punishment of Jesus.
- Because this trial is about Roman rules, not Jewish rules, the Pharisees have to change their accusation against Jesus.
- Let's see what happens...

READ MT 27:11-26 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

Now Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; and Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "That's what you keep saying." 12 But when Jesus was accused by the Israelite chief priests and Pharisees, he did not answer at all. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14 But Jesus still gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. 15 Now at the festival the governor was supposed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom the crowd wanted. 16 At that time they had an evil prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So after they had gathered, Pilate said to the chief priests, Pharisees and crowd, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 Pilate said "Jesus who is called the Messiah" to annoy the chief priests and Pharisees because he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over. 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, Jesus, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." 20 While that was happening, the chief priests and the Pharisees persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" And all of them said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 Then Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" 24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, and that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 26 So he released Barabbas to them; and after having his soldiers whip Jesus, he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

ASK (*answers are in parenthesis*)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird, too" works*]

- Verse 11 tells us the main accusation that the Pharisees are leveling at Jesus in this Roman trial. What do you think it is? (“Are you the king of the Jews” is the accusation)
- Why do you think that’s an accusation that Pilate would care about? (Because the Romans are in charge of Israelites and if Jesus is saying *he* is the king, that means he’s challenging Roman rule)
- V11 -- Does Jesus agree or disagree with the accusation? (No)
- Verse 13 and 14 -- Jesus, then, does not speak at all to the Pharisees or Pilate after his one comment to Pilate. What is Pilate’s reaction to Jesus’ silence? (tries to get him to talk and is amazed at his silence)
- Why do you think Pilate is amazed? (because this is not typical prisoner/on-trial behavior. Pilate is probably used to people boasting about their crimes [if revolutionaries], begging for mercy [if guilty], or proclaiming their innocence. Jesus does *none* of this).
- As the governor, it is Pilate’s job to determine the guilt or innocence of the prisoners brought to him. But he does not proclaim Jesus as guilty or innocent. What does he do instead in verse 15-17? (puts Jesus up against Barabbas for the crowd to choose who is to be released)
- Verse 18 tells us that Pilate understands why the Pharisees brought Jesus to him for trial and it has nothing to do with Jesus’ actions. So why do you think Pilate doesn’t just proclaim Jesus innocent and let him go? (we don’t *really* know. Main possibility seems to be that Pilate knows that the Pharisees have a personal problem with Jesus – and doesn’t want to get in the middle of this personal problem between them and Jesus. If he does, then Pilate will have a personal problem with the Pharisees, which he does not want)
- Verse 20 – what do the Pharisees do to the crowd? (get them riled up against Jesus; they probably used the verdict from the trial the previous night to help with this: “Did you hear that Jesus was convicted of blasphemy? He is not one of us!” Which might help explain why the crowd calls for Jesus’ crucifixion as well...)
- Verse 24: Who does Pilate proclaim as innocent? (himself)
- Was Pilate on trial?
- So...do you think Pilate did his job here? (he kept the peace [no riot], but he did not do what he knew was right regarding Jesus)

Extra Information (not meant for the lesson, but here in case questions are raised): *Messiah* simply means “Anointed One.” In Jewish culture, kings were anointed. So, when the Jewish prophets talked about an anointed one (ie a *messiah*), it was easy to hear their message being about a person who would be a political king of the Jews.

More Extra information: Barabbas was considered a murderer, most likely of Romans. Probably of a political nature. Which means there’s some irony and a play on words here: In Hebrew, “Barabbas” means Son (bar) of the father (abba). In other words, the crowd chose who they WANTED the son of the father/messiah to be (Barabbas – a killer of the Romans) instead of who the son of the father/messiah actually was (Jesus – who teaches the people how to better experience God throughout their day). This misunderstanding of Jesus by the crowd happens consistently throughout the Gospels – because the crowd does not follow Jesus – they only see him sporadically and from a distance. Early in his ministry, the crowd’s confusion about Jesus seemed mostly comical (except for that time they tried to throw him off the cliff). But now, at the end of Jesus’ ministry, we see how this distracted characteristic of the crowd is deadly to Jesus because it allows the Pharisees’ to persuade them to doubt who Jesus was and then turn against him.

TELL

- So let’s highlight the stresses/stressors in the story:
 - Jesus is under immense pressure – his life is being threatened
 - The Pharisees are afraid of Jesus and his influence which is why they are breaking their rules and lying to Pilate.
 - The crowd is under pressure by the Pharisees. Remember that the Pharisees were leaders of the people – and in today’s story we see them exerting their influence upon the people.
 - Pilate is under pressure from the Pharisees, his wife AND the crowd. The only person NOT creating pressure for Pilate is Jesus.

- Next, let's highlight how all this stress affects the people in the story:
 - The Pharisees break their own rules
 - Pilate doesn't set Jesus free. Instead he lets the crowd decide.
 - The crowd, pressured by the Pharisees, condemns an innocent man
 - Pilate lets the crowd condemn an innocent man and announces his *own* innocence
 - Due to all this stress and people's different reactions to it, Jesus is silenced.
 - And, Jesus is sentenced to be killed.
- Today's story is a sad story. It reminds us that when the Pharisee way of living and the crowd way of living are stressed out, then Jesus and the way of living he offers is silenced and killed.
- To show how stress can cause us to be destructive and silence communication, let's watch a movie clip from *Despicable Me 2*, where the main character (Gru) is practicing asking out someone he likes.
- Let's see what the stress of this task drives him to do.

WATCH CLIP

ASK

- In the clip, did Gru actually make the phone call where he asks Lucy out? (No)
- What did he do instead? (set the phone on fire)
- What do the minions do in response to Gru's stressful response? (create more destruction while trying to be helpful)
- If Gru had changed his mind about calling Lucy, did he still have an open line of communication? (with Lucy, yes. But not by using that particular phone, no.)

TELL

- When stress is applied to the Pharisee and Crowd way of life, things get destroyed and communication gets silenced.
- Which the video clip is meant to demonstrate in a funny way and the crucifixion story demonstrates in a sad way.
- This is why I had us to look at all three groups that surround Jesus before reading these stories leading to Jesus' crucifixion, because when we see how the Pharisee approach and the Crowd approach leads to Jesus' death, those ways of living don't look very promising in this story (or other stories, for that matter, but especially this story)
- And, remember, there is a third choice – the choice to be a disciple, to learn from Jesus how to respond to these stressful situations where we don't add to the stress, to the damage, to the injustice, to the chaos.
- Also remember, that third choice leads to new life, to resurrection.
- But before we get to resurrection, there's the crucifixion story.
- So, in our next lesson, we'll read and discuss the crucifixion of Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER