

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 3: Session 8 – Post-Crucifixion

Class 23: Acts 1:1-14 – The Ascension of Jesus

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

In the form of questions that will be discussed with offered answers (in the lesson):

- Why does Resurrected Jesus leave the disciples (using Elijah and Elisha as a reference)?
- How does (Resurrected) Jesus' essence/presence/spirit remain (on earth) after he has ascended?

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Bagger Vance*)
- Questions from end of lesson (you might want to print them out and then cut each one into a strip of paper and shuffle them).
- One plastic spoon (big or small – doesn't matter)
- A place to rest the spoon where two people can both reach it (fairly easily). Like a music stand or podium or table or (my favorite due to its ease of use) a bar stool.

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:** *Do you have a quote or phrase that you like to say from a movie or a book or an athlete? If so, what is it?*

TELL

- Last class, we started a new session about what happens after Jesus is crucified.
- We read the story of Doubting Thomas and noted that he doesn't understand resurrection when he's by himself because resurrection is a team event – it is something that is better understood when you are on TEAM DISCIPLES

- And, we talked about how being on TEAM DISCIPLES is not something that starts after crucifixion. Instead, it is something that starts at the beginning of Jesus ministry – joining TEAM DISCIPLES means following Jesus, learning the stories about Jesus and what he taught, staying with him through Holy Week, and then staying with TEAM DISCIPLES after the resurrection.
- In today’s story, we’re going to see that Resurrected Jesus, who has spent some time with TEAM DISCIPLES since resurrection, leaves the disciples.
- The story is often referred to as “The Ascension” story (as in “ascending” or “going up”).
- This might seem strange – for Jesus to leave after just being reunited with TEAM DISCIPLES
- The reason Jesus leaves is what we’ll be talking about today.
- To get started, we’re going to watch a movie clip that captures the spirit of the Ascension story and will help us, I hope, think about what this strange story of Ascension is trying to tell us.
- The video clip is from a movie called “The Legend of Bagger Vance.”
- Bagger Vance is a caddy and golf coach (played by Will Smith), who showed up out of nowhere to help a golfer (played by Matt Damon) get his golf game/swing back. This is helpful because the golfer had “lost” his golf game/swing since leaving for the war (WWI) and then returning after seeing action.
- The scene happens right before the golfer (Matt Damon) is going to make a very important shot at the end of a very important golf match, where the stakes are high and the stress is even higher.
- Let’s see what happens.

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- Who leaves? (Bagger Vance/ the caddy / the coach / Will Smith)
- There are three people who have responses to Bagger Vance leaving, the golfer, the young boy, and the older man. Were their responses the same? (No)
- What was the golfer’s (Matt Damon) response? (scared at first, “I need you.” And then amused, maybe a little sad)
- What was the young boy’s response? (frightened / scared / overwhelmed)
- What was the older man’s response? (also scared, but showed it by being angry)

TELL / TRANSITION TO SCRIPTURE READING

- There may not be enough information given in the clip for why Bagger Vance chose to leave – especially at that moment ... anyone want to share their thoughts about why he left?
- It’s hard to say from the clip, but it seems likely that Vance knows that both the golfer and boy need to know that what he (Vance) has given them is now *inside* of them and not *outside* of them.
- But for them to be able to see/know this, Vance has to physically leave.
- Because, if Vance doesn’t leave, they’ll keep relying on him instead of themselves.
- In today’s scripture story, Jesus leaves his disciples just like Bagger Vance left the boy and the golfer.
- The situation is a little bit less stressful, though.
- Let’s see what happens.

READ Acts 1:-14 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning **2** until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. **3** After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. **4** While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." **6** So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" **7** He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **9** When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. **11** They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." **12** Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. **13** When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14** All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

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 3 – what do you think "after his suffering" means? (After Jesus' crucifixion)
- Verse 3 again – How long does the author of Luke say that Jesus stuck around after resurrection? (40 days – and 40 is symbolic number to the Israelites that denotes a "complete time")
- Verse 4 – what does Jesus tell the disciples to do? ("wait for the promise of the Father" i.e. God)
- Verse 5 – and what is that promise? (the Holy Spirit)
- Verse 6 – What do the disciples ask Jesus in this verse? (Basically: NOW will you be king? So, even now, after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples think that Jesus is going to be a political leader who will restore Israel to military, political and economic might. This concept of Messiah is a hard one for the Israelites to let go of)
- Verse 8 – What kind of power will the disciples receive? (Power from the Holy Spirit)
- Verse 9 – After Jesus tells them about the Holy Spirit, what happens next? (He floats away)
- Does this remind you slightly of another (Old Testament) story that we read earlier this year? (hopefully they say, "Yes, that story where Elijah gets taken up by a chariot of fire, and Elisha, his student gets double Elijah's spirit")
- Verse 12 and 13 – Do the disciples do what Jesus told them to do? (they stay together and in the city and they wait...so YES, they do what Jesus told them to do)

TELL

- The biggest and most important thing that Jesus has been preparing his disciples for since the start of his ministry is to prepare his disciples to experience baptism by the Holy Spirit.

- And, Jesus says that’s going to happen soon for the disciples
- But instead of staying around to see it happen, Jesus LEAVES just before this very big thing happens.
- This is the very same thing we saw happen in the movie: Just before the biggest shot is taken, Bagger Vance LEAVES.
- We’ve already discussed why Bagger left – so that the golfer and the boy can see that what Bagger has taught them is now *inside* of them.
- And, they won’t see/know/trust that until Bagger is gone – because they’ll just keep relying on Bagger as long as he’s there. So he leaves.
- Jesus leaves for the same reason.
- He leaves so that the disciples will know that what Jesus has taught them and prepared them for is *inside* of them.
- He’s been with the disciples long enough (40 days) that they know that the crowd and Pharisee way of life didn’t win – which is important for them to know.
- But, if Resurrected Jesus stays, the disciples won’t ever trust themselves. Instead, they’ll keep looking to Jesus to make the decision and tell them what to do.
- As long as the teacher is present, the students will keep looking to the teacher for guidance.
- Which is exactly what Jesus DOES NOT want to have happen, right?
- So to make sure that (the students always looking to the teacher for guidance) doesn’t happen, Jesus leaves before the big event.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit is something they have to do on their own.
- But, and I think this is important, they aren’t *really* on their own.
- Because the things that Jesus has taught them still live on in them.
- Even though “Resurrected Jesus” leaves earth, “Teacher Jesus” lives on in the minds and hearts of the disciples.
- Which is why they listen to him, and stay together, and stay in the city at the end of the story.
- The same thing is true for us: There are things that our parents or teachers say to us, that we can still hear them say even when they are not right next to us. Some are simple things, like, “Look both ways before crossing the street” or “Wash your hands before you eat.”
- But some things might be more specific to your relationship with that person.
- Can you think of some things that a teacher or a parent or a relative or a friend shared with you that you often hear in your mind even when they are not with you? [**Note:** *This may not necessarily be an easy thing for the students to respond to right away, so don’t expect answers from them, and in preparation for their silence, have a few examples of your own ready and available to share*]

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- It is not just living people who instill thoughts and words in our minds.
- Stories can do the same thing.
- Our following activity is meant to help us see how words from the stories in the Bible, including the words of Jesus, may already be with us, in our minds and hearts – or at least be pretty familiar to us.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We’ll split into two teams.
- And then, each team will send a player to the “front” of the class where the “host” of the game (most likely a teacher) will be.

- There will also be a bar stool here with a plastic spoon on top of it.
- Once there is a representative from both teams (one player standing on each “side” of the bar stool), then the host will read a quote from one of the Bible stories that we’ve read and discussed this year in class.
- The answer we are looking for is the name of the person (or group of people) who said the quote.
- Whoever grabs the spoon first gets to give the answer. (BE SURE TO NOT BUMP HEADS WHEN REACHING FOR THE SPOON)
- Teammates MAY NOT yell out the answers. If a team does this, they will lose a point for *each* infraction!
- You may grab the spoon before the quote is finished. However, once the spoon is grabbed, the rest of the quote will not be finished.
- A correct answer will be worth 2 points. If the first person answers incorrectly, the other person gets to hear the rest of the quote before guessing.
- If neither participant knows the answer, then a clue will be given. The clue will be the book, chapter and verse of the quote. If you THEN grab the spoon and answer correctly, your team will receive ONE point.
- Also, sometimes, there will be a follow-up bonus question offered to the TEAM that answered a quote correctly. If the bonus question is answered correctly, then that team will receive an extra point.
- Once a question has been answered, then it is time for two new contestants to come to the front of the room.
- Any questions?
- Then let’s begin!

DO ACTIVITY of “Match the phrase to the Bible character who said it”

(Note: The quotes are in order of the stories as we read them during the year. You will probably want to mix them up a bit)

1. "Go, lie down; and if God calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' "
1 Samuel 3:1-20 --- **ELI**
2. "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you."
1 Samuel 8:7-8 --- **God (speaking to Samuel)**
3. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."
1 Kings 18:27 --- **Elijah**
Bonus question: To whom was Elijah speaking? **(to the Baal prophets)**
4. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."
1 Kings 19:4 --- **Elijah**

5. "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"
2 Kings 2:12 --- **Elisha**

6. "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years."
Luke 1:18 --- Zechariah
Bonus Question: What was Zechariah's son to be named? (**John** as in John the Baptist)

7. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.
Mark 1:8 --- **John the Baptist**

8. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian.
Luke 4:27 --- **Jesus**

9. Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone? Mark 2:7 --- **The Pharisees**
Bonus Question: The Pharisees are talking about Jesus here. Whose sins had Jesus just forgiven? (Hint – this story involves a hole in a roof...) ANSWER: **The paralyzed man whose friends had lowered him through the roof to get him to Jesus.**

10. How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?
John 3:4 --- **Nicodemus**

11. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." Mark 12:17 --- **Jesus**

12. ...teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.
Luke 11:1 --- **the disciples**

13. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!
Luke 11:13 --- **Jesus**

14. God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.
Mt 16:22 --- **Peter**
Bonus Question: What does Jesus say in response to Peter's line? (**Get behind me, Satan**)

15. 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'
MT 16:22 -- **The workers at the vineyard** (half credit for those who say "Pharisees" -- give them a chance to get full credit if they say Pharisees first.)

16. "Why, what evil has he done? ... I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

MT 27:23-24 --- **Pilate**

Bonus Question: What was Pilate's first name? (**Pontius**)

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

John 20:25 --- **Thomas, a disciple**

TELL

- So as you can see, with a little help, some of Jesus and his teachings live on *in you*.
- Pretty cool, huh?
- In the next class, we'll talk about what happens for the disciples when they wait together in the city after Jesus' ascension (Hint: We call it *Pentecost*).
- And, we'll use these three stories to help one way we might think about Resurrection.

CLOSING PRAYER