

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 3: Session 4 – Jesus and the Crowd

Class 11: Luke 4:14-30 – Jesus and his hometown

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- In this lesson's scripture passage the people in Jesus' hometown are excited to have him back in town. But then they get upset at what he has to say. So upset that they try to kill him. There are a number of reasons for why the Israelites were so infuriated by Jesus. This lesson looks at two of those reasons:
 - There are some assumptions that the townsfolk make before Jesus speaks to them. We'll look at what assumptions are in general, what the assumptions were in the story, and how they affected the outcome of the story.
 - Being "in the wrong" often leads us to argue (defensively) rather than simply acknowledge that we were wrong.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *The Breakup*)
- Written-out one-minute mysteries (included in the lesson)

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: *Is or was there something that you knew you were not very good at, but when someone pointed it out to you, you got upset about them saying it?*

INTRO

- We are on to our 2nd story out of 3 about Jesus and the crowd.
- Remember from last class: there are three groups of people who surround Jesus: The Pharisees, the Crowd and his disciples.
- Each of these groups has certain characteristics.

- In this session, we're looking at how Jesus and the crowd interact with each other as well as some characteristics of the crowd.

TRANSITION to Activity

- In today's story, Jesus comes home.
- And, as we'll see, the townspeople make some assumptions about Jesus.
- An "assumption" is a type of thinking where a person thinks they know what is going to happen before it actually happens.
- However, assumptions can cause us to misunderstand situations and be disappointed by what actually happens.
- So, to begin, we're going to do an activity that will help demonstrate how assumptions can get in the way of our ability to understand a situation.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- So I'm going to share with you a mystery.
- Then, as a group, we will attempt to solve the mystery.
- You are allowed to ask me questions that can be answered with a "Yes" or a "No."
- I will answer truthfully and with an answer of "Yes," "No" or "I don't know"
- [Optional: If you want to increase the challenge of the activity, limit their amount of questions to say, five.]
- Once you solve the mystery, as a group, we'll then identify the assumption that could have or did make our solving of the mystery more difficult.

- **EXAMPLE STORY:**

If you think the class needs an example story, use this: *A man and his son were rock climbing on a particularly dangerous mountain when they slipped and fell. The man was killed, but the son lived and was rushed to a hospital. At the hospital, the operating surgeon on duty looked at the injured young man on the operating table and declared, "I can't operate on this boy: he is my son." How can this be?*

Answer: The operating surgeon was the boy's mother

Assumption: That the surgeon was a man.

DO ACTIVITY

- **FIRST STORY:** *There is a cabin on the side of a mountain. Two people are inside and they are dead. How did they die?*
Let the class ask their questions and figure out the mystery.
Answer: They died in an airplane crash.
Assumption: That the cabin is a cabin that people live in. But really, it is the cabin of a 747 jetliner. The dead are the pilot and co-pilot/passenger.
- **SECOND STORY:** *A man rides in on Friday, stays 3 days, and then leaves on Friday. How did he do that?*
Answer: Friday is the name of the man's horse
Assumption: That the word "Friday" refers to the day.
- **THIRD STORY:** *How do you get down off a duck? (or "How do you get down from a duck?")*
Answer: You pluck it
Assumption: That the word "down" refers to a type of feather, and not to the action of climbing off of a duck. This assumption is especially tricky to catch because the previous mystery put the image of a character riding a horse. So the mind immediately jumps to "riding a duck" even though that's absurd.
- **BONUS/EXTRA CREDIT STORY** [use ONLY IF the other mysteries were solved within a **total** of five minutes]: *It is a hot August afternoon. The location is the living room in an old Victorian mansion. The 7-foot window is open and the curtains are blowing in the breeze generated by the thunderstorm that just passed. On the floor lie the bodies of Bill*

and Monica. They are surrounded by puddles of water and broken glass. They have no clothing on. How did they die?

Answer: The wind blew open the windows, knocking over the fish bowl in which Bill and Monica had been swimming. The fish bowl crashed to the floor and broke, leaving Bill and Monica to suffocate without their water.

Assumption: That Bill and Monica were human. They were actually two goldfish.

TRANSITION to SCRIPTURE

- That was fun and maybe a little frustrating, right?
- Assumptions not only cause difficulties in understanding a situation, but they can also create strong feelings of disappointment in us when reality is the *opposite* of what we assumed was going to happen.
- That difference between assumption and reality can really hurt, emotionally, sometimes.
- So, in today's story, Jesus has recently begun his ministry, and it's been going well. So now he's returned to his hometown.
- As we read through the story, see if you can spot any assumptions that the hometown folk make that help contribute to the ending of the story.

READ Luke 4:14-30 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. **15** He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. **16** He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. **17** The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: **18** "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." **20** Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, **21** and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." **22** All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. **23** Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" **24** "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. **25** I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. **26** Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. **27** 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." **28** All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. **29** They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. **30** But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

ASK/TELL (*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*]
- V14 – what gives Jesus the power to do what he does? (The Holy Spirit)
- From two lessons ago—when and how did Jesus receive the Holy Spirit? (when he was baptized by John the Baptist – and not when he was born)
- V14&15 – how are people responding to Jesus in general (very well)
- V16 – where is Jesus visiting? (Nazareth, where he was raised as a kid)
- V17 – Can you tell what Jesus is doing here? (Yes, he's reading scripture out loud to the congregation – just like we do in worship. **Noteworthy note:** This tells us that Jesus can read. Reading is thought to be a not-widely shared skill in Jesus' days)
- V22 – So Jesus is reading the scripture and then talking to the people of his hometown sanctuary. How are his hometown people responding to him at this point? (favorably and with amazement)
- V22 – Why do you think the people are responding to Jesus favorably? (probably because he was from the same place that they were and that they were feeling proud of him. They probably thought his first words were gracious.)

- V24-27 – Uh-oh...Jesus isn't going easy on them. Any guesses on what Jesus' point is in these verses? (*Nod encouragingly at offered answers and ask for more ideas/thoughts, but you don't need to respond with any answers. This is one of the main points that will be discussed in the following TELL section*)
- V28 –The people are definitely mad! Any ideas about why? (They don't like what Jesus is saying. *Why* they don't like what he is saying will be addressed in the following TELL section)
- V29 – what do the people do in their anger? (Try to throw Jesus off the cliff/kill him!)
- What do you think about that response?
- Thinking about assumptions, what assumptions, if any, do you think the people in the congregation make in this story?
 - Possibilities:
 - They might have some assumed pride about how *they* helped raise someone in their town who then became a rabbi (which was an honorable and accomplished position in that time and place)
 - They might also think that Jesus is going to treat them just like he's been treating other crowds, by healing the sick
 - Overall, seems like they probably think that Jesus is going to go "easy" on them – that Jesus is going to tell them how great they are and how thankful he is that he grew up there, etc.

The following are NOT Teaching Points for this particular lesson, but are notes meant to help answer questions the students may have:

- V16 –A synagogue is sort of like how we would think of a church. Each town had one, and that's where the people gathered to worship on the Sabbath (which for the Israelites was and is on Saturday)
- V18 and 19 – the passage Jesus is reading from is the book of Isaiah. The words are actually what Isaiah said about himself to the people of Israel, but Jesus is appropriating Isaiah's words for his own situation. Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born
- V20 – it was a custom to sit when teaching. Just the opposite of today, when we often stand to teach to large groups of people.
- V23 – Jesus is saying out loud the types of expectations his hometown may have of him. He's thinking their thoughts out loud for them
- V30 – Wish we knew how Jesus walks "through" them. Some more detail would be appreciated there, don't you think?

TELL

- So, the people's assumptions turn out to be not true, right? Jesus doesn't thank them or tell them how great they are or heal their wounded townspeople.
- I suspect those assumptions not being met is partly why the people get angry, but let's talk about what additional things are happening along with the people's assumptions to get them so angry.
- It really starts to unravel in v21 because what Jesus says in v21 can be interpreted in two ways.
 - Interpretation #1 is the way the townspeople interpreted Jesus' words – that the scripture was fulfilled the moment Jesus read it. This interpretation understands the phrase "in your hearing" to mean "happening right before your very eyes (or ears)."
 - In other words, the people thought the scripture was being fulfilled right then and there because Jesus was talking about *himself*. It's almost like a boast when understood this way. It's like Jesus was supposed to be saying, *You people are very lucky and honored because I've chosen to fulfill scripture in your presence.* And, since they probably had this assumption that they were going to be honored by Jesus, that assumption made it easier to arrive at this interpretation of Jesus' words.
 - Interpretation #2 is the way Jesus interprets the phrase (as we find out in the later verses). This interpretation is that the scripture is fulfilled whenever the people hearing it actually *understand* it and then *live* it.

- Since the gospels are written in Greek and not Hebrew/Aramaic (which would've been Jesus' native tongue would've been speaking), then we don't know exactly what word Jesus used for "hearing." But most likely he used the word *shema* which is a Hebrew word that means to "hear, understand and then act accordingly." Our word of "hear" does not capture the intent of this word *shema* very well. In Jesus' interpretation, the scripture is fulfilled when *everyone* (not just him) preaches good news to the poor, heals the sick, proclaims freedom for the prisoners, and forgives the oppressed.
- So in v23 we get our first clue that Jesus is interpreting the phrase the #2 way, but he is also speaking AGAINST interpretation #1 – he's speaking against the idea that Jesus (or any ONE individual) is the one who is supposed to do all the work in front of everyone else and for everyone else (the "Physician, heal one's self" line was probably said sarcastically or with scorn).
- V24-26 Jesus continues to speak against interpretation #1 – Elijah, the greatest OT prophet was often on his own (remember how it was just him against 450 Baal prophets and how the Queen wanted to kill him and no one protected him?) and when he needed help, it was not Israelites who helped him, but *foreigners* (we didn't read those stories this year). And why was that the situation for Elijah? Because the people of Israel were not fulfilling/*shema*-ing the scripture
- V27 Why is it that only foreigners were *healed* and not Israelites? Same answer as before: Because the people of Israel were not believing in God's power / fulfilling the scripture.
- V28 – Jesus basic message here is that, "Hey, I grew up here, so why I am I the only one doing this? Why aren't you doing this too?"
- Putting Jesus' words in this light, then, can help paint the picture of why Jesus is really getting under the people's skin with his message.
- On top of that, Jesus' message is really not jiving with the assumptions the people had in place about what Jesus was going to do or say. All of this, then, (Jesus' message and the people's incorrect assumptions) makes the people defensive and furious.
- v29 – The people then prove that they are STILL not hearing, understanding and fulfilling the scripture...by trying to badly hurt Jesus

REVIEW

- If we use today's story to outline how crowds can reaction to Jesus, this is what've learned:
 - The crowd is quick to react emotionally, both positively and negatively.
 - Not only is the crowd quick to react, the crowd is quick to *change* its reaction.
 - The crowd is focused on itself in a selfish sort of way (wants to be affirmed/wants to push away criticism)
- And, what we've learned about Jesus' reaction to the crowd is that...
 - Jesus is not afraid of the crowd and will not hold back in speaking truth to the crowd, even if it makes them angry.
 - In the previous class, we saw how Jesus healed the crowd. Healing, though, takes different forms. In this case, speaking truth to the crowd is also a form of healing.
 - As we can see, though, it is a less appreciated form of healing.

TRANSITION to MOVIE CLIP

- To help us think about how the crowd's reaction is not necessarily so over the top, let's watch the following movie clip, "The Break Up."
- In it, one person in a relationship will tell the other person in the relationship that a mistake has been made.
- Let's see how that other person responds and how that conversation goes.

Watch Video Clip

ASK

- How many lemons were there supposed to be? (12)
- And how many lemons were brought home? (3)
- Was there an apology/an admitting of making a mistake? (No)
- Were there excuses? (Yes)
- And what was the overall result of not admitting fault and apologizing? (arguing / tension / a lack of feeling of teamwork)

TELL

- So one of the things we see happening in the movie clip is that one character “defends” his actions instead of apologizing for his mistakes/actions.
- His defending and justifying of his mistakes, then, makes the communication between the two characters combative.
- This type of defensiveness can happen in a lot in relationships and interactions.
- We also saw it happen in the scripture story for today.
- The people in the Jesus’ hometown were pretty defensive of their choices.
- Can you think of a different way that both the character in the movie clip and the crowd could’ve responded?
 - It would’ve been tough for them to do it, but they could’ve been like, “You know what, you’re right. We’ve made some mistakes. We’re sorry. What can we do differently to make the situation better?”
- In the story we read, today, had the townspeople responded by admitting to a mistake, then they probably would’ve avoided the even worse mistake of trying to badly hurt Jesus (or even kill him) by throwing him off of a cliff.

CLOSING PRAYER