

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 3: Session 7 – Holy Week

Class 21: Luke 23:32-53 – Jesus' Crucifixion

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Review the usual / acceptable way the world thinks you should respond when hurt by someone
- Highlight what Jesus does in the face of the injustice done to him
- Invite students to ask God for help in forgiving others

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *The Office – the US TV series*)
- Dissolving paper / paper that dissolves in water (like [this](#))
- One writing utensil per individual in class (might need pens for this)

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 you consider to be an unforgivable action?*

INTRO

- Today is the last lesson in our *Holy Week* session.
- A quick review: First class of the session was about Jesus telling a story to the Pharisees ABOUT the Pharisees that helped explain why they wanted to/were going to kill Jesus: Because they wanted the vineyard (i.e. Israel) all to themselves instead of being ok with paying the owner (i.e. God), so they mistreated anyone who spoke for the owner (i.e. prophets and Jesus).
- Second class: Jesus is given unfair trial by Pilate (the Roman governor) who does not find any wrong-doing by Jesus, but let's the crowd do his job and pass judgment. The only person Pilate pronounces innocent is himself. We mostly talked about how stress causes Pilate, the Pharisees and the Crowd to act in ways they wouldn't normally act and how the combination of the way of the crowd and the way of the Pharisees kills Jesus.
- These ways of thinking and acting between the crowd, Pharisees, and Pilate that Jesus reveals all contribute to the killing of Jesus. Holy week ends with Jesus' death and that's the story we're going to read today – the crucifixion of Jesus.

- And though I don't want to lose sight of how these choices and actions result in killing Jesus, I want us to make sure we focus on what Jesus does in today's story.
- Because the crowd and Pharisee way of life happens every day. It's all around us, all the time.
- And when these ways of life are at their worst, I want us to remember how Jesus responds to it as a reminder that his choice is also available for us to make.
- To get started with today's lesson, then, I want us to watch a *somewhat* light-hearted video clip from the US TV series, *The Office*, that shows us how the world mostly responds to acts of injustice.
- In it, a character in that office setting, Pam, has been wronged by her boss, Michael, in a number of ways. The biggest one being that he was dating Pam's mother and then broke up with her on her birthday.
- The clip starts with the boss trying to make amends with his employee.
- Let's see what happens.

VIEW VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- What did the boss first offer his employee to make amends? (a raise)
- What did the employee choose instead? (to hit him)
- Did the employee (Pam) have second thoughts about hitting her boss? (Yes)
- What finally caused her to do it? (the boss tried to blame Pam's mom)
- Did Pam feel better after hitting her boss? (she said she didn't feel better)
- Did the rest of the office do anything to stop what was happening? (Not at all – they even brought popcorn)
- Does that action of the office workers remind you of anything we've seen in the Jesus stories? (very crowd-like behavior)

TELL

- When we are wronged or hurt or someone we care about is hurt, our instinct is to hurt the person that hurt us.
- We sometimes call this "getting even."
- As the video clip shows rather well, I think, *actually* getting even is difficult.
- For instance, after Pam hurts her boss (even made him limp!), Pam did not feel better.
- Part of the reason she doesn't feel better is because hurting someone else does not actually help us heal.
- And it is this healing part aspect of today's story that I want us to focus on and talk about today.
- But first, let's read the story of what happens to Jesus after his joke of a trial with Pontius Pilate.

Luke 23:32-53

32Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

44It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. 47When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. 49But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

50Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, 51had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. 52This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.

ASK

- 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*]
- v33 – Is Jesus the only one being crucified? (No)
- v34 – In the previous two lessons, we focused on a lot of unfair things that led to Jesus' crucifixion (Pharisees acting like thieves; crowd being easily persuaded; Pilate finding himself innocent) Once Jesus is actually on the cross, then,, what do we hear Jesus say to God? (Jesus asks God to forgive them)
- If you were in Jesus' position, would you ask the same thing? Why?
- v34 – What do the soldiers cast lots for while Jesus is being crucified? (cast lots to determine who gets to keep his clothing/belongings)
- v35 – What do the Pharisees and other religious leaders do while Jesus is on the cross? (taunt him)
- v37 – What do the soldiers say to Jesus (they tell him to save himself)
- v39 – Who also mocked Jesus? (one of the criminals who was being crucified)
- v40 – Who defends Jesus? (the other crucified criminal)
- Do the actions by either criminal surprise you? Why?
- v43 – Does Jesus seem grateful for the criminal's defense? (seems so, yes)
- v47 – What does the centurion say about Jesus? (that Jesus must've been innocent)
- v50-53 – Who takes care of Jesus' body? (Joseph of Arimathea)

TELL

- Today's story is a sad and disturbing story about the world we live in.
- Jesus healed, welcomed outsiders, taught, and even fed large crowds and yet...the way the powers of the world respond to him is to oppose him, lie about him, mock him, and kill him.
- Thinking back to our opening question, this seems like something that could be put on the unforgiveable list
- Which is why I think it is important that we pay attention to what Jesus does in today's story: He asks God to forgive the people.
- Not because what the people did was ok
- But because forgiveness is how to move on – is how healing works.
- Who Jesus is shows us how powerful and beautiful a person's life can be AND how some of the people respond to Jesus also shows us how ugly and terrible a person's life can be.
- If we want to live a powerful and beautiful life like Jesus did, then we can't let the ugly lives own our thoughts and action.
- We can't let that ugliness get and stay inside of us.

- Which is what forgiveness does. It helps us to expel that ugliness from inside of us while still acknowledging that it is a force and it exists.
- This is not an easy task, which is why I think Jesus' wording is important to note. Jesus doesn't directly forgive the people.
- Instead, he asks God to forgive them.
- In other words, forgiveness is not something we can do or manage on our own.
- We need God's help to forgive – especially the things we consider unforgiveable.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- I'm going to hand out some paper to you
- At the top of it, I want you to write, "Things people have done to me or others that have hurt me or that I'm really angry about"
- Then, at the bottom of the paper, I'd like you to write, "God forgive them for they know not what they do and help me to forgive them, too."
- For the next few minutes, I want you to either write the names and/or actions of the things that you or others have been hurt by or are angry about
- Note #1: I'm not saying you WILL forgive these actions. I'm saying you're asking for help to forgive – like you're working your way towards it.
- Note #2: None of what you are writing will be seen by anyone else. You will not be asked to share this with anyone else.
- Note #3: If you want to keep this paper, use your phone to take a picture of what you've written or grab another piece of paper to write a second copy of it – because we're going to do something with the paper I gave you in about five minutes.

DO WRITING EXERCISE – give about 5 minutes

TELL

- [*Give a 30 second notice to students to wrap up with their writing*]
- I don't think "forgive and forget" when taken at face value is a helpful phrase.
- But I do think "forgive and stop obsessing" is worth considering
- To forgive is to let go of the hurt and the anger
- And when we ask for God's help with forgiving, there can be a release that we experience.
- Visually, today, we offer that reminder of what forgiveness can be.
- I invite you to take the paper that you wrote on, to fold it up so that others can't see your writing, and when you are ready, to approach this bowl of water and put your paper in it.
- Then watch the paper and see what happens to those words of anger and hurt.

DO ACTIVITY

TELL

- Obviously, this is not a true representation of what forgiveness looks like or feels like
- But it is a reminder that with God's help, we *can* move beyond even the most hurtful and angering words and actions of others, if we so choose
- And on the other side of that letting go, there is new life. There is resurrection.
- We'll talk about that new life and resurrection in our next session of stories.

CLOSING PRAYER