

Herod and doing the right thing — Christian ed at home

Adapted from an article by JOELLE BRUMMIT-YALE in the
Presbyterian Outlook



Scripture: Mark 6:14-29

Materials: n/a

As parents, we hope to raise our children to be ethical, moral human beings who do good in the world. But we also recognize that the choices that they'll need to make won't always be easy. They will be presented with situations where they will need to opt for one path or another. Sometimes they'll struggle because there are pros and cons to both sides. And sometimes they'll hurt someone's feelings regardless of which option they select.

While we know that God forgives all hurt and damage we cause, we also want to encourage children to make choices that advance God's love and care for all. In this week's lesson, your children will explore the story of King Herod killing John the Baptist. Reflecting on Herod's choice, they will talk about choices and their

consequences, while also recognizing that the power of God's love is greater than our choices.

Introduce

Begin the time with your children by presenting a series of choices for them to make.

- Begin with an easy choice where one option is more attractive than the other. For instance, you might ask them if they would like to clean the toilet or watch their favorite TV show.
- Next, offer a choice where both options are appealing to your children, such as going to a friend's house to play or going to visit a relative the child loves. Ask them to share which option they would choose and why they went with this option.
- Continue this activity presenting increasingly more difficult challenges to make.
- Conclude by asking your children to consider this scenario: You promise your friend you will help him anytime he needs help. One day your friend says he needs help. You go to help him and he asks you to do something dangerous. You will help your friend by doing this dangerous thing, but you also might risk your safety, his safety or someone else's. What do you do? Why? Would your choice change if he wants you to do something that will help him, but will hurt someone else?
- Note that we often have to make difficult decisions. Sometimes we have to choose between two appealing options, but sometimes we're faced with making a decision where all of the possibilities have negative consequences.

Prepare

Prepare to read aloud Mark 6:14-29.

- Share that this story takes place after Jesus has become well known. He and his disciples have been traveling around teaching and healing. Many people are talking about Jesus' powers and are wondering where they come from.
- King Herod, the ruler over the area of Galilee where Jesus and his disciples have been teaching, hears about Jesus' ministry. Notice who Jesus reminds him of and what Herod associates with that person.

Before you read the text, it may also be helpful to remind your children who John the Baptist is, especially if they will not easily remember how he fits into Jesus' life.

- It's important to highlight that John saw his role as "preparing the way" for Jesus.

- He has a public ministry focused on baptizing people and calling on them to repent for their wrongdoings. He was helping people get ready to receive Jesus' teachings.
- John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. John recognized that Jesus was God's son before many others did. Though he did not feel important enough to baptize him, Jesus asked him to do so.

Read

Read aloud Mark 6:14-29.

- Note that this is a somewhat gory story, as Herod has John the Baptist beheaded and his head given to his wife on a platter. Decide how to best share this information with your children based on their age and sensitivity. You may choose to simply say that Herod had John killed to keep a promise to Herodias' daughter.

Wonder

After reading aloud the story, ask your children to share who Jesus reminded King Herod of.

- Then ask them to describe the story about John the Baptist that Herod thinks of as he wonders whether Jesus might be John the Baptist come back to life.
- What was the choice that Herod had to make? What were his options? Which did he choose?
- What do you think of his choice?
- Explain that Herod had a difficult choice to make. While it may seem that it was excessively cruel to honor Herodias' daughter's request to have John the Baptist killed, in that time and in the position he was in, it was very important to keep a promise, even if doing so caused something terrible to happen.

Conclude your discussion of the Scripture by shifting from the historical event (John the Baptist's death) to the time period in which this story is taking place. Note that Herod thinks of this story because he believes Jesus is John the Baptist returned from the dead.

- Ask your children how they think Herod feels realizing this. How did Herod feel about John the Baptist when he was alive? How would he feel knowing that John has returned?
- Explain that Jesus is not the resurrected John the Baptist. However, this story does tell us something about the good that God can bring out of a bad situation.
- Even though John was killed, Herod still believes he can return. His good work can continue. This hints at the idea that Jesus' good work can never

be destroyed. Though Jesus will eventually be killed, he is resurrected so we know that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God.

Do

Carry your exploration of these themes into your children's daily lives. Here are a few extension activities that you can choose from. You can also create your own.

- Role play difficult choices that your children might have to make in their lives. Choose instances that are likely to come up for them such as negative peer pressure situations, responding to someone bullying someone else, etc. After role playing each situation, talk with your children about what each choice felt like. What was difficult? Why did they make this choice? How can they make the best choice if they are faced with this situation in real life?
- Help your children notice times when God brought good out of a bad situation. Talk about difficult or sad times that have happened in your child's life. Acknowledge the hurt that they experienced. Then ask them to think about the positives that came about because of that situation. Note that sometimes the good comes much later.
- Explore what might have happened if King Herod had broken his promise and refused to kill John the Baptist. Ask your children to imagine this alternate reality. What would have happened to King Herod? How might John the Baptist's ministry have continued? How might John's and Jesus' ministries have connected? Look at situations where people have made a promise that caused them to hurt others, but later realized that they needed to break that promise. An excellent example to explore with older children is former white supremacists. Many have spoken out about the damage they did while participating in white supremacist groups.



JOELLE BRUMMIT-YALE is the director of children's and youth ministries at Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. When not at the church, she can usually be found at home with her son and husband caring for their many animals and developing their family homestead.

Published July 7, 2021