

Upside Down Kingdom

A Lenten Curriculum for Children

by Mary T. Meadows

General Instructions and Tidbits

This bible study was developed for a multi-age, small group of children for use during a six-week Lenten series. The lesson plan presumes a 50-minute work period. It is based loosely on Donald B. Kraybill's *Upside Down Kingdom*, published by Herald Press. This book is designed for Bible study with discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Ideally, the adults could work through Kraybill's book while the children study some of the same stories on their own!

Please feel free to use these lessons as you find them helpful. If you have more time or older children, you may want to try more complicated art projects. You may also want to work on a specific piece of music. For example, the Ghana folksong "Jesu, Jesu" would work well with these lessons and verses could be learned over time. It can be found in the *Chalice Hymnal*, among other hymnals.

Most of the other music I suggest in these lessons I have learned over the years from others. Occasionally, I actually find the music in a songbook. If you don't know a song and would like more information, please feel free to e-mail me at mmeadows@pullen.org.

The Ken Medema CD *Just Kiddin Around* has many wonderful stories and story songs. It can be obtained through Brier Patch Music, 3825 Meadowood Lane, Grandville, MI 49418. It is a worthwhile resource for children and adults alike!

I hope that you have as much fun with these lessons as I have with the children I've worked with. Enjoy!—mtm



Week 1--Upside Down Birthday

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Sing a gathering song together. Example: "Ha-la-la-lah" or "Peace Like a River." Introduce yourself and invite the children to introduce themselves by finishing the following sentence: My name is _____ and if I could walk upside down I would _____.)

Introduction

5 minutes

What is rightside up and upside down?

Experiment

- Stand on heads

- Spin around and then look at the world
- Show a picture/object and turn it upside down

Story Time

10 minutes

The Upside Down Birthday (Luke 2:1-14)

Now we're going to sing an "Upside Down song. (Sing "Away in a Manger.") Who can tell me the story of Jesus's birth? (Let the kids tell pieces of the story. If they are slow starting, remind them of the Christmas story. Prompt as necessary.)

How is Jesus an important person? (Let the children talk about who Jesus is—King, Savior, Messiah, friend, etc. Explain words like Messiah—one who saves.)

How would *you* expect a king to come into the world? (Have kids throw out ideas...you may ask some of the questions below.)

Where would you expect a king to come from? (A palace, a rich place)

What kind of clothes would he have? (Royal, expensive)

What kind of parents? (A king/queen, etc.)

How old would he be when he was king? (A grown-up)

Who would be told about the king first? (Important people)

How did Jesus come into the world?

Where did he come from? (Bethlehem, a small town—a stable, manger—a feeding trough for animals)

What kind of clothes did he have? (swaddling clothes)

What kind of parents? (Peasants—father a skilled laborer)

How old was he when he was called king? (A baby!)

Who was told about Jesus first? (Shepherds, people who were considered crooks)

What do you think God was trying to say by sending Jesus as God did?

Project

15 minutes

When God sent Jesus, God saw a lot of things God didn't like. People were fighting. Some people were very rich while most people were very poor, and the rich weren't helping the poor. In the Temple, which was a little like our church today, the religious rulers made up lots and lots of rules and told people that you had to follow all the rules exactly right or you weren't a Godly person.

Today I'd like us to create an Upside Down world. I want you to think about what would make a world Rightside Up in God's eyes, but maybe Upside Down to what we sometimes think is important. We'll make a mural so that we can work together to make our Upside Down world.

(Prompt for ideas if needed to get started. You could use markers, crayons for mural. Or, if you have magazines available, let them cut out pictures, words, etc. If your children are

younger, it would be helpful to have useful magazine pictures already cut out.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Talk about prayer.) What is prayer? (talking to God, asking God to help us, etc.) What are different ways we can pray? (in church, being quiet, etc.) Today we are going to pray by singing a song and using our hands to help us. (Teach "Spirit of the Living God" with motions. Once learned, ask children to sing once more, this time with their eyes closed.)

Closing

5 minutes

(Let kids shout out something learned today. Have the children talk about one "upside-down" thing they can do this week.)



Week 2--The "Happys"

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Sing together, repeating some songs from last week.)

Looking Back

5 minutes

(Talk about last week's session.) How was Jesus's birth Upside Down to what people expected? (You may want to let them look at things Upside Down again, as in the first session. Ask children if they did anything Upside Down in the last week.)

Story Time

10 minutes

The "Happys" (Matthew 5:1-12)

In today's lesson, Jesus talks about people who are happy. But some of the people this song describes as happy may not seem like the type of people we think of as happy.

Do we usually think of someone who is poor as happy? What do we usually think about someone who is poor? (Let the kids throw out ideas.)

What about someone who is sorrowing? Do you know what it means to sorrow? It is like being very sad.

What about people who show mercy? When they help other people are they doing it so someone will help them?

We're going to hear a song based on these things that Jesus said to the people he was teaching. In this song, we'll sing "Happy are the ones," but sometimes you hear people say "Blessed are the ones." Sometimes people refer to this part of Jesus's teachings as the "Beatitudes," which is just a big word for blessings. And being blessed is a little bit like being happy.

This song is going to need some help from us, so listen closely. (Play Ken Medema's "Happy Are the Ones" from *Just Kidding Around*. It quotes an echo song; let your kids dance around and participate as they like.)

What did you think about that song? Did that song make you happy? How did that song make you feel about God? What do you think Jesus was trying to say about God?

Project

15 minutes

(Have the children try their hand painting or drawing one of the "Happys!" This might result in some interesting pictures. You might want to have each child choose a different "happy" and then put them up on the wall for them. You might want to play the Ken Medema song again while they paint.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Talk again about prayer. Use "Spirit of the Living God" again as a prayer, showing how we can use all of ourselves for prayer. Try humming it and using motions, also.)

Closing

5 minutes

(Let kids shout out something they learned today. Sing a song enjoyed in the beginning.)



Week 3--Zacchaeus

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Sing together.)

Looking Back

5 minutes

(Talk about last week's session.) What did we talk about? (The "Happys.") What was Upside Down about the Happys? (You may want to play the song again if the children enjoyed it last week.)

Story Time

10 minutes

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Do you know the song about Zacchaeus? (Hopefully, they'll say "yes.") Let's sing it together. "Zacchaeus was a wee little man."

Now that song tells us a little bit about who Zacchaeus was, but it doesn't tell the whole story. Today, we're going to hear a story about "transformation," about change.

But we should really start at the beginning. Who was Zacchaeus? (A Jew, but he worked for the Roman government collecting taxes. Tax collectors often took more than they were supposed to and kept it for themselves. Zacchaeus was rich!)

Was Zacchaeus liked by anyone? (No, because he cheated people. He used force to get taxes and worked for the Romans. In fact, religious people wouldn't take money or even eat with

a tax collector because that would make them less clean, pure. And the Romans just used him for work; they didn't associate with Jews.)

Well, the song tells us that Jesus saw Zacchaeus in the tree and told him to come down because Jesus was going to go to Zacchaeus's house and eat with him. Jews aren't supposed to eat with tax collectors, so this was pretty shocking to the religious people.

But what happened after Jesus had lunch with Zacchaeus? (Let the children answer if they know the story.) Zacchaeus came out and called to his neighbors and friends. And he told them in front of Jesus, "Lord, I'm giving one-half of my goods to the poor, and if I've stolen from anyone, I'll give them four times more."

Then Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house."

So what transformation happened in this story? What changed about Zacchaeus? (He changed his ways, his behavior. He changed his heart.)

I want you to hear another story today. This is a story about a girl named Alice and her pockets. Something happens to her in this story. See if you can tell me about it at the end. (Play Ken Medema's "Pockets" on the *Just Kidding Around* CD. After the song, ask questions.) What changed in this story?

Project

15 minutes

(Have construction paper ready with one-half the page one color, and the other half of the page another color. The kids can use markers or crayons. Or, if your children are all readers, you could have a sheet of paper on which the children could draw a cartoon strip.)

Today I want us to draw two pictures. I want you to draw me a picture of something that changes. See if you can draw me a picture of something or someone that makes a change—either because it just happens, or because someone helps them/it to change. (You may want to prompt the children with ideas.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Continue with "Spirit of the Living God." This time, sing the song with motions, then hum the song with motions, and then try to do the song with the motions only. I often encourage the children to sing it with their eyes closed the last time.)

Closing

5 minutes

(Let the kids shout out something they learned today. Sing a song they enjoyed in the beginning.)



Week 4--The Bent Over Woman

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Repeat some of the opening songs. Then say the following.) I want to teach you a song about some follow-

ers of Jesus who also healed someone. It's a story about Peter and John going to the temple one day and there was a man

outside who couldn't walk. He was begging for money and he asked Peter and John for some. Peter said, "We don't have any money, but I'll give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up!" And the man did. Let's sing "Silver and Gold Have I None." (Let kids go "walking and leaping and praising God.")

Looking Back

5 minutes

(Talk about last week's session.) What happened last week? (Zacchaeus climbed up a tree. Jesus went to his house to eat). What was wrong with that? (Zacchaeus was not liked very much by the religious people. He was a tax collector). Did Zacchaeus make any changes? (Yes. He gave back everything he stole and four times more.) What was Upside Down about this?

Story Time

10 minutes

The Bent Over Woman (Luke 13:10-17)

This is a story about a woman who was bent over for 18 years. I want you to stand up and bend over and stay like that while I tell the first part of this story. One day Jesus was in the synagogue, which was a little bit like a church building.

It was the Sabbath day, which is like Sunday to you and me. And there were certain rules about what you could and could not do on the Sabbath. Mostly, you couldn't do any kind of work, and sometimes it was hard to tell what was work and what wasn't.

Well, on this day, Jesus saw the woman bent over and he told her "Come here." So she did. And then Jesus placed his hands on her (place your hands on one of the children's shoulders) and said, "Stand up!" and she did. How do you think that woman felt? (Happy, etc.) Yes, she was, and she thanked God for bringing this man to heal her.

But do you know what? Not everyone was happy about it. No, not the religious leaders. They were mad at Jesus. And do you know why they were mad? Because they thought that healing was "work" and you weren't supposed to do work on a Sabbath day.

But Jesus told them that healing this woman was like letting your ox go for water—you let go of its chain so it can walk to the water on its own. All he was doing was taking off the chains that had been put on this woman.

After that, the leaders of the synagogue sat down. They didn't have anything more to say to Jesus. But the women, and the other people who needed help, praised God for bringing Jesus to them.

What do you think Jesus was trying to tell the leaders of the synagogue? (Let the children come up with some ideas!)

Project

15 minutes

Today, let's use clay to sculpt the story we heard today. (Pick a scene from the story and make a "picture" with the clay. You will want something sturdy to mount these "pictures." I have done it as a diorama in a shoebox.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Ask the children if they have any one they would like to pray for tonight. Perhaps they know someone who needs heal-



ing. Ask them to keep these people in their mind as they pray through “Spirit of the Living God.” Again, sing through it once with the motions, then hum it with the motions, then go through it with only the motions.)

Closing

5 minutes

(Let the kids shout out something learned today. Sing a song enjoyed in the beginning.)

Week 5--The Good Samaritan

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Sing together.)

Looking Back

5 minutes

(Talk about last week’s session.) What happened in our story last week? (A woman was healed.) Why were the religious leaders upset about it? (It was on the Sabbath day) Did Jesus think that was wrong? (No, Jesus thought people were more important than rules.)

Story Time

10 minutes

“The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37)

Today we have another kind of upside-down story. It all started when a young lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked the man what it said in the law. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus told him that his answer was right. “Then who is my neighbor?” asked the man. So Jesus told him a story.

A man was walking along a winding, isolated road from Jerusalem to Jericho, minding his own business, when suddenly robbers came out of the hills, stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road just after the robbery and saw the man lying half dead in the road.

Now, what would be the neighborly thing to do? (Help the man.) Is a priest someone that you think would help people? (Yes.) Well, do you know what? This priest didn’t. He saw him, but he passed by on the other side and went on. And the same thing happened again with a Levite, a Levite being a fellow Jew. Jews had rules about being “unclean.”

But a third person also walked by. He was a Samaritan. And I have to tell you something about Samaritans—the Jews did not like them. Not only did the Jews not like Samaritans, but they would have no dealings with them at all. In fact, if a Jew wanted to insult you, they would call you a “Samaritan.”

And yet this hated person stopped to help the Jewish man lying along the roadside. He took him to an inn and paid for him to stay until he was better. This was not what Jesus’ audience was expecting Jesus to say in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus was calling Jews to love Samaritans, their sworn enemies.

In other words, Jesus was saying that God’s love doesn’t discriminate. In the Upside Down Kingdom, God loves everyone.

Project

15 minutes

Let’s act out the story of the Good Samaritan. (This does not have to be elaborate. I’ve been with children who begged to act it out several times in a row, switching parts each time. Let them do it!)

Now, I want you to think of ways God is calling you to love your “neighbor.” What are ways we can help other people? Let’s act some of those out.

(Scene 1: Explain there are two friends playing on the playground and one of them falls. A teacher is nearby. What can the friend do?)

Scene 2: Explain there are three friends and a new kid at school. Two of the friends are making fun of the new kid. What can the friend do to be a neighbor?

Scene 3: Let the kids think up a scenario.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Talk about what asking God to “use me” might mean in the context of being a neighbor. Ask the children to think of someone they might know who needs a “neighbor” as they sing and motion their way through the song today. Continue with “Spirit of the Living God.”)

Closing

5 minutes

(Let the kids shout out something learned today. Sing a song they enjoyed in the beginning.)



Week 6--Jesus and the Upside Down Kingdom

Gathering Time

10 minutes

(Sing together.)

Looking Back

5 minutes

(Talk about last week’s session.) What happened in last week’s story? (A man was beaten up on the highway.) Who was he? (A Jewish man.) Who helped him? (A Samaritan.) What was Upside Down about that? (Jews considered Samari-

tans to be unclean, and to be enemies. Also, a priest and Levite had passed the man by without helping.)

Story Time

10 minutes

Today is our last session together. I want us to talk a little bit about what we remember in the next couple of weeks and maybe why it happened long ago.

Does anyone know what the Sunday after next is? (Easter!) And what is Easter? (The day Jesus rose from the dead.) What happened before Easter? (Jesus was killed, crucified ...).

Well, we've been studying a lot about Jesus. Can you think of one mean thing that Jesus did? (No.) But Jesus was hung with a couple of criminals—did Jesus break a law? (No. Except maybe the religious people's law.) Then what do you suppose made people want to kill Jesus? (Let them think and talk about this.)

You know what I think? I think that people were scared of Jesus. You know why? Because Jesus made the religious leaders think about what was really important. The religious people had gotten so caught up in this rule and that rule, that they made it hard for ordinary people to get close to God.

When Jesus came, he reminded the religious people that rules that kept people from God and didn't help God's people were not good rules. Jesus said that you have to think about what you're doing, not just look up a rule.

And this was scary for the people because it meant they had to re-think everything they had learned. And it meant that they might not get to be so important anymore. How do you think you would feel if, just when you thought you were first, you found out you had to be last? (Let the children talk about this.)

Do you know what was Upside Down about Jesus getting himself killed? He fooled everyone. What happened on Easter morning? (Jesus got up!) Jesus even beat death!

Project

15 minutes

I want us to act out one more thing that Jesus did. Shortly before Jesus died, he was with his disciples having a meal. And Jesus realized that no one had had their feet washed.

Now in those days, people wore sandals or went barefoot so feet could get pretty dirty. And usually the person who washed the other people's feet was the lowliest servant in the house.

But, on this day, do you know who washed the feet? Jesus. Because Jesus said that the most important thing about being a leader is knowing how to serve. So today, I'm going to wash your feet. Washing your feet is a symbol for showing you that I care for you; it's a way I can show you God cares for you.

(While washing their feet, you can talk to the children about other ways we can show people we care. When you are finished, you can talk to them about how it felt to have their feet washed by you.)

Prayer

5 minutes

(Continue with "Spirit of the Living God." Talk again about what asking God to "use me" might mean as we think about caring for others.)

Closing

5 minutes

Let's think about some of the stories we've learned about Jesus these past five weeks:

Jesus' birth: Showed that God wanted to get close to people. God didn't want Jesus to be born in a palace because then he wouldn't be able to be with and understand ordinary people.

The Happys: The beatitudes turned Upside Down the things that people thought were important and showed people that God could make good things out of bad.

Zacchaeus: This tax collector, who wasn't very much liked by the Jews because he stole a lot of money, not only heard what Jesus had to say, but changed his life because of it.

The bent over woman: Jesus placed his hands on her and she stood up, but he did it on the Sabbath. Jesus said you have to look at people first, not rules.

The good Samaritan: The Jews found out that the person they thought was their enemy was really their neighbor!

Have a special treat tonight!



—Mary Meadows is a children's minister for a church in Raleigh, North Carolina. She develops children's curriculum for camps and national church groups and is a strong advocate for children's justice issues.

—The art on these pages was done by Gertrud Mueller Nelson and is from a superb art resource for churches called *Clip Art for Feasts and Seasons*, published by the Order of St. Benedict, the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 56321.