

“Misunderstanding Jesus” - John 14:1-24 ¹

Before the lesson: Create a chart on the board with three columns: Text; Teaching; Misunderstanding; Cause of the misunderstanding.

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

- 1 What is a recent misunderstanding you've had? Was it resolved?
2. Do you have a “went the wrong direction” story?

Information

John 14 has three stories that follow a familiar pattern in John's gospel. In that pattern, Jesus says something, someone says something in response - something that is wrong or ignorant - and Jesus responds with a corrective teaching.

In the first story, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away, but he assures them that they know where he is going and they know the way to follow him. Thomas argues that they know no such thing. Jesus responds, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

In the second story, Jesus says, “If you know me, you know the Father. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” Phillip responds, “Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus, with a measure of frustration, says, “Hey, dummy. [Not in the original Greek.] Listen to my words. Look at my actions. These are the actions of God the Father if God were here in the flesh, walking with you. Which I have been doing, walking with you Phillip, for three years. What's it going to take? [The last line is also not in the Greek.]”

A third disciple lays his question on the table in our third story. This is Judas. Not Iscariot, John is careful to let us know. Another Judas. Another confused disciple. “How are you revealing yourself to us and not revealing yourself to the world?” Jesus responds, “I am revealed to those who want to see love revealed. You want this. The world does not want this.”

[Create a chart on the board with three columns: Text/Teaching; Misunderstanding; Why the misunderstanding]

This theme of misunderstanding Jesus is woven throughout John's gospel. Commentators do not agree on the number, but there are at least 15, some say as many as thirty. We will not look at all of these, but we will pay attention to seven of them. After we have heard each one read, let's list what the misunderstanding was in five words or less. Then, let's provide a speculative answer to why there was this misunderstanding. (unexpected teaching, willful ignorance, literal interpretation, etc.)

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- Have class members read John 1:9-13; 6:56-60 and 66-68; 12:14-16; 13:5-7; 13:21-24; 16:16-18; 20:6-9.

[Following this discussion, lead a discussion about Judas’ question and Jesus’ response. I have included a chart that my class completed after we listened to each passage. These are not the “right answers” but are simply answers that we came up with one morning. They may be helpful to you if the discussion stalls, but if your class comes up with different answers, which should happen, write those down. The point is not the specific answer but to demonstrate that there are a variety of reasons the disciples (and we) misunderstand Jesus and his teachings.]

Text	Teaching	Misunderstanding	Cause of the misunderstanding
John 1:9-13	God has come in the flesh	Not recognized or accepted	Hard to comprehend; has never happened before
John 6:56-60, 66-68	Eternal life; eat flesh, drink blood	Harsh language; not kosher; cannibalism	Literalism
John 12:14-16	Passover parade	No king rides a donkey; did not see as a fulfillment of prophecy	Outside their set of expectations
John 13:5-7	Washing feet	Why? This is not your role	Not what a powerful person does
John 13:21-24	Predicts betrayal	Who would ever betray Jesus???	Betrayal does not seem possible
John 16:16-18	You will see/not see; I go, you know; a little while	Vague	Hung up in details; focus on the wrong thing
John 20:6-9	Post-resurrection	Where did Jesus' body go?	Illogical; mystery; never happened before

Transformational Exercise

Look at the “Why the misunderstanding?” column. What blocks *you* from seeing who Jesus is and then obeying and loving him?

What is keeping us from knowing Jesus better? What is keeping us from loving him and obeying him?

CLose in a prayer something like this: *Great Teacher, like your first students, we sometimes misunderstand you and your teachings. We misunderstand our role as your followers. Give us grace. Give us wisdom. Give us another chance to get it right. Amen.*