



SESSION 1 of 4

Palm Sunday

MEETING AIM

To unpack the story of Palm Sunday.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 19:28-44

BACKGROUND

Jesus has been demonstrating God's kingdom with miraculous signs and provocative stories, but now it's time for him to prophetically enter Jerusalem as the king he is. The crowds are high on excitement, and the Pharisees realise they need to shut this down fast. Jesus points out to them that even creation recognises who he is and weeps over the destruction that will happen to Jerusalem because of its failure to recognise him.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the group to sit together in a circle and pass around a simple object. When a child has the object they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it's helpful to have a sand timer so you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn't want to say anything they can just pass on the object. Ask the children what the strangest thing anyone has asked them to do is.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a large sheet of fabric; masking tape; felt-tip pens

Spread out the fabric sheet on the floor (it will help if you can tape the edges down). Give the group felt-tip pens and ask them to think about words they might use to praise Jesus. These could be describing words or they could be phrases they've learned from the Bible. It's good for the leaders to contribute here as they may have different phrases. Ask the group to write their words creatively on the fabric. Encourage them to use lots of different sizes of lettering so the whole sheet is covered.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a first-Century costume; a toy or cardboard donkey; the sheet from 'Intro activity'

Before the session, dress a leader up in traditional Bible dressing-up gear: a dressing gown and tea towel usually works! Position the leader somewhere at the edge of your space, clearly visible to the group but not alongside them. Have a toy donkey (or cardboard cutout) tied to the wall or a piece of furniture close to the leader.

Tee up the story by talking about all the signs and stories Jesus has been responsible for over the past three years of his life. The group might be able to suggest some of them. Say that Jesus knew that it was time to go up to Jerusalem – the main city – to do something that would be a sign to everyone of who he was. Before that happens, though, Jesus asks two of his disciples to go and get something for him. What does the group think this might have been? Choose two volunteers and ask them to bring you the donkey that is tied up. Tell them that if anyone asks them why they are taking it, they're to say: "The Lord needs it." As they're untying the donkey, your leader should ask them what they're doing (in as dramatic a fashion as possible!) and hopefully they will remember the response.

When they bring the donkey back, choose another volunteer to be Jesus and have them ride (or walk with) the donkey across the sheet where you all previously wrote words of praise for Jesus. Talk about how lots of people came out to see Jesus enter the city like this, and they all shouted words of praise. You could get the group to shout their words. The people who were in charge of religious affairs (the Pharisees) weren't too chuffed about what was going on. They wanted to shut the people up and stop Jesus. Jesus told them that even if the people were quiet the stones on the road would cry out in praise.

As Jesus continued to ride into Jerusalem he became aware of how far the city was from God. He could see the future that was coming, when the city would be destroyed by its enemies (which happened 70 or so years later). Jesus cried as he thought about these things.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- Do you think the disciples thought that taking the donkey was an odd thing to do?
- Why did all the people come out to see Jesus ride in?

- Why didn't the Pharisees like Jesus? What sort of feelings might they have had about him?
- Would the stones really have shouted? What did Jesus mean when he said this?
- Would you have cried tears over Jerusalem if you were Jesus?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: stones (no bigger than fist-sized); sticky googly eyes; card; scissors; felt-tip pens; strong glue

Jesus talks about the stones crying out. Ask everyone to write a word or phrase about Jesus onto a piece of card and draw a speech bubble around it. These need to be quite small, so you might want to preprint the speech bubbles. Let them choose a stone and stick on some eyes, then have a leader use strong glue to stick the speech bubble on.

5 PRAYER

You will need: a bowl of salty water

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. What things in our world make us sad? Have a think for a few minutes, then place a bowl of salty water in the middle of the circle. If the group members want to they can dip their fingers into the water, speak out the situation they are sad about and then taste the 'tears'. You can pull these prayers together by asking God to be present in all the situations mentioned.

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SESSION 2 of 4

Good Friday

MEETING AIM

To follow the story of Good Friday.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 22:39-23:56

BACKGROUND

Tensions have continued to rise since Jesus' controversial ride into Jerusalem. It is the week of Passover and Jesus has celebrated this with his friends, although not in the usually scripted fashion. He is pointing forward to what is going to happen next, and that is alarming for the disciples. Judas makes the decision to betray Jesus and hands him over to the chief priests. Peter swears he is with Jesus for the long haul but Jesus calls him out on it, stating that before the night is through Peter will deny him three times.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass around a simple object. When a child has the object they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it's helpful to have a sand timer so you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn't want to say anything they can just pass on the object. Ask the children what the most confusing situation they have ever been in is – a time when they didn't expect or understand what had happened.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: nine cardboard people shapes; felt-tip pens

Ask the group if they can name any key characters in the Good Friday story. As they do so, write each correct name on the back of a person shape and give it to a child (or pair of children depending on the size of your group) to colour in as that person. The characters you will need are Jesus, Judas, Peter, the high priest, Pilate, Herod, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea. If they don't get all of them, add in the missing ones and give them out.

15 BIBLE STORY

You will need: cardboard people from 'Intro activity'

Today's passage is long, so you will need to paraphrase rather than reading out every word of it. Make sure you have read the passage yourself a couple of times before the session, and planned how you are going to retell it using the key points below. After each point, ask the children to hold up the correct character as you tell their bit of the story.

- After having the special Passover meal with his disciples, **Jesus** went out by himself to pray. He was asking God for strength for what was about to happen. Once he had finished praying he woke the disciples, who had fallen asleep.
- A crowd of soldiers arrived with **Judas**. Judas kissed Jesus to show the soldiers who to arrest. There was a fight and one of the disciples cut off a soldier's ear. Jesus healed it and told them to stop fighting. He was arrested.
- **Jesus** was taken to the **high priest's** house. The disciples followed to see what would happen. People kept recognising **Peter** as a friend of Jesus, but three times Peter said he wasn't. Jesus was mistreated by the soldiers, chief priests and teachers of the law cooked up a charge against him so they could have him executed.
- They took Jesus to **Pilate**, the Roman who was in charge. He didn't really understand what Jesus had done wrong, so he sent Jesus to Herod.
- **Herod** was excited to meet Jesus, but Jesus wouldn't do what he asked, so Herod mocked him for a bit and then sent him back to Pilate.
- Pilate wanted to release Jesus but the crowd shouted for **Barabbas**, a political terrorist, to be released instead.
- The crowd was going crazy, demanding that Jesus be crucified. In order to keep the peace, Pilate agreed. Jesus was too weak to carry his own cross, so they grabbed a man called **Simon of Cyrene** and he had to carry it instead.
- Jesus was crucified with two other men. While Jesus hung on the cross it all went strangely dark, and in the middle of the afternoon he died. When Jesus' body was taken down from the cross, a man named **Joseph of Arimathea** (who was part of the group that had had Jesus killed) asked if he could have the

body. Joseph didn't agree with what had happened, and he buried Jesus in a brand new tomb on his land.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What sort of feelings would Jesus have experienced during these events?
- How might Peter have felt after he denied knowing Jesus?
- What do you think the high priest and chief priests felt about Jesus?
- How do you think Pilate felt, and what made him agree to crucify Jesus?
- What might Joseph of Arimathea been feeling, and what led him to ask for the body?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: visual aids from 'Bible story'
Give everyone a blank person and ask them to choose a character from the story. Ask them to fill the shape with words that might describe the person and how they felt about these events.

Once everyone has finished, invite any children to share what they have written or drawn if they would like to.

5 PRAYER

You will need: cardboard people from 'Creative response'; felt-tip pens; pencils

Ask the children to turn their response characters over and write on the back the things they feel about today's story. Encourage them to think about all aspects of their feelings, as they might have responded differently at different points in the story. Remind them that none of their feelings are wrong. They may feel thankful, confused, sad or even happy. As they hold the figure, they can imagine giving all these feelings to God.

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SESSION 3 of 4

Easter Sunday

MEETING AIM

To follow the events of the first Easter Sunday.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:1-12

BACKGROUND

It seems as though it is game over for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus has been arrested, convicted on trumped-up charges and finally crucified. There is no doubt that he's dead as he is taken down from the cross on the first Good Friday and laid hastily in a borrowed tomb. Then the Sabbath began. A whole 24 hours of doing nothing. I'm guessing it seemed like a long, long time. Finally, on the first day of the week, Jesus' female disciples go to the tomb to do what's right and prepare Jesus' body properly for burial. Except he's not there...

5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass around a simple object. When a child has the object, they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it's helpful to have a sand timer so you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn't want to say anything they can just pass on the object. Ask the children to share the most unbelievable thing they ever heard that turned out to be true.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: strong-smelling herbs and spices; pestle and mortar sets (optional)
Gather together some herbs and spices with strong fragrances. Get a couple of pestle and mortar sets if you can, and let the group crush and tear the herbs and spices to release the scents. Talk about what they like and what they don't, and whether the scents remind them of anything.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: items to create a 'tomb' (see below); a white sheet or surplice
This is a story that needs to be experienced as much as possible. Before the session, create a tomb in your meeting space. It needs to be big enough for at least a few people to get inside at once. If you have a small group, make it big enough for everyone to gather in. You could use a tent or event shelter. Drape the outside with black cloth to make it dark. Inside, you might like to have a long, low coffee table (or a bookcase laid down) draped with white cloths to represent the burial clothes. Have one of your leaders dress in white and wait inside the tomb.

Begin the story outside the tomb. Ask the group to recap what has happened so far. Talk about Jesus being laid in the tomb on the Friday and then everyone having to rest on the Saturday: the Sabbath. Ask the group members to imagine they are Jesus' disciples. How would they be feeling right now?

Talk about the fact that when someone dies their body has to be treated in a particular way before they are buried. The way the body is prepared varies in different cultures. In Jesus' time, the body would have been wrapped in a certain way, and spices and ointments would have been put on it. Jesus' friends didn't have time to do this on the Friday, so some of the women went back on the Sunday to finish what needed to be done. The tomb was in a garden outside the city. Say that you're going to go inside the tomb just as they did.

As you gather inside the tomb, ask the children what they see. Point out that there is no body. Ask the group members who they think the person in white is. While you are gathered together here, read Luke 24:1-8. After you have read it, talk about how the women went back to the city to tell the male disciples what they had seen. Say that the men didn't believe them until they had seen it for themselves.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute. You can continue to sit in the tomb from 'Bible story' if you wish:

- How many different emotions can you think of that the disciples in the story might have been feeling at different points?
- Do you think the women believed what they were seeing?
- Why didn't the men believe the women?
- If you were one of Jesus' friends and you had been there, what would you do next?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: seeds of plants with strong scents (such as lavender, basil, thyme or mint); compost; cardboard egg cartons cut into individual cups

Talk about how a seed looks dead. We even bury it so it can grow and bring new life. Point out that there is a link to Jesus dying and rising again in that picture. Let the children choose some seeds and plant them in their egg carton pots. Make sure they know how to care for them so they will grow. When they do grow, the smell will hopefully remind them of this story.

5 PRAYER

You will need: herbs and spices from 'Intro activity'

Give each person some of the fragrant herbs and spices from 'Intro activity' and invite them to find a quiet place to focus on smelling them. If it's big enough for everyone, you could gather inside the tomb again. As they use their sense of smell, encourage them to revisit the story in their imagination. Ask them to imagine that Jesus appears to them in the garden, as he does in some of the other accounts. What would they want to say to him? What do they think he would say to them?

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SESSION 4 of 4

Road to Emmaus

MEETING AIM

To see what happened during the second half of the first Easter Sunday.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:13-35

BACKGROUND

Everything was so confused. The disciples thought Jesus had come as the Messiah to be the ruler of Israel, but then he was crucified, which seemed like a complete failure in his mission. Some of the women had reported that the tomb was empty, which was fantastical, and women weren't to be believed anyway. But then Peter reported the same thing, so no one knew quite what to make of the situation. Was there any hope? Had something miraculous just occurred? Or was it all simply wishful thinking on the part of a deluded group of followers?

5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass around a simple object. When a child has the object, they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it's helpful to have a sand timer so you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn't want to say anything they can just pass on the object. Ask the children to share their biggest questions about life or the universe and everything.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a long sheet of paper (lining paper is ideal); felt-tip pens

Spread out the long sheet of paper and ask everyone to draw around their feet a few times so there is a long pathway of footprints. Talk about walking. Ask what the furthest distance anyone has ever walked is.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: footprints from 'Intro activity'; speech bubbles cut out of card with the words below written on; a loaf of bread or bread roll

Remind the group that Jesus has died on the cross. On the Sunday morning, some of

the women and other disciples discover the empty tomb. That evening, two of Jesus' disciples, Cleopas and another man, were walking from Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus, which was about seven miles away. Lay out your foot-printed pathway. Ask the group how they think these men would have been feeling. Can they make their faces and bodies match up with that feeling?

Explain that, as they were walking along, Jesus came alongside Cleopas and his friend, but they didn't recognise him. They thought he was just a stranger. Jesus pretended not to know what was going on and asked them what they were talking about. Cleopas couldn't believe this guy didn't know the story, so he filled Jesus in. Give out speech bubbles with the following points on, and get the group to read them out together:

- Surely you must have heard what has been happening in Jerusalem these last few days?
- Jesus had been doing amazing things, but the chief priests had him put to death
- We thought he would be the one to rescue God's people, but he has been dead for three days now
- Some of our women visited the tomb this morning and said he was alive again, but we haven't seen him...

The stranger (who was Jesus, remember) appeared to be surprised. Show the next set of speech bubbles with Jesus' responses and get the group to read them out:

- The prophets have been saying this stuff for years!
- God's people have been separated from him by the wrong choices they have made
- None of their sacrifices could put things right. That's why God sent the Messiah!
- The Messiah – Jesus, God's Son – had to suffer and die on a cross to be the sacrifice that makes things right with God

Say that Jesus explained how all the things in the Jews' holy book showed them what to expect about the Messiah: the special one God was going to send to rescue his people.

Just as it was getting to teatime, Jesus and the two disciples arrived at Emmaus. Jesus looked like he was going to walk on further but the men asked him to stay for tea. They sat down at the table together, then Jesus took the bread, said thank you to God and broke it. Break your bread and pass it around. They suddenly realised who he was, just as he disappeared!

The two disciples got up without even finishing their tea and ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell Jesus' other friends what had happened!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- Why don't you think the disciples recognised Jesus?
- Do you think they were beginning to suspect who he was when he was telling them about the scriptures?
- What do you think Jesus was thinking and feeling all the way through this chat?
- Why did they recognise him when he broke the bread?
- How do you think the two felt as they ran all the way back to Jerusalem?
- How do you think they told the story when they got there?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: black card; bamboo skewers; sticky tape; scissors; metallic or chalk pens

Encourage the children to cut speech bubble shapes out of the black card. Ask them to consider what Jesus said about what had happened – why he died and was raised back to life – and let them come up with a sentence or two of their own to express it. They can then write it on their speech bubbles and tape a skewer to the back so that it makes a mini placard. If you like, you could take pictures of each child holding their speech bubble up as if they are in a live cartoon.

5 PRAYER

You will need: Plasticine or playdough

When Luke writes about this in the Bible, he says that the two disciples felt as though their hearts were burning when Jesus was explaining these things to them. It was like they suddenly really knew things for the first time. Give everyone a piece of Plasticine or playdough and let them warm and mould it into a heart shape as they reflect on what they have understood from this story. What would they like to say to Jesus about it?

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