



## PALM SUNDAY

### MEETING AIM

To explore and experience Palm Sunday.

### BIBLE PASSAGES

Mark 11:1-11

### BACKGROUND

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem at the start of what we now call Holy Week is an outrageous, expectation-defying event. Jesus was clearly signifying the kind of Messiah he was going to be – not the conquering hero that many were expecting, but a servant king riding on a donkey. Help the young people in your group to approach this story ready to find out more about who Jesus is, rather than who society says he is.

### GATHERING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session.

### INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

**You will need:** recyclable black bin bags; sticky tape; newspapers; a small prize  
Split the young people into teams (or work together if your group is smaller). Each team should create the best 'donkey' in five minutes. The donkey can consist of one or two team members, plus a costume made out of the bin bags and newspaper.

After five minutes, ask your 'donkeys' to parade around – the designs should be judged both on artistic merit and ability to hold together. Award a prize to the team with the best 'donkey' (and recycle the costumes as much as you can).

### BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

**You will need:** large sheets of paper; felt-tip pens; Bibles

Ask the young people if they are good at drawing. Ask those people with their hands up to find a non-artistic partner.

Challenge each pair to come up with a new superhero – a person with superhuman abilities capable of saving the world. If time allows, they could also create a vehicle for their hero.

Invite each pair to show their hero to the group; then display the drawings around the venue for the rest of the session. Talk about how the people of God were expecting someone like a superhero. Some were waiting for a great military leader who would overthrow Roman rule and restore their nation to international dominance. Instead they got a rabbi on a donkey. God's idea of a superhero is not the same as ours.

Draw the group together, and hand out Bibles to those who need them. Then read Mark 11:1-11. Ask the group what they notice from the passage. Which bits leap out particularly? Draw their attention to some of the more striking, even strange, moments in the reading.

### CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- What do you make of the whole donkey episode? What's its significance? (See Zechariah 9:9.)
- Why do you think the disciples get away with taking the donkey?
- Why do people throw their cloaks and branches down?
- How would you describe the attitudes of the different people watching the scene (the crowd, the disciples, the Pharisees)?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

Invite everyone to find a space and explain that you'll be doing an ancient monastic approach to reading the Bible. Ensure the room is quiet. Encourage everyone to focus on their breathing, then on the noises within the room, then on the sounds outside it.

Read the story again; the young people should imagine they're actually there in the story, as Jesus' disciples. Read slowly, and pause between verses, feeling free to ask prompting questions like "What can you see?" and "How does this make you feel?" Invite them, within their imaginations, to explore the story

in three dimensions, using all the creative power of their five senses. What is going on around them, and what does it mean to them? Most importantly, what do they see of, and learn from, Jesus?

When you reach the end of the passage, start again, but this time they should imagine that they're members of the crowd. Ask the group to feed back on what they felt, saw, and perhaps experienced of God though taking part in it.

Finish this activity by saying that the opening act of Jesus' history-changing week is important because it establishes who he is – humble yet worthy of worship; a powerful king yet not the kind of messiah who was expected. The way that those around him perceived him is crucial to the developing story.

### PRAYER 5 MINS

**You will need:** images of Jesus on card or paper (choose various images, eg film portrayals, classic works of art) – enough for at least one each

To finish, provide a selection of images of Jesus. Invite everyone to spend some time in silent prayer with one or more images, asking Jesus to make himself more real to them today and in the weeks ahead.

If you're running all four sessions on Easter, choose a movie that illustrates the various episodes covered by the session plans. The clip should be the moment where the main heroic character is introduced. For example, you could choose *The Lion King* and watch the opening shot as Simba is held aloft; the scene where Princess Leia is under attack in *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*; the original *Toy Story*, when Woody comes to life or when Buzz arrives. Ask the group what they notice about how the main character is introduced. What do they learn about them? How does this introduction set up the story?

This session was inspired by ideas from the Premier Youth and Children's Work archive, adapted by **ALEX TAYLOR**.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to [youthandchildrens.work/together](http://youthandchildrens.work/together).



## THE LAST SUPPER

### MEETING AIM

To explore how the communion meal fits into the story of Jesus' journey to the cross.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 14:12-26

### BACKGROUND

The last supper is commemorated in every church tradition and if the young people in your group have been part of a church for any length of time, they will be familiar (perhaps overly familiar) with the tradition. Use the story and activities in this session to help your group see the context of the last supper within the wider narrative and begin to understand its significance to Christians across the world.

### GATHERING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session.

### INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

**You will need:** sticks of celery; tape measure; string or masking tape; sprouts; turnips; swedes; small prizes

Ask for volunteers to compete against one another in the following events: Celery javelin: see who can throw a stick of celery the furthest. Make sure your competitors use the traditional javelin technique, and mark out a foul line to stop any cheating.

Sprout-blowing dash: on a table, use string or masking tape to create two 'lanes', then get two volunteers to compete to blow a sprout to the finish line the fastest. If they blow their sprout out of their lane, they have to go back to the start.

Vegete-boule: play bowls using a small round vegetable (eg a sprout) as the 'jack', and two sets of larger round vegetables (eg turnips vs swedes) as the bowls. The closest vegetable wins.

Award prizes for the winners and offer the vegetables to the losers!

### BIBLE EXPLORATION

10 MINS

**You will need:** a table large enough to fit your whole group around; chairs; bread; grape juice

Break into small groups. Invite everyone to discuss what they would do with their last night on earth. After a moment, ask how many people focused on their own pleasure, spending time with loved ones or something else. Ask the groups to discuss a second question: if you knew you had a little longer to live – perhaps a few weeks or even months – what impression might you want to leave behind on the world? How would you want others to remember you? After taking feedback, explain that we might refer to this 'impression' as our 'legacy'. As we look at Jesus' last night with his disciples, we find someone who is focused on that legacy.

Seat everyone at the table and place the bread and grape juice in the middle. Read out Mark 14:12-26. As you come to the parts where Jesus breaks and shares the bread, and shares the wine, do so with the young people. (If anyone has allergy issues, provide a suitable alternative.)

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- If you were one of the disciples present at the meal, what would you have thought when Jesus said someone would betray him (verses 18-21)?
- What about when Jesus shared the bread and wine and linked them to his body and blood?
- When your church celebrates this event, what do you think? Do you engage with it? Why? Why not?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

**You will need:** a volunteer from your church leadership

Before the session, invite a volunteer from your church leadership to come to your

session and chat with the young people about the last supper and the significance it has for them and for your church.

Tell the group who is coming to visit and ask them to come up with some questions that they would like to ask your guest. These could come directly from your exploration of the Bible story in the session, or be things that the young people have always wanted to ask. When your volunteer arrives, make them welcome and invite the group to ask their questions.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

**You will need:** map or globe; information about persecution faced by the Church from a site such as *open-doorsyouth.org*

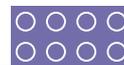
Share the information you have found about persecuted Christians with the group and use the map or globe to locate the different places. Comment that if you're a Christian in these countries, you can't openly remember Jesus in the way you've explored today.

Spend a few minutes praying for Christians in those places, that their faith would remain strong, their hope would not be extinguished, and their numbers would grow.

If you're running the four-part Easter series, show a clip from your chosen movie. The clip should be the moment where the action is set up. For example, in *The Lion King* – Scar and the hyenas plot and sing 'Be prepared'; *Star Wars* – Luke and Obi Wan meet Han Solo at Mos Eisley; *Toy Story* – Woody and Buzz argue in the Pizza Planet claw machine. Ask the group why they think this scene is so important to the movie. After this scene, life is never going to be the same for the characters; why? The answer is that – as in all films – this setup moment forces the drama forwards. It is often a moment of calm before the storm, but the storm has to happen.

This session was inspired by ideas from the Premier Youth and Children's Work archive, adapted by **ALEX TAYLOR**.

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## CRUCIFIXION

### MEETING AIM

To explore why Jesus died, what happened when he did, and our response to that.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 15:15-40

### BACKGROUND

The story of Jesus crucifixion is a key one for our faith, so spend some time before the session reflecting on what this story, and its significance in the wider story of God's plan for salvation, means to you. It might be that you could explore different models of what the cross means, eg atonement, victory or rescue. How will you communicate that to the young people in your group?

### GATHERING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session.

### INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

**You will need:** pieces of paper with a range of different jobs written on (one job per piece)

Give everyone a piece of paper with a job title on it. The jobs should be varied in terms of their 'worthiness', eg doctor or drug dealer. Ask them to think about why their role is needed in society. They should consider all the positive contributions they make.

Explain that you are all passengers in a hot air balloon. The balloon is losing altitude, and the only way to save the majority is to throw a third of you overboard! Everyone has 20 seconds to explain to the group why they should live. At the end of that time, the group takes a vote as to whether the person gets to live or die.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

**You will need:** pens; paper; scissors; Bibles; a distinctive chair

Split into small groups and give out paper, pens and scissors. Ask the group to write down all the 'sins' they can think of. Now get them to cut up their pieces of paper so that each 'sin' is on its own piece. Can they order the 'sins' from most serious to least bad? After a few minutes, take some feedback, asking:

- How did you decide which sins were worst / least serious?
- Which sins do you think matter most to God, and why?
- Who do these sins cause a problem for? You? Others? God?

Give out Bibles and place your distinctive chair in the middle of the room. Ask someone to read Mark 15:15-40 and encourage those who know the Bible well to try to hear it in a fresh way. It may be a familiar story, yet it's the most dramatic and important story in the Bible.

Brief some volunteers in advance to play the parts of key characters at the cross. One person should be the centurion, others could be disciples, the person who thinks he's calling Elijah, or Simon from Cyrene. Invite them to sit in the 'hot seat'. Anyone in the group can ask them any question they like; your volunteers must improvise an answer. Make sure everyone has access to their Bible – including the volunteers, and allow a certain amount of silly questions. Focus the discussion on what they saw and how they felt at the cross. Before each one leaves, ask them a final question: what do you think was really going on at the cross?

### CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- What do you think is the most important part of the story?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- What does this story tell you about people?
- How does the 'sin ordering' activity fit in with this story?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE AND PRAYER 10 MINS

**You will need:** paper; art materials

Explain that you're going to attempt the ancient Christian practice of solitude together. Once everyone is in a relaxed and comfortable position, read the Bible passage again. Ask everyone to think about what they've just heard. Pray, inviting God to help you all reflect on the story, then allow three minutes of silence.

Invite those who want to, to pick up a pen and start writing a letter or prayer to God in response. No one else will see it.

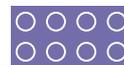
Read the passage again. After three minutes of silence, they can then begin to draw anything they like as an artistic response or prayer.

As you finish, encourage everyone to keep reflecting on the cross and what it means for us in the week ahead. You may want to end with a time for people to silently talk to God about their own sins, and if you're running the series, make sure you encourage everyone with the news that next week, it all gets a lot better!

If you're running the four-part Easter series, show a clip from your chosen movie. Every movie contains a moment where it appears that good is losing the fight with evil. For example, the death of Mufasa in *The Lion King*; Obi Wan Kenobi being 'killed' by Darth Vader in *Star Wars*; when Buzz realises he's a toy and loses his arm in *Toy Story*. Ask why the scene is so important to the movie. What is your emotional response? What do you want to happen next? We're wired to find this kind of 'all is lost' moment hard to watch; we desperately hope that there'll be redemption, even if it seems impossible.

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## RESURRECTION

### MEETING AIM

To explore what the resurrection means for us today.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 16:1-8

### BACKGROUND

The story of the resurrection is the essential conclusion to the story of Jesus' death. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: "...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (verse 14). Today's session is designed to be a celebration of this momentous event, and also a challenge to the young people to see what it means to be 'resurrection people'. Before the session, spend some time thinking about what this might mean for you.

### GATHERING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Welcome the young people and chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session.

### INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

**You will need:** a selection of party food (make sure you cater for the different allergies in your group); tablecloths; cutlery; crockery; Easter decorations Show the group the food and decorations you have brought and invite them to help you prepare the food, set out tables and decorate the room. You can do this all together or split into teams and take on one of the aspects of preparation each. Make sure you risk assess any cooking or baking you decide to do. You will share the food together later.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION

10 MINS

**You will need:** copies of the Bible passage printed on paper; reflective music and the means to play it Explain that you're here to celebrate Jesus's resurrection from the dead –

the big comeback after Good Friday's 'all is lost' moment. Take this opportunity to look at how the Bible tells the story. Give everyone a copy of Mark 16:1-8 as a print-out which they can write on. Give them five minutes to read and reflect on the passage while you play some ambient music in the background.

After five minutes (or less if the group are restless), ask if anyone would like to share any words or phrases that particularly spoke to them, anything that they felt God might be saying, or anything significant that the passage made them think about. If no one brings this out, make sure you clarify that Jesus' death was all part of the plan. Because he died and rose again, the way is open for us to be in relationship with God – and the exciting news is that he's still alive today.

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- What do you think the women were talking about on their way to the tomb?
- What might have gone through their heads as they saw the empty tomb? And the angel?
- What might have happened next?
- What does this story mean?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

**You will need:** the party set-up from 'Intro activity'

Sit everyone around the table and ask someone to give thanks to God for the food. Invite people to serve one another and enjoy the banquet you've prepared together.

Ask the group how they think Christians are seen by the rest of the (non-Christian) world. As do-gooders perhaps? Religious weirdos? Do they think Christians are known for what they stand for, or for what they stand against? As you eat this meal, you're getting to the heart of what Christianity is really about – celebration, community, serving each other out of love.

Ask what it might mean to live as 'resurrection' people, rather than as 'Good Friday' people. How can your lives reflect that the Christian faith is about good news, not a list of things you have to stop

doing? Invite everyone to come up with one way in which their lives are going to better reflect the celebration heart of their Christian faith from now on.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

**You will need:** small Easter eggs; small pieces of card to be used as labels; marker pens; sticky tape

Give out Easter eggs to the group, along with pens and card labels. Invite everyone to write something on their label which would encourage someone who found it – perhaps something they've heard or thought of in this session. Stick those labels to the eggs and challenge the group to hide the eggs where they will be easily found. You could choose to hide them around your church building (but not near any radiators) or you could be bolder and hide them around another place or building in your local community. Do this now if you have time and the opportunity, or encourage the group to hide them this week.

Pray for the people who will find the eggs, that they will be encouraged and encounter something of the Easter story through their discovery.

If you're running the four-part series, show a final clip from your chosen movie. The clip should be the redemptive moment in the film's finale. In the *The Lion King*, show where Simba is restored to his rightful place as king; if you're watching *Star Wars*, it's when Han Solo returns to help Luke destroy the Death Star; with *Toy Story*, show when Buzz and Woody pursue the removal van by rocket power, and Andy finds his two favourite toys safe and well. Think back to the previous session's clip and ask how this scene makes the group feel in the context of that earlier scene? Do they prefer stories with a happy ending? Why?

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