



Palm Sunday

MEETING AIM

To see the way that the events of Palm Sunday evolved.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 12:12-19

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used in a home setting or online using video-calling software. You could also run it in person, if restrictions allow.

Tensions are rising – people are flocking to see and hear this amazing Jesus who paints a radically different picture of God than anyone had previously understood; but the religious leaders don't like it one bit and they know they'd better act quickly now before things get really out of hand. As Jesus makes a huge statement with his triumphal, kingly entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees become even more determined to shut him down. For good.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can). Chat about what the children have done this week and ask the children who the most famous person they've ever seen is.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: Post-it notes or paper; pens

Ask the children to get into pairs or threes and make sure they have Post-its and pens (if you're online, use the breakout room feature if you have one). Ask them to write down as many stories about Jesus as they can think of – one per Post-it, if you're using them. Don't give them too long to do this. Ask them to come and stick their notes in a central area or just read out what the story is. Chat with the children about why people would have loved the events of each story. Ask everyone which people might not have liked this and why. For example, Jesus heals the paralysed man – people would have loved seeing the miracle, the man would have loved being healed but the Pharisees would've been super-mad that Jesus forgave the man's sins.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: the phrases below written out on slips of paper; donkey mask (optional)

Start by pointing out the tensions you've uncovered from the opening activity. Lots of people love Jesus and what he's doing, but the religious authorities think that he's bad news. Jesus knows that this tension isn't going to end well for him, but he goes to Jerusalem anyway, where they are about to celebrate the Passover. Loads of people hear that Jesus is on the move and they all want to see him. If you're doing this at home, get the group to sit in two lines facing one another, as if there is a road in the middle.

- Give these phrases to four volunteers:
- Praise God!
- God bless the One
- who comes in the name of the Lord!
- God bless the King of Israel!

Get a volunteer to be Jesus and another to be the donkey – if you can get a donkey mask, so much the better. The donkey will need to be able to give Jesus a piggy-back so choose wisely! Ask them both to take their shoes off. (If you're online, you could ask two children in the same household to be Jesus and the donkey.)

Ask the group what it's like to be waiting to see someone famous. Have they ever been to a pop concert? Or maybe they've seen crowds on the TV. Ask them to try to feel that sense of excitement inside. The crowds were so excited that Jesus was coming and they believed he was a king – especially since, when he appeared, he was riding a donkey. They laid down their coats (see the three other Gospel accounts) to make a red carpet for him, and they waved palm branches (that's why we call this Palm Sunday). Ask everyone to take off their jumpers and make a carpet on the road between them. Then have Jesus and the donkey walk down the carpet, while your four volunteers read out their lines and everyone else waves their arms. If it's your church tradition to give out palm crosses, you could get the children to wave these too.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

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

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- Why did the crowd lay down their coats and wave palm branches?
- What do you think the crowd thought Jesus was going to do next? (Remember that Israel is under Roman control just now and no one likes that much!)
- How do you think Jesus felt about this episode?
- How do you think his disciples felt?
- How do you think the religious leaders and teachers felt?
- If you didn't know any of these stories, what do you think would happen next?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: You will need: scraps of fabric; scissors

Three of the Gospel accounts talk about the crowd laying down their coats to make a red carpet for Jesus. Let everyone cut a jumper or coat shape out of fabric. Talk about whether you would let Jesus walk on your clothes. Are there some clothes that you'd be happy for him to walk on and some that you wouldn't?

PRAYER

5 MINS

The crowd on Palm Sunday were explosive and excited in their expression of praise for Jesus. Have a look at the four lines your volunteers read earlier. Ask the children to create their own lines of praise to Jesus. Once everyone has something, let everyone take turns to shout out their new lines of praise.

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Servant king

MEETING AIM

To see the way that Jesus turns everything upside down by serving his disciples.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 13:1-20

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used in a home setting or online using video-calling software. You could also run it in person, if restrictions allow.

Jesus has been in Jerusalem a few days and has been teaching some challenging things. Miraculous signs are floating about but the Jewish teachers still don't believe that he's the Messiah, the special saviour sent from God. The disciples gather with Jesus for the Passover meal – probably the most important feast that Jewish people shared together – but before the meal even begins, Jesus starts to turn everything upside down.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can). Chat about what the children have done this week and ask the children what would make them feel really awkward or embarrassed. Be sensitive to those for whom even talking about things like this is difficult.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: two large sheets of paper; marker pens

Lay out the two large sheets of paper on a table or on the floor. In the centre of one, write 'King', and on the other, write 'Servant'. (Use your video calling's chat or whiteboard functions if you're online.) Ask the children to write or suggest things to put on each piece of paper. What do kings do? What do servants do? Have the children come up with anything surprising?

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: chair; bowl full of warm soapy water; towels

Set up your chair and bowl with warm soapy water and some towels. Explain that the disciples and Jesus were about to celebrate a very special meal together (there'll be more about this in the next session). They didn't have dining tables in the same way that we do: in that time and place, you ate lying down round a low table – more like a coffee table. That meant your feet were pretty close to the food and, since you wore sandals and the roads were dusty and dirty, you needed to wash your feet before dinner.

Usually a servant would wash them for you. In this part of Jesus' story there was no servant, so Jesus got up and started to wash people's feet. Ask for a volunteer to have their feet washed (if you're online, ask someone from your own household). Sit the volunteer in the chair and then wash and dry their feet. Talk to them about how it feels. It's kind of awkward, isn't it? Now imagine if the person washing their feet was their head teacher, the Prime Minister or the Queen! That would be even more awkward, wouldn't it?

Jesus' disciples felt very awkward about him washing their feet. They knew he was God's Son and the guy they followed, and so really it should've been the other way around: they should've been washing his feet! Peter was especially embarrassed. He told Jesus that he couldn't wash his feet. Jesus said that Peter had to have his feet washed! After Jesus had finished, he explained to his disciples why he'd done it. Ask someone to look up John 13:14-17 and have them read it. Be sure to use something simple like the International Children's Bible or the Contemporary English Version.

If you have time, and more than one volunteer to have their feet washed, you could repeat the story with different children.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

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

- Why does Jesus say that he washed the disciples' feet?
- Do you think it made a difference to the way they behaved afterwards?
- Do you think Jesus liked washing their feet?
- Whose feet would you not mind washing?
- Whose feet would you not want to wash?
- Would you let Jesus wash your feet?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: bowls of soapy water; towels (or, for less mess, baby wipes and foot lotion)

Put your family into pairs (on this occasion, this is important rather than letting them choose someone because it ensures that no one's going to be left out). Ask them to wash one another's feet. If there are people who don't want to have their feet washed (or for whom it would be impractical), then they can have their hands washed instead. If you're working online, then encourage the children to do this for the other people in their household after the session has finished.

As they do this, get them to tell the other person what they would like them to pray for them.

PRAYER

5 MINS

Once the foot washing is complete, ask the children to stay where they are and pray simple prayers for one another, along the lines of what they've been asking for prayer for. It might be helpful to demonstrate this with another leader first if the children are not used to praying in this way.

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The last supper

MEETING AIM

To see the way that Jesus shares with his disciples what's about to happen and begins the great Christian tradition of Communion / Eucharist / Lord's Supper.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 14:12-26

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used in a home setting or online using video-calling software. You could also run it in person, if restrictions allow.

Jesus is preparing to complete the rescue plan to bring his people into a forever-relationship with him. It's the time of the Passover, when Jews remembered how the blood of an innocent lamb had protected them as God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. Unbeknownst to the disciples, Jesus is about to show them how these events were a prophetic foreshadowing of what they are going to see unfolding before them in the next few hours.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can). Chat about what the children have done this week and ask the children what traditions they have to celebrate or remember certain things in their families.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: story sections printed out or put in the chat function (one set per small group)

Put the children into small groups (or work as one group), and give each group a set of these story sections:

- God's people were slaves in Egypt.
- God spoke to Moses and said: "Get my people out!"
- Moses spoke to Pharaoh the king and said: "Let my people go!"
- Pharaoh said: "No."
- God used Moses to send plagues to Egypt. In the last plague the firstborn children died.
- God's people were protected by putting lamb's blood on the doorposts.
- Finally, Pharaoh said: "Go!"
- God's people escaped.
- Pharaoh changed his mind and chased them.
- God opened up the sea.
- God's people went through safely.
- When the Egyptians went through, the water covered them.

Mix them up and challenge the children to put them in the right order. If they're struggling, read from Exodus 11-14 or watch clips from The Prince of Egypt (check your streaming service for availability, or watch the DVD if you have it).

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: tablecloth; flat breads (pitta or matzah); grape juice; cups

Spread the tablecloth on the floor and ask everyone to sit around the edge. Set out your flat bread and grape juice. (If you're online, make sure everything is in full view of your camera. Ask parents and carers to make sure their children have some bread and juice.) Explain that the story you've just pieced together was so important for God's people that they celebrated it with a special meal every year called the Passover:

We saw last time how Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the start of the meal. Jesus continues to do some surprising things as they eat together. At the Passover meal, Jewish people ate (and still eat)

certain things in a certain order and drink wine at particular points too. The meal tells the story of how God rescued his people from Egypt. Jesus and his disciples would've known exactly how this went as they would've done this every year since they were children.

This time, however, was different. Jesus had started the meal by telling the disciples that one of them was going to betray him. They were upset because they couldn't imagine how that was going to happen. One of them, Judas Iscariot, knew very well, though: we don't know exactly why but Judas had become disillusioned with Jesus. Perhaps he thought that Jesus was going to overthrow the Romans or maybe there was another reason, but whatever it was, Judas had agreed with the chief priests to sell Jesus out and to make it possible for him to be arrested.

Of course, no one except Judas and Jesus know this during the meal. Jesus picks up the bread, thanks God, breaks it and tells the disciples that this is his body. That was a bit odd. Break the bread you have and give a piece to everyone.

Then it gets even weirder: Jesus picks up a cup of wine, tells everyone that it's his blood which is a sign of a new promise to God's people, and then he offers it around. Give everyone some of your juice.

At some point in the meal, Judas sneaks off to betray Jesus. Peter and Jesus have a conversation where Peter promises that he will never betray Jesus, but Jesus tells him that he'll say he doesn't know him three times before the night is finished. All in all, it's a very strange meal. At the end of the meal, they sing a hymn together. You can sing a familiar worship song at this point too. And then they leave and go to a place they knew called Gethsemane. Jesus goes off by himself to pray for a while and then Judas shows up with some soldiers who arrest Jesus and take him away.

**CHATTING TOGETHER** 5 MINS

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

- What do you think the disciples thought when Jesus said someone would betray him?
- How do you think Jesus felt, knowing that Judas would betray him?
- What do you think Jesus was talking about when he said the bread and wine were his body and blood?
- Do you think the story of the Passover is going to be linked somehow to what happens next?
- What do you think they thought would happen next?

CREATIVE TIME 10 MINS

You will need: paper, felt-tip pens

Show the children how to draw an outline of a wine glass and then colour it in so that it looks like a glass of wine. Let them continue to talk about the story of Passover from 'Play' and of the last supper from 'Bible story' as they do this. Especially prompt them to chew on the question of why blood is important in both stories.

PRAYER 5 MINS

Ask the children to find a space, get comfortable and close their eyes. Read Mark 14:17-18 and 22-24. Read slowly and leave a gap after each bit, encouraging the children to imagine they are part of the scene and to have a conversation with Jesus in their hearts.

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Good Friday

MEETING AIM

To explore the events of Good Friday and wonder about what they mean for us today.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 18-19

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used in a home setting or online using video-calling software. You could also run it in person, if restrictions allow.

Jesus and his disciples have shared the last supper together and Judas has betrayed Jesus' whereabouts to the chief priests. At the end of the last session, we saw Jesus being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Be ready for a range of responses to today's passage. Those with little or no church background may never have heard this story. To encounter a loving and forgiving Jesus and then hear how he was killed could be a shock! Even those who have grown up in a church community may never have explored this story in any depth. You might need to have a time when children can ask you questions or express how they feel as part of your session.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can). Chat about what the children have done this week and ask the children what they would do if a friend ended up in trouble.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: hot-cross buns; paper plates; knives and butter (optional)

Share out the hot-cross buns with the children. Ask if anyone knows why we eat these at this time of the year. What do they remind us of? How much of the story can they tell? Share thoughts and ideas as you eat the buns. (Be aware of food hygiene and allergy issues. If you're working online, drop off packs of hot-cross buns to your group as an Easter treat!)

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: cards with the Bible

passages below written on; a toy sword; a picture of a gate in a wall; a toy rooster; a Roman helmet; a whip or rope; a small cross; some kind of scented ointment; bandages; Bibles

Before you start, place the Bible passage cards with their props around your house so that you can take the children on a journey and relate different parts of the story at each spot. If you're online, do the same, but log into the call using a mobile device, so you can take the children with you as you discover the story props. Have your Bible in hand, but you probably won't need to read every single verse. Show the prop and plot the main points of the story at this moment. Let the group ask questions if they want to.

Station 1: John 18:1-11 (toy sword)

Judas leads the soldiers to Jesus, they arrest him. Simon Peter cuts off a soldier's ear.

Station 2: John 18:12-18 (picture of a gate in a wall)

Jesus is taken to the high priest. Peter eventually gets let into the courtyard outside but, when questioned, denies knowing Jesus.

Station 3: John 18:19-27 (toy rooster)

Jesus is questioned by the high priest. Peter is asked twice more if he's one of Jesus' guys. He says no. The rooster crows, just as Jesus had said it would.

Station 4: John 18:28-40 (Roman helmet)

The high priest turns Jesus over to the Roman official, Pilate. Pilate can't see what the problem is and wants to release Jesus. The people say no.

Station 5: John 19:1-16 (whip or rope)

Pilate has Jesus flogged to try to keep the people happy, but they want him dead. Pilate starts to get frightened by the crowd and disturbed by his conversation with Jesus. Eventually he hands Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified.

Station 6: John 19:17-37 (cross)

Jesus is crucified, the soldiers gamble for his clothes. Jesus tells John to look after his mum and then he dies. The soldiers come to make sure he's dead because they want to get the body down from the cross before the Sabbath.

Station 7: John 19:38-42 (scented ointment and bandages)

Two secret disciples of Jesus come and take Jesus' body to a tomb and lay him in it.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

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

- How does this story make you feel?
- What's unfair in the story?
- How would you have felt if you were Peter after you'd denied knowing Jesus?
- Did Pilate act in the right way? How could he have acted differently?
- How do you think Jesus' disciples felt at the end of this story?
- Why is Jesus dying on the cross important to us today?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: junk (such as boxes, foil, egg boxes and yogurt pots); sticky tape; scissors; glue sticks

Ask the group to reflect on the different bits of the story they've just walked through, and the props you showed them at each point. Ask them to create a junk model of one of those props. As you work, encourage them to talk about why they've chosen that object to model.

If you're online, then ask parents and carers a few days before your session to collect some clean recycling for this activity.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: paper; pens or pencils

Give out the pens and paper, and ask the children to write a note to Jesus saying how they feel about him dying on the cross. If you're working at home or in person at church, you could stick or nail these notes to a wooden cross (two branches tied together would be fine). Otherwise, ask the children to hold their notes in their hands.

Ask the children to talk to God about what they've heard and how they feel.

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