



Palm Sunday

MEETING AIM

To explore the difference between how God wanted to 'announce' Jesus to the world and how the world (the Pharisees, the disciples and others) wanted to announce him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 12:12-19

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

This is a pivotal moment in the grand story of the world. It is essentially when Jesus gives himself up to the authorities for them to kill him. In the world's eyes, this might look like a mistake, weakness, failure...but he was demonstrating the upside-down way that the kingdom of God operates, the epitome of subverting common understanding; that 'winning' could be achieved a different way, a non-violent way of love. All of the prophecies and all of Jesus teachings are here: the crowd tries to put him on a pedestal, but he comes riding in on a donkey, refusing to play the celebrity, refusing earthly plaudits and worldly methods of gaining power, but making himself vulnerable and in doing so, undermining the sin of the world.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask everyone to say two things that they are happy about right now and two things that they are unhappy or cross about.

INTRO ACTIVITY 5 MINS

You will need: pens and paper

Ask the group which celebrity is best and worst at social media. What makes them successful (or unsuccessful)? Work out which celebrity is followed on Instagram by the highest number of your group. If chaos ensues, ask them to list the top three celebrities they like to follow and create a table of results, and hopefully the most common celebrity will become self-evident!

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: pens and paper

Create two teams from your group (use the breakout room function if you have one). Imagine Jesus was to make his long-awaited return to the world and would be arriving in London in six months' time.

Ask one group to devise a marketing campaign about God coming back to earth – a campaign so good and so huge that it would eclipse all other promotion campaigns the world has ever seen! (A good reference point might be the way boxing matches get so much press.) They have a budget of £500m and should think through everything from taglines to TV adverts to social media to venue hire to press conferences.

Ask the other group to come up with an alternative campaign with a more modest budget of £500! The aim is still to spread the message, but who are they trying to reach? How can the entire nation see the message behind it? This group should think more like a grassroots social movement – what is the real message that might get eclipsed by the big advertising campaign of the other group? How can they keep Jesus' return to the key points of who he is and what he is about? How can they let people know about it but without compromising his values – what are those values?

Chat through the pros and cons of both campaigns and discuss the ways they could both help and hinder the spread of the gospel message.

Encourage the group to imagine they were the main players in the story. How might they answer these questions?

- What is the aim of this arrival in Jerusalem?
- How could it be used to my advantage?
- What are the threats or risks to me / my current situation?

Finally, read John 12:12-19 to the group.

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions, encouraging everyone to join in if they want to:

- What do you think about the approach Jesus takes here?
- What does this approach tell you about Jesus?

- What response do you have to what Jesus does?
- What does this story mean to your life today?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: pens and paper

In pairs, think up a few similes for Jesus using the best feature of any celebrities, brand names, famous items, or movies, or songs. When you bring them all together after five or ten minutes, you will have a hilarious but also hopefully quite profound poem of how Jesus surpasses all the best bits of all the things we worship, look up to, follow and admire.

For example: "You are more everywhere than Coca-Cola, more bountiful than baked beans."

"You would be more followed on Twitter than Katy Perry and more liked on Instagram than Selena Gomez."

"You are more meaningful to our childhood than Harry Potter, a better healer than even the NHS."

PRAYER 5 MINS

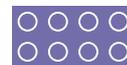
You will need: 'Creative response' poems

Read out the poems from 'Creative response' again but in an attitude of prayer this time. Pause regularly and encourage the young people to be aware of Jesus inside every aspect of our world and culture. In that silence encourage them to 'look' for him in the quiet, humble places, such as when they enjoy a sunset, or in how they feel when someone gives them an unexpected gift, or when a member of their household hugs them when they are sad. End by thanking Jesus that he offers a different way of looking at our society and that amongst all the busyness and clamour for our attention, he is still king and more powerful and more kind, more forgiving and more loving to us than any other thing:

"You went to Jerusalem and quietly died on a cross and now you are now always present in our lives and live in our heart for ever. Amen."

JOEL TOOMBS

is an experienced mentor, writer and volunteer youth worker.



The servant king

MEETING AIM

To better understand the metaphor behind Jesus' words and actions and engage with it.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 13:1-20

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

Washing someone's feet is an odd thing to do these days. It wasn't in biblical times, although it was looked down on as a dirty job. However, it was a normal part of life. The streets were dirty and people would have worn open sandals. Remember how dirty your feet get when you wear flip-flops on holiday! It's a famous story but explore why this is so symbolic. Particularly look at the part with Peter asking to be completely washed. Yes, it is showing that even someone as important as Jesus was humble enough to act as a servant to others, but also it is a picture of the gospel: when we become a Christian, we are forgiven and baptised; spiritually 'washed.' From then on, we no longer need to be baptised – we just need to come in prayer regularly to confess our sin and 'get right' with God again, simply to remember we are forgiven!

GATHERING TIME

5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask the young people what jobs and chores they have to do at home. Then chat about chores that young people around the world might have to do that they don't.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

Play a game similar to 'Grandma's shopping list' – instead of shopping items, have an itinerary of places they've been, things they've done, people they've spoken to. So simply start off the sentence: "This week has been amazing, first off, I went to..." Each person in the circle repeats it and adds something from their week, eg: "Then I saw a red kite on our walk", "Then I got a D for my English homework" or "Then we ordered a banquet from the local takeaway". Ask them to think about things that other people did for them as highlights, as well as times they did something sacrificial for someone else. Under pandemic restrictions this could be a challenge, but will help young people focus on the good things.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

10 MINS

You will need: washing-up bowls of warm water; towels

Ask the young people to get a washing-up bowl, bucket or plastic box and put some warm water in it. (You might want to ask parents or carers to help with this.) Encourage everyone to take off their shoes and socks and put their feet in the warm water. Invite everyone to close their eyes while you read out John 13:1-20, asking them to imagine they are there in the room with Jesus and the disciples.

With eyes still closed and feet still in the water, ask a few imaginative questions, such as: "What would you think if you were one of the disciples?" or "What might it feel like to have Jesus wash your feet?"

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions, encouraging everyone to join in if they want to:

- Why is washing someone's feet such a shocking thing to do?
- What might be a similar act to washing someone's feet in our culture?
- Who are the people in our society who need God's love and our service?
- Do you feel we serve our community as much as Jesus would like? How can we serve the people who live around us more?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: poster paint; paper plates; paper; felt-tip pens; cover-up and clean-up equipment including warm water in bowls and towels

Ask the group to put some paint on a paper plate and put their bare foot in the paint. They can then make a footprint on the paper. They should then list around their footprint the ways people need serving and the needs, both obvious and hidden, that Jesus wants us to care about.

Ask the young people to wash their feet. As they do so, invite them to think about the story and what they have discussed and experienced. What conclusions might they have come to about Jesus' actions, and how we might put this attitude into action in our own lives?

PRAYER

5 MINS

Continuing on from 'Creative response', invite the group to be quiet. Speak over them about how God can be found in the small, quiet, humble things in life – that he is not often found on billboards or Hollywood but in a kind word spoken to someone at school, through a foodbank that a family is in much need of, in the beauty of a spider's web on a frosty morning. Invite prayers of similar examples from their own experience.

Pray to close and ask them to all repeat the final phrase: "Thank you, God, for being with us" at the same volume as you say it. Say it perhaps up to ten times. Start off very quietly and reflectively, building up to a shout, and then bring it back down to a whisper again, and end with a normal level "Amen".

JOEL TOOMBS

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The last supper

MEETING AIM

To explore betrayal and forgiveness and why the last supper was symbolic.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 14:12–26

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

The writer tells us it was just before the Passover festival. This reference could be easily overlooked, but I love this (fully intended) metaphor by God: the Passover festival was integral to the Jewish calendar, commemorating when God killed the firstborn of all the families in Egypt, all except the Israelite families who had to paint their doorframe with the blood of a firstborn lamb. They wouldn't have known why that was significant, but thousands of years later, as the writer tells the story, it would have become apparent for the first time. Can you imagine how they must have felt when they realised? This was an image of Jesus in the Old Testament! Suddenly they would have to reread and rethink everything they knew...Everything about this story is so meticulously choreographed by God, even right back to Moses.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Chat about memorable meals, both before and during the pandemic. What is most important about these meals?

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

You will need: scene of betrayal from a film or TV programme

Before the session, find a film or TV clip of one character betraying another. If your group are sci-fi fans, you could show a clip of Lando betraying Han in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Watch the clip and chat about what happens. Is there a betrayer right to do what they did? Can it be explained?

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: a ploughman's lunch-style meal (including bread and grape juice)

If you can, deliver a lunch to each of your young people before the session. Make sure you consider food hygiene and allergy issues.

Invite everyone to eat together and ask the meaning of bread and wine, and discuss its significance to the Church. Ask what their experience of Holy Communion has been so far, and if doing it means something special to them personally.

Explain that these two items would have been standard at Israelite meals... Jesus was a master at using relevant, understandable references and metaphors for his spiritual teaching.

Read Mark 14:12-26 as you share your meal. As you come to verses 22-25, act out the passage with the grape juice and bread. Wonder together about how the disciples might have felt. Would they have understood what was going on? Or would they look back afterwards and realise the significance?

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions, encouraging everyone to join in if they want to:

- What is your favourite part of the story?
- If you were one of the disciples, what would you think about Judas' actions?
- What do you think Jesus means when he calls the bread his body and the wine his blood?
- What does this story tell you about why Jesus came to live with his people?
- Do you know what happens next? Does knowing that help you to interpret what's happening here?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: paper; pens; bin

Make sure everyone has some paper and a pen. Ask the young people to write the names of people they have ever felt betrayed by in the past.

Next, they should write their own name and think of times they have betrayed God – by denying him, avoiding doing what he asked, or putting other things in front of him in their lives.

Finally, they throw away their paper to symbolise a new start, and ask God's forgiveness and help.

PRAYER 5 MINS

The last supper was a time when the disciples had an incredible bond – a very intense time of friendship and togetherness. Give each person the name of another in the group to pray for. Go around the circle with each person saying a prayer-statement such as: "You forgive me when I betray you by losing my cool when I play football."

Finally, thank God for the people he has put in our lives to support us, and ask him to help us be supportive of the friends in our lives and stand by them in a godly way.

JOEL TOOMBS

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Good Friday

MEETING AIM

To explore the events leading up to the crucifixion and specifically how Judas and Peter responded – and what implications that has for us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 18-19

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

There are a number of aspects you could explore in this passage, so don't feel you have to explain or cover everything. Allow the young people to delve into and discover new aspects they haven't previously thought of before – although don't assume they are all familiar with the story. Go with your group on a brand-new journey in the passage – don't fall into the trap of walking the same old worn, cliched paths! Can you get this generation excited about the crucifixion story in a fresh way?.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. If you are doing this session at Easter, the young people are probably on holiday, so chat about the different things they have been doing. Has everything gone to plan? Or have some things been a disappointment?

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

You will need: a pack of cards

Count out enough cards for each person to have one, including the ace of clubs. Show a card to each of the players, while everyone else closes their eyes. Set the scene: you are all in the high priest's courtyard after Jesus has just been arrested. The person holding the ace of clubs is Peter, who is denying that he was with Jesus. The rest of you are trying to work out who is Peter!

'Peter' must lie, trick, bluff, stay silent,

or use any tactics to not give away that they had that card. Give a couple of minutes for everyone to discuss together what happened and what clues they have, before the group has three guesses at who Peter is.

When the game is over you could ask them how it felt to deny Jesus! It's meant to be tongue-in-cheek of course, but it could actually be quite an emotional insight into the passage for them. If they like it, you could play again and use a different card to represent Peter.

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: large sheets of paper or card; felt-tip pens; paper; pens

Tell the young people there are six main locations in today's passage (the garden, the high priest's courtyard, inside the high priest's house, Pilate's headquarters, Golgotha and the tomb). Split them into six teams and assign a location to each. Ask them to design a sign for their location. As they are working, read out John 18-19.

Staying in their teams they should complete the following tasks:

Look at the passage to find out what happened at their location and list the main events on a sheet of paper.

Come up with a statue-like freeze-frame scene involving all the team that gives some idea of the most important thing that was going on there. This will be tricky on a video call, so they will need to be creative!

Discuss the main questions (not the answers) that occur to them as they discuss the story and look at the passage. For example: "Why was Simon Peter carrying a sword in the garden?" or "Was Pilate brave, or a coward?" They should write down the main one or two questions so that they can ask the rest of the group later.

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

As a whole group, 'travel' around the locations in the story. Read the appropriate part of the story (you will visit the high priest's courtyard twice). At each location ask the group to:

- Display the freeze-frame pose.
- Give a quick overview of their thoughts on what was going on.

- Present the question(s) that they discussed in 'Bible exploration'. The rest of the group should then help answer these questions and discuss this part of the story.

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: art materials

Ask the young people to find whatever art materials they can, and encourage them to create a picture in response to the story. What the young people produce is not the most important thing here. What is important is the process. When hands are busy, it gives the mind space to think about the story and to listen to God.

As you work, continue to chat about the story and what they think. The young people might have questions that to us seem strange or unimportant, but you should treat these questions with respect, as they represent your young people sorting out elements of the story and what it tells them about God, faith and life. This is especially true of young people. Try to answer some of these questions together as you create your artwork.

PRAYER 5 MINS

Remind the group that we all can know Jesus' love and forgiveness – that because of the cross we can all be free from condemnation and fear and guilt and happily press on, trying again when we slip up and growing in boldness with his help to be a good witness.

Be silent together for a moment, and ask them to think about their reflections when they were doing 'Creative response'. Encourage them to chat with God about their thoughts and to explore what he is saying to them.

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