



## Easter Sunday

### MEETING AIM

To explore and celebrate the best day ever!

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 20:1-18

### 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.

This story is filled with wonder and amazement, and a journey from utter despair to outrageous joy. This session encourages the children to physically participate in that journey, as they empathise with those who witnessed events first-hand, and experience for themselves the celebration that Easter Sunday brings to all of us.

### STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask them to think about their best day ever; what made it so good? Do they have more than one best day ever? Invite them to share their stories and celebrate their happy memories together.

### PLAY

10 MINS

**You will need:** access to the internet, either during the session or beforehand if you learn the signs

Explain that during this session, you are going to be thinking about some different feelings or emotions, so you are going to learn how to sign, using BSL, some of the different signs for our feelings.

You can use the online BSL dictionary to watch and practise the signs together, or rehearse them before the session, ready to teach them to the children yourself. Words used could include: sad, frightened, surprised and happy. Talk about each of the different feelings as you practise the sign and invite the children to briefly share their own experiences of these different emotions.

### BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

**You will need:** a garden space to retell this story (alternatively, use potted plants, green blankets etc to create an appropriate space)

Gather the children together at the edge of the garden space and explain that you are going to think about what happened to some of Jesus' friends a few days after they had seen him die on the cross. You may choose to find a space where you can sit together to tell the story, but it could work particularly well if you are able to move around as a group, as described below, linking movement to emotion to experience the story in a more direct way. If you're meeting online, then invite the children to pretend they are in a garden.

Ask the children how they think Jesus' friends would have felt when they got to the garden, perhaps using the signs learned earlier, and say:

Very early on the Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb to treat Jesus' body with special oils. Tiptoe through the garden, to an assigned place, perhaps a rock.

But when she got there she was amazed to discover the stone had been rolled away. You could sign 'Amazed'.

She ran back to find Jesus' friends. Encourage the children to rush back to the garden entrance.

The friends hurried back through the garden to see what had happened. Run back through the garden.

They couldn't understand where Jesus had gone. Perhaps they were worried, perhaps they were confused. Ask the children how they might be feeling right now.

Jesus' friends left the tomb to tell the others what they had seen. Mary stayed behind. While she was there, two angels appeared. They asked her why she was so sad. Mary tried to explain that someone must have taken Jesus' body away, when someone appeared behind her. Turn around together, wondering who it could be.

At first, Mary thought it must be the gardener, but when he spoke, she knew that it was Jesus! Not dead, but alive and standing right in front of her!

Jesus sent Mary to tell his friends that she had seen him, so she hurried off once more; it really was the best day ever!

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

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

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- Was there anything you didn't like about the story?

- How do you think Mary must have felt when she realised it was Jesus?
- Why was this the best day ever?

### CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

**You will need:** trays; a selection of materials to create a garden (this could be playdough and artificial flowers or items collected from your time in the garden, peg people, stones)

Invite the children to use the gathered materials to create an Easter garden; either individually or working together to form a larger group garden. Encourage them to think about what this place may have been like and what features to include – a tomb and a pathway, for instance. Provide blank peg dolls for the children to use as the key characters in the story. As you create your gardens, talk about the story and encourage them to ask any questions they may have.

If you're online, then consider delivering garden kits to families beforehand. Alternatively, ask parents and carers to find materials for their children to use.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

**You will need:** pens or pencils and paper; balloons

Tell the children that you are going to celebrate Easter in your prayers. Give each child a small piece of paper and invite them to draw or write their praise or thank-you prayers to God. It could be as simple as: "Thank you for Easter Sunday" or something specific they have discovered today. Invite the children to put their prayers into a balloon and help them to blow up and tie the balloons. Play some praise music and invite the children to celebrate who Jesus is and what he has done, dancing and throwing the balloons around. When the music stops, pop the balloons and invite the children to gather the prayers together in the centre of the group. Pray over these prayers and over the children, thanking Jesus for what he has done for us.

(Some children may not like balloons popping, so have some scissors ready to cut the top of the balloons if necessary.)

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## Jesus and Thomas

### MEETING AIM

To explore what it means for us to trust in Jesus, even when we cannot see him.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 20:19-31

### 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.

We love to use this story as a finger-pointing, 'look a disciple got it wrong' moment. But perhaps instead, we should use this story to help us remember that faith is not always easy. For our youngest children, who are beginning to question things for themselves and ask whether the stories they hear match up to their own experiences and discoveries of truth, this session provides a safe space where doubts can be articulated and questions asked as we, together, ask Jesus to reveal himself to us.

### STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask them to think about a time when something or someone has surprised them and to share their stories together.

### PLAY

10 MINS

**You will need:** a postcard; scissors

Gather the children together and ask them if they believe you can walk through a postcard. The chances are that they won't believe you can, so tell them that you are going to show them how it can be done. If you have never seen this trick before, full instructions can be on Youtube.

Once you have completed your trick, say: "Sometimes things seem very unlikely and they have to be seen to be believed! Today's story is about somebody who found it hard to accept the truth, until he saw it for himself."

If you can, help the children to do the trick themselves (you'll need some child-safe scissors).

### BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

For this retelling, you will need a storyteller to play the part of Thomas who can learn the script and tell the story to the children as though sharing his own recollections. It may help to dress your volunteer in a simple Bible character costume to set the scene. Gather the children together to sit in front of Thomas (or spotlight Thomas' screen if you're online), who should begin the story:

Hello, I'm one of Jesus' friends. You might have heard of me – my name is Thomas, although sometimes I get called Doubting Thomas. I wonder if you know what that means? I get called Doubting Thomas because I doubted that Jesus really had come back to life; I found it really hard to believe! Well, you would too, wouldn't you?

You see, we'd all been there when Jesus had been taken to die. It was so very sad and not what we'd expected to happen at all. In the few days afterwards, we tried to lie low, me and the other disciples. We weren't sure if the Romans were going to come after us too, so we thought it best to hide away. Then some of the others said they'd seen Jesus! Actually seen him, large as life and walking around again!

I think it's pretty fair to say I found this hard to believe; well, wouldn't you? How could he be alive again? It just wasn't possible!

I said I wouldn't believe it unless I saw him with my own eyes, right in front of me. And if I could see the scars in his hands and side, then I'd know it was actually him and not just the others hoping for the best.

Well, you'll never imagine what happened. He came! Jesus, I mean! He came to see me, and the others too, while we were hiding away safely. He came right up to me and showed me the scars in his hands and side too. I knew it was him; Jesus, the Son of God had come back to life again. Jesus is alive!

Jesus challenged me then. He said it was easy for me to believe Jesus because I'd seen him with my own eyes. It was far better for the people who hadn't seen Jesus but still believed in him; they were really blessed.

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- Can you understand why Thomas found it hard to believe?
- What would you ask Jesus if you saw him?
- What helps you to believe in Jesus?

### CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

**You will need:** scratchart boards; tools

Scratchart boards are readily available in plain A5 cards or ready-cut shapes from a variety of craft stores, including Baker Ross. Explain to the children that Jesus revealed himself to Thomas by appearing directly in front of them. How does he reveal himself to us? Invite the children to use the scratchart to reveal a picture, symbol or question in response to the story today. They may choose to write a question they would like to ask Jesus or draw something which helps them to put their trust in him in their day-to-day lives, or a scene from the story today. Use the coloured background to the board to reveal the picture as a reminder of the way Jesus revealed himself to Thomas.

If you're working online, then think about delivering some scratchart boards to families before the session.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

**You will need:** foot shapes from 'Creative time'

Invite children to participate in the actions, as you lead the group in prayer:

Dear Jesus, even though we cannot see you with our eyes, help us to see that you are right here with us. Hold your hands up to your eyes, as though forming a pair of glasses or binoculars.

Even though we cannot feel you with our hands, help us to feel you close to us today. Hold your hands out, palms up in front of you.

Even when it is hard, help us to trust that you are right here with us. Stamp your foot. Amen.

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## On the beach

### MEETING AIM

To share in Jesus' invitation to follow him.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 21:1-19

### 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.

This story is one of incredible parallels, with the first time Jesus met the disciples (Luke 5:1-11), inviting them to put down their nets and follow him. Three years of following Jesus, and the disciples once again found themselves at their nets. In this encounter, Jesus challenges the disciples to realise that their work was not over but had only just begun. We too, together with the children we serve, have the opportunity to put down our nets and follow Jesus, even when we cannot see where he will lead.

### STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask them whether they have ever been to the beach. Encourage them to share their stories of the things they did there, and what they like about being at the beach.

### PLAY

10 MINS

#### You will need: food-related toys

Have some free-play time around the idea of food and picnics. Introduce a role-play area with a 'camp fire', together with a pretend boat and fishing net, where children can role-play catching and cooking their own fish. If you're online, you can play together on screen.

### BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

#### You will need: a boat (an inflatable dinghy would work well); a large piece of net

If there's only a few of you, you could tell this story as you all sit in the boat. Alternatively, ask the children to pretend they're on the seashore and stand in the boat as you tell this story:

I wonder if any of you remember what happened when Jesus first met his disciples? Some of them were fishermen who had been out all night trying to fish but they hadn't caught a thing. Jesus came along and told them to throw their nets out the other side of the boat. *You could act this out as you talk.* The fishermen were amazed when their nets filled with fish and they chose to follow Jesus, leaving their nets behind and becoming his disciples.

A long time had passed since then. The disciples had learned lots from following Jesus, but now they were on their own again. They had seen Jesus die on the cross and they had seen he had come back to life again, but he wasn't with them every day and they weren't sure what would happen next.

So the disciples went back to fishing, like they had done before. One night, seven of the disciples went out in their boats, trying to catch some fish. But when morning came, they had caught nothing! A man standing on the beach shouted to the men on the boat: "Put your nets out on the other side of the boat!" So they did. *Act this out again.*

Once again, their nets were filled with fish, just like they had been all those years ago. The disciples realised it was Jesus and they brought their fish into the shore, ready to share a fish sandwich breakfast together.

And just like the first time, when Jesus saw the men fishing, Jesus invited the men to follow him again. Jesus would not be with them on earth for much longer, but he still had important work for them to do. Now they would learn what it meant to follow Jesus, even when they couldn't see him.

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Still sitting at your Passover table, ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- Is there anything you don't understand about this story?
- Why do you think Jesus chose to appear to the disciples in this way?
- What would you ask Jesus if you saw him?

### CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

#### You will need: pebbles; acrylic paints; paintbrushes; clean-up and cover-up equipment

Invite the children to select a pebble and paint something on it from the story today. Some children may choose to paint an image such as the boat or fish as a reminder of the story, while others may paint a word or symbol; something that has spoken to them through this story. Once completed, gather the pebbles together to look at in the centre of the group. At the end of the session, invite the children to take their pebbles away and choose what to do with them – either displaying them at home as a reminder of the story of God's message to them or perhaps passing it on to someone else to share the story with them.

If you're meeting online, it might be easier to draw on pebbles with felt-tip pens, as families are more likely to have those than acrylic paint.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

Gather the children together, perhaps inviting the group to hold on to the net together in a circle. Lead the children in a prayer, as follows:

Thank you, Jesus, for your invitation to follow you. Thank you for the disciples who left behind their nets to follow you and share your story with the world. Thank you that we can follow you too and share your story with the people we know and love. Amen.

As the children continue to have their eyes closed, suggest to them that they can choose to let go of the net, as a symbol between them and God that they want to follow him too, if they so wish, and leave a silent space for children to pray for themselves, as you close.

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## Ascension

### MEETING AIM

To share the challenge that Jesus gave to his disciples when he was preparing to leave them, and explore how we can take Jesus' story out with us too

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 1:1-11

### 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.

This is a story scant on detail, begging questions as to how prepared or otherwise the disciples must have felt as Jesus ended his time on earth. In this text, we see Jesus passing the baton on to those who had been closest to him, preparing them to take his message out into the world. Through this session, we explore how we, too, are invited to take the story out and pass the baton on.

### STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask them to think of a time when they have had to say goodbye. Was it a sad goodbye or a good goodbye? What helps us to say goodbye?

### PLAY

10 MINS

**You will need:** something to use as a baton

Play some simple relay races around your house or meeting space – make your course as simple or as complicated as you like (and which is safe). If you're online, play the shopping list memory game: "Today I went to the shops and I bought..." passing the sentence on from player to player. When a child forgets something, just start again, so that it's easier for younger children.

### BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

**You will need:** felt shapes to use for the telling of the story – a blue sky background, a green piece to represent the ground, Jesus and disciples, angels, clouds

Depending upon the size of your group, you will need to decide whether to lay the story out on the floor or put it up on display, perhaps using an easel (do this second option if you're meeting online). Spread the background out and gather the children so that they can see. As you begin the story, lay the green grass at the foot of the picture and slowly set out the people figures, gathered together around Jesus to one side of the scene. Tell the story:

When Jesus rose from the dead, he spent 40 days on earth. He would appear and talk to his disciples once again, reminding them of the things he had taught them. He told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for God's promised Holy Spirit. Jesus' disciples still had questions for Jesus; they were still waiting for him to become king and wanted to know when Jesus would finish the work he had started. Jesus told them that only Father God knew how the story would end and that everything would happen in God's perfect timing.

One day, Jesus gathered his friends together. *Move the figures to the centre of the scene.* He told them that he would be returning home to Father God in heaven. But the disciples' work was not yet complete. Jesus told them that they were to wait for the Holy Spirit and then they should take Jesus' story out to the whole world, telling people all over about the work that Jesus had done on earth, his death and resurrection.

When he had said this, Jesus was taken up into the clouds. *Move the shapes appropriately.* He was hidden from the people. The disciples looked up into the sky, and as they waited, two angels appeared. Add these figures to the scene. They told the disciples not to wait there for Jesus, he had now returned to heaven, and one day he would come back the same way. This would be the last time the disciples would ever see Jesus on earth, but they knew they still had work to do. They would wait for the Holy Spirit to come before they would go out and share his story the world over.

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

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

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- What questions do you have about this story?
- How do you think the disciples would have felt when Jesus left them?
- What does it mean for us to wait for Jesus to return?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

**You will need:** a crown; a globe; a house; a clock; playdough

Show the objects and ask them to choose something that stands out to them, after hearing the story. Which of these objects speaks to them the most? What did they hear in the story that made them think about this?

Provide some playdough so that the children can create their own object. Gather together the children's chosen or created symbols and look together at how the objects help to tell us the story. What challenges us from these objects? How might God be talking to us through these symbols?

### PRAYER

5 MINS

As you gather to pray, stand together in a circle, facing inwards and holding hands if the children are happy to do so. (Just pray on screen if you're online.) Begin by praying for the children in the group; perhaps invite the children to share their own prayers, thanking God for the things they have discovered during this session. Pray specifically that the Holy Spirit would come and fill each of us with the same power he gave to the first disciples. Now turn the circle around and face outwards. Pray that we would have the courage we need to take Jesus' story out into the world and share Jesus with our friends and family this week.

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