



Palm Sunday



MEETING AIM

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



BIBLE PASSAGE

John 12:12-19



BACKGROUND

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 or failure. But Jesus was demonstrating the upside-down way the kingdom of God operates, which is the epitome of subverting common understanding: that 'winning' can be achieved a different way; a non-violent way of love.

The crowd tries to put Jesus on a pedestal, but he comes riding in on a donkey, refusing to play the celebrity, rejecting earthly plaudits and worldly methods of gaining power. He makes himself vulnerable and, in doing so, undermines the sin of the world.

GATHERING TIME



Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have. Go around the group asking everyone to say two things they are happy about right now and two things they are unhappy or cross about.

INTRO ACTIVITY



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 most people in your group. If chaos ensues, ask them to list the top three celebrities they like to follow and create a table of results. Hopefully the most popular celebrity will become self-evident!

BIBLE EXPLORATION



You will need: paper; pens

Create two teams from your group. 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 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 lots of press or the announcement of Prince Harry and Megan's engagement.) They will have a budget of £500 million and should think through everything from taglines to TV adverts, social media, venue hire and press conferences.

Ask the other group to come up with an alternative campaign with a modest budget of £500. The aim is still to spread the message, but who are they trying to reach? How can the entire nation get behind it? (If stuck, think of Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign.) This group should think more like a grass-roots 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's about? How can they let people know about it without compromising his values. What *are* those values?

Chat through the pros and cons of each campaign and discuss the ways they could help and hinder the spreading of the gospel message.

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

- What was the aim of this arrival in Jerusalem?
- How could it have been used to my advantage?
- What might the threats or risks to me/my current situation have been?

CHATTING TOGETHER



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 it tell you about Jesus?

- What's your response to what Jesus does?
- What does this story mean for your life today?

CREATIVE RESPONSE



You will need: pens; paper

In pairs, think up a few similes for Jesus using the best feature of any celebrities, brand names, famous landmarks, 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 everything we worship, look up to, follow and admire.

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

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

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

PRAYER



You will need: pens; paper

Read out the poems again, but in an attitude of prayer this time. Pause regularly and encourage the young people to become aware of Jesus in 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 friend hugs them when they are sad.

End by thanking Jesus that he offers a different way of looking at our society and that, amid all the busyness and clamour for our attention, he is still king. He is more powerful, more forgiving, more loving and kinder to us than any other thing.

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

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