pilot booklet 2
lent 1a to easter day
13 march 2011 to 24 april 2011

spill the beans
worship and learning resources for all ages

In the beginning...

A lectionary-based resource with a Scottish flavour for Sunday Schools, Junior Churches and Worship Leaders

2011 Spill the Beans Resource Team
ethos

There is a particular ethos behind this material: it’s all about story. When we spill the beans about anything, we tell the story of what happened and we share the story of what that means for us.

We believe story is the lifeblood of faith. In story we can tell the truth and speak with honesty about things for which there are not yet words. Story contains mystery and is the poetry that forms faith. Stories grow as we grow and can reveal new truths at different times in our lives.

So we believe giving stories to people is one of the most important things we can do in sharing our faith. Children and adults hold stories in their being and keep coming back to them throughout life. Our culture is stored in story. The same is true for our faith.

We believe in telling story. This material is simply the retelling of our faith stories. It always starts with the story each week. Then each activity is simply a way to engage the story and enable children and adults to imbed the story, capturing different aspects of it, highlighting different images that help us hold the story in our beings.

But we believe these faith stories ought to be able to mingle with our own life stories, our day-to-day experiences. So as activities are engaged, it is important to ask people to retell the faith story along with their own story of that week. It’s the tangle of life stories with faith stories that perhaps make both real.

We believe one story is the lens through which we hear other stories. Faith narratives create a web: if we think about water, then what other stories involving water do we find in the Bible; if we are reflecting on forgiveness, what other stories of forgiveness can we hear. During activities the question ought to be asked: does this story remind you of other stories in the Bible? Stories don’t exist on their own but in a diverse web, each feeding the other.

We believe that as we grow we reflect in different ways on the faith stories we hold. Our idea is to invest these stories in people, offering each as a gift of faith. The story may be understood in a literal way during younger years, then with questions about their historical accuracy as people move into teenage years and then move into a third stage where we hear the story again for the first time, but this time holding the meaning, the deep down truth in the story that helps it shape our living and how we understand and engage with the world in justice and in grace. Story holds the faith more honestly and in a much deeper way than any creed and doctrine.

Join us and spill the beans.

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spill the beans team

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Key to Abbreviations

In the worship ideas section the following abbreviations are used:

CH4  Church Hymnary, 4th Edition
JP  Junior Praise
MP  Mission Praise
WGRG  Wild Goose Worship Group
using spill the beans

One of the many memorable inventions in J.K. Rowling’s alternative world is “Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans”. You never know what flavour you are going to get, from Apple or Chocolate to Worcestershire Sauce or Parsnip, even Earwax!

It is our hope that with every week of Spill the Beans you will find a range of different ideas that will encourage you to explore the depth of different flavours in each week’s story.

Like a huge bowl of multi-coloured jelly beans or a table laid out with a rich feast, no one should be expected to consume everything!

worship ideas

These are a few ideas that possibly expand upon the story offering words, phrases, poetry and ideas that could be used in some way in worship. They are not to be used exactly as they are but ought to be edited and expanded to suit the culture of your own faith community.

Each week we provide a selection of words, ideas and creative moments to take the theme and the passage a little further. We do not provide a ready made service or perfect prayers but ideas and pointers that hopefully scratch at your own creativity and provoke heaven’s imagination within you.

age group ideas

Here are some helpful tips to guide you in your use of the material in age groups:

1. It presumes some introduction to the story will have taken place in worship together or will play a part in the service when children join it later.

2. Depending on the make-up of your own groups of children you will need to remain flexible in how you use the material.

3. Each idea has been given a guide age range to help your planning, but this is only a guide and your own circumstances may make certain crafts or activities more or less successful.

4. Before the sit-down activities if you have a group of young children or lots of boys, you may want to add a run-around type game before the gathering time to expend some energy.

5. Use the gathering time exercise to get into the story. Begin with a circle where the whole Sunday School is together and do this activity together (gathering time).

6. Then retell the story together (it should have been told already in worship if you begin together there).

7. Follow that by choosing as many or as few activities your space and time allow. You could offer a number of activities each at different stations all at the same time for all ages to self-select with a teacher staffing each one, or have traditional classes.

8. During activities, ask children to retell the story to you and ask about their week, what was happy and what was sad and if this week’s story reminds them of other biblical and personal stories.

9. The intention is not to complete “the task” brilliantly, but rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it might have felt like then and what it means for us today.

10. Bring everyone back together and use the sending activity to reflect upon the current week and look forward to the following week.

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through the season

Here are a couple of ideas that can link all the weeks together. One is about the story telling itself, which is the most vital part of the material.

The second is creating a scene that helps form a Lenten Space so that those who learn visually can engage more thoroughly, marking the season as it moves through the weeks.

help with telling the story

Story Staff / Walking Stick

Make a walking stick to accompany the storyteller from week to week from location to location with the purpose of linking the series and as a visual reminder of a sense of movement from story to story. This could also be used as a memory stick—looking back and forward in the stories and developed also as a prayer stick—i.e. to give focus to those people and situations we might pray for in our intercessory prayers.

Either use talent in the congregation to make a 5’– 6’ walking stick or purchase bundle of 6’ garden canes and secure together (can be bought already secured).

You could divide the stick into 7 areas which could also be developed into a memory stick at its simplest by wrapping different colours of crepe paper pertinent to the week’s story.

These could be:

- red (a bright fruit colour combining with danger idea);
- green (oak of Moreh);
- blue (water from rock);
- gold (David’s ‘crown’);
- cream (visor of bones);
- green and gold (Palm branches and kingship of Jesus);
- white (linen wrappings).

Secure crepe paper by wrapping round stick and wrapping string/wool over the top and tying—it doesn’t need to be neat, just secure!

You will find it easiest to start wrapping from the bottom of the stick and build up each week.

If you have artistic people they could instead make symbols for each week to be attached to the stick. Remember to work out how best to attach these to the stick.

creating space

Here are some ideas that will help you to build up a visual as you move through the season. These ideas are provided for you to adapt depending on the size, shape and layout of your worship space. Perhaps your worship space is used by other groups during the week so a new space is recreated each week. We hope that these ideas could also be adapted to be used within age groups.

Worship Focus

You might want to set the scene by placing some objects in your entrance / gathering area or as a focus at the front of the worship space:

Lent 1  Brown material, green material, gardening tools, plants, plant pots.
Lent 2  Beige material, tent pegs, camping gear, pictures of trees.
Lent 3  Blue material, buckets, rocks / stones made into cairn.
Lent 4  Green material, oil, images of well known people, magnifying glass, binoculars.
Lent 5  Grey material, cactus plants, fans (to make ‘breath’).
Lent 6  Green material, grey material, bricks, palm leaves.
Easter  Green material, folded white material (linen wrappings), unfurled hallelujahs on strips of brightly coloured cloth, flowers, Easter eggs.

Looking ahead:
Easter 2  Beige material, buckets and spades, paper fish.
**Lenten Collage**

The basic idea is to build up a collage, week by week. Mark out a simple pathway on a large piece of cotton sheeting or cardboard which can be removed during the week or could be hung on the wall for the whole season.

Alternatively have a different sheet for each week and add one each week using different parts of your worship space. The different sections could be connected with paper footprints (purple would be a good liturgical colour!) which have the names of people in the worshipping community on them.

Each week a different symbol is added to the pathway and as we move through the season we have a reminder of where we have already travelled. Symbols could be added at the beginning by the worship leader to introduce the theme. Work on symbols could be incorporated into worship and the symbols added during or after worship. Symbols could be made by a group during worship, possibly children or young people and brought in and added at the end of the worship time with someone explaining their significance.

**Lent 1** Beginnings—garden—flowers, apple blossom—give everyone a flower/blossom shape and ask them to write a hope for themselves or the church or the community or the world at the beginning of this new season—stick flowers at beginning of pathway.

**Lent 2** Setting Out—tent—give everyone a small piece of material and glue this onto tent shape already marked out on pathway—as sign that we journey together—or use tree image and give everyone a leaf to stick on tree.

**Lent 3** Along the Way—draw stone on pathway, give everyone a paper water drop and ask them to write something they feel they need at this time onto drop, stick drops around stone and talk about how God provides what we need.

**Lent 4** Look to the Future—give people a small blank face shape and ask them to sign their name on the face—stick faces onto field and think about God choosing us.

**Lent 5** Signs of Hope—draw a valley shape into your pathway for this week, give everyone a bone shape and ask them to write the name of a place or situation where hope is needed today—stick bones in valley. This can link with prayers of intercession.

**Lent 6** It all leads to this—decorate the entrance to your worship space with large paper palm branches which everyone has to walk through, then give some people small palm leaves and others brick shapes. Ask those with palm branches to write words of welcome onto their leaves and those with bricks to write words about what makes barriers onto their bricks—stick these onto pathway.

**Easter** Which leads to this—prepare small card crosses with words of new beginnings appropriate to your situation and stick them on pathway as a symbol of new beginnings offered to us at Easter for our living in the world. Ask people to come and collect cross to take away with them as they take the message of Easter with them into their day to day living.

**Looking ahead:**

**Easter 2** On the beach—give out fish and sheep shapes—ask people to write name of someone they think Jesus is calling them to look after this Easter.

**Object Journey**

Or you might want to try something a bit different and have an object for each week. You could set this up in a different part of your worship space each week and, depending on your space, leave it set up as reminder of where we have already travelled or set up a mini labyrinth type path in another area using the objects/displays. You could use/adapt the ideas above with the following.

**Lent 1** Have large bread tray with soil or turf in it and stick flowers/blossom onto fuse wire and ‘plant’ in soil or turf.

**Lent 2** Have small pop-up type tent set up and sew pieces of material onto it.

**Lent 3** Have water feature with stones set up and sound of running water being heard, place paper water drops on floor around it. Or have tree, either using branches stuck into a pot of stones or 3D tree made from thick corrugated card and ask people to stick their leaves onto the tree using sticky tac.

**Lent 4** Have bale of hay to represent field and ask people to stick their face pictures onto hay. Or have a photo montage of worshipping community and stick face pictures around it.

**Lent 5** Have black/grey material hanging from a frame so that there is some movement and ask people to pin their paper bones to it.

**Lent 6** Have pile of bricks available and ask people to stick their paper palm leaf or paper brick onto a brick.

**Easter** Have large wooden cross with lots of small card crosses attached.

**Looking ahead:**

**Easter 2** Have large bucket with fish and sheep shapes in it.
Within the context of an Israel that had known the horror of exile from their own homes, this story of two people banished from the idyllic Eden because of their action of disobedience to God would have been clearly understood not just as a story of what had been, but also about what shall be, depending on our actions. While you can read this story as a description of the ‘original sin’ leading to ‘the fall’, perhaps more helpful is to understand that this grand myth is to be read afresh for every generation, each and every day, as we consider the temptations and challenges we all face. How do we respond to the varied ‘fruit’ that are offered to us?

Who of us can say that when faced with new opportunities we haven’t experienced the whispered temptation that may lead us into making decisions we later regret? Some temptations are just so... tempting!

While apocryphal, there is an illustration using the Apple Computers logo complete with a bite taken out of its side that is begging to be used.

The Apple logo for many is a symbol of lust, desire, and temptation. Its lure will keep people waiting up all night outside stores bearing this mark waiting to taste the new fruit when it is released.

And so the scene is set for humanity’s encounter once more with God in Jesus, the one who was able to do what we abjectly fail to do: to resist temptation.
The following evening, there she was as usual, the lovely woman creature coming across the garden to see me. She gave me the perfect opportunity. "Hello snake! I must tell you about the new fruits that are growing in the garden! I know you can’t see them from down there in the grass. Well, they’re big and round and pinky red and very shiny. They’re so beautiful!"

“And…errmm… did God really tell you not to eat the fruit from the trees in the garden?” I held my breath, feeling very foolish. What a silly question. I didn’t sound sly and cunning at all!

The woman creature looked at me, puzzled. “Of course we can eat the fruit!” she laughed. “Just not the fruit from God’s Special Tree. It’s not to be touched, as you know very well, dear snake!”

I decided to try one more time, and with all the cunning I could muster, I said in my sluest voice, “God only told you not to touch it because if you eat it you’ll know everything that God knows!”

As soon as I’d said it I wished the ground would swallow me as easily as I could swallow an egg. She’s going to laugh at me, I thought, she might even stop being my friend, oh what have I done? It’s no fun being cunning after all…

“Everything that God knows? Everything that God knows…?” The woman creature seemed to have gone into a trance, as though a thousand thoughts were tumbling through her mind all at once. Then all of a sudden she got up and ran off. I tried to follow as fast as I could, slithering and twisting in the grass but quickly getting left behind. By the time I caught up, the woman creature and the man creature were standing beside God’s Special Tree, holding pieces of its fruit in their hands, and the fruit had been bitten, and they were munching on the fruit God had told them not to touch!

Dis-ast-er!

I covered my eyes with my tail and couldn’t bear to look. Any minute now God would turn up. I buried my head in the grass and groaned, “O God, I’ll take the great sense of humour instead…”

There were voices and footsteps and I dared to have a peek. It was still just the man creature and the woman creature standing there, but they had… they had… what on earth did they have? There were leaves all over them! I thought for a moment God had answered my prayer and given me that sense of humour, because I laughed out loud.

When God found out, it wasn’t so funny. God was sad. The woman creature and the man creature were sad. I was sad. And somehow everything changed.

I only meet the woman creature outside the garden now. We’re still friends. We talk about the choices we have to make, and how you have to think about where your choices will take you. Every choice is like setting out on a journey. We should know.

Retelling for young people

Use a sock as a puppet. Decorate as you wish or simply have an old sock lying on the ground.

Talk about gardens and what you find in them. Talk about colour and smell and taste. Lead this into the story of one garden you know that seemed to have been better than all the things already described.

Right in the centre was not a swing or a slide or a Wendy House but a tree full of delicious fruit. But it was God’s special tree.

God had taken some dust from the ground (cup hands), blew into it (blow into hands) and made humans (point to everyone there). He asked Adam and Eve, the very first two, to look after the garden and especially the Special Tree and never to eat anything from it.

But in the garden there was also a snake (make the sock come to life with your hand) who was very cunning. He said to Eve, “Look at that tree. Isn’t it lovely? And the fruit looks so sweet. Wouldn’t you love to take a bite?”

So what should she do? Should she take a piece of fruit or should he do as God asked? What do you think she did?

Well, Eve thought about it, looked at the tree and the snake and the tree again and… took a bite! And she went to find Adam and told him how lovely the fruit tasted and what do you think he did? Did he bite it too or did he do as God asked? Well, Adam… bit it!

Oh no!

God found out and was very sad. Adam and Eve were very sad, and they weren’t allowed to live in the garden any more. From then on they had to work hard to grow food, and care for plants, and feed everyone. How they missed the garden.

The story

Tricked Couple Face Eviction!

based on Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Well what would you have asked the good Lord for, as your unique characteristic? By the time I got my turn, all the good things were gone. There were no wings left, no fins or paws or claws. There weren’t even any legs left. So I wasn’t going to get to fly or swim or run. Best features, a very long belly, a forked tongue, and the ability to dislocate my jaw to eat an egg whole.

Great.

Then God said there were some ‘personality traits’ still up for grabs. You know: great sense of humour, courage, empathy, compassion… oh please, who would take notice of a longbellied, forked-tongued, egg-swallowing creature who is “very caring” or “will really make you laugh”?

“What else is left?” I asked God.

“Loudest burp, deadliest sting, most offensive smell… compliance, cooperation, cunning…”

“No!” I shouted. “I want the great sense of humour instead…”

God answered my prayer and was very sad. The woman creature and the man creature were sad. I was sad. And somehow everything changed.

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worship ideas

**Gathering all age**

Ask people to turn to those sitting on either side and talk about places they think are beautiful and special for them. Ask them to describe the places, what they did there, who was with them, etc.

Create a different focus point in worship such as a wilderness using sand and stones or a brown sheet with a branch with leaves lying across it.

*Note: there are other ideas in the Gathering section of Age Group Ideas.*

**Prayer of Separation or New Beginnings**

God, wherever you close a door, somewhere you open a window.

Whenever we say ‘yes’ to someone or something, we are saying ‘no’ to someone or something else.

So many choices we have to make.

So many opportunities for life or death, for experience or stagnation, for blazing a new trail or tramping well-worn pathways.

God, you may close a door in our lives but still we choose which side of the door we wish to be on.

God, you may open a window in our lives but we decide whether to cower in the far corner of the room or to spread our wings and fly.

So much of our lives are made up of endings and beginnings.

We wither, we flourish.

Our relationships are no different.

They go through life-giving times and times that are destructive—even deadly.

We all experience highs and lows but sometimes there is a point in our journey together where our paths need to diverge.

This can be a mutual or an individual decision for life over death; constructive rather than destructive days; for breathing fresh air rather than suffocating.

God who said, “Do not cling to events of the past. Look for the new things I am already doing”; help us to know when the spark has gone out, when there will be no rekindling of the flame.

Enable us to part from our loved one in peace and where there can be no mutual understanding, help us to remember your words that we might not cling to past hurts but embrace the new in your arms, our welcoming God.

**Born Naked**

We are pushed out of our mother’s womb Naked as…

Well… naked as the day we are born!

Wrinkled, prune-like, blotchy all over Yet everyone agrees: We are beautiful.

When do things change?

When do we start to cover up—to hide away that beauty in which we are created?

When do we become conscious of self or learn self loathing, losing that gift of enjoying beauty in ourselves and in others?

Blaming the serpent—or the woman—will not restore the innocence and ignorance or the wonderful knowledge that creation, though blemished, though often imperfect, is yet beautiful.

**Closing Prayer**

From beginning to ending, from first to last, from embarkation to arrival, from lift-off to touch-down, from dust to dust, you go with us.

Be ever present, Companion God, as we go from this place to face challenge and decision, temptation and opportunity. Give us discernment to choose well, and grace when we fail to do so.

**Praise Songs / Hymns**

Be still (CH4/MP)

Before the world began (WGRG)

Come on, let’s get up and go (JP)

Praise to the Holiest in the height (CH4)

Stand up clap hands (JP)

The one who longs to make us whole (CH4 Rowan Tree)

There is a Redeemer (CH4)

We lay our broken world (CH4)

Where can we find (Finding God) (WGRG)

Who put the colours in the rainbow (JP)

Yes, God is good (MP)
age group ideas gathering

Snakes! age 3-9
with help from older

You will need: circles of coloured paper, scissors, crayons
Either using a printed template or simply give everyone a circle of paper and ask them to cut a spiral into it starting from the outside edge into the centre. Hang it from the centre of the spiral and decorate the worship space with snakes. While this is happening ask everyone about the story and the pictures they remember from it.

Setting age 9-12
Before children’s activities invite the older ones to help set up the space in a different way to mark a new season and new beginning: for example, place the circle of chairs in a different part of the hall or make a different shape with them. Create a different centre image with just sand or sandy coloured sheet. Have a branch lying across the sand.

crafts

While the following crafts and activities are being done it is important to connect the story with life by talking about the story, about favourite fruit, about unusual tastes, about doing things we shouldn’t have done, etc.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story.

Plasticine Creation age 3-5
You will need: plasticine in different colours.

Make fruit, flowers, plants, trees out of plasticine and put together to make a model garden.

Dusty Names age 3-5
You will need: a tray of sand or flour, glue sticks, paper.

Give everyone a sheet of paper and a glue stick. Write their name with the glue stick then press the paper onto the sand or flour: they have their name written in dust.

Vegetable Prints age 6-8
You will need: paint, fruit, a sharp knife, card.

Cut fruit/veg in half and cut out a simple design (leaving design raised) and then paint over raised design and print onto thick paper. Share fruit/vegetable stamps with others to create a varied design. Alternatively, simply cut fruit or vegetables in half lengthways and cover in paint and print onto card. These could be laminated to use as place mats or turned into cards for others.

Plantimals age 9-12
You will need: pens, glue, funky foam, recycled material, straws, pipe-cleaners.

Invent amazing plants, flowers, trees and vegetables for the new garden of beginnings. Use felt pens, glitter, funky foam, and lots of different recycled material to design on paper or attach designs to straws or pipe-cleaners to make models.

Story Board all age
You will need: card, pens, paint, glue
Make a story board with some children painting background, some drawing people, plants, trees, creatures etc and some producing words to retell the story. Different age groups could be responsible for different parts so it is a group effort, each helping out each other.

Fruit Kebabs all age
You will need fresh fruit (with some unusual fruit to try for the first time), kebab sticks or forks for younger children
Make fresh fruit kebabs or fresh fruit salad. Ask everyone to help prepare. These could be offered to adults after the service.

Discussion Starters all age
- Have you ever been told not to do something?
- What was it?
- Did you do it anyway?
- What happened?
- Why do you think you were told not to do it in the first place – were there good reasons?
- Why do you think God told Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge?

Colours of Creation all age
You will need a dice with each side a different colour. Use sticky dots on each face to colour the dice.
Ask each person to roll the dice in turn and with each colour ask them to think of a fruit of that colour. This could be expanded to think about flowers, or parts of the world.
activity

Body Jigsaw  age 3-8

You will need: wallpaper/lining paper, marker pens, colouring in material, scissors.

Draw around the body of a child as an outline and get the children to draw on eyes, ears, shoes, etc., and/or cut outline up into 6 sections (head, body, 2 arms, 2 legs) and get children to build it back up again.

Snake cake  all age

with help for youngest

You will need: fairy cake for each child, ready to roll white icing, food dye—green for grass and yellow for the snake and 99 size flakes, rolling pins, loose icing sugar to cover stick hands and patches on table. Pre-ice the cakes and pre-dye some yellow icing and green icing before you arrive.

Put the halved sized 99 flake standing up right in the middle of the fairy cake and set aside.

Roll out a very small amount of yellow icing into a very thin roll and then do the same with the green icing. Each child gets one strip of each colour, they join both the colours at the end and then criss-cross them like a pleat. When they are finished flatten the top end so it looks like a small bump. This will be the head and tongue of the snake. Lay the bottom end of the snake on the fairy cake and then wind it up the flake. If the icing is not sticking together just use a little water on your fingertip to moisten.

Tree Prayer  age 9-12

You will need: paper leaves, crayons, string, glue.

This activity could be done as a take home activity and also as a sending activity.

As this is the beginning of Lent, we could create an activity for ourselves to do each day to remind us of this season of preparing. This week we could say thanks.

Invite everyone to cut out a leaf shape and draw or write something on it that we are thankful for. Cut more if people would like to say thanks for more than one thing. Once they are completed, thread the leaves onto some string leaving about 5 cm (2 inches) space between each one. Stick the string in a spiral shape onto a large sheet of paper creating a round tree shape. Draw a trunk and celebrate what everyone gives thanks for.

Outside  all age

Weather permitting take the children outside and point out all the things God has created.

games

Donkey  younger children

Children form a circle with one in the middle. They throw a ball to the person in the middle and then back out to the next person in the circle and if the ball drops they have to shout out something from the story ie snake, tree, Adam, apple, Eve, garden etc. To make it more fun throw the ball quicker and the person has to make the sound of an animal Adam named.

Cat and Mouse  older children

The traditional game, but link with Adam and Eve hiding from God and each other.

One child is the cat and one child, the mouse, all the other children to go in straight lines eg 3, 4 or 5 rows with 4 or 5 children in each line. They all stand with arms outstretched, fingertips touching. The mouse is given a 5 second start and then the cat chases them. Every now and then, especially if the cat is getting closer, the leader shouts change and all the children in the rows turn right or left 90 degrees and the cat is blocked out. A time limit is needed if the mouse is not caught quickly.

sending activity

Memory Tree  all age

You will need: cut out leaves, string.

Have everyone sit together in the focus area set up at the beginning. Give everyone a cut out leaf. Ask them to write or draw on the leaf something they remember from the story. Ask them to thread their leaf onto one long length of string. Together twist this into a spiral with one end in the centre of the sand and spiralling outwards thus creating a memory tree.
Anyone who has ever moved home or relocated to a new area will know the strange mixture of excitement, trepidation and grief that can arise. Excitement at the thought of a new start and opportunities, trepidation about whether the decision to move is the right one (particularly when it impacts on other people) and grief as you move from the comfort of the known to the discomfort of the unknown.

This week the lectionary passage from Genesis has been extended from the first four verses to the first nine verses in order to get not only the call to Abram from God but also a feel for the setting out on a journey that Abram and Sarai began.

It is worth flicking back through the previous chapters of Genesis to get a sense of the story so far. It has been tumultuous. From the stories of beginnings and the banishment from Eden, through the grizzly destruction of all life bar a remnant bobbing around in Noah's Ark safe from the deluge, to the confusion of the Tower of Babel, the story has not been easy.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis used archetypical characters, but from this chapter on the characters have more flesh to them, they are more real, even if they are still, as the scholars inform us, not historical figures. There is debate about whether they are the product of a long oral tradition or the product of the redactors of the Pentateuch, which is all very interesting, but, as with last week's story, to become too locked into a debate about historicity is to miss the point. These are first and foremost theological stories. They exist to teach us about God.

Abram (and thereafter Isaac and Jacob) receives God's promise. With Abram and Sarai we see a call to begin again by God after all that has gone before. Abram is promised both a new land in which to live and that he will sire a great nation. Who could fail to be impressed by these promises, but the latter would have been a particularly tantalising promise.

In the story it seems clear that Abram and Sarai were living a comfortable enough life in Ur and later Haran with their extended family. But they were unable to have any children. In the patriarchal family context of the day this was a terrible thing, without a male heir for Abram, then who would benefit from their hard work? We feel Abram and Sarai's anguish and pain as the years pass without the cry of a newborn.

This theme will resonate with some couples today, who may be in the midst of IVF treatment or investigations to explore why they have been unable to conceive a child. The reality of Abram and Sarai's situation needs to be sensitively explored.

This is not just a personal story, however, for God promises to make from Abram a 'great nation'. This is also about politics. With images of attempts at nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade in our minds, the collateral cost of such promises cannot be underestimated. That God promised that all peoples would be blessed through Abram perhaps salves any worries and concerns in this regard.

When Abram sets out in faith to follow God's call, it is to an as yet unnamed new land, later revealed as Canaan. The faith in God's promises that Abram exhibits in this story, even when these are unclear and undefined, is rightly held up as an example of trust and obedience.

The readers of this story in post-exilic Israel would have known all too well the vulnerability of being uprooted as was Abram. Likewise today in a depressed economic climate individuals and families may know the vulnerability of their financial and employment situation. That this may require a step of faith to move out to a new area in order to seek out prosperity and a new life is a common experience, even in these early chapters of Genesis.
So this is the place I’ve waited all these years to see. Canaan. This is the place my Dad went on and on about! But he really knew nothing about it. Let me explain…

This was my Dad’s dream, long before it was mine. Oh yes, getting here from Haran wasn’t the start of our journey! It was my Dad who left our home in Ur, dragging me, my wife Sarah and my wee nephew Lot along with him.

I’ve often wondered what made Dad do it. Why leave home like that? Did he hear God speak to him, somehow? Or did he just need to run away from his own sadness? You see, my wee brother died in Ur. Next we know, Dad is saying we’ve got to leave and never come back.

So we set off, following the River Euphrates. What a long river it is, it goes on for miles and miles! The biggest surprise was the wild animals. We only ever saw lions in the distance, thankfully, but the wild boars running around really scattered our flock a few times. And we were always amazed and afraid when the eagles appeared, they looked powerful enough to take a lamb. But the ostriches were more afraid of us, and ran off with their useless wings flapping, making us laugh!

We stopped and camped along the way. Sarai cooked up delicious dinners from the wild fruits and vegetables we found and some meat from our little flock.

There were days we loved living like nomads, moving on from place to place. It makes you travel light, and trust the earth. It was then that we faced such disappointment too…Sarah and I had no children. Was God saying we had got it all wrong with leaving home? But you wouldn’t say that, if you knew my Dad. The further he walked the more deeply he trusted God. He taught me so much…

But sometimes we couldn’t wait to stop and settle down, to have a proper home again. And Dad got tired. “I’ll take you halfway, son,” he used to say, “I’ll take you halfway, and then you must keep going on to Canaan and see what God has promised.”

Arriving at Haran was amazing. We hadn’t seen so many people in months! Sarai made friends with all the women straight away. Lot had grown up so much, he was a great help in building our new house, making new pots, planting vegetables and keeping our goats and sheep well.

We never thought we’d stay so long in Haran. The years went by and we were a close family. Lot didn’t get married, and Sarai and I still had no children, and Dad grew older, but he never let me forget this was only halfway, the time would come to move on again. We both knew it wouldn’t happen while he was still alive. And after he died, sure enough I started wishing I was travelling again, crossing the mountains, walking day after day, just as we had when Dad was there. Maybe that was when God was trying to speak to me too.

A wee bunch of friends came with us this time. Some of them shared our faith and some were just curious about going to an unknown land. It was so different not having Dad to lead the way. I had to work out for myself where God was leading us, this way or that way, and how can I be sure? I don’t know how I knew that this was it…Canaan… but we kept going until this huge oak tree was in our path. You must know how special the oak tree is to us! An oak tree is a place we believe we can meet God. So I wonder if this is a sign.

Well, here I am then. My father’s dream? I hope I’ve got it right. Yes, I hope I’ve done you proud, Dad. And I pray to God to keep showing me the way…

Retelling for young people

- Have you ever packed for a holiday?
- Have you ever packed to move house?
- Have you ever packed to get ready for nursery or school?

Here’s a story of someone who had to do a lot of packing:

Abraham was a very old man. As old as some of your grandparents and maybe older.

He had worked hard all his days and now wanted to stop working and enjoy the rest of his life.

And just when he was getting used to that idea God told him to pack his bags because Abraham was to move house.

(Have everyone mime as you do this)

So Abraham packed his bags, Sarah his wife packed the clothes, Lot’s nephew packed all the animal food and the servants packed the tents and rounded up the sheep and goats.

And off they went (move around a little) and they came to the next street and Abraham asked, “Have we come far enough yet?”

And God said… “No!”

So they walked further and when they came to the next town Abraham asked, “Have we come far enough yet?” and God said… “No!”

So they walked further and when they came to the next river Abraham asked, “Have we come far enough yet?” and God said… “No!”

So they walked further and when they came to the next country Abraham asked, “Have we come far enough yet?” and God said… “No!”

Phew, so Abraham unpacked the bags, Sarah unpacked the clothes, the servants unpacked the tents and let the sheep and goats graze. But Abraham knew this wasn’t the end of the journey and was waiting for God to tell him he’d have to move again.
Gathering all age

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and for a few minutes to talk about what it's like having to move onto something new: house, school, job, stage in life.

Invite people as they arrive to mark their home on a street map placed in the centre of the worship space. This could be used for prayers of intercession during the service.

The local street map could be combined with a large map of the United Kingdom to map out the migration of church members. People could be invited to draw a line across the map from point to point marking the places they have lived.

Note: there are other ideas in the Gathering section of Age Group Ideas.

Monologue for an Elderly Person

Is there a stamp on my head that says, "Too old for you"?

Does my wrinkly skin offend you?

Are you so busy that you can't wait an extra few minutes to get off the bus or up the escalator?

Young people have a lot to learn, but I daresay I was similar at their age—no patience, little consideration.

When I was younger and healthier, I always looked at the outward appearance too!

I was attracted to bright eyes, silky hair and smooth skin—(with a chuckle) not that they were always attracted to me, right enough.

I used to be so active, never a dull moment, my diary was always full. If iPods had been invented I would definitely have had one.

The thing about being older is that I have more time to reflect. And more time to act as a result of my reflections.

“What's that silly old fool on about,” I bet you're thinking.

But you know, I've come to realise that what's really important is not how full my diary is but what's in it.

Who's benefiting as a result of all my activity?

Is my time spent meaningfully or am I merely frittering away all those precious minutes?

Perhaps these are just the ramblings of an old fool but I wouldn't dismiss the aged too readily.

After all, it was two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, who had the faith to be grandparents to an entire nation. How many of you young folk would even take the time to stop and look at a seemin’ (crying), smelly wean (bairn or baby). See (walking away), God knows who it is who really needs the specs. God knows who really needs the hearing aids. Ha, ha, bye now, bye.

Prayer read by an elderly person

God, I looked in the mirror today and someone else looked back.

This old man/woman was staring out at me whom I did not recognise.

It's strange that as my body grows weaker, my spirit grows stronger.

My bodily functions begin to fail me, yet my spirit seems far more in harmony with yours, my dear companion.

Great Healer, I realised as I saw my reflection today that as the medical profession strives to maintain our physique, you doctor to and nurture our spirits.

God of mystery, there are times when people's lives on earth seem to be prematurely cut short. That is so hard to come to terms with. But for those of us who have reached our senior years, it seems that there comes a time when our spirits simply outgrow our bodies.

Eternal Friend, enable us to accept our physical limitations and help us to enjoy our spiritual maturity as we move forward towards a new, exciting and freeing stage of our journey.

Meditation

Change is the only constant the only way to follow your dreams to reach for the stars and set out on a journey of discovery plumbing the depths of life and love and mystery.

Charting unknown territory, pushing the boundaries leads to insights considered impossible and knowledge won through trial.

There's a vague promise of prosperity but, in the end, that is not the driving force. Once the bug of exploring takes hold, it is impossible to let go and settle down.

Once the promised land has been glimpsed the journey only becomes richer and the stops along the way afford wonderful opportunities for living and laughing and loving and learning.

Embracing change leads to growth, a whole new lease of life in all its fullness.

Closing Prayer

God of promise, as we reflect on journeys past, on journeys today, and journeys yet to happen, assure us with your presence.

As we celebrate the faith of Abram and Sarai, let us go today filled with expectation for how you will use us in the week ahead.

Praise Songs / Hymns

As we go now (Fischy Music, 'Build Up' CD) Blessing and honour (Ancient of Days) (MP) Build Up (Fischy Music, 'Build Up' CD) I do not know what lies ahead (MP) One more step along the world I go (CH4) Thanks to God whose word was spoken (CH4) The God of Abraham praise (CH4) We will walk with God, my brothers (CH4) When upon life's billows (Count your blessings)
age group ideas

setting all age

set a fun challenge of constructing simple

tent/wendy house. this could be putting

up a simple pop-up tent, or creating a

massive den with chairs, tables, sheets and

whatever else is available.

game all age

children stand in a circle. start the game

by throwing a beanbag to someone in the

circle and asking a question at the same

time - such as “what’s your name?” , “do

you have a brother or sister?” , “what’s your

favourite colour?” and so on. the person

who catches the beanbag must answer

the question and then throw it on and ask

their own question. the game works best

if you keep it moving quite quickly, so you

may have to step in to help very young

children.

crafts

while the following crafts and activities

are being done it is important to connect

the story with life by talking about the

story, about what it is like to move home

or school, about starting a new life

somewhere else, of what would be scary

and what would be exciting about that.

the craft is not an end in itself but a way of

engaging in conversation with people and

to help focus on the story.

backpack mosaic age 3-5

you will need: backpack outline, funky

foam, tissue, glue.

provide the outline of a backpack on a

sheet of paper. invite everyone to fill in

different areas of the backpack with funky

foam mosaic shapes or scrunched up

tissue paper.

story tent age 6-8

you will need: construction things to

make a tent to sit in.

make a tent/shelter out of garden canes,

thin material, sticky tape, glue or a bigger

shelter from chairs and sheets. when it is

complete get everyone to sit inside and

see if people can recap the story today.

name chase all age

the children sit in a circle, facing each

other. one child is chosen to be “it” first.

the child who is “it” stands up and walks

around the outside of the circle tapping

each child on the head and saying their

name, with prompting if necessary. at

some point as he taps a child on the head

he will say the name of the congregation

instead. the chosen child must now jump

up and chase the first child around the

circle, trying to tag “it” before he can sit

down in their place. if he succeeds, “it” has

another go. if he fails, he takes over as “it”.

suitcases all age

with everyone in a circle start with the

rhyme: “i going on a journey and i need

to pack…” (suggest something unusual).

the next person then has to say: “i’m going

on a journey and i need to pack…” and

they have to remember what the previous

person said and add something of their

own and so on round the circle with the

list of remembered items getting longer

and longer.

for older children instead of remembering

everything you can allow people to take

only items that begin with the initial of

their first name. the puzzle of working

out why certain people can take items

and others can’t is fun. for example, if you

name was jane you could take a jellybaby

but not a giraffe!

discussion starters all age

• what’s the longest journey you’ve ever

been on?

• or, what’s the strangest place you’ve

ever been to?

• if you could choose only three things

to take with you on a long journey,

what would you take?

fast food all age

you will need: food dye, paint brushes,

white bread, toaster.

use food colouring and paint brushes to

paint a picture, perhaps of abraham and

sarah, onto bread. once painted, toast

the bread and eat as a sandwich for the

journey.

using a cookie cutter on a slice of bread,
different shapes can also be used for some

variety.

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variety.

blessing boxes all age

you will need: shoe boxes, glue,
decorating things.

cover and decorate some shoeboxes or

similar boxes with tissue and words and

sequins which become ‘blessing boxes’

and ask people to take them home and fill

them with things which remind them of

ways in which god has accompanied and

blessed them as they travel through life.

this could be done with parents and the

story could be told to them as children

explain the box.

community map age 9-12

you will need: lining sheets joined

together to form a large square, pens.

make a map of your community including

significant local buildings e.g. schools,

church, shops, library and streets where

group members live and at the edges of

the map ask each member of the group to
draw a road and name somewhere they

would like to travel to.

lent 2a: sunday 20 march 2011
activity

Family Tree  age 6-12

You will need: sheets of paper, pens.

Help each child draw a basic family tree and see how much people can fill in. Suggest they take it home and complete it with parents who can then tell the story of their own families.

World Family  all age

You will need: double bed sheet, paint of different colours, a pre-painted world on the sheet.

On a large white double bed sized sheet draw a picture of the world in blue and green paint (it doesn’t have to be exact). Ask the children to put their hand prints round the world and write ‘our world family’. This cloth could be used each week as a central focus in the circle time.

games

Journeying  age 3-5

You will need: suitcase, clothes, shoes, spade, bucket, sun tan lotion, etc.

Tell a story of going on a seaside journey. Ask the children what things from the pile of clothes and objects they would need to pack in the case for that. Ask them to help you pack them. They then tell a story of going on an adventure holiday, or a journey to nursery, etc. Each time ask about what you would need and then pack those objects in the case.

Paper Chains  age 3-5

You will need: pre-cut strips of paper from old magazines (lots of colour), glue stick, a paper chain already started so that it is quite long.

Tell the children that you need to leave a trail of where you are going so that other people can follow you. To do this you will need to make a very long paper chain. Children start to add to both ends of the paper chain already prepared and once the leader has laid it down (in and out of chairs, etc.), they have to follow the chain.

Rhyme  all age

Adapt this children’s rhyme which can be sung to the tune for ‘The Wheels on the Bus’:

Find The Story  all age

You will need: a black bag for each team filled with dry rubbish, a list of objects that help tell the story: a piece of cloth for the tent, a map, a sheet of names, sand, an oak leaf, and a list of these items.

For each team fill the black bag with dry rubbish and story objects. At one end of the hall provide a list of the objects they have to find. One team member runs up to find the next object, goes back, tells the team who rummage round and once the object is found runs up again to find the next object. The winning team is the one who has all the objects and can tell you the story.

sending

Footprints  all age

You will need: flour or sand, sheet, towels.

Spread some flour or sand in the middle of a circle (put a sheet down first!). Invite everyone into the circle saying that the story has been about setting out on a journey. We’re on a journey home now but hopefully the journey will bring us back to church next week. In hope of that, invite everyone to make a footprint in the sand or flour, stepping out on a journey with directions to come back next week.

your notes
Moses had a witness to the provision of God.
This story is part of a triad of stories about God’s provision. The famous story of the provision of manna is framed with two stories about water: this one and before it the story of how God sweetened the bitter water of Marah.
In these three stories we see God’s people being tested by God through the circumstances in which they are placed, testing their obedience to his will. But we also see God being tested to see if he will provide for the people in their time of need. It is a foretaste for the covenant relationship that will be sealed at Sinai with the Ten Commandments.

An illustration that could be used this Sunday is the work of organisations like No More Deaths (www.nomoredeaths.org) whose members place life-saving bottles or barrels of water along tracks in the wilderness of Arizona for the benefit of illegal migrants. Each year hundreds of these people die from lack of water as they wander in the Arizona wilderness after crossing the US/Mexico border.
A case study in Time Magazine follows the story of Daniel Millis who was arrested in 2008 for ‘littering’ because he was leaving water along these tracks. The article is titled, ‘The Crime of Giving Water to Thirsty People’.
Web address to Time Magazine article: http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2016513,00.html.
Moaning People and Water from the Rock:
Waterless Wanderers turn on Leader!
based on Exodus 17:1-7

I was thirsty. Weren’t we all! Have you ever been anywhere really hot and really dry, and not had any water, not a single drop? Do you know how long you can live without water? Three days, if you’re lucky. And we’d been camped at Rephidim for two days when the panic started…

The first day, the men started digging for an underground spring. My mother told my sisters and me to keep out of their way. But I’d asked my uncle how he knew where to dig, and this time he wasn’t following any of his own clues. First, you look for natural rock pockets that hold surface water. If there are none, you look for any patches of damp sand. Then you look for any plants that are growing, even the tiniest one. Then you look for any lines of a streambed, and dig outside the sharp bends. Or last of all, if there are any cactus plants, you can cut them and suck water from the pulp inside.

My uncle’s face was dark and frowning by that first sunset. There wasn’t even much hope of soaking up dew in the morning, as there was nothing growing that could catch the dew.

On the second day, I told my sisters I was going to walk outside the camp and search for plants, for rock pools, anything. We spread the word to our cousins, and let the whisper grow among the children. Our mothers mostly stayed in the shade of the tents while the men organised themselves for further digging. We gathered in clusters and disappeared into the surrounding desert, keeping the camp in our sights but feeling like brave adventurers who might just save the day!

I glowed with importance as I taught the others what to look for. The smallest shoot of something green and we dived on it with bare hands, scooping down into the sand, taking turns to dig. Beneath the hot surface, the cooler layers raised our hopes, but there was no water. Again and again we thought we would feel the sand turn damp beneath our clawing fingers and show us the buried treasure our bodies longed for, but still there was no water.

“Our fathers will be praying for God to help us!” my little sister suddenly cried. “That’s what we should do too!”

Our search began again with new enthusiasm, and as one voice we recited all the prayers we knew so well. How many hours did we spend, how many places did we try, how many prayers did we chant, but still there was no water. Our tongues felt rough and our lips cracked till it was almost painful to speak. As the sun dipped towards the horizon, we threw ourselves down in an exhausted heap, scared and silent but for our heaving ribs and rasping coughs.

I pulled myself up at last and the others followed, the long line of us like defeated warriors, none of us daring to say what we desperately hoped—that we would return to find the camp rejoicing because our fathers had found what we had not. Only my little sister said a thing, when she stumbled up beside me, took my hand and croaked, “God will look after us. Remember that’s what Daddy always says!”

We knew there was something very wrong as we came near the camp. More than half the tents had been taken down and our mothers were packing up our belongings. Men’s voices were raised in angry argument and we could hardly take in what was happening.

“Why did he bring us here to die? Is this what the Lord wants for us, to starve and thirst in this godforsaken place?”

“He’s gone ahead with the elders. They will call for us soon!”

“You fool. What can we hope for but to return to Egypt! God has abandoned us! Why rescue us from Pharoah and kill us for want of water? A curse on Moses, a curse on him!”

A chill ran through me at my father’s rage. “Daddy! No!” It was my little sister’s sobs that halted his tirade. He turned to see her running, and swept her up in his arms, his rage disintegrating into tears of his own, sinking to the ground with his child whimpering. “God will look after us, Daddy, God will look after us, won’t he? Daddy? Won’t he?”

“Gaddiel! Gaddiel!” A loud yell in the distance broke in on us. My father staggered up at the sound of his name. My uncle Abidan was running towards us, his face wild with a crazed delight, and as our eyes took him in, there was a surge forwards, and cries of disbelief. Abidan’s face and hair, his clothes and skin, were dripping wet! “Water!” he panted, “we have water!”

We all crowded in, touching him, squeezing his robe and licking our hands. But my father quickly raised an authoritative hand bidding us to step back and calm down.

“Abidan, lead us to where God has provided.”

It was the strangest sight when we got to the rock. None of the usual signs, no plants or marks of a river bed, yet water poured freely out of the ground. It was almost dark but nobody cared, we drank and washed and played in it, even my solemn father splashed his feet like a child.

I wondered why I had ever thought that our young foolish adventures would save the day. But my mother had a surprise for me later. “Thank God you sneaked off like that,” she said. “The men were ready to kill Moses. They were calling on your father to lead them back to Egypt! The only thing that stalled him was not knowing where his children were.”

I watched again as my father cupped some water in his hands and threw it over my squealing sister. She came running to where I stood with my mother, shouting, “See? God looks after us! Daddy always knew it!”

My father winced. But he also smiled.

Retelling for young people

If possible have a centre of sand and a rock under which is a small tub of water hidden until you remove the rock.

The desert was very hot
The sky was very blue
The people were very thirsty
What were they to do
The sand was very warm
The place was very dry
The people were getting angry
And some began to cry
The journey was very long
The sun was very hot
The people were wanting water
and no one had a drop

Moses spoke to God
Who told Moses to go and explore
He found a rock
in the middle of the desert
and when he touched it,
the water poured
The people started to cheer
as it poured into a rocky sink
they said a big thank you to God
and together they began to drink
Gathering

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and for a few minutes to talk about the things of which they are afraid.

Gather a list of phobias and list of fears. Spend some time in a quiz matching them together correctly.

Give each small group of people a sheet with question words: who, why, how where, when, etc. and get them to make up questions they would like to ask another group.

Note: there are other ideas in the Gathering section of Age Group Ideas.

Thirst

Two readers read this while others bring in the appropriate symbols

Bowl  We thirst for water.
Jesus said: If anyone is thirsty let them come to me and drink

Bread  We thirst for community.
Jesus said: Love one another as I have loved you

Shoes  We thirst for companions.
Jesus said: Come, follow me

Candle  In the crisis we thirst for peace
Jesus said: I give you peace beyond the world's understanding

Bible  In our loneliness we thirst for a word
Jesus said: I am with you always to the very end of the world

Stone  In this season we thirst for alleluias
Jesus said: If you keep quiet, these very stones will cry out

Cross  On this journey we thirst for life
Jesus said: I have come that you may have life and life to the full

Dialogue

Reader: Faces fly in and out of my mind,
Hurt faces, tear-stained faces,
Faces needing attention and care,
Young, enthusiastic faces,
Tired faces, heading for home.
I try so hard to look into each face
One at a time.
And I try
To empathise, to encourage, to comfort.
But each one seeps into my mind and trickles down into my heart.
Each face, each feeling,
Too much, too many, too full.
God, I can't carry them all!

God:
My dear, passionate child,
I know about carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders.
But that's my job, not yours.
Your job is to support, not to carry one another.
Give them to me, all of these faces.
Bring them here to my cross.
I love them even more than you do.
Trust me with your people
And I will take care of them.
Let them go.
Set them free to come to me,
And they will find that I am already with them.
And you will find that I was always here.
“Come to me all you who are heavy laden
and I will give you rest.”

Lead into a musical time when people can lay named cards at the foot of, or on, the cross.

I Want Jesus

For two readers and a singer singing, ‘I want Jesus to walk with me’. The congregation ought to sing the whole Spiritual following this. An image of the vine/cross/pathway is projected for the congregation to reflect upon.

One: This cross is a road and this road will become a cross once more a scaffold cross And on this road I meet a child and she says

Two: I thirst
I thirst for justice
And what I say is this:
It makes me feel really sad that children have to work as slaves. I have asked for money for Easter so that I can buy my own chocolate. I buy fair trade now. We drew around our hands and sent the pictures to the Prime Minister to show him that children are small and shouldn't be working so hard.
I thirst
I thirst for justice
I thirst for a companion on this road

Singer: I want Jesus to walk with me

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I thirst for justice
And what I say is this:
It makes me feel really sad that children have to work as slaves. I have asked for money for Easter so that I can buy my own chocolate. I buy fair trade now. We drew around our hands and sent the pictures to the Prime Minister to show him that children are small and shouldn't be working so hard.
I thirst
I thirst for justice
I thirst for a companion on this road

Singer: I want Jesus to walk with me

One: This cross is a road and this road will become a cross once more a scaffold cross And on this road I meet a child and she says
Two:  
I thirst  
I thirst for freedom  
And what I say is this:  
I live in Cote d'Ivoire now. But I didn't always. I was trafficked. One of 15 000 children each year trafficked into the country to work on cocoa and coffee plantations producing chocolate for Easter Eggs. I was take by force, by deception, and work 12 hours a day.  
I thirst  
I thirst for freedom  
I thirst for a companion on this road  

Singer:  
I want Jesus to walk with me  

One:  
This cross is a road  
and this road will become a cross once more  
a scaffold cross  
And on this road  
I meet a child  
and she says  

Two:  
I thirst  
I thirst for true neighbours  
And what I say is this:  
I live in a community a million miles from coffee plantations and trafficked cocoa pickers, yet I need justice too. I need to live in right ways, for my choices affect too many people. It could be my child trafficked to Cote d'Ivoire if I had been born in a different country. If one of the chocolate executives had just one of their children in slavery anywhere, it would be a crisis that would be sorted out by teatime. We want my coffee, my chocolate, my tea slave-free.  
I thirst  
I thirst for true neighbours  
I thirst for a companion on this road  

Singer:  
I want Jesus to walk with me  

One:  
This cross is a road  
and this road will become a cross once more  
a scaffold cross  
And on this road  
I meet Jesus  
Who walks with me  

Two:  
I thirst  
I thirst for this world  
And what I say is this:  
I am the real vine. Remain in me and I will remain in you; come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  
I thirst  
I thirst for this world  
I thirst for a companion on this road  

The Fickleness of Folk

Before
Water  
lovely clean water  
dripping down our beards  
cooling off our dusty, weary feet  
purifying us before we worship.  
The very stuff of life.  
But now it's just the stuff of dreams in this place that reeks of death.  
Day after day  
we long for what we knew even though it wasn't perfect at least it was life not this slow slide into death.  
Reduced to remembering what was we cannot see what will be, our senses are dulled by want and longing.  
We followed the leader expecting miracles expecting freedom  
but we backed the wrong camel and now we're paying the price.  
Better the devil you know than a promised land you've only heard about.  

After
I knew it.  
I knew Moses (and God) wouldn't let us down.  
They didn't drag us all the way here to let us collapse in a heap in the wilderness.  
I knew that, together, they'd have something up their sleeve.  
But water – from a rock? Amazing!  
I didn't see that one coming.  
I suppose that's why they left it to the last gasp.  
I suppose it would have been just another miracle  
if we hadn't been so desperate but now we have a special place that will always feature in the lives of our people: the place where God produced water from a rock just in the nick of time.  

Prayer
God of promise, when times are hard, when journeys become tough, when all we feel like doing is moaning, you come to reassure us.  
God of life, when we are parched, in body, mind or soul, when we fight for survival, when we give up on life, you bring a new stream of life-giving water from a sun-baked rock.  
God of covenant, when we strive to do things our way, when we listen only to voices that agree with our preconceptions, when we ignore your leading, you call us back to relationship with you, and show us life-in-community.  
God of hope, when we only see the hopeless, when events spiral out of control, when we face grief and loss, you walk with us, you bring water to the dried land, you bring direction to the lost, you bring joy and peace.  
God of love, when we feel unloved, uncared for, untouchable, reach out to us, let us drink from the fountain of your love, and know we are your people.  

Praise Songs / Hymns
As the deer pants for the water (MP)  
Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you (MP)  
Glorious things of thee are spoken (CH4/MP)  
Guide me, O thou great Jehovah (CH4/MP)  
I want Jesus to walk with me (CH4)  
Jesus stand among us (MP)  
Oh hear my prayer, Lord (CH4)  
Sometimes Problems (JP)  
Though hope desert my heart (CH4)  
Will you come and follow me (CH4)
Setting **all age**

You will need: tarpaulin or sheet, sand, pebbles or small rocks.

If possible use the result of the footprints ‘sending activity’ from last week and decorate with stones and rocks to make it look like an area of desert through which people have travelled. If it has not been possible to keep the previous week’s activity, create another with the assistance of the older children.

**Water, Water Everywhere**

In a circle invite people to mime something they do with water such as brushing teeth, washing, cleaning car, floor, mixing, drinking, etc. Ask everyone to guess what it is.

**Water Bombs** **age 6-12**

You will need: several balloons filled with no more than an egg cup of water, some music.

Pass the balloon round the circle to music. When the music stops whoever is holding the balloon has to think of an activity using water within 5 seconds. If they don’t manage it the balloon is burst while they are holding it.

**Discussion Starters ** **all age**

• What do you moan about when you’re tired?
• What makes you feel better when you’re scared or worried?
• Go through your day—when do you use water? Any idea how much?
• For the internet savvy, there’s a good water use calculator here: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/629/629/5086298.stm

• The average person in Scotland uses 150 litres a day (30 buckets of water), but in developing countries it goes down to only 10 litres a day (2 buckets). When women in Africa and Asia carry their water on their heads, it weighs on average 20 kg which is the same amount as a suitcase packed for going on holiday (i.e. luggage allowance on a plane. Source: Water Aid).

**crafts**

While the following crafts and activities are being done it is important to connect the story with life by talking about the story, about how we use water, about the things we moan about, about how thankful we really should be to have so much, and so on.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story.

**Aqua Draw** **age 3-5**

You will need: paper, paint, Aqua Draw or just paint brushes.

Borrow or buy an Aqua Draw set and let the children try this. Alternatively, make a picture by painting the background in thinned blue poster paint and use painted thumb prints as rocks.

**Stone Art** **age 6-8**

You will need: large stones, paint, PVA glue, paint brushes.

Paint large stones in different patterns or with a scene from the story today. When the paint is dry cover with diluted PVA glue to give glossy finish.

**Splatter Pictures** **age 9-12**

You will need: card, ink or watered down poster paint, straws, simple stencils for palm trees and rocks to create a desert scene.

Use the stencils to create a desert scene. Make sure each stencil is lightly stuck in place. Place a few drops of ink or watered down poster paint onto each stencil and use the straw to gently blow the ink off of the stencil. Remove stencils to create a silhouetted desert scene.

**Questions** **all age**

You will need: poster paint, card, garden canes or similar.

Make placards with questions or protests to God about things which you feel are wrong in the world. This could be used in worship later or at the end of the time together as a prayer. Ask God to help everyone work at these problems together.

**Rock Cakes** **all age**

You will need: 225g (8oz) self-raising flour, 75g (3oz) margarine, 25g (1oz) sugar, 100g (4oz) dried fruit, chocolate chips, 1 egg, 1-2 tablespoons milk.

1. Sieve flour, and rub in margarine until mixture becomes like breadcrumbs.

2. Stir in sugar and fruit.

3. Beat egg and stir in with milk until a stiff mixture is formed.

4. Place small rocky piles of mixture onto a greased baking tray.

5. Bake at gas mark 5 (190C) for 20-25 minutes until golden brown and set.

**Fountain** **all age**

You will need: a chocolate fountain machine, chocolate, oil, fruit, marshmallows, fudge, skewers.

Have a chocolate fountain running in the room and after each activity everyone can dip fruit, marshmallows, fudge, into the chocolate.
activity

Build a Water Channel  
age 6-12

You will need: straws, sellotape, paper, scissors, jug of water, basin.

The children have to build a water channel that runs downhill using only straws, paper and sellotape. They need to build a tripod style holder to hold the straws that will carry the water. Two will suffice but the end tripod will need to be shorter so the water will flow downhill. Once the two tripod style holders are built, they need to link them with either straws to carry the water or sheets of paper folded into a ‘V’ shape.

Pour water very slowly at start and see it pour out into the basin at the other end.

讨论

Water  
age 9-12

You will need: pictures of water, visual aids of examples.

Discuss the following questions having found out some of the answers on the internet (go to http://www.treehugger.com/files/2009/06/we-use-how-much-water.php for info).

- What do we use water for?
- How much water do we waste?
- How far some people have to walk to get water in the developing nations?
- How can we stop wasting water?
- What forms does water take? Eg. Clouds, snow, rain, ice, frost, hail, ocean, seas, lochs, ice cubes, ice lollies, etc. Have some examples.

游戏

Singing  
3-5 years

Sing a number of songs connected with water: Mr Noah built an Ark, Fishers of men, Deep and wide, Have you heard the raindrops, etc.

Play With Water  
3-5 years

You will need: bowls, basins or sinks, soap, bubble bath, washing-up liquid, bubbles.

Let the children play at the sinks or with basins of water. Lather up their hands with soap bubbles, froth the water up with bubble bath/fairy liquid. (To take away buy small tubs of bubbles, e.g. Asda, 12 for £1-2)

Froggy, Froggy, May We Cross Your Golden River  
age 6-12

All the children bar one are at one end of the hall while one is at the other. The children ask ‘froggy, froggy may we cross your golden river’. The other child answers ‘not unless you are wearing the colour XXX’. If any children are wearing this colour they may cross the river safely and if not they have to try and cross and not be caught by the person up front. If they are caught they join the other person and it becomes harder to cross the river when more people join them.

Straw Game  
age 6-12

You will need: straws of different colours.

Get the children into small groups of three or four. Tip the straws onto the floor and one at a time see if the children can pick up a straw without disturbing any of the others. To make it more of a challenge about greed, give the straws value: e.g. red straw 10 points, green straw 20 points, yellow straw 30 points, etc.

Cream Crackers  
age 6-12

You will need: packs of cream crackers and glasses of water for later.

Who can eat two cream crackers the quickest without stopping for a drink?

Table Top Discussions  
age 8-12

You will need: 4 tables set out thus:

- Table 1: cream crackers for everybody to try;
- Table 2: photo’s/pictures of deserts and/or floods;
- Table 3: a variety of different types of water and flavoured water;
- Table 4: words/pictures from the story of water from the rock.

Put people into groups and they spend one minute (or longer depending on how it works) at each table. A leader is at each and they begin a discussion asking what is on the table, how the feel about things on the table, how they can improve what’s on the table, how they can get involved etc. It is a fast way to have a number of discussions. At the end draw everyone together for a plenary.

Ice Cube Race  
All age

You will need: ice cubes, tea spoons.

Instead of an egg and spoon race use an ice cube instead. Have different rounds asking people to hop, jump or move backwards, or go blind folded with instructions being shouted to them. Turn it into a relay race using the same ice cube as it gets tricky when it starts to melt.

送礼物

Water Thanks  
All age

You will need: a small glass of tap water for everyone.

Just before people leave give everyone a glass of water but before they drink it ask them to think of one thing they want to give thanks for about water. As each is mentioned, everyone takes a sip of their water until it is all gone. Invite them to do the same activity at home round the meal table in order to give thanks.
look to the future

lent 4a
ten 3 april 2011
1 samuel 16:1–13

bible notes

The Lord looks at the Heart

If you have ever felt the demeaning and humiliating horror of the playground mechanism of picking teams when the captains of each team grudgingly accept you as a team member having already picked everyone else, then this is a story that will resonate with you. It may even give you a warm sense of justification as the underdog, David, gets one over on all his larger and older brothers.

This chapter of 1st Samuel marks the beginning of a long section that extends into 2nd Samuel telling of the rise of King David. As it tells David’s story it also tells the corresponding story of the fall of a bitter and jealous King Saul. It is both a story of blessing and curse. God’s blessing transfers to David through the anointing with oil by Samuel, and Saul is cursed and rejected by God.

An elderly Samuel is put in the difficult position of being the change-maker. His actions mark the transition of God’s blessing from one to another. While he follows God’s command, Samuel is rightfully fearful of the repercussions for him if King Saul finds out what has happened. And thus Samuel resorts to the ruse of coming to Bethlehem with the cover of a heifer for a sacrifice.

The narrative draws out the comparison between the election of Saul and David to kingship. Neither came to the throne by force, they came because God chose them to be the leaders of his people.

Saul came from the smallest tribe, even the least important family within that tribe, and here we see that David was the youngest and thus least significant son in a large family. Saul was found hiding amongst the baggage when the time for his election came, and David is not present either when his moment arrives, being out in the fields with the family’s livestock.

While there are similarities in the accounts of the election of Israel’s first two Kings, there are also differences. Saul was a huge man, strong and handsome. The expectation would inevitably have been for the next King to be similarly powerful-looking. Eliab, the eldest brother of David was that man. That Eliab was passed over is a clear indication that God is signalling a change. This is a clean break from the past. The future is going to be different.

Samuel is cut short by God when he looks admiringly at Eliab. God reminds the wise judge that while people look on the outward appearance he looks at the heart of each person. Having passed over all the other sons of Jesse, it is only when the young David appears that Samuel is sure that this young man with the beautiful eyes is the new king who will lead them into the future.

The shock of this choice in a deeply patriarchal society where power and authority in the family transferred from father to eldest son is not to be easily dismissed.

As God reminded Samuel, he does not judge by these external cultural identifiers, he looks at a person’s character. God sees who they really are beyond the labels and pigeonholes that others might apply.

As any politician will know all too well, how we react to those in positions of leadership, whether we follow them or resist them, is complex. When a leader is younger than we are does that give us cause for concern that they are inexperienced, or does it lead to an expectation that they will be better able to handle the challenges that face us in the future?

How do we discern what lies at the heart of those who aspire to leadership today? And what part does God’s calling play within not just the Church but also in wider society?
the story

Samuel anoints David to be King

Voted out! Seven brothers left aside as youngest honoured

based on 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Eliab: (overjoyed) It wasnae me! Yeeesssssssss!

Abinadab: (extremely annoyed) It should have been me.

Eliab: What are you talking about? It should never have been you! It should have been me, actually.

Abinadab: But you didn’t want it to be you! And it wasnae you. So it should have been me!

Eliab: Why did you want it to be you? It’s a lucky escape, bro, that wee eejit can have it, I’m glad it’s him, and no’ me! And no’ you either!

Abinadab: But I wanted it! He’ll be a right pain in the neck now. He’ll think he’s better than us. If you didnae get it, I’m the next in line, but no, all seven of us get passed right over for that wee nyaff.

Eliab: Away an’ complain to Sam then. He’s your man. It’s all his doing. But I don’t see why you’re so bothered. Aye, thank God it wasnae me!!

Abinadab: How come you didn’t want it anyway? You think it’s a lucky escape? That was your big chance for glory, and you’re glad to miss out? How come?

Eliab: Aw, work it out, will you, doh! The King is still alive and well, though rumoured to be going a bit nuts, and good old prophet Sam anoints someone else to be the next king. Well, you bet I’m glad it’s no’ me with the sign on my head saying “King’s rival.” Just wait till word gets out—I don’t think our wee bro will last a minute. He’ll be hunted, for crying out loud!

Abinadab: But prophets aren’t in the business of putting people’s lives in danger.

Eliab: Aye right! What was the first thing Pharaoh did when Moses went asking for liberation?

Abinadab: Ok, ok, he doubled the workload of the slaves for a bit, but it was alright after that.

Eliab: (sarcastically) Alright after that? Sure! Everything was just dandy, save for a few plagues, a near drowning, near death by thirst, and near mutiny against the great prophet for putting people’s lives in near constant danger!

Abinadab: (after a thoughtful pause) Do you really think wee Davy will be assassinated or something?

Eliab: How can we know? What happens now, who can say?

Abinadab: So much for being the Lord’s anointed. No’ much of a pleasure really.

Eliab: Nope.

Abinadab: But does it not put Sam on a dogdy footing too, if the King finds out what he’s done?

Eliab: Mhmm. Great perks and privileges, being a prophet. Bet you wish that was you too?

Abinadab: Should you or Dad not just have stopped all this happening then?

Eliab: Ah, and you’d like to do a better job of being eldest son or father aswell?!

Abinadab: I’m just thinking what all this could do to our family. He’s still our kid brother.

Eliab: And he’s been anointed by a prophet and chosen by God to be King. You want to argue with that?

Abinadab: But I don’t get it.

Eliab: Neither do I. But what I do get is this—you and I are still to be who we’ve always been. Shepherds, soldiers, sons and brothers. That’s quite enough to live up to.

Abinadab: Do you think wee Davy actually wishes it wasnae him?

Eliab: Maybe we all live up to what’s asked of us. And he’s no’ that wee anymore. It might make him less of an eejit.

Abinadab & Eliab: (together) OOR DAVY FOR KING! GAUN YERSEL, WEE YIN!

Retelling for young people

Use fingers when talking of numbers and pause each time waiting on the answer of Samuel

There were, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 sons of Jesse.

Samuel the old prophet came to visit to seek out a new king from among them.

They all lined up.

(Using fingers again)

Samuel looked into the eyes of number one son and said… No! It’s not him.

Samuel looked into the eyes of number two son and said… No! It’s not him.

Then number three son and said… No! It’s not him.

Number four son came along and Samuel said… No! It’s not him.

With number six son Samuel looked and said… No! It’s not him.

Then with number seven son, Samuel looked into his eyes and said… and said… No! It’s not him either.

“There must be someone else,” said Samuel.

All seven sons looked at each other. There was another brother, David, but he was very young and on the hills caring for the sheep.

When David came back home Samuel looked into his eyes and said… and said… Yes!

This is the one.

And David was promised to become king of Israel.
worship ideas

Gathering all age

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and for a few minutes to talk about how they feel when they meet new people and about the effect first impressions have on them.

Have images of famous people on posters or projection and see how many of them folk can name.

Stick small prizes underneath randomly selected chairs. Get people to check if they have won a prize and to reflect on what it feels like to be chosen and not to be sure of the reason and to reflect on what it feels like not to have been chosen and not to be sure of the reason.

Note: there are other ideas in the Gathering section of Age Group Ideas.

Chosen

I’ve been chosen can you believe it? not the strongest, not the sharpest and certainly not the oldest But I’m the one who has been chosen seems like a dream but maybe not a pleasant one more like the stuff of nightmares And it’s down to those soft, melting, brown eyes they land me in it every time People just look – even prophets and decide – there’s a boy with soul But this time, those eyes might be my downfall How am I going to fulfil God’s calling for me to be king? There’s a perfectly good king already Maybe a tyrant Maybe a bit unhinged But that’s the way of kings And this crazy prophet thinks I’ll be next? I don’t think so. I’m off to lie low and hope that, in time they’ll forget all about the prophet’s visit today with his talk of God’s will I’ll head back to my sheep and, hopefully, they’ll carry on without me.

Chosen to receive

This sketch is about being chosen by God. It is most effective if God is portrayed as a seen person rather than an unseen voice.

Personnel:
- New Mother (NM)
- Prisoner (Pr)
- Politician (Po)
- God (G)

NM: God, I’m so sorry, I’ve had no time for you for weeks. My life is full of nappies, feeding and trying to sleep. I don’t know where the time goes, but I just can’t seem to fit you in.

Pr: God, I’ve totally messed up. I know I’m a hard man in front of the rest, I have to be, but inside I feel awful. I’ve really hurt people; I’ve ruined other folks’ lives. God, I’m sorry, man.

Po: God, I know I’ve made some decisions today for the wrong reasons. I wanted to further my career more than I want to serve the needs of the people. This responsibility weighs heavily on me. I don’t know if I’m really up to it. I’ve really let you down, I’m sorry.

G: That’s how I feel about you.

NM: (Stands) Oh, she’s wonderful. So full of energy and she smiles too. Yesterday she actually chuckled. She means everything to me.

G: Tell me how you feel about your baby.

G (to NM): Did you think that your busyness would somehow remove you from my heart? When your daughter grows and becomes preoccupied playing games or with school or with friends and seems to need you less, will you love her less because of that? Of course not! But I tell you this, “Even if a mother forgets her own child, I will never forget you.”

G (to Pr): Did you think that your crimes would somehow remove you from my heart? When your son behaves in a way that hurts or angers you, do you love him less because of that?

Of course not! “I created you and I know you. I knitted you together in your mother’s womb. Wherever you go I will be there with you.”

G (to Po): Did you think that your questionable motives would somehow remove you from my heart? When your kids are selfish or inconsiderate of others’ needs, do you love them less because of that? Of course not! “For I tell you, that even if I knew that you would betray my very life, still would I welcome you at my table.”

Praise Songs / Hymns

Build up one another (Fischy Music, from ‘Build Up’ CD)

From heaven you came (The Servant King) (CH4/MP)
God has chosen me (MP)
God made me as I am (CH4)
Here I am, Lord (CH4/MP)
I’m special (JP/MP)
I am the church (CH4)
age group ideas
gathering

Baby Photos  
age 3-12

You will need: photos of some leaders as babies.

Display a few baby photographs of famous leaders (or well known people in the congregation or local community) and invite everyone to guess who they grew up to be.

Baby Animals  
age 3-5

You will need: a selection of photos of baby animals such as bunnies, chickens, fouls, but definitely including animals that change as they grow such as tadpoles and caterpillers.

Show everyone the images and ask them what animal they grow into.

crafts

While the following crafts and activities are being done it is important to connect the story with life by talking about the story, about how we sometimes have choices about what we do and at other times others choose us to do something, about what it is like to learn something totally new, about how we choose what to do.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story.

Paper Chain  
age 3-5

You will need: A4 paper with outline of a person drawn on it, scissors, tape, crayons.

Make a paper chain of people and decorate each individual person with the name of a child in the group and add the things that person is good at.

Guess Who  
age 6-12

You will need: pictures of famous singers or TV actors, cellotape.

Stick a picture of a singer or TV presenter to the foreheads of each person without them seeing who it is. They then have to guess who the person is by asking others clues to the person. No one is allowed to tell each other directly who they are.

Discussion Starters  all age

• Pick three ‘candidates.’ For example, the minister, a well-known celebrity or footballer, one of the group, a cartoon character, etc.

• Which one would you choose to run the country? Why? Different groups could defend a different ‘leader’.

• What makes a good leader? For Sunday school? For the church? For sports? For all of humanity?

Junk Family  
age 6-8

You will need: recycled material, milk bottles, newspapers, etc.

Make big junk model of family and dress them in newspaper clothes.

You’ve Been Framed  
age 9-12

You will need: heart shaped picture frames (bought or made), digital camera, printer.

Take individual photos of people in the group. Insert their photo into the frame and decorate the frame with words which say what is good about the inside of that person, e.g. smiley, generous.

Special Messages  all age

You will need: white crayons or candles, paper, watered down poster paint.

Write messages or draw pictures which talk about what’s good about different people in the group. Write messages using the candles and then shine light behind paper to reveal message.

Fingerprint People  all age

You will need: ink pads or poster paint, paper, black pens.

Ask everyone to make a fingerprint in the centre of a sheet of paper. Examine it and note how it is unique to each one. Use the black pen to add eyes, legs and arms to the character. Do a few others as well adding facial detail. Once everyone has tried this, ask them to create an image of the story with the seven brothers, all different.
activity

Rhyme  age 3-5

This fits rhyme/tune of Frère Jacques.

Prophet Samual, Prophet Samuel
Spoke God’s truth, spoke God’s truth
Said what God was saying,
said what God was saying
Loud and clear, loud and clear
We must listen, we must listen
Hear God’s truth, hear God’s truth
Hear what God is saying,
hear what God is saying
Loud and clear, loud and clear

Talk Talk  age 3-5

You will need: a few phones (mobile or toy phone).

Pretend play with the telephones with each other and with God. What would they like to ask God? How would you tell God the story today?

Scrolls  age 3-5

You will need: pre-made scrolls, pens, crayons.

Pre-make scrolls with a message on them about how special each person is to God and ask each to colour theirs in and take home.

Tick Tock  age 6-12

You will need: long strips of crepe paper.

In pairs give each child thin strips of crepe paper. Using images from the story shout: Tick Tock Rock and Roll a __________, substituting images from the story: Sheep, horn, David, Samuel, hills. The pairs have to make outlines of these with their crepe paper. A great way to reinforce the story by asking everyone about the roll each plays in the story. Make sure you have a time limit on these.

Shoesizes  age 6-12

You will need: tin foil.

For a bit of fun to start with get all the children into a circle and when the leader shouts ‘size’ each child shouts out their shoe size. When they find someone who has the same size or nearly the same size they team up.

After that give each child a piece of tin foil to make their shoe print: this will be a unique footprint because even if the child is wearing the same shoes as others they stand differently. We are each unique in God’s eyes. The partners help each other to stand on one foot while the imprint takes.

games

Target Practise  all age

You will need: a large target marked on paper, large elastic bands, scrunched up paper balls or ping-pong balls, alternatively use a commercial velcro ball and target game.

Talk about how David had to be a skilled hunter even as he was looking after the sheep and goats for his family. He would have used a sling and stones to scare away wolves and his aim would have to be excellent—which would come in handy later in his story. Let everyone try out their aim using elastic band catapults against the target which could be lying on the floor. Older children can fire from further back than the younger ones.

Whose Shadow  age 6-12

You will need: a large white sheet suspended (badminton net stands are good for this), a powerful lamp.

Darken the room and split the children into two teams. One team on either side of the sheet. Using the lamp get one team to pose between the lamp and sheet so that on the other side you see the shadow of the child. The other team has to try and guess who it is. You can have a lot of fun with changing the size of the person’s shadow depending on how far or close they are from the lamp.

A Job To Do  all age

You will need: a selection of small jobs to help tidy up, enough for everyone to be involved.

Just before everyone goes, make a point of choosing each person for a particular job to help with the clearing up because we are all called in a special way to help each other and God.

your notes
signs of hope

lent 5a
sunday 10 april 2011
ezekiel 37:1–14

bible notes

Rattles, Sighs, and New Life

Is there a more evocative and vivid passage within the Bible than the vision received by Ezekiel of dry bones coming to life? It is like a cross between scenes from 1999’s “The Mummy”, the incredible Ray Harryhausen’s animated skeleton army in 1963’s classic film, “Jason and the Argonauts”, and images of Aragorn calling forth the Dead Men of Dunharrow to join him in the battle against Sauron near the climax of Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings”.

St Nicholas’ Church in Deptford, London, (which is known for its preponderance of skulls, indeed the skull and crossbones adorning the entrance way are rumoured to have been the inspiration for the Jolly Roger pirate flag) has a stunning wood panel by Grinling Gibbons who grew up in Deptford and is still, over 300 years later, regarded as a master wood craftsman. The panel powerfully depicts the vision of dry bones by Ezekiel.

A cursory glance around St Nicholas’ Church might lead you to respond in horror to the macabre images, but these were actually symbols of hope when first carved, reminding of eternal life and a motivator that judgement might not be far away, so make good your life today!

The vision of the valley of dry bones by Ezekiel is such a story. It is grim in its imagery, and yet it is a story filled with hope. What place is there for hope when everything is perfect? This is a vision of hope that comes from the absolute depths of despair. It is a vision of God’s response to the despair of his people. It is about a promise shortly to be fulfilled for the people of Israel, a promise outlined in the previous chapter of Ezekiel.

There is a glorious irony to the passage. One of Ezekiel’s moans was that after all his years of prophesying to the people of Israel he might as well have been preaching to the dead for all the good he felt he was doing. He kept talking about the new life that comes with God, but was his breath wasted on people who were as good as dead to hearing his message?

And now in his vision, Ezekiel is literally taken amidst all these dry bones, and told by God to prophesy one more time to the piles of bones. “Ha, ha, very funny, God!” you can imagine Ezekiel thinking.

But, as a good and faithful servant, Ezekiel lets his voice speak in prophecy. The bones stir and we are given a graphic description of the bones taking shape into skeletons and those skeletons taking on flesh and skin.

Yet there is still something amiss. The bodies are there, called into form by the prophetic words of Ezekiel, yet they are lifeless. It is only when Ezekiel again breathes out his words of prophecy that the corpses are called to life. Within this passage there is a wordplay going on using the Hebrew word ruach which is used interchangeably meaning breath, wind and spirit. We lose out on the ambiguity in our more clearly defined English translation, but the references to breath, the winds and spirit all blur into one in this passage. The wind that blows is the breath of God, the Spirit of God who brings life into the situations which seem devoid of hope.

It is only when God’s breath is blowing in his people’s lives, when God’s spirit is guiding, that the people of God have the faith and trust to follow him. To a people who had known battle and conflict at the hands of the Babylonians, who knew the pain of dislocation from their homes and the feeling of having all hope torn asunder, God promises to bring new life from the devastation they had suffered.

In many different denominations of Christ’s Church today there is gloom and despair as the church struggles to adapt to being a witness to God in a different cultural setting to that of 50 years ago. In what ways does your congregation breathe new life into your community? How can it change the sound of rattling bones into the thrilling and optimistic sound of a baby’s first breath?
The Story

Valley of Dry Bones

Prophet’s vision of hope puts flesh on bones! 
Prophet’s bold words renew nation’s muscle!

Based on Ezekiel 37:1-14

Suggested introduction: percussion instruments given out before story and a reader other than Ezekiel/God introduces story saying something like: “Our story today tells of a vision God gave the prophet Ezekiel, at a time when God’s people were feeling pretty hopeless because they were in exile, far from their homeland. Get ready to join in as Ezekiel leads us, because we are all going to be part of enacting the vision today! It all begins in a strange and deserted place…”

Ezekiel: (quite pensive at first, rhythmic from start, but pace can be slow)

What is this place where I’m being led?
What is this place, this valley of the dead?
No sign of life, no river bed.
What is this place, this valley of the dead?
So empty there’s no sense of dread,
What is this place, this valley of the dead?
No vulture flies, no insect groans,
Nothing here but all these BONES!

(pause, look around slowly, keep whispering “bones” while ‘surveying’ all the bones on the ground, in every direction. Resume rhythm slightly faster…)

These bones so old, these bones so dry, across the valley floor they lie.
Ahead, behind, bones fill the eye, these bones so old, these bones so dry.

God: (quite dramatically, as if interrupting Ezekiel)

These bones so old, so dead, so dry, These bones can LIVE, now prophesy!
Breath, flesh, and skin I will supply,
These bones WILL LIVE!

(prophesy)

Ezekiel: Listen, bones!
This is the word of God who is our sovereign Lord!
Breath, flesh and skin God will supply,
Bones, get up and come alive!

(‘Ezekiel’ begins to beat established rhythm on wooden blocks/ tambourine or suchlike, repeating phrase below and moving round to bring in sections of congregation to add to rhythm on other percussive instruments, foot tapping, hand clapping, etc. May need to give hand signal to lower volume before ‘God’ continues speaking, but keep rhythm going steady!)

Bones, get up and come alive!

God: These bones are now raised up from death with flesh and skin but still no breath
Command the winds to come and blow,
Give breath, give life, Let it be so!

Ezekiel: Come winds, come breath, within us blow!
God’s people, rise and have new hope!

(‘Ezekiel’ moves around sections of congregation again, repeating phrase below and inviting folks to stand, move, jiggle, squirm, process out of seats if so wished, etc., keeping rhythm going. May need to give signal to return to seats or stop where they are before ‘God’ continues speaking, but again, maintain rhythm.)

God’s people, rise and have new hope!

God: When life feels dry, when strength turns weak, when hope seems gone, the future bleak, I’ll bring you back, to your true home, a place that’s good and is your own. You will know my love and care, by my breath within, you know I’m there.

Ezekiel: By your breath within, We know you’re there.

(Continued repetition of last line by all, ‘Ezekiel’ gradually leading a slowing down of pace, quietening of voices and tailing off of rhythm into silence.)

Retelling for young people

Ezekiel the prophet looked towards the horizon. There was sand everywhere as far as your eye could see. There were rocks and stones everywhere, as far as your eye could see. And there were dry bones everywhere as far as your eye could see.

“Wow!” said Ezekiel.

And God said to Ezekiel, “I want you to tell these bones to live then I want you to watch and wait.”

Ezekiel shouted over the bones to come alive and then he sat down and waited. And waited. And waited. And as he waited the wind blew up and sand filled the air and the rocks rolled and the bones began to roll, clanking off one another. Ezekiel kept on watching and as the bones rolled together they began to join up to look like people and as he watched skin grew over them and they began to move around.

And God said, “What I have just done to these dry bones, I will do to you all: I will bring you hope and life again.”

Ezekiel blinked. The wind died down, the sand settled, the rocks stopped rolling and the bones fell to the ground again and as far as his eye could see there was desert and dry bones. But he was filled with hope.
Worship Ideas

Dem Bones!

_provide a group (or everyone if you can) with two sticks or pencils to hit together. the storyteller sets the different rhythms for everyone to copy as the story is told._

Let me tell you a story of something amazing that happened to me...

God’s Spirit set me down in the middle of an open plain covered with bones. There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun. (Slide the two sticks together making a swishing sound)

The spirit asked me, “Can these bones live?”

I said, “Only you know that.”

The Spirit said, “Speak over the bones saying: ‘God will bring the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life.’ (Rub the sticks in a circular motion) I’ll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You’ll come alive and you’ll realize that I am God!”

I spoke over the bones as I’d been asked.

As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! (Slightly tap the twigs together, bone to bone. I kept watching. The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them. (Silence)

The Spirit said to me, “Tell the breath, ‘God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe life!’”

So I spoke just as I was commanded. The breath entered them (swirl sticks together) and they came alive! (Double tap the stick on a surface or together) They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

God said to me, “These bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they’re saying: ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there’s nothing left of us.’ (Swish the sticks together once)

“Therefore tell them, ‘God says: I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realise that I am God. I’ve said it and I’ll do it. God’s Decree.’” (Slowly tap the sticks together getting faster and faster)

Gathering & All Age

_ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and for a few minutes to discuss where they feel new life is needed in their community._

Create a skeleton quiz naming different bones in the body. For help, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bones_of_the_human_skeleton

Note: there are other ideas in the Gathering section of Age Group Ideas.

Meditation

Can these bones live?

that depends on whether there is the will for resurrection the will to bring together creaking, groaning, can’t be bothered spirits and transform them with a whoosh of life a whoosh that is infectious that starts off as a wee rumble but gathers pace and momentum disrupting all in its wake even in the dryness there is potential sometimes visible only to the God of life the God who revives tired spirits and lifts up weary souls and brings revival when all seems lost.

Who Am I?

The first breath

Speaker centre-stage using a gift-tagged jacket.

Who am I?

I am hidden beneath layers and layers of Do’s and Don’ts that have been wrapped around me since the day I was born. If I could see through these layers I can imagine what the gift tags might say.

Let’s see, one of the very first wrappings (peel off gift tag):

“To me, with all our love Mum and Dad. We give you the gift of being separate from us.”

That must have been when I cried to be held as a baby and finally gave up when no one came.

Here’s another two from when I was a toddler. These gift tags are from Mum and Dad, and my babysitters.

“We give you the gift of safety.”

I used to be a very curious kid.

I loved exploring and discovering.

I became quite nervous and cautious, though, because everything I touched seemed to be dangerous, according to the adults around me.

I wonder what wrappings are around me from my toddler years?

Here are two from my grandparents. They quite often looked after me while my parents worked.

“We give you, our dear Grandchild, the gift of cleanliness and stillness.”

Cleanliness—oh yeah, I remember.

I loved experimenting with water, mud, food colouring—whatever.

I loved textures and colours—perhaps I was really destined to be a scientist?

But of course, I was far too messy—I’m very particular about hygiene now, you know—ask my kids!

And Grannie and Grandad gave me the gift of stillness.

I suppose I was a very lout child.

But I just loved to sing, dance and perform.

I did eventually learn to sit quietly and look at my book or play with my toy truck—but even that was too noisy sometimes.

Right, let’s move on to my young childhood.

This is a big tag and I think it’s attached to a huge amount of wrapping paper. It is again sent to me with lots of love and it comes from all the important adults in my life—family, friends and teachers.

“We give you the gift of not showing extreme emotion.”

Not showing extreme emotion—right enough, I did use to tantrum when I didn’t get my own way.

And I was a very sensitive child, so tears did fall easily even in the dryness there is potential—and brings revival when all seems lost.

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giggling and just being daft. I think the adults around me were a bit embarrassed by my behaviour. In time they managed to tame me and now I would defy anyone to know what I’m really feeling behind the quiet smile. Mind you, it took some time to settle me down.

Here’s a tag from my teenage years, again from my parents and again sent with love—they did love me a lot. “We give you the gift of being socially acceptable.” Oh, I fought that one before I succumbed. I remember my angry outbursts, the way I constantly challenged everything and of course my never ending questions. My parents let me know in no uncertain terms that my anger was antisocial, my challenging behaviour was not nearly compliant enough for their liking and my constant questioning was irritating. I lived and learned—Behold the Man!

Who am I? Hey look, there’s one more tag here—it’s old. I think that perhaps it’s the very first gift I was given but it doesn’t seem to be attached to any wrapping paper—just to me. In fact, it won’t come off.

“To my unique child who I breathed into being. I give you the gift of your life. With all my love, which is the essence of all that you are, from God.”

P.S. Remember your first breath.

**Meditation**

Imagine you are sitting in church one Sunday morning. You are chatting to those around you and enjoying the familiar buzz of anticipation before the service begins. Suddenly you sense a definite change in the atmosphere. Turning round, you see a family enter whom you have never seen before. They stand out from the rest. They obviously come from another country. You guess this because of their appearance and also because they seem to be struggling with even the simplest conversations. As they draw nearer, you realise that they also have a different smell. You find yourself hoping, almost praying, that they won’t sit beside you and you keep your head tilted slightly downwards as if deep in thought.

Immediately you feel guilty. You look up to smile just as they make their way towards the seats beside you. Panic rises within you. How will you communicate? Words become obstacles. Protocol, meaningless. They seem apprehensive, but naturally friendly folk. Three children, mum, dad and grandparents take their seats. The grandmother obviously senses your anxiety. She reaches out and gently touches your eyelids, gesturing that you should close them. Then she lifts your hands to cover your ears. You feel completely vulnerable but somehow compelled to do as she wishes.

Now a moment that you will never forget. She gently kisses your cheeks and wraps her arms around you. You cannot see her; you cannot hear her but through her you experience God’s touch of love. This physical gesture moves you into spiritual realms where the physical senses which you rely on are null and void. This energy-merging embrace reminds you of a far deeper reality. This hug is soul-deep. You are now in touch with God’s nearer presence and you know with your whole being that you are loved exactly the way you are. You realise, perhaps for the first time in your life, that you are primarily ‘spirit’ not ‘body’ and so are those around you.

For when God breathed His life-giving Spirit into us, we began to live.

**Prayer**

Bring new life, O God. Feed the tired ambitions that once flourished in us as hope, revive in us the vision of life of being your people here in this place, set fire to the passion we still have deep within us, and turn what is moribund and spent, into a new way of living, stirred by your word, filled with your hope, alive to your vision, of renewal, of rebirth, or resurrection.

Bring new life, O God, through the valley of death, through the gathering darkness, through the passion of Christ, and into a new dawn, a new day, a new beginning. May we hold your vision of renewal, and find in it the promise that calls us on into the valley, and through to the garden at dawn, and find there living and freshly alive, the promise, made flesh, once more. Bring new life, O God, that we may be fully alive.

**Praise Songs / Hymns**

Breathe on me breath of God (CH4)
Dem bones (Traditional Spiritual, words can be found on the internet)
Hands to work (CH4)
I am the Church (CH4)
I hear the sound of rustling (MP)
Lord can this really be (CH4)
O breath of life (CH4)
Rejoice! (MP)
Revive thy work, O Lord (MP)
We lay our broken world (CH4)
age group ideas

breath races all age

You will need: sheets of paper, some folded into fans.

Set a fun challenge of seeing how quickly a piece of paper can be moved from point A to point B using a wee hand held fan. Set up as a race or time a few different folk.

wake up! age 3-8

You will need an alarm clock that you can make ring immediately and repeatedly, alternatively, just shout ‘Wake up!’

Invite everyone to go to sleep in the circle. Tell a story of morning: the sun rises, the milkman is out and about, it’s time to ‘WAKE UP!’ and everyone has to scramble awake. Then go through very rapidly various activities such as brushing teeth, breakfast, etc., and then comment that you are so tired you need to go back to sleep.

Talk about the things that are happening when everyone is asleep, then realise it is lunch time so you need to ‘WAKE UP!’ and make lunch and eat lunch and play, then go back to sleep… Carry on the story all through the day. Ask what gives us energy for all of that, for life? Lead onto the story of the valley of dry bones waking up.

exercise is good all age

for you

You will need: some ideas for exercises to waken everyone up.

Simply go through some wake up exercises, stretching, bending, jumping, running on the spot. Ask how people feel. What makes you feel awake in the morning, what gets you going?

Discussion Starters all age

• Ezekiel was talking about the valley of the dry bones to give people hope when they thought they had none. What hopes do you have: for yourself, your family, people in your school/town, for the world?
• What would you like to tell people in these situations to help them hope?

crafts

While the following crafts and activities are being done it is important to connect the story with life by talking about the story, about how breath is a sign of life, etc.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story.

junk skeleton age 3-5

You will need: recylates or lining paper, bone shapes cut from paper.

Make a big junk model of a person and stick bones on to it or draw round someone and stick bones to the image.

pasta skeletons age 3-8

You will need: different shapes and designs of pasta, glue, card, paint.

Ask everyone to create their own skeletons from the pasta using different shapes for different parts of the body. Stick these onto card. Once dry, paint and cut out. These would be used to decorate a montage about the story.

let’s go fly a kite age 6-8

You will need: tissue paper, garden canes, string.

Make kites from tissue and canes and take them home to fly when wind/breath is added.

balloon skeletons age 6-8

You will need: balloons, marker pens, lots of breath.

Give everyone an uninflated balloon. Invite them to draw a skeleton on it and then retell the story and whenever they hear the word ‘breath’, they blow into the balloon a little each time, inflating the skeleton.

whipped dessert all age

You will need: a dessert that requires whipping: e.g. Angel Delight, milk.

As you make the dessert with some of the children’s help, talk about how the whipping process is about adding air (breath) to the dessert which then makes it take shape.

Taste and enjoy!
activity

**Indiana Jones**  **age 6-12**

You will need: half fill a box with sand or soil and hide either bone shapes or different types of dry pasta, small paintbrushes.

Ask the children, a few at a time, to carefully brush away the soil as though at an excavation dig and see if they can reveal any of the bones. Once they have found one they carefully have to remove it, place it on a piece of paper and identify what it is eg what bone it is or what type of pasta it is.

This could be done as a game where the box is in the middle and everyone sits round it. A dice is thrown and when it lands on a six that person begins excavating the box until someone else throws a six and takes over.

**Puppet Show**  **age 6-12**

You will need: finger puppets or felt to make the puppets.

To make the puppets simply cut two broad finger shapes from felt and sew or glue together. Draw on some skeleton faces and on others the face of Ezekiel, and a face with cheeks bowing like the wind. Invite everyone to work together to retell the story using the puppets. After rehearsal this could be shown just before everyone goes home or a special performance during coffee after church.

**Redesign The Church**  **age 6-12**

You will need: pens and paper.

In conversation ask people to think about how they could breathe even more life into the church. What sort of things would they like to do? How would they plan that? Ask them to draw the new church plan on the paper: where would things go, what extra things would they add and what things would they take away. This could be done as one big plan designed by everyone together or individual plans. These could be offered to church leaders to consider(!) and certainly displayed.

games

**Head And Shoulders**  **age 3-5**

Play a game of head, shoulders, knees and toes.

**Potato Head**  **age 3-12**

You will need: a dice for each team, a large potato for each person, pre-cut eyes, ears, mouth, nose and arms and legs from funky foam or card. A beetle drive type list of body parts and the corresponding number on a dice.

This is a variation on a beetle drive. Each person, using a dice, rolls to find out what body part can be added to the potato. The winner is the first person to put the whole potato person together ad shout: 'Potato Head'

This could be turned into a relay game for older children or a simple craft for younger children

**Operation**  **age 5-12**

You will need: the game ‘Operation’

Play the game as teams. It doesn’t matter if they touch the sides, just find the bone and pick it out.

**Mummy Game**  **age 6-12**

You will need: lots of toilet rolls.

In pairs or in teams, one child from each is selected as the ‘mummy’. The others have to wrap their team member in the toilet roll until only the eyes are visible. Always start at the feet.

**Breathing God**

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Tell them you are going to repeat a blessing and to help us with it everyone has to follow what you do.

May you be filled with God (breathe in)
And may you share God (breathe out)
May you learn about love (breathe in)
And may you share love (breathe out)
May you find God in your heart (breathe in)
And may you share that joy with everyone (breathe out)

your notes

**senting**

**Breathing God**

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May you find God in your heart (breathe in)
And may you share that joy with everyone (breathe out)
it all leads to this

lent 6a
palm sunday 17 april 2011
matthew 21:1–11

bible notes

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21: 1-11

Decision Time

What does the average Sunday worship-attending church member make of Holy Week? If you only attend the Sunday services and do not attend any mid-week services that may be offered, which, if we are honest, is the case for most church members, then what is the message that is received from Holy Week?

On Palm Sunday we have the joy and celebration of Jesus riding into Jerusalem and being hailed as the one who was coming in the name of the Lord. A scene beloved of children's bibles and the festive high point of many films of Jesus' life such as 'Jesus' produced by TimeLife (scene pictured below).

Then the following week the singing is ramped up a notch further as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ on Easter Day.

With Jesus we see all these things happening too. The arrival, including a story about finding donkeys which inevitably reminds us of Saul in 1 Samuel 10:1-9, the waving of palm branches and singing, the entrance into the city and then Jesus' visit to the centre of the Jewish religion, the Temple, which immediately follows this passage.

The difference we have with Jesus is that this entrance is not as the result of a military victory. Jesus hasn't defeated anyone in battle. Nonetheless, we find in these verses of Matthew's gospel the first subtle public claim by Jesus in seeking out the donkey and colt to ride into Jerusalem, that he is the Messiah and we have also the responding recognition by the crowds of that claim.

This is it. This is the moment. This is what it has all been working towards. The long journey to Jerusalem has ended with this wonderful scene. But, by its very nature, it throws into sharp relief what kind of Messiah Jesus is. What is going to be the cheering crowds' reaction when they find out what Jesus is really about? It is decision time for them and for the leaders in the city. What are they going to do with Jesus?

It doesn't take them long to find out what kind of Messiah this is. When Jesus enters the Temple, it is not meekly, as he entered the city, to make a sacrifice on the altar as everyone would have expected, and thereby acquiescing to the cultic religious leaders of the Temple. No, far from it. Jesus doesn't only fail to offer a sacrifice, he causes utter mayhem by rejecting the whole rotten cultic system that had grown up around the Temple. What next?
the story

Palm Sunday
Donkey ride for Temple Rebel

based on Matthew 21: 1-11

Ideally the Pharisees and Crowd should be at least four voices chanting together. Jesus begins as though addressing individuals in congregation. Crowd and Pharisees grouped to either side. First four chants set the scene recapping aspects of his ministry and bringing alive the reactions aroused in others. Each chant section should build up in volume so that the capitalised lines are pretty forceful!

Jesus:

The Kingdom is within you!
Pick up your bed and walk
Does no-one condemn you?
Your sins are forgiven
Happy are you poor and hungry
Go in peace my friend
TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME!

Pharisees: He eats with tax collectors!
He speaks blasphemy!
He cannot forgive sin!
He breaks our traditions!
He’s a glutton and drunk!
What he says proves nothing!
NO PROPHET EVER COMES FROM GALILEE!

Pharisees: By what right does he do this?
He has no authority!
WHAT will we do with him?
He will cause a RIOT!
He MUST be arrested
But the crowd ADORE him…

For God’s sake he HAS TO GO!

Crowd:

(appropriate actions may be devised from here on, as simply or elaborately as wished)
Our King is coming!
Spread the palm branches!

Pharisees: Who is this man?
What is he doing?

Crowd: THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH!

Jesus: This house of prayer
Is no hideout for thieves!

Pharisees: Do you hear what they say?
Silence these people!

Crowd: Praise to David’s Son!
Praise to Jesus!

Jesus: THEN THESE STONES WILL SHOUT ALOUD!

(As Pharisees chant final section, Crowd members should gather round Jesus, sit at his feet, as though hanging on to his every word, cheering him on, while Jesus mimes talking to them, laying hands on people etc. Pharisees sounding both angry and alarmed, possibly pacing around, gesturing towards Jesus but addressing each other. Could do individual voices for each line, or in twos or threes rather than all speaking in unison.)

Pharisees:

By what RIGHT does he do this?
He has NO authority!
WHAT will we do with him?
He will cause a RIOT!
He MUST be arrested
But the crowd ADORE him…

For God’s sake he HAS TO GO!

(All freeze and hold still for a few seconds).
worship ideas

The following worship suggestions are designed for all ages. We are presuming that people will be together for the whole of worship to retell the story of Palm Sunday and move into Holy Week.

**Gathering**
Ask people to turn to the folks sitting near them and for a few minutes discuss what it’s like being part of a big crowd. What are the good things about being in a crowd, and what are the negative things?

Give people flags, streamers, balloons, scarves to wave while singing a Palm Sunday hymn/song. Could people or group of all ages process around worship space?

Reflect on how Jesus had made arrangements for a donkey and colt to be ready. How can we be ready to do as Jesus asks us?

**Palm Sunday Openers**

**A way to call people to worship**

Why are we gathered here? What were the crowds doing? Who was it that they were proclaiming king? Why are their ‘Hosannas!’ changing to ‘Crucify’s?’

Do we spectate or are we part of the crowd? Which character in the story are we following? Why do we think we are so innocent? Where are we going? And who are we going with?

**Palm Sunday Prayer**

May we follow you, O Jesus, with palms in one hand and bread and wine in the other.

May we follow you, O Jesus, with hosanna in our throats and questions on our minds.

May we follow you, O Jesus, trusting your love even as we hesitate at it’s cost.

May we follow you, O Jesus, familiar with the story, frightened by the reality.

May we follow you, O Jesus, hearing the sounds of the week and recognising our own voices.

May we follow you, O Jesus, there at the beginning through to the ending as well.

Hear us
Hold us
Always
So be it
Amen

**Stone Prayer**

*Give people two stones to clack together on the last line each time.*

We want to shout hosanna, for we want to follow you but if we could not shout the very stones would cry aloud

We hear the people call you king and redeemer and lord but if they were to be silent the very stones would cry aloud

We know you are messiah and we call you friend and companion and Christ but if we were not able to shout the very stones would cry aloud

May we proclaim you the one who comes to save us to love us completely and show us the way

May we proclaim you Lord of the whole world loving each person uniquely and calling them all to your way

We say you are the Christ the one who saves and cares for us but if the whole world was to remain silent these very stones would cry aloud.

**Prayer of Intercession**

May we wave palm branches and shout hosanna and proclaim you lord and follow you as love enters the world as Justice come among us as peace finds it’s way and truth becomes known

May the story of then happen now

So in the places of hunger and famine may we who can ride in with sharing and a new way of living together

In places of loneliness may we who can ride in with compassion and a better way to share together

In places of conflict may we who can ride in working for peace an a safer way to live with each other

May we be like you and proclaim God’s Good News and tell the world about the work of love and what it does

May our hosannas be good news for those in the world who need your care and hope

Hear us pray for the world and for our friends and family those who are ill and those recovering hear us in Jesus’ name

So be it
Amen
Holy Week Prayer

This prayer can be helped with projecting some of the images suggested, found on the internet. But it works equally as well without.

SLIDE: DONKEY
When the donkey gets going and you ride into town when the hosannas start rising and the crowds begin to shout when the branches are waved high and the authorities worry ride right into our lives Jesus

SLIDE: ROAD
May we follow you on our road may we should hosanna and may we believe you are saving us

SLIDE: TABLE
May we find you at our table sharing bread and wine may we eat with you and share the promise

SLIDE: GARDEN
May we pray with you in the garden waiting and watching and may we love you till the end

SLIDE: CROSS
May we be there by the cross hoping against all hope this end is not the end

SLIDE: SUNDAY
And may we wake early on Sunday and hear the light break through and hear the angels whisper: ‘Resurrection’

Hear us
as we journey with you forever
So be it
Amen

SLIDE: PALM SUNDAY

Praise Songs / Hymns

Children of Jerusalem (MP)
Come into the streets with me! (CH4)
Hosanna (from ’Songs for Every Easter’ CD, Out of the Ark Music)
Hosanna, hosanna (MP)
Hosanna, loud hosanna (CH4)
Meekness and majesty (MP)
My song is love unknown (CH4/MP)
Rejoice! (MP)
Shout ‘Hosanna, welcome to Jesus’ (CH4)

Crafts

Palm Branches  age 3-5

You will need: card tubes, sheets of paper (green or multicoloured), card tubes or garden canes/sticks.

Make palm branches by drawing round hands, cutting out hand shapes and sticking onto long piece of card tubing or garden cane.

Banners  age 6-8

Make ‘Hosanna’and ‘Halleluiah’ banners which can be used to decorate worship space.

Sock Puppets  age 9-12

You will need: socks or wooden spoons or cardboard with split pins, wool for hair, felt-tip pens.

Make puppets (either using socks, wooden spoons or cardboard using split pins to give joints and therefore movement) of the different characters and animals in the story and then act out (some children could write a script, some children could make a backdrop).

Palm Crosses  all age

You will need: strips from palm leaves, or strips of paper.

Fold palm leaves or paper into crosses while talking about the events of Palm Sunday and where the story is heading.

Hot Cross Buns  all age

You will need: dough for hot cross buns, trays, oven, etc. or cup cakes and icing.

Use making your own hot cross buns as a means for talking about the events of Holy Week. If making actual hot cross buns is too complex, how about decorating cup cakes with icing in the shape of a cross, or with shapes of palm leaves?

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It may be possible to create a labyrinth for Palm Sunday that could be used early morning or in the evening of Palm Sunday. A labyrinth is like a maze though you cannot get lost, there is only one way in and one way out. There are many designs, some far more complicated than others.

Using the very simple design suggested here use chalk or masking tape or stones and candles on a hall floor or outside if the weather is decent. Create seven stations along the way, three as people move into the labyrinth, one for the centre and three as people leave, each on a small table with a chair for people to sit if they wish. The stations suggested here take people through Palm Sunday and Holy Week in a meditative journey, opening up questions and connections with the story rather than tell them what to think.

The stations do not need to be used at all. A labyrinth could simply be a walk with music in the background and that’s it. The stations are there simply to help focus the pilgrimage through the story rather than tell them what to think.

Print out the descriptor for each station and leave it at the point in the labyrinth you wish people to reflect.

**Station One:**
Remove your shoes if you wish. This journey is a tactile journey. It allows you to feel the ground beneath your feet:
It is not smooth but rough, not always easy.

**Station Two:**
*You will need: a pile of stones.*
Touch the stones.
Feel their age.
They have been here long before humanity.
Imagine the story they can tell:
of the transformation of creation,
of the story of humanity,
of the journey of the world.
Jesus said, these very stones shall cry out.
Can you hear what they say?

**Station Three:**
*You will need: an old bible with some pages torn from it and a pen.*
Jesus longed to redeem God’s people from all that bound them.
He overturned tables, set free the sacrificial doves, and wanted to unbind the people from bad religion.
Think for a moment about the freedoms faith brings but also the way it has been abused.
If you wish write a prayer across the pages of this bible a symbol that The Word sets us free to live fully.

**Station Four:**
*You will need to ensure that as you plan the labyrinth that this station is in the centre of the labyrinth.*
Simply sit in the centre of the journey a time to reflect and look at those who travel with you different paths same journey.
Each one seeking as Jesus did on the way to the cross.

**Station Five:**
*You will need: a goblet of wine and loaf of bread.*
Nourishment for the journey. Tear a piece of bread and dip it into the wine.
Enjoy the taste of heaven with all those who journey with you.

**Station Six:**
*You will need: a piece of ripped cloth*
It is never an easy journey. Holy Week takes us to places we never wish to go and perhaps can only imagine. But go we must and go we shall with others so make a rip in this cloth along with all the other rips as a reminder we do not suffer on our own and we will join Jesus this week knowing what he does for us.

**Station Seven:**
*You will need: another pile of stones*
We heard the stones cry out before. Can you hear them cry ‘Halleluia’?
Take a stone with you for the rest of the journey for this stone speaks of hope of the renewal of life of the resurrection to come. Keep it with you this week to remind yourself of where this journey leads.
which leads to this

easter day a
easter sunday 24 april 2011
john 20: 1-18 or matthew 28:1-10

bible notes

Don’t Cling To Me

What comes next? After the entrance into Jerusalem and after the events of the intervening week—teaching in the Temple, foot washing, a last supper, a trial, mob violence, politics, torture and execution—we have this, the high point in our church calendar: Easter Day. It is the day when all those fears and uncertainties are put to rest. The day when, after the world has thrown every ‘no’ it can at Jesus, God turns around and gives an almighty ‘yes!’

John’s account of the scene outside the tomb where Mary Magdalene comes to pay her respects is laden with emotion. We have the overwhelming sense of grief at an unexpected loss, the confusion over what has happened and why things are not as Mary expected them when she arrives at an empty tomb, and finally the overpowering relief and joy as Mary realises Jesus is standing with her.

John’s account is fascinating as he draws from the synoptic gospels but weaves his own narrative of the events. If you try to compare the different gospel accounts of the resurrection scene, to determine what exactly happened, who was there and who wasn’t, and so on, it is easy to become flummoxed as to what is going on, as each account is different. Far better to take the story as found and travel with Mary on her rollercoaster ride of emotions. It is a journey that all can relate to. It is honest, searching and inspiring, and when people let themselves hear the story again with fresh ears it is inevitable that God’s Spirit will speak through it into their own experiences of loss, hurt and pain.

Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, John, play just bit parts in this account, literally running in and out of the story. The emphasis is all on Mary Magdalene and her encounter with the risen Lord.

If a friend or family member has died suddenly, who can say they have not, in the dark torment of a grief-stricken night, begged for one more moment in order to say the things you wish you had said.

Here Mary gets that opportunity with Jesus. Needless to say, she does not want it to end quickly. She grabs hold of Jesus, holding him tightly to her both physically, one must assume, but also psychologically. How quickly her tears of separation and grief were turned to tears of joy. And an onlooker might not have noticed the change, but she knew and Jesus knew.

It seems almost cruel of Jesus to say what he says to her when he says, “Don’t cling to me.” What is she supposed to do?

But it is a way for Jesus to begin to help Mary move on with her life. Perhaps John is adding a commentary here on Matthew’s account where we read the women run to Jesus and grasp his feet in order to worship him.

Here John seems to bring together the resurrection and ascension into one event. Mary must not cling to him, because he is yet to make his way to his Father.

Jesus is reassuring Mary that once he is gone, and once physical contact is no longer possible, and she is unable to grasp him with her hands, then it becomes a matter of faith to hold on to Jesus.

These are heady themes, and in what will be an all-age service for many congregations this will need to be explored carefully—for this is a joyful day.

Above all, this is a day for letting the story tell itself and for celebrating along with the story. Creating space and opportunities to let the story live will be more important than getting every theological nuance out of the passage.

It is resurrection day, a time for song, for tears of joy. The questions can come later...
Suggest that this story is interspersed with congregational singing of an ‘Alleluia’ as indicated, very quietly at first, as though the song is itself an expression of the gradual dawning of a new understanding and a new way forward.

The reading needs to be very gentle in tone and pace, with good pauses between paragraphs, and before each ‘Mary’.

Alleluia…

It was still dark the first time she came. She hadn’t brought her spices for the body yet. She hadn’t brought her woman friends yet. She wanted to come alone, just to sit for a while. She hadn’t slept a wink… Mary.

She didn’t notice anything at first. She came stumbling her way in the dark, exhausted and still full of tears. She didn’t come too close for a while… Mary.

She couldn’t believe he was gone. She had lived for weeks with the fear of what they might do to him. She was numb from the horror of it all… Mary.

She crawled up to the entrance eventually, her hands outstretched, feeling for the stone. Then both hands, her eyes blinking, trying to focus. She gasped, her heart suddenly thumping. She staggered up and saw the gaping black hole, the opening that made no sense. She was frozen to the spot… Mary.

Alleluia…

She fled. She ran blindly, crying out, and the garden was silent again as daylight crept over the rocks.

Then the men came. They hadn’t believed her, but they saw it just as she’d said, and more. The stone, out of place. The grave, opened. One of them looked in, his stupefied gaze locked on the white strips of linen that had wrapped the body. He motioned to the other, who bent down and walked right inside, grasping the cloths in his hands, pulling at them, rifling through them, as though the body might reappear if he searched hard enough. Then they backed away, wide-eyed, and left.

She was alone again. Weeping again… Mary.

Alleluia…

And so, to her grief, her bewilderment, as gently as we could, we spoke to her. “Woman, why are you crying?”

She was not alarmed, but replied as if to any passer by, “They have taken my beloved Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him.”

She turned away from the tomb, and we knew that she could see him, standing there. Whoever she took him for, she had no idea it was him. He too asked, just like any stranger would, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you’re looking for?”

“She’s your voice carried a faint hope, “if you know where he is, please tell me, so I can go to him.”

He said only one word… “Mary.”

“Rabboni!”

They fell into an embrace and held each other, a tender reunion, but short-lived, as he gently stepped back.

“Don’t hold on to me, Mary. But go tell your brothers that I am returning to the Father, to your God and mine.”

Alleluia…

She did as he asked. She told her story of that morning. How many times she would tell it! And each of the others came to have their own story too. Of how they knew he was indeed with the Father and still there with them, always.

Yet she never saw him again, nor us. Not that we ever left her… Mary.

Alleluia…
worship ideas

Once more this week, we are presuming people are together for the whole of worship celebrating and retelling the story of resurrection. There are a few ideas for age group crafts as well however.

Gathering all age

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and do a word association game beginning with the word ‘Easter’.

Graffiti ‘alleluias’ and other Easter greetings outside on paths, steps, etc. with multicoloured pavement chalks.

In the worship space leave large stones under which are signs of new life. Invite people to move round these and lift the stone (returning them for the next person) as they gather for worship. These symbols can be used later in worship.

Call to Worship

God
source of all life
has just burst open the tomb with laughter

Resurrection
silent as dawn
has set loose random explosions of alleluia’s

Jesus
crucified one
has given breath to his first resurrected word, a word filled with love: ‘Mary!’

Mary
valueless woman
is the first to proclaim, before any religion catches on, ‘Jesus is Risen!’

May we not dither with the alleluias

Christ is risen!
Alleluia!

Opening Prayer

When the day is quiet and the world still sleeps and the morning is crisp

and love breathes again
we praise you, O God of resurrection

When the time is now and the moment is on us and the place is here and the grave clothes are folded
we praise you, O God of renewal

When the day is new and the sun is fresh and the light is clean and the stone has rolled
we praise you, O God of empty tombs

Now we see the world differently
What we thought was the way of things, yesterday
is no longer the way of things today
deaht was yesterday
new life is today
tombs were sealed
now they are open
love was dead
now is alive again
death has been given a make-over endings have a new perspective things work differently now

When the shouting has stopped and the suffering ended and the betrayal complete and the darkness stolen
then we praise you, O God of life

A Statement of Faith

Louder each time

Three days in a tomb
Two angels watching
One resurrection
Al-le-lu-ia

Three days of waiting
Two disciples running
One stone a-rolling
Al-le-lu-ia

Three days of darkness
Two soldiers sleeping
One Jesus risen
Al-le-lu-ia

Three days of weeping
Two nights of hiding
One dawn like this one
Al-le-lu-ia

Three days of rumours
Two Emmaus travellers
One Saviour rising
Al-le-lu-ia

Three days of sorrow
Two Mary’s weeping
One resurrection
Al-le-lu-ia

Meditation

Bread and wine:
a table in a village,
two travellers journeying to Emmaus and a stranger between them, and in the breaking of bread, and the silent explosion of crumbs, suddenly it all comes clear: Jesus is risen!

Fish cooking on the beach,
early at dawn,
from the distance of the lake, all the disciples could see was a thin line of smoke, but in growing closer everything came into focus, including the chef on the beach: Jesus is risen!

Upper room: locked doors, the disciples pacing, confused now that Jesus was gone, yet daring to believe the rumours of empty tombs and miracles, and without a lock being turned, they found the spirit of Jesus was alive among them: Jesus is risen!

Among the olive trees and garden, in the yellow light of dawn, the gardener came to see
what all the noise was about, 
a woman frantic, crying, shouting, 
and all he said was ‘Mary!’ 
and all she said was ‘Raboni!’: 
Jesus is risen!

In the pews of churches and beaches 
and fields and hillsides at dawn, 
in cathedrals and chapels, 
and hardly noticed by the world, 
the loyal faithful who return each week, 
today receive a shock. 
This might actually be true! 
Jesus is risen!

Choral Reading

Leader: We thought you were dead. 
We thought the cross was the end. 
We thought that when the stone rolled over the tomb, 
that was it. 
But this is it:

All: the dead are living; 
the cross is empty; 
the stone is rolled, 
and one word describes it all: 
Alleluia! 
Jesus is risen!

Leader: We thought you had said your final word. 
We thought those with the power had won. 
We thought that when you cried out, 
that was it. 
But this is it:

All: the word breathes; 
the powers are defeated; 
the final cry was only the beginning, 
and one word says it all: 
Alleluia! 
Jesus is risen!

Leader: We thought the story was finished. 
We thought the hope had ended. 
We thought that when the tomb was sealed, 
that was it. 
But this is it:

All: the story has just begun; 
the hope is newly born; 
the tomb is empty, 
and one word says it all: 
Alleluia! 
Jesus is risen!

Leader: This is the news:

All: Jesus is risen!

Leader: This is the moment

All: Jesus is alive!

Leader: This is the gospel

All: Jesus is with us!

Leader: We thought that when they crucified you, 
death had defeated life, 
and that was it. 
But this is it:

All: Love is stronger than death, 
and one word says it all: 
Alleluia! 
Jesus is risen!

We believe

Adults: We believe in resurrection: 
we believe that stones roll 
and dawn breaks, 
that grave clothes are folded 
and gravestones opened. 
We believe death is not all there is.

Children: And you cannot whisper alleluia.

Adults: We believe in resurrection: 
we believe Jesus died 
and rose again, 
that he spoke to Mary 
and left footprints in the dew. 
We believe Jesus is alive again.

Children: And you cannot whisper alleluia.

Adults: We believe in resurrection: 
we believe we live 
in the Good News of love, 
that grace has broken free 
and death is vanquished.

Children: And you cannot whisper alleluia.

All: Alleluia!

Blessing

May resurrection grasp you 
and never let you go. 
May the word speak in you 
and never be quiet. 
May promise surround you 
and never be broken, 
and may the God of life, 
the Spirit of hope, 
and the Son of resurrection, 
ever and always be with us all.

Praise Songs / Hymns

At dawn the women made their way (CH4) 
Comes Mary to the grave (CH4) 
I danced in the morning (CH4/JP) 
I know that my Redeemer lives (CH4/MP) 
I tread on the grass (Lord of the morning) (WGRG) 
Jesus Christ is risen today (CH4) 
Jesus is risen, alleluia! (CH4) 
Jesus is risen from the grave (CH4) 
Led like a lamb (MP) 
Haven’t you heard (CH4) 
Meekness and majesty (MP) 
Now the green blade riseth (CH4) 
Now is Christ risen from the dead (MP) 
Roll the stone (JP) 
Sing and celebrate (Easter) (JP) 
Thine be the glory (CH4/MP) 
To God be the glory (CH4/MP)
worship ideas

crafts

Funky Foam Eggs  age 3-5

You will need: funky foam egg shapes, stickers, shapes, words, glitter pens.

Provide egg shapes cut out of funky foam and a selection of things with which the children can decorate their eggs.

Easter Garden  age 6-8

You will need: stones and rocks, different coloured sheets, flowers, moss or turf, and imagination.

Create a model of the Easter Garden and while making it talk about what happened in the garden.

Chocolate Nests

You will need: box of all bran, melted chocolate, cup cake cases, mini eggs, or hard boiled eggs and coloured pens.

Make chocolate nests with all bran and put mini eggs in them or decorate hard boiled eggs.

Easter Cards  all age

You will need: coloured card, variety of colouring pens/pencils, stickers.

Make Easter cards to give to family, friends or perhaps elderly people in community.

activities

Easter Garden  age 6-8

You will need: stones and rocks, different coloured sheets, flowers, moss or turf, and imagination.

Create a model of the Easter Garden and while making it talk about what happened in the garden.

Celebration Egg

You will need: carton of 5 raw eggs plus one egg blown out and dried and filled with confetti (to cover the hole use white tissue paper), a bowl.

Crush one of the eggs with your hand into the bowl, it is what you expected. Do it again or ask a child to do it. With the egg with the confetti, tell everyone you are going to smash this egg and throw it over them—when you do it they will be covered with confetti.

Surprise, surprise

You will need: have a number of different tins/boxes available. For example, a cake tin, sweets tin, cereal box, egg box, etc. Fill them with something unexpected: e.g. cake tin with wool, sweet tin with eggs, egg box with nails, and so on.

Ask people to guess what is in each tin or box. But what do they have in common? What was inside was unexpected. Link to the unexpected nature of Jesus being alive when everyone expected a dead body within the tomb.

Headlines


Retell the story using these words within it and whenever the children hear these words they have to cheer.

Give each child some newspaper which they can roll up into a megaphone and shout ‘Hallelujah’.

Mosaic Crosses  age 9-12

You will need: white bathroom wall tiles, mosaic tiles, PVA glue.

On the white tiles, which are cheaply bought at DIY stores, create a cross with different coloured mosaic tiles using plenty of PVA glue.

Mosaic tiles can be bought online from www.mosaicheaven.com.

Easter Cards  all age

You will need: coloured card, variety of colouring pens/pencils, stickers.

Make Easter cards to give to family, friends or perhaps elderly people in community.

your notes
feedback

The Spill the Beans Team would greatly appreciate any feedback you may have to offer on the use of these materials. Please keep a note here of what works well, anything you have problems with, or improvements you think could be made as you use the material.

At the end of this pilot period, please email your feedback to Roddy Hamilton:

rghamilton@ntlworld.com

Thank you!