



## **Stories on the Way: Lesson Plans for Small Sunday Schools**

### **The Passion and Resurrection of Christ (paraphrase of Matthew 26-28)**

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## **A Note**

Although these lessons are to be taught before Easter, I decided to treat the Passion and Resurrection as a whole. I am uncomfortable about leaving children at the crucifixion. This is especially true if you can't count on them being present for a future lesson on the Resurrection. I would, however, encourage you to find ways to make at least some of your Holy Week services accessible to children. Intergenerational liturgy is a more appropriate context to let children experience the story in "real time". You could even consider planning special family services – see the lesson plan *Servant to All* in the Last Supper Unit for one possibility.

## **The Passion and Resurrection of Christ**

Jesus knew that the leaders of the temple and the city did not like what he was teaching people. They were worried that so many people would follow him that they would not be able to stay in charge of Jerusalem. Jesus knew that they wanted to kill him so that he would not be able to keep teaching and he knew that one of his disciples, Judas, had helped them figure out how to do it. After he ate Passover supper with his disciples, he went to a garden in a place called Gethsemane to pray. He was scared and sad. He told God that he didn't want to be arrested. He didn't want to suffer and die. But he also told God that he would do whatever God wanted him to do because he trusted God to know what was best.

After Jesus had finished praying, Judas brought a crowd of people with swords and clubs into the garden. Jesus wouldn't let his disciples fight and they all ran away when the crowd arrested him because they were scared about what would happen to them. Even his close friend Peter told people that he didn't know Jesus.

Now Jesus was all alone with the people who arrested him. They took him to house of the high priest, the person in charge of the temple. All the other temple leaders were there, with a whole crowd of people, and they created a lie. They said that Jesus had *blasphemed* (said and done things that disrespected God) and that the right punishment for his crime was to be killed. In the morning, they took him to Pilate, the governor, who was in charge of the city, and had the power to sentence Jesus to death.

Pilate realized that the leaders of the temple were jealous of Jesus and scared by his teaching but he did not really see why Jesus should be killed. There was a custom that, at the Passover festival, the governor released one prisoner to the people, and Pilate hoped that he would be able to release Jesus. The crowd that had come wanted a different prisoner released instead and told Pilate that the government should kill Jesus. Pilate gave in to the crowd and sent Jesus away with the soldiers.

The soldiers beat Jesus up very badly. Then they took him to a hill, called Golgotha, where they crucified him along with two criminals. Crucifixion is a terrible way of killing people that

was used by the Roman government in those days to kill criminals and rebels. They did it on a hill so that everyone could see what the government could do to people it did not like. The people who saw Jesus made fun of him – even one of the criminals being crucified beside him made fun of him. All of his disciples had run away except for some of the women who watched from a little ways away.

At noon, an amazing thing happened. The sky got dark and stayed that way until about three o'clock, when Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you left me?" Then Jesus died. At that moment, there was an earthquake and the curtain in the temple split in two. The soldiers who were guarding Jesus were very scared and said, "This man really was God's Son!" That evening, a rich man who had followed Jesus came and got Jesus' body from the soldiers. He wrapped it in a clean cloth and put it in a tomb – a room that was carved into rock. A big stone was rolled in front of the tomb to close it and soldiers were sent to guard it and make sure that no one stole Jesus' body.

All the people who loved Jesus were very sad and very scared – they did not know what might happen to Jesus' disciples.

As soon as they were able, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who also followed Jesus, went back to see the tomb. There was an earthquake and an angel came and rolled away the stone in front of the tomb. The guards were terrified and fainted. But the angel said to the two women, "Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here anymore – he has been raised from the dead and is alive. Go quickly and tell the other disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee – there you will see him."

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary ran off, full of joy. Suddenly, Jesus himself was in front of them. They rushed to him and knelt before him, holding his legs and worshipping him. Then Jesus said, "Do not be afraid. Go give my message to the others. I will see them in Galilee."

The sadness and fear of the people who loved Jesus was turned into great joy!

## **Saying No (Passion and Resurrection Lesson 1)**

This lesson repeats the activity from *Choose Life* (Commandments Lesson 3). The repeated activity highlights the repeated lesson and draws a link between the Word as found in the Commandments and the Word as found in Jesus. I do not, however, think you need to worry about making that link explicit.

Things to know about this lesson:

- To make up for all the talking and listening in this lesson, the activity is easy and involves lots of running. You will need a decent amount of open space.

**Open with prayer.**

### **Introduce the Story**

Who remembers what church season we are in right now? (Lent)

And what is Lent for? (getting ready for Easter by focusing on God and thinking about how God wants us to live)

Lent is also a time for us to pay attention to the bad, sinful things in the world. These are things that are dangerous and sad – things that hurt us, other people and the rest of creation instead of helping.

Before Easter comes, we have to go through the story about Jesus dying. This story is sometimes called the Passion of Jesus or the Suffering of Jesus. It is a very sad story about the terrible things that people can do to other people. It is also an important story because it reminds us that we have to pay attention to the bad things. If we don't pay attention to them, we can't say "no" to them. And God wants us to say "no" – when God raised Jesus from the dead on Easter, God said "no" to all those bad things and wants us to join in.

We are going to read the Passion story today

### **Read the Story (see page 2)**

### **Discussion**

The leaders of the temple and the government killed Jesus because of fear, jealousy, greed, and their desire to stay in charge no matter what. Because of these terrible feelings, they lied, cheated, beat Jesus up, and finally killed him.

Jesus' friends also did something bad. Do you remember what they did? (betrayed)

him/ran away when he was in trouble)

Can you think of some other bad, sinful things in the world? (war, hunger, drugs, racism, pollution)

What about some of the bad things that we do or experience sometimes? (lying, not sharing, picking on other people, being selfish, not doing our work)

These are the things that God wants us to say NO to.

The good news is that there are lots of wonderful things in the world, too – things that help people live in loving, fair, happy ways. Those are the things that God says “yes” to and that we should say “Yes” to. What are some of those things? (peace, sharing, friendships, family, nature)

What happened at the end of the story? (Jesus was raised – introduce the word ‘resurrection’)

Jesus’ resurrection doesn’t mean that the bad things never happened to him but it does mean that the bad things weren’t stronger than the good things of life and love and God. It means that we can trust the good things even when the bad things seem to be really strong – we can say “no” to the bad things.

## **Introduce the Activity**

We’re going to use our bodies to say yes and no. This side of the room is the Yes Side. This side (the other side) is the No Side. I will call out something and you have to decide which side of the room to run to. For example, if I say racism, you would run, as fast as you can, to the....No side.

## **Play the Game**

After each call, bring the students back to the centre. Don’t simply alternate back and forth – try to keep them guessing as to which direction they will have to run next. Here are some call suggestions:

racism	fear	hate
war	love	violence
lying	loneliness	good food
jealousy	forgiveness	trees
God	trust	joy
fun	family	security/safety
hunger	friends	
pollution	cheating	

## **Regrouping**

Gather the students and congratulate them on their speed.

That was an easy and fun way to say yes to good things and no to bad things. It's not always so easy in real life, though. Forgiving people instead of fighting with them, sharing things instead of keeping them for yourself, telling the truth instead of lying – those are all ways of saying no to bad things and yes to good things but they can be very hard to do. Let's say a prayer for God to help us.

## **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for raising him from the dead so that we can join you and Jesus in saying no to the bad things in the world and yes to the good things. Amen.

## **The Passion**

### **(Passion and Resurrection Lesson 2)**

This lesson is designed for use on Palm/Passion Sunday. Operating under the assumption that, if your church observes Palm Sunday, the children will have participated in the procession, the lesson focuses on the Passion.

Things to know about this lesson:

- The story is long. And I ask you to read it twice. I would discourage you from editing it, though, as it really is the core of the lesson and there should not be too much discussion. It's also broken up and made interactive so the children should be able to handle it.
- You need to buy paper plates for making masks.

#### **Materials**

- paper plates
- crayons/markers/pencil crayons

#### **Open with prayer.**

#### **Introduce the Story**

Today has a special name. In fact, it has two special names. Does anyone know one of them?

It is called Palm Sunday because many churches remember the day that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the last time before his death and resurrection. A crowd of people was waiting for him and waved palm leaves and were very happy to see him. (Describe your church's tradition of a procession, if you have one.) It's hard to imagine that, just a short time after that wonderful welcome, Jesus would be killed.

This day is also called Passion Sunday because many churches (including ours?) tell the whole story about Jesus' suffering and death as a way to get ready for Holy Week. Holy Week is the week before Easter when we have special services for thinking about all that Jesus went through before his resurrection. On Thursday, we will have a service about the Last Supper. On Friday, we will have a service about Jesus' crucifixion. And, finally, late on Saturday night and/or on Sunday morning, we will have a big celebration about Jesus' resurrection.

We are not going to have a Palm Sunday lesson today but we are going to have a Passion Sunday lesson. The word passion comes from an old Greek word that means to have strong feelings. We're going to read the passion story slowly and talk about the strong feelings that we can see in it.

## **Read the Story I**

Jesus knew that the leaders of the temple and the city did not like what he was teaching people. They were worried that so many people would follow him that they would not be able to stay in charge of Jerusalem. Jesus knew that they wanted to kill him so that he would not be able to keep teaching and he knew that one of his disciples, Judas, had helped them figure out how to do it. After he ate Passover supper with his disciples, he went to a garden in a place called Gethsemane to pray. He told God that he didn't want to be arrested. He didn't want to suffer and die. But he also told God that he would do whatever God wanted him to do because he trusted God to know what was best.

## **Discussion I**

How did Jesus feel? (scared, sad, angry, determined, trusting)

## **Read the Story II**

After he finished praying, Judas brought a crowd of people with swords and clubs into the garden. Jesus wouldn't let his disciples fight and they all ran away when the crowd arrested him because they were scared about what would happen to them. Even his close friend Peter told people that he didn't know Jesus.

## **Discussion II**

How did Jesus feel? (scared, sad, angry, betrayed, hurt)

How did his disciples feel? (sad, ashamed, scared)

## **Read the Story III**

Now Jesus was all alone with the people who arrested him. They took him to house of the high priest, the person in charge of the temple. All the other temple leaders were there, with a whole crowd of people, and they created a lie. They said that Jesus had *blasphemed* and that the right punishment for his crime was to be killed. In the morning, they took him to Pilate, the governor, who was in charge of the city, and had the power to sentence Jesus to death.

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The soldiers beat Jesus up very badly. Then they took him to a hill, called Golgotha, where they crucified him along with two criminals. Crucifixion is a terrible way of killing people that was used by the Roman government in those days to kill criminals and rebels. They did it on a hill so that everyone could see what the government could

do to people it did not like. The people who saw Jesus made fun of him – even one of the criminals being crucified beside him made fun of him. None of his disciples were there except for some of the women who watched from a little distance away.

### **Discussion III**

How did Jesus feel?

How did his disciples feel?

How did the women who were watching feel?

### **Read the Story IV**

At noon, an amazing thing happened. The sky got dark and stayed that way until about three o'clock. Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you left me?" Then Jesus died. At that moment, there was an earthquake and the curtain in the temple split in two. The soldiers who were guarding Jesus were very scared and said, "This man really was God's Son!"

That evening, a rich man who had followed Jesus came and got Jesus' body from the soldiers. He wrapped it in a clean cloth and put it in a tomb – a room that was carved into rock. A big stone was rolled in front of the tomb to close it and soldiers were sent to guard it and make sure that no one stole Jesus' body.

All the people who loved Jesus were very sad and very scared – they did not know what might happen to Jesus' disciples.

As soon as they were able, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who also followed Jesus, went back to see the tomb. There was an earthquake and an angel came and rolled away the stone in front of the tomb. The guards were terrified and fainted. But the angel said to the two women, "Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here anymore – he has been raised from the dead and is alive. Go quickly and tell the other disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee – there you will see him." Mary Magdalene and the other Mary ran off, full of joy. Suddenly, Jesus himself was in front of them. They rushed to him and knelt before him, holding his legs and worshipping him. Then Jesus said, "Do not be afraid. Go give my message to the others. I will see them in Galilee."

### **Discussion IV**

Now how did Jesus feel?

How did the two Marys feel?

How are his disciples going to feel?

Can you remember all the feelings we identified?

Can you think of times when you felt those different feelings? (yes or no) Are there any you have not felt at all before?

I hope that you have never felt as scared or worried as Jesus did, although I'm sure that you have felt at least a little scared and worried sometimes. There are people in the world who probably have felt like Jesus, though - people who are in great danger. Jesus understands those people and is with them in their trouble. He doesn't want them to be in so much danger, any more than he wanted to be killed himself. He wants them to feel the great joy he and his disciples felt after his resurrection – and he wants other people to help them.

### **Introduce the Activity**

We are going to make masks that show the different feelings of Jesus and his friends. When we're done, we'll read the story again and use the masks at the right times.

### **Make the Masks**

Distribute paper plates and crayons/markers/pencil crayons. Everyone should make a happy face mask on one side of their plate and one of the other emotions identified on the other side of their plate.

### **Story with Masks**

Read the story again, without the discussion breaks (**see page 2**) and have the students hold up the appropriate masks. Cue as necessary. When you reach the end, rejoice with the happy masks for a few moments – you had to wait quite a while to use them.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for being with people when they are sad and scared and angry as well as when they are happy. Help us to do everything we can to make the world a place of joy and safety for all your children. Amen.