

ASSEMBLIES TO USE BEFORE EASTER

Four assembly outlines are given to use before Easter. They introduce the themes of the Easter story and are a good introduction to the workshops that will be held in the church.

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THE GREATEST LOVE

Aim: to consider how God showed his love for the world through what Jesus did at Easter

You will need:

- a chocolate bar, a football shirt or football, a DVD of a popular children's TV programme or recent film, a baby doll or a large picture of a baby
- two large bags
- signs saying 'eat it'; 'cheer and shout at it'; 'watch it'; 'look after it'

Preparation:

- Create the signs by printing or writing the words onto A4 sheets of card. Use large lower-case letters so that children will be able to read them from the back of the hall. To make these more durable, you could laminate them.
- Put the objects in one bag, and the signs in the other.

Introduction

Ask children if they know what festival is celebrated at the end of the week/late in the term - it's Easter. But what is Easter all about? You can probably think of things that you do at Easter – maybe you eat chocolate, or see friends and family, and you'll have some days off school. But what are we celebrating at Easter? That's what this assembly is about.

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Explain that in the bag are some of your favourite things in the world. You love these things, and you wonder if any of the children love them too.

Invite a child up to pick something out of the bag and then comment on it. For example, if it's the chocolate, talk about how much you love chocolate. Invite children to put up their hands if they love chocolate too. Say that we know we mustn't eat too much chocolate but a little bit every now and then is fantastic and very delicious. Ask the child to hold the chocolate so everyone can see it.

Invite three more children, one at a time, to pick out the other items and comment on each of them. The football shirt could get some friendly rivalry going – you may want to end up asking who loves the game of football rather than that particular team! You could talk about your own baby daughter/nephew/godchild; ask the children who has a baby brother or sister that they love. Make sure you pick a film or TV programme that you genuinely love as well as it being one that children will like. You could talk briefly about a favourite scene/episode. You'll end up with four children standing in a line holding their items.

Then ask what we do to show our love for these things? Say that you have some suggestions in your other bag. Deal out the cards, or fan them out and get the children to pick one and read it out.

Then say that you wonder which item should go with which action, and deliberately mix them up. For example, give the card saying 'eat it' to the child with the baby; the card saying 'watch it' to the child with the chocolate; the card saying 'cheer and shout at it' to the child with the DVD; and the card saying 'look after it' to the child with the football. Ask the children if that's the right way round. Follow their suggestions for a better match of actions and items! Baby – look after it; chocolate – eat it; football – cheer and shout at it; DVD – watch it.

Summarise so far: We show our love for these things by the way that we treat them and the things we do with them or for them. Our actions show how much we love these things. Thank the children for their participation and ask them to sit down.

Explain that at Easter, we celebrate the fact that God loves us and we remember what God did to show that love. Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- God showed his great love for the world through what Jesus did at Easter.
- Jesus was God's son who came to earth to live as a man and to tell people and show people what God is like.
- Jesus died and came back to life so that we can know God and have a future with God. That's what we celebrate at Easter.
- So this Easter Sunday, you might like to stop and think: Easter is the way that God shows how much he loves me.

If the children will be coming to the church to take part in the workshops, talk about that briefly here and explain that they will hear the whole Easter story on that day.

Reflection and prayer

Invite children to think quietly for a moment about the people that they love and how they show that love. How can they show their love to others? What could they do for their mum or dad, or brother or sister, to show how much they love them?

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Dear God

Thank you for your love for us and for all the world.

Thank you that you sent Jesus to live here on earth, to die and to come back to life.

Help us to remember this Easter just how much you love us; help us to show that love to other people.

Amen

FORGIVENESS

Aim: to talk about the forgiveness that Jesus offers us through his death and resurrection

You'll need:

- a story from your own childhood about a time when you got into trouble and had to face a punishment.
- if appropriate, some props to illustrate the story – see below for an example

Preparation

- rehearse your story so that it flows well and will engage the children
- gather and/or make your props

Introduction

Ask children if they know what festival is celebrated at the end of the week/late in the term – it's Easter. But what is Easter all about? You can probably think of things that you do at Easter – maybe you eat chocolate, or see friends and family, and you'll have some days off school. But what are we celebrating at Easter? We're going to think about one very important thing that Easter is all about.

Content

Tell a story from your own childhood about a time when you got into trouble and had to face a punishment, and what it is like to be forgiven. This is a very simple idea, but children love to hear stories about when adults were naughty! They will probably be able to identify with the reasons why you did it, the feeling of dread when something went wrong, and the expectation of punishment or being told off.

You'll use the story to talk about forgiveness. Maybe you have a story where you were actually forgiven and didn't have to face the consequences of what you had done. If not, you could talk about what actually happened, but then ask them to imagine that the story ended in forgiveness – 'What if my Dad had said, "I forgive you. Let's start again. It's as if this never happened." What would that be like?' Explain that forgiveness means that you don't have to face the consequences of what you have done wrong.

It's important to be honest when telling stories – if something didn't happen to you, then don't pretend that it did. You could however tell a story about someone else's misdemeanour. 'I want to tell you about a boy called Martin...'

You may like to get children to act out some of the story, using some props. For example, a school worker who has used this idea tells the story of when he and his brother were playing football in his Aunt's garden. They promised their Dad they would be careful, but ended up smashing her greenhouse! The school worker made a mock greenhouse from a plastic sheet with black tape on the top to represent the panes of glass; two helpers held this up. He built up the tension by explaining the lengths he and his brother had gone to, to persuade their Dad to let them play football. He got a couple of children out to gently kick a football to each other, and

then on his signal one of them kicked it at the greenhouse which the helpers then let collapse.

Having told your story, talk about the forgiveness that Jesus offers us. Explain that Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- God created a beautiful world and gave it to people to enjoy and to look after. But we haven't done a very good job. We can see lots of things that are wrong with the world – war, poverty and suffering. And we know that we do lots of things that are wrong – we hurt people, we tell lies, we're selfish. The Bible calls this sin, and it stops us being close to God.
- But instead of us having to stay like that, Jesus came to earth to enable us to be close to God again. At Easter we remember that Jesus offers us forgiveness for everything that we have done wrong. He wipes it all away and enables us to be close to God.

If the children will be coming to the church to take part in the workshops, talk about that briefly here and explain that they will hear the whole Easter story on that day.

Prayer

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Dear God

We are sorry for all the wrong things that we do.

Thank you that you sent Jesus so that we can be forgiven.

Thank you that we can be close to you again.

Amen.

FORFEITS AND PRIZES

Aim: to explain that Jesus has paid the price for our wrongdoing, to enable us to be in relationship with God.

You'll need:

- prizes – in the current healthy-eating climate of schools it's best not to hand out sweets or chocolate. You could give a small bottle of fruit smoothie, or a fairtrade healthy snack bar.
- a forfeit - chocolate, a packet of lemon jelly and a clean empty tin of dog food with the label still attached; or a tin of beef stew and a tin of dog food.
- a fork
- a tin opener if you choose the second option for the forfeit
- flour, bowl, plate, jelly babies, table knife if you choose to play the flour cake game

Preparation:

- The forfeit involves eating 'dog food' and you will be doing this, rather than the children! One option is to fill the clean empty dog food tin with chopped up chocolate. Make up the lemon jelly according to the instructions on the packet and pour it into the tin, leaving it to set. Or carefully take the labels off both of the cans, and put the dog food label onto the can of stew. When you open the can and show the contents to pupils, it will look like dog food, but only you will know that it's not. Keep the 'dog food' and fork hidden from view at the start of the assembly.
- Choose one of these four games that you will get the children to play. Each of them is fun and has a clear winner and loser.
 - **Game one - Word association.** (If you're over a certain age, you may remember this as Mallett's Mallet!) Get two children to sit facing each other at the front. Give a word to start the game. Each child has to say another word that's related to the previous one in some way. They are not allowed to repeat a word that has already been said, hesitate or say a random word. Give each child three lives – if they lose all those they have to pay a forfeit. Words to try:

water	dog	chocolate	football
party	Easter	music	sausages
 - **Game two - Simon says.** Get a few children out the front to play in front of the school. Issue instructions such as 'Simon says hop on one leg', 'Simon says stick your tongue out', 'sit down!'. If the instruction begins 'Simon says...' they have to do it; if it doesn't they should stay as they are. Anyone moving when they shouldn't has to pay a forfeit. Give them a trial run to get into the game.
 - **Game three - Tongue twisters.** Get two or three children out and see who can say a tongue twister the most times clearly. Start with simple ones and progress from there.

Unique New York
Selfish shellfish
Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry
Mrs Smith's Fish Sauce Shop

- **Game four - The flour cake game.** Please note, this is not the game to choose if you have never done an assembly before! Fill a bowl with flour and press it down. Place a large plate over the top and invert the bowl so that you end up with a cake of flour on the plate. (You will need to turn out the cake at the school.) Put a jelly baby in the centre. Get two or three children out to take part. Contestants take it in turn to cut a slice from the cake; the one who makes the jelly baby fall down has to do the forfeit which is to pick it up with their mouth from the flour. You won't need to prepare the 'dog food' forfeit for this assembly. Encourage children to cut big slices at the start.
- **Important** Talk to the head teacher about what you are planning to do and ask him or her to choose children to take part who will be able to cope with losing in front of everybody, and with the thought of eating dog food. (Remember they don't have to eat it – you do!) You don't want a sensitive child bursting into tears because they have lost!

Introduction

Ask children if they know what festival is celebrated at the end of the week/later in the term - it's Easter. But what is Easter all about? You can probably think of things that you do at Easter – maybe you eat chocolate, or see friends and family, and you'll have some days off school. But what are we celebrating at Easter? We're going to think about one very important thing that Easter is all about.

Content

Explain that you're going to play a game and invite your pre-selected volunteers to the front. Explain the rules of the game and that they have the chance to win some great prizes, but that if they lose they will have to do a forfeit. Get them to agree that they are happy to do the forfeit without revealing what it is. Play the game until you have a loser.

Congratulate the person who has to do the forfeit on their effort and on how close the game was. Then bring out the can of 'dog food' with a flourish and explain the forfeit. Show them the open can of 'dog food', produce the fork and say that they need to eat it all up. Allow some time for some reaction – ask how they feel? Have they ever eaten dog food before? Are they hungry? Let them 'enjoy' the moment.

Then say, 'You lost the game, so really you should have to do the forfeit. But what if I do this forfeit for you, and give you a prize instead? Would you like that? How do you feel about that?' Hand over the prize, and eat some of the 'dog food'.

Explain that this is an illustration of what Easter is all about. Explain that Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- God created a beautiful world and gave it to people to enjoy and to look after. But we haven't done a very good job. We can see lots of things that are wrong with the world – war, poverty and suffering. And we know that we do lots of things that are wrong – we hurt people, we tell lies, we're selfish. The Bible calls this sin, and it stops us being close to God.
- Because we have all sinned we deserve to be separated from God when we die – that's our forfeit if you like. But Jesus stepped in and said that he would pay the forfeit instead of us. Jesus died on the cross even though he hadn't done anything wrong, so that we could be close to God again. He came back to life to show us that God loves and accepts us. We don't have to pay the forfeit because Jesus has done it for us.

If the children will be coming to the church to take part in the workshops, talk about that briefly here and explain that they will hear the whole Easter story on that day.

Prayer

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Dear God

We know that the wrong things we have done come between you and us.

We thank you that Jesus died so that we could be close to you again.

Help us to remember that this Easter.

Amen

BRIDGING THE GAP

Aim: to explain that Jesus 'bridges the gap' between God and people, enabling us to be in a relationship with God again.

You'll need:

- a banana skin
- some old children's magazines
- lots of 'rubbish' - screwed up newspapers, cardboard cereal boxes, larger cardboard boxes. You need to create a large volume of rubbish that is fairly quick to clear up so go for a few big items rather than lots of little items
- some toys - a football, small foam ball, some cards, a book

Preparation:

- This can be used as a straight story; invite the children to imagine what's happening. Or enlist the help of a couple of children to act it out who will need to respond to what you are saying. You can suggest actions that they should do during the story.

Introduction

Ask children if they know what festival is celebrated at the end of the week/late in the term - it's Easter. But what is Easter all about? You can probably think of things that you do at Easter – maybe you eat chocolate, or see friends and family, and you'll have some days off school. But what are we celebrating at Easter? We're going to think about one very important thing that Easter is all about.

Content

Read the following story which illustrates the barrier between God and people that is caused by our sin. Two children could act out the parts of Katie and Simon while you read. Their actions will be obvious from the script. Katie should start with the smaller pieces of rubbish, and then put the bigger ones on top. While Katie is adding rubbish, Simon should be playing with the toys rather than just standing there. You may need to extend the description of Simon clearing up the stream so that it ties in with his actions - add in more descriptions of working hard and clearing up!

The story

Katie and Simon were friends. They lived next door to each other and saw each other every day. In between their gardens there was a beautiful, shallow stream. They used to splash across the stream to each other's gardens and have fun together. Sometimes, they used to play in the water together. Each night they slept in their own beds, but every morning before school they went to the bottom of the garden to say 'hello' to each other.

One day Katie woke up feeling rather grumpy. She ate a banana for her breakfast and went down to the stream to say hello to Simon. But when she left to go to school, she threw the banana skin over her shoulder and it landed in the stream.

After school, Katie's Mum asked her to tidy up her room which made her even more cross. She collected up a load of old magazines and went outside. She could see that Simon was playing and she felt envious that she couldn't play too. Simon waved to her, but instead of waving back, she threw the magazines into the stream.

The next morning Katie went out to see Simon as usual. Simon said to her 'Why have you made such a mess of our stream? Don't you think you should clear it up?' She felt annoyed that he was telling her what to do, so she threw some more rubbish in the stream.

And so it went on. Katie got into the habit of throwing rubbish in the stream. She forgot that Simon was her friend. She forgot the fun she used to have playing in the stream with him. She forgot how beautiful the stream used to be. She threw so much rubbish in the stream that she could hardly see Simon any more.

One day Simon came down to the garden as usual, to try to wave to Katie. He saw the huge mound of rubbish and he felt very sad. He could remember the fun and the beauty and the games, and he wanted to be friends with Katie again. And so he started to clear up.

He moved the boxes, and the paper, and the rubbish. He worked hard all day clearing and tidying and making the stream beautiful. He fished out all the magazines that Katie had dropped in the stream, and even the banana skin that she had thrown in at the beginning.

That evening Katie came out to the garden with some rubbish to throw in the stream. But she stopped in amazement. She could see the beautiful stream; she could see space to play; and she could see Simon again smiling and waving to her. She waved back, and called out, 'I'm sorry that I made all that mess. Thank you for clearing it up.' And Simon splashed across the stream to her with his football, and they had lots of fun playing again.

And if ever Katie was tempted to throw some rubbish in the stream again, she remembered all the work that Simon had done to clear things up and she put it in the bin instead.

Invite the children to give a round of applause to your actors, and get them to sit down. Explain that Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- this story is a picture of our relationship with God. God created us to be friends with him. He loves us and wants to spend time with us.
- but there are lots of things that come between God and us. The rubbish in the story represents some of the things we do wrong that spoil our relationship with God - when we hurt other people, or tell lies, or we're selfish it's like the rubbish piling up in the stream. The Bible calls this 'sin'. These things come between God and us so that we forget that God loves us and is our friend.
- but the good news is that God has done something to clear up all the rubbish and that's what we celebrate at Easter. Even though Jesus didn't make the mess between us and God, like Simon, he has cleared it all away. Christians believe that God sent Jesus to live here on earth to tell us all about God and to remind us that God loves us. And then Jesus died on the cross and came back to life to get rid of all the sin between God and us. Now we can be close to God again.

If the children will be coming to the church to take part in the workshops, talk about that briefly here and explain that they will hear the whole Easter story on that day.

Reflection and prayer

Invite children to reflect on their friendships. Can they remember a time when they fell out with someone - maybe they had an argument or they upset each other? How did they feel? And what was it like when they made friends again? How did that feel?

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Dear God

We are sorry for all the wrong things we do that stop us being close to you.

Thank you that Jesus came so that we can be close to you again.

Amen.