

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

47. A PRAYING COMMUNITY

Bible Base: Acts 12: 1-19

Key Christian Belief: The first Christians prayed together.

Aim: To help children understand that the church is a praying community.

Introduction

Tell a few 'Knock! Knock!' jokes and ask the children if they know any too. E.g:

'Knock! Knock!'

'Who's there?'

'Me!'

'Me who?'

'Miaow!'

Explain that today's Bible story is about someone who heard a knock on the door and got a very surprising answer when she asked 'Who's there?' As you tell the story, invite the children to join in, in the usual way, every time you say 'Knock! Knock!'

Story

Peter was in bed asleep when he heard someone knocking loudly on the door.

'Knock! Knock!'

'Who's there?'

'Soldiers!'

'Soldiers who?'

'Soldiers who have come to arrest you!'

'Arrest me? What for?' Peter asked as he opened the door. 'Are you Peter from Capernaum, ex-fisherman, brother of Andrew, follower of Jesus?' asked one of the soldiers, reading from his notes. 'I am' replied Peter. 'Well' said the soldier 'it says here you've been telling people about Jesus.'

'So - what's wrong with that?' asked Peter. 'Your leaders don't like it' replied the soldier. 'They've told you to stop again and again and you still keep on doing it. They say you're a trouble-maker and they've sent us to arrest you and take you to prison.'

'I've always obeyed my leaders' replied Peter 'but I can't stop telling people about Jesus. It's what God wants me to do. This time, I have to obey God even if it means disobeying my leaders.' 'We don't know about that, mate' said the soldier roughly 'but our orders are clear. We're to take you to prison. Now come quietly!'

So Peter was taken off to prison. (*Walk across to the other side of the stage.*)

'Knock! Knock!'

'Who's there?'

'Soldiers!'

'Soldiers who?'

'Soldiers who have brought Peter here to be locked up.'

The prison guards turned the keys, and pulled back the bolts and slowly the big prison door opened. The guards led Peter inside and took him through several doors to a dark cell, where he was chained to two soldiers so that he could not escape. And just to make sure, all the doors he had gone through were locked and bolted behind him.

Next day news of Peter's arrest spread and that night all the Christians gathered in Mary's house to pray for Peter. *(Walk back to the other side of the stage.)*

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'Matthew!'
'Matthew who?'
'Mathew who has come to pray for Peter.'

It was Rhoda the servant girl who answered the door and took Matthew into the room where others had gathered to pray for Peter. They were just about to start when...

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'Thomas, Andrew and Martha!'
'Thomas, Andrew and Martha who?'
'Thomas, Andrew and Martha who have come to pray for Peter.'

So Thomas, Andrew and Martha joined the others. Again, they were just about to start when...

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'John, Mark, Barnabas, Silas, Philip and Nathaniel!'
'John, Mark, Barnabas, Silas, Philip and Nathaniel who?'
'John, Mark, Barnabas, Silas, Philip and Nathaniel who have come to pray for Peter.'

And so it went on until it seemed like the whole church had come to pray for Peter. Meanwhile... *(Walk across to the other side of the stage again.)*

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'It's the duty officer!'
'It's the duty officer who?'
'It's the duty officer who has come to bring the prisoner's supper.'

'Come in!' grunted one of the soldiers. Peter drank the water and slowly ate the bread. Then, still chained to the soldiers, he lay down and began to drift off to sleep. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the room and Peter thought he saw a man dressed in white standing there. The man seemed to put his fingers to his lips and whisper 'Quick - put your sandals on and follow me!'

As Peter did so, his chains seemed to fall away and the doors opened silently in front of him. 'I must be dreaming' he thought. 'I'll waken up in a minute!' Before he knew it, however, he was outside in the street with the big prison doors locked and bolted firmly behind him. A cold blast of air hit him and suddenly he was wide-awake. It hadn't been a dream. He was free. God had sent His angel to rescue him!

Meanwhile (*walk back to the other side of the stage*) the Christians were still gathered in Mary's house praying for Peter - asking that God would be with him and help him to be brave and strong; asking that next morning he would be found not guilty of causing trouble and be set free. Just then...

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'Peter!'
'Peter who?'
'Peter who has just escaped from prison!'

Rhoda ran into the room where everyone was praying. 'Listen, everyone!' she called out, interrupting their prayers, 'It's Peter - he's at the door!'

'Impossible!' they all said. 'Peter is in prison!' 'Go and see who it really is; and be careful - it might be a trap.'

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'Peter!'
'Peter who?'
'I've told you - it's Peter who has just escaped from prison!'

'Are you sure?' called back Rhoda. 'Of course I am' said Peter. 'Haven't you been praying for me?' 'Yes - all night' answered Rhoda. 'Well' said Peter 'God has answered your prayers. He sent his angel to rescue me and here I am!'

Rhoda ran to tell the others. 'It is Peter!' she said, excitedly. 'He says God sent an angel to rescue him.' The others could hardly believe it. They had been praying for Peter - but they hadn't really expected God to answer their prayer - or at least not like this!

'Knock! Knock!'
'Who's there?'
'Peter!'
'Peter who?'
'Peter who is still standing out here and is now freezing! Will you please let me in?'

The others stared in amazement as Peter came in to the room. 'Thank you for your prayers' he said with a big smile. 'God certainly answered them!'

'Praise God!' they all said together.

Exploring Christian Belief

As we saw last time, the first Christians often met in each other's homes and one of the things they did was to pray together - praying for those who were sick or who needed help, praying that God would be with them and help them to tell others about Jesus. Isn't it strange that although they were praying, they didn't really expect God to answer their prayers - or at least not in the amazing way that he did.

Explain that Christians today still meet to pray together and talk about some of the ways in which this happens in your church.

Point out also that Christians believe God still answers their prayers - sometimes in surprising ways. Share some ways in which God has answered your church's prayers.

If it is true, tell the children that your church (or perhaps a group from your church) regularly prays for them and their school, mentioning some of the things you pray for.

(With prior permission you might say that in their classes they will have an opportunity, if they wish to do so, to write down something they would like your church or group to pray for. Tell them that their requests will be passed on and promise that your church or group will pray for them.)

Finally, suggest to the children that there is no reason why some of them shouldn't get together, say, at break or lunch time once a week, to pray for their school. Maybe the School Council or one of the teachers could help organise this or find a place for them to meet. Who knows in what surprising ways God may answer their prayers!

Prayer

Invite the children to think of one person, other than themselves, that they would like to pray for and of what they would like to ask God to do for them. Finish with a prayer thanking God that He answers our prayers and asking Him to answer those that the children have brought to Him this morning as He sees best.