

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

64. ZACCHAEUS

Bible Base: Luke 19: 1-10

Key Christian Belief: Jesus came to give us a new start.

Aim: To encourage children to consider ways in which Jesus might help them change.

Introduction

Ask the children if they have ever needed to make a new start. Tell a real or imaginary story along these lines:

Imagine you are doing your homework at home with the television switched on and a glass of orange juice sitting on the table beside you. After a while you look down at the page and realise that your writing has gone off the lines. You try rubbing some of it out but the rubber leaves a dirty mark. Then your pen starts leaking and leaves a blotch in the middle of the page. You spill your orange juice. Finally you realise that the only thing to do is to turn over a new leaf and start again - this time with the television switched off, a pen that does not leak and the orange juice well away from you.

Explain that today's story is about someone in the Bible who needed to make a new start. Ask for five volunteers to help you tell the story. One should be smaller than the others - so perhaps choose one younger and four older children.

Ask the rest of children to imagine that they are in the crowd watching as this story takes place and that they each have a camera with them (although of course they would not have had cameras in the days when this story takes place). At certain points in the story you will say 'Let's take a picture!' When they hear this they should pretend to hold a camera in front of them and look into the viewfinder. You will then say 'One! Two!' and they should say 'Click!' and pretend to take a picture.

Bible Story

Bring the smallest of your volunteers into the centre, beside you, and explain that he is to play the part of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus lived in a city called Jericho where he was a tax collector. It was his job to collect money from the people of Jericho and give it to the people in charge of the country who at this time were the Romans. Let's see what this might have looked like.

Bring three more of your volunteers into the centre. Ask them to line up diagonally opposite Zacchaeus (so that all can be seen). Ask Zacchaeus to put his hand out as if demanding money from them and to put on his meanest, greediest face. Ask the three volunteers to look totally disgusted as they search their pockets for some money to give him. Ask all four to 'freeze' in this position. 'Let's take a picture...'

Zaccheus was very rich. He lived in the nicest house in town and had loads of money. However, sadly, Zacchaeus had no friends. No one ever called round to ask him how he was. No one ever asked him round to their house for tea. In fact most people when they saw him in the street would cross to the other side to keep out of his way.

That was because they all knew something about Zacchaeus that wasn't very nice. When he came to collect their money, he often took far more than he should have done and instead of giving it to the people in charge, he put some of it in his own pocket and kept it for himself. He wasn't supposed to do that. But Zacchaeus was greedy, selfish and mean. He was dishonest. He was a thief - and nobody liked Zacchaeus.

One day, Zacchaeus noticed that a crowd had gathered in the street outside his house. So he opened his door and asked what was going on. 'Is there a circus coming to town?' he asked.

'No - there is no circus but Jesus is coming this way. He'll be here any minute now' they said.

Now Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus. One of his friends, Matthew, had left his job as a tax collector to go and follow Jesus and Zacchaeus wondered why anyone would do that. 'What's so special about Jesus?' he wondered. So he decided to find out for himself.

Unfortunately, Zacchaeus wasn't very tall and when he tried to join the crowd, everyone in front was bigger than him, and they wouldn't let him through.

Ask the three volunteers used previously to form a tight line, shoulder to shoulder, facing the audience. Ask Zacchaeus either to stand behind them trying to peep out between their shoulders or round the side. Then take an imaginary picture again...

'This is no good!' thought Zacchaeus. 'I can't see a thing from here. What am I going to do?' He tried standing on tiptoes and jumping up and down but nothing worked.

'I know!' he thought. 'There's a tree up the road here. I was always getting into trouble for climbing it when I was a wee boy. But I don't care anymore. I'm going to climb that tree! I'll be able to see everything from up there!'

So that's what Zacchaeus did. And sure enough, soon he could see Jesus in the distance coming along the road. The crowd were clapping and cheering and Jesus was coming nearer and nearer. Then Zacchaeus got the surprise of his life. Jesus stopped under the tree where Zacchaeus was hiding. He looked straight up at Zacchaeus and said 'Zacchaeus! Come down! I'm coming round to your house today!'

Place a chair in the centre of the stage. Ask the three volunteers to stand in front of this, squeezed tightly together with their backs to each other and to make tree branch shapes with their arms. Ask Zacchaeus to stand on the chair and to peer through the 'branches' of the 'tree'. Ask your fifth volunteer to play the part of Jesus and to stand close to the tree, pointing up at Zacchaeus. Ask Zacchaeus to look amazed and to point to himself as if asking 'Who - me?' Then take another imaginary picture.

Zacchaeus could hardly believe it. 'How did Jesus know I was here?' he thought. 'How does He know my name? And He's coming round to my house? No one ever comes to my house!'

He scrambled down the tree at once and took Jesus round to his house where he made Him something to eat and they both sat down for a chat.

Meanwhile the crowd mumbled to themselves. 'What on earth does Jesus want to go to his house for? Doesn't he know what sort of person Zacchaeus is?' Some time later, however, the door opened and out came Zacchaeus with Jesus by his side.

'Listen everyone' he said. 'I know that when I have collected money from you in the past I have often taken far more than I should have and I want you to know today that I am really, really sorry. So if I have stolen money from you, I promise to give you back four times as much as I stole. And what's more I am now going to give half of everything I own away to people who don't have all the nice things that I have.'

In the next few days, that is exactly what Zaacheus did.

Ask Zacchaeus and the original three volunteers to stand in the same position as in the first picture - only this time ask Zacchaeus to smile and to hold both hands out open wide as if giving money back. Ask the three volunteers to look totally amazed! Ask Jesus to stand beside Zacchaeus with his thumb up. Then take a final imaginary picture.

Well the crowd could not believe it. 'What has happened to him? they said. It seemed to them as if one Zacchaeus went into the house and a completely different one came out.

'I'll tell you what has happened to him' said Jesus. Today Zacchaeus has made a new start with God. It's like he was lost and far away from God but now he has been found and is back with God where he belongs. This is why I have come - to bring lost people like this back to God.'

Exploring Christian Belief

We don't know what Jesus and Zacchaeus talked about while they were alone together. But I imagine that Jesus told Zacchaeus that God loved Him and wanted Him to be His friend. No one had ever told him that before. Everyone told him that he didn't deserve to be a friend of God because of all the bad things he had done.

But Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was willing to take the blame for all the wrong things he had done. Because of this, God was ready to forgive him and now, if He wanted to be, even he could be a friend of God.

Zacchaeus knew that in order to be a friend of God, he would have to change. He couldn't go on cheating and being dishonest if He wanted to be a friend of God. He would have to learn to live God's way instead. Perhaps he thought he couldn't do it; he would never be able to change.

But Jesus would help him bit by bit to become a different person and somehow Zacchaeus knew that with Jesus help he could change and become the person that deep down inside he always wanted to be.

So Zacchaeus made up his mind that with Jesus help he would make a new start and he showed that he was sorry for the way he had behaved and was ready to change by starting to put things right.

Christians believe that this good news is for everyone. If Jesus were to come round to your house, I believe he would want to say exactly the same to you as he did to Zacchaeus. With Jesus help - anyone can be a friend of God. The Bible says that

because of what he has done for us we can be forgiven and with his help we can make a new start with God any time we need to!

Reflection and Prayer

Ask the children to imagine Jesus has called them by name and has come round to their house to chat to them. What might he want to talk to them about? In what ways would they like to ask Jesus to help them change?

Finish with a prayer asking God to help those who may need to, and would like to, to make a new start. For example, you could say sentences like...

‘If we have been selfish and greedy and have failed to share what we have with others...’

‘If we have been dishonest, and perhaps have hurt others by the lies we have told...’

‘If we have been mean, grumpy and rude...’

‘If we have been lazy and have not helped others as we could...’

The children could then join in with: ‘Please forgive us and help us to change.’

Song

‘Little Zac’ from the album ‘Songs That Jesus Said’ by Keith and Kirstyn Getty would fit well with this assembly.