

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

68. A PICNIC ON THE BEACH

Bible Base: John 21: 1-19

Key Christian Belief: Following Jesus means being forgiven.

Aim: To help children understand that Jesus is always ready to forgive us.

You will need:

- the attached PowerPoint presentation
- a chair centre stage for Peter to sit on
- six chairs arranged in a boat shape to one side of the stage
- some netting draped to the side of the 'boat' for added effect

Introduction

If you have ever seen a programme like 'It'll Be Alright On The Night' you will know that when they are filming, actors and presenters don't always get things right the first time. But when things go wrong they just start again and keep going until they get it right. *(Play the first clip from the attached PowerPoint presentation.)*

These days even cartoon characters sometimes get things wrong. Even they have to start again sometimes...or so we are meant to believe. *(Play the second clip.)*

It is good to be able to start again if you have got something wrong the first time. For example, if you have been doing your homework, or writing a letter to someone and made a mess of it, often you can just take a new page and start again.

But life is not always like that. You don't always get a second chance. Often life is more like live TV - where if you say or do something wrong, everyone sees and hears it and you can't go back and change it no matter how much you might want to.

Bible Story

(Either use the pictures from the PowerPoint presentation attached to tell the story or choose some volunteers to act it out as below.)

Peter wished that he could go back and start again but he couldn't. It was too late. He had messed up and everyone knew it. He had had his chance to stand up for Jesus and he had blown it. He had let everyone down.

Choose a volunteer to act as Peter and have him sit in the centre of the stage with his head in his hands.

If you can imagine what it would be like to have a chance to score a goal for your team and miss in full view of everyone or to forget your lines in the middle of a school play with everyone watching, you will know what Peter felt like. Jesus and the others had been depending on him but he had let them all down badly.

The worst thing was that Jesus had said it would happen. 'Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning you will have said three times that you don't know me.'

'Never!' Peter had said - and he had meant it. 'I will stand by you whatever happens.'

But then Jesus had been arrested. The Jewish leaders had sent a whole squad of rough looking soldiers to arrest him and bring him to the High Priest's house where the charges against him were to be read out. All the other disciples had run away in terror - but at least Peter had been brave enough to follow at a distance, being careful not to be seen.

Choose three volunteers to act as servants. As you tell the story, have them walk up to Peter one at a time and point at him accusingly. Have Peter shake his head 'no' more and more forcefully each time.

But then in the courtyard a servant girl recognised him. 'You're one of His followers' she said. 'No - I'm not' Peter replied nervously. Later on, two others recognised him. 'You are one of His followers, aren't you?' they said. But Peter was so scared of what would happen to him if anyone found out that he was a friend of Jesus that he swore blind he wasn't. Just then the rooster crowed and Peter remembered what Jesus had said. He hung his head and wept bitterly. He knew he had let Jesus down badly.

Next day Jesus was crucified. Now he was dead and as far as Peter knew it was all his fault. If only he had spoken up for him - maybe he would still be alive!

On the third morning, some women started telling people that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was alive again. Peter had gone to the tomb to see for himself - and sure enough it was empty. Jesus' friends were confused. How could someone who had died and been buried come back to life again?

'Even if He is alive' thought Peter to himself. 'He won't want anything to do with me again - not after what I have done.'

So Peter decided to go fishing that night - and some of his friends came with him.

Choose five volunteers to act as Peter's friends. Ask them to sit in the 'boat' along with Peter and act out what happens in the story. (You should play the part of Jesus.)

So they started rowing out across the lake. They stayed out all night but caught nothing. Not a single fish. By the time it was morning, they were tired, grumpy and fed up.

Then they heard a voice coming from the shore. They couldn't quite see who it was but in the early morning stillness, they heard his voice loud and clear.

Stand on the opposite side of the stage and pretend to call to the disciples in the boat.

'Have you caught anything?' he asked.

'Not a thing!' they replied.

'Let down your nets on the other side!' shouted the stranger.

They shrugged their shoulders and decided to give it a go even though they were sure there would be nothing there. But all of a sudden their nets were so full that they began to break and they had to call out to others on the lake to come and help them.

'It's Jesus!' Peter called out excitedly and without waiting for his friends he splashed through the water as fast as he could to get to the shore.

And sure enough, Jesus was there waiting. He had cooked a delicious breakfast of bread and fish for his friends and once they had pulled their boat up on to the shore they all sat down and began to eat.

After breakfast, Jesus signaled to Peter to follow him and together they walked along the shore. 'This is it' thought Peter. 'This is when Jesus tells me off for letting him down and tells me that there is no place for me on his team any more.'

But that wasn't what happened.

'Peter' said Jesus. 'Do you love me?'

'Yes' Peter answered.

'Do you really love me?' Jesus asked again.

'Yes - of course I do.' Peter said again.

'Do you love me more than anything?' Jesus asked for the third time.

'You know everything' Peter replied. 'You know that I love you.'

'Then' said Jesus 'I have a job for you to do. I want you to take care of the others for me when I'm gone.'

Three times, Peter had denied knowing Jesus. Now three times he had told him that he loved Him. Jesus had given Peter a second chance. He had forgiven him completely. And not only that - now he was putting him in charge! Peter could hardly believe it.

Exploring Christian Belief

Even followers of Jesus, like Peter, sometimes let Jesus down by the things they say and do. But Christians believe the good news is that if we love Him, Jesus is always ready to forgive us and to welcome us back as His friends again. No matter how many times we let him down he is always ready to give us a new start.

As far as Jesus is concerned, the important thing is that we love him. Peter wasn't perfect but he loved Jesus. That's why he cried when he knew that he had let Jesus down. That's why he jumped into the water to get to be where Jesus was as fast as he could. That's why whenever Jesus had a job for him to do he was ready to do it.

Peter loved Jesus - and so Jesus was able to help Peter change and become the person he wanted him to be. And he was able to use Peter to do amazing things for him as you can read in the book of Acts in the Bible.

The followers of Jesus aren't perfect. We often get things wrong. But Jesus never stops loving us and if we love him and truly want to be His friends he is always ready to forgive us and to welcome us back. Not only that but we believe that He is able to change us - and to use us to do incredible things for him just as he did for Peter.

Reflection

Suppose Jesus were to ask you by name as he asked Peter, 'Do you love me?' I wonder what your answer would be? If, like Peter, you can honestly say 'yes' then why not tell him so and ask him to show you what he wants you to do for him?

If not, and if you are willing, you could ask him to help you get to know him better so that you can learn to love him like Peter did.

Allow a few moments of silence and then finish with a prayer asking God to help the children learn to love Jesus most of all, like Peter did, and to show it in their lives.

Song

Invite the children to join in with the song 'I'm Gonna Clap My Hands' from the attached PowerPoint presentation. The audio track comes from the album 'Great Big God' by Vineyard UK and is available to download from iTunes.