



Introduction

For Christians, following Jesus is sometimes compared to setting out on a journey or embarking on a race through life. But how do Christians keep going on that race? Teamwork is vital both for success in sport as well as in the Christian life. The support of other Christians is part of the journey of faith

Preparation

One of Jesus' best-loved miracles is recorded in Mark 2:1 - 12, where we find the story of Jesus healing a man who was paralysed. The commitment of the four friends, their perseverance when faced by the crowds, the drama of the roof demolition and then the unexpected exchange of words with the religious leaders make it a memorable and rich insight into both the compassion and the power of Jesus that Christians believe can transform lives.

The following classroom activity uses simple drama and a variety of storytelling suggestions to unpack the story. Only two basic props are used: a rope and a rectangular piece of carpet.

Development

1. Hands up if you like drama... and stories. Today's story about Jesus involves some rope and a mat - you might like to produce these two props at this point.
2. Let's get ready to explore this story with some actions that were involved in what happened. (Get the class to spread out so they have room to manoeuvre.)
 - Stand up straight; now look up and look down, at the roof and at the floor. Repeat roof... floor... roof... floor... in rapid succession.
 - Now loosen stiffened joints: shoulders - arms - legs.
 - Tense the whole body up (breathing in through the teeth) and then relax the whole body ('big sigh').
 - Mime getting through a crowd with some elbow exercises.
 - Mime climbing stairs - running up them but then going slower and slower; then try small steps, followed by bigger steps.
 - Mime pulling on ropes and letting ropes out.
 - Mime digging a hole.
 - Next, walk around disgruntled, with slumped shoulders and going 'moan-mutter-moan-mutter'.
 - Finish on the count of three, with a leap for joy and a great shout of 'Yes'!
3. Let's explore today's story with our imaginations and our bodies. It is about:
 - Someone who was let down... but who wasn't let down!
 - A group of friends who worked as a team and didn't give up.
 - Feeling OK on the inside as well as the outside.
 - Jesus saying something surprising.

4. Let's explore the feelings of the story. Set the class off walking around the room, portraying the following different moods from the story and then freezing as statues of that mood on the command 'freeze':

- Happy
- Worried
- Sad
- Excited
- Exhausted
- Puzzled
- Angry
- Amazed

5. Now let's step into the atmosphere of the story.

A crowded house

Split the class into two groups. Ask one group to work together to create a square with hands joined. Now invite the rest of the class to come slowly into 'the house' through a 'front door' and become the crowd inside, even spilling out through 'the door' and imaginary windows! Can everyone fit in?

A paralysing illness

Get everyone to stand up and do the following: let the arms go stiff, then the legs and then 'fix' the head. There should be less and less movement until eventually everyone is rigid. Get the children to lie down on the ground, still rigid, looking up. What can they see? Imagine living life from this angle!

Friends helping friends

This is for older children and only then if you are absolutely confident that they can carry out the activities safely. All physical activities involve an element of risk, so only you, the teacher, can decide if this activity is appropriate and safe for your pupils and does not contravene your school's Health and Safety Policy. If in doubt, consult a member of your school's management team.

- Get the children into twos, one giving the other a piggyback and walking around.
- Get the children into threes, two crossing hands to create a seat for a third and walking around.
- Get the children into fives, four crossing their hands to create a stronger seat for one person and walking around.
- Introduce a mat and ask a child to sit on it! Can four children lift him/her?

6. Telling the story

For younger children (4 - 7 year olds)

Tell the story with fingers and hands, inviting the children to copy the storyteller's actions:

- Use the fingers and thumb of one hand to be the five faithful friends.
- The four fingers are the active, caring friends but the thumb becomes stiff and cannot move - this is the paralysed friend.
- The others have to carry him. Curl the four fingers around the thumb and 'carry' him.
- Now use the other hand as the crowd of people around Jesus (= the middle finger). Have them 'look up' in surprise.
- Uncurl the four finger friends from the thumb, which should then be 'lowered down' slowly before Jesus.
- Jesus reaches down and touches the 'paralysed' thumb.
- The thumb flexes and dances.
- The friends rejoice (jiggle the four fingers!).
- The crowds are amazed (move the hand with crowd up and down with the fingers stiff with shock!).

For older children (8 - 11 year olds)

This can be done as a response version of the story or as a drama version.

Response version

Tell the story, having given action responses to certain words, which you should repeat as often as you can in the retelling:

Paralysed man = lying still on the floor

Crowds = shuffling around, squashed up

Friends = in a group of four, arm-in-arm

Teachers of the law = cross-legged on the floor, stroking their imaginary beards

Jesus = standing tall, arms reaching out

Tell the story and keep shifting characters so they need to respond accordingly!

Drama version

- Set the scene in Capernaum.
- Organise groups to be the people in the village and decide on what jobs each could be doing.
- Choose children to be Jesus, the four friends, the paralysed man and the Pharisees.
- Introduce props: carpet and some rope.
- Get everyone to gather at a 'well' outside the village and ask people why they are looking forward to Jesus coming and what their expectations are.
- Tell the story briefly.
- Get everyone to gather at the 'well' again and ask them how they feel after the miracle - What



did they see? What did they think? What will they do about it? And so on.

7. Give some space for a reflective response to the story:

- What do you like about this story?
- What surprises you about this story?
- What sort of things paralyse people on the inside?
- What does that feel like?
- What would it feel like to be made well again?

8. Further development: Using craft materials, ask the class to make something to show what the story meant to them. Have some paper, colours, paints, modelling material and glue sticks available for them to use.

9. Some key points to talk about include:

- That fact that Jesus was saying he was God and that he could forgive sins; that Jesus can mend people on the inside as well as the outside; that Jesus cares about people and sets them free.
- Maybe this miracle took place in Peter and Andrew's home again (see Mark 1). If so, why was everyone so amazed this time? They had seen healings before: ...*We have never seen anything like this!* (Mark 2:12, CEV).