



Introduction

Jesus experienced the full force of broken friendship in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was arrested. He had offered friendship with God to all who came to him but now that friendship was thrown back in his face as the tide turned and people chose to become his enemies instead. Only hours before, in the Upper Room, he had told his disciples that they were his friends and so great was his love that he would lay down his life for them. In the following Bible story that friendship is betrayed by a kiss, denied by one of his closest friends and abandoned by the rest. Jesus experienced the pain of broken friendship.

Christians believe that Jesus took all this into the grave and then, through the resurrection, made available a new power to choose friendship with God again.

The following lesson outline explores how Jesus tasted the destruction of friendship in order to mend what had been broken.

Preparation

Use the retelling of this story from The Barnabas Children's Bible (stories 304 and 305).

Development

1. Play some simple games that try to capture some of the experiences of the disciples and Jesus that night in Gethsemane.
 - Take it in turns for one of the children to ask for help from the rest of the group. As he/she approaches the others one at a time to ask for help, each child should deliberately and unemotionally turn away and face the other direction so that in the end everyone has a back to the one asking for help, ignoring the request. Make sure several of the children experience being the person in need.
 - Prepare a set of cards for the group, one each. Only one card has an X on it. Deal these out randomly and secretly so that they find out whether they are the one with the X or not. Now ask them to walk around the room shaking hands or giving a 'high five' greeting to everyone else. The one with the cross is the betrayer. After about half a minute of greetings, everyone should sit down where they are and then try and guess which of them is the betrayer. It was someone they shook hands with. The betrayer himself/herself must try and make sure they don't guess that it was him/her. What does it feel like to know that someone with whom you've been enjoying a game is actually a traitor? Let several people have a go at being the secret betrayer so as not to stigmatise anybody in that role.
 - Set the group off, milling about the room calmly but then suddenly call out one person's name. Now all the rest should do their best to avoid that one person and isolate them, keeping as far away as possible. Freeze the situation and explore how it feels to be treated like this. Make sure you do this again, calling out other children to be the isolated one, so that no one feels

got at.

Use these simple games to explore some of the feelings ready for the story.

2. Next tell the story of Gethsemane from a hidden spectator's point of view.

Set up some covered chairs around your room for your class to hide behind like bushes and trees in a garden. Also darken the room as much as you can. Tell them that they are observers of the story late that night on the Thursday before Easter.

Jesus arrives just after midnight with his friends, hoping to find some time to pray.

Focus on the different sounds that the hidden spectators will probably hear from behind the bushes including:

- several footsteps coming through the undergrowth
- a settling down of a group amongst the leaves and roots of some olive trees
- a few people walking off alone (Jesus and his three closest disciples)
- the groans of a prayer
- particular words from that prayer, namely 'not my will but yours be done'
- the sound of snoring
- later the sound of marching feet coming towards you
- the sound of a kiss
- sounds of fighting
- sounds of running away
- soldiers marching away

Occasionally stop the narrative to invite the children to come up with how they feel about what they are hearing.

3. Jesus experienced being thoroughly let down that night.

Judas gave him a kiss, which should have been a sign of affection but in fact was the cue for Jesus' arrest.

The disciples all ran away.

Later in the courtyard near where Jesus was being tried, his best friend Peter denied even knowing him.

Make a list of all the qualities the children associate with being a true friend and then compare that list with the events and the reactions of disciples that night. Jesus knew all about friendship that fails.

- Why do you think this is recorded as part of the Easter story?
- Why might this be important to Christians today who hear about what happened?



4. As a painful visual aid for this story, collect together some attractive friendship bracelets, preferably twelve of them. Then, if you can bear it, cut them up as you talk, sharing how Jesus' friends let him down. Use the torn and jagged pieces of the friendship bracelets to make a cross shape as a link to what happens on Good Friday.
5. As a reflection together print off the word FRIENDSHIP in large letters and then cut up the individual letters.

Place these in the right order in the centre of your circle. Then as you talk about friends who have fallen out with each other, break up the letters, scattering them around randomly.

For Christians, the fact that Jesus experienced all this is very important. To illustrate this, reform the letters as a cross.