



## Introduction

What was it like to be at the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his friends? This idea re-enacts part of the traditional Seder meal celebrated by devout Jewish people at Passover.

## Preparation

You will need:

- a large plain tablecloth
- twelve small place mats
- a Jewish Seder plate (check your school's RE resource bank.)
- a glass tumbler/chalice
- a jug of red fruit juice ('wine')
- Jewish matzo or pitta bread, wrapped inside a clean tea towel
- a larger towel.

You might like to use other 'props' as they suggest themselves. Beforehand, research (or if possible, attend) a traditional Seder meal, to become familiar with some of the words and rituals. You might then want to customise this script in your own way, after revisiting the original passages referring to this meal in the Christian Gospels - Matthew 26:1-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22: 7-30.

It is important to honour the Jewish background to this story, because it heightens the meaning of some of the famous parts of the Easter story and re-emphasises Christianity's Jewish heritage, although traditional Orthodox Jews would have been rather shocked at the way Jesus adapted this meal to suit his own purposes. In this retelling, the whole 'body-and-bread, blood-and-wine' theology is treated very simply. (The traditional service of Holy Communion or Mass explains it for Christians in more detail.) This version aims to give children an 'experience' of the meal to capture its drama, where Jesus has a strong sense of what will happen next - but his disciples don't.

## Development

### Background

Explain that during 'Easter' week when Jesus entered Jerusalem with his followers, his enemies were trying to find ways to capture him and put him on trial. Jesus may well have been staying at a secret address, but by Thursday, his curious disciples were wondering where and how they would be celebrating Passover. Passover (and is) was an important Jewish family festival and many of Jesus' disciples were a long way from their homes in Galilee. He told them to appear at a secret address in the city that evening, and when they arrived, they were invited to share a Passover meal in an upstairs room.

### Warm-up



Ask the pupils firstly to act out some of the 'feelings' in this story - fearful, curious, ambitious, angry - as faces or statues. Then act out together the nervous walk of the disciples along the narrow cobbled Jerusalem streets, checking no one is following, watching out left and right for guards or soldiers, walking along a narrow alley, checking the address, knocking on the door, saying who you are and finally being ushered upstairs to find 'a table laid ready'.

### **Main drama**

Now for the main drama. Spread out a large tablecloth on the floor near your props and kneel at one place, asking the pupils to sit around the edges (not on it). Then place the twelve place mats around the edge, saying the names of some of the disciples that were present as you do so.

Explain that the disciples were very excited: if Jesus was the Messiah (as many of them believed), who would soon be proclaimed king, his friends might be princes or princesses, sitting at his right hand and left hand on thrones! Imagine being in charge and bossing people around! Of course, Jesus' best friends would get the most important jobs, wouldn't they? So they started arguing.

Get your class to argue (safely) with each other, saying:

'I'm his best friend!'

'No, I am! I'm more important than you!'

'No, I am!' (etc).

Now you act out the role of Jesus, shaking your head in disbelief, throwing the towel on the table and saying:

'QUIET! That's how the Roman Emperors do it. They call themselves servants of the people but, for them, it's all about bossing others about. But that's not how it should be with you. I'm here to serve, that's God's way, and that's how it's got to be with you. The last will be first, and the first will be last!'

Get them to repeat this last sentence: Are there any blank looks? Then retell, or get up and walk around the group, explaining (holding the towel) how Jesus went around washing their feet like a common servant.

The disciples didn't like it, saying: 'Kings don't wash feet!'

Reply by saying: 'This one does!'

Now return to your place at the table and emphasise: 'That's how it is with God!'

Next, introduce the Seder meal, explaining how it's all about remembering the time when God used Moses, Prince of Egypt, to lead his people out of Egypt where they were being kept as slaves. All the special foods and words are reminders of that story. Show the Seder plate and talk about one or two of the special foods eaten, like the roast lamb shank, or the bitter herbs.

Then bring out the (matzo or pitta) unleavened bread explaining that it's a reminder of having to make bread quickly as the Jewish people left Egypt in a hurry. At the meal, the leader of the feast (usually the father of the family) holds up the bread and says 'Blessed are you Lord God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth...' and then breaks it.

But Jesus added some new words: 'This bread is like my body, that's going to be broken to... feed the world. When you eat it, you will remember me, won't you?'

Ask the children to say, rather baffled 'Yes, we'll remember you' then turn to each other and mutter 'He's changing the words. What's going on?'

Later, the leader of the feast takes the wine, pours it, saying 'Blessed are you Lord God, King of the Universe, who brings forth fruit from the vine.'

But Jesus added some new words: 'This wine is like my blood, that's going to be poured out for you and the whole world, healing so many things. When you drink it, you will remember me, won't you?'

Again, the disciples are shocked, repeating 'Yes, we'll remember you', but then muttering 'He's changed the words again!'

You could also add:

- Simon Peter's conversation with Jesus when Simon promises to remember Jesus and be his best friend for ever, and Jesus' warning about what's going to happen next.
- Judas getting up to leave the table and Jesus telling him 'If you're going to do it, do it quickly.'

### **Follow-up**

Ask the children to discuss in pairs: If you'd been there at the meal, what might be your biggest questions so far? Don't try to answer all the questions but note down the most interesting ones for a future session.

This could lead into the story of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, the arrest and trial, or even the crucifixion and resurrection, depending on the time available and your lesson objectives. If so, vary the storytelling and don't keep your class sitting around the 'table' for too long.

Finally, get pupils to copy a simple sentence into their exercise books to reinforce the key ideas - for example: At Passover, Jewish people bless the food and drink - but at the Last Supper, Jesus changed the words. Then ask them to complete some or all of the following tasks:

- Draw and label the bread and wine, explaining what they meant for Jesus.
- Write your own questions about what happened.
- Write your own thank you 'blessing' that might be used by a Jewish believer, a Christian or someone else.
- Write about a family celebration you have been to that was expressing thanks for something.



To think about: Do we have to thank someone if we're thankful? Why?