



Introduction

Christians believe that when God made people, he breathed into them the breath of his life. There was no death in the beginning; creation bubbled and sparkled with life. But people chose to disobey God's life-giving instructions and death came into the world. Death brought an ending; it hurt and it destroyed. But God is a God of life and again and again in the stories of the Bible we read how God brought life out of death for those who trusted in him. Finally, God sent Jesus to bring us life in all its fullness. He raised people to life from death and he gave them a new beginning. On the cross, Jesus chose death so that death itself could be turned upside down. Christians believe that for all who follow Jesus, death is not the end.

You might find it helpful to read about Good Friday and Easter Sunday in The Barnabas Children's Bible before the session to get an overall picture of the context of the following outline (see stories 308 to 311).

What follows are some ideas that can be used to explore this story with children in an assembly or in the classroom.

Preparation

Use the retelling of the main part of today's story in The Barnabas Children's Bible, page 270 to 271, story 309. See also Luke 23:32-43.

You will need:

- two pieces of card/ paper (A3 is best but A4 will work, too) each with a red X on, as large as possible
- one piece of card/paper the same size as the other with a golden X on (a church cross/equal-armed cross), again as large as possible
- plenty of heart Post-it notes or paper cut-out heart shapes
- some Blu-tack

Development

1. Show the first red X picture. Ask the children what this sign means if they see it in their maths work at school. It means they have made a mistake.

Can they remember a time when they got something wrong?

Can they remember a time when they tried their best at something and still got it wrong?

How did it feel?

If there are those who say they have never got things wrong (!), ask them how they think they would



feel if they had.

How does it make them feel inside when they get things wrong?

Explain that we all do things wrong - adults as well as children - and we need to be honest with others and ourselves when that happens.

2. Show another red X picture. Ask the children what this sign means if they see it underneath someone's name on a birthday card. It means love - that person loves them.

Can they remember a time when someone really special said that they loved them or sent them a card with that sign on?

Say how that made them feel (or 'think' it, to avoid embarrassment or mickey-taking).

Explain that deep inside we all need to know we are loved by others.

3. Introduce the story. Jesus had done nothing wrong, yet some people wanted him to be put to death. He was captured and taken through the streets to a place called Golgotha or 'The Place of the Skull'. As he walked through the streets some people were very unkind and shouted unkind things. Others cried as he walked by because it made them so sad. Jesus was nailed to a cross. On either side of him was a thief. They, too, were to be put to death but Jesus had done nothing wrong.

Again, some people shouted unkind things at Jesus when he was on the cross. Again some cried because they were so sad. At around three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus called out, 'It is finished,' and he died.

4. Hot seating

Ask a child or adult to take the place of the thief who was kind to Jesus. How do they feel knowing they have done wrong but Jesus has done nothing wrong and is going to die?

Ask a child/adult to take the place of someone in the crowd who didn't want Jesus to die. How do they feel watching Jesus being put to death? Do they think they should stand up for Jesus and shout out to save him? Why might they not want to do that?

Ask a child/adult to be Pilate. How does he feel to have made the decision to put Jesus to death when he couldn't find anything that Jesus had done wrong? How does he feel as Jesus dies?

5. Continue with the story. Explain that Jesus' body was taken from the cross, wrapped in strips of linen and placed in a tomb, which was sealed by a large, very heavy stone.

Read from The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 311, 'The empty tomb' pages 272 to 273.

6. Display the golden X (a equal-armed cross sign) in between the two red X crosses from before.



Explain this is the cross that says 'you have done wrong' (pointing to one X) but it also says 'I love you' (pointing to the other X cross).

Now point to the new middle cross and say, 'We all do things wrong but Christians believe that Jesus died on a cross so that people can be forgiven. He did that because he loves people so much.'

7. Ask the children what they have discovered about God from this story.
8. As a reflection, hand out some heart-shaped Post-it notes or paper heart cut outs.

Invite each child to take these away somewhere on their own.

Put on some quiet music.

On one heart they could write or draw something they have done wrong or something they want to say sorry for. Then, so no one can see what each has written, they should stick the other heart over the top as a symbol of the new beginning that is possible through saying sorry.

Invite each child back to stick their hearts onto the card with a piece of Blu-tack, giving the children space to think or say their own words in response to the story.