



Introduction for teachers

If working with a small group, this story could be told using wooden figures, Playmobil or similar. If using model figures, you will need enough props to create an obvious house setting, a road passing by outside and maybe a symbolic wall separating the house's estate from the road.

For larger audiences, use a few selected props (e.g. costumes, a chair, something that could be used to indicate a bed) and some reliable pupil volunteers to repeat the lines you say to them, in character.

Development

Who do you trust? It all depends, doesn't it? We trust some people to look after us at home. We trust others to provide us with food to eat. We trust the bus driver or the airline pilot to get us where we are going safely. We trust different people for doing different things. This is a story about trust. But first of all, we need to practise our different parts.

Divide the audience into two groups by drawing an imaginary line down the middle and asking each side to shift a little to the left or right. Those on your left will be Roman soldiers. Those on your right will be the local people and Jesus' disciples. Extract a few reliable volunteers at this point to sit at the front. Explain that we're all going to be telling a story together, though some of us will have different parts.

Principal roles and props

- *Marcellus (Roman centurion): some sort of Roman-looking robe or armour. (Needs a chair to sit on.)*
- *Servants: no special clothes needed. A place to serve as a bed.*
- *Jesus: played by you.*

We're going to be acting out a story with two groups of people who don't like each other at all. One group are Roman soldiers who have invaded Judea and are now in charge.

Rehearse this group to follow instructions (remaining sitting) first from you, then from your appointed Marcellus, telling them to:

QUICK MARCH! (All 'march' using their arms to give the impression of marching.)

HALT! (Sit up straight, hands to side.)

SALUTE THE EMPEROR! (All say 'Hail Caesar!', placing fist on chest then raising it in salute, outstretched.)



The other group are the local Jewish people whose country has been invaded and occupied by the Romans. I want you to sound and act bossy and angry. (*Hands on hips, head forward and staring, shoulders up to say 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT!'*)

Jesus was getting into a lot of arguments, because he kept breaking lots of bad rules. If there were people who had made mistakes and got into trouble, then Jesus said, 'I forgive you.' Some local people said, 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT!' But Jesus said, 'Oh, yes I can!'

There were people with broken bodies. Jesus was making them better on the Sabbath, the holy day when no one was meant to work. Some local people said, 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT!' But Jesus said, 'Oh, yes I can!'

He was a single man who treated women and children with respect and kindness. Some local people said, 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT!' But Jesus said 'Oh, yes I can!'

He kept getting into trouble. But then *this* happened.

Place your volunteers.

Imagine that this is a Roman house where a Roman family live. There are servants, ready to do all sorts of household jobs. Cleaning, washing, cooking. And this is Marcellus. He's a Roman centurion, an officer in charge of lots of soldiers. Marcellus? Let's see you give the orders!

Marcellus proceeds to give his servants a few polite instructions, and they follow readily. (Cleaning, washing, cooking...)

But Marcellus is a bit unusual for a Roman. He doesn't worship the Roman gods like Mars, Venus or Jupiter. In fact, he worships one God. He's even given money to the local Jewish people to build their own synagogue (place of worship).

Marcellus: 'Here you are. Use it to buy some chairs.'

Servants: 'Thank you kindly, sir!'

But one day, one of the servants (Reuben) was carrying some firewood across the yard, when he fell, banging his head near the fire. When he awoke, he couldn't move. The others put him on a bed (*Health and Safety! Nobody should be carrying anyone else*), and told Marcellus.

Servants: 'What can we do?' they cried. 'He's in a bad way!'

Marcellus: 'Fetch a doctor!'

But one said -

Servant: 'I know someone who can help. He's visiting our town. He's a special kind of doctor!'



Marcellus: 'Get him, then.'

So one of them did. He/she ran out to find Jesus.

Servant: 'One of our people is hurt at the Roman house! It's Reuben! Please come and help!'

'I'll come right away,' Jesus said.

But some of Jesus' friends and the local people were saying, 'Go to a Roman house? Are you serious? YOU CAN'T DO THAT!'

But Jesus said, 'Oh, yes I can!'

'Going into that house is going to make a lot of trouble! We have rules about foreigners, you know! YOU CAN'T DO THAT!'

But Jesus said, 'Oh, yes I can!'

But when he was just about to walk towards the house, out came Marcellus.

Marcellus: 'Sir, please, stop right there.'

'Why?' asked Jesus.

Marcellus: 'It's going to make trouble for you.'

'But Reuben's sick! I can help him!'

Marcellus: 'But you don't really need to come in, do you?'

'Why?' Jesus was fascinated.

Marcellus: 'Look, I'm a soldier. I'm a centurion. I've got hundreds of soldiers under my command. If I say "March!" or "Salute the Emperor!" they'll do it. (*Get children to act these out again, sitting down.*) I'm in charge. Now I've heard about you. You've got power over all sorts of things like sickness. So if you're real, then just say the word and my servant will get well. Because you can do that, can't you?'

There was a long silence. Then Jesus started smiling, then giggling and then laughing out loud! 'That's absolutely brilliant!' he said. 'I've finally found someone who really trusts me, and he's a Roman! Brilliant! My own people don't do that! Marcellus, it's all right. Reuben's going to be all right. Trust me on this! And thank you.'

And as Marcellus dashed back to his house, another servant ran out to say -

Servant: 'Sir, I was just coming to say don't bother finding Jesus. Reuben's woken up! He's better!'



I wonder... what happened next?

What's the difference between respecting someone - and trusting them?

Our countries are made up of all sorts of people whose families come from all around the world. We speak different languages, like to eat different foods and sometimes wear different clothes. Some have different faiths and beliefs too.

I wonder... what could we learn from Marcellus about learning to trust other people who are different?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us to trust you more like that Roman soldier did. And show us how to respect people who are different to us as well. Amen

Information for teachers

Christianity started out as a uniquely Jewish sect that quickly leapt cultural barriers to spread among the many Gentile peoples of the Roman empire. By AD300, Christians were even meeting for worship in Roman Britain. The history of how that happened is a tale in itself, but this story illustrates Jesus' early openness to thoughtful enquirers from those outside the Jewish faith.

This retelling is based on original Gospel narratives found in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. Did the centurion himself ask for help, or was it the local Jewish elders who were grateful for his help with building their place of worship? (Remains of the ornate Capernaum synagogue can still be seen today.) Either way, this Roman's show of respect 'amazed' Jesus, who predicted that many like him would enter the 'kingdom of heaven', while others who expected to be there would find themselves shut out.