



On your marks

Maybe we have sometimes tried too hard in services with children present to find 'clever' and eye-catching ways to share the story of Jesus? On occasion visual aids and gimmicks might serve only to distract from the power of this story. When it comes to Easter maybe it is best simply to let the events speak for themselves, as we trust the Holy Spirit to touch the listeners' hearts with that part of the story that is especially for him or her at the time. What follows is a retelling of what happened between Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday morning told through the voice of young Mark, who traditionally went on in later life to write the Gospel that bears his name. It is inspired by the strange reference to the young man who 'ran away naked' from the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52).

Get set

Keep any visuals you decide to use to a minimum - use maybe only a blanket, some Matzo bread and a chalice. Try to learn by heart this story outline as best you can, so it can be told without a text in front of you. Lower your voice for the parts that are set in the Garden in particular and when the news of the crucifixion comes, but raising it for the excitement of Easter morning.

Go!

I'll never forget that Passover weekend. It changed my life! In fact, it changed a lot of people's lives... but maybe I ought to start at the beginning of my story.

My mum and dad live in an upstairs house in the back streets of Jerusalem, above a shop. It's all right, I suppose, as homes go... and I never thought of it as being anywhere special... that is, not until the visit! Let me explain.

Mum has relatives up in Galilee and that's where it all started. The story of Jesus, I mean. You must have heard about him. He said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people followed him. People said he was the special rescuer - the one to make Israel great again - the one to get rid of our enemies and bring a time of justice and peace. Everyone was talking about him. *confidentially* They say he could command evil to come out of people, just like that! And he bothered about people... all sorts of people, but especially the ones no one else bothered about. He made them well!

Now wait for it! This Jesus - the very same one - came and visited us in Jerusalem. Can you believe it? I was so excited. Maybe he would do a miracle in our very own home! They say that once he turned water into wine. His friends - mum's relatives were among them - wanted a place to stay in Jerusalem for the Passover festival, a place to celebrate the Feast.

You do know about the Passover, don't you? It's the great festival, when we remember how long ago God rescued our ancestors from being slaves in Egypt and God took them through the water to



freedom. The Passover meal is full of foods to help us remember and be thankful. I began to wonder whether it would happen all over again? But this time it would be Jesus rescuing us. Well, I was right in a way... but not as I expected.

I helped mum get everything ready: there was the table to lay, plates to collect, food to buy... we had to borrow some extra cushions from next door. Mum wanted everything just right. She wasn't having her Galilean cousins say that she didn't know how to put on a meal for guests - especially a great guest like Jesus.

I was forever fetching and carrying that evening: jugs of water, bowls of spices and herbs, cups of wine. I was back and forth like a yo-yo but once I just stayed in a corner and listened. There was strange talk at that table. Everyone seemed much more subdued and quiet than normal - not the usual party chatter at a festival.

And then Jesus took some of the bread. He lifted it up and said thanks to God and broke it and said: 'This is my body. It's going to be broken for you. When you eat bread like this, remember me.' And then he picked up a cup of wine and said: 'This is my blood. It's going to be poured out for you. When you drink wine together like this, remember me.'

So weird! Jesus was talking about death and dying, not about the great rescue we were all hoping for. It really confused everyone. I noticed the Judas left the meal soon after that.

Mum sent me to bed as it was late, but I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about what Jesus had said. What did it mean? Then I heard them all singing (the final hymn of the meal I reckoned) followed by the sound of lots of footsteps leaving. They were all going for a walk - at midnight! What was going on? I just had to find out.

I was already changed for bed, so I just pulled a blanket around me and crept down the stairs, being careful to avoid the fourth step, which always creaked... and hoping my mum wouldn't hear the extra pair of feet going out that night.

The friends of Jesus walked along the twisty, dark streets of the capital. I followed secretly at a distance. Where were they going? They left the city via a side entrance of the Sheep Gate and walked down to the Olive Grove called Gethsemane. I used to play there a lot when I was younger, so I could easily find my way now in the dark... though it wasn't as dark as you might expect, because of the full Passover moon.

Even so, the garden was quite scary at night. There were strange noises and odd shapes and shadows. I almost didn't stay. Then I thought I heard a moan from the place where Jesus had gone; but why should he be moaning?

Soon after that it all happened... the sound of marching feet... some guards were on the way. I froze with fear. They appeared through the trees and were being led by Judas. He went right up to Jesus and gave him a kiss of welcome. It seemed to be a signal, because the guards immediately arrested Jesus. There was some shouting and a bit of a fight but then it was all over and the friends of Jesus



ran for their lives past me as I was hiding in the bushes. One of them knocked me flying and I cried out in pain. A guard must have heard that and suddenly began coming straight for me. I panicked. I dropped my blanket and ran like crazy... just as I was.

I might have had a difficult time trying to explain about the missing blanket the next day, but mum never asked me. Everyone was caught up with what had happened. Everyone was so sad. You see, they had taken Jesus and killed him on a cross outside the city.

Jesus, the special rescuer, was dead. How come? It just wasn't right. He'd done nothing wrong.

And that was it - or so I thought. But on the Sunday of the festival, we began to hear the news, only rumours at first. People were saying that they had seen Jesus again. Yes! Back from the dead! Jesus was alive again.

In fact many people saw him. And once he appeared in our own house (really!) in the very room where we'd had the meal, and I was there. It was all true. Jesus was alive. He was the special rescuer after all. He was stronger than death! He was a light that couldn't be put out out!

And now I'm a follower of Jesus, too. Not in secret now, creeping down the back streets with my blanket, but as part of his new family - the family of Jesus that is spreading all over of the world!

Bible Link:

'Get Mark and bring him with you, He helps me in my work for the Lord' (2 Timothy 4:11 NIRV).