



On your marks

One of the best-loved of Jesus' miracles is recorded in Mark 2:1-12, where we find the story of Jesus' healing a man who was paralysed. The commitment of the four friends, their perseverance when faced by the crowds, the drama of the roof demolition and then the unexpected exchange of words with the religious leaders make it a memorable and rich insight into both the compassion and the power of Jesus that can transform lives. There is so much to act out and explore here for children and adults, and I have used the following outline more than once with both large and small groups.

Get set

The following session ideas use a mixture of games, simple drama and a variety of storytelling suggestions to unpack the story.

Only two basic props are used: a rope and a rectangular piece of carpet.

You can find a retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 260 ('The man on the mat').

Go!

1. Hands up if you like games... drama... and stories.

Today's story about Jesus involves... (*produce the following items*) some rope and a mat!

2. Let's get ready to explore this story with some actions that were involved in what happened.

(The group should spread out around your meeting space with room to manoeuvre.)

Stand up straight; now look up and look down, at the roof and at the floor. Repeat roof... floor... roof... floor... in rapid succession!

Now loosen stiffened joints: shoulders - arms - legs.

Tense the whole body up (and breathe in through teeth) and then relax whole body (*big sigh*).

Mime getting through a crowd with some elbow exercises!

Mime climbing stairs, running up them but then going slower and slower; then try small steps, followed by bigger steps.

Mime pulling on ropes and letting ropes out.

Mime digging a hole.



Next, walk around disgruntled, with slumped shoulders and going 'moan-mutter-moan-mutter'.

Finish on the count of three, with a leap for joy and a great shout of 'Yes'!

3. We are going to explore today's story with our imaginations and with our bodies.

It is about...

... someone who was let down... but who wasn't let down!

... a bunch of determined friends who didn't give up.

... feeling OK on the inside (thumbs up by your heart) as well as the outside.

... Jesus saying something surprising.

4. Let's explore the feelings of the story:

Walk around your meeting area, portraying the following different moods from the story and then freezing as statues of that mood on the command 'freeze':

happy

worried

sad

excited

exhausted

puzzled

angry

amazed

5. Now let's step into the atmosphere of the story:

6. A crowded house

The leaders, along with the oldest children, should create a square with hands joined.

Now invite the rest to come slowly into 'the house' through a 'front door' and become the crowd inside, even spilling out through 'the door' and imaginary windows! Can we get everyone in?

1. A paralysing illness



Everyone should stand up.

First let the arms go stiff; then the legs; then the head should become fixed.

There should be less and less movement until eventually everyone is rigid. Lie down on the ground, still rigid, looking up.

What can they see? Imagine living life from this angle!

1. Friends helping friends

Get into twos, one giving the other a piggyback and walking around.

Get into threes, two crossing hands to create a seat for a third and walking around.

Get into fives, four to cross their hands creating a stronger seat for one person. Walk around.

Introduce the mat and put a leader on it! Can four children lift him/her?

6. Telling the story

7. For a younger group tell the story with fingers and hands. Invite the children to copy the storyteller's actions:

Use the fingers and thumb of one hand to be the five faithful friends.

Then the four fingers are the active, caring friends but the thumb becomes stiff and cannot move. This is the paralysed friend, who can't move.

The others have to carry him. Curl the four fingers around the thumb and 'carry' him.

Now use the other hand as the crowd of people around Jesus (= the middle finger).

Have them 'look up' in surprise.

Uncurl the four finger friends from the thumb, which should then be 'lowered down' slowly before Jesus.

Jesus reaches down and touches the 'paralysed' thumb.

The thumb flexes and dances.

The friends rejoice (jiggle the four fingers!)

The crowds are amazed (move the hand with crowd up and down with the fingers stiff with shock!)

1. For a mixed age group, either use a response version of the story:



Tell the story, having given action responses to certain words, which you should repeat as often as you can in the retelling:

Paralysed man = lying still on the floor

Crowds = shuffling around, squashed up

Friends = in a group of four, arm-in-arm

Teachers of the Law = cross-legged on the floor, stroking their imaginary beards

Jesus = standing tall, arms reaching out

Tell the story and keep shifting characters so they need to respond accordingly!

1. Or a drama version:

Set the scene in Capernaum .

In groups become people in the village with various jobs.

Also have Jesus, the four friends, the paralysed man and Pharisees.

Introduce props: carpet and some rope.

Decide on what jobs each could be doing. All gather at the well in the morning and interview people looking forward to Jesus coming - what are their expectations and so on.

Tell the story briefly.

Now gather at the well again and interview everyone after the miracle. What did they see, what did they think, what will they do about it and so forth.

7. Give some space for a reflective response to the story.

- What do you like about this story?
- What surprises you about this story?
- What sorts of things paralyse people on the inside?
- What does that feel like?
- What would it feel like to be made well again?

If there is time, ask the groups what sort of craft response they would like to make to capture what the story meant to them. Have some paper, colours, paints, modeling material and glue sticks etc available for them to use.

Some key points to talk about include:



That fact that Jesus was saying he was God and that he could forgive sins; that Jesus can mend people on the inside as well as the outside; that Jesus cares about people and sets them free.

Other thoughts:

Maybe this miracle took place in Peter and Andrew's home again (see Mark chapter 1).

If so, why was everyone so amazed this time? They had seen healings before (see verse 12 'We've never seen anything like this')