

John 11:1-46

Aim of lesson

To show the compassion of Jesus, and that God has given Jesus the power to raise the dead to life.

Background study

Find a map to show the proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem. Study burial customs of the Jews. Luke 10:38-42; 16:31; John 10:31 and 40-42; 12:1-3 and 9-11.

Suggested outline of lesson

Outstanding miracle

This is probably the most outstanding of the miracles that Jesus performed. Although he had already demonstrated his power to raise the dead, this was the only occasion upon which the person had been dead for four days and had been entombed. The raising of Lazarus may be considered the climax of Jesus' ministry, occurring at a time when he was very conscious of his own fast-approaching death.

Sorrow in the family

Introduce the story by describing the family at Bethany where Jesus had spent some happy hours relaxing in the company of his dear friends - Mary, a quiet attentive listener, Martha, always generously hospitable, and Lazarus, their much-loved brother. Naturally, when Lazarus became seriously ill, the two sisters sent for Jesus. They knew that he was on the east bank of the river Jordan, where he was safe from his enemies in Jerusalem, who were determined to kill him. On receiving the message that he was needed in Bethany, Jesus delayed his visit. He knew that it was God's will that Lazarus should die, in order that the glory of God might be made known. Jesus understood the great significance attached to the events of the next few days. When, at last, he was ready to leave, the disciples were anxious for his safety but, seeing his determination, were willing to accompany him.

Belief in resurrection

Meanwhile, Mary and Martha were hurt and disappointed that Jesus had not come immediately. They had so longed for Jesus to come and cure their brother, but now it was too late. Lazarus had died; the funeral was over and Mary and Martha were grief-stricken. Martha's confession of faith, Mary's sorrowful words and the powerful declaration of Jesus are so important that they should all be quoted direct from the text. Let the children participate by reading the dialogue in parts. It may be advisable for you to prepare the parts as for a play, together with a narrative, from John 11:20-34.

Following the “play”, you should expand on the important doctrine of the resurrection. It was clear that both Martha and Mary believed that one day Lazarus would be raised from the dead, together with all those who had served God faithfully.

Why Jesus wept

Show how moved Jesus was at this time. Let the children talk about the reasons why they think Jesus wept. He was sad to think that Lazarus had suffered and he shared in the grief of Mary and Martha. Jesus wept, too, knowing that within a few days his own family and friends would be grieving over his own death, and he wept because he knew that his people would reject him and there would be many who failed to understand his mission.

Raised to life

Ensure that the children understand how different was the scene at the tomb from anything with which they may be familiar, namely that the body had been anointed and bound round with strips of cloth prior to being sealed up in a cave. This scene should be presented in such a way as to prevent children from feeling fear or horror. Concentrate on the strength and authority of Jesus and his spoken prayer, acknowledging God’s will and power at work within him. Martha and Mary began to hope as the stone was removed. Suddenly the voice of Jesus rang out with a loud command. Suggest that there was an air of expectancy among some of the onlookers, whilst others were sceptical, and even offended at what was taking place. Then they all saw something that had never been seen before - a man who had been dead and entombed, walking out into the light. Could any of the witnesses possibly doubt that Jesus was the Son of God? Yes, even after this, some of those who had seen the miracle did not believe. Had not Jesus said: “if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead”. But there were many who did believe, and who would never forget what had happened that day.

Relevance to the children’s lives

Although we always feel sad when someone we love dies, we need not worry about it. What hope is there for the friends of Jesus? How can we make sure that Jesus will want us to live for ever with him?

Although Mary and Martha were very sad that their brother was dead, they knew for certain that one day Jesus would raise him to life. Jesus has promised to all who follow him that, even though they die, they will one day come alive again, to live with him for ever.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for showing us how Jesus raised a dead man to life. We have hope that, when Jesus comes back, he will raise to life all those who have believed in him. Amen.

Memory verse

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).