Open the Word

Present the reading

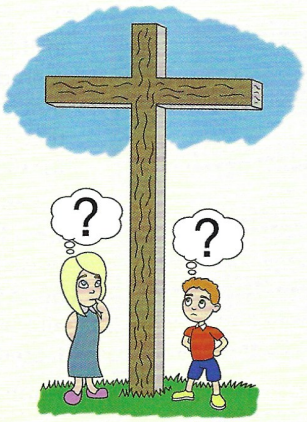
Open the Bible at Matthew 16.21-28

Jesus explains that being a follower will not always be easy, and that whoever puts themselves first will end up coming last.

Choose from these two ways of telling the story.

Bunting story Hang up a length of string and prepare the passage written out in sections on cross shapes. As you read each section, ask a child to peg the cross containing that section of the passage onto the piece of string to make a row of bunting. Talk about how bunting is used for celebrations, but we have used the cross, a symbol that shows how Jesus' story has difficult and sad parts, too.

Balloon revelations Write a couple of paraphrases from the Bible passage on deflated balloons and ask the children to read them out as you blow them up one by one, and put them in order. For example: balloon 1 – If you want, 2 – to save your life, 3 – you will lose it, 4 – but those who, 5 – lose their life, 6 – for my sake, 7 – will find it, 8 – Matthew 16.25. You could then read the whole passage to put it into context



The followers of Jesus didn't like everything he told them. Some things he talked about were difficult to hear and others were difficult to do.

Peter had just been praised by Jesus, for saying that Jesus was the Messiah, but as Peter listened now, he couldn't believe what he was hearing. Jesus was saying that he would have to suffer and die. 'I will be killed,' he said, 'but on the third day I will rise again.'

The Messiah can't die, Peter thought. 'God forbid it, Lord!' he said. 'This must never happen to you.'

Jesus got angry. 'You're not thinking as God thinks, Peter. You can only see things like humans do. If I thought like that, it would make me stumble instead of doing the right thing. Get behind me, Satan!'

This was hard for Peter to hear, but then Jesus told his followers to do things that sounded very tough too.

'If someone wants to follow me, they have to stop putting themselves first and take up their cross. If they want to save their own lives, they will lose them, but if they lose their lives following me, they will find them again.

'What is the point of having whatever you want, if it means losing your life? What can someone give in exchange for their life?'

Jesus said, 'When the Son of Man comes in glory with his angels, he will repay everyone for what they've done. Truly, I say, some of you standing here now will see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom before you die.'

Talk together

- What do you think about Jesus telling us to 'take up our cross' to follow him?
- What in life is hard work but worth persevering (keeping on) with?
- Do you think people tend to put others first, or themselves first, and how?

For very young children

Play and explore how we are part of Jesus' story.

Play materials: large felt crosses and craft items that can be placed onto them.

Storytelling

Lay out a cloth and tell the story using wooden bricks on the cloth as indicated in italics.

Jesus was heading to Jerusalem. (*make an arrow*)
He told his friends that when he got there, things would be hard. He would be hurt and killed. (*make a cross*)
But on the third day he would be alive again.
Peter heard about this and shouted out, 'No! Don't go!' (*make an 'x' shape*)
But Jesus was angry and Peter knew that he should not try to stop Jesus. (*make a path*)
Jesus was doing what God wanted.
Jesus said to his friends, 'Pick up your cross and follow me.' (*make a cross*)
'It won't be easy but one day you will be rewarded.'

Play

Provide play figures, a road map and a cloth. Allow the children to use these to retell the story in their own way.

Create

Cut cross shapes into potatoes or sponges. Provide plates of paint and encourage the children to print lots of crosses onto a large sheet of paper.

Praise

Take strips of coloured paper and ask the children to draw themselves on one. Loop the strips together to make a chain. Hang the chain up as you say: We praise you, Jesus, that we are all part of your story.

Pray

Give everyone a ball of play dough. Help them to mould it into the shape of a cross. Hold onto the crosses as you pray: Lord, we want to pick up your cross and follow you. **Amen.**

Find more prayers opposite and additional activities on the next page.

WEB *Very young children* page with more activities, prayers and songs.