

Roots activities for children

Useless game

Play a game without a vital piece of equipment, for example, say that you are going to play a ball game and then announce you don't have a ball; or introduce musical chairs and take all the chairs away. Talk with the group about how difficult it can be to play some games without certain equipment. See if the children and young people are able to make suggestions to improvise and then play the game.

Alternatively, make a collection of board games for each group and take vital parts out – like the dice, question cards, or counters.

Collapse

If you have access to a Jenga™ game, let the group play this. At a vital point remove a piece that is obviously going to make the whole tower collapse. Discuss how difficult it can be to complete the tower if a vital piece is removed.

Alternatively, with younger children, have a simple jigsaw for them to complete and remove the last piece. Talk with them about how we cannot see the whole picture if there is a bit missing.

Treasure hunt

Set up a treasure hunt for the children to complete, but when they get to the end they discover that the treasure is missing. Talk about the feelings of disappointment that it was not there. Make ready some other 'treasure' on stand-by to make them feel better!

Seek and find

Play 'Snakes and Ladders'. Talk about the players' progress towards their goal. It is not always as they expect, is it! The apostles were told not to go on looking upwards for God.

Open the Word = Phone news

Using a mobile phone, recount the story of the Ascension by having a 'conversation' with one of the apostles. Ask another adult helper to ring your mobile and interrupt you as you start to tell the story from the Bible.

Many stories in the Bible tell us about Jesus. He was crucified and died on the cross, but came back to life and was once again teaching his followers about how God wanted the world to be.

Today... (phone rings and interrupts)

Oh, excuse me. I forgot to turn my phone off. Just let me take this call...

Answer the phone saying: Hello... oh hello, Peter.

Turn to children and say: It's Jesus' friend, Peter, calling.

Back to the phone: So, Peter, how are things? It must be great knowing that Jesus is OK and still around to help you. (pause)

What do you mean? Jesus is gone. Gone where? (pause)

Back up to heaven! Did you say that Jesus has gone back to heaven?

You did!

Oh, my goodness!

And you say that you saw it all? (pause)

You were talking with Jesus. He was telling you how the Holy Spirit would come to help you. Yes, I see. (pause)

And then someone asked when all this would happen and Jesus said that it was God that would decide. OK. (pause)

You are kidding! Tell me that again. (pause)

He went up into heaven on a cloud and disappeared from your sight! That must have been something to see! (pause)

And who do you think those two men were who appeared? (pause)

Angels! And what did they say? (pause)

And do you really think that Jesus will one day come back, just like he went? (pause)

Well, that's great, Peter. I can understand how it must all be a bit scary for you at the moment. But I am sure you will all be fine. (pause)

Well, if you know that the Holy Spirit will come to help you, then that's great.

I'd better go, Peter, I'm in the middle of something right now. (pause)

You too, Peter. Take care. Bye.

Ask the children to talk about the conversation they just overheard then go back to the Bible and go through the story with them, picking up on the bits that were mentioned in the conversation. (Acts 1:1-10) One very important point for all ages to grasp is the idea that although God cannot be seen in the person of Jesus for us today, there are many ways in which we can see God around us.

Talk about

It was an uncomfortable time for the followers of Jesus. They had recovered from the crucifixion only to have Jesus seem to leave them again.

Discuss with the children what situations make them feel uncomfortable.

Encourage them to share their feelings in confidence and safety.

Ask the children how they think God can help them through their uncomfortable times.

In this story it is clear that Jesus meant the disciples to take the news of the kingdom of God to others all over the world. The Holy Spirit came to help them do this.

Discuss with the children how they think the church takes the news of Jesus to the people in their community and school

What things could they do that would help to spread the story of Jesus?

Watching the Ascension take place would have been an amazing and perhaps slightly frightening experience. One of the problems the disciples might have faced was convincing people that it really happened.

Talk with the children about how it can be difficult to talk to people who do not believe in Jesus. If they have had experience of this, ask them how they felt and how they got through it.

Discuss the importance of the church community as a group of believers who can draw strength from each other in a world where many do not believe in God.

With older children start asking about the 'how' of this story. Discuss the meaning of this story and how we cope with different thoughts about what it says.

Where's he gone?

Think about 'gazing into heaven?' Why did the apostles do this, do you think? Invite the young people to write a brief monologue or meditation beginning: 'I just wanted him to come back!'

Talk about how this passage might be about leaving the 'comfort zone' in order to find God. The apostles have grown used to having Jesus among them again, at least intermittently. Now this is coming to an end and they have to wait for the unknown.

What is our 'comfort zone' in this context, our family, our church community, our Junior Church group, our house group?

Are we inward-turned when we should be outward-turned? How do we know?

Can we get the balance right between knowing where to look for help, in prayer, in the church fellowship, in the Bible, and when we are too inward-looking?

Are we looking in the right places to find Jesus? Do we know when we are looking vainly up to heaven?

Respond to the Word

Witness badges

Either using a badge-making machine or simple cardboard cut-outs backed with safety pins, ask the children to make badges with the logo God is here! They can decorate them with different things that show God is around us. They can wear these and take them home to remind them of God's presence around us at all times.

Ascension banners

Using tinfoil, silver and gold wrapping paper, and cotton wool, invite the children in small groups or all together to make banners to symbolise the amazing sight of the Ascension. You could either put a representation of Jesus on the banner, or use the words: 'He was lifted up'. These banners could then be used to decorate your home ready for Pentecost.

Prayers

Prayer web

Remind the children that prayer keeps us connected to God and also to one another. Invite the children to stand in a circle and, using a ball of string, ask the children to throw it to one another across the circle. When it is their turn, they could each name something that God has created in the world around them that reminds them of God's continuing presence. As the prayer continues, the string will form a web, connecting them all together. Display this web or use it as a background for the frieze in God in our world.

Dear God,
we thank you that you are always with us.
When we see the sun in the sky,
we remember you are there.
When we feel the rain on our faces,
we remember you are there.
When we watch the birds flying,
we remember you are there,
When we sing and pray together,
we remember you are there.
When it is dark and we feel alone,
help us to remember you are there.
Amen.

God with us
Giving and loving God,
on this special day we remember your loving actions
in this world,
the sending of your Son and the glory of your rising
from death at Easter.
Thank you that you guide us.
We recognise that we are never alone,
for we are always surrounded by your love.
Help us to witness your presence in a world that
needs your love.
Strengthen us with your Spirit
and let your light shine through us.
Amen.