

Messy Church



Get Messy: Aussie Add-Ons

Welcome to Get Messy Aussie Add-Ons.

As we move towards the end of the year all our focus is often pulled in many different directions. There are events to attend, presents to buy, family and friends to catch up with and so much food to be eaten. This time can get very messy because life is messy. But as Beth reminds us being messy isn't just giving in to the chaos of our world, it is also an accurate reflection of the way Jesus moved through his life and ministry. Messy spirituality is a "faith (that) spills out over all parts of our life – beyond our gathering, into our working and households and other expressions of life".

This edition also features a prayer activity which develops across the four months. This activity is designed so that people who may not be used to spoken word prayers can find a meaningful way to engage. It is our hope that your community will find this a live giving experience.

Think about

Messy Spirituality Messy Everything
Messy, not Careless: Music, Meaning and Focus



Experience

Prayer Tree - Belonging
Rain Tree - Lament
Birds of the Air - God's Care
Growing the Lord's Prayer

Celebrate

Matthew 8
Luke 15
Mark 10:13-16
John 3:16-17



Blessings and great joy from all the Intergen Team.



by [Beth Barnett](#)

Messy Spirituality – Messy Everything

To pursue the ways of Messy Church over the long haul, to give ourselves to it as fairdinkum church, church that counts, church for all of us, we need to be convinced that being messy is a reasonable, reliable, robust way of following Jesus. That being messy is a deep and diligent way of doing discipleship. That being messy is not a concession or compromise of our spirituality, but in fact a best-practice approach to faithful living. We need to know that being messy is theologically sound. We need to be sure that being messy aligns with biblical to fast to what is good, to leading a life worthy of the Lord, to taking up our cross and following a crucified and risen Lord, to loving our neighbour and our enemy and our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

As I meet messy church people, I find a mob that are passionate about following Jesus. We are not satisfied with sitting back and riding the status quo. We are a movement of disciples with a healthy dose of dissatisfaction for the mediocre. We want to know that we are putting ourselves towards something that counts.

Being messy must be something more than just a good branding hook line. I believe it is. Being Messy Church comes not from some artsy or kiddy trend, but from a deep and thorough biblical understanding of God and the messy life of Jesus.

Have you noticed how Jesus had a knack for messy methods?

Jesus encounters a man, blind from birth, and rather simply, with a word, healing him, as we know Jesus can, he spits in the dust, makes mud, plasters it on the man's eyes and sends him away to wash. In the moment of healing – Jesus makes a mess. (Check it out in John 9)

A woman is caught in the act of adultery, and she is hauled before Jesus among a court of judgement-frenzied religious fanatics. Jesus bends down and draws in the dust with his finger. He gets his hands dirty. In the moment of forgiveness -Jesus makes a mess. (Check it out in John 8)

A leper kneels before Jesus to be cleansed. Jesus reaches out and touches the contagious, unclean, isolated man, infecting himself, corrupting himself in the eyes of all around him. In the moment of compassion – Jesus makes a mess. (Matthew 8)

Jesus arrives in the city of Jerusalem – it's a moment of destiny, celebration and conspiracy tangle around him in the crowd. He enters the Temple, the centre of religious life and Jewish national pride, and creates havoc, turning over tables, spilling coins and disturbing animals. His anger blazes, appalled from every angle – the religious hypocrisy, the financial corruption, the exploitation of the poor.

In the moment of prophetic justice – Jesus makes a mess. (Check it out in Mark 11)

Jesus delivers a man from evil – and thousands of pigs stampede across the land and over the edge in to the sea. In the moment of deliverance – Jesus makes a mess. (Check it out in Luke 8) Jesus is arrested and tried, convicted and executed. A pathetic end in human evaluation, and yet

Messy Sprituality - Messy Everything

the fulfilment of God's determination to demonstrate the scale of his love and grace. 'Forgive them (and he means all of us) for they don't know what they do.'

His bleeding messed up form barely recognisable as a human, let alone as God.

At the moment of the salvation of the world – Jesus makes a mess. (Check it out in Luke 23)

Our messy church ways can indeed be authentic expressions of the messy ways of Jesus.

Jesus makes earthy mess. But he also makes moral mess, allowing women to touch him, and choosing traitors as hosts. He makes social mess with Roman soldiers and slaves and children. He makes intellectual mess with riddles and toilet jokes in answer to the self-righteous religious leaders' questions.

As followers of Jesus in Messy Church communities of faith and practice, we need to ask ourselves if we are making enough mess.

I don't just mean, do our activities look something like a *pinterest fail meme.

But are we messy in enough ways.

Are we socially messy?

- Do our messy churches have people from various different social circles and cultures? Are there many different types of relationships; models of family; household arrangements? Do you see cohorts of dissimilar people gathering around different encounters, or do the toddlers collect in one spot, the middle primary aged boys gravitate somewhere else, the mums hover together most of the time?

Are we theologically messy?

- As we engage with the Bible, do we make a beeline for a straight answer, or do we allow for many ideas and unresolved questions to keep bugging us through the week?

Are we intellectually messy?

- When children have been present in church over the years there has been a cultural urge to 'simplify' concepts in explaining them. Encountering God is a large mystery, and doesn't merit a simple explanation. Does your messy church allow for both simple statements and complex conversations?

Are we spiritually messy?

- The spiritual life is not just one sector of our living, a slice of the pie alongside our physical and emotional and social and cognitive engagements. Rather our spiritual life is what connects all of our other parts together – and all of us to God and all of us to one another as participants in creation. Our spiritual life is the life that is bigger than any one of us – and only possible because of the grace of God which holds us all together.

So as messy church, we need a messy spirituality. This means that our faith spills out over all parts of our life – beyond our gathering, into our working and households and other expressions of life – sporting and dancing and neighbouring.

And our spiritual life takes many forms. For a long time especially in protestant and reformed churches, ministry with children and adults has focused a lot on learning, teaching and understanding. There are many other expressions of the spiritual life that need to be in our messy mix – celebrating, seeking justice, contemplating in stillness, serving, practicing simplicity and generosity, praying. Churches have traditionally become a little bit stuck in one or the other of these expressions, because, if you pick out just one or two, you can set up your space neatly and effectively for that way of gathering and things run smoothly.

In messy church, we can aspire to not settle for just one routine way of defining and doing our spirit work, but keep it messy – like Jesus.

Messy Church



by Beth Barnett

Messy - not Careless: Music, Meaning and Focus

Some people mistake the idea of messiness in Messy Church as a lack of effort and care. A slap-dash, “she’ll be right, mate!” attitude that signals lowering standards, and this grates against an old-fashioned notion of ‘giving God our best’ as reflected in formality, and upper class manners, customs and dress. When

I was a young girl in a coastal country town where the primary industries were ocean fishing, farming, and abattoir, everyone scrubbed up and suited up for Sunday morning worship. It meant something in those days for labourers to down tools and wash the sweat and smell of their work off and come together in a way that was different to the way the community connected – over hay bales and carcasses and ice chests and diesel - during the week. It was an expression of the intentionality of country church. That was good for then and there.



But those of us involved in Messy Church know that mess in our communities isn’t a reflection of lack of planning or care, lowering standards, or of neglect. In fact, it takes a lot of hard work to make as much mess as we do!

An important feature of what makes Messy Church effective is the degree to which every aspect of the Messy Church experience has been thought about intentionally and worked from the ground up. There are many mainstream churches doing a number of things in their gatherings which no one has thought intentionally or critically about for decades. Things can just roll on in the routine way without question.

Not so in Messy Church. What a great gift it is to invest ourselves only in things that we know the reasons and meaning behind.

Of course, this level of care and intention takes a whole community to put together – and this too is a beautiful gift – to all be valued contributors to the Messy Church experience together.

In this issue of Aussie Add Ons, there is a resource for using the song ‘Hear Our Praises’, a well known and loved Hillsong number, for celebration time.

The recommended process for using this song connects the song to the reading from Matthew 8 in which we track Jesus’ movements from place to place, leading to his statement of his own homelessness: ‘Foxes have holes, and birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head.’ The Bible reading points to Jesus belonging no where, because, as Lord of the entire Cosmos, he belongs everywhere.

Music, meaning and focus



The actions for the song, therefore, connect to noticing the places named in the song. You'll notice that, unlike some other forms of 'action songs' there isn't simply an action for each line – the actions arise only in response to highlighting the places.

On another occasion, paired with a different bible passage, you would rework the actions – or use some other medium - to reflect a different focus, perhaps freer actions for the theme of praise; or streamers and party poppers for the themes of dancing and joy and praise and glory.

Perhaps you are surprised, too, at the recommendation to use a contemporary Hillsong piece for a Messy church celebration. As our Messy Church gatherings are truly intergenerational, we need to choose music that is diverse and connects with various ages and cultures. Including a contemporary song

like this brings a different atmosphere to using songs of the specifically 'children's' genre. The intentionality of the songs – connecting it everything else that is part of the Messy Church encounter on a particular day broadens its accessibility, as you are inviting your gathering to connect with the song, not via its musical style or lyrics alone, but to connect with it as an expression of the ideas and meaning that you have been exploring together.

When you use songs in this way, the words you need in leading take on an open invitational slant.

“We are going to keep on exploring the idea of the places we might sense God through a song. In this song there are different ways you can get involved: by singing the words, by watching for the actions that highlight the different places in the song, by choosing a percussion instrument and making a loud sound whenever a place where God is comes up in the lyrics. You might like to dance, or just sit and listen and think – that's OK too. You might listen out for the places that are mentioned in the song that are also in our bible reading today – and be ready to remember them and tell us about it at the end of the song.”

“May this song help us all with our wondering and sensing of God around us.”

As you put together Messy Church Celebration times, be courageous in choosing music for the sake of its meaning and as a focus for making intentional space for encountering God in many different ways.

You might also be surprised by the Bible reading – which, rather than being limited to the key verse, 'Foxes have holes, birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head', takes a step back and covers the whole of chapter 8. However, not by reading every word, but by plotting the geography of the narrative of the whole chapter as context for Jesus' statement of homelessness. Again, this is a bit messy, not just taking a neat one or 2 verses, or a short one-episode story. However, this kind of messy reading helps us grow in our understanding of the bigger story of Jesus life. It leaves us more to read at home in our households and a framework in which to place it.

Messy, but not trivial. We keep reaching for meaning and focus to what we do, trusting in God's spirit among us to work the truth and grace of God's good news deep into our lives.

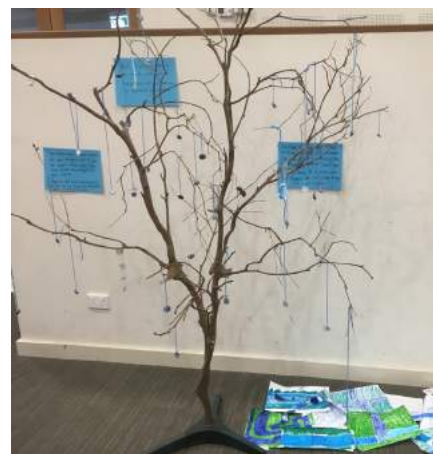
Prayer Tree Activity

The activity section of this Aussie Add on's will be a little different. We will provide four ideas to help create a prayer space in your Messy Church. In the first session we invite you to build a prayer tree which will then be used in the following months. The size and construction of the tree will depend on the space you have available, your capacity to store it and the materials you choose to use. We have intentionally NOT told you how to build your tree, as there is really no wrong way of doing it. Build your tree without leaves.

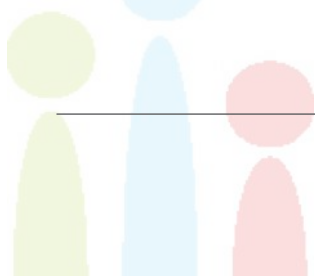


The prayer activities will only touch on the bible readings for that month focusing instead on providing opportunities for prayers of praise, confession, petition and thanksgiving.

We will often use actions or activities to represent our prayers as a way for people who may be new to the concept of prayer to engage with the space.



This will also shift the focus away from words and allow a greater number of people to participate.





by [Stacey Wilson](#)

Prayer Tree Activity



What this is: Interactive prayer space



Where it's used: Messy Church activity time



What's needed:

Free standing tree

- Base to support the tree (eg: christmas tree stand or single stick on an X base)
- Branches
- Tape

Painted tree

- MDF board (or canvas) with background painted and tree outline
- Paint



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Matthew 8:19-20

When Jesus saw the crowd, he went across Lake Galilee. A teacher of the Law of Moses came up to him and said, "Teacher, I'll go anywhere with you!" Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens, and birds have nests. But the Son of Man doesn't have a place to call his own."

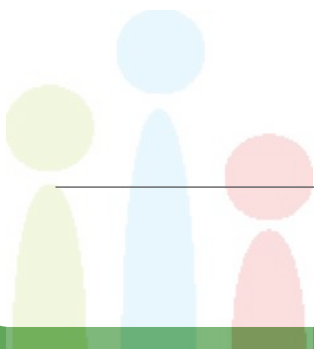
Think

In the old testament a fruitful fig tree was a symbol of God's blessing, where as a dying one represented God's judgement. The prophet Jeremiah described Israel as a 'green olive tree.' (Jeremiah 11:16).

In many cultures trees symbolise life and immortality and in others it represents family.

There are lots of trees in the new testament.

- People climb them to see Jesus (Luke 19:4),
- They lay branches down to welcome Him (John 12:13),
- Jesus cursed a fig tree and it died (Matthew 21:19),
- He even found one of his disciples under a tree. (John 1:48)



Prayer Tree

Trees are also used as symbols or in stories.

- Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is like a great big tree that grows from a tiny seed (Luke 13:19).
- He told his disciples that they would know what was in someone's heart by the type of fruit they grew (Matthew 7:15)
- Paul told the gentiles (non Jewish people) that they were like 'wild branches' and they could be grafted into the 'olive tree' and become part of that 'tree'- the family of God. (Romans 11:17)

We are building a tree that we will use for the next few months at messy church. As you build the tree think about the way all the parts (branches, trunk, roots) are connected together. Think about the parts that belong on this tree but aren't on our tree yet (leaves, seeds, flower).

Jesus tells us today that while birds have nests and foxes have dens he has no fixed home. Being homeless is a deeper, more complex issue than just being without permanent safe accommodation. One website defined homelessness as 'An inadequate experience of connectedness with family and or community,' (<http://www.homeless.org.au> Dominic Mapstone).

Pray

Not all prayers have to be made with words, in these Messy Church experiences we will use actions to represent our prayers.

Who are the people in your life that you are connected to, who helps you feel like you belong? Working together to build the tree symbolise or represents our prayers for these people.

There are many people who don't have a place to belong. Winding the tape around to hold the tree together symbolise our prayers for those who are lonely, isolated and/or live on the margins of our communities.

Hang colourful feathers in our tree to symbolise our prayers of hope. Jesus knows what it is like to be rejected, to have nowhere to call home, he understands this pain. He invites us to belong, he loves us in our most vulnerable places. He is the Lord of the cosmos and the creator of everything and in him we have a home.

You don't need to have words for your prayers but if you do share them with God who hears the prayers of your heart.

Act

How can you support those who are vulnerable to becoming isolated or disconnected? Is it enough to offer our thoughts and prayers or is there something we can do?



by [Beth Barnett](#)

Bible Engagement: Matthew 8



What this is: Intergenerational Bible Reading



Where it's used: Messy Church Celebration time; any intergenerational gathering



What's needed:

- 10 A3 posters printed from images attached. Paste the line of text from Matthew 8 that corresponds to the picture on the back of each poster.
- 10 Volunteers prearranged to hold the poster and lead reading the text (invite pairs of different abilities including a strong reader to share presenting the posters)
- Whole text (selected verses from Matthew 8 as set below) displayed on screen, or printed and distributed among your gathering.



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Matthew 8:19 in the context of Matthew chapter 8

Introduction

Today we are looking into a part of the Bible, in a book called the Gospel According to Matthew. We are looking at chapter 8. And we are going to see if we can track Jesus down. Maybe we will even find Jesus' home.

But first, let's do a bit of our own tracking.

I wonder where we all call home?

Invite participants to ask the person next to them 'Where is your home?' Allow a minute or two for this, and then invite people to share with the whole group.

Welcome and affirm all contributions. Make plenty of eye contact with people of all ages, to encourage participation.

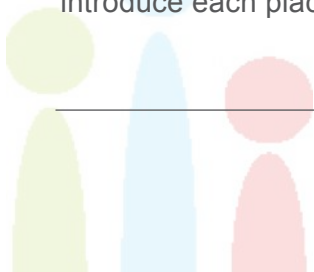
Great! There are lots of different places that people make their homes.

Let's look at Matthew Chapter 8.

We are going to track all the different places Jesus turns up in this chapter. We aren't going to stop and read all the stories that happen in each of these places, but that's something you can do in your household or with some friends.

There are 10 different places named in Matthew chapter 8.

We have 10 posters each with one of the ten places. And with the words from Matthew 8 that introduce each place that Jesus goes.



Matthew 8

We are going to look at them and read them one by one and put them together to make a rough map of where Jesus goes.

Distribute the 10 posters

Invite each poster to be presented, and the text read aloud. As all of the portions of text are short, invite the whole gathering to repeat the line after it has been read out.

Place the posters either on the ground, or blu-tak onto a large blank wall. Making one large continuous map.

After all of the posters are assembled and you have heard all of the lines of text, invite a volunteer to use their fingers to “walk” across the map as you all read the text together again.

If the volunteer has trouble working out where to go, encourage coaching from the group.

Reflection

We began with the question of where Jesus lived. I wonder if our reading and our big map and tracking Jesus’ across it has helped us with this question?

Where does Jesus live? Here or here? Or Here? Or here? (point to various places on the map)

Let’s read the text one more time and when you think you hear the answer call out – “stop”

Read text...pause on ‘No Where’.

Jesus says Everyone has a place to live – even birds and foxes – even if you live in a hole – that’s somewhere that you belong. But Jesus says, he doesn’t have any home, no fixed address. I wonder why that is.

I think there are two reasons:

One is because of the kind of human Jesus was. A Human who understands how life can be tricky and troubled. So that we can be sure that no matter where we live, even if it’s in a hole in the ground, or we have to move around and make a new nest like birds every season, we know that Jesus understands what that is like.

The second reason is because of the kind of God Jesus is. Jesus is God over the whole of the universe, the whole of the world, the whole of the cosmos. So there is no just one place that Jesus lives. Jesus lives everywhere – he belongs everywhere, or maybe we could say everywhere belongs to him.

Where does Jesus live? Here and here and here and here – your place, my place...he belongs everywhere, and everywhere belongs to him.

You can read the rest of the stories in Matthew chapter 8 that tell what happens where Jesus is in your own households, where you live.



Matthew 8

Matthew Chapter 8 - text

vs 1 When Jesus came down from the mountain

vs 5 When he entered 'Na-um's village'

vs 14 When Jesus entered Peter's house

vs 18 He gave orders to go over to the other side (of the lake)

vs 19 "Wherever you go..."

vs 20a "Foxes have holes

vs 20b Birds have their nests

vs 20c The Son of man has No Where

vs 23 Got in a boat

vs 28 When he came to the country of the Gadarenes



Vs 1 When Jesus came down from the mountain

Vs 3 When he entered Nazareth's village

Vs 19 Whenever you go...

Vs 26 When he came to the country of the Gadarenes

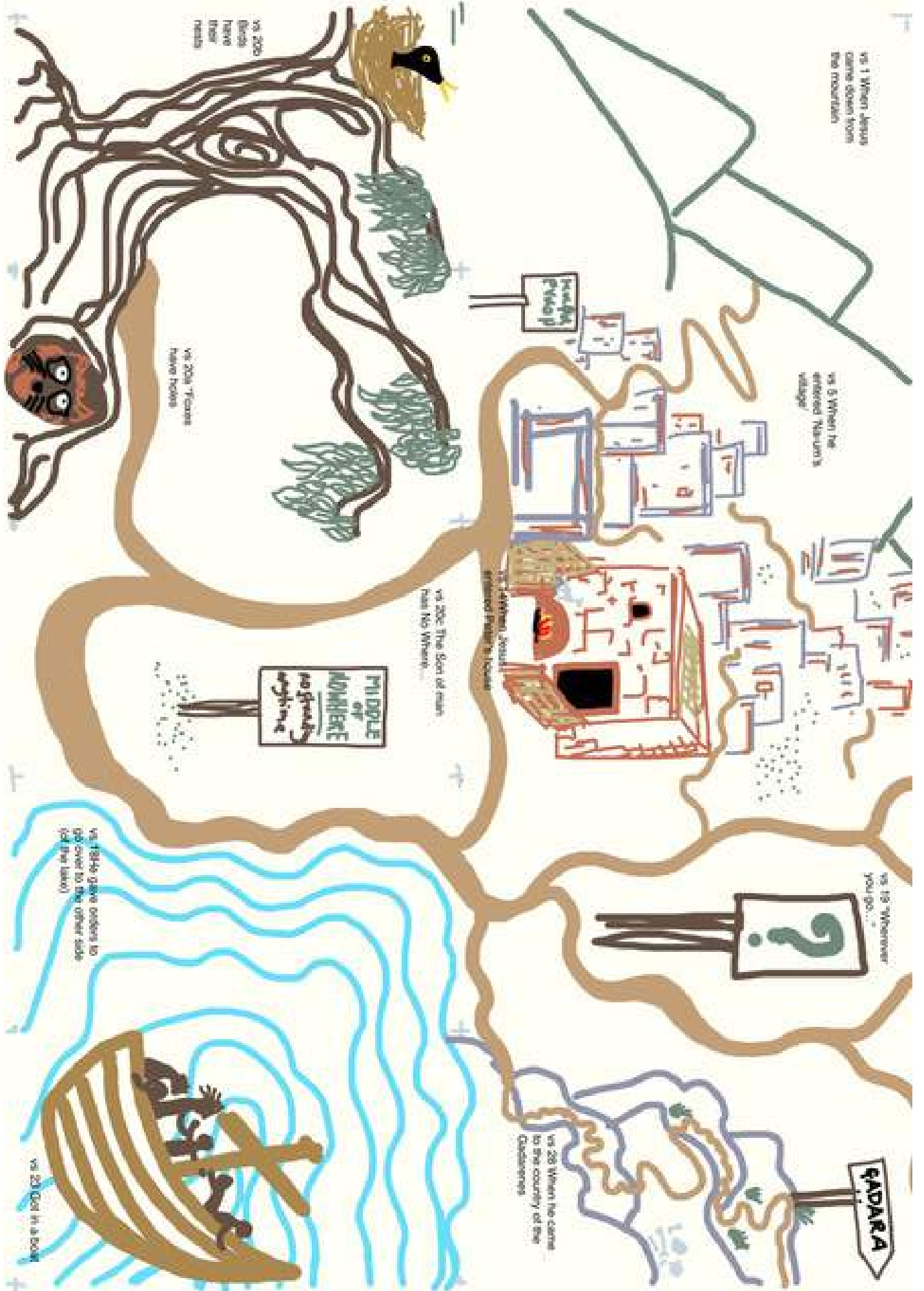
Vs 20b Birds have their nests

Vs 20a Foxes have holes

Vs 20c The Son of man has no where to lay his head

Vs 18-19 Give orders to go over to the other side (of the lake)

Vs 23 Got in a boat



Music: Hear Our Praises



What this is: Celebration time music resource



Where it's used: Messy Church celebration time



What's needed:

- Musicians rehearsed and ready to lead 'Hear our Praises', ready for the pauses for sharing stories.
- Or youtube track cued.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X4sf6HxYLU>
- Team of people with actions rehearsed
- There are 10 different actions: recruit a team of 3-5 people and allocate each person 2 or 3 actions each, rather than having the whole team try to demonstrate all the actions.*



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Matthew 8

Introduction

Today as we look at the places Jesus lived, and how he made a difference, bringing justice and Good news of hope and peace wherever he was, we are going to sing a song celebrating some of the places God is with us.

The song uses the words 'Praise' and 'Hallelujah' and 'Glory' – these are words of celebration – like saying “YAYYYYYY!!!!!! God is here!” There's also dancing and joy – again ways of saying a huge “YAYYYYYY!!!!!! God is here!”

So here are some of the places we are celebrating with our “YAYYYYYY!!!!!! God is here!”

Our Homes – hands with fingers pointing together overhead to form a roof

Our Streets – arms and hands straight out in front of you

Injustice – double thumbs down

Mountains – Arms in a V shape lifted up overhead

Valleys – hands in an inverted V shape pointing down

Heavens (sky) – arms straight up

Nations – hands beginning in front of you spreading out to either side

The Air – hands swishing side to side overhead

The Darkness – hands over eyes

The Earth – arms overhead, circling out

The Sea – wavy arms out either side

Hear Our Praises – One Minute Stories

As we sing together there will be lots of ways to join in.
You can join in the actions with these words.
You can dance, like it says in the song.
And we'll have some chances to share some of our stories too.

Let's sing together

Begin by singing the first verse and chorus.

*Return to the first verse, sing through to the end of the first line and stop.
Invite participants to ask a person near them to tell them something about their home.*

*Allow 1 minute for this, then return to the top of the first verse, sing through to the end of the second line and stop.
Invite participants to ask a (different) person near them to tell them something about their street.*

*Allow 1 minute for this, then return to the top of the first verse, sing through to the end of the third line and stop.
Invite participants to ask a (different) person near them to tell them somewhere that they think there is injustice.*

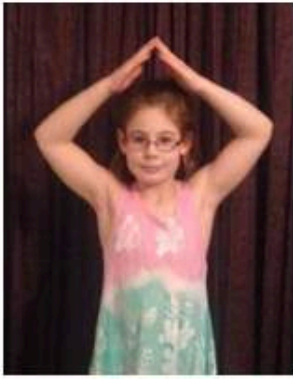
Allow 1 minute for this, then return to the top of the first verse, sing through the first verse and into the chorus and the whole of the second verse, with your team demonstrating the actions.

At the end of the second verse, go back to the beginning of the second verse, sing through to the end of the first line and stop.

Invite participants to ask a person near them to tell them something about Darkness – do you like darkness? Is it scary? Where do you think the darkest places are? (either physically or metaphorically)

*Allow 1 minute for this, then return to the top of the second verse, sing through to the end of the third line and stop.
Invite participants to ask a (different) person near them to tell them something they think of when they hear the phrase 'the whole earth'.*

Allow 1 minute for this, then return to the top of the second verse, sing through the whole second verse and into the chorus, and the hallelujah section and final chorus with the team demonstrating the actions.



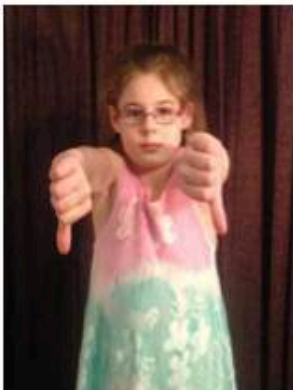
Our Homes

– hands with fingers pointing together overhead to form a roof



Our Streets

– arms and hands straight out in front of you



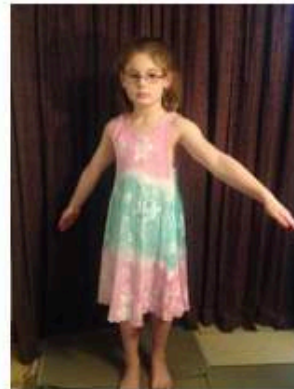
Injustice

– double thumbs down



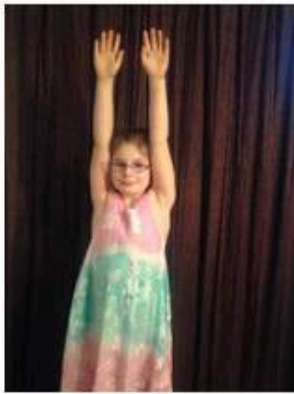
Mountains

– Arms in a V shape lifted up overhead

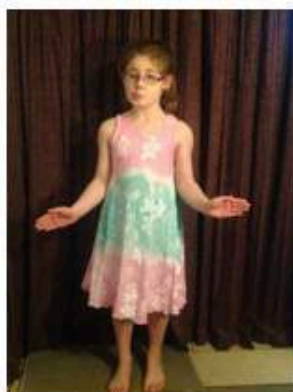
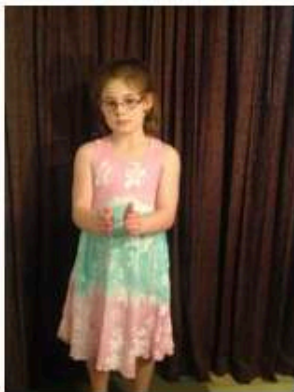


Valleys

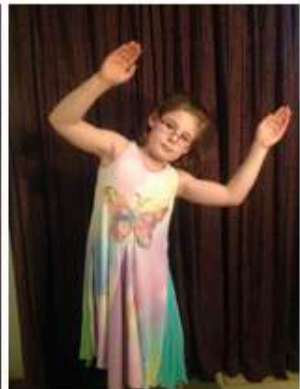
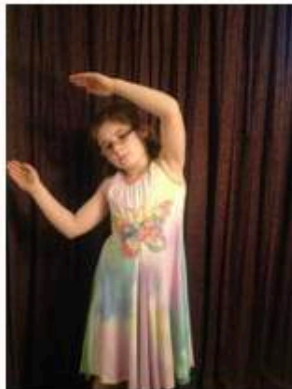
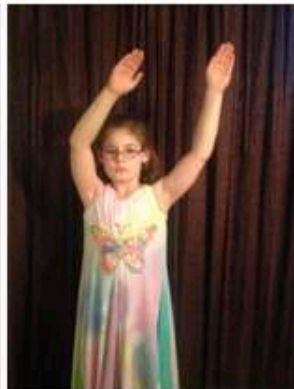
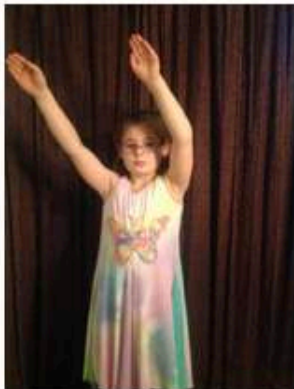
– hands in an inverted V shape pointing down



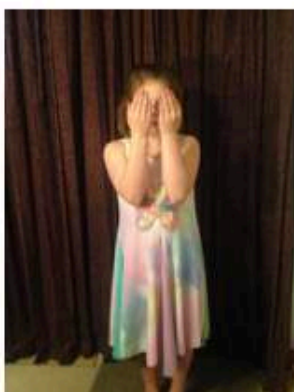
Heavens (sky)
– arms straight up



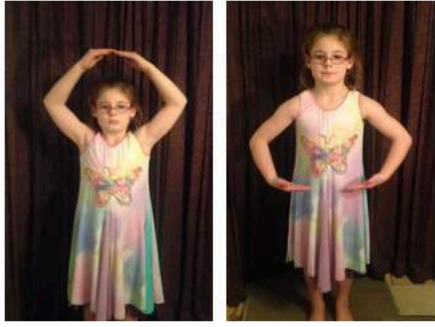
Nations – hands beginning in front of you spreading out to either side



The Air – hands swishing side to side overhead



The Darkness
– hands over eyes



The Earth – arms overhead, circling out and down



The Sea – wavy arms out either side

Thank you to my friend Josephine for modelling these actions!



Rain Tree Prayer



What this is: Interactive prayer space



Where it's used: Messy Church activity time



What's needed: Glass beads (blue or clear), Sticky tape, blue wool, scissors



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Matthew 8

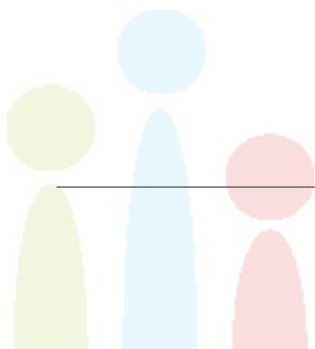
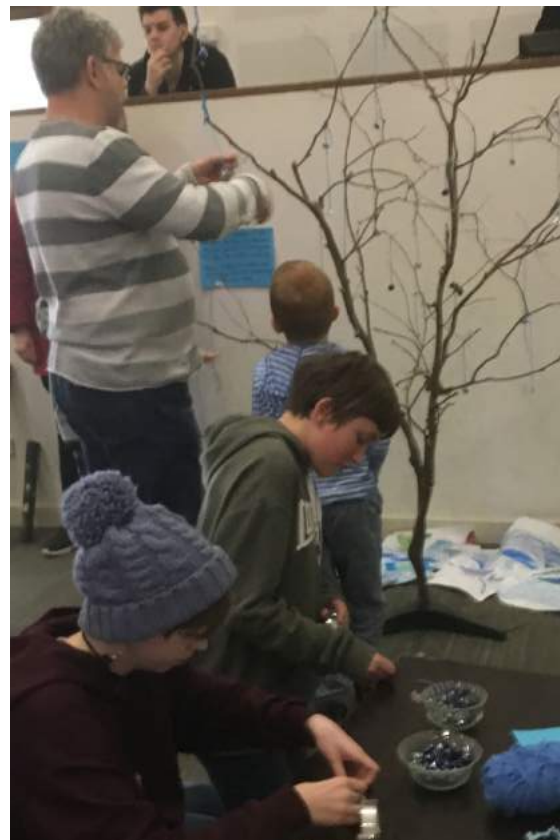
Think

Our tree has no leaves. This is a natural part of a deciduous tree's life. As the seasons pass leaves grow, change, are lost and regrown.

This process is a natural part of our life too. As we learn and experience different parts of life we change. Sometimes we have to let go, so that something new can grow. This usually isn't easy. We often feel lost when this happens.

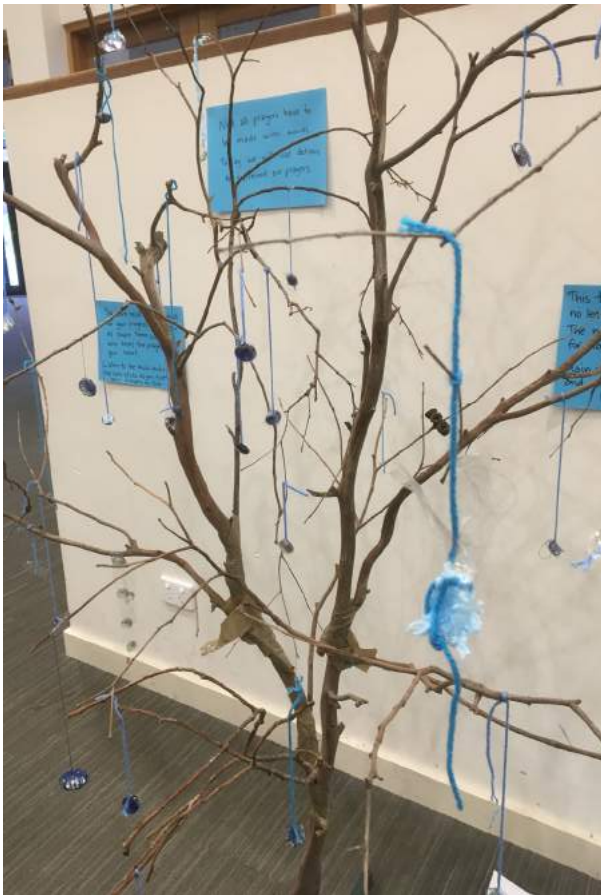
There are many people in our community and our world who have lost their homes or people they love. These losses are very hard to cope with.

But we are not alone. Jesus tells us three stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son and the people who are missing them. Each of these stories
Pray: Not all prayers have to be made with words, in these Messy Church experiences we will use actions to represent our prayers.



Rain Tree Prayer

Pray: Not all prayers have to be made with words, in these Messy Church experiences we will use actions to represent our prayers.



This tree is a symbol. It has no leaves because it is dormant. The new growth is coming but for now the spring rains fall.

Rain is funny. It is often cold and always wet, but it also brings life and hope.

Today, hang the glass beads from the tree as prayers.

These might be prayers of lament or sadness for those who are feeling lost or alone, they are our prayers for those who have experienced great loss.

Or they might be prayers of thanks and hopefulness for the possibility of there being new stories in our lives and the lives of others. Stories of being found, of things being set right, of welcome and home- stories of love, justice and mercy.

You don't need to have words for your prayers but if you do share them with God who hears the prayers of your heart.



Act

How can we support people who have lost everything to war or natural disaster as they try to find a new life in our country?



by [Beth Barnett](#)

Bible Engagement: Luke 15



What this is: Intergenerational Bible Reading



Where it's used: Messy Church Celebration time; any intergenerational gathering



What's needed:

- Shepherd, Woman and Rich Father costumes
- 3 prepared characters in costume to answer the questions about their stories (See script). Shepherds were typically quite young, a job given to the children of the family. Girls were married in their early teenage years.
- Cards with each of the four questions



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Luke 15

Introduction

Today we are looking at three stories that Jesus told about lost things. They are all in the one chapter of the gospel of Luke, chapter 15 and right one after the other. Three stories all in a row. Jesus told these stories to help us think about what God does to bring people back together and back to himself.

In each story God is shown as a different character; the thing that gets lost is different; the way that each thing gets lost happens a different way; and the way that each thing that was lost gets found and put back together with the rest of the things they belong with is different too.

Three lost and found stories. But three different lost and found stories.

Before we hear the three stories from the Bible, from the Gospel of Luke, we are going to practice telling some Messy Lost Stories ourselves.

See if you can think of something that you lost once. How did it get lost? And how did you find it again?

Take volunteers to tell their lost story by responding to your questions:

Who are you?

What did you lose?

How did you lose it?

How did you find it?

To help us with these stories we have three characters – these are the characters that represent God in each of the stories.

So let's meet each of them now.

Luke 15

Enter Shepherd, Woman, Father

We have some questions for each of the Characters.
There are four question-askers here. And they are going to tell you their questions.

Call forward the four people you have prepared to ask the questions. Invite them to each state their question, one after the other.

- Who are you?
- What have you lost?
- How did that thing become lost?
- How did you find what you had lost again?

Great questions. Let's see what our three story characters have to say...

Who are you?

Shepherd: I am a shepherd, I look after sheep. I'm from a story that Jesus told about God and people.

Woman: I'm a married woman. I'm from another story that Jesus told about God and people.

Father: I'm the Papa of two sons. I own a lot of land. I'm from yet another story that Jesus told about God and people.

What have you lost?

Shepherd: I was caring for one hundred sheep and one of them got lost

Woman: I had ten coins that were given to me by my family when I got married, and I lost one of them.

Father: I had many slaves and two sons, and one of my sons was lost.

How did that thing become lost?

Shepherd: This little sheep wandered away; it didn't know what it was doing, and it got lost.

Woman: One of my coins just fell and went missing.

Father: My son deliberately left his home and all that he knew, and became lost far away.

How did you find what you had lost again?

Shepherd: I went out searching, looking for my sheep and found it and brought it home.

Luke 15

Woman: I had to clean up and put things in order and then I found my coin.

Father: I waited and waited, and my son decided to come home – when I saw him, even from a distance I ran to him like I was a little boy.

Thank you for sharing your stories.

Each about something lost and found, but not lost the same way, and not found the same way.

Just remind us again of your story.

Shepherd: I am a worker – a shepherd, I look after sheep. I was caring for one hundred sheep and one of them got lost. This little sheep wandered away; it didn't know what it was doing, and it got lost. I went out searching, looking for my sheep and found it and brought it home.

Woman: I'm a married woman. I had ten coins that were given to me by my family when I got married, and I lost one of them. One of my coins just fell and went missing. I had to clean up and put things in order and then I found my coin.

Father: I'm the Papa of two sons. I own a lot of land. I had many slaves and two sons, and one of my sons was lost. My son deliberately left his home and all that he knew, and became lost far away. I waited and waited, and my son decided to come home – when I saw him, even from a distance I ran to him like I was a little boy.

I wonder why Jesus told three different stories about lost things being found?

I wonder why Jesus made God into a different character in each story?

What does Jesus think God is like? Like a rough working shepherd, like a married woman, like a Father who owns much land. Something different to see about God in each story.

And each story of being lost and found happens in a different way.

Some people just wander away from God without meaning to.

Some people get lost in all the chaos and clutter.

Some people deliberately turn away from God.

I wonder if you sometimes feel like you've wandered away from God? Like a sheep, confused... Or that you can't see God for all the clutter? Like the coin. Or that you know you've chosen to leave God behind? Like the son.

However lost we might ever become, these three stories show us how God loves and cares for us and will do whatever it takes for us to know that we belong to him.

God goes looking for us, the like shepherd.

God sorts things out and set things right, like the married woman.

God is patient and never gives up, waits for us to return and welcomes us home, like the papa.

Birds of the Air Prayer



What this is: Interactive prayer space



Where it's used: Messy Church activity time



What's needed: Feathers, sticky tape and wool/string



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Mark 10:13-16 and Matthew 6:25-6

Think

The story today tells us about a time when some grown-ups thought what they were doing was being interrupted by a bunch of kids. The disciples were anxious that Jesus was being bothered by the children, they thought that he had more important things to do. But Jesus had other ideas, in fact he got quite cross. He reminded his 'very important' disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to children and not just adults. Matthew 6:25-6 reminds us

...do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow or reap or gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

It is easy to get overwhelmed by all the things that are going on, especially at this time of the year. Sometimes this makes us miss what is really important.

Pray

Not all prayers have to be made with words, in these Messy Church experiences we will use actions to represent our prayers.

Lay the tape on the table, sticky side up and place the feathers on the tape. Roll the tape up around the feathers and tie a string to your bird. Hang it on the tree.



Birds of the Air Prayer

It can be difficult to hear the phrase “do not be anxious about your life” when you are anxious about your life. Often being told to just stop worrying adds great burden. So today you are invited to come and make a bird to hang on the tree as a reminder of God’s care.

There might be some people who don’t feel they can join in this activity, but that’s OK there are other people here who can do it for you. This is the beauty of community we are all here to pray for and support each other.



Act

Think about the impact what we buy can have on our earth and other people, how can we do our Christmas shopping ethically?
Who do we exclude because we think our stuff and business is more important? How could we change that?

Bible Engagement: Mark 10:13-16



What this is: Intergenerational Bible Reading



Where it's used: Messy Church Celebration time; any intergenerational gathering



What's needed:

- As people arrive at your gathering, one by one explain that in the Celebration time, when you begin introducing the Bible Reading, you want an adult and a child to interrupt you; the adult calling out to get your attention, coming forward with the child, announcing that the child wants to say hi and give you a hi-five, or shake your hand, or take a selfie. The child should greet you enthusiastically. Explain that one of the leaders will turn them away and send them back to their seats. Make sure that the children involved are really clear that it's a set up – that you are just acting out what happened in the Bible story, and they would never be really brushed aside in your community.
- A couple of leaders, prepared to turn the adults and children away saying lines like 'Stop interrupting!' – 'take the kids away' – 'not now – this is important'
- Copy of the text with key words highlighted, on screen or in print and distributed among your gathering.



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: Mark 10:13-16

Some **people** brought their **children** to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his **disciples** told the **people** to stop bothering him.

When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, "Let the **children** come to me! Don't try to stop them. **People** who are like these little **children** belong to the **kingdom of God**. I promise you that you cannot get into the **Kingdom of God**, unless you accept it the way a **child** does." Then Jesus took the **children** in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.

Mark 10:13-16

Introduction

Welcome to our Messy Celebration time today. We are going to read from the Bible together. We are reading from a part of the Bible called The Gospel according to Mark – and we're in chapter 10. In this chapter, Jesus is having some very interesting conversations with people – his friends are there, but there are other people who are interested in what Jesus has to say. Though not all of them like what they are hearing. There are community leaders, workers, people who are too sick to work, children and parents.

By this time, you will have had plenty of interruptions, with children being turned away by your leaders.

So as we read the story from the Bible today, we'll notice lots of these different people. And it is fantastic that we have all kinds of people here today to help with this. And it is especially good that we have children and young people here – because honestly, we couldn't do this story about Jesus without you!

Can you believe that sometimes people think children get in the way of listening to Jesus and knowing how God wants us to live?

In fact this story shows it's the opposite. We are all welcome, especially children, to be part of how Jesus shows the world God's good ways.

As we read the Bible together today, there is a way for us all to be involved. First time through reading, you are invited to join in on the words that describe you.

So when it says people – that's all the grown ups.
When it says children – you know who you are!
Disciples – are people who help people to get to know Jesus - so that's our messy church team – you'll call our disciples.
And the Kingdom of God – that includes all of us!

Read the text, pausing on the highlighted words and encourage participation.

That was great. Now that we've found our parts in the story, we're going to read it again and this time as you join in on your word, there are some things for you to do as well.

First of all when the story mentions **people** – that's all the **grown ups** – so we'll need a big wave from all the **grown ups**.

There are **children** in the story. When you hear of 'children' that's the time for all the **children** to be **children**! Have a little run around, do a handstand, dance a little bit – just for a moment!

Then there are some **disciples** – they are the meant to be the ones who are helping **people** to meet Jesus – like our **messy church team**. So when we hear **disciples** – the **messy church team** will pull grumpy faces and call out 'Stop! stop!'

Finally, there is mention of the **Kingdom of God** – this is all of us; all of us belonging to God and living with peace and love and justice together. So when we hear the '**Kingdom of God**', we will all turn to someone nearby and say 'Peace'.

Mark 10:13-16

Practice each of these responses making sure there is enthusiastic participation.

Read the text slowly and expressively, pausing on the highlighted words and modelling the action that corresponds to the word.

Some **people** brought their **children** to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his **disciples** told the **people** to stop bothering him.

When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, “Let the **children** come to me! Don’t try to stop them. **People** who are like these little **children** belong to the **kingdom of God**. I promise you that you cannot get into the **Kingdom of God**, unless you accept it the way a **child** does.” Then Jesus took the **children** in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.

Conclusion

People respond to Jesus in different ways.

Jesus welcomes our responses – whatever they are as straightforward as the enthusiasm and simplicity of a child, or a bit bothered and grumpy like the disciples. We are all welcome.



Growing the Lord's Prayer



What this is: Interactive prayer space



Where it's used: Messy Church Activity time



What's needed:

Prayer Tree



A pot (or basket, or trash bin) to place the tree in, and lots of brown fabric/tissue paper to be "soil" in a garbage bag or chaff bag



Flowers or leaves: paper or felt/fabric flowers and leaves with yarn or string loops glued to them.

Fruit: you could use a bucket of plastic or real fruit with string loops, or paper cut outs that the kids have cut out or coloured or embellished.

Ivy and scissors: pre-wrap the tree in strands of 'ivy' – you could simply use green yarn, plastic ivy, or real ivy if you have access to some.

Sun: cardboard circle or a ball

"Water": a large bucket full of blue cellophane strips or pieces of blue yarn (30cm long)

Birds from November session

A printed copy of each separate line of the prayer by Mark Berry

<https://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au/?p=2621>

Time: 10-15 min

Bible focus/theme: Matthew 6:9-13

There are two options for this activity. The first is a prayer space which takes place during the activity time and the second is an option for the celebration time.

Option One

Set up the prayer tree with a table near by. On the table place

- the "soil" brown pieces of fabric
 - the flowers and leaves,
 - the fruit,
 - the "water" and
 - the feathers to make the birds
- in their own baskets. As well as
- string that can be cut and tied each object
 - scissors

And the sun circle with

- yellow textas or paint to colour it

Weave the Ivy through the Tree



Growing the Lord's Prayer

In front of each of the baskets have some printed copy of the following version of the Lord's prayer cut into sections with a hole punched in it so that string can be attached.

Invite your members to read through the prayer and choose which part is meaningful to them and that they would like to place on the tree or enact. Use string to tie words to the object and hang it from the tree.

Print or write the words "Bring your life!" and hang near the tree

Soil: Wrap around base of the tree

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere!
Release a space to plant your Presence here.
Imagine your possibilities now.

Flowers and Leaves: Add to tree

Imagine your possibilities now.
Embody your desire in every light and form.

Fruit: Add to tree

Grow through us this moment's nourishment and wisdom.

Ivy: Cut pieces from the tree

Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' faults.

Sun: Colour or paint

Help us not forget our Source,

Water: Hang from tree

Yet free us from not being in the Present.

Birds: Make and add to tree

From you arises every Vision, Power and Song from gathering to gathering.
May our future actions grow from here!

Mark Berry

<https://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au/?p=2621>

Growing the Lord's Prayer

Option two: Celebration time

Set up

Distribute the props: depending on the size of your gathering, you might put family groups together, or have a prop on the coffee tables that groups of families sit around. You might have designated 'readers' and scatter all the bits randomly all around the room and then gather all the "birds" together at the appropriate time. This activity is really scalable, so you can have more, or less, of the objects so that many people, or few, can participate.

Ideally, an overhead projector presents one slide per line of the reading, which the designated 'reader' reads out aloud, and then the facilitator encourages the whole group to respond enthusiastically – Bring your life! – together and then the prop is added to the tree. The facilitator might encourage discussion by asking someone coming up what they are bringing up and how they think it relates to the sentence on the screen.

Script

Facilitator: You have probably noticed all the bits and pieces lying around the room! We are going to pray together. Each group has a copy of just one line from this prayer, and when I point at your group, can someone read out the line in a great big voice ... and we are all going to respond: Bring your life! Then, that whole group will bring up the things from their table and add it to the tree.
Where's number 1?

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere! Release a space to plant your Presence here.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites the group or representative to bring up the pot and bag of "soil")

Facilitator: Who has number 2?

Imagine your possibilities now.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites the group or representative to bring the branch and plant it in the pot, and tip the "soil" over the base)

Facilitator: Number 3?

Embody your desire in every light and form.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites the group to come up and all hang flowers and leaves from the branches)

Facilitator: Number 4...

Grow through us this moment's nourishment and wisdom.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites the group to come up and all hang fruit from the branches)

Growing the Lord's Prayer

Facilitator: FIVE!

Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' faults.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites someone to come up with scissors and cut the ivy and pull it off the tree)

Facilitator: Who has 6?

Help us not forget our Source,

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites a representative to come up and nestle the Sun globe in the branches)

Facilitator: Who has 7?

Yet free us from not being in the Present.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites whole group to come up and drape the blue cellophane or yarn over the branches)

Facilitator: and, 8!

From you arises every Vision, Power and Song from gathering to gathering.

(All) Bring your life!

(facilitator invites whole group up to place birds in the tree)

Facilitator: What a beautiful tree full of life! When we pray, we are encouraging life and love to grow inside of us and out from us to others!

How about we read through it again without the pauses? If you want to read along, please do, but everyone can join in, enthusiastically with Bring your life! At the end of each line.

Facilitator: O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere! Release a space to plant your Presence here.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Imagine your possibilities now.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Embody your desire in every light and form.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Grow through us this moment's nourishment and wisdom.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' faults.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Help us not forget our Source,

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: Yet free us from not being in the Present.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: From you arises every Vision, Power and Song from gathering to gathering.

(All) Bring your life!

Facilitator: May our future actions grow from here!

(All) Amen

Based on Aramaic paraphrase by © 1995 - Neil Douglas-Klotz - Desert Wisdom

Bible Engagement: John 3:16-17



What this is: Intergenerational Bible Reading



Where it's used: Messy Church Celebration time; any intergenerational gathering



What's needed: 4 or 5 sets of the following.

- Large ball (Styrofoam) and pieces of red wool
- Gift Ribbon
- Mustard seeds
- Rope joined into a circle
- Manger and baby doll (use a cardboard shoe box lined with some straw)
- Coloured paper for prayer.

Each item should be wrapped as a package with a numbered tag with the corresponding instructions.

Optional – pictures of something from different views – side on at ground level and above. Eg. The Bell Tower, Perth or the Melbourne Cricket Ground or the Sydney Harbour Bridge.



Time: 10-15 min



Bible focus/theme: John 3:16-17

Introduction

(Optional extra intro: show pictures of iconic landmark from two perspectives and explore the idea of seeing something from two different view points – ground level, above, below, up close, far away.)

It's coming close to Christmas time. The Christian celebration of Christmas focuses on the story of God coming into the world as little baby, in Jesus, as a gift to the world, a gift of love, to help us know and follow God's good ways of love.

When God came as a baby, as Jesus, we often talk about this as God's Son – which helps us think about Jesus being little, and growing, like we all have.

We often hear the Christmas story told as it happened from the view of the human people involved. What they saw and heard and felt.

We are going to read a little bit of the Bible that tells us this story from God's view. How was God thinking and planning and feeling in the Christmas story?

John 3:16-17

To help us pay attention to each part of this story we have 6 things to do and some questions to think about.

We will do this in 4 (or 5) groups. Each group has 6 packets to open in order – Read the tag on the outside, then open the package and follow the instructions on the tag. Each Package should only take a minute or two. Distribute the sets of packages to each group and allow 10 minutes for their exploration.

Conclusion

To finish our celebration let's put together the little story of Christmas from God's view that we have read from the Bible. Take a minute to choose your favourite phrase and practice it a couple of times. Ask someone close by to help you if you need help. Check in with those around you to see if they need help.

I will read all of the words – join in on your own favourite phrase...

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish [be destroyed] but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

1. Large ball (Styrofoam) and pieces of red wool

For God so loved the world

What do you love so so much?

What do you think God loves so so much?

- Wrap the 'world ball' in red wool, winding small pieces around and around the sphere.

2. Gift Ribbon

That he gave his only Son,

What would be the most precious thing you could give someone?

What would be the most precious thing God could give?

- Tie a gift ribbon around the world

3. Mustard seeds

So that everyone who believes in him

*It doesn't say how much faith

If you have even a little bit of faith – this includes you. And if you don't have any faith God has a huge abundance of faith and is absolutely happy to give you some.

So if you have some faith, or if you'd like some faith this means you.

- Take a little mustard seed and hold it in your hand

4. Rope joined into a circle

May not perish [be destroyed] but may have eternal life.

What kind of things do you wish would last forever and not be destroyed?

What things do you wish would be destroyed?

- Find the end of the rope.

John 3:16-17

5. Manger and baby doll (use a cardboard shoe box lined with some straw)

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,

Manger – Look into the manger. This is how God came into the world.

What do you feel thinking of God as a little baby?

- Take the baby out of the manger and pass it around for each person to hold and cuddle.

6. Coloured paper and markers for prayer.

but in order that the world might be saved through him.

What are some of the things in the world that need saving? That need God's help?

- Turn those into prayers, asking God's loving help for difficult situations.



Meet the Contributors

Intergen (formerly the VCCE) develop intergenerational ministry resources and the collate material for Get Messy Aussie Add-Ons. Submissions of original resources are always welcome!

General resource sharing (such as links to pinterest and website ideas) is also encouraged through the Messy Church Australia facebook page and website.

Intergen resources can be found at intergen.org.au or through the Intergen facebook page.

Beth Barnett works for Intergen in Learning & Theological Engagement

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Beck Finger is part of the leadership team at Kaleidoscope Community Church in Beaconsfield, where she explores creative theological engagement with her community.