3 – The Cross

Aim: To help your child understand why Jesus died ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS



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| Welcome & Opening prayer [1 minute] 8.34 / 8.19 pm |
| *Welcome the group with an affirming message. Give an outline of today’s session. Pray* |
| SMALL GROUP – ICE-BREAKER [10 minutes] 8.35 / 8.20 pm |
| Q: What did your child enjoy most when exploring the Family Handout?  Supplementary question:  Q: Talk about what you were excited to share with your child and how they responded. |
| Introduction [1 minute] 8.45 / 8.30 pm |
| If you think about it, the cross is a weird thing to represent an entire religion because the cross was a form of execution. Most leaders who have influenced nations are known for the impact of their lives.  Jesus, who, more than any other person, changed the face of world history, is remembered for his death even more than his life. Why does Jesus’ death matter to us today? What is the difference between his death and the death of a war hero or a martyr? Why did he die? What did it achieve? Why is it important?  An expression appears in the New Testament: ‘He died for our sins.’ What does that mean? How can it be relevant to your child’s life or your life?  **Why did Jesus die? Because God loves you**. That is the reason for the cross; it is God’s amazing love for you on display. In this session, we are going to discover why. |
| Let’s REMEMBER WHO God is [9 minutes] |
| **Page 26 is a key page of the handout.**  Page 26a  As we discovered in the last session, all the amazing things that Jesus did, taught and said about himself show us that he was more than just a good man; that he was, in fact, God.  If you think about it, **by becoming human, Jesus shows us even just through his birth how much God loves us, how much he cares about us** and how much he wants us to know that.  We recommend discussing that with your child when you are on this page.  **Before discussing the cross, we must remind our children that God is not a man sitting on a cloud with a long beard looking down at us**. We must remove the image of a vengeful God looking down at humanity in disappointment. But you can understand how that image of God has taken root and why the idea of the cross can become problematic for some.  God became a man in Jesus so that we can know how much he loves us. **This is meant to change us.** We are meant to see a change in how we see ourselves and others. We are meant to see a change in our choices and lives.  We experience this all the time – as parents, we know that love changes us. Only love—not duress, guilt, shunning, or social pressure—affects true inner transformation.  **Jesus did not come to change God’s mind about us. He came so that we could change our minds about God.** |
| Jesus believed in change. |
| The first public word Jesus spoke translates into the Greek “*metanoete”*, which means “change your mind”.  Matthew 4:17 - From that time, Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’  Unfortunately, in the fourth century, St. Jerome translated the word into Latin as “*poenitentia”* (“repent” or “do penance”). What was meant to be about the internal became about the external signs of holiness. **The problem is that we can change a few externals without changing our thoughts**.  Faith became about external requirements that could be enforced, punished, and rewarded, much more than an actual change of heart and mind, which Jesus described as something that largely happens “in secret, where your Father who sees in secret can reward you” (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).  Jesus didn’t focus on individual sin outside or over there, where we can point to it, punish it, and try to change it. That is too easy and mostly ineffective.  **Jesus emphasised inner motivation and interior change more than visible behaviours**, rituals, or anything with a social payoff or punishment.  We expect this pattern**: sin > punishment > repentance > transformation.**  With this pattern, we accept that we fall short, then we need to be punished for it, and then we need to turn back to God, and then and only after jumping through all these hoops can transformation occur.  But Jesus teaches that transformation has nothing to do with anything external. **Transformation means only this: to accept that God loves me.**  Jesus came so we could change our minds about ourselves (that we are loved) and each other (that they are loved).  The pattern becomes **sin > unconditional love and forgiveness > transformation > repentance.**  The Church gives us the rituals, and Jesus has given us the sacraments (particularly reconciliation) to help us experience this cycle. Remember, God became man in Jesus so that we can know how much he loves us, and it’s from that position we should consider everything else.  We will spend some time chatting about what you’ve just heard in our small groups. |
| SMALL GROUP – lET’S REMEMBER WHO GOD IS [10 minutes] 8.55 / 8.40 pm |
| Q: Are the concepts shared new to you? Is there anything you find particularly challenging?  Q: How were things explained to you when you were young?  Q: If you had heard this message when you were younger, how would it have changed your relationship with God/the church/faith? |
| Plenary discussion [5 Minutes]  9.05 / 8.50 pm |
| Why did Jesus die? [9 minute] 9.10 / 8.55 pm |
| Here is something we always say, “Jesus died for our sins, and in the Cross of Christ, we are saved.” But what does it mean, precisely?  If you're in the army and a colleague throws himself on a live grenade and saves your life by giving his own, that's very clear. He gave his life for me. He saved me by his death. Or if a mother, let's say, donates an organ for a child and, in that process, she dies, we would say she sacrificed her life to save her child.  But **Jesus died on the cross because the authorities did not like what he was saying or doing at the time**. So, they had him killed. And yet we say that his death saved us from our sins. **What do we mean when we say that?**  Page 2B  In Mark 8, Jesus speaks to his disciples. "Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest. Whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all. The son of man has come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life in ransom for the many".  **Somehow, the cross of Jesus pays a price.** But Christians and theologians have wrestled with this idea up and down the centuries, and they've come up with several different theories to try and answer questions like, who precisely gets the ransom money? How are we held to ransom? Who has us, and how does Jesus' death involve a payment?  The early church fathers developed the **Christus Victor** theory - Christ, the victor. Here's how it works: We have sold ourselves to the devil in our sins. When Jesus comes along, the devil is so interested in having him that he says, “I will exchange everything for him. If I can have him, I'll give up all the people I've held for ransom.” And so, he cuts a deal with God, and God says, “OK, you can have Jesus”. So, the devil takes control of the situation. He presides over the Passion and Death, and he takes Jesus. But then, in the Resurrection, the divinity of Jesus is revealed, and now the devil is conquered by that greater power. It's as though God, the Father, used the humanity of Jesus as bait, and the divinity of Jesus is a hook, and God, the Father, reels in the devil. Christ the Victor has paid a price and ransomed us from the devil.  A few centuries after that, **Saint Anselm of Canterbury proposed another theory**. He says the ransom is paid to God, the Father, not the devil. Our sin has offended God – look at Adam and Eve's fall as an example. God is infinite; therefore, his offence at sin is infinite. **Who of us could ever pay a price that would satisfy the anger of God?** No one. Therefore, God, the Father, sends his son into human flesh so that, in one sense, a human being is paying the price. But in the deepest sense, it's God himself paying the price. Now, an infinite payment can be made for the infinite offence given by sin. Therefore, in the death of Christ on the cross, a price is paid. A ransom is settled, and God, the Father's anger is satisfied. **Does this sound familiar to you?**  The re-establishment of justice through the cross is the right idea. But at the same time, it is a troubling theory because it makes God, the Father, sound like the ultimate dysfunctional parent. He's fallen into this infinite anger over sin and now demands the bloody sacrifice of his son before his anger is satisfied. **For many people, this sounds unlike the loving father proclaimed by Jesus Christ**. It’s more consistent with the image of God on a cloud judging us but not with the image of God as one who loves us unconditionally.  So, what do we do? We have this language of ransom from Jesus himself. We have these two theories. **The Church’s teaching has changed as we understand context better**. Understanding the context in which Mark wrote the Gospel and those words of Jesus gives us a different perspective.  So, what did the word “ransom” mean to them?  In Jesus' time, people were constantly exposed to the elements and the danger of kidnapping. It was commonplace for travellers to be kidnapped, taken to a distant place, and *held for ransom*. Imagine how long it would take for that ransom note to get wherever it was going. Think of how long it would take to pay the ransom if the people back home could pay it. It was a dire and hopeless situation.  So, **for the first Christians, being in sin felt like being held for ransom in a kind of hopeless situation, captive, imprisoned.**  Have you ever felt that way? When you find that you can’t break free of a repeated behaviour or feeling toward someone you know is harmful to yourself or them?  **Sin can be described as a kind of violence born of fear**. A sin that goes unchecked is harmful. It can hurt us and others around us.  Here’s an example. Think of being jealous of someone. You can look enviously at someone, thinking I wish I had. Now, you could leave it there wishing well for the other. Or you could think I wish I had, and because I don’t, you shouldn’t either, so you grab the toy from someone else. That is violence born of fear in action.  A sin that goes unchecked can take a real hold over us**. There is something about being in sin, which is like being in prison.** What did the first Christians sense in the cross of Jesus Christ? They sensed liberation. It is like being ransomed.  **Maybe the primary question is not who gets the ransom, the devil or God. Maybe it's primarily a question of being liberated.** |
| What does the cross mean to us? [1 minute] |
| **How did the cross of Jesus liberate them from this fear?** Here are two ways that we ask you to reflect on with your child. You can find these on **page 27 of the handout**.  Page 27a God is with us. The first is that Jesus’ passion and death show us that **he is with us in our suffering** because he also suffered. On the cross, Jesus said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). He lived and died in solidarity with us. That is something that no other religion offers and is such a comfort. It also gifts us with being able to identify with other people’s suffering and be a comfort to them.  **We ask you to reflect on this with your child and maybe pray if you, your child, or anyone you know or don’t know is suffering.** God forgave. Page 3B  **When we look at the cross, we can remember God’s forgiveness.**  Icon  Description automatically generated with medium confidence1 Peter 2:23 - When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.  When someone hurts us, it is natural for us to look at that person and try and determine for ourselves what justice they should face and even the time scale. Holding a grudge allows the other person to live rent-free in your head. We can hold on to unforgiveness, thinking it could somehow harm the other person. But it is more like drinking the poison you want to give someone else.  How often have you broken up a fight/argument between your children and insisted that they forgive each other and "just let it go for goodness’ sake!". Think about a time when you have forgiven someone for something. **Forgiveness is setting somebody free and discovering that you have been set free.**  Luke 23:24 – Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing  Forgiveness is at the core of Jesus’ consciousness and awareness, even on the cross. |
| SMALL GROUP – The Cross [20 minutes] 9.20 / 9.05 pm |
| Q: What questions would your child have about the cross? Discuss together how you could answer them.  e.g., Why did Jesus have to die the way he did? Why did God let Jesus die? Or If Jesus is God, why didn’t he save himself? Focus on page 26 of the Family Handout.  Q: What impact should the cross have on your life? HOW HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CROSS CHANGED?  Focus on page 27 of the Family Handout: “What does the cross mean to us?” \*LEADERS: Perhaps share the cross's impact on your life. |
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| Plenary discussion [5 Minutes]  9.40 / 9.25 pm |
| Sin [1 minute] 9.45 / 9.30 pm |
| The last half of the handout looks at sin in more detail. It looks at what it is and isn’t and how sin can affect our lives. We recommend reading through the handout yourself before you take your child through it. Please also use the references to the YouCat because they are great and will help reinforce your conversations.  The most important thing to share with your child is that we all fall short. God loves everyone the same. When we sin, it means turning away or making choices that lead us away from the path of love. We all know we can love each other better and ourselves. But God is not the one who turns away. It is us that does. And if that goes unchecked, it can feel like a wall has been built between us and God, and we can feel a bit stuck. But God is not the one who built the wall. It is us. God is always waiting at the door for us, waiting for us to turn back and open the door. |
| Final NOTICES [1 minute] 9.46 / 9.31 pm |
| Let us now spend a moment in silence, praying to God using the TSP prayer structure.  \*Next session’s topic: Sacraments and Baptism. |