

Reflections for team members and leaders

Day one

Expect the unexpected

Even if we have done a club before, the first day is always an anxious time: is anyone going to show up? What will the children be like? Are we up to doing this? But, perhaps more importantly, can we meet everyone's (including our own) expectations? This is also more pressing if this is your first time doing this.

The two readings today are about defying expectations.

The first is about the boy Jesus, who we often sing of as 'meek and mild'. We picture him as the most perfect, obedient child ever. This story shows him as anything but matching these imaginings. He has run off from his parents and is holding his own with the best theologians of his day as a child prodigy. When his parents discover him, he gives them a snotty comment that must have been rather annoying after scaring them half to death.

Similarly, the mustard seed parable is not we expect. We are not sure which type of mustard Jesus was talking about, but they are normally small, smelly shrubs that attract vermin, not the stately trees of our fond imagination.

The point is that we often feel less open to new experiences and want to remain in our comfort zones. We may be unused to having strange people in our church. We may have fond memories of past events or even long past events when people behaved differently. We may hate to admit things have changed radically.

We urge you to park these feelings and expectations. Be open to something new. The new people who may be attracted to our holiday offering can help us learn and be blessed through our time together. If we do things in partnership, we both benefit.

Be open to mutuality and surprises. God can be surprising!

What are the opinions and expectations you need to park in order to be open to the new experiences that this week offers?

Disobedient, disruptive Jesus,
Help us to lay aside our preconceptions.
Help us to put away our fears and worries about this week.
Holy Spirit, blow through our souls and through our buildings,
Clearing out our mustiness,
And bringing freshness to our souls and our lives.
We ask that you bless us in all we do this week.
Amen.

Day two

Sharing faith

The readings today are about public declaration: a very public baptism and Jesus's urging to shine our light so it can be seen.

For many of us, the hardest part of trying to be a good Christian is sharing our faith. We don't want to be impolite; we fear being a pushy zealot and we certainly don't want to say the wrong thing. So we often retreat into a busy, functional Christianity where we do things and stay busy to avoid those conversations.

If this is you, don't fear: you are in the majority.

It is often true that what is important is not what you say but rather how you 'are'. Be conscious and deliberate in welcoming. Talk to people as they drop their children off. Answer questions and, if you're not sure, say so. And then have a think about it and go back. Be honest that 'it's complicated'. Engage with kindness and integrity.

The most important thing you can do this week is simply be you – a person who is motivated enough to give up time to run these sessions. Just show people this and perhaps even tell them why it is important enough to do this. Don't worry, relax and trust – you are enough.

What is the biggest barrier that stops you from shining your light?

God, we are all scared of talking about you.
We're afraid of getting it wrong.
We're frightened that we'll show ourselves up.
We're frightened we'll let you down.
Help us relax, help us to trust.
Help us just to be.
Amen.

Day three

My neighbour can be exasperating

At this stage, it's likely to be mid-week or mid programme. You all may be feeling a bit exhausted. You might be asking, as Jesus was, 'why can't others do a little bit more?' This could be other church folk, the people who are dropping their kids and running, or even that person who is long on opinions but short on action.

Even if you have a great team and it's running like clockwork, in the mid-week session there is often a dip. If you're feeling any of this, take a deep breath. If you're not feeling this dip, make sure everyone thanks each other for being amazing.

Just a reminder of why we are here - the story of the good Samaritan is about asking that very difficult question of all - who is my neighbour? Who should I care for? Is there anyone beyond my immediate responsibility that I am called to treat well this week? The parable answers this question – it is even the people you have been taught to despise that you should care for.

Putting these readings together, we get a clear message – it's OK to feel as you feel, but everyone is within our circle of concern. The most annoying parent or co-worker. Or that child that always seems to be where they shouldn't (I once had a child that climbed up a pole and hung on a balcony rail during hide and seek, despite my best efforts to keep track of him). Our neighbours can be annoying. But that doesn't mean we don't care about and for them.

Continue – you're doing great!

How do we continue to work together in affirming and life-giving ways as the week progresses?

Lord Jesus, even you asked questions in exasperation,
Wondering why people couldn't just do what you needed them to do.
Give us the gifts of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.
Use us beautifully.
We are yours.
Amen.

Day four

Uncompleted stories

If we stop halfway through both of these stories, we are in sad and difficult places. A dead Messiah and a disgraced wastrel eating pig slop. It's important to remember we are always at some point in a story. Sometimes it isn't always the most comfortable point. It doesn't mean where we are is the end of the story. In the case of both of these stories, it is resurrection, whether it be in body or relationship.

Wherever we are in our church life, we are all in need of both types of resurrection. It is hard to know where you are in your own story and in your church's story. It almost seems redundant to say that many churches have it tough in the current climate. Yours might be one of them. If you are struggling, treasure this time of outreach and connection. Well done, good and faithful servants!

Even if things are going swimmingly, this is a serious bit of work that has taken time and effort to pull off. Pat yourself on the back and treasure that this is a valuable part of your engagement with the wider community. Well done, good and faithful servants!

Wherever you are in your story, you are working towards resurrection. You are at one point in the story and it doesn't necessarily mean you know how anything ends. The journey you have undertaken with the children continues to be an unfolding story that you may not know the ending of.

Kindness has a way of bringing surprising results.

What resurrection do you hope for in your community?

Lord Jesus, we are simply at a point in our story.
Let us stay and be still and savour it.
Let us be in the moment,
Acknowledging our realities and our complexities.
Help us to find a blessing wherever we are
In this bubble of time.
Amen.

Day five

The ongoing invitation

You've got there! Well done!

This week you've been doing the great commission – trying to make disciples and friends. If you haven't already, pat yourself on your backs!

The great banquet parable tells us that it isn't always the obvious, or even the people we ask, who responds to God's invitation. Think of who has been here this week. Not just the bright and shiny children but the shy, the quiet, those who might have struggled; the loud, noisy ones who have perhaps driven you to distraction. Think of the parents and carers, the people who have perhaps looked unsure of their welcome, perhaps looked like they felt judged, perhaps a little embarrassed about dropping their kids off and running.

If we look at the parable, these are people who need a special invitation. They are most likely to feel uninvited. Be intentional. Be invitational. Do what Jesus asks us. A genuine invitation, whether it is taken up or not, tells people they are loved and valued.

Yes, this isn't always easy or comfortable but you've probably been doing it all week.
Don't stop now!

But also do something great for yourself and your teammates. Celebrate this win. And by this I don't mean butts on seats type of win but rather celebrate the fact that YOU DID IT. Whatever happened, whatever joys and sorrows, no matter what successes or slip-ups, remember you have been a disciple trying to make disciples!

That, quite simply, is awesome!

What do you celebrate most from this programme?

God, thank you. We're nearly there.
We offer you all that has happened this week.
We offer it in trust that you will use it for your holy purposes.
Bless us all who participated in this week.
Bless all our efforts our hopes and dreams.
Help us go from this week knowing we are affirmed and loved.
Amen.