

What is Easter?

What do we think of when we think of Easter? For many people, it's all about chocolate eggs or bunnies!

Go and buy a large easter egg. Carefully unwrap it and then prise the 2 chocolate sections apart. Remove anything that is in there and then put some nails inside, possibly even some fake blood. Then put the 2 pieces back together (you may need to melt some chocolate to act as a 'glue'). Then carefully wrap the egg back up so it looks new.

Ask the students what they think of Easter and what things come to mind.. After they have responded, produce the big egg - delighted howls follow as they expect to have their stomachs filled.. (Or groans for those fasting / on a diet, LOL!) Hit the egg with a mallet and watch the reaction as nails spill out. This has a great response every time.

Make the point that while we think of Easter as a time of eating chocolate eggs, it has a much deeper significance. The chocolate egg represents the superficial and the outer layers of Easter. The nails represent the internal, deeper meaning of Jesus being crucified on the Cross and then rising again - and the new life we can have in him.

New Life - Matthew 27.57-66, 28.1-5 and Luke 24.1-12

When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared that it was all over. The disciples were depressed, dispersed and dysfunctional! Basically this means they were feeling down, they were all over the place and didn't know what to do with themselves! In Matthew 27.61, we read that aside from Joseph of Arimathea, the only people present by the tomb after Jesus has died were Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of Jesus. Then in Matthew 28.1 we find that it was again the 2 Marys who hurried down to the tomb, longing not to be far away from Jesus, even in his 'death'.

The other disciples were together in another place, no doubt despondent and confused. The one they thought would be the Messiah and the one who had called himself 'I AM' (a name for God), had been killed in front of their eyes. How could this be? This wasn't in the plans of the disciples. What was going on? Where was Jesus? What would they do now? They must have felt hopeless and remembered the good old times.. 'Do you remember when Jesus fed the 5000...?'

Amazingly, while the disciples were struggling with their belief, the very people who had caused the death of Jesus understood who Jesus might be and the influence he had - recalling his words.. In Matthew 27.63, they went to Pilate and reminded him that Jesus had said, 'After 3 days I will rise again.' They were concerned enough to go to Pilate and ask that

the tomb be made secure so that the disciples couldn't steal the body. Amazing that sometimes it's people who don't believe in God that know God's Word and seem to have more faith than we do! We all have faith that the electricity will come on in the morning, but struggle to believe God's perfect and true Word! It's time to change that!!

What the Pharisees and religious leaders didn't figure out that no tomb could hold Jesus. We see in our nations and schools that people who hate Jesus are trying to push him and his Word out of society, and even persecuting those who follow Jesus. But the tomb and a big stone couldn't contain Jesus. And no barriers that man or evil forces put up, will ever be able to contain Jesus, his Word, his truth, message and powerful influence. Amen! The tomb wasn't rolled away to let Jesus escape, it was rolled away so that the people could see he had gone!

Back to the disciples.. Aren't we like them so often? Jesus had died and maybe things seemed like they were over. The disciples were powerless (literally as they didn't yet have the Holy Spirit - God's power source given to us) and there was nothing they could do. They only had a limited human understanding to figure things out. They didn't know of God's perfect plan to send Jesus at the right time, to die on the Cross, rise again - so we could all be restored in our relationship with God by accepting and believing in Jesus in our lives. They couldn't see this big and incredible picture. They may have been angry, sad, crying, off their food, speechless, frightened.. So often this is what we are like. But Jesus is calling us to look at what happened at Easter and build our faith in an awesome God who longs to do miracles, is always faithful and alive!!

But there was some amazing news just around the corner. In Matt Maher's song, 'Creation brings an offering (on the third day)' off his album, 'Empty and Beautiful' there is a line, 'For everything must die to rise again..' The disciples would soon find out what this meant..

No matter what's going on in your life, no matter what the suffering and pain you may have been through.. God has an incredible plan that goes beyond anything you could ask or imagine. After 3 days, Jesus rose from the dead.. And things would change radically and never be the same. When we die to our selfish desires; when the old sinful person in us dies and Jesus comes into our life (or in a new way), there is new life and transformation - and things will never be the same again..

Eggs

Get some real eggs, boiled eggs, rubber eggs - and throw them to the young people to catch. Question - how do you know which is the real one that could break? They all look alike but are different. It is like the devil who can disguise stuff to look good but it is not what it seems. Things looked bad for Jesus' followers at Easter Good Friday, but it was not as it seemed - Easter Sunday was here..

Talk continued..

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Mary and Mary when they got to the tomb. They had probably come down to be near their Master and to bring an offering and to look at the tomb. Something amazing happened - the stone was rolled away. Not only that, an angel was there and told them that Jesus was not there.. *'he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him..'*

God will always do what he has said. His Word is true and his promises are 'yes and amen' which basically means God always does exactly what he says he will. The disciples had forgotten what Jesus had said in their confusion and sadness. So often we do the same. During the 3 days, the disciples had a test of faith. Maybe you have had some tests of faith that have gone on longer than 3 days. But God is mighty to save and there is power in the name of Jesus. Jesus conquered death so you could be more than a conqueror in all that you're going through.

Today, the angel's message is just as relevant - we are to go quickly and take every opportunity in every way to tell people that Jesus has risen from the dead and that if people seek Jesus, they will find him.

Once the disciples heard about Jesus, they ran the tomb - led by Peter. Things were starting to change. Once people realise that Jesus is alive and run after him to find him, their lives also change. And when we carry on with a passion, running after Jesus and obeying him, things will continue to change.

Today, this and every easter, God's message to you is this: believe in God, obey him, believe in his Word completely as it's the truth - and be filled with hope and the excitement that is only found in Jesus. Then take this message to a world that is dying, a world that is stuck in the tomb and cannot get out without the power and Word of God unleashing Jesus from the tomb and opening people's eyes to the fact that he is risen, he lives and he will always be!!

Final game

Offer someone the choice of a box of real eggs, a bagful of choc eggs, a cream egg, a large egg and they get to keep the one they choose - hopefully they go for the big egg. Then you unwrap the smallest one/real eggs and reveal a £5 note - some times the things that look the best are not always the best. People chose to release Barrabas as the best option at Easter and everyone went for him - yet Jesus was actually the best choice. As above things looked bad for Jesus's followers on Good Friday. But we know that things changed. Big time!!

Prayer

Lord, we want to say to you that I believe that you died and then rose from the dead so that I can be made free and have new life in you. I accept you as Lord of my life and ask you to change me from the inside out. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and all that you are. If I'm a follower already I re-dedicate my life to you. I believe you, I believe your Word and that you are the way, the truth and the light. Please do amazing things in and through my life. Roll away the tombstones that are blocking my God-filled life and let Jesus rise up in every area of my life. Lord, thank you for what you've done. I want to walk in everything that you have for my life. Amen.