

We're going to use the parachute to help us to tell today's Bible story. Can you bring your sock fish with you? We'll need them in a minute.

We're going to start by sitting in a circle around the parachute, as if we're sitting on the shore of a big lake.

That's what Jesus often did. He spent lots of time at the seaside, by Lake Galilee. One day, while Jesus was walking along the shore of the lake, he saw two brothers. One was Simon, also known as Peter, and the other was Andrew. They were fishermen, and they were casting their net into the lake. Jesus said to them, "Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish." At once the two brothers dropped their nets and went with him.

We thought that you might like to have a go at catching some fish today.

PARACHUTE GAME: GOING FISHING

N.B. Always start any parachute play by stressing the importance of everyone listening and following instructions, and immediately stop any game to re-emphasise the safety rules if there's a risk.

Everyone remains sitting. The adults ripple the parachute a foot or so off the ground, to make the lake. The children throw their sock fish under the parachute. Adults continue to ripple while children crawl underneath to retrieve the fish. And/or use foam balls.

Simon left everything to follow Jesus. He spent lots of time with him, and became one of his best friends. Jesus didn't call him Simon: he called him Peter, which means 'rock'. He said that Peter would be

like the rock on which Jesus would build his church. Peter said that even if everyone else left Jesus and let him down, he never would.

But ... oh, dear ... Peter couldn't keep his promise. When Jesus was arrested, Peter felt scared. He could be arrested, too, if people knew that he was friends with Jesus. As he sat beside a fire, very early the next morning, some people thought they recognised him. "Aren't you one of Jesus' followers?" they asked him. And Peter said "No!" Not once, not twice, but three times, Peter said that he wasn't friends with Jesus. Peter pretended that he didn't even know Jesus.

When things got tough, Peter sank.

We're going to play a game, now, about sinking under the water.

PARACHUTE GAME: SWAMP

All sit around the parachute with their legs underneath it, shaking it to create the waters of a swamp. Someone is chosen to be an alligator, slithering around under the parachute. When the alligator gently pulls on someone's feet, that person slides under the parachute with a suitable scream, and becomes an alligator too.

N.B. warn everyone not to pull so hard that players fall over backwards and bump their heads. Decide how many alligators to allow under the parachute at once, before restarting the game.

Peter wasn't the only one who let Jesus down. All of Jesus' friends ran away when he was arrested. He was completely on his own the next day, when he was killed on a cross. The crowds laughed at him.

They said, “If you’re really the Son of God, why don’t you save yourself?”

Of course, Jesus really is the Son of God, and he could have saved himself if he had wanted. But instead he chose to die on the cross, to take the punishment for all the mistakes we make - when we sink, like Peter. So that whenever we say sorry to God, and really mean it, we can have a new start and be friends with him again.

How do we know that this is true? Because on the third day after he died on the cross, Jesus rose again. He came back to life! The Easter story tells us that no matter how bad things look, God can always make a difference. He can always bring new hope and new life out of even the worst of situations.

So let’s play a game that reminds us how Jesus rose again to new life - a game where we lift up the parachute as high as we can.

PARACHUTE GAME: CROSS OVERS

Everyone stands, holding the parachute at waist height. At the word ‘down’, everyone crouches down so the parachute is resting on the floor. On a count of three (‘One, two, three, go!’), players all stand and stretch up their arms so that the parachute fills with air and mushrooms about their heads.

N.B. small children should either hold hands with an adult on either side, so that they are lifted with the parachute, or be carefully prepared to let go as everyone else raises it, so that they are not hurt by their arms being pulled up further than they can reach.

When they have practised this a few times, introduce a cross-over game. E.g. divide players into five types of fish or animals or fruits, and when their category is called out, as the parachute is at its highest point, they have to cross over to the opposite side. Or call out "all those who ..." e.g. live in X, have a dog, are wearing blue, etc. N.B. caution players to be careful in crossing over, to avoid collisions.

Peter knew that Jesus had risen from the dead, because he had seen the empty tomb and he had even seen Jesus himself. But he didn't yet understand what it all meant. So one day he decided that it was time to go back to fishing, and some of Jesus' other friends went with him. They went out in their boat, but they didn't catch a thing all night. It just doesn't work when we try to do things on our own, without Jesus. Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore, but his friends didn't realize who he was. Jesus shouted, "Friends, have you caught anything?"

"No!" they answered.

So he told them, "Let your net down on the right side of your boat, and you will catch some fish."

They did, and the net was so full of fish that they could not drag it up into the boat.

Let's play another fishing game, now.

PARACHUTE GAME: FISHING

A larger child (the fish) crawls underneath the parachute while those around the edge ripple it and a smaller child crawls on top, trying to catch the one underneath.

When Jesus' friends reached the shore, dragging their net full of fish behind their boat, they saw that Jesus had lit a fire and was cooking breakfast for them: some bread and fish. "Come and eat!" he said to them.

When they had finished eating, Jesus and Peter went for a walk along the seashore. I wonder how Peter might have been feeling, early that morning as they walked away from the fire together. Was he remembering how he had sat by another fire, very early one morning, and pretended that he didn't even know Jesus - how he had said it not once, not twice, but three times?

But Jesus never stops loving us, no matter how badly we mess up. He doesn't just see our mistakes. He sees the amazing people that Father God made us to be, and he just longs to give us another chance.

So now he asked Peter, "Do you love me?" He asked him not once, not twice, but three times. And three times, by the light of the fire that early morning, Peter said, "Yes, Lord. You know I do!"

Wouldn't it be great if we were sitting around a fire now, warming our hands and maybe making some popcorn? Well, there'll be some real popcorn later, but for now let's pretend.

PARACHUTE GAME: MAKING POPCORN

With the parachute flat on the ground, throw on some small foam balls. Everyone then stands up and begins to shake it vigorously, to 'pop' the corn. A variation is to divide players into two groups, which take it in turns: one group pops the corn while the other collects the balls and throws them back onto the pan as fast as they can.

When Jesus first met Peter, on the shore of Lake Galilee, he said: "Follow me!" Peter said yes then, but later he let Jesus down. But the good news is that Jesus never gives up on us.

Now, back on the shore after he died and rose again, Jesus said the same thing to Peter: "Follow me!" And this time, Peter didn't let him down. This time, everything was different, because of what Jesus had done for him on the cross.

And everything can be different for us, too. Jesus invites each and every one of us to follow him. We get to choose our answer. He doesn't force us to say yes. But if we do, then everything changes.

Let's stand to praise the Lord for his great goodness. We'll use the parachute to help us.

PARACHUTE WORSHIP

Sing a worship song while raising, walking around, etc. the parachute

Let's end by saying the Messy Grace together.