

Free to believe?

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Planning

LECTIONARY

Ezekiel 37.1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8.6-11, **John 11.1-45**

Context The conversations surrounding the event in today's reading provide a context of anguish and puzzlement for a denouement, provoking belief in its witnesses, prefiguring the resurrection of Jesus himself. We read of a death and raising to life, Jesus' final sign before he, himself, becomes the sign.

Common thread – Free to believe?

(John 11.1-45) The raising of Lazarus is the last and most important of John's 'signs'. We overhear conversations with the disciples and with the dead man's sisters and finally, Jesus' authoritative command to Lazarus to 'come out'.

Seasonal pages Additional resources to use in Lent can be found on pp. 6–13.

ROOTS Resources Don't forget to look at *ROOTS Adult & All Age* magazine for further ideas.

Previous issues [WEB](#) See *This week* page for links to previously published resources for these readings.

Songs and music Father, I place into your hands (CCH, CHE, CHY, HON); I believe in Jesus (KS); Jesus, Jesus, here I am (JU); Jesus is my friend (BBP); There is a Redeemer (IO); Who spoke words of wisdom and life? (KS); You are the light of the world (KS).

CHILDREN

Children's Sheet [WEB](#) Downloadable page to use in your session and at home.

Book *The Wednesday Surprise*, Eve Bunting. Full details are on the [WEB](#).

YOUNG PEOPLE

Film *Bruce Almighty* [12](#).

On the [WEB](#)

Short story to use before or after the Bible reading. **Reflection** for young people. **Children's sheet** to use during or after the session.

[i](#) Ideas on these two pages can be used with children and young people aged about 3–16. Activities to respond to this week's Bible reading are on the next two pages.

Gather

[i](#) Ideas linked to today's theme to gather the group at the start of the session.

Prepare the space

In one corner of your room, build a tomb. This could be a small tent, or some sheets draped over some chairs. Before the session starts, you could hide Lazarus in the tomb – wrap a volunteer in bandages and put the in the tomb to wait for the story telling. Alternatively put a pile of bandages inside the tomb to use when you tell the story.

Gathering activity

You will need: cornflour; water; large bowls.

- Let the children mix cornflour and water in large bowls, and play with the resulting 'gloop'.
- When they stir the mix quickly or try to suddenly put a hand in, it will appear solid, but move it slowly and it returns to liquid. It doesn't behave in the way you might expect a mixture to behave.

Gathering prayer

Come to us, Lord,
as we gather here today.
Live with us, Lord
through our worship and our prayers.
Help us to hear you,
help us to know you
and help us to be with you,
today, and always.
Amen.

Tip of the week

Be aware of any children in your group who might have experienced a bereavement or have a seriously ill relative. Allow time for them to answer their questions in an atmosphere of faith and support.

Open the Word

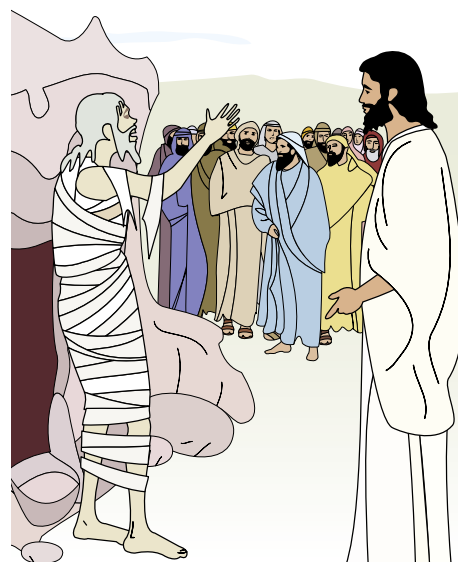
Based on **John 11.1-45**

[i](#) A way of presenting this week's Bible reading to your group.

Notes on the Bible reading

The raising of Lazarus.

The story of the healing of Lazarus is highly dramatic, and found only in John's Gospel. It points towards Jesus' own resurrection from the dead, while exploring the relationships that he had with Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. It is in this passage that Martha echoes Peter's great confession when she declares Jesus to be the Messiah, and it is also in this passage that we read 'Jesus wept'. Thus John explores the emotions around friendship and death, in a beautifully composed and memorable narrative.



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

With all children

Jesus' friends shared their sadness.

You will need: a tomb set up in the room, perhaps with Lazarus waiting inside. You might do this with a blanket draped over a chair or a small pop-up tent.

- Tell today's story by walking through it, going from Bethany up to the tomb.

> BEGIN IN THE OPPOSITE CORNER OF THE ROOM FROM THE TOMB.

“Mary and Martha were very sad. Their brother Lazarus had been very ill and they had sent a message to their friend Jesus. They thought he would come and make Lazarus better. But Jesus didn't come, and Lazarus died.

The sisters put the body of Lazarus in a tomb, and the tomb was sealed up. Four days after Lazarus was put in the tomb, Jesus arrived in Bethany where Mary and Martha lived. Martha went to meet him. 'If you had come sooner, Lazarus wouldn't have died' she said.

Jesus asked her if she believed that he was more powerful than death. 'Yes Lord, I believe,' said Martha.

When Mary came out to see Jesus, and he saw her crying, he asked where they had put Lazarus. The sisters took Jesus to the tomb.

> WALK FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE TOMB.

The tomb was a little way away from the village. When they got there, Jesus told someone to open up the tomb. But Lazarus' body had been in there for four days. Martha told Jesus that they shouldn't open the tomb, because it would be really smelly in there. Jesus said 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God'.

So they rolled away the big stone in front of the tomb, and Jesus shouted 'Lazarus, come out!'

> ALL SHOUT 'LAZARUS COME OUT!' A FEW TIMES, THEN IF LAZARUS IS IN YOUR TOMB, HAVE HIM COME OUT, AND THE CHILDREN CAN UNWRAP HIM.

When everyone saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb they were amazed. They unwrapped the bandages around him. Lots of the people watching believed in Jesus because of what they had seen. ”

With young people

A pared down dramatic version of the story, using tableaux and mime.

Cast: Narrator (N), Mary and Martha, Jesus, Lazarus.

You'll need to prepare a space to represent the 'tomb (see above).

- Decide on who is going to play which character.
- Run through the different scenes of the story: Lazarus ill; Lazarus dead; Lazarus buried; Where are you Jesus?; Mary meets Jesus; Mary's great realisation; Lazarus, come out; Lazarus comes out.
- Decide on how you are going to present the scenes, bearing in mind: where is the 'front'; the different levels of presentation – low down, middle and higher levels/sightlines.
- Appoint a narrator or choral narration group.
- The tableaux move soundlessly from one scene to the next as the poem is being read.

N Lazarus is seriously ill.

> TABLEAU SCENE OF MARTHA AND MARY SAT BESIDE LAZARUS WHO IS SAT UP BUT LOOKING ILL. JESUS AT FAR SIDE OF ROOM FACING AWAY.

N Lazarus dies.

> TABLEAU SCENE OF MARTHA AND MARY HUGGING EACH OTHER IN GRIEF. LAZARUS LIES FLAT. JESUS STILL BACK TO THE ROOM.

N Where are you Jesus?

> PAUSE. LAZARUS TO TAKE UP POSITION IN TOMB, MARTHA SITS LOOKING LOST ON HER OWN.

N It's too late!

> TABLEAU SCENE OF MARY AWAY FROM MARTHA AND LAZARUS BEATING HANDS ON CHEST OF JESUS.

N Jesus asks Mary to trust him and Mary says 'I believe, Lord, you are the Messiah.'

> TABLEAU SCENE OF MARY SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS.

N And Jesus said 'Lazarus come out'.

> MARY AND JESUS JOIN MARTHA AND STAND TOGETHER FACING THE TOMB

N And Lazarus came out.

> LAZARUS LEAVES THE TOMB AND ALL FOUR CHARACTERS FREEZE IN POSITION TOGETHER.

Talk about

i Discussion starters to help the group explore the Bible reading.

Discuss with children and young people

Martha and Mary were very sad when their brother died. They asked Jesus to help.

What makes you feel sad?

Have you ever felt really sad? Who did you go to for help?

How can you help other people when they are feeling very sad?

Have you ever known of a close friend or family person dying? How did people cope? What did they say and do?

How can Jesus help us when we are sad?

Discuss with young people

Many TV programmes, films and books feature the death of characters. You might like to pick up on a recent death in a popular soap such as *Neighbours* or *Eastenders*, and reflect with your group about how death affects a community.

How did the programme present the death of a character?

How did other characters react?

How do you see the other characters supporting each other?

Have any of the characters found it hard to cope?

Have you any experiences of this kind of loss that you feel able to talk about?

How could we support each other through these very hard times?

Why do you think some people get better from serious illness and others don't?


Have there been times when you have felt incredibly sad, as though you are grieving for something or someone you have lost?

How can you support each other through these times?



Respond to the Word

WITH CHILDREN

i Activities, games and prayers to respond to the Bible reading – see previous page for ways of presenting it. The  icon shows activities suitable for 3s–5s. Activities more suited to 11s–16s are on the next page.

Free to believe?


John 11.1-45

Martha and Mary are concerned about their very ill brother, Lazarus and call on their friend, Jesus to help them. In the meantime Lazarus dies. Jesus arrives some time later and tells the dead Lazarus to get up out of the tomb. He does.

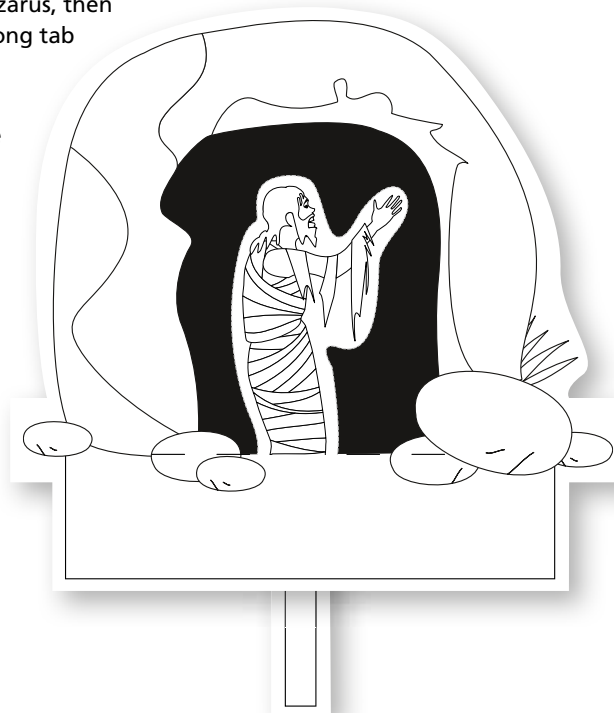
Throughout all these activities please consider the sensitivities of your group. If anyone is going through a time of bereavement consider how to handle this material; talk to their families and other ministers of the church and ensure you provide the support they may need.

Lazarus, come out!

Make a model of Lazarus coming out of the tomb.

You will need: tomb template ; scissors; pens.

- Print out the template on thin card, or stick it on to card.
- Colour in the tomb and Lazarus, then cut out Lazarus, leaving the long tab attached to him.
- Cut along the arch of the doorway to the tomb and the slot for the tab to go through at the back of the tomb. For young children you might want to do this beforehand.
- Slide the tab on Lazarus through the slot you have cut at the back of the piece of the card, so that Lazarus is behind the card. When you push the tab forwards, Lazarus appears through the doorway of the tomb.



People in my life

Think about the people we can turn to when we are sad.

You will need: a hexagon shape divided into six segments; blunted matchsticks; colouring pens or pencils; card.

- Beforehand, cut out a hexagon for each person and a few spares. Mark the centre point clearly.
- Give each child a hexagon divided into six segments.
- Ask the children to think about who they would turn to when they are sad.
- They can write these names or draw pictures of these people into each of the segments so that they have six different names or drawings.
- Use the matchstick to create a centre balance on which the hexagon can swizzle.
- Invite the children to think of a time when they might feel sad. They should spin their swizzler and see whose face it lands on. Ask themselves if this person might help them face the situation.
- Encourage the children to repeat the exercise thinking about different sad times but recognising that there is a range of people ready and able to help them feel better.

Bandage prayers

Pray for people in hopeless situations.

You will need: strips of cloth or thin paper, e.g. toilet roll; pens; pictures of people whose situations seem hopeless.

- Show the group a set of pictures of people in hopeless situations – the poor, homeless, destitute, victims of war, famine or drought. Talk about how they might feel. Is there anything we could do to help them? The one thing we can all do is to pray for these people. Lazarus was dead, his situation was hopeless, but Jesus did something unexpected and brought him back to life.
- Invite the children to pray and ask God to help these people too.
- Give the children time to write or draw prayers on the strips of cloth, like Lazarus' bandages.
- When all the prayers have been written, have a time of prayer, and invite the children to read out their prayers if they want to. Finish the time of prayer by praying that God will be with people whose situations seem hopeless, and do something unexpected for them.

Pray

Thank you, God, that you can do things we don't expect.

Help us say **Yes, Lord, I believe.**

When we don't know what to do or say help us say, **Yes, Lord, I believe.**

When we see people who are suffering or sad, help us say **Yes, Lord, I believe.**

When we don't understand what is happening, help us say **Yes, Lord, I believe.**

And when believing in you is difficult, help us say **Yes, Lord, I believe.**

Amen.

Send out

i Gather the children together, give them a copy of the *Children's Sheet* and pray:

Lord, you gave comfort to your friends. Give us the words to say when our friends are sad, and friends to support us when we are sad.

Help us to leave today saying, 'yes Lord, I believe'.

Amen.

Respond to the Word

WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

i Activities, games and prayers to respond to the Bible reading – see page 35 for ways of presenting it. Activities more suited to 3s–10s are on the facing page.

Free to believe?

John 11.1-45

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Lazarus dominoes

A craft activity.

You will need: A4 size stiff white card for each person; paints, brushes; glitter; anything else that you can find to enable the activity; table protection; old shirts to protect the group from paint; a 'washing line' to hang up the painted cards to dry.

- Invite the young people to decorate their card on both sides, one to represent Lazarus dead and the other Lazarus alive.
- Once decorated, allow the cards to dry.
- Once the cards are dry, lay them out so they overlap just a little in a long line, with the 'dead' side uppermost.
- Say 'Lazarus is dead' and invite the group to look at the images.
- Then say 'Lazarus come out!' and pick up the lowest card and turn it over, so that the turn effects a domino change, and all the cards turn over to present the Lazarus alive side.
- Cheer if it works!

Life changes!

Mapping the moments.

You will need: A4 plain paper; felt pens; a simple map of a journey (use 'Google maps' to illustrate or print off a route map on an internet journey planner).

- Explain that life can be likened to a journey and you are going to invite them to draw their life as a map of the journey so far.
- You might like to demonstrate your life recently, so that everyone understands the concept.
- The junctions are the significant points in your life, so you might like to put on diversions, etc. to illustrate where you think your life might have gone if...
- Include things like starting school, joining this group, birthdays and significant other dates. They might also think of times when they felt sad, bereaved, supported by friends and think of symbols for their map to mark these moments.

- When everyone has finished, give them a moment to reflect on what their life looks like.
- Ask them to consider

*What were the significant points for you?
How can you see God at work in your life?*

Lazarus, come out

A drama exercise.

- Invite the group to work in pairs and they should be numbered one and two.
- Explain that they are going to show eight still pictures, representing Lazarus coming back from the dead. '1' is dead, '8' is fully alive.
- Number one lies on the floor, as if dead and Number two slowly counts from 1–8.
- Lazarus slowly comes back to life, in a series of still pictures, as if watching a movie being projected at a slow speed.
- They might like to take turns being numbers one and two.
- Ask the young people how they felt during this exercise? Older groups might consider how Lazarus might have felt being pulled back from the dead.



Let there be life!

Simple active prayer.

You will need: a dark room; large candle; a small candle per person.

- Beforehand prepare wax guards for the small candles or ensure they are not going to drip on the hands of the young people.
- Place the large candle centrally in the darkened room, preferably raised up from the floor and on a wax- and heat-proof surface.
- Invite the young people to gather and each take a small candle and wax guard.
- Say 'Lazarus is dead' and pause before saying 'Lazarus, come out'.
- Light the central candle, then light your own small candle from the centre.
- Light the candle of the person next to you as you say 'Name, come out'.
- Invite them to do the same with the next person.
- Close with a prayer.

Lord, we thank you for our lives.
May we use them for you.
Amen.

Send out

i Gather the group and close your time together by sending them out to live the message after the session. End with a prayer.

Jesus said 'Lazarus, come out'.
Today, as we leave and move into the world
may we respond to the call Jesus makes to each one of us
to go out into the world and make a difference.
Amen.