

## **Scene 3: The stone that the builders rejected**

### **Bible**

Matthew 21:33-46; Mark12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19; Psalm 118:22

### **Aim**

To familiarise pupils with one of the stories Jesus told during the week that has come to be known as Holy Week; to help them understand that Jesus often used stories with hidden meanings (parables) to explain things about God; to enable children to imagine for themselves what the story might mean. What sort of king is Jesus? An unwanted and a suffering king.

### **Setting the scene**

During the days leading up to the Passover festival Jesus spent time talking to people, healing those who were unwell and telling stories. He challenged the teaching of the chief priests and leaders who were by now questioning his authority and feeling concerned about his influence on ordinary people. The story of the tenants in the vineyard tells of a land owner who put his tenants in charge of his vineyard while he goes on a journey. He sends back servants to get some of the harvest, but they are killed by the tenants. Eventually, the owner sends his son who is also taken and killed. Jesus asks those who are listening what they think the owner would do. He goes on to talk about the stone which the builders rejected becoming the most important stone of all. In saying this he is warning the chief priests and leaders that God will not allow his kingdom to be ruled by those who do not do as he commanded. Many people were puzzled by what Jesus said, but the chief priests and leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them.

### **Character(s)**

Storyteller (this can be the same person as before or a different person, if desired)

### **Costume**

None needed

### **Scenery**

There is no need for scenery in the story although it is preferable if the children are taken to a different room to the first area where everything is ready for them. In the presentation in Frodsham the same room is used subsequently for the resurrection garden scene, so the room is already dressed as a garden, but the scenery is disguised with greenery and a piece of hardboard, painted to resemble a bush, covers the tomb. Flowers are added to transform the scene into the resurrection garden, so are not present when the children first enter the room.

## Props

Some large pebbles are provided in baskets for the children to handle, and a large rectangular piece of rock sits in the middle of the room. The storyteller uses pebbles to create a wall effect for the vineyard.

The children should be invited to sit down in the room, which is scattered with pebbles. In the middle of the room is the large rectangular rock. The pebbles become the prompt for one of the stories that Jesus told during that last week of his Easter journey

*Storyteller:* Many strange things happened during the next days. Jesus and his friends stayed in a village outside the city near to a hill called the Mount of Olives. Each morning Jesus would go into town and join with the festival crowds and then, near to the temple, he would sit down and tell stories.

The temple was a magnificent building. It had taken years and years to build. It shone with its gold decorations. Its beautiful carved stonework gleamed in the sunlight, its towers and columns were overpowering in their splendour. In fact, the temple was still in the process of being built and there were stones lying around which the builders had rejected. It was near these that Jesus once told a very special story.

*(Encourage the children to pick up the stones and feel them.)*

Just think how old the stones in our story might have been. How far might they have come? They would have been cut from quarries, chipped and shaped to become part of the magnificent temple. But not every stone had been used. There was one stone in particular that caught Jesus' eye.

*(Draw the children's attention to the big stone. Feel its shape as the story begins to unfold.)*

Jesus pointed out that this was one of the stones that the builders had rejected. I wonder what they didn't like about it. I wonder why they decided they couldn't use it. Was it the wrong shape? Wouldn't it fit? Didn't they like its colour? It made Jesus think of a song from the Psalms. Jesus looked up and remembered words he learned when he was very young.

‘The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all.’

*(Invite the children to touch and handle the stones. Ask them to look out for 'building' words during the story, and, of course, to watch out for the mention of stones.)*

Let me tell you a story to show you what Jesus meant.

There was once a landowner who planted a vineyard. He wanted grapes to grow so he could make some fine wine. He called in the builders to make a strong wall right around his land to keep the vineyard safe.

*(Make an outline with the stones.)*

He got his men to dig a ditch to keep out the wild animals. He even prepared a great vat in which they could collect the grapes once they'd grown, to crush them for the juice to make the wine. This was his own vineyard; his special place.

Finally, he had one more building put up. On the edge of the vineyard he built a great tower, a watchtower to make sure no enemies came to steal the grapes.

*(Build a small tower with stones at one corner of the vineyard.)*

He did everything possible to make sure of a good harvest. But then the landowner had to go on a journey. So he left some hired servants to look after the vineyard in his absence. But he had to be away longer than he planned and he couldn't be there when the harvest time came.

The landowner sent some messengers to go and bring back a share of the harvest so he could at least taste the fine grapes that he had planted.

When those messengers arrived at the vineyard, the hired servants decided that they would not give up what they'd been looking after. They wanted the vineyard for themselves. Instead of giving the messengers some of the harvest, they told them to go away. They beat them up, chased them away and send them packing. When the owner got to hear what was happening, he sent some more messengers but they too were badly treated. They even killed one of the messengers and threw stones at others so that none dared go near the vineyard. Every group that the owner sent was treated in the same terrible way.

Finally, the owner decided to send his own son to the vineyard. They won't dare to treat him badly, he thought. They will respect him. They will hand over some of the grapes to him so he can bring them back to me.

When the hired servants saw the son coming, they began to plot. This is the owner's son, they thought. It will all be his one day. But, if we got rid of him, then the vineyard could truly be ours. So they ganged up on him. They grabbed him. They dragged him outside the vineyard and... they killed him.

*(Bring one of the stones crashing down on to the large rectangular stone to indicate the moment of the son's death.)*

The crowds near Jesus gasped. What a terrible story! Even as they were thinking that, Jesus asked a question.

'When the owner of that vineyard comes, what do you suppose he will do to those tenants?' he asked.

*(Invite some responses from the children.)*

You're right. They deserve to be put to death. The vineyard doesn't belong to the likes of them. They have rejected the owner's only son. But listen...

*(Hold on to the big stone.)*

'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all.'

I wonder what Jesus was talking about? What has this got to do with Jesus' Easter journey? Many people in the crowd were puzzled... but some of them realised what the story was really about.