

Junior Soldiers

UNIT 13 : LESSON 10



Tenebrae

PURPOSE: For the children to explore and understand the sorrow and triumph of Easter through engaging in a Tenebrae service.

I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.

John 12:46

Consider & Prepare

This lesson is a wonderful opportunity to invite Big Buds and family members to join you. It would also be appropriate for use with your whole congregation. For an unforgettable experience, plan this as an outdoor event on the evening of Maundy Thursday (Thursday before Easter), set around a campfire.

Easter, especially the story of Jesus' crucifixion can be a traumatic event for children. Be aware of how children are responding and take time to debrief with them afterwards. This lesson also incorporates darkness as candles are extinguished. Check in with the children and ensure they are prepared for the darkening of the space. Adjust according to their responses. For example, if you have a child who is very fearful of darkness, place a lamp to one side and allow them to sit by the lamp.

Consider whether electric candles would be best for your setting.

This lesson will work through nine readings. The reader will extinguish (turn off) a candle as they complete their reading. Note, some of the shorter readings may be suitable for children who are less confident readers.

Read:

'Tenebrae' is a Latin word meaning 'darkness' or 'shadows'. A Tenebrae service engages the senses and is typically held on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. The story of the suffering and death of Jesus from John's gospel is divided into several readings. It may also include other elements such as music or Communion. After each segment of the story is read, a candle is extinguished. After the final reading, which confirms that Jesus died on the cross, the last of the candles is extinguished or taken away. Worshippers traditionally leave in silence to ponder the impact of Christ's death and await the celebration of the coming Resurrection.

During the service, the readers go up one at a time, read their assigned selections, and extinguish one of the candles, until only the Christ candle remains. Then someone reads the first part of Psalm 22, which Jesus quoted on the cross.

The purpose of the service is to recreate the betrayal, abandonment, and agony of the events, and it is left unfinished, because the story isn't over until Easter Sunday.

The central message of Tenebrae is that even though the darkness may appear stronger or even victorious at times, the light of Christ shines brighter and brighter forever. God has gone into the shadowy place, so that even there he is not absent, and we need not be so afraid.

What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- Optional: a campfire if you are meeting outdoors
- A table to set the candles on
- A black tablecloth
- Nine candles – tall pillar candles or electric candles
- Matches and a candles snuffer if using regular candles
- Set up chairs so that there is space to move around during this lesson

For 'The Main Thing'

- Print two copies of the readings and cut into strips. You will need additional copies of readings 2, 4 and 8 for those who are calling out the words of the characters in the narrative
- Prepare volunteers to do the nine readings – give them a copy of the reading the week before to practice. Let them know if others will be calling out parts of the verse, if there will be sounds playing or other movement during the reading.
- Have a second copy of the readings ready for use on the day.
- Give the readers a list of who will be doing each reading. Explain to them that they need to come forward when it is their turn. Ask them to snuff out or turn off the next candle when they finish reading.
- Reading 1 – a jug of water and a metal bowl. For option 2, a hand towel (several if you have a large group); optional fragrant essential oil.
- Reading 2 – let the reader know that others will call out the words of Jesus and the soldiers. Prepare two adults who will be attending to call out the words during the reading.
- Reading 3 – prepare sound clips of fire crackling or a rooster crowing to play during this reading. Alternatively, prepare three sheets of cardboard – on one side of each, draw an 'x' on the other side of each, draw a cross U. Prepare three volunteers to hold the signs and have one flip from the x to the U each time Peter denies Jesus. For options 1 and 2, small cards and pens or pencils for everyone. For option 2, a campfire or rubbish bin.
- Reading 4 – let the reader know that others will call out the words of Pilate and the Jewish leaders. Prepare two adults who will be attending to call out the words during the reading.

- Reading 5 - prepare sound clips of a whip cracking and slapping a face to play during this reading. Alternatively, prepare two sheets of cardboard that say, 'Hail king of the Jews!' and 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'. For option 1, enough strips of purple cloth for one per person. For option 2, a few thorny branches (for example, rose stems or bougainvillea).
- Reading 6 – before the lesson, lay a simple wooden cross on the floor or table at the front. A hammer, nail and piece of wood. Prepare someone to hammer the nail into the wood during this lesson. Optional, music to accompany the song, 'Here I am to Worship' – Chris Tomlin. A projector or copies of the words, especially the chorus.
- Reading 7 – prepare someone to throw several dice into a metal tray at the end of this reading.
- Reading 8 - let the reader know that someone will call out the words of Jesus. Prepare an adult who will be attending to call out the words during the reading. Option 1, enough small cups and grape juice for everyone. Option 2, music to accompany verse 2 of the song, 'How deep the Father's love' – Stuart Townsend. A projector or copies of the words, especially verse 2.

For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the Home & Beyond cards for each child

Connecting In

Activity...

Light (turn on) the candles.

Link...

Welcome visitors.

Our lesson today is going to be a bit different to a normal lesson. This is a special time of year. At Easter, we remember that Jesus died. It's a very sad part of the story and it's okay for us to feel sad as we remember what happened. We are going to experience a Tenebrae service. This word means 'darkness' or 'shadows'. As you can see, there are nine candles here. We are going to listen to 9 different readings. After each reading, we will extinguish one candle. The space will grow darker as the story continues. This will also be a quieter lesson than usual as we think about what happened on Good Friday.

The Main Thing

Invite the first reader to come forward.

Reading 1 – as verses 4 and 5 are read, pour water from a jug into a metal bowl (pouring from a height will increase the volume of the sound). You might like to add a few drops of fragrant essential oil to the bowl beforehand

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father.² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus.⁴ Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist,⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

Option 1: invite everyone to quietly remove their shoes, feel the texture of the floor on their feet – remind them that as we gather it is a holy space – God is with us.

Option 2: invite everyone to quietly come forward and dip their fingers in the water – drying on a towel. Remind them that at Easter we remember that Jesus has washed us clean.

Reading 2 – prepare two adults to call out (from their seats) the words of Jesus and the soldiers

Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees.² Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples.³ The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

⁴ Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

⁵ "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied.

"I am he,"

¹² So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up.

Reading 3 – arrange to play sound clips of a fire crackling and/or rooster crowing during this reading. Alternatively, have three volunteers hold cardboard signs and flip them from an x to a cross U each time Peter denies Jesus.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest's courtyard with Jesus.¹⁶ Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in.¹⁷ The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?" "No," he said, "I am not."

²⁵ Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "No, I am not."

²⁶ But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed.

Option 1: Explain that Peter denied Jesus. Invite everyone to write their name or draw a picture of themselves on a small card and place it by the candles as an indication that they choose to follow Jesus.

Option 2: Invite everyone to write on a small piece of paper a choice that they have made that they are sorry for. Ask them to then scrunch the paper and throw it in the fire (or rubbish bin). Explain that Jesus made choices that wipe away the bad choices we make.

Reading 4 - prepare two adults to call out (from their seats) the words of Pilate and the Jewish leaders

Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor.²⁹ Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"

³⁰ "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.

³¹ "Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied.³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)

³³ Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

Reading 5 – optional: prepare sound clips to play during this reading of a whip cracking and slapping a face. Alternatively, prepare two signs to hold up during the reading that say, 'Hail king of the Jews!' and 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'.

Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime.³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip.² The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him.³ "Hail! King of the Jews!" they mocked, as they slapped him across the face.

⁴ Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty."⁵ Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look, here is the man!"

⁶ When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"Take him yourselves and crucify him," Pilate said. "I find him not guilty."

Option 1: Give everyone a strip of purple cloth. Explain that Jesus was and is the king. Invite everyone to hold their cloth and thank Jesus for being king of their life.

Option 2: Pass around a few thorny branches. Invite everyone to feel the thorns and thank Jesus that he took on pain and death for our sins.

Reading 6 – prepare someone to hammer a nail into a piece of wood during this reading. As verse 18 is read, stand the cross up so that it is visible.

So they took Jesus away.¹⁷ Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, Golgotha).¹⁸ There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them.¹⁹ And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.

Optional: sing 'Here I am to Worship' – Chris Tomlin

Reading 7 – prepare someone to throw dice onto a metal tray at the end of this reading.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.²⁴ So they said, "Rather than tearing it apart, let's throw dice for it."

Reading 8 – prepare someone to call out the words of Jesus during this reading.

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips.³⁰ When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Option 1: Invite everyone to take a small cup of grape juice and drink it

Option 2: Sing verse 2 of 'How deep the Father's love' – Stuart Townsend

Reading 9

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Pause for a few moments in silence.

Tying In

Even though this is a sad story, it reminds us of God's love for us. John 3:16 says that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us. At this point in the story, we might feel very sad, but there is hope! John 12:46 says, "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark."

Ask everyone to tell the person next to them a word that describes how they are feeling.

Invite everyone to come back on Easter Sunday and bring a friend.

Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

Home & Beyond

Talk to your Big Bud or someone in your family about the Tenebrae lesson. How did you feel about it?

Memorise John 12:46
I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all

who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.

Invite a friend to come to church with you this Easter.


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Reading 1 - John 13:1-2, 4-5

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father.² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus.⁴ Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist,⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

Reading 2 - John 18:1-5, 12

Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees.² Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples.³ The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.⁴ Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

⁵ "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied.
"I am he,"

¹² So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up.

Reading 3 - John 18:15-17, 25-27

Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest's courtyard with Jesus.¹⁶ Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in.¹⁷ The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?"

"No," he said, "I am not."

²⁵ Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "No, I am not."

²⁶ But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?"²⁷ Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed.

Reading 4 - John 18:28-33

Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor.²⁹ Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"

30 "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.

31 "Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied.³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)

33 Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

Reading 5 - John 18:38-40, 19:1-6

Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime."³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"

40 But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip.² The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him.³ "Hail! King of the Jews!" they mocked, as they slapped him across the face.

4 Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty."⁵ Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look, here is the man!"

6 When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
"Take him yourselves and crucify him," Pilate said. "I find him not guilty."

Reading 6 - John 19:16-20

So they took Jesus away.¹⁷ Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, Golgotha).¹⁸ There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them.¹⁹ And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.

Reading 7 - John 19:23-24

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.²⁴ So they said, "Rather than tearing it apart, let's throw dice for it."

Reading 8 - John 19:28-30

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips.³⁰ When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reading 9 – Psalm 22:1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?