

Bible study questions for children in their early youth
based on Mailis Janatuinen's texts and revised by Outi Paukkunen

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GLAD TIDINGS BIBLE STUDIES FOR CHILDREN IN THEIR EARLY YOUTH

- These questions were revised suitable for children and youngsters by Outi Paukkunen, the youth organiser FLOM, and they were translated from Finnish to English by Helena Rantanen.
- The questions in this guide are meant for 10 to 12 -year-old children, but in case of need they can be made use of in the age groups between 7 and 14 years.
- The questions have also been tested with boys. The results were encouraging.
- Each session should not last more than 40 minutes.
- The leader of the study group must guide the conversation more than in adult groups and also state supplementary questions. Yet, he/she should not answer him/herself, but try to make the youngsters answer by themselves.
- The leader must give the youngsters time silently to ponder over the answers and he/she should encourage several youngsters to answer each of the question.
- The leader can, if he/she feels so, state his/her own ideas and opinions to finish with or bring them up in the final prayer.
- We recommend these study groups to be included in congregational club activities. The leaders could be chosen among youngsters over 15 years.
- This guide will be updated along with the advancement of the study groups.

1. A SOUND BODY IN A SOUND MIND (Mark 2:1-12)

Background: Houses in biblical times were flat-roofed, built of limestone and bricks. They were presumably more easily pulled down than their Finnish counterparts. The roof was reached from the outside by climbing up a flight of stairs. In Jesus' time people thought that a person had committed a serious sin, because he had fallen ill. The Son of Man means Jesus himself.

1. Imagine the daily life of the paralysed man. What kind of troubles and sorrows did it contain? (What kind of care did the man need? How was his interaction with other people changed after he got ill?)
 - Imagine the life of the family member whose task it was to take care of the man.
 - In verse 5 we read that the man had sinned. What kind of sins can be committed even when one is unable to move? Discuss the topic: does a disease make us better or worse human beings?
2. Who were the bearers - reflect on different alternatives?
 - What made the bearers so determined as is told in verses 3 - 4?
 - List stage by stage starting from the doorsteps what the friends had to do to be able to lower the paralysed man down to Jesus. (What was difficult, what was easy?)
3. The bearers had brought their friend to Jesus to be healed. Why did Jesus first forgive him his sins (5)? (Why did Jesus choose this particular order?)
 - What did this forgiveness mean to this paralysed man?
4. Imagine that you would be bringing Jesus your most difficult problem and he would answer you by saying: "My Son / my Daughter, your sins are forgiven." Would you become happy or unhappy?
 - How did the paralysed man's attitude to his disease change when he was able to rejoice over the forgiveness of his sins?
5. Answer Jesus' question in verse 9. (How much did it cost to Jesus to heal the man? How much did it cost to Jesus to forgive the man his sins?)
6. How could we help to bring / "carry" to Jesus those of our friends who cannot or do not want to come to him on their own feet? (Where could they meet him?)

2. A TRAP SET FOR JESUS (Mark 3:1-6)

Background: Jesus' first quarrel about the day of rest (the Sabbath day) with the Old Testament teachers is described in the previous chapter (Mk 2: 23 - 28). This present quarrel is number two in order. To the teachers the observance of the minute traditions of the Sabbath day meant realisation of two things: 1) the coming of the Messiah, the future Saviour, Jesus and 2) the redemption of man.

1. How did the shrivelled (damaged) hand affect the man's life? (work, financial affairs, family, faith? What kind of work could one in those days do with one hand?)
 - In verse 5 we notice that the hand had earlier been well. What do you think the man experienced after his hand became shrivelled, possibly due to an accident?
 - What kind of impression does this text give of the man? What was he like? (shy, timid, fearful...)

2. What was the atmosphere like in the synagogue that particular Sabbath?
 - In the text we notice that the man did not come to the synagogue to be healed. Why did he come?
 - Why didn't the man ask Jesus for help?
 - Compare the sick man's versus the teachers' (the Pharisees) reasons for coming to the synagogue that Sabbath day.
3. Why did Jesus ask the man to stand forth? Why didn't he heal him unnoticed in his own place?
 - Do you think that the man would have come before congregation at anyone's command?
4. Jesus' wrath is seldom mentioned in the Gospels. Why was Jesus now both angry and distressed(5)?
5. What did the man think of the Jesus who made the muscles of his shrivelled hand function again?
 - What do you say about Jesus?
6. Why was the healing of this man so important to Jesus so that he was ready to risk his life because of it (4)?
 - Why was Jesus killed even though, in order to quote verse 4, he only helped and saved people?

GLAD TIDINGS: Sabbath meant a different thing to Jesus from the Pharisees. To the Pharisees it meant laws which people were to observe in order to be saved. To Jesus, on the contrary, the Sabbath day was a reflection of the Gospel, a sign of God's giving his own people rest from their work through the forgiving of their sins (Heb 4: 9 - 10). Read together!

3. IN THE MIDDLE OF A STORM (Mark 4:35-41)

Background: Among the disciples there were four professional fishermen, who knew the lake like the back of their hands.

1. Lake Gennesaret is 20 x 21 kilometres by size. How long will it approximately take to sail across it?
 - What would you think if somebody asked you to cross a lake of that size late at night?
 - Why didn't the disciples resist at all when Jesus ordered them to cross the lake at that time of the day (35)?
2. What kind of person can soundly sleep in a boat even in the middle of a raging storm?
 - What might such a person think of God and his own death, if he can sleep in a storm?
 - Have you ever been in a storm and could you have imagined sleeping then?
3. What do you think the disciples did to keep their boat from drowning after the storm had broken out?
 - Why couldn't the disciples in this situation believe that God would help?
4. In what kind of situation have you felt that Jesus only slept and didn't care how things would turn out with you and your family or friends (38)?

- What kind of difficulties do you remember, difficulties where you would have needed help and no help was given?
- Verse 38 contains in fact a prayer. What do you think about prayers after this?

5. Why were the disciples astonished when they got the help they needed?

- Question yourself if you were similar to or different from the disciples when you were in a difficult situation.

6. Is it difficult or easy for you to believe that the wind and the waves really obeyed Jesus' orders (39)? Give reasons for your answer.

- Today Jesus stands in the middle of your difficult problems and says: "Quiet, Be still!" (Jesus said this to the wind and the waves...) What can these words mean to you today in your own difficult affairs (domestic things, school and friends)
- Jesus knows your troubles and wants to intervene in them. What can this mean in your difficulties?

7. How did the disciples feel when they heard Jesus' words in verse 40?

- Close your eyes, so I read these words of Jesus to you. Would you like to tell how it felt?

8. Why does Jesus help even those who lack faith?

- How was the disciples' faith changed because of this incident?
- How would you hope your own faith to change through your present difficulties?

GLAD TIDINGS: The disciples were saved from dying by drowning, but Jesus was not. His crucifixion meant suffocation just like drowning means. Jesus had to pay with his own life so that he could save us to Heaven. When helping us Jesus' perspective is always in the future, we see only this moment, but Jesus knows what is best for us later on ... (for example, it may be really important to go through some trouble so that we can believe in Jesus' reconciliation on the Cross).

4. WHEN THE WORST COMES TO THE WORST (Mark 5:21-24 and 35-43)

Background: The ruler of the synagogue was chosen among generally respected townspeople. All the other rulers of the synagogue in the New Testament except Jairus were antagonistic towards Jesus. Jairus had only this one child (Lk 8:42).

1. What may Jairus have thought of God when his only child became ill?

2. Why did Jairus consent to ask for help from Jesus, even though Jesus was not popular in those circles where Jairus belonged to?

- What does the way of this request tell us about Jairus (22-23)?

3. What happened in the father's heart in verse 35?

- In what kind of situation have you felt that it is not worth bothering Jesus any longer?

4. Why did Jesus forbid Jairus to be afraid, even though the worst had come to the worst in his situation (36)?

- What are you most afraid of in the world? (you can answer silently in your mind)

- What if Jesus forbid you to be afraid when your worst fears had come true - what would you think?
5. In what should Jairus have believed even after the girl had died?
 - What would Jairus have done if he had not had any faith in Jesus?
 6. When Jesus arrived at Jairus' home there appeared to be an atmosphere of mourning and funeral. What did Jesus want to say to the mourners with verse 39?
 7. Reflect on this miracle from the girl's point of view - how did it affect the girl and her future?
 - How was the parents' life changed after this incident?
 - What do you think the Jairus family thought when they later heard rumours about the death and resurrection of Jesus himself?

GLAD TIDINGS: "Don't be afraid, only believe!" means in Jesus' language: "Leave this in my hands. I am able to take care of it."

Jesus himself was afraid of only one thing, i.e. separation from his Father. That fear was so serious that he sweat blood in Gethsemane. In this way Jesus showed that separation from the Lord is the only thing that is worth fearing. All other fears Jesus can and wants to change into something good (blessings) in the lives of those who believe in him.

Therefore, some negative thing can in time turn into something positive, for example you have to move house and you lose thus a good mate, but in the new home you get several new ones.

Memory verse: "Don't be afraid, only believe!"

5. THE HEAD ON A PLATTER (Mark 6: 16-29, for more advanced)

Background: Herod was not in fact a king but a tetrarch - he ruled over one quarter of Palestine with the Romans' permission. The historian Josephus tells us approximately the same things about Herod's married life as the Bible does. According to him Herod's daughter was called Salome. When arrested John was about 30 years old.

1. Try to find out reasons why Herod had taken his brother's wife (17-18).
 - What do you think why Herodias had wanted to change her husband for a new one?
2. Why did John interfere in Herod's married life although he certainly knew this to be dangerous?
 - What would you say to a person who would come and tell you about some thing that you did wrong?
3. What do you believe John was thinking while sitting in chains in prison after a successful but short career as a preacher? (Mk 1:5 tells us that he was very popular)
 - Do you think John regretted at some stage that he had reprimanded Herod?
4. Why was Herod afraid of John even though John was only a prisoner (20)?
 - Why wasn't John afraid of Herod even though he was Herod's prisoner?
 - There was perhaps in what John said something that interested Herod. What was it?

5. Salome, Herod's daughter, was at this stage in her puberty. Try to think what this girl's life had been like so far.

- Why didn't the girl wish for a horse or a new ball dress as a birthday present, such things as young girls usually hope to get?

6. What do you believe John was thinking at his last hours? Do you think John could already understand the meaning of Jesus' life? John knew the scriptures well along with the prophecies of Jesus in the Old testament. We read Isa 53: 3-6.

7. What may John's disciples have thought about the fate of their teacher (29)?

- What similarities and what differences do you find between the lives and deaths of John and Jesus? (the leader can list these on a paper or on the blackboard)

8. John made people ready to meet Jesus (Jn 1:28). How did John do this?

9. What do you think is the most important message of this story to you and our age?

5b. 25000 LOAVES OF BREAD AND 10000 FISHES (Mark 6: 30-44)

Background: The leader of the group may show on the map the scene of this miraculous feeding opposite Bethsaida (45) and count how many kilometres it is from there to the most important towns in Galilee. Note that it was Jesus' and his disciples' intention to rest during this voyage (31-32).

1. What will usually become of a person who is so busy that he has no time to eat (31)?

- What might the disciples have thought when they saw the crowd on the shore waiting for Jesus (32-33)?
- Why didn't Jesus get nervous of this crowd even though he lost his day off (34)?

2. When Jesus had finished his speech it was late in the afternoon. In what kind of mood do you think the disciples were at that time of the day?

3. Five rolls and two fishes meant a meal for one person. How much would a lunch like that cost in our local currency?

- How many villages should one approximately have scoured before one would have been able to produce a meal for 5000 people: 25000 rolls and 10000 fishes?

4. Why did Jesus say to his disciples: "You give them something to eat"(37)?

- What should the disciples have answered to this order of Jesus?

5. Where did the disciples get the courage to do like Jesus said (39)?

- Did the people believe in getting food when they sat down on the grass and if they believed, where did they think it came from (40)?

6. Reflect on different reasons why believers in our times are not always too interested in feeding the hungry of the world?

- Where are the hungry whom Jesus would like you to feed today?

7. Do you believe that Jesus can multiply 5000 times the (even scanty) presents which you give to him?

GLAD TIDINGS: After having performed this miracle Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread which I will give is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). When dying on the Cross Jesus became our sacramental bread and bread for eternal life (by believing in Jesus' death on the Cross we have eternal life).

6. EPHPHATHA - BE OPENED (Mark 7:31-37)

Background: The man in our text had apparently been hearing handicapped from his early childhood, because he was not able to speak properly. Therefore, he could not have contact with other people (those times there was no unified sign language). Isaiah had foretold 700 years earlier (Isa 35:5) that the Saviour chosen by the Lord would make the deaf hear and the mute speak (37).

1. List what kinds of voices and sounds you hear every day. What do you think would be most difficult if you didn't hear anything?

- Further, we can bend down our heads and listen to different sounds (opening of the door, walking, coughing...) and we can imagine what it would be like if we didn't hear anything.

2. Imagine what the childhood of this man had been like. (What means did his parents have to bring up their child, to protect him against dangers, to teach him to work, etc.? What might the blind youngster's communication with his friends have been like? What do you think he thought about himself?

3. What was the daily life of an adult with impaired vision like when compared with the daily lives of those who could hear?

- This handicapped man in our text had certainly been taken to the synagogue or the temple now and then - how much do you think he understood of the invisible Lord?

4. Why did other people bring the man to Jesus - list different alternatives (32)?

- If you had brought the man how would you have explained to him where he would be going to and why?

5. What did the deaf man understand about Jesus' four-phase procedure in verses 33 and 34? (What did Jesus want to express to the mute man by looking up to heaven before his miraculous healing? And what by sighing?)

6. Why has Mark kept in his text Jesus' curative word even in the original language, i.e. in Aramaic (34)?

- Jesus is standing in front of you right now and says: "Ephphatha! Be opened!" What does he mean by this - (I can already hear)?
- Can I hear God's voice in the Bible?
- Think of your communication with your friends. Is there between you and your friends something that needs to be changed? (you can answer silently in your mind.)

7. Every miracle Jesus performed tells us something about Heaven. What can we learn about it based on this particular incident?

8. Why didn't people care about Jesus' request to be silent on this miracle (36)?

- What "news" do you think Jesus would preferably have wanted people to tell their friends?

GLAD TIDINGS: The smooth communication between Jesus and his father was cut off when Jesus was hanging on the Cross. This was the price Jesus had to pay for the communication between us sinners and the Lord.

7. BLIND WITHOUT ONE'S OWN WILL (Mark 8:22-26)

Background: The man had been able to see in his childhood; we know that, because Jesus healed only one person born blind (Jn 9:32). Our text tells us about the only time when Jesus healed an invalid little by little. Jesus had just finished his discussion with the disciples about their unbelief in his being the Son of God (18). Further, he had earlier complained about the unbelief of the inhabitants of Bethsaida, the scene of this present miracle (Mat 11:21).

1. Why didn't the blind man himself ask Jesus for anything?

- Imagine what the life of this blind man had been like this far.
- What had made this man so unhappy that he could not ask for anything; list different reasons?

2. What did his companions want Jesus to do to the man (22)?

- How did Jesus answer to the friends' request?

3. Why didn't Jesus want to heal the man in the village of Bethsaida, but outside it?

- Imagine that some unknown person would take you by the hand in a situation where you could not see him. What would you do, would you follow him submissively? (What does it tell about the man that he did not resist when Jesus led him outside the village?)

4. What four things did Jesus do to the blind man?

- Why did the healing demand so many phases? (What did the discussion and the gradual healing mean to the blind man himself?)

5. Jesus led the man outside the village particularly in order to get away from the people. Do you think there were still people present or did the man only imagine that he saw some (24)?

- Imagine the situation when Jesus held both his hands (note! plural in the original language) over the man's head and asked if he saw anything. What would have been the correct answer to that question?
- Why didn't Jesus repeat the question in the latter phase of the healing (25)?

6. Why didn't Jesus want the man to return to Bethsaida, where his friends were apparently waiting for him? (What might have happened in the village if the cured man had returned there?)

- What else was cured in the man's life, except the eyes?
- What was Jesus' final goal in this man's life?

7. This text also asks us if we see Jesus with faith "with the eyes of our hearts" (18). Today Jesus is standing in front of you and asks: "Can you see anything?" What will you answer to him?

- In what different ways has Jesus tried to open "the eyes of your heart" and to show you that he is behind everything? In what ways has he tried to help you so that you could learn to know him?

8. What does this miracle teach us about Heaven?

GLAD TIDINGS: The opening of the blind man's eyes was a sign that the Master himself had arrived and people were allowed to see him face to face (Isa 35:4-5). Jesus was, however, so concealed that many people did not see God in him. Even the disciples had difficulty in seeing who Jesus actually was (18). This story affirms that Jesus does not leave his work in us unfinished before we see him like he really is (1 Jn 3:2).

8. JESUS AND CHILDREN (Mark 10:13-16)

Background: In Jesus' time circumcision of boys or in other words the taking of boys as members among God's people took place as early as the 8th day after birth. The situation of children in society was not otherwise particularly good. The Greek word used here "pais" indicates children of all ages, also babies.

1. When you look at your siblings and friends, is it easy or difficult for you to believe that such as they own the Kingdom of God? Why is it / why is it not?
2. List different reasons why the mothers in our text brought their children to Jesus - even babies, who did not yet understand anything about his teachings?
 - Why weren't most mothers then and are not now interested in bringing their children to Jesus?
3. Why didn't the disciples rejoice that children were brought to Jesus?
 - Jesus is nowhere else said to have been annoyed. What was it that in this situation made him irritated?
4. In our situation the bringing of children to Jesus means bringing them in contact with the Bible. Why don't even Christian parents always take care that their children hear the Word of God at home and in Sunday school, on camps or in other similar places?
5. Why is a child allowed to the Kingdom of God before adults?
6. In what way does a child receive a present? What about an adult?
 - How does a child receive God's greatest gifts: friendship with Jesus and forgiveness of sins? What about an adult?
7. The children whom Jesus blessed became adults after a few decades. Some of them led normal everyday lives, others got into serious difficulties, some were happy, others unhappy. Do you think that the blessing of Jesus had some permanent effect on them? If it had, what was it like?
 - What might this blessing have meant to the mothers when their children met with trials later in their lives?

GLAD TIDINGS: Later the mothers in our text perhaps thought as follows: "Jesus will never forget my child, over whom he once said the Lord's Blessing". You have a right to believe in the same way for your part when you have received the blessing of Jesus from your parents, godparents or your Bible study group leader, and this will carry you over your most difficult days, too. We say together the Lord's Blessing.

9. A TREASURE ON EARTH (Mark 10:17-27)

Background: Matthew tells us that the man in our text was young (Mt 19:22) and according to St. Luke he was a ruler (Lk 18:18), i.e. in a high social position and very wealthy. This young man was thus really successful in his life. Note that in those days men in Israel usually neither ran nor knelt.

1. Reflect on different alternatives: what made this rich man behave so unusually as what verse 17 tells us. Did he expect an answer?
2. Why was the man uncertain of getting into heaven, even though he had obeyed God's Commandments or in other words he had been leading a good life in his own estimation?
3. Many rich people get into difficulties with money and can drift into a bad life. What might be the reason that this man had got through all temptations without falling a single time (19-20)?
 - Note that according to Jesus the Commandments must be followed in thoughts and words, as well, not only in deeds. Do you think that the man had always done well even in his thoughts (19-20)?
 - Could you answer Jesus in the same way as the young man answered, now that you know that one can also sin in one's thoughts?
4. The man was still missing one thing. Suggest different alternatives what this thing might be (21).
5. What kind of things people usually regard as their treasure (21)?
 - The man in our text had two treasured things on earth. What were they?
 - How can we gather treasure in heaven?
 - Compare the treasure on earth with the treasure in heaven. How many similarities and how many differences do you find?
6. What alternatives were left to the man when he noticed that he had recourse to his possessions and good deeds more than to Jesus?
 - What could Jesus have done, if the man had confessed that he loved money more than God and if he had begged for forgiveness?
7. Compare with each other the answer which Jesus gave to the rich young man (21) and that which he gave to his disciples (27). Why are they so different?
 - Think together: Is it possible for God to save one in whatever kind of situation one is (whether one is poor or rich clinging to one's possessions)?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus gave up his heavenly treasure when coming onto this earth. When dying on the Cross Jesus suffered the punishment which belongs to the them who cling to their treasure. Do you already guess why?

10. A BATTLE OVER A MINISTER'S PORTFOLIO (Mark 10:35-45)

Background: James and John were sons to Zebedee, a fairly wealthy fisherman from Galilee. They were among the twelve disciples together with Peter. Jesus once called James and John "Sons of Thunder". Now Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die.

1. What do you think the sons of Zebedee wanted to do after having achieved a minister's portfolio in Jesus kingdom?
 - Why is lust for power so common in our world? What kind of power do you have?
 - Consider how you have yourself used the power entrusted to you, e.g. over your siblings, or at school.
2. "A cup" often means suffering in the Bible. What would the brothers have answered if Jesus had promised them a place at either side of his Cross (38-39)?
 - Are you for your part ready to accept the responsibility and even difficulties that power brings with it? (think of e.g. the responsibility of a big brother or sister)
3. In what way do you think James and John did wrong (sinned) against Jesus and their neighbours?
4. Why did the ten disciples get angry with the Zebedee brothers in this situation (41)?
 - What does this Bible passage teach us about quarrels and their reasons between believers in Jesus?
5. What is different in the idea of an ideal leader described by Jesus from what we generally think of leadership (42-45)?
 - To what extent do you think the idea of an ideal leader in this text is realised among believers in Jesus today?
 - What does this mean to you?
 - Have you been following Jesus' teachings in verses 43-44? (You can also answer silently.)
6. What is the biggest difference between Jesus and the sons of Zebedee?
 - Do you remember where and when Jesus himself acted as a servant and a slave (45)? (The answer is found outside this text.)
7. The saying "to pay as ransom" meant the buying free of a slave. Read verse 45 once more so that you take turns and each one reads the passage and every time replaces the word "many" with his / her own name - to finish with think where Jesus bought you free from and at what price.

GLAD TIDINGS: Even today Jesus expects you above all to consent to be served by him and to receive his forgiveness of your sins - even the sin that you have misused the power entrusted to you.

11. A BLIND BEGGAR'S CONFESSION OF FAITH (Mark 10:46-52)

Background: As far as we know, Jesus visited Jericho only once. It happened when he was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. Jesus belonged to the House of king David. It can be said that he was David's son. God had promised David that his son was to sit on the throne of Israel for ever

(2Sa 7:12-16). The Roman rulers of the country did not want to hear anything about either the former or present kings of Israel.

In the beginning you can enter into the role of a blind man so that everybody covers his / her eyes, and the leader gives each one in turn some objects to be touched and felt with hands.

1. What do you think would be the worst thing if you had to earn your living by begging?
2. What things can one learn when sitting by the roadside from year to year (46b)?
 - What do you think Bartimaeus thought about Jesus during the three years when he visited every other place but Jericho, Bartimaeus' home town?
 - Do you think that Bartimaeus all the time had a ready plan what he would do if Jesus should happen to visit Jericho?
3. What made Bartimaeus conclude that Jesus was king David's son (47)? The one whom God had promised to become the king and saviour of Israel, as well as that of the whole world.
 - Why was Bartimaeus not afraid of the Roman soldiers while loudly shouting the name of David's son?
 - How was Bartimaeus' shouting changed when they tried to hush him down (47-48)?
4. Reflect on different reasons why people wanted to silence Bartimaeus' cry for help. Try to remember some incident when your cry for help was not willingly answered - why do you think it was not?
 - What should the people around have done instead of forbidding Bartimaeus to shout (48)?
5. What might Bartimaeus have thought when he heard that Jesus was calling him (49-50)?
 - It is probable that so far Bartimaeus had taken good care of his cloak, which also served as both a mattress and a cover in the night. Why did he then suddenly throw this vital garment aside (50)?
6. Why did Jesus ask Bartimaeus a self-evident question(51)?
 - Jesus also asks you today: "What do you want me to do for you?" What will you answer to him?
7. Bartimaeus followed Jesus to Jerusalem (52b). Why did he do so?
 - On the following day all people called Jesus David's son at the gates of Jerusalem (11:9-10). Why were people not afraid of the Romans in the heat of the moment?

GLAD TIDINGS: Only a week later Bartimaeus could see with his newly healed eyes how his benefactor was nailed on a cross. What do you think Jesus' crucifixion then meant to him?

12. LOVE NEVER FAILS (Mark 14:1-9)

Background: At the beginning of the session the leader of the group summarises the contents of Luke 10:38-42, John 11 and John 12:1-11. The woman in our text is Mary of Bethany. The parents of Martha, Mary and Lazarus were apparently dead. They had possibly left their daughter some money for her prospective marriage or for the staff of her old age. The last week of Jesus life on earth is starting.

1. What kind of present would you like to give to your best friend if you knew that he / she was dying?
2. Spikenard was worth a worker's annual wages and it was usually used only by drops. What would the price of a bottle of spikenard be in euros (if a man earned about 2000 euros a month)?
 - How much time would it take to earn such a sum?
 - What did Mary think of the money meant for her marriage or old age when she spent her inheritance on the expensive spikenard bottle?
3. Why did Mary pour the whole bottle on Jesus' head - wouldn't a lesser amount have been enough?
 - The words "Messiah" and "Christ" mean "anointed" in English. Jewish kings were anointed when they became kings - why was Jesus anointed only before his burial?
4. Mary had spent her savings on a spikenard bottle. What was the thing in the rebukes of those present that she possibly felt to be the worst (4-5)?
5. What do you think delighted Mary most in Jesus' words with which he defended her (6-9)?
 - Can you think of anything that you could in future do for Jesus?
6. How do Mary's pouring the ointment on Jesus' head and Jesus' dying on the Cross (i.e. the Gospel) resemble each other (9)?
 - Which one do you think is bigger "waste": Mary's pouring of the spikenard for Jesus' sake or Jesus' shedding of his blood for Mary's sake?
7. What was so special in what Mary did that it will be remembered for ever and ever (9)?
 - What kind of memory would you like to leave after you (9)?
8. What do you think Mary years later thought about the money she had "wasted" on Jesus that day?
 - How had Mary learned to love Jesus so much?
 - How could we learn to love Jesus like Mary did?

GLAD TIDINGS: Mary had learned to know Jesus' love while listening to him. That's why she could also serve Jesus when the time came. First Mary believed in the Gospel, and the faith in it made her willing to sacrifice everything for Jesus' sake. And thanks to Mary, Jesus smelt of spikenard during his last days wherever he was, even on the Cross.

13. JESUS' TRIAL (Mark 15:1-15)

Background: This text can be dealt with in pairs, too. Hand out each pair pencils and paper in order to make notes. Every participant should, however, have a Bible of his / her own. Each pair chooses one or two people, and in the end everybody shares his / her observations with the others. Jesus can be dealt with together to finish with.

1. PONTIUS PILATE

was the Roman governor in Judea in 26-36 AD. The Romans had occupied Judea, and its inhabitants were then subordinate to them. Pontius Pilate was the supreme representative of the

occupying Roman Empire and responsible for his actions to Caesar Tiberius. Pilate did not, on any account, want that the Caesar would hear about Jewish revolutionary undertakings (they regarded Jesus as an agitator for rebellion or in other words as a dangerous criminal). The passing on or rejection of a death sentence was solely in the hands of the Governor.

Verses 1-15

- What kind of impression does this text give of Pilate?
- What would you think about a judge who would under trial ask the questions mentioned in verses 12 and 14?
- Why didn't Pilate execute the power which he had, but let others decide for him?
- What do you think Pilate thought about Jesus deep in his heart?
- Who decided on the outcome of Jesus' trial?
- How did Pilate possibly try to defend himself when delivering a wrong sentence?
- If you had been in Pilate's position that morning what would you have done?

2. BARABBAS

was the leader of a political uprising and a murderer. His name means simply "father's son".

Verses 6-15

- Discuss together what Barabbas' childhood and youth had been like. What might have made this man into an offender and a murderer?
- What kind of thoughts might Barabbas have had while waiting for the execution of his death sentence? (Did he regret something?)
- Do you think that Barabbas went to see the death of the man who was crucified as if in place of him?
- Even though we had not literally killed anyone, what in the eyes of Jesus makes us resemble Barabbas?

3. CHIEF PRIESTS

were usually one in number at a time, but in this case there were two of them: Caiaphas, the actual chief priest in 18-35 AD, and his father-in-law Annas, who had held this office in 6-15 and who still executed his power through his son-in-law Caiaphas.

Verses 1-15

- What do you think what the chief priests considered their aim in life?
- Why did the chief priests envy Jesus?
- Why didn't they understand that they were only envious?
- Which party do you think was more condemnable: the chief priests with their wrong sentence to Jesus or Barabbas with the murder committed during the uprising?
- Do you always want to behave righteously in the eyes of your friends or do you notice that you sometimes take the wrong path? Consider if you may resemble the chief priests in some matters?

THE CROWD

had shouted hosanna to Jesus on the previous Sunday. Now they shouted "Crucify him!" It is certain that this crowd contained many people who had personally been helped by Jesus.

Verses 8-15

- Why did the crowd want to release this dangerous murderer?
- How is it possible that people could be incited to rise against their benefactor? (Why didn't anyone in this situation raise his voice in favour of Jesus and against the wrong sentence?)
- What would you have done if you had been among the crowd that morning?
- Could this happen in our country today? Give reasons for your answer.

5. JESUS

utters only one short sentence during the whole process (2). Otherwise he keeps silent.

Verses 1-15

- This far Jesus has refused to be called by any other name than Son of Man. How come he in this situation admits that he is the king of the Jews (2)?
- Why doesn't Jesus defend himself?
- Compare Jesus with all the other people in this text. What differences can you find between them? (What makes Jesus such an admirable person in this particular situation?)
- What do you think that Jesus thought about the people around him?
- Who finally decided the case in Jesus' trial: Pilate, God or Satan? Why?

14. UNBELIEVABLE RESURRECTION (Mark 16:1-14)

Background: According to an ancient tradition Mark is Peter's scribe. The Gospel of Mark is thus Jesus' life seen through Peter's eyes. One theme in this Gospel is the unbelief of the disciples. Even though Jesus had foretold his death and resurrection the disciples did not believe this to be possible.

1. Why did the women from Galilee stubbornly go to the tomb even though they knew the stone and the Roman guards (according to St. Matthew) to prevent their access inside (1-3)?
2. That time it was customary that the dead body was anointed with fragrant ointments. The women had seen the anointing of the battered body of Jesus two days earlier. Why would they have wanted to anoint it once more?
 - Only John had seen the death of Jesus. The other disciples did not want to see Jesus' dead body at all. Why not?
3. If the women had believed in Jesus' resurrection based on his predictions, what would they have been doing on Easter Sunday?
4. What did the women think when hearing the angel's words (6)?
 - In spite of the angel's words the women were, however, so much afraid that they did not dare to tell anybody about the resurrection (8). What were they so afraid of?
5. Why did Jesus choose these women as the first witnesses of his resurrection, even though that time women were not even suitable as witnesses in law-courts (7, 10)?

6. What in your life seems as impossible as the arousing of a dead person? (you can answer silently in your mind)

- What would you answer if Jesus criticised your faith in the way described in verse 14? (each one reads the verse silently by himself)

7. Peter had disowned his Lord two days earlier. What did Jesus' special greetings mean to him (7)?

- Imagine that you had deceived your friend badly. What would you think if soon afterwards you heard from Jesus greetings informing that he would like to meet you? What alternatives would you consider to be the reason for the prospective meeting?

8. We read together Jn 3:16.