

Understanding Spirituality



Others

Created by Elisabeth Sutcliffe

THE CHURCH
SCHOOLS OF
CAMBRIDGE

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Belonging

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you are a theist, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are an agnostic, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you are an atheist, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Do you ever feel like you're being left out?

Do you ever feel that you're being left behind while others move ahead?

This is a story that Jesus told about no one being left behind and lost.

Read the story of 'The Lost Sheep.'

Response

I wonder, why do you think the shepherd left 99 sheep to find just one?

I wonder, how do you think the shepherd recognised the lost sheep as his own?

I wonder, how do you think the sheep felt when he was found and carried back?

I wonder what this story might tell us about being left out or left behind. Perhaps you feel like you're stuck in the brambles and lost. Perhaps you've noticed that someone is being left out and needs some help.

I wonder, who is the shepherd for you? Is the shepherd a friend, who has helped you to not be left out? Could the shepherd be you, looking out for someone else? Is the shepherd God, helping everyone to be looked after and protected?

As we listen to the music, you might want to think about who the shepherd is for you. *Listen to the music: The Lord is my Shepherd.*

As we continue to listen, use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you for those who look out for and care for us. Help us to look after other people who are feeling lost. (Thank you that, no matter what, you are with us and will find us.)

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

The Lost Sheep

Taken from Luke 15: 1-7

Many people, including tax collectors and outcasts, came to listen to Jesus. Other people complained that these people were not good enough or kind enough to be welcomed by Jesus. This is the story Jesus then told them:

There was a shepherd who cared for his flock of one hundred sheep. All day long he would walk with them to new pastures and all night he would stay with them to protect them from wolves. He would count the sheep to ensure all of his flock were ok.

“...96, 97, 98, 99, 100!”

One day, after the shepherd had walked his sheep to a new pasture, he counted his sheep.

“...96, 97, 98, 99... 99...”

The shepherd counted again and again, but he was certain: there were only 99 sheep now with him. What could he do? He had 99 of his flock to care for? However the shepherd knew one of his sheep was out on the fields, lost and alone. Quickly, he left the 99 sheep grazing in the new pasture and began to search for the one lost sheep. He searched high and low, near and far.

Suddenly, in the distance, he heard a mournful bleating sound, a sound that he instantly recognised. Hurrying towards the sound, he noticed a movement in some brambles – the sheep was caught and in the thorns and could not escape. The shepherd could tell he was exhausted from trying to pull himself free.

Tenderly, the shepherd released the sheep and lifted the tired creature onto his shoulders, before carrying him all the way back to the other sheep.

As he returned, he called to all his friends, “Rejoice! For one of my flock was lost but now has been found!”

Moments of coincidence?

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Why do some people believe in God? What difference do they believe God makes in their lives? This is a story about someone who decided to believe in God.

Read 'The Shadow on the Wall' story.

Response

I wonder, why do you think he didn't turn on the lights?

I wonder, how do you think he felt when he realised the pool was empty?

I wonder, what do you think he did next?

For some people, there are moments which seem like a coincidence, but they believe it is God, making a difference in their lives.

Have you ever experienced a moment that changed your life? What did you think when it happened? Do you believe these moments are a coincidence or do you believe they might be God?

On a piece of paper, you might like to draw a response. Perhaps it is remembering an important

moment and being thankful for how it turned out? Perhaps you might be thinking about a moment you believe God helped you? Perhaps you might write a prayer.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you for important moments in our lives and for our reflection on what these moments mean for our lives.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Moments of coincidence?

The Shadow on the Wall

Based on Dwayne Savaya's re-telling of the story "The Diver" (original author unknown)

Copyright: <http://www.godsworship.org>

A young man who did not believe in God was training to be an Olympic diver. The only religious influence in his life came from his outspoken Christian friend. The young diver never really paid much attention to his friend's sermons, but he heard them often. One night the diver went to the indoor pool at the college he attended. The lights were all off, but as the pool had big skylights and the moon was bright, there was plenty of light to practice by.

The young man climbed up to the highest diving board and as he turned his back to the pool on the edge of the board and extended his arms out, he saw his shadow on the wall. The shadow of his body was in the shape of a cross. Instead of diving, he knelt down and asked God to come into his life. As the young man stood, a maintenance man walked in and turned the lights on.

The pool had been drained for repairs.

Helping others, even if it is difficult for us

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Have you ever been helped when you weren't expecting it?

Have you ever helped anyone?

Read 'Dogger' by Shirley Hughes.

Response

I wonder, how do you think Alfie felt when he realised Dogger was lost?

I wonder, why do you think Bella helped Alfie?

I wonder, how do you think Alfie felt when Bella helped him?

Let's have a minute of silence – you might want to be thankful for something someone did for you, or you might want to think of a way you could help someone else, even if it means you give something up yourself.

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about. You might want to

draw a picture of someone who has helped you or how you helped someone else. You might want to write a word or phrase about how this made you feel.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either open on display or closed in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Help us to offer someone help, even if it means we have to give up something we want.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Note:

Some children may find it hard to think of what to draw. Explain they don't have to draw anything but could just draw their favourite part of the story. They could also draw a picture of Dogger and write an important thing they were helped with, or a picture of Bella and write who has helped them.

Risking your own life for others

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Have you ever wanted to help other people but were worried that you might end up hurt?

Have you ever taken a risk to help someone else?

This is the story of a girl and her father who risked their own lives to help other people.

Read the story about Grace Darling

Response

I wonder, how do you think Grace felt when she saw the people clinging to the rock?

I wonder, how do you think Grace felt when she first set out in the rowing boat with her father.

I wonder, do you know of someone today might need rescuing?

Grace was determined to help other people, even people she didn't know. She and her father took a huge risk to help them but their hearts and their Christian faith made them want to do so.

Is there anyone today that you think needs help? Would you have to risk anything to help them? Is it a risk you are able to take and should take? Would you still help?

On the paper on your table, you might want to draw a boat or a storm. Who is in the boat that you want to save? What risks like the high waves would you have to take to help them?

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you that people like Grace Darling are brave, and committed to helping strangers. May we be able to help others, even if we have to take a risk.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Note:

It may be important to recognise that some risks are worth taking but others may be too dangerous. Being able to ask for help, just like Grace asked her father to help save the people, is important too.



Risking your own life for others

Grace Darling

On 24th November, it will be 200 years since Grace Darling was born.

William Darling was a lighthouse keeper. He and his family lived in the Longstone Lighthouse, on a small rocky island a short distance off the Northumberland coast.

On 7 September 1838 only Grace, her mother and father were at home – her brothers were away. During the night, a steamship, the Forfarshire, was driven onto rocks, about a mile away from the lighthouse. Early in the morning Grace and her family could see people clinging on to the rocks and crying for help. The wind and waves were so strong that they knew it would be impossible to launch any lifeboats from the shore. What were they to do?

Grace persuaded her father to row out to the people with her and try to rescue them. She and her father bravely set off alone in their large, heavy rowing boat (called a coble), which really needed three strong men to manage it. Grace's mother was terrified she would lose them both as she could only watch from the lighthouse. After a terrible struggle through the high waves they eventually reached the rocks where nine people were still alive.

Grace was left to try to steady the coble in the stormy seas and crashing waves while her father clambered onto the rocks to help. If the boat was damaged on the rocks then there would be no way of getting back safely to the lighthouse.

There was only room for five of the people in the boat. Together, they made the difficult and dangerous journey back to the lighthouse. Then Grace and her mother cared for the survivors while Grace's father and two of the ship's crew went back to save the others.

The weather was so bad that it was another three days before the storm died down and help arrived from the shore.

When news of the rescue spread, Grace Darling and her father were awarded medals for their brave action. Their faith and determination to help other people in need had helped them risk their own lives to save the lives of nine other people.

Helping a friend

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Have you ever helped a friend, even if it means you have missed out on something yourself?

Have you ever needed help but not known who to turn to?

This is the story of a paralyzed man and his friends who helped him.

Read the story 'Down through the Roof.'

Response

I wonder, why do you think the friends went straight to the paralyzed man?

I wonder, how do you think the man felt when he saw Jesus and was healed by him?

I wonder, how do you think the friends felt, having to stay outside on the roof?

It must have been difficult for the friends to carry their friend all the way to see Jesus, to lower him through the roof and to give up their chance to see Jesus. Yet they went straight to help their friend and were determined to help him, even when it seemed impossible.

Have you ever realised a friend needs help and gone straight to them? Has anyone ever come to help you?

On the paper on your table, you might want to draw a stretcher and write the name of someone who you might want to help. Or you could draw your friends and think about how they help you. Perhaps you might want to think about how Jesus would help you or your friend.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you for our friends and for all the times they help us. May we help others, even if it is difficult.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Helping a friend

Down through the Roof!

Based on Luke 5: 17-39

This is a story from the Bible, that Christians believe in. It is a story about a man who wants help from Jesus and his friends who helped him.

Jesus was going from town to town. People heard that he had been able to perform miracles and everyone wanted to see Him. They were excited whenever they heard that Jesus was in their area because they either wanted to see a miracle or be the one who was healed.

As Jesus entered one of the homes in the town of Capernaum (Cap-er-ne-um), people quickly gathered around him. So many people came that there was no room left, not even outside the door. People were pushing each other a little bit to squeeze everyone in, and when no one else could enter, the crowd gathered outside to see or hear Jesus when he came out.

There were four men who heard that Jesus was in town and, rather than following the crowd to see Jesus themselves, they went immediately to their friend. This friend was paralyzed – he could not move his legs and had to spend all day lying down. There was no way he could get to Jesus on his own. His friends knew Jesus could help their friend and so they decided to carry their paralyzed friend on a mat to him, to see if he could be healed. It was tiring carrying their friend: he was heavy and felt like a long way, but they kept walking.

As soon as they got to the house where Jesus was, they realized that they wouldn't be able to get through to see him. They had carried their friend such a long way and were exhausted. They didn't know how long Jesus would be in town plus they were too tired to be able to carry him home - they had to see Jesus today!

Suddenly, one of the friends had an idea. Most houses had staircases outside to get to a flat roof. This roof was made of tiles or plaster. They knew they would be able to make a hole in the roof... Carefully they carried their friend up the stairs.

Below, the crowd heard the ceiling crumble away and, in shock, suddenly saw a stretcher, bearing a man, being lowered slowly from the roof. Jesus looked up and saw the man desperate to meet him and be healed. His friends remained on the roof.

When Jesus saw the man he said, "Son, your sins are forgiven. I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

On hearing this, the man rose slowly to his feet. Tentatively, he took a step forward. Could it be true? For the first time in his life, he could walk! Looking upwards with a smile, he took his mat and, thanking Jesus, he walked out to find his friends.

The crowd were amazed and said, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Helping others: keep passing help on

Opening

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Stimulus

Why does it matter to notice other people and help them?

What does it mean to give and receive?

Read the story about Mr MacNally's hat (from 'The Big Alfie and Annie Rose Storybook' by Shirley Hughes) - the hat being given to different people who could use it.

Response

I wonder, who do you think was helped in this story?

I wonder, why do you think Alfie was upset?

I wonder, how do you think Alfie felt at the end of the story?

Hold both your hands out. Look at one of your hands. Think of someone who has helped you. What did you receive from them? Imagine how it feels in your hand. Now imagine passing it to your other hand. You've received something. How can you share this? What could you give to someone else?

We'll have one minute of silence – you might want

to think about something you are thankful for receiving, or something you could give.

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Help us to be open to receive from others, and to give to them in return.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Note:

It may be important to recognise that some risks are worth taking but others may be too dangerous. Being able to ask for help, just like Grace asked her father to help save the people, is important too.

Creating peace with others (Remembrance)

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of an argument, or watching a fight or being in a conflict?

Have you ever wanted there to be no more fighting or war?

This is a story about some of the people who fought in WWI.

Read 'The Christmas Truce' story.

Response

I wonder, how do you think the soldiers felt when they first stood up and laid down their guns?

I wonder, how do you think the soldiers felt when they were singing and playing together?

I wonder, how do you think they felt when they had to start fighting each other again?

Many people bravely lost their lives fighting in WWI. Many people may not have wanted to kill other people. This story can remind us of a moment of peace.

As we listen to the music and then have a time of silence, you may want to remember the people who died and pray or hope for peace.

Play 'They shall grow not old' music and then hold a short silence appropriate for the children.

If you want, you may want to draw a poppy and write one of your thoughts or prayers onto it.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

We are sorry for those who have lost their lives in war, and for those who will lose their lives in war today. Help us to bring peace into our lives.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Note:

Some children may find this topic difficult, especially if any of them have experience of war or death.



Creating peace with others (Remembrance)

The Christmas Truce: 1914

Copyright Peace Education Network: <http://paxchristi.org.uk>

It was 24 December 1914 – Christmas Eve. Many children were getting ready for Christmas without their fathers. Earlier that year, in August, war had broken out right across Europe and around the world. Germany had invaded the next-door country of Belgium. Britain had agreed to help defend Belgium and so hundreds of thousands of men had set sail to France. Before very long they were facing German troops in a long line of trenches.

These deep trenches were cold, wet and muddy and were crawling with rats. Although they were dug to protect soldiers on both sides from the guns of the enemy, thousands of men on both sides had already been killed. Regularly the men were ordered out of the trenches to run across ‘no man’s land’, kill the German soldiers and push the Germans back. But in four months, little or no ground had been made.

As Christmas eve continued and the British soldiers kept watch, they heard something which surprised them. It was not gunfire but singing. As dawn broke, instead of the guns starting up once more there was a strange calm. Someone in the German trenches raised a board on which they had written the words, “You no fight, we no fight”. Along the line, a German officer raised a white flag. Nervously, some British soldiers stood up above the trench – and nothing happened. Cautiously they began to advance, without their guns, towards German lines. The Germans, too, came forward and began to greet their enemies with warm handshakes. “Happy Christmas, Fritz!” and “Merry Christmas to you, too, Tommy.”

By that afternoon, thousands of soldiers on both sides were talking and laughing and singing. Some showed their new friends pictures of their loved ones. Some Germans had been working in England just before the war and one soldier asked a British officer if he would take a letter back to his English girlfriend. There was much swapping of small presents such as cigarettes, tinned food, plum puddings, and even helmets! Someone else found a football and a game began. Other games started and where there was no ball, tin cans or sandbags stuffed with straw were used. And all the while, carols continued to be sung in both languages. This truce had been started by ordinary soldiers not wishing to fight on Christmas Day.

The officers who were fighting with them joined in the truce but officers higher up were not at all pleased. They worried that the soldiers would no longer want to fight if they knew and made friends with the Germans they were killing. Orders went out that there was to be no more contact with the enemy and before long, sadly, the shooting began again. Many people had hoped the war would have been over by Christmas that year. Sadly, it went on for another three and a half years. By this time, millions of people had died. But many people remembered that moment of peace.

Being honest

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

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Stimulus

Have you ever told a small lie to try and get your own way? Have you ever thought it wouldn't make a difference?

This is a story, about two brothers and how their lives change, based on whether they are honest.

Read the story of 'The Two Brothers.'

Response

I wonder, why do you think the poor brother helped the people who were being tricked?

I wonder, why do you think the richer brother was so easily tricked?

I wonder, do you think it's ever ok to be dishonest?

In this story, it seems at first as though being dishonest and doing anything to get your own way works best. However, the poorer brother, by being honest, does end up with a better life over time.

Sometimes we might think that lying to get our own way or to get out of trouble means our life is easier and better. But in the end we will all be happier and will have a better life if we are honest.

Have a few moments to reflect. Can you think of a time when you thought about lying to get your

own way, or to try and avoid trouble? Did you lie or not? What would you do next time?

Give a few moments for reflection

You might want to use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Help us to be honest – to ourselves and to each other – so that we can all support one another and work together.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Being honest

The Two Brothers

Copyright: Jan Edmunds, Assemblies.org.uk

There were once two brothers. One was rich and one was poor. They almost always disagreed.

‘Do you think it pays to be an honest man?’ asked one of their neighbours. The poor man thought that it was right to be honest, but his rich brother believed that the only way to get on was with lies and deceit. They decided to have a bet to see who was right. Whoever won would get all that the other owned. So they set off in search of an answer.

The first person they met was a farm labourer who told them that he had worked hard for his master but had been cheated by him and now had nothing. That was one point for the rich brother. Next they met a wealthy merchant who told them that he had become rich by telling little lies here and there, which he felt had done no harm. That was a second point for the rich brother. Next they met a priest who said: ‘The ways of the world are wicked. Where can you find honesty in this dark age? Honesty certainly does not pay.’

‘I think I have won our bet,’ said the rich brother. ‘Now you must give me all that you have.’

The poor brother did not have much to give but because he was honest and kept to his word he fulfilled his promise and went out into the world empty-handed. He had no home or money and he soon became cold and hungry. He went into the nearby forest to find shelter and something to eat. While he was sheltering beneath a tree he overheard voices. They belonged to three little elves who had been doing some wicked things.

One was boasting that he had told a farmer that the only way he would get his labourers to work for him was to beat them. The second elf boasted that he had blocked the river upstream with stones. The people of the local village could not work out why they no longer had a water supply. The elf told the people that if they paid him handsomely he could restore the water by magic. The third elf told the king that his daughter had promised to marry the son of his worst enemy in the next kingdom. So the king imprisoned the princess in a high tower and declared war on his neighbour. The third elf told the king that if he gave him 20 sacks of gold he would cast a spell on the princess so that she no longer wanted to marry his enemy. The elves danced around feeling very proud of themselves and the mischief they had caused. The honest brother was shocked by their dishonest ways and felt determined to help those they had tricked.

First of all, he went to the farmer whose labourers were so unhappy and were not working well for him. The honest brother told the farmer that if he treated them kindly



Being honest

they would work much harder for him. This he did and soon the labourers worked twice as hard, and received more pay as the farmer became richer and shared his wealth with them.

Next, the honest brother went into the village and asked for help to move the stones that were blocking the river. He and a group of villagers found the place and worked hard for many hours removing the stones. Soon the water began to flow again into the village. The people were very grateful to him.

Lastly, he went to see the king. He told him that his daughter was innocent and that he should not make war with his neighbour. 'You are an honest man,' said the king. 'You have shown this in the way you have helped my people, so I believe you.' His daughter was released from the tower, the king made peace with his neighbour and the honest brother was made a hero by the villagers.

The poor brother was invited to live at the palace and not long afterwards he and the princess were married. When the dishonest brother heard of this he went to visit his brother to see if he could share in his good fortune. The honest brother told him truthfully how he had overheard the elves boasting about their mischief. The dishonest brother decided that he would go into the forest, find the elves, hear their plans and become a rich hero like his brother.

He found the tree and could hear the elves talking. He did not hide, but approached them. As soon as they saw him they could sense that he was dishonest. They were full of mischief so they told the dishonest brother that if he gave them all his money they would take him to a cave where he would find gold and jewels beyond his wildest dreams. The dishonest brother handed over his riches and they took him to the cave. There he found a lot of bulging sacks. He eagerly opened each in turn, only to find that they were filled not with gold and jewels but with common stones. He was left with nothing.

He went back to see his brother, who had now become king. 'Well,' said his once poor brother, 'I think you have discovered for yourself whether it pays to be honest or dishonest.'

The dishonest brother was sorry for what he had done. He lived a very modest life in the village and at last he changed into an honest man.

Sacrifice

Opening

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Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

What does it mean to sacrifice something for someone else?

This is a story, believed to be true, about what it

means to help someone, while giving something up yourself.

Read the story of 'The Praying Hands.'

Response

I wonder, how do you think Albert felt when he realised he could no longer achieve his dream?

I wonder, why do you think Albrecht drew Albert's hands as if they were praying?

I wonder, is there anyone you know who has made a sacrifice for someone else?

This story is about the sacrifice Albert made for Albrecht. Perhaps he didn't know he was sacrificing his dream at first, I wonder if he would have done the same thing again, if he had known what would happen?

I wonder, who makes sacrifices for you? I wonder who you make sacrifices for? All around the world are people who will make a sacrifice today; the starving mother who gives the last food she has to her children, the doctor who leaves his family to help people in another country, the friend who leaves a game to be with someone who is lonely.

Albrecht drew Albert's hands to show the sacrifice they made for him. What will your hands do for someone else today?

Give a few moments for reflection

You might want to use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you for those who make a sacrifice for someone else (and the sacrifice of Jesus made for all people on the cross). Help us to use our hands wisely to help others.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

The Praying Hands

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Albrecht Dürer lived in Nuremberg around 500 years ago. He was the eldest of 18 children and his father was a goldsmith who had to work hard to keep food on the table. From a young age, it was clear that Albrecht had a talent for drawing. He often helped in his father's shop, working to produce fine metal brooches and decorative ornaments and he enjoyed putting the same detail into his drawings. As he got older, Albrecht knew that he wanted to become an artist. This would be expensive and he knew that his father would find it difficult to afford the years of training that were required. There was another problem, too: his brother, Albert, also wanted to become an artist, and there was no way that their father could afford for both boys to train.

The two boys discussed their hopes and plans endlessly, but could see no way for them both to get what they wanted. Eventually, they made a pact and agreed that one brother would have to work in the local mine in order to support the other during his training. Then, once the training was finished, this brother would sell his paintings to support the other brother with training. It was settled with the toss of a coin and Albrecht won – he would be first to learn from the masters.

Albrecht spent time with artists in Germany and Italy. He became especially skilled at producing pictures cut into wood blocks that could make prints. While Albrecht mixed with artists, his brother, Albert, worked in the mines. It was hard and dangerous work, but Albert persevered in the hope that soon he would have the opportunity that his brother was having. As they had agreed, Albert regularly sent money to support Albrecht.

After four years, Albrecht's training was completed and he returned to his home town. He had become a well-known artist and could earn considerable sums of money. Albrecht was now prepared to keep his end of the bargain. At the family party that was thrown on his return, he renewed the promise that he had made to his brother. 'Now, dear Albert, you can leave the mine and learn from the masters as I have. You have supported me and now I will support you. You will lack nothing. My earnings will pay for the best teaching anyone could wish for.'

Albrecht looked with dismay at his brother, who stood with tears running down his face. Albert stretched out his hands and spoke quietly. 'Not so, dear brother. I am proud that you have become an artist and I am glad that I was able to help you, but look at my hands. Work in the mines is hard. I have had every finger smashed at least once, the joints are swollen, I have developed arthritis. I find it hard to hold a glass in my hand, let alone a paintbrush. For me it is too late.'

Albrecht embraced his brother: he realised the sacrifice that Albert had made, and marvelled that his brother was not resentful and bitter about what had happened. Would he, he wondered, be so generous if it were the other way round? One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Dürer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands."