

2

Crossing the Water: Becoming Community

EXODUS 14:10-31



GOAL

By exploring how crossing the sea brought the people of Israel together, children explore how to find, create, and participate in Christian community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for the community of faith formed in the waters of baptism. May I help the children in my care know that they belong to God. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Finding belonging and friendship are key tasks for elementary-age children, and they don't always happen automatically. Before a group *gels*, they usually have to overcome some hardship or participate in an initiation of sorts together. In the Christian church, this rite of initiation is baptism. For the Israelites, the exodus from Egypt becomes crucial to their group and identity formation. Through the conversations and activities in this session, children will explore how they can find, create, and be a part of community.

THE BIBLE STORY

Today's text is one of the most pivotal in Scripture. As the Israelites pass through the Red Sea unscathed while their Egyptian pursuers are killed, they are finally free from slavery and free to form their own community.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

To children, community means belonging. It means having a place where you are known and have friends. We push children to grow in their understanding of community when we ask them to consider how they themselves can have an effect on a particular community. At the most basic level, we all want children to feel like they are known, are loved, and belong at church. Only then can they begin to take in some of the more complicated theological constructs. It all boils down to having a place where "everybody knows your name."

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Baptism Questions" (p. 8): Display the newsprint with questions and answers from session 1.
- "Water Play" (p. 16): Set up a water station with one or more large tubs of water, bowls, pitchers, measuring cups, and various containers. Cover the floor around the water tubs with a tarp or plastic tablecloth. Have towels on hand.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Community Charades" (p. 18): Write out charades clues such as: being an acolyte, picking up trash on the grounds, singing in a choir, playing an instrument, helping with younger children, sorting canned goods for a food drive, reading Scripture in worship, working on a service project, preparing a meal, and serving a meal. Add opportunities specific to your context as well.



GETTING STARTED



Post the newsprint with questions and answers about baptism from session 1, “Baptism Questions” (p. 8). Invite the children to add questions and answers throughout the session. Keep for sessions 3 and 4.

-
- Large tub(s) of water
 - Tarp or plastic tablecloth
 - Bowls, pitchers, measuring cups, and containers of various sizes
 - Towels

WATER PLAY



As children arrive, invite them to engage with the water play station. Provide containers to pour, measure, and splash in the water. Have towels on hand for drying off.



Some children will likely get wet! Have extra towels on hand for drying exuberant children and their clothes.

-
- Bowl of water (preferably a clear bowl)
 - Small table

WATERS OF BAPTISM



Place a bowl of water on a small table where the children can sit in a circle or semicircle around it. Invite each child to dip their fingers in the water. As they do, say to each one, “(Name), through the waters of baptism, God loves you and calls you God’s own beloved child.”



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

-
- Large map or globe

NATURAL BORDERS



Display the map or globe so all the children can see it. Ask them to identify boundaries between different countries and continents, showing them the lines of division if necessary. Then, draw their attention to all the water on the map or globe and how water divides large landmasses from each other. Ask the children to find examples of water within the land masses, such as rivers and seas. Point out that many borders are actually formed by water. For example, the east-west borders of several states are formed by the Mississippi River. Explain to the children that, just as water separates different communities, it can also bind communities together by its geography. Tell the children that, in today’s Bible story, we will learn how water shaped one particular community: the people of God, also known as the Hebrews or Israelites.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

-
- Copies of Resource Page 1

CROSSING THE RED SEA



Distribute copies of the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 1. Read or invite volunteers to read the story out loud. Note that this is an adaptation of the story from Exodus 14:10–31 and does not necessarily reflect the

attitudes of the people involved. It can be helpful to hear the story in a more modern style. Engage the children in discussion about the story.

- What trouble had the Hebrews run into?
- How did God make a way out of no way?
- What miracle took place in this story?
- How did the miracle help the people?
- Do you think the people changed in this story? If so, how?



To make the story more interactive, assign children to play the parts of Moses, Miriam, Aaron, and Yahweh (God) and present the story as a reader's theater, with the assigned children speaking the characters' lines as you narrate.

SENSORY JOURNEY



Internet-connected device

Invite the children to imagine what it must have been like to walk through the sea. Encourage them to use all of their senses, asking:

- What did the people see?
- What did they hear?
- What did they feel?
- What did they smell?
- What did they taste?

Allow a few quiet moments for the children to enter the scene in their minds.

Then show the YouTube video “The Prince of Egypt (1998)—‘Red Sea’ scene” (bit.ly/FMRedSea, 4:32). After you have watched the scene, wonder together about what that experience must have been like for the Israelites. Ask the children the following questions:

- How did the picture in your imagination match the movie's version?
- How were they alike or different?
- What else would you like to know about the journey through the sea?



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.


JOINING PRACTICES



Engage the children in conversation about how we become parts of the various communities in our lives. Explain that, way back when the church was just starting, Christians used baptism as a way of joining the Christian community. Early Christians had to go through several years of classes before they could be baptized, and only then could they participate fully, even just by staying for the whole worship service! That's not how we do it today; everyone is welcome at our worship services! But it's not unusual for other communities to have things you have to do before you can join them.

Help the children think about other joining rituals or practices they may encounter or experience, such as trying out for a sports team or stage production, a scouting “bridging” or “crossing over” ceremony, beginning of the school year “meet and greets,” kindergarten graduations, getting a library card, taking class pictures, moving up to the next sports league, and so on. Have a discussion using the following questions:

- ✦ What do all of these activities have in common?
- ✦ Which of these activities have you participated in?
- ✦ If you have participated in any of these activities, how did the joining practice make you feel like part of the group?
- ✦ How did these *joining* activities affect your feelings about the group or activity? What about your friendships with others participating or already in the group?

 Be sure to emphasize that we don't have to be baptized to be a part of our church community or the people of God. We already are. Baptism symbolizes and celebrates that connection in a special way.

Internet-connected device

BELONGING SONGS M T

Community, friendship, and belonging are frequent themes in children's literature and films because forming these relationships is an essential part of childhood development. Show and listen to one or more songs from the YouTube videos listed below.

- "You've Got a Friend in Me—Randy Newman (Toy Story Edition)" (bit.ly/FMFriendInMe, 2:24)
- "Where You Are (From "Moana"/Sing-Along)" (bit.ly/FMMoana, 3:29)
- "Justin Timberlake, Anna Kendrick—True Colors (Lyric)" (bit.ly/FMTrueColors, 4:03)
- "Everything Is AWESOME!!!—The LEGO® Movie—Tegan and Sara feat. The Lonely Island" (bit.ly/FMAwesome, 2:44)
- "Hercules: Go the Distance—Sing-Along—Disney" (bit.ly/FMDistance, 2:23)

After each song, lead the children in conversation around questions such as:

- ✦ Who did the character singing feel connected to? Who do they not feel connected to?
- ✦ How have they found or not found community?
- ✦ What friendships do you hear about in the song?
- ✦ What does this song show us about being a part of a community?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options

Prepared charades clues

COMMUNITY CHARADES G AM

Help the children think of ways they can serve their communities (whether church, school, or local) by playing a game of charades. Remind the children that there is no speaking allowed. They must act out the service without using words. Have the children take turns acting out one of the prepared clues, as they wish to play. After each clue has been guessed, allow a few moments of discussion about that way of serving. Ask the children if they have served in this way and what they thought about it.

COMMUNITY IMPROV

D

Form pairs or groups of three. Have each group of children think of a situation in which a child could help out a community. (The community can be your congregation, their school, their family, your town—whatever community they want to focus on.) Invite them to consider how they could act out the situation but not the helping part. Their job is to set the scene and present a problem that another child can help with.

After the groups have had time to make a plan, explain to the children that they are going to do some *improv*, improvisational acting. Invite one group at a time to present their skit, setting the scene and showing a problem or need. Have them freeze at the end of their skit. Encourage one of the other groups (or a single child) to join the skit and unfreeze the actors in order to improvise a solution or a way to help. For example, a group might act out one child breaking their pencil in class and asking their partner to borrow one, but the partner doesn't have an extra. The improv actor could come on scene and present one of their extra pencils to the child who needs one.



This activity may be difficult for concrete thinkers to understand at first. Be ready to provide prompts as needed. Once they catch on, though, they may want to play several rounds!



FOLLOWING JESUS

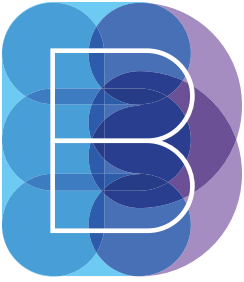
WATER BLESSING

Return to the bowl of water. Form a circle. One by one, invite each child to dip their fingers in the water and then turn to the person next to them in the circle and draw a cross on their hand, saying, “(Name), you are God’s child. God loves you!”

Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God of big spaces /
and little places, /
help us each find /
where we belong, /
where love is strong, /
and where all come along. /
Amen. /

Bowl of water from “Waters of Baptism” (p. 8)



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON EXODUS 14:10–31

Moses turned to Aaron and Miriam and said, “So what are we going to do about that?”

That was the expanse of sea that spread out before them and the thousands of Israelites standing behind them.

“Of course there’s a sea. *Of course*. Why would Yahweh make anything simple?” Moses said, almost to himself.

Aaron piped up. “Dude, you know that’s not how Yahweh works. Like, ever.”

“It’s a challenge,” Miriam said. “You know, one of those *growth opportunities* Yahweh loves.” They sighed in unison and surveyed the sparkling water. They could hear the hoofbeats of the Egyptian army getting closer.

“Surely you’re not complaining about *me*, are you, Miriam?” The siblings froze at the sound of Yahweh’s voice. Miriam cocked her head. “Well, yeah, maybe just the tiniest bit,” she said sheepishly.

“Well, you’re right!” Yahweh’s voice boomed. “This *is* a ‘growth experience.’ An experience you’ll never forget. A chance to bond. It’s some real teambuilding.” Aaron rolled his eyes at Miriam, and Moses just looked defeated.

“All right, Yahweh, what do we have to do this time?” he asked.

“Oh, this one’s easy. Just tell those Israelites to get moving. You’re going to go right through that sea.” Yahweh instructed.

“OK, cool,” Aaron said, “I’ll just start telling folks we’re going to swim across the entire sea. C’mon, Miriam.” And they wandered away, leaving Moses to deal with Yahweh alone.

Moses looked up at the heavens. “OK, so what are we really doing?”

Yahweh said, “Like I said. You’re going through the sea. But you’re not going to swim. All you gotta do is hold up that staff of yours, and I’ll make a path through the water. Just like that.”

“Just like that?” Moses asked, skeptical.

“Just like that,” Yahweh said. Moses could almost feel the LORD nodding.

Moses sighed again. He found Miriam and Aaron and told them the plan.

“That’s not a plan!” Miriam sputtered.

“I know,” Moses said. “But Yahweh is going to make a way out of no way.”

And just like that, Moses picked up his trusty old walking stick, and raised it above the water. Almost immediately, the water jumped back from his feet. As he moved forward, the water continued to split, revealing dry land. The people followed him right through that sea, which closed behind them, giving Pharaoh’s army the bath of a lifetime.

Even though it wasn’t the first miracle Moses performed, it was the miracle that brought the Israelite people together. Instead of a group of people, it made them God’s people.