



## On your marks

The parable about the tenants of the vineyard is just about the last story that Jesus told before the last supper and his arrest; it is arguably one of his most powerful. In it, he makes it as clear as he can that they are about to kill the king's son but that the 'rejected stone' will become the most important one of all. He is telling everyone listening both about his death and his resurrection. Interestingly, it is only the chief priests and the Pharisees that 'get it'. Only much later do his disciples understand what Jesus means.

## Get set

This outline contains many further suggestions for storytelling and drama activities for the whole of Holy Week.

The following material can be used as the basis for a storytelling session with children, as part of an all-age service to introduce Holy Week or as part of a Messy Church celebration. You can find the story in Matthew 21:33-46.

You will need a number of stones and one larger stone which does not need to be especially smooth or beautiful.

## Go!

*Set up an area, visible to all, which is scattered with stones. Place the large stone in the middle. The stones become the prompt for the story that Jesus told during the last week of his life.*

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

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

*Encourage some to pick up the stones and feel them.*

Just think how old these stones might be. How far have they come? They've been cut from quarries, chipped and shaped to become parts of the magnificent temple. Of course, not every stone brought had been used. And there was one stone in particular that caught Jesus' eye.

*Draw everyone's attention to the large stone. Feel its shape as the story begins to unfold.*

Look, said Jesus, this is one of the stones that the builders have rejected. I wonder what they didn't like about it.

*Ask for suggestions*

I wonder why they decided they couldn't use it.

- Was it the wrong shape?
- Wouldn't it fit?
- Didn't they like its colour?

Jesus looked up and remembered words he had learned when he was very young. They came from the Psalms: *The stone the builders rejected has become the most important stone of all. This is something that God has done - something amazing for all.*

*Touch and handle the stones to help make the story that follows very visual - especially the 'building' words and of course the 'stones' mentioned.*

Then Jesus told them this story to show them what he meant.

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

*Invite some to make the ground plan of the wall with the stones.*

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

Finally, on the edge of the vineyard, he built a great tower - a watchtower to make sure no enemies came to steal the grapes.

*Invite some to make a small mound, to represent a tower, with their stones at one corner.*

He did everything possible to make sure of a vintage harvest.

But then the landowner had to go on a journey, so he left some hired servants to look after the vineyard in his absence. Unfortunately, he had to be away longer than he planned - he was detained on business - and he couldn't get back for harvest time. So, he sent some messengers to bring back a share of the harvest so he could at least taste the fine grapes he had planted.

When the messengers arrived at the vineyard, the hired servants decided that they would not give up what they'd been looking after. They wanted the vineyard for themselves. Instead of giving them some of the harvest, they beat them up and chased them away. When the landowner heard what had



happened, he sent some more messengers, but they too were badly treated. They had stones thrown at them and some were even killed so that none dared go near the vineyard again. Every group that the owner sent was treated in the same terrible way.

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

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

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

The crowds near Jesus drew a sharp intake of breath. What a terrible story. And, even as they were thinking that, Jesus asked this question: What do you think the owner will do next?

*Invite some response.*

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

*Hold on to the large stone and then lift it slowly, as you say:*

The stone that was rejected will become the most important one.

The one that was tossed aside will become the one that holds everything together.

Only God can do this and it will be amazing.

I wonder what Jesus was talking about.

What's this got to do with what happens at Easter?

Many in the crowd were puzzled but some of them realised what the story was really about.