



On your marks

It isn't easy to find a way to talk to children about the terrible and extraordinary events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, which lie at the heart of our Christian faith. What follows is one idea to do this that has been used successfully in school assemblies, at holiday clubs and on special Holy Week children's days.

Get set

You will need a large piece of A2 card on to which you have placed a noughts and crosses grid of two vertical and two horizontal bars attached by a small amount of tape so that it can be removed. You will also need three marker pens - red, black and green - which will be used to play and 'add to' the game as described below.

Alternatively you could draw this grid on an acetate sheet and project the game onto a screen using an overhead projector.

Go!

Introduce the noughts and crosses grid, saying that you are ready to challenge anyone to a game because you have been practising hard and know a foolproof way to win!

Arrange with another leader or teacher beforehand whom you will choose to play at this game. You will need to prepare your opponent in advance so that he or she knows where to put the crosses. You will be the noughts.

Play to the crowd about the game. Who's going to win? Who's the cleverer? Dither and spend time working out where to put your marks.

The other leader or teacher starts by putting his/her cross in the top left. You put a nought in the middle bottom. Then the other puts his/her next cross in the top right. The crosses should be slightly at an angle, slanting toward the middle of the grid. Dither about where to put your next mark but eventually decide to put your nought in the bottom left. Ignore the children's advice (which will be to stop the line of crosses at the top). The leader/teacher wins with a flourish by putting a final cross in the top middle!

The leader/teacher leaves satisfied with an easy win.

Say something like: Oh dear it looks like he/she has won. An easy win and I know what you're thinking. I didn't even try and stop him/her winning. I just let him/her have the winning line. So he/she has won. Or has he/she?

You know, this game makes me think of Easter. About Good Friday and Easter Sunday. On Good



Friday it seemed like Jesus just let death and evil and hatred win. It looked like he was completely defeated. He'd lost the battle. But had he? Let me add some scenery and shading to the game that we have just played.

Remove the grid and draw a green line to make a hill for the crosses and with the black marker pen fill in the nought in the bottom middle, so it looks like the stone rolled away from an the empty tomb.

Three crosses on a hill on Friday. But in three days' time, by Easter Sunday, a stone rolled away from an empty tomb down below! Jesus didn't stay dead. He beat death. He won a victory over evil and hatred and all that is ugly and horrible in this world and inside us. Now he can offer us the power to beat that in us, when we become his followers.

It looked like he'd lost but in fact he won. That's why it's called Good Friday. Easter is so important to every Christian because it tells them loud and clear that death has been defeated forever and that evil can be beaten, as they trust in him. Easter can completely change a life.

God in Jesus has the winning line.