**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 3 of 4

# On the beach

### MEETING AIM

To share in Jesus’ invitation to follow him.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 21:1-19

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

This story is one of incredible parallels, with the first time Jesus met the disciples (Luke 5:1-11), inviting them to put down their nets and follow him. Three years of following Jesus, and the disciples once again found themselves at their nets. In this encounter, Jesus challenges the disciples to realise that their work was not over but had only just begun. We too, together with the children we serve, have the opportunity to put down our nets and follow Jesus, even when we cannot see where he will lead.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask the children whether they have ever been to the beach. Encourage them to share their stories of the things they did there, and what they like about being at the beach.

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** food-related toys

Have some free-play time around the idea of food and picnics. Introduce a role-play area with a ‘campfire’, together with a pretend boat and fishing net, where children can role-play catching and cooking their own fish.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** a boat (an inflatable dinghy would work well); a large piece of net

If there’s only a few of you, you could tell this story as you all sit in the boat. Alternatively, ask the children to pretend they’re on the seashore and stand in the boat as you tell this story:

I wonder if any of you remember what happened when Jesus first met his disciples? Some of them were fishermen who had been out all night trying to fish but they hadn’t caught a thing. Jesus came along and told them to throw their nets out the other side of the boat. *You could act this out as you talk.* The fishermen were amazed when their nets filled with fish and they chose to follow Jesus, leaving their nets behind and becoming his disciples.

A long time had passed since then. The disciples had learned lots from following Jesus, but now they were on their own again. They had seen Jesus die on the cross and they had seen he had come back to life, but he wasn’t with them every day and they weren’t sure what would happen next.

So the disciples went back to fishing, like they had done before. One night, seven of the disciples went out in their boats, trying to catch some fish. But when morning came, they had caught nothing! A man standing on the beach shouted to them: “Put your nets out on the other side of the boat!” So they did. *Act this out again.*

Once again, their nets were filled with fish, just like they had been a few years ago. The disciples realised it was Jesus and they brought their fish into the shore, ready to share a fish sandwich breakfast together.

And just like the first time, when Jesus saw the men fishing, Jesus invited the men to follow him again. Jesus would not be with them on earth for much longer, but he still had important work for them to do. Now they would learn what it meant to follow Jesus, even when they couldn’t see him.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

* What is your favourite part of this story?
* Is there anything you don’t understand about this story?
* Why do you think Jesus chose to appear to the disciples in this way?
* What would you ask Jesus if you saw him?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** pebbles; acrylic paints; paintbrushes; clean-up and cover-up equipment

Invite the children to select a pebble and paint something on it from the story today. Some children may choose to paint an image such as the boat or fish as a reminder of the story, while others may paint a word or symbol – something that has spoken to them through this story. Once completed, gather the pebbles together to look at in the centre of the group. At the end of the session, invite the children to take their pebbles away and choose what to do with them – either displaying them at home as a reminder of the story of God’s message to them, or perhaps passing it on to someone else to share the story with them.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** a large piece of net (optional)

Gather the children together, perhaps inviting the group to hold on to the net together in a circle. Lead the children in a prayer, as follows:

Thank you, Jesus, for your invitation to follow you. Thank you for the disciples who left behind their nets to follow you and share your story with the world. Thank you that we can follow you too and share your story with the people we know and love. Amen.

As the children continue to have their eyes closed, suggest to them that they can choose to let go of the net, as a symbol between them and God that they want to follow him too, if they so wish, and leave a silent space for children to pray for themselves, as you close.

**BECKY MAY**

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