

Return with Thanks

(based on Luke 17:11-19)

One day ten men were sitting on the side of the road on the border between Samaria and Galilee. They had a skin disease. They were not allowed to go into the towns or villages. They couldn't go near other people. The ten men were sad. They wanted to be with their families. How they wished they did not have this terrible skin disease.

I wonder, "Where did the men go and what did they do if they could not go home?"

As they were gathered outside the village, they saw Jesus and his friends coming down the road. Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem. The men had heard about Jesus. They knew that Jesus helped people. They knew he had the power to heal. They wondered if Jesus would help them.

The men were not allowed to go near Jesus, so they all cried out together: "Jesus, please help us. Jesus, have mercy on us."

When Jesus saw them, he stopped walking. The disciples also stopped and wondered what Jesus would do. No one was allowed to go near anyone with a skin disease.

I wonder, "How loud did they have to be for Jesus to hear them?"

Jesus smiled at the men, "Go and show yourselves to the priests," he instructed. "They must see that you do not have a skin disease any longer."

The ten men followed Jesus' instructions. As they went, they realized that something had happened. Their skin was clear. They were healed. They could go home. The men ran to show the priest so they could go back to their families.

All but one of them, that is. One man, a Samaritan, ran back as fast as he could. He knelt down in front of Jesus.

I wonder, "Why did only one man return to Jesus?"

"Thank you, Jesus," he cried. "Thank you for making me better. You have made me clean."

"Weren't ten men healed?" Jesus asked. "Where are the other nine?"

Then Jesus reached down and helped the man stand up. "Go in peace," Jesus said to him. "Your faith has made you well."



Welcoming Zacchaeus

(based on Luke 19:1–10)

The city of Jericho buzzed with the exciting news. “Jesus is coming,” the people shouted to each other. “Let’s go and see him!” A huge crowd gathered along the road. Everyone was very excited to see Jesus.

A tax collector named Zacchaeus (zak-KEE-uhs) was in the crowd. Zacchaeus was rich, but he was not popular. Almost everyone hated tax collectors because they worked for the Roman leaders.

Zacchaeus was a short man who could not see over the crowd. The people in the crowd would not let the tax collector push to the front so he could see. After trying for a while, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree that was next to the road. It was a lovely tall tree and gave Zacchaeus a great view.

I wonder, “How did the sycamore tree smell?”

When Jesus reached the tree, he looked up and saw Zacchaeus sitting there. To Zacchaeus’ delight Jesus spoke to him, “Zacchaeus,” Jesus called. “Hurry down. I must be a guest in your house today.”

Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree hardly able to believe his good fortune. Could it be true? Jesus wanted to come to his house?

The crowd was not as pleased as Zacchaeus. In fact, they were very upset. “Jesus is going to the house of a tax collector,” they muttered indignantly to each other. “Everyone knows that tax collectors do not follow in God’s way. Why would Jesus go to the house of a sinner?”

I wonder, “What could Zacchaeus do to make friends?”

When he heard the grumbles of the crowd, Zacchaeus stopped and spoke to Jesus: “Teacher, I give away half of my money to the poor,” he stammered. “If I discover that I have cheated anyone, I pay that person back four times what I owe him.”

The crowd went quiet and looked at Zacchaeus in astonishment. Could it be true? Could a tax collector follow in God’s way? Jesus smiled and looked around at the crowd.

“A good thing has happened here today,” said Jesus.

“Now you can see by his actions that Zacchaeus is part of the family of God. He is a child of Abraham just like you. I have come to welcome those on the outside back into the community. ”

Then Zacchaeus and Jesus went to Zacchaeus’ home and had a wonderful meal together.

I wonder, “What did they eat?”





Put Zacchaeus in the Tree



A New Disciple

(based on Acts 1:12–14, 21–26)

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus went back to heaven to live with God. Jesus' friends knew they had to carry on without him. Before he left, Jesus gave them an important job to do. They had to share the good news of God's love everywhere. The disciples knew it was time to get organized.

Everyone was afraid of the soldiers because of what had happened to Jesus, so they decided they would meet together in groups to pray and worship God.

At first the gatherings were quite small, but the word quickly spread and the small groups grew into larger ones.

I wonder, "What made the groups grow larger?"

One day, there were 120 people gathered together to pray. All of the disciples were there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a lot of other women and men. Peter had called everyone together to choose someone to help the disciples with their important work.

"As you know, Jesus chose twelve of us to become leaders," Peter explained. "Judas was one of us, but he died. We need someone to take the place of Judas so that we can be twelve again. The person we choose needs to be someone who traveled with Jesus from the beginning."

I wonder, "Why did they need twelve disciples?"

There were two people who had followed Jesus from the beginning. Their names were Matthias (muh-THAI-uhs) and Justus (JUHS-tuhs). The group gathered in a circle around them.

Justus and Matthias were both good people. They were both willing to serve God. Who would it be: Matthias or Justus—Justus or Matthias? How could they possibly decide?

Jesus' friends remembered that he always prayed to God whenever there was a decision to be made. So, they prayed:

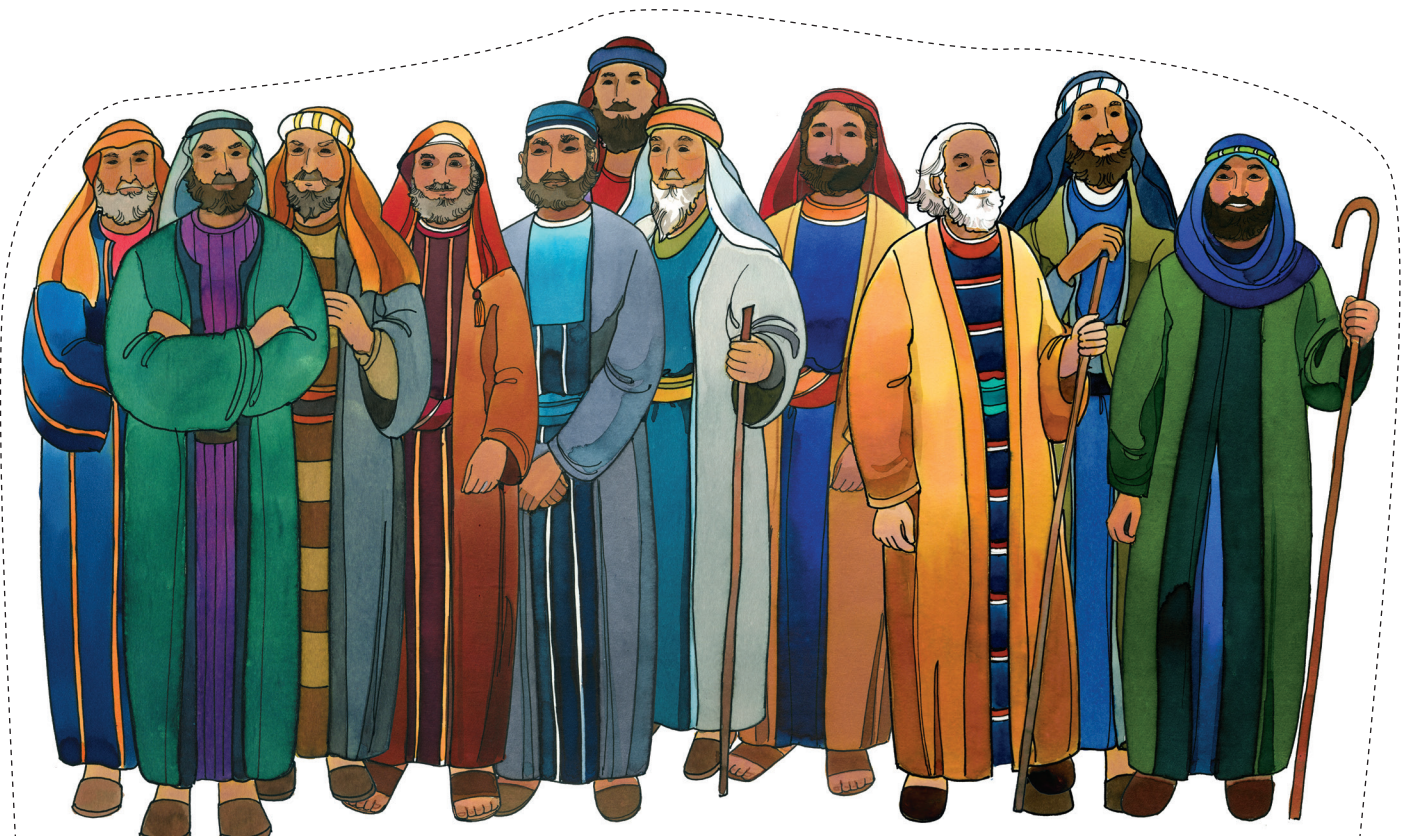
"Lord, you know what everyone is like! Show us the one you have chosen to be an apostle and to serve in place of Judas."

They wrote Matthias and Justus's names on small stones. After a lot of praying, thinking, and talking, they tossed the stones and . . . Matthias's name was chosen!

Matthias was glad to join the other eleven disciples. He knew that God would use him to share the good news everywhere. He wanted to help and serve others like Jesus. Matthias couldn't wait to get started.

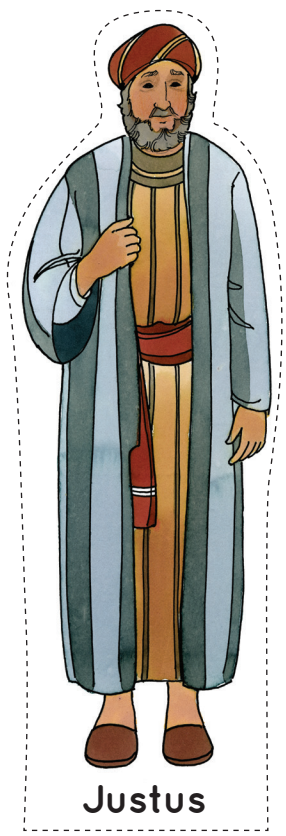
I wonder, "What did Justus do?"



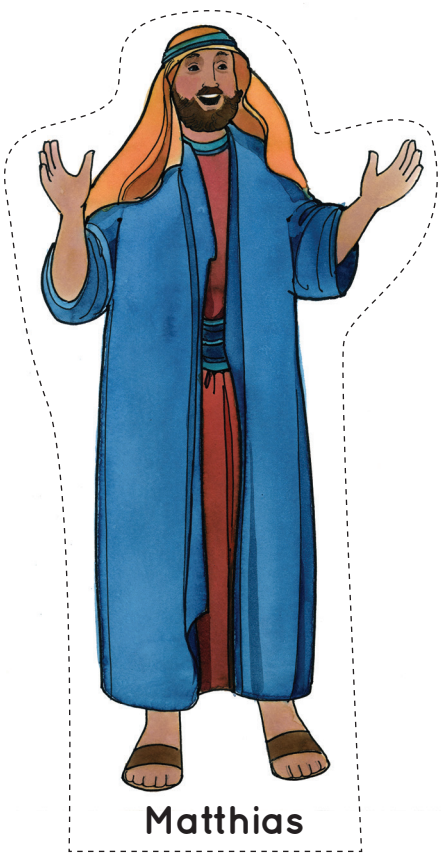


Jesus' Disciples

(Peter; Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, son of Alphaeus; Simon; and Judas, son of James)

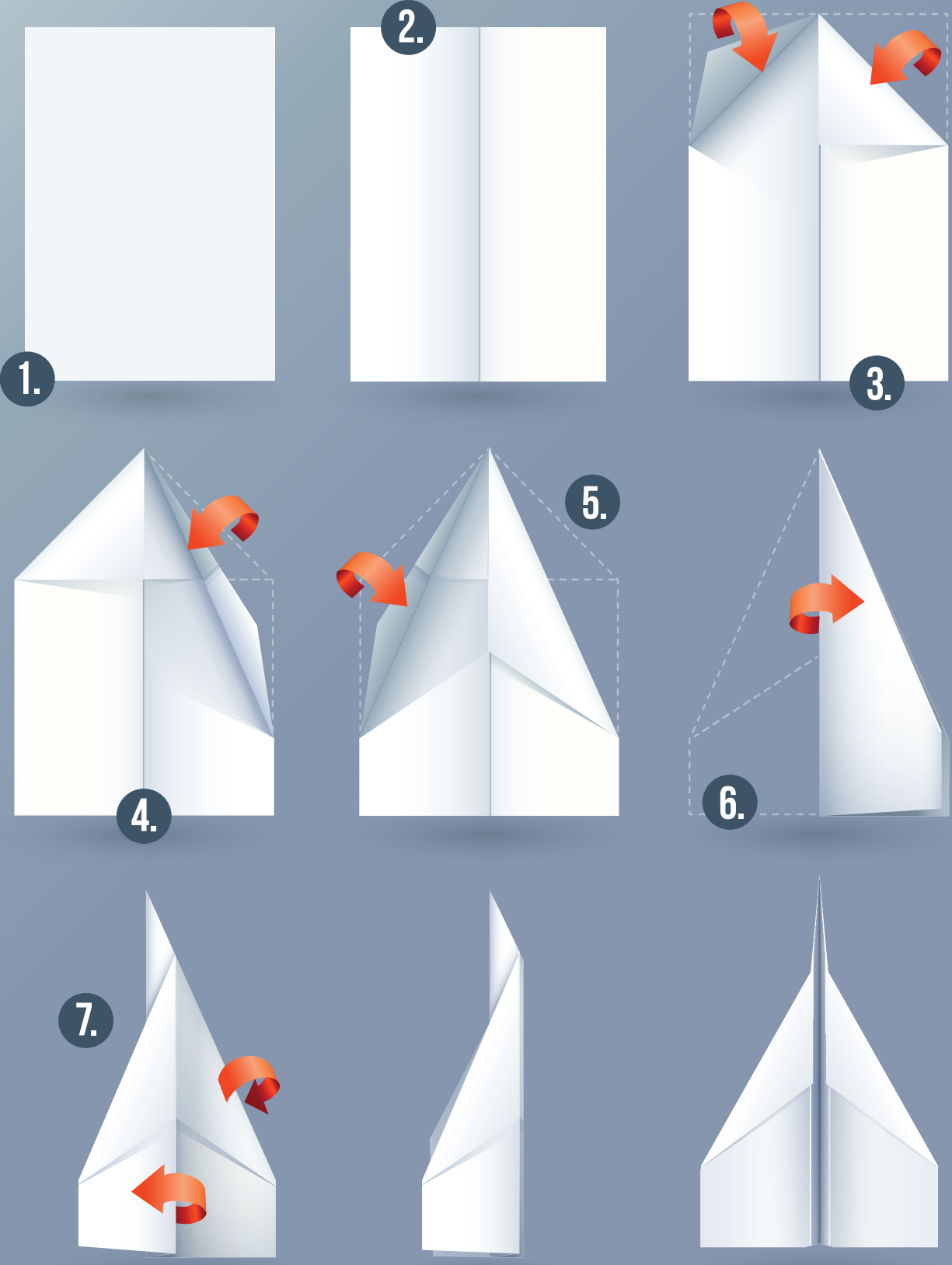


Justus



Matthias

How to Make a Paper Airplane



The Spirit Unleashed

(based on Acts 2:1-13)

The disciples were waiting. Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, but it seemed as if they had been waiting forever.

“How long will it be?” they asked each other.
“When will the Spirit come?”

“What if the Spirit has already come and we didn’t realize it?” some of them wondered.

Still they waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Soon it was the day of Pentecost, the festival celebrating the spring harvest. All of the people came to Jerusalem to give thanks for new grain.

I wonder, “What did the people use grain for?”

Jesus’ disciples were gathered in Jerusalem, waiting and praying. It had been fifty days since Jesus’ horrible death and his remarkable resurrection. Suddenly there was a loud sound from heaven like a fierce wind. It filled the whole building with its sound. The disciples had never heard anything like it. They looked at each other with wide eyes. What was going on?

Then it happened. The Holy Spirit came upon them. Swirling and powerful, the Spirit came like fire, moving from one person to another. Everyone was filled with power just as Jesus promised. They all began talking in different languages as the Spirit helped them to speak. The noise was incredible.

I wonder, “What did the noise sound like?”

Now there were many people staying in Jerusalem. Many visitors from faraway countries had come to the city to celebrate the festival of Pentecost. When they heard the noise, a huge crowd gathered. They were astonished because all of them heard their own language being spoken.

I wonder, “What were some of the languages?”

“Aren’t all these people from Galilee?” they asked. “We are from many different countries, yet all of us are hearing the message of God’s grace in our own tongue.”

“How is this possible?” they asked each other.
“What does this mean?”

Jesus’ followers knew what it meant. The wait was over. The Holy Spirit had come in power. Now they could go out and tell everyone the story of Jesus.

