The Sunday School Substitute

The Sunday School Substitute — Short Christian Playlet (10 min)

WHAT

A 17-year-old gets guilted into subbing for the K-2 Sunday school class. The lesson on the printout is Jesus walking on water. He has no idea what he is doing. The four kids in front of him absolutely do. They ask the questions adults are too embarrassed to. He keeps trying to redirect to the craft project. They keep dragging him back to Jesus. By the end, he is the one being taught — and the kids never notice.

THEME

A personal relationship with Jesus does not require a theology degree. Just a willingness to keep asking.

WHO

CALEB — 17. High school senior. Got cornered in the hallway eight minutes ago. Nervous. Trying. Carrying a printed lesson plan he has not read.

MIA — Age 7. The class theologian. Asks everything she is thinking. Loud. Fearless.

JONAH — Age 6. The class skeptic. If Jesus walked on water, he wants the physics of it.

RUTH — Age 5. The class poet. Sees everything sideways.

ELI — Age 7. The class realist. Mostly worried about the boat.

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

A church classroom. Four small chairs in a half-circle. One slightly too-big chair facing them. A folding table along the wall stacked with construction paper, glue sticks, blue tissue paper, and googly eyes. The energy is bright and chaotic — the kids interrupt, talk over each other, laugh, ask the next question while Caleb is still answering the last one. Caleb gets quieter as the skit goes on. The kids get louder. By the final beat, Caleb is the still one in a bright room.

PROPS

- Four small classroom chairs
- One slightly too-big chair (for Caleb)
- A folding craft table
- Construction paper, glue sticks, blue tissue paper, googly eyes
- A printed Sunday school lesson plan, slightly crumpled
- A children's Bible, on the craft table, open at random

TIME

10 minutes

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Scene 1 — The Setup

(Lights up on a church classroom. CALEB stands holding a printed lesson plan, clearly seeing it for the first time. The four KIDS are already on their chairs, watching him. He is sweating.)

CALEB

Okay. Hey. Hi. So I am — I am subbing today. For Mrs. Patterson. She — she has a thing. So we are going to have a — a great time.

MIA (immediately)

Are you going to be the teacher every week now?

CALEB

Oh, no, no. Just today. Just this once. So today's lesson is — let me check — Jesus walking on water. From the book of — uh — let me see —

JONAH (helpfully)

Matthew fourteen.

CALEB

Right. Yeah. That. So. Jesus walked on water. Which is — that is the lesson.

RUTH

How.

CALEB

How — how did Jesus walk on water?

RUTH (nodding)

Yes.

(Caleb opens his mouth. He closes it.)

Scene 2 — The First Question

CALEB (recovering)

Well — uh — because he is — he is Jesus. So he can do that.

JONAH

But like, did he hover? Or did the water get hard?

CALEB

I — that is a really good question, Jonah.

JONAH (pleased)

Thank you.

MIA

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Can we do the craft.

CALEB (lighting up)

Yes! Great idea. Let us do the craft. The craft is — the craft is making a boat from blue paper. So we will all —

ELI

Was the boat scared.

CALEB (slowing)

Was the — was the boat scared?

ELI

Yeah. Because it was nighttime and the wind was bad and Jesus was not in the boat. Was the boat scared.

Scene 3 — The Storm

CALEB (sitting down, slowly)

Eli. That is — okay. So in the story. The boat is in the middle of the lake. And there is a big storm. And the wind is going against them. And the disciples are rowing really hard but they cannot get to the other side.

MIA

Where is Jesus.

CALEB

Jesus stayed back. He went up the mountain to pray. By himself.

RUTH

Why.

CALEB

I think — I think he needed to talk to God.

MIA

Is he not God.

CALEB

Yes. But also — also he prays. To his father.

RUTH

That is so weird.

CALEB (smiling for the first time)

Yeah, Ruth. It is a little weird.

Scene 4 — Peter Tries

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JONAH
What about Peter. Did Peter walk on water.

CALEB
Yes. Peter walked on water. For a second.

ELI
Just a second.

CALEB
Yeah. Then he looked at the wind, and he got scared, and he started to sink.

ELI
Was Peter in trouble.

CALEB
He — uh — Jesus pulled him up. And said, why did you doubt.

MIA
But was he in trouble.

CALEB (thinking)
I do not — I do not think so. I think Jesus was a little sad. Like, like he wished Peter had not gotten scared. But he was not in trouble. Jesus did not tell him to go back to the boat alone or anything.

MIA
Then what is doubt.

CALEB
Doubt is — doubt is when you start believing the wind more than the person who told you it was okay to walk.

RUTH (slowly)
The wind is loud.

CALEB
Yeah, Ruth. The wind is really loud.

JONAH
I would have got scared too.

CALEB
Me too, Jonah. I get scared in the cafeteria when I have to ask for chocolate milk.

JONAH (delighted)
That is funny.

CALEB

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It is also true.

Scene 5 — The Big Question

RUTH (out of nowhere)
Caleb.

CALEB
Yeah.

RUTH
Why did Jesus go up the mountain alone first. If he knew the boat was going to have the storm.

(Caleb stops. He sets the lesson plan down on the craft table. He looks at Ruth like she just spoke a foreign language he half remembers.)

CALEB
I — I do not know. I do not know, Ruth. That is a really good question.

RUTH (satisfied)
Okay.

MIA
Maybe he wanted them to row a little. Before he came.

ELI
Maybe the boat needed to know it could not get there alone.

(Caleb stares at Eli. Eli is six years old and just preached him a sermon.)

Scene 6 — The Boat

CALEB (quietly)
Maybe.

JONAH
Caleb. Why are you all quiet.

CALEB
I am — I am thinking, Jonah.

MIA
Can we do the craft now.

CALEB
Yes. Yeah. Let us do the craft.

(He moves to the craft table. The kids swarm. He hands out blue tissue paper. They start tearing it into wave shapes. He sits among them on the floor, suddenly

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small.)

ELI (handing Caleb a paper boat)
Here. This one is yours.

CALEB
Thanks, Eli.

ELI
It is sinking. So Jesus has to come.

CALEB (looking at the boat in his hands)
Yeah.

Scene 7 — The Conversation

MIA (gluing wildly)
Caleb. Do you believe in Jesus.

(Caleb's hands stop moving. The room is quiet for a beat. Then —)

CALEB
I — yeah. I do. Some days more than others.

MIA
Okay.

RUTH
Some days I do not believe my brother is a real person but he still is.

JONAH
Ruth. He is.

RUTH
I know. I am saying.

CALEB (laughing)
Ruth. That is — yeah. That is exactly it. Some days I do not believe Jesus is in the boat with me. But he still is.

ELI
He is right here. He is in this room.

CALEB
How do you know, Eli.

ELI (shrugging)
He said he would be. When two of us are together. There is way more than two.

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CALEB
That is — yeah. That is in the Bible too.

MIA
Caleb. I think you are good at this.

CALEB (small)
Thanks, Mia.

Scene 8 — The Quiet

ELI
Caleb.

CALEB
Yeah.

ELI
Did Jesus get tired. From walking on the water.

CALEB
I do not think so, Eli.

ELI
Then why did he stop.

CALEB
Because he got into the boat. With them.

ELI (nodding, very serious)
Yeah. I would do that too. The boat is where everybody is.

RUTH
And then the storm stopped.

CALEB
And then the storm stopped, Ruth. And the disciples worshiped him. And they said, truly you are the Son of God.

MIA
Did they know that already.

CALEB
They — they kind of knew. But this was the day they really knew.

JONAH
Because he came in the boat.

CALEB (quiet)

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Because he came in the boat.

(Mia raises her hand, then puts it down because she remembers there is no rule about hands today.)

MIA

Is the lesson over.

CALEB (looking at the four small faces)

Yeah, Mia. I think the lesson is over.

Final Moment — The Doorway

(The classroom door opens. PARENTS' voices drift in from the hallway. The kids gather their crafts and their backpacks. Caleb stands at the door. Eli walks past him last, paper boat in one hand.)

ELI (offhand, on the way out)

It is okay, Caleb. Jesus walks on water for everybody.

(Caleb stands very still. He looks down at the paper boat in his hand. He swallows. Lights down.)

END

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