



Community of Christ

# COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

YOUTH

18 FEBRUARY 2018 — 27 MAY 2018

# COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS



Lifelong Disciple Formation in Community of Christ is the shaping of persons in the likeness of Christ at all stages of life. It begins with our response to the grace of God in loving community and continues as we help others learn, grow, and serve in the mission of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is expressed as one lives the mission initiatives of the church through service, generosity, witness, and invitation.

We invite you to use these lessons for your class, group, or congregation.

**Lectionary-based:** The weekly lessons connect the *Revised Common Lectionary* for worship with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

**Quick, easy:** The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament* (with focus on the gospel according to Matthew).

Lessons are available for three age groups. Recognizing each age group represents multiple stages of development, the instructor is encouraged to adapt lessons to best meet the needs of the class or group. When possible, optional activities are provided to help adapt lessons for diverse settings.

**Children (multiage, 6–11):** Help children engage in the Bible and introduce mission and beliefs with stories, crafts, and activities.

**Youth (ages 12–18):** Engage teens in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, and beliefs.

**Adult (ages 19 and older):** Deepen faith and understanding with reflective questions, theological understanding, and discussion ideas.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Bible scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON 12  
18 February 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:9–15

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus, in his total obedience to God, is baptized, and his identity as the Son of God is revealed. The Gospel of Mark declares that Jesus is the Son of God, the good news for the world

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- identify key details of the story, including Jesus' baptism, time in the wilderness, and proclamation of the kingdom of God.
- describe how in baptism we see Jesus' obedience to God's will and what this means for us as we follow Jesus' example.
- share their understanding of the kingdom of God as a different way to live.
- evaluate how the Mission Initiatives help build the kingdom of God.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper (half sheets and small slips)
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- A bowl
- Pens or pencils
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 1:9–15 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 48–49, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Welcome students by name as they enter the class space. Give each student a half sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Explain that today is the first Sunday of Lent, and you are interested in what they know about the meaning of Lent. Allow two minutes for students to list or draw everything they know about Lent. You may choose to have students work in pairs. Invite each student to silently act out something on their list for the rest of the group to guess. Discuss the students' responses, using the following information to guide discussion.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, a season of 40 days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." These 40 days represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God.

We will spend a few moments of class during Lent to engage in spiritual practices. This week we will examine the practice of fasting. To fast is to empty oneself intentionally in a way that makes space for God. During Lent, fasting is for 40 days (minus Sundays) remembering Christ's own fast in the wilderness. It is a time to focus on what matters most in your life as a disciple of Jesus.

On the back side of their papers, have students write or draw something from their everyday lives they would noticeably miss. This could be a food item, an electronic device, an activity they enjoy, or something they buy daily or weekly. It could also be intentionally changing their daily routine. If they are willing to fast from this object, activity, or routine, they can also choose to replace it with an intentional act of kindness, generosity, or prayer.

Ask:

- Have you ever practiced fasting? If so, what was your experience?
- In this season of Lent, what will you do in place of what you will give up?
- How might this practice benefit your spiritual life?

If you choose to fast during Lent this year, pay attention to what is going on within you. Intentionally reflect on your experience. Is your craving from what you have given up increasing or decreasing? What is the depth of your prayer life during this time? Are you feeling more focused? (More information can be found at [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf).)

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Have a student read Mark 1:9–15.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Ask students to identify some important signs about Jesus in today's scripture passage.

- What locations are named? (Nazareth, Galilee, Jordan)
- Why would Jesus have gone to John to be baptized? (to model repentance and baptism for others)
- How does the writer identify Jesus? (Son, Beloved)
- If you were present as Jesus was being "driven by the Spirit into the wilderness," how would you respond?
- What does the passage reveal about Jesus' commitment to God?

The author of the Gospel of Mark gets right to the point. There is no story of Jesus' birth. There is no account of his childhood. Instead the writer begins with the words:

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

—Mark 1:1–3

The writer wants us to understand this messenger Isaiah describes is John the Baptist, who was first to encounter Jesus in this Gospel. Though Jesus and John spoke no words to each other in this scene, Jesus' obedience in baptism dramatically underscores Mark's message heard in the voice from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

- What does it mean for us to understand Jesus is the Son of God?
- What does it mean to follow Jesus' example of obedience to God?

In his obedience and continuing to trust and follow God, Jesus goes into the wilderness, turns from temptation, and lives peacefully with the wild beasts. Over and over the Gospel of Mark holds up Jesus as the Son of God, living fully as one with God.

Form groups of two or three. Invite the students to imagine what it would be like if the account of Jesus going into the wilderness and being tempted was recorded today. Have each group create a modern-day scenario of this account. What would the wilderness be? What would the temptations be? How would Jesus respond? Share and discuss scenarios with the larger group.

Life can be hard at times. People can quickly lose hope in times of struggle. Today's passage tells us a different story: "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" Jesus tells us God is here; God is at work! There is hope. There is a way forward when we follow him.

Jesus' relationship with God is our example for creating our own covenant relationship with God.

# 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Baptism is one of the most significant choices we can make. It affirms a life calling as a disciple and opens us to the many blessings of community, God's grace, and Christ's mission.

The good news of the kingdom of God can be a reality today when we make a covenant to live Christ's mission. Explore "We Share a Mission," *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 8–9, online at [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.pdf).

Have each class member pick one question to answer about the five Mission Initiatives:

- How do you invite people to a relationship with Christ?
- How can you abolish poverty and end needless suffering?
- How can you pursue peace on and for the Earth?
- How can you help develop disciples to serve?
- In what ways can you experience congregations in mission?

# 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

Explore with the group what it means to live as a disciple in the circumstances of life. Have the group write on slips of paper different scenarios that challenge them as disciples to make responsible choices. Put these slips of paper into a bowl to be drawn and discussed in groups of two or three, or with the full group.

Examples of scenarios:

- A group of friends is out for lunch and notice one of their classmates eating alone. How can you invite your classmate to feel included?

- You've noticed your family uses too much water and wastes food. What can you and your family do to uphold the Enduring Principle Sacredness of Creation?
- You notice a friend is having a hard time with circumstances in life. As a disciple, how can you help your friend?

Optional activity: Have students write on slips of paper concerns they have about making responsible choices as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Place the slips in a bowl and have each student draw a slip of paper, which should not be their own. Invite them to pray for the person's concern they have drawn, even if they do not know the name of the person.

# 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Tell the students you look forward to hearing about their experiences with the practice of fasting this week.

Read the following prayer, or invite one or more students to offer a closing prayer.

God, life at times is hard, and sometimes even tragic, but you bring the good news. With You we work to bring peace and justice. We recognize our faults, yet know your kingdom is near when we live in covenant relationship with you.

Following Jesus is not a salvation scheme or a means for creating social order, but is our calling to share the fate of your Son for the life of the world. We accept Christ's invitation to follow him into personally bearing the mystery of human life, death, and resurrection. Lord, we agree to carry and love what you love, both good and bad, and to pay the price for reconciliation.

God, may we be the leaven, the salt, the remnant, the mustard seeds you can use to transform the world, remembering the cross is a dramatic image of what it takes to be such a usable people for God. Amen.

—based on the writings of Richard Rohr,  
<https://cac.org/following-jesus-2016-07-27/>

# SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON 13  
25 February 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 8:31–38

**Lesson Focus:** Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- practice the prayer of Examen as an opportunity to review our lives and realign with the mission of Christ.
- infer the response of the disciples to Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection.
- consider their responses to Jesus' words about the price of discipleship.
- review the Practices of Discipleship.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Copies of the Practices of Discipleship chart (end of lesson)

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 8:31–38 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 50–51, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Welcome students by name as they gather in the class space. Invite them to share their experiences with fasting over the past week. From what did they fast? How did they replace the object or activity with an intentional act of kindness, generosity, or prayer?

Today is the second Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God. We will spend a few moments of class during Lent to engage in spiritual practices.

We focus today on the Prayer of Examen, a daily spiritual practice that encourages us to review the day with God, remember our connection with the Holy, and recommit ourselves to encounter God once again. Many Christians have used this practice since the 1500s, and while it is often practiced at the end of a day, it may be done any

time. Praying the Examen during Lent is an opportunity to review our lives and realign with the mission of Christ.

Ask the class members to get comfortable (they may even choose to lie on the floor) and to quiet their minds to silently pray following the steps that will be read aloud. Be sure to allow plenty of time for the students to respond between each step.

1. Spend the next few minutes reflecting on the events, interactions, and emotions of the day (current or previous).
2. Ask God for insight into the ways your actions and responses were good, life-giving, or loving.
3. Ask God for insight into the ways your actions and responses may have been insensitive, unloving, or damaging to others, creation, or self.
4. Pray for forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and release.
5. Offer God the next day. Ask God to be present in your thoughts, actions, and relationships as you move on to live a new day more fully alive to the presence of Christ.

—based on [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf)

Note to teacher: Close the prayer of Examen with a brief prayer of blessing, and invite youth to draw their attention back to the group.

Ask group members to reflect on the feelings and awareness that came from praying the prayer of Examen. Invite any who wish to share their experience.

- What was surprising to you as you prayerfully reflected on your day and actions?
- How can this practice help you develop as a disciple of Christ Jesus?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

In today's scripture passage Jesus and the disciples are in the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Here Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter offered a strong response that Jesus was the Messiah. In the very next sentence Jesus tells them he will suffer, be killed, and rise on the third day. Most people expected the Messiah to arrive as a powerful leader who would overturn the Roman occupation. Peter's response, to rebuke Jesus, reveals that his view of the Messiah also excludes suffering. Jesus uses a phrase that often catches modern readers when he says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" These words should not be taken as evidence of hostility between Jesus and Peter. During that time the phrase was simply a way of saying, "Go away!"

In the second half of the reading Jesus carefully teaches the crowd using condition words and phrases like "if any want to become my followers" so hearers can decide on their own about following him. Discipleship comes with a clear price when you follow a man who tells you upfront he will be killed and rise again.

Have the students act out Mark 8:31–38 as it is read aloud. Characters include Jesus, Peter, the disciples, and the crowd.

Then [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and

follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Ask the following questions:

- How do you imagine your character was feeling at the beginning of this interchange as Jesus was talking about suffering, dying, and rising again?
- Did your character's emotions change as Peter and Jesus exchanged rebukes?
- Does knowing Jesus' words "Get behind me, Satan" were merely another way to strongly say, "Go away!" change your understanding of this scripture?
- Imagine you had been a member of the crowd listening to Jesus say, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Would you have responded positively or negatively? Explain.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing

(35% of total lesson time)

Discipleship comes with a cost. Even Jesus—in our story today—was describing the cost. Followers must deny themselves and serve generously in Christ's mission for the sake of others and creation.

Community of Christ's Basic Beliefs statement on Discipleship tells us,

Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life. God's boundless love sets us free for lives of responsible stewardship in which we generously offer our lives in service to God's reign. Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey. Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 16

- What choices do you make when you live in radical obedience to Jesus in every part of your life?

- What might happen at school?
- What might happen with your family? With friends? With strangers?
- What challenges do you face?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived

*(10% of total lesson time)*

Review the Practices of Discipleship chart. Discuss which practices you are currently doing and which you would like to practice more often. As a class, pick one practice that everyone will do throughout the coming week and share the results in class next week.

## 5 BLESS

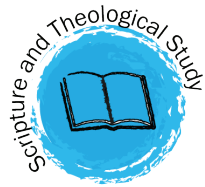
Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

*(5% of total lesson time)*

Offer a prayer of blessing for the class as they continue to grow as disciples of Jesus



# Practices of Discipleship



| Young Children              | Children  | Youth  | Adults  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| Learn scripture stories.    | Study scripture and Community of Christ beliefs.          | Study about God through scripture and Community of Christ beliefs. | Responsibly interpret and faithfully apply scripture. Study Community of Christ theology.     |
| Help God by helping others. | Generously share your gifts to help others and the world. | Generously respond to God's love through action.                   | Apply a Christ-like response to the needs of humans and creation.                             |
| Learn to pray.              | Pray and listen to God.                                   | Spend time alone with God.   | Closely connect with God through spiritual practices.   |
| Go to church.               | Come together to worship and praise God.                  | Get together with others to worship and praise God.                | Closely connect with God and one another through spiritual practices.                         |
| Be a friend.                | Build friendships.  | Know God through friends and mentors.                              | Develop one-on-one relationships for sharing and accountability as disciples of Jesus Christ. |
| Be with family and friends. | Be with family and friends.                               | Share God's love with family and other communities.                | Experience fellowship and build relationships in Christian community.                         |
| Hear about Jesus' love.     | Share your story of God's love.                           | Hear, tell, and live the story of Jesus Christ.                    | Hear, tell, and live the sacred story. Share personal and communal stories of God's grace.    |
| Grow and learn.             | Grow your mind.   | Learn new ways to be a disciple.                                   | Deepen discipleship through specific instruction and training.                                |

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# THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON 14  
4 March 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 2:13–22

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus took dramatic action to challenge religious practices of the temple. This story also challenges us to rethink our practices as disciples of Jesus.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- practice Holy Attention as an opportunity to value the worth of all persons and to respect others as an unrepeatable miracle of God.
- explore the radical challenge Jesus presented to the temple authorities and to us.
- consider how the church's future is related directly to our willingness to go where the Spirit is calling us to go.
- imagine new ways to use the basic blueprint (spiritual formation, community, compassionate

ministry, and action) to create new communities of disciples.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Copies of excerpts from President Veazey's address, "A Time to Act," end of lesson

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 2:13–22 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 52, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Welcome students as they gather, and invite them to share their experiences with the practice of Examen over the past week. Spend a few moments talking about the students' experiences of with the practice of discipleship chosen the previous week.

Today is the third Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God. We will spend a few moments of class during Lent to engage in spiritual practices.

Today we will engage in the practice of Holy Attention. This practice allows us to suspend our inner thoughts and

agendas and give reverent and receptive focus to a specific person or part of God's creation. Respecting another as an unrepeatable miracle whose life journey is unique and sacred brings awareness to and affirmation of God's presence in all creation. We do this in the spirit of Christ who saw deeply into the hearts of people and recognized their true identities as God's beloved. During Lent, as we continue to empty ourselves (fasting) and evaluate our lives (examen), we begin to make space for awareness of where God is showing up in the world around us.

—based on [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf)

Guide the class through this practice by reading the following instructions aloud and providing adequate time for the students to reflect on each step and question.

Enter a time of quiet reflection. Relax your body and breathing and bring to mind a particular person, group of people, or part of creation. Ask God to bless you with curiosity and gratitude as you consider the life journey of others.

- In what ways do you feel connected to this person, group, or part of creation?
- In what ways do you experience separation from this person, group, or part of creation?
- How are you being led to share peace and love with this person, group, or part of creation?

Ask the class to respond to the following questions:

- What new awareness did you experience as you engaged in this practice?
- In what ways can giving holy attention to others impact your journey as a disciple?
- What person or part of creation do you feel drawn to give holy attention?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Give each member of the class a piece of paper to record their answers to the following questions before reading today's scripture story. You may choose to have students work in pairs, particularly younger students.

1. List details you remember from the story of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple.
2. Why were cattle and money changers in the temple?
3. How do you make sense of Jesus' anger in this scene?
4. How did the authorities respond to Jesus' action?

Ask the class to share and discuss their responses.

Read as a class John 2:13–22, having each person read one verse until finished.

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

**Note to instructor:** The following commentary helps learners understand the meaning in the scripture passage. Adapt as needed according to students' age and needs.

All four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) include a story of Jesus driving the moneychangers from the temple. John's version of the story includes details not included in the others, such as Jesus making a whip out of rope and driving the animals out of the temple. John places this story at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as opposed to the final week before his crucifixion as in the other three Gospels. Commentaries suggest that John's placement of this story at the beginning serves a symbolic function highlighting the challenges and threats that new life as a disciple of Jesus pose to the existing order.

Readers often assume that Jesus' actions are about dishonest practices occurring in the temple, when in reality Jesus is confronting the whole system itself, not just its abusers. It is important to understand the religious and historical context. Passover was a pilgrimage feast. The faithful traveled to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. To participate in worship and present burnt offerings, animals were needed, yet difficult to travel with. The temple tax could not be paid using Greek or Roman coins because of the human image of the emperor on them. To pay the tax required to enter the temple meant exchanging those coins for the Tyrian currency of Jerusalem. Jesus was driving out those who were placing difficult restrictions on the worshipers, disrupting a system of producing income for temple authorities.

The Jews, as John refers to the temple authorities, asked, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" meaning on what authority is Jesus doing this? Jesus explains his actions by pointing to his death and resurrection. His authority is based on his whole life bearing testimony to the power of God in the world. Jesus, an observant Jewish male, is not anti-Jewish but is prophetically challenging the institutions of the faith as the prophets Amos and Jeremiah did.

Ask:

- What unjust systems would Jesus challenge today? How would he respond?
- What unjust systems have you seen challenged in your school, community, or in the news?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Jesus took dramatic steps to challenge the practices and institutions of his time. Reading this scripture passage for today issues a radical challenge for our time about the organization of the church. Christian communities must be open to change, renewal, and restoration in order to avoid the dangers of complacency and the status quo.

President Stephen Veazey challenged the church in September 2017 to move beyond the status quo and experiment with new ways of being the church. Read the excerpt of this message as a class, asking each person to listen for one idea that catches their attention.

Ask the class to share one idea that caught their attention.

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

Being open to the leading of God's Spirit requires us as disciples to not be complacent with just "doing church."

As a class create a list of ideas for how we might "be the church," using the basic blueprint of spiritual formation, community, compassionate ministry, and action.

- What kind of church do you want Community of Christ to be?
- How will you be part of the church's future?

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

As a class recite the Mission Prayer together:

God, where will your Spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.  
Grant me courage to risk something new  
and become a blessing of your love and peace.  
Amen.

# EXCERPTS FROM PRESIDENT VEAZEY'S SERMON, "A TIME TO ACT!"

20 SEPTEMBER 2017

The word of calling, hope, and possibility emerges from the reality that **great change is happening in the world**. And the rate of change is accelerating. This change includes how people view God, culture, finances, technology, politics, and religious institutions.

The word of calling, hope, and possibility is that **new ways of understanding, communicating, and living the gospel** in response to changing circumstances already are happening in Community of Christ. The church's future is related directly to our willingness to go where the Spirit is calling us to go.

As we respond to the unavoidable change in the world, simply persisting in typical church activities will not take us into the future. **We need to adjust how we understand, communicate, and live the gospel in a new time.**

I sense **the future church will be focused more on spiritual, relational, and missional growth** and less on debating correct doctrines or maintaining organizational structures. The future church will fulfill the counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 163:1 that as we embody our name, Community of Christ, by embracing its full meaning, we will become a blessing to many.

The future church is being formed by a basic concept: **Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action.** This basic blueprint—spiritual formation, community, compassionate ministry and action—is true to the vision of Christ. Everything else, like organizational structure, resources, funding methods, congregational forms, etc., should support this primary purpose.

Such communities of disciples and seekers can **gather anywhere, any time**. While some may choose to do so, they are not dependent on owning buildings or property. They will be connected locally and globally. They will be salt, leaven, and light...

**Our journey into the future will continue** through more congregations becoming willing to transform in response to new opportunities. It also will occur through starting new expressions of the church to model what we are talking about. We already are working on all of this and more.

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON 15  
11 March 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 3:14–21

**Lesson Focus:** God’s abundant love, shown in sending Jesus, changes how we see and treat others in God’s light.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- engage in a centering prayer practice for Lent.
- explore the larger context of the widely memorized scripture John 3:16.
- consider how Community of Christ’s Enduring Principles are expressions of God’s abundant love.

## Supplies

- Bibles

- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Eight-foot table
- Bag of full-size, round balloons
- Enduring Principles found at [www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles](http://www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles)

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 3:14–21 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp.53–54, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Welcome students by name as they enter the class space. Allow time to share experiences of practicing holy attention.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God. We will spend a few moments of class during Lent to engage in spiritual practices.

Today we will engage in our Lenten journey with a centering prayer. This prayer simply uses breath and a prayer word to stay focused on God’s presence. The intent of this prayer is to spend time with God, seeking no answers but merely

connecting to the Divine. It is called centering prayer because one’s attention is gathered in and centered on being open to and receiving God. During Lent, centering prayer helps us dwell more deeply in the mystery of God.

Invite the students to find a comfortable prayer position sitting, standing, or lying down. Gently enter a time of prayer with the expectation of being guided by the Holy Spirit in this practice of opening and receiving.

Use your breath to create a sense of peace and letting go into God. Breathe deeply, slowly, calmly, allowing the deep breaths to release you of tension throughout your body.

Focus on breathing God in, breathing all else out until you feel calm and centered.

Be aware that God is present and that you are in this space intending to love and be loved by God.

Listen for a word or phrase that comes to you, expressing the desire of your heart. Repeat it silently to yourself in rhythm with your breathing.

As you become distracted—and you will—bring yourself back to that centered place by using your breath and your prayer word. Let go of the thoughts that pull you away. Merely note them and let them go.

Continue in this pattern of focus and breath for several minutes. When the time of prayer ends, offer a prayer of thanks to God, take several more breaths, and gently return your awareness to your surroundings.

—based on [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf).

#### Questions for Reflection

- Was this prayer easy or difficult for you?
- What is significant about the prayer word that came to your mind during this prayer?
- In what ways may practicing this prayer deepen your relationship with God?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Ask the class, “How many of you can recite John 3:16 from memory?” Invite them to say it together as a group. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (NRSV).

Sometimes when we are so familiar with something, we can get bored and lose the wonder and awe we once felt. As we study the expanded scripture passage today that includes John 3:16, practice the wonder and awe of God’s love for the world.

Ask a student to read aloud John 3:14–21.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the

world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Jesus’ conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus (John 3:1–17), leads into this passage about God’s great love. John is making an important connection between Jesus being lifted on a cross to bring salvation to believers and the story of God telling Moses to make a bronze snake, place it on a pole, and lift it to protect the Israelites from the fiery snakes. The Greek verb used in this passage for “lifted up” also means to “exalt.” John is implying that in the physical act of crucifixion, Jesus is exalted.

There is some debate about exactly where Jesus’ words to Nicodemus end and John’s comments begin. Probably, verses 16–21 are John’s comments about Jesus’ words that end at verse 15. In 3:16, the cross seems to be in the past. Belief is important for John; in fact, it appears 99 times in this Gospel. Belief in God and Jesus in this Gospel means to give unconditional trust and faith to God and Jesus. Through this, faith believers find abundant life, a higher and more satisfying quality of life because God unconditionally loves the world, loves all people.

#### Questions for Discussion

- Does John’s connection between Moses’ bronze snake and the cross make sense to you?
- Give some examples from your life where your belief in someone equates with your trust in them. Is your trust in that person unconditional? Does your trust in that person affect your relationship with them? Would a loss of trust change your relationship?
- How might belief or unconditional trust help disciples find a more abundant life?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing

(35% of total lesson time)

“For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” This statement of God’s abundant, generous love shapes our actions as believers to love others in the same way God loves us. In Community of Christ we share nine Enduring Principles that reflect God’s love.

- Using a copy of the Enduring Principles found [www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles](http://www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles), ask the class to pick two principles to explore in detail.
- How does God’s love shape the Enduring Principle you chose?
- How do your actions in living out the principle show God’s abundant love to others?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

### Step of Faith

Hand out balloons to several students in your group. Have them blow up the balloons and tie them off. Turn a table upside down so that the legs of the table are sticking up. Have the people with balloons put their balloons under the table. You should have at least 15 balloons under the table; make sure they are evenly distributed.

One at a time, allow students to take the step of faith and step on the table. Others should help stabilize them so they don’t lose their balance. You will see that the balloons will not pop. Continue to allow as many students as possible to step on the table until you can’t fit any more on. One or two balloons may pop; however, you should be able to get at least 15 persons on the table. Most of the students think that when they get on the table, balloons are going to pop. They are always very surprised.

Sometimes we just need to trust God and step out in faith, trusting that God has bigger plans than we can dream. God always comes through. It is this faith in God that saves us.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Close class with a prayer



# FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON 16  
18 March 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 12:20–33

**Lesson Focus:** Disciples are called to love as Jesus loves and to serve as Jesus serves in response to Jesus' ultimate service of love, giving his life.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- participate in the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*.
- evaluate how Jesus' death is an act of love.
- create a plan to serve others.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Pens

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 12:20–33 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 55–56, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Welcome students by name as they enter the space. Invite them to share experiences with the practice of centering prayer in the past week.

Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God. We will spend a few moments of class during Lent to engage in spiritual practices.

In recent years, the practice of *Lectio Divina* (Latin for "sacred reading"), sometimes called Dwelling in the Word, has become a more prominent spiritual practice in the life of Community of Christ. It provides opportunity for encountering God through the use of sacred text. Listening deeply to the words opens us to an awareness of God's invitation to us through a particular scripture passage or hymn text.

We will use the focus scripture passage for today, John 12:20–33.

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken

to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

- Ask the class to sit comfortably or lie on the floor and enter a time of prayerful reflection. Invite them to relax their bodies and breathing.
- Offer a prayer for guidance as you interact with the text.
- Read the text four times to the class, each time with a different focus.

**Lectio**—Get a sense of the story or setting. Imagine the scene, senses, emotions, and tensions involved in the text. What do you see, hear, smell, or feel? (*Allow time for prayer and reflection.*)

**Meditatio**—Focus on meaning and understanding. What are the surface and underlying meanings? What does the text tell you about God? How do you relate to the text? (*Allow time for prayer and reflection.*)

**Oratio**—Focus on your emotional response. Do you feel joy, sorrow, fear, anger, or guilt? Share your feelings with God in prayer. Ask for help in listening deeply to these emotions and meanings. (*Allow time for prayer and reflection.*)

**Contemplatio**—Breathe deeply and calmly, entering a deep silent state of listening. Wait for whatever God may bring to you in the quietness. (*Allow time for prayer and reflection.*)

- When you feel your prayer and meditation have ended, offer a word of thanks to God as a way to close your time with this practice.
- Ask students to share their experiences and understandings after experience this text.

—Based on [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf)

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

The scripture passage we are exploring with *Lectio Divina* has multiple layers of understanding for us to consider. The story begins with the festival of Passover, prior to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He has raised Lazarus from the dead. Mary has anointed Jesus with perfume. All

kinds of people are surrounding Jesus in the crowd. The tension in the story is beginning to heighten.

The arrival of the Greeks marks John’s intent to underscore that these non-Jewish individuals are seeking out Jesus. The words of the Greeks to Philip and Andrew, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” parallel the words of Jesus’ invitation to Philip and Andrew to “come and see.” Some commentaries say this similarity indicates the Greeks’ desire to become disciples.

Jesus responds to this inquiry by telling his disciples what is about to happen. He wants to be sure they understand the meaning of his purpose and mission—that his death will be an act of love. In the Gospel of John, Jesus flatly states he will not ask to be spared: “It is for this reason I have come...”

Verse 25, “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life,” is one of the best-attested sayings of Jesus. Some form of this saying appears five other times in the other three Gospels. To love one’s life is the opposite of Jesus’ own actions. To love one’s life places that person outside of the community created by Jesus’ gift of his life, and leads to the loss of that life. To hate one’s life in this world is to declare your commitment to Jesus. Disciples are called to love as Jesus loves and to serve as Jesus serves in response to Jesus’ ultimate service of love, giving his life. This is not an act of needless suffering, but suffering for the sake of others in acts of love.

The predictions of his death contain a play on words that we have seen before. Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself,” again using the double meaning of “lifted up” to indicate the Crucifixion and his exaltation.

- Describe how Jesus’ death was an act of love.
- How would you explain the saying of Jesus, “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life,” to friends or family?
- To love as Jesus loves. To serve as Jesus serves. What examples have you seen of this?


## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

The call for disciples “to love as Jesus loves” and “to serve as Jesus serves” is important for our lives. In Community of Christ we express the mission of Jesus through five Mission Initiatives listed below. One of the initiatives,

Develop Disciples to Serve, responds to this call to be like Jesus. Those who respond to Jesus' call make up the church. It is in community that God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and with other disciples in service to the world.

 **Invite People to Christ**—Christ's mission of evangelism

 **Abolish Poverty, End Suffering**—Christ's mission of compassion

 **Pursue Peace on Earth**—Christ's mission of justice and peace

 **Develop Disciples to Serve**—Equip individuals for Christ's mission

 **Experience Congregations in Mission**—Equip congregations for Christ's mission

Create a plan to serve together with a younger Sunday school class and experience the call for disciples to love as Jesus loves and to serve as Jesus serves.

- Speak with the pastor or other congregational leaders about a small project the youth can do with the children to meet the needs in the congregation (for example, straighten the sanctuary or entry, help with decorations for Easter, help with a small repair).
- Speak with the other class teacher to see if this can be done during class time or another time.
- Write down what you think will be important to share with the younger class about serving like Jesus.

**4 SEND**  
Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

On a piece of paper, make two columns. Title the first column "Someone I Can Serve This Week" and the second column "How I Can Serve This Person." Identify three persons and ways to serve.

During the coming week, complete the service ideas you have identified.

**5 BLESS**  
Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Close class by reading together "The City Is Alive, O God" CCS 365.

The city is alive, O God, with the sound of rushing feet,  
with flashing lights and rapid change that pulse through every street.  
But oft there's inhumanity behind the bright façade,  
and empty souls with hungry hearts cry out for help, O God.

O God, inspire your church today to take Christ's servant role,  
to love the world, to hear its claims, to sense its yearning soul,  
to live within the marketplace, to serve both weak and strong,  
to lose herself, to share her dream, to give the world her song.

—William Watkins Reid Jr., ©1969 The Hymn Society

# PALM SUNDAY

LESSON 17  
25 March 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 11:1–11

**Lesson Focus:** The triumphal entry of Jesus

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- participate in the spiritual practice of silence.
- hear the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- explore the peace of Jesus Christ.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Pens

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 11:1–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 57–58, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today is Palm Sunday, the last Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, self-examination, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on deepening their relationship with God.

Today we will engage in the spiritual practice of silence. Practicing silence reminds us that relationship with God is a mutual act. In silence, we take the time to listen intently and be present with God without words. Often, our most profound spiritual experiences cannot be fully described with words. Intentional time in silence allows us to be fully present with God without the confines of language.

- Find a place free from noise or distractions.
- Practicing silence may be difficult at first. The mind may run wild, and centering in God's presence could take some spiritual effort!

- Breathe deeply. Focusing on each breath in and out can help quiet the mind and center you in God's Spirit.
- Become aware of your surroundings; notice how the air feels on your skin; trust that you are in the presence of the holy—fully surrounding and embracing you.
- Don't expect that God will speak to you in a certain way. Just open yourself to what is. Allow your inner conversations to stop for a while, being fully present with the one who is fully present with you.
- After being silent for about five minutes, offer a prayer of gratitude for God's constant presence whether you are fully aware of it or not. Pray that you may continue to draw closer to God and discover what God is saying and doing within you.

### Questions for Reflection

- How does it feel to be present with God in silence? Was this easy or difficult? Explain.
- In the silence, did you discover something new about yourself? Your relationship with God?
- How can this practice help deepen your discipleship?

—based on [www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/documents/2015-lent-guide.pdf)

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

As you read Mark 11:1–11, invite students to place themselves in the story. Have them pay attention to what they see, hear, smell, and feel.

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

*“Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

- What details did you notice? What did you see, hear, smell, and feel?
- Did any details surprise you?
- Do any of the details differ from your memory of Palm Sunday dramas and services?

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem in three parts:

1. Obtaining the colt
2. Approaching the city
3. Visiting the temple

The first two parts involve symbolism from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Zechariah 9:9 lays the framework for Jesus riding into the city on an unbroken colt, in which “Jerusalem is called to rejoice because its victorious king comes humble, and mounted on a donkey.” This connection provides a dramatic metaphor for the Messiah Jesus would be. But the people had different expectations of what a Messiah should be. Some expected a warrior king, like David, who would be a threat to the Roman Empire. Others expected the Messiah to be like Elijah or other ancient prophets, a threat to the temple authorities. Still others expected the Messiah to be like a great priest who would cleanse the religion and set new standards of righteousness, again posing a threat to the authorities of the temple and Pharisees. Being “near the Mount of Olives” also alludes to Zechariah 14:14 where it is proclaimed that on the day of the Lord “his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives.” Mark is framing Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as a proclamation of the long-awaited day of the Lord.

During the approach to the city, the second part of the story, again Mark uses Old Testament imagery with the crowd spreading cloaks on the road, a custom reserved for royalty, as in the 2 Kings account of Jehu ascending the throne. Jesus rode the colt into Jerusalem to send a message of humility and peace. As he rode by, the crowds chanted, “Hosanna,” which meant “O save,” expressing their hope for deliverance.

In the final part of this passage Jesus “went into the temple and when he had looked around at everything” went out to Bethany. In Mark, Jesus returns the next day to drive out the moneychangers. This differs from Matthew and Luke who have Jesus disrupt the temple the same day he arrives.

- What do you imagine Jesus was feeling as he rode the colt into the city?
- Compare and contrast people’s expectations for the Messiah.
- The disciples didn’t understand what Jesus meant by Messiah. Do you think Christians today understand Jesus as Messiah in the peaceable kingdom of God? Or do some still await a powerful political warrior king?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from  
hearing to doing

(35% of total lesson time)

Read “We Share the Peace of Jesus Christ” and the scripture passages from *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 7–8.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Early in its history, the church, often referred to as the Restoration movement, perceived the call to share the fullness of the gospel throughout the world (Doctrine and Covenants 1:4) and to "seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 6:3). Today, we understand this as the call to share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions.

Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconciles and restores people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God's will.

This approach is the fullest meaning of restoration.

For he [Jesus Christ] is our peace, in his flesh he made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility... So, he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...  
—Ephesians 2:14, 17 NRSV

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy

or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2

- How would you describe the peace of Jesus to your friends?
- In what ways can you share the peace of Jesus Christ with someone else?

## **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

We have spent the last six weeks on a journey through Lent, reflecting on scripture, participating in spiritual practices, and thinking about our lives as disciples of Jesus.

- How has this journey prepared you for Holy Week?
- How has Jesus entered your life in a new way?
- What is God's invitation to you during Holy Week?

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Close the class with this prayer:

Creator and sustainer of life, in your tender love for us and for your world, you sent your son Jesus, to be like us, to teach us to love, to teach us to serve, to teach us suffering for others, even to death upon a cross. This is the ultimate act of love. Grant us the hearts to walk in his way as servants to all. Amen.

# EASTER SUNDAY

LESSON 18  
1 April 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 16:1–8 and John 20:1–18

**Lesson Focus:** Christ is risen! We, too, are witness to the Resurrection.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- hear two traditions of witness to the Resurrection.
- hear the story of Mary Magdalene's visit to Jesus' tomb and her encounter with the Risen Christ.
- celebrate the joy that Jesus is alive by committing to his mission.

## Supplies

- Bibles
- Paper
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Pens
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 16:1–8 and John 20:1–18 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 64–67, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Ask the students:

- What would you consider the most significant event that has happened in your life that you would feel free to share?
- How did you respond? Were you in shock? Were you excited? Were you afraid?
- Did you keep it to yourself?
- Did you tell others? Did others believe you?
- How did this event change you? Change others?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

In celebrating Easter, we remember the Resurrection stories of the New Testament. Each of the four Gospels offers a glimpse of the disciples' experience with the Risen Lord. We will look at two of the stories today.

First, the Gospel of Mark is considered the oldest of the Gospels, most likely written between 66–70 CE. Mark is unique among the Gospels as it contains three endings to the Resurrection story—verse 8, the shorter ending, and the longer ending. We will consider the verse 8 ending of Mark today. The earliest manuscripts available stop at verse 8, offering an abrupt ending with an empty tomb and the audience dangling in awkward silence.

## Read Mark 16:1–8.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

- As the women bought spices and walked to the tomb, what do you think they expected to find?
- Jesus' mission and the following of disciples appeared to end with his death three days before this story. Do you think the women were planning to return to their homes and life as it had been before they met Jesus? Why or why not?
- If you were one of these women looking in the empty tomb and an angel told you Jesus would be in Galilee, would you "say nothing to anyone for they [you] were afraid"?

The second Resurrection story we will consider is from the Gospel of John. This is the climax of faith for John, proof of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. John shares two separate traditions of witness to the Resurrection. First, the empty tomb is witnessed by Mary Magdalene who runs and brings Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved to see for themselves. The second tradition shares experiences with the Living Christ. Mary Magdalene saw both the empty tomb and encountered Jesus.

## Read John 20:1–18.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to

them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

- Why do you think John includes two separate traditions of witness to the Resurrection?
- Why does John mention the disciple whom Jesus loved "saw and believed" but does not comment on the response of Simon Peter?
- When the supposed gardener spoke her name, Mary's eyes were opened to see Jesus. What emotions may she have felt in that moment?



# 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
*(35% of total lesson time)*

The message of the Easter story is one of surprise. We may not always find Jesus where we last saw him. We often expect Jesus to be waiting for us in our comfortable places. But Jesus is at work in the world, not just inside our church building or campground. If we listen for our name, like Mary, our eyes will be opened to see that familiar relationship of love and caring all around us.

Provide the class with paper, pens, and markers.

- Have the students create a chart that compares and contrasts the Easter texts from Mark and John.
- Add to the chart any inference the class may have about the characters' experiences.
- Have the students draw an empty tomb and write the names of places or people through which they may have witnessed the Risen Christ.

Followers have continued through the centuries to encounter the Risen Christ in various ways. Sharing that testimony still makes a difference in the world, still brings change, and still brings hope.

# 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Christ is risen! God is the God of life. In Christ, God's love overcomes all that demeans and degrades creation, even death itself. Easter gives us hope that the tragic suffering of victims throughout history is not the last word.

Just as the early disciples quickly learned, Jesus' mission continues in his Resurrection. As disciples, we serve in that mission by Inviting People to Christ; working to Abolish Poverty, End Suffering; Pursuing Peace; Developing Disciples to Serve; and Experiencing Congregations in Mission.

- Select one Mission Initiative to focus on this week to celebrate Easter and the Living Christ. What will you do?

# 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Sing together as a closing blessing "Mfurahini, Halleluya (Christ Has Risen, Alleluia)" CSS 471.

# SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 19  
8 April 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 20:19–31

**Lesson Focus:** We are called to live Christ's peace!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- make connections with the thoughts and feelings of Jesus' first disciples.
- understand that Christ can bring peace in the midst of fear and doubt.
- explore how their own gifts and talents can be used to live out Christ's mission.

## Supplies

- Bible
- Adhesive notes or index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Two to four small baskets
- Copies of Dwelling in the Word worksheet, one per student
- Blank piece of paper for each student

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 20:19–31 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 68–69, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Form students in two to four teams, depending on the class size. Pass out the pens and the index cards or adhesive notes. Have the students write down three of their fears, one on each paper. Remind them to keep their fears anonymous and secret from other students. Collect them, putting each team's papers in separate baskets. Give each group a different basket from their own. Taking turns by group, have one person draw a paper from the basket and act out that fear. If their team guesses correctly, that team receives a point. Encourage every student in each group to participate until all fears are guessed.

If you do not want to have students write down their own fears, premade cards are available for your use at the end of the lesson. Prior to class you will need to print and cut them out if you choose to use them.

After the activity, explain that while this game focused on fears, the students will have an opportunity to focus not on fears, but on how Christ brings us peace in the midst of our fears.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Invite the students to find a comfortable place in the room either sitting or lying down. Next, invite them close their eyes. Open your Bible to John 20:19–31 and ask the students to listen during the first reading. Pause and give some time for silent reflection. After a brief reflection period, pass out the Dwelling in the Word handout provided at the end of the lesson. Read John 20:19–31 again. Give the students several minutes to respond to the questions on the worksheet. Discuss each question with the class.

There are several interesting points in the scripture passage that are helpful to share after students answer the questions. To the early followers of Christ, community was a very important part of their identity. It is important to note that the term "disciples" is used to represent the core group of Christ's followers. These people could have represented the first men, women, and children who followed Christ, not just the apostles. Christ offers his promised gift of peace, greeting them saying, "Peace be with you." Through the power of the Holy Spirit Christ then breathes on the disciples after explaining that he now sends them to continue God's redemptive work.

"Doubting Thomas" is a common name to call someone who simply doubts. It is important to know that Thomas was not the only one to doubt. When Mary Magdalene initially told the disciples she saw Christ, they, too, did not believe. Only when Christ revealed himself to them did the disciples and Thomas believe. However, Christ did not shame or become frustrated with them because they did not believe. Christ offered to show them what they needed to affirm what they saw and give them peace.

### **3 RESPOND**

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
*(35% of total lesson time)*

Explain to the class that we are still in the Easter season. The liturgical calendar year takes us on an Easter journey for six weeks, the seventh week being the celebration of Pentecost. Celebrating Easter is not only about celebrating the Resurrection but also the beginning of the Christian church's mission.

Ask the following questions:

- What do you think kept the disciples in fear?
- How do you think Christ brought peace to the disciples?

Sometimes our fears or doubts get in the way of reaching our potential. As the teacher of the class, share a time you felt your fears or doubts kept you from doing your best at something.

Encourage the class to share in response to the following questions:

- What is one thing you excel at?
- What qualities do you have which help you excel at that skill, job, or task?
- What fears or doubts keep you from being your best at it?
- Who or what helps you overcome those obstacles that keep you from doing your best?

Pass out a piece of paper to each youth. Have them draw five circles with enough space to write in each. Give them time to think of five things they are good at or positive characteristics (for example, singing, martial arts, good sense of humor, playing the cello) and write one in the middle of each circle. Pass each student's paper around the room giving the other students a chance to see what they may have in common. If another student finds a similarity, they will write their name in that circle. If the class is smaller, do the activity as a class on one large paper.

Have the students share the skills/characteristics that others have in common with them. Then allow them to share their differences. It is important to remind them they have many gifts, talents, and skills that are worth sharing with the world. As disciples we are called to share those gifts with God's creation.

### **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Have each student choose one characteristic or talent from the previous activity. Remind them of verse 21, "As the Father has sent me, now I send you."

- How are you going to use this characteristic or skill to better a community you are part of?

Using our gifts and talents to improve the environments around us can impact our world in many ways. Christ called his disciples to continue his mission and message. As 21st-century disciples and followers of Christ, we are called to continue that mission. Have them share specific ideas how they are going to do this. Feel free to give them your example as guidance.

### **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Invite the class to stand and hold hands. Have one student read aloud the mission prayer, or have everyone read it together.

God, where will your spirit lead today?

Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.

Grant me [or us] courage to risk something new

And become a blessing of your love and peace.

Amen.

|                     |                     |                   |                         |                           |                 |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Fear of heights     | Fear of open spaces | Fear of flying    | Fear of enclosed spaces | Fear of bugs              | Fear of spiders |
| Fear of loud noises | Fear of snakes      | Fear of dogs      | Fear of storms          | Fear of mice              | Fear of aging   |
| Fear of change      | Fear of the unknown | Fear of water     | Fear of ghosts          | Fear of crossing bridges  | Fear of failure |
| Fear of fire        | Fear of silence     | Fear of darkness  | Fear of needles         | Fear of natural disasters | Fear of love    |
| Fear of loneliness  | Fear of birds       | Fear of the ocean | Fear of clowns          | Fear of everything        | Fear of bridges |

# Dwelling in the Word

As you engage with the scripture passage, listen to what the Spirit is trying to say to your soul.

What words, images, or phrases are speaking to me in this text?

What is God's invitation to me in this passage?

What is God's invitation to our community in this scripture?

What is the relevance of this scripture in today's world?

What does this passage tell us about God?

# THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 20  
15 April 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Luke 24:36b–48

**Lesson Focus:** Christ lives, and we are called to be his witness!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- be affirmed that God is present in our lives.
- know that we are called to be witnesses of the Resurrection.
- understand that when we live out Christ's mission, we become blessings of his peace.

## Supplies

- Bible
- Pens
- Copies of "God's Continuous Redemptive Work" handout, one for each student

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Luke 24:36–48 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 70, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Begin class by reading the Mission Prayer aloud.

God, where will your spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.  
Grant me [or us] courage to risk something new  
And become a blessing of your love and peace.  
Amen.

If you followed last week's lesson:

- Ask the students what piece of the prayer they lived out last week. Did they use one of their gifts or talents to better a community they are a part of? As an example you can ask, "Did you risk something new?" or "How were you a blessing of Christ's peace in your school?"

If you did not follow last week's lesson:

- What is a gift or talent that others notice in you?
- How have you been a blessing to someone else?
- How has someone been a blessing to you?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Before reading the scripture passage for today, explain it is Luke's account of Jesus' appearance, commissioning his disciples, and his ascension. Last week the scripture lesson focused on the Gospel of John's story of Jesus' appearance and commissioning the disciples. If the students don't understand what a commissioning is, explain that commissioning is sending forth into service.

Ask:

- Share a time you had to do something that required courage.
- What made that task challenging?
- What blessings came from the experience?

Read Luke 24:36–48.

Ask:

- What would be your response if your best friend returned from the grave?

- Christ first greeted his disciples, “Peace be with you.” They heard his voice. Then he showed them his physical wounds. He ate in front of them. Why do you think Christ had to do these things? It is important to explain that Christ was proving he was not a ghost, and his presence in the flesh eased their fears. In that time, those who believed in ghosts did not believe ghosts had flesh or could eat. Christ wanted to assure his disciples that God was still alive and present in the world.
- Jesus opened their minds to understanding scripture. He explained that he suffered and rose again, and repentance and forgiveness would be proclaimed in his name everywhere.
- How do you think the disciples became witnesses for Christ?

Resurrection is an important concept during the Easter season. The disciples had to understand that Christ conquered death. This passage is not only about Christ’s appearance to the disciples but their commissioning, too. This passage also affirms God still lives in the hearts and souls of those who live out all that Christ represents.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus’ life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

Ask:

- Who is Jesus Christ to you?
- Who in your life is a Christ-like figure that brings blessing?

Community of Christ believes Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, fully human and fully divine. He lived as a human, died, and was resurrected as an act of reconciliation and forgiveness. Today’s scripture passage can’t ignore Luke’s theme of scripture fulfillment.

- Christ will suffer.
- Christ will rise from the dead.
- Repentance and forgiveness of sins shall be proclaimed in his name.

It is important for the students to understand the magnitude of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Explain that repentance is showing remorse or desiring to make amends for wrongdoing. Community of Christ describes sin as follows:

God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and of self and turn them against God’s purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 15

God is still active in the world as part of redemptive acts. Whether it was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States, working with Catholic Archbishop Romero of El Salvador to end the oppression of his people, or helping stop a bully from hurting someone, God continues to be part of our world.

Christ called his first disciples to continue his mission. He calls us today to continue that mission. God’s redemptive work is all around. There are people, ministries, communities, and movements that strive to help others. Their acts of service become the hands and feet of Jesus.

Prior to this lesson please print out the “God’s Continuous Redemptive Work” handout. Make sure each student receives the handout and a pen or pencil. Have them each fill in the blank spaces.

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

Give each student an opportunity to share what he or she wrote on the handout. Encourage them to share personal stories of how they have seen God at work. God’s presence in the world is something to hear and celebrate. Sharing their stories makes them witnesses of God’s goodness in the world. Embrace that!

# 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,  
blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Read the following prayer aloud or invite a student to read it:

Redeemer of life,

As we go beyond these walls as your witnesses,  
may our doubts and fears subside.

May we be affirmed by your presence and feel your  
loving peace.

May that peace empower us to live out your call  
and mission for us:

To bring your good news to the poor, proclaim  
peace to those who feel they are captives, bring  
sight to those who cannot see the injustice, and  
help liberate the oppressed.

May we be bold enough to answer your call and  
take action as your witnesses everywhere.

Amen.



# God's Continuous Redemptive Work

Redeeming act, service, ministry, person, or place you see God today:

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How that has become a blessing to you or others:

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# FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 21  
22 April 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 10:11–18

**Lesson Focus:** Christ is our good shepherd.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- know Jesus is the good shepherd who calls us by name.
- engage with a practice that helps us more authentically listen to others.
- have an understanding that despite our busy and overwhelming lives, God desires us to be present in God's flock.

- understand we are called as disciples to live out Christ's mission.

## Supplies

- Bible
- Copies of "Holy Listening" handout, end of lesson
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 10:11–18 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 71–72, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Ask the class if they have ever played the game Telephone. Ask everyone to sit in a circle and have one student whisper a phrase to the person on his or her right. Players continue around the circle repeating the phrase to the next person until the last person is reached. After the last person hears the phrase, have them tell the whole group what they heard.

Some fun phrase options are

- "A blue dinosaur went running in the woods until the clock struck midnight and turned back into a bird."
- "The mouse found the cheese, the cat found the mouse, the dog found the cat, and they all lived happily ever after."
- "A big, black beetle bit a big, black bear, and the big, black bear went 'Roar!'"

Feel free to make up your own phrase for the students to repeat.

You can play the game as long as you like. Explain to the students that listening is not always easy. While this game was fun and silly, sometimes life gets in the way of being fully present and hearing God's call for us. Today you have the opportunity to explore yourselves, our community, and God's call for us to be part of the "flock."

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The scripture passage we are about to explore offers powerful imagery of Christ as a shepherd who cares for his flock.

Read John 10:11–18.

Ask:

- Christ describes himself as the good shepherd. What importance do you think shepherds had during the time of Jesus?
- Who do you think represents the flock/fold?
- What do you think Christ means when he says, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold”?

We know Christ is our good shepherd. As disciples we are the flock or fold. Christ is the example shepherd who protects us, guides us, and shapes who we are. He is not only the good shepherd but also the model shepherd. *Kalos* is the Greek word for “good.” There is, however, a deeper sense of the word. *Kalos* can also mean “model.” Not only is Jesus the good shepherd who protects and sacrifices his life, but Jesus is also that exemplary shepherd calling us to model after him. This idea also reflects Old Testament imagery from Ezekiel 34.

Ezekiel 34:11–16

<sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup>As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup>I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. <sup>14</sup>I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. <sup>16</sup>I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...

If Jesus is identifying himself as the good shepherd, as described in Ezekiel 34, he is thus identifying himself as accomplishing God’s promise.

The other sheep refer to those outside of Jerusalem, sometimes referred to as gentiles. This point is important because it emphasizes that Jesus is inclusive regarding who is in the flock. God’s community is not limited to a small group of people, but includes all of creation.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

The good shepherd is in relationship with creation and God. As our caretaker God is authentically present and desires all people to have a relationship with God. This relationship is not simply a one-on-one relationship. While God desires to connect to each of us on a deep level, the flock imagery is that of a communal relationship. As the flock of Jesus we as a community are called to listen to God’s desires and mission for us. We are called to listen.

The class now has the opportunity to engage in a deep listening practice. Have the students find a partner or become a small group of three. Pass out the “Holy Listening” handout created by Spiritual Formation Ministries and follow the instructions on the sheet.

This exercise may not be easy and even awkward. Nevertheless, it gives students the opportunity to listen intentionally without needing to respond. Allow for some debriefing afterwards.

You should challenge the class to continue this practice. As members of Christ’s flock we are called to live in community in divine relationship with each other and with God. Such an exercise opens up new possibilities of authentically listening.

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

In 2007 President Stephen Veazey offered these words of counsel to Community of Christ which are now part of the Doctrine and Covenants:

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

As part of Jesus' flock, called to live in divine relationship with God, how can we live out this mission? How can we listen to the cries of those who weep? How can we bring hope? How can we live as a community that answers the call to serve?

What can be done? All responses are helpful, even simple things like hugging a friend in need, talking to someone who may be feeling down, or connecting with an old friend. When we are in relationship with one another, we are in relationship to Jesus' flock.

Challenge your class to take some time this week to pray or meditate. Simply listen. Sometimes moments of silence and calm are all we need in a world of chaos, confusion, and busyness.

Ask:

- How will you listen, to whom will you listen, and for what will you listen?

You may also challenge the class to find someone new to practice the deep listening with.

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise,  
blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Sing or read together "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" CCS 87.

## HOLY LISTENING

### Invitation to Practice:

- ✚ Practice in being present to one another and witnessing each other's stories.
- ✚ Practice in sharing vulnerably: Our time together is a form of prayer.
- ✚ Listening to one another is a holy act. As we listen, we sharpen our attention to the way God speaks to us through one another in shared and differing experiences.
- ✚ We approach each other with reverence, respect, curiosity, and blessing. We do not want to fix each other, but journey with. Emmanuel, God *with us*, is at the heart of the Christian story, and being *with* one another is a way we imitate God's own nature in relationship together.

### **Sample Questions to Prompt Sharing:**

- How is it with your soul?
- How would you describe your current spiritual journey?
- When have you been most aware of God's Presence with you?
- When have you felt yourself spiritually stretched into growth?
- What questions are you currently journeying with?
- What spiritual practices are most instrumental in shaping your discipleship?
- What is God's invitation at this moment in your spiritual journey?
- Where do you sense the Spirit's movement and activity in your life, or community?

### Process:

- ✚ 1 minute of silent prayer for the person about to share.
- ✚ Designated person has 5 minutes (or other designated time) to share. Chime will indicate that the time has started and ended. They do not have to share the whole time, but the space is held open for them if something else emerges in the silence.
- ✚ 1 minute of silent prayer of blessing for the person who has just shared.

### Reflecting:

Share with your group what you heard (**not advice giving!!**).

- What was the Spirit stirring within you as you listened to others?
- Was there a word, phrase, or image that meant something to you?

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 22  
29 April 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 15:1–8

**Lesson Focus:** Bear fruit and share it with the world!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- understand as disciples we are not only connected to each other, but to Christ.
- see how Zion, God's kingdom on earth here and now, can be fulfilled.
- be challenged to bear fruit—act in love.

## Supplies

- Bible
- String or yarn (green for the vine, various colors for branches)
- Scissors
- One-hole paper punch
- Pens or pencils
- Whiteboard or large pad of paper and markers
- Printed images of fruit (end of lesson)

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 15:1–8 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 73–74 available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Have the students huddle in a tight circle but ensure there is space to move around. Have them join hands with someone across from them in the circle until all students have joined hands. Make sure they overlap other hands and arms to make it more of a challenge. Inform the class that their goal is to untangle themselves without letting go of each other. Feel free to play several times if you have a small group who solves the problem more quickly. With a large class size you may want to form smaller groups.

Today's activity required our class community to work together to solve a tangled mess. Our arms were linked together similar to vines in a vineyard. Through hard work, problem solving, and maybe a little help from the leaders, we were able to work together as community.

Note: Even if the group was unable to solve the puzzle, still affirm to them that sometimes in community we cannot

accomplish our goals, but through love and support we can work together to discern what may not have worked, striving for a better outcome next time.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Before reading the scripture passage, ask the class the following questions.

- What communities embrace and accept you?
- What does that community do to make you feel welcomed and loved?
- Have you been empowered to give back to others from your experiences?

Share a story with the class of a time you felt a deep connection to a community you are part of. Share with

them why it was a meaningful community to be involved in and how the community made you who you are today. You may answer the questions above to inspire a student to share.

Read John 15:1–8.

Ask the class their initial thoughts about this scripture passage. Does this passage make sense to them? Does a word or phrase stick out, and why? Give them time to initially process the verses. Invite a student to read the passage a second time.

This text is meant to show its readers the deep, intimate relationship between God, Jesus, and the community. The gardener, vine, and branches are all important elements for the production of fruit. If God is the gardener and we, the community, are the branches, then Jesus connects us. Jesus is the middle ground.

This passage introduces the principal metaphor of the vine and its branches. Jesus explains he is the vine and God is the vine grower or gardener. We, as the disciples, are branches of the vine. When we abide in Jesus, the vine, we can bear much fruit.

Ask:

- What do you think Jesus means when he is talking about “bearing fruit”?

Bearing fruit can be simply interpreted as works of love, which are required to follow Christ. Bearing fruit is providing acts of love to those around you.

Ask:

- What are some simple but meaningful acts of love you see around you?

While the pruning (or cleansing) of the branches that do not produce fruit seems harsh, there is a communal importance. We already know that to bear fruit is to love others and God. The concern is to be in relationship with Jesus and his word. When we are showing love to others, we are in relationship with Jesus, God, and the community. As long as we are loving, then we are bearing fruit that will grow into something beautiful, bringing joy to all those who experience it.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Prior to class print the handout at the end of the lesson. Have one long piece of string or yarn at least 5 ft/1.5 m, precut and displayed in class. If supplies are limited, have each fruit precut. Print out one extra fruit for a lesson point explained later.

Make sure every student in class has a handout. God is the vine grower. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches of the vine who are called to bear fruit. Give the class a chance to think about the statement:

- I will show love by...

Have students complete their statements on their fruit and cut them out if they are not precut. Give each student a piece of yarn. Have them hole-punch the top of their fruit and loop their piece of yarn through the hole.

Explain: Jesus represents the long strand of yarn as the vine. The small pieces of yarn represent you as a branch, and the fruit you bear is how you show love. This could mean calling your grandparent once a week, sitting with someone new at school, or volunteering for an organization. This visual reminds us that we as a community are called to share love as members of God’s sacred garden. We are called to bear fruit!

Invite students to attach their yarn and fruit to the large strand of yarn representing Christ.

After everyone’s branch and fruit are added to the vine, ask:

- What does it mean for our church community to live as a branch?

It is important to note that Community of Christ and other Christian denominations are also called to live as branches that bear fruit. If we look at the church as a branch that can lead to radical corporate love, then God’s global garden could bloom the best of fruit. Imagine if churches and denominations could set their differences aside and act in love. Human problems such as poverty, war, and political tensions could cease to exist. To live as branches of the vine is to live in a community of pure love. The concept of Zion, God’s kingdom here and now on Earth, could be a reality:

The Reign of God is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy, and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus’ life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom’s full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems of that new creation. “Zion” expresses our commitment to herald God’s peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ-centered communities in families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 16

Brainstorm ways your congregation or church community can live out love. How can we create Zion, God’s kingdom here and now? Feel free to write student responses on a whiteboard or large pad of paper. When the class is done reflecting together, fill out the blank space of the fruit with the heading “Our church will live out love by...” Add it to the vine.

# 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson  
might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Have each student share what he or she wrote on his or her fruit. If students did not write something specific, encourage them to share a specific example. With permission from a pastor or congregational leader, find a place to hang your vine project in your church building or worship space. As disciples we are called to share the fruit!

# 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,  
blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Read or have a student read the following prayer:

Steward of the garden,

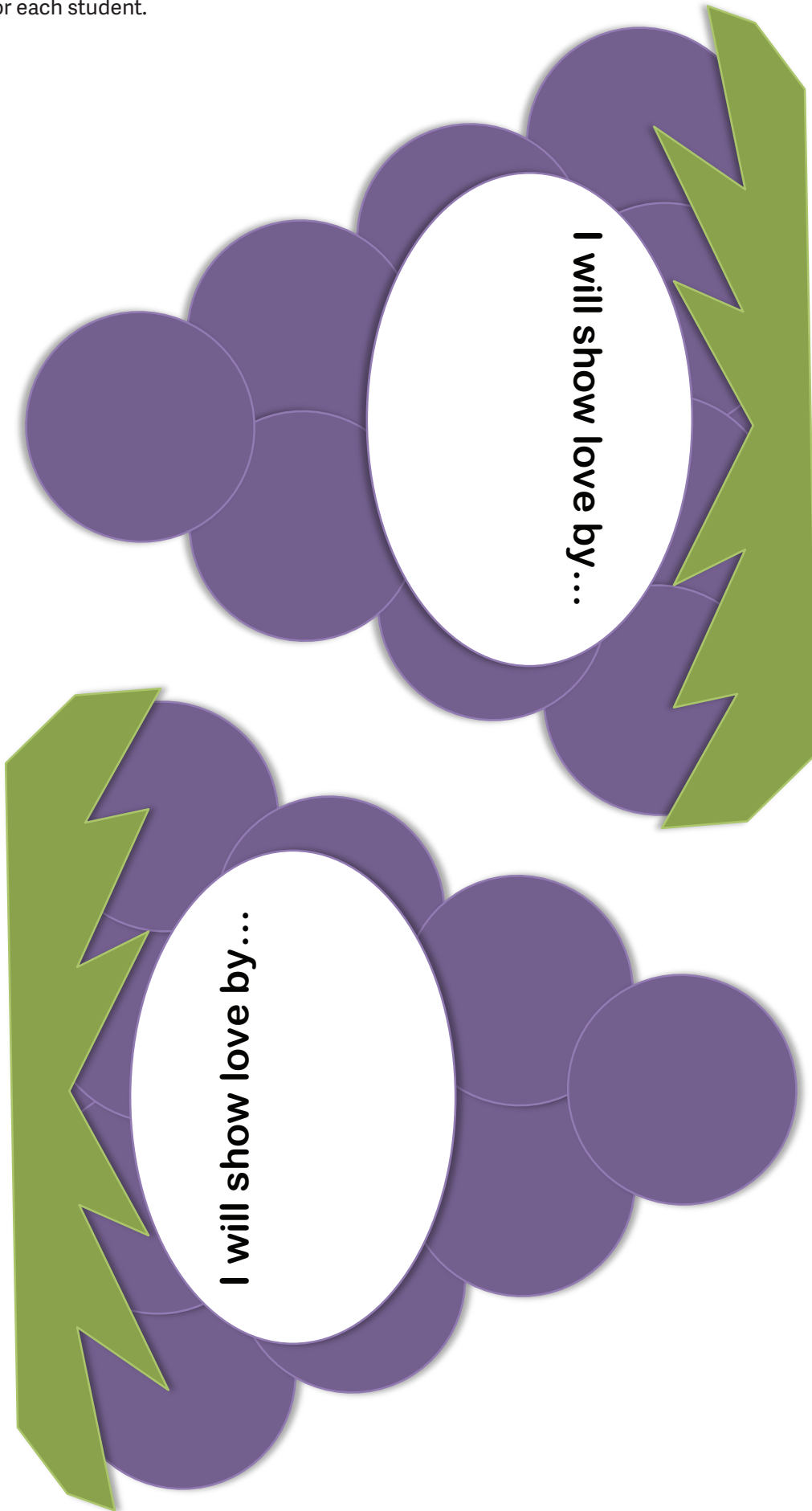
We praise you for the opportunity to be part of your sacred garden. Help us hold tight to the vine so we can be the branches and bear fruit of love. May we feel your life-giving presence in our communities, empowering us to share your love and peace. For when we share our love with others, the garden can only grow and flourish. Let it be so. Amen.



Print one copy for the class to complete.



Print one "fruit" for each student.



# SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 23  
6 May 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 15:9–17

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus commands us to love!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- identify people in their lives who unconditionally love and care for them.
- be affirmed that every person deserves love of God and their community, the Worth of All Persons.
- dive deep into Christ's commandment requiring us to love.

## Supplies

- Bible
- Whiteboard or large pad of paper and markers
- Lined paper
- Pens or pencils
- (Optional) mailing envelopes and stamps
- Props for drama (for example: items of clothing, office supplies, recreation equipment, party decorations)
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 15:9–17 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 75–76, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Have the students think of three individuals who currently show them unconditional love. If necessary you can explain unconditional love as limitless unrestricted love, a love that is forever. Have each student write those names on the whiteboard or pad of paper so everyone can see.

Example:

| Those who love us unconditionally |               |         |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Becky                             | Grandma Betty | Kinsey  |
| Tony                              | Michael       | Mark    |
| Mom/Debra                         | Greg          | Quinton |

Invite each student to share:

- why they chose those individuals.
- a specific memory about that person showing love or care for the student.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Before reading today's scripture passage, hand out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil to each student. Next have them number their papers one through 10. Ask how many of the traditional Ten Commandments they know. Give them time to think and write as many as they can. When all of the students finish, have them share their answers and write them on the board or pad of paper for everyone to see.

### The traditional Ten Commandments from the book of Exodus

1. God is the God of all; only one God.
2. Have no idols.
3. Do not use God's name in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day sacred.
5. Honor your mother and father.
6. Do not kill.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. Do not covet/want.

In addition to these Ten Commandments, the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, has a total of 613 commandments. Some deal with food laws and others dive deep in cultural norms of Hebrew peoples as they endeavored to understand what God desired.

Read John 15:9–17.

Ask:

- What do you think Christ means when he says to “love one another as I have loved you”?
- What do you think the major point of this passage is?
- Why do you think loving someone else is so important?

After engaging the class with these questions, read John 15:9–17 again.

The use of the word “friend” in verses 13–15 has great significance. The original Greek word used to translate “friend” comes from the verb “to love.” This verb in ancient Greek is used interchangeably with the understanding of agape love, the unconditional love we talked about earlier. So the friends Christ is talking about are those whom he loves. The Enduring Principle Worth of All Persons is embraced in the concept of deep love. The Worth of All Persons in Community of Christ means:

- God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.
- God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
- We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.

- We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13

As disciples of Jesus Christ and members or friends of Community of Christ, we are commanded to love others. All people of God's creation are worthy in the eyes of the Creator. When we love others, we embrace the worth of all persons, live in deep relationship with others, and have a more cherished connection with God.

Earlier we listed the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites during the exodus from Egypt. While these commandments are still important, Christ demands we follow a primary commandment “that you love one another as I have loved you.” This does not mean we disregard the other commands given to us. Christ's command intensifies and embraces all the other commandments given. He loves us so much that he healed us, fed us, invited us to the table even if we didn't deserve it, wept with us, lived with us, and died for us. And in his ascension he challenged his first disciples to resume God's work of love and liberation, a mission we, as 21st-century disciples, must continue. If we truly do as Jesus asks and love others as he has loved us, then we are following all the other commandments.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

The class will now participate in a drama activity. Form groups of three to five people. Next, hand out blank paper and pens or pencils. Have each group brainstorm different ways people have shown love (volunteering at shelters, stopping bullying, caring for a sick friend, talking to someone who needs to be heard). Give them several minutes to brainstorm. Then have each group pick one of their ideas. Bring out the props so everyone can see them. Have each group take two or three items (number can vary depending on class size), and have the group act out their acts of love. Some examples may include the following ideas:

- Volunteering at a shelter: Two students act out serving two other students.
- Listening to a friend who needs to be heard: One member of the group shares with a friend (or friends) showing genuine concern and desire to help.
- Lonely student: A group of students at lunch sit by someone who is sitting alone.

Note: Some dramas may be short or conclude after several seconds. If necessary, have your groups choose multiple scenarios and act them all out.

The purpose of this exercise is to help the students engage in relationship with other people. When we are in relationship with someone in our community, then we are in relationship with God. Love can blossom from deep relationships, and God's kingdom on earth can be realized.

## **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Students had an opportunity to explore love; Christ commands us to love one another. At the beginning of the lesson students had the chance to think of three people who have shown them unconditional love. Now that the students know they are called to share the love they received, they can now give back. Pass out lined paper and have them choose one person on their list and write a letter of thanksgiving for everything that person has done for the student.

Guidelines for letter:

- Share a message of thanksgiving for that person.
- Share a memory or example of how he or she showed the student love.
- How is the student going to pass on that love to someone else?
- If you have the time and the students want to, they may write to more than one person on their list.
- Optional: Help the students prepare mailing envelopes with address labels and stamps if they want to send the letters through the mail.

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Close by singing together "We Are One in the Spirit" CCS 359.

# SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 24  
13 May 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Luke 24:44–53

**Lesson Focus:** Let us engage with scripture!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- explore Community of Christ’s understanding of scripture.
- know that Jesus calls his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness (God’s redemptive acts).
- bless and affirm one another as God blesses us.

## Supplies

- Bible
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Handouts (end of lesson)
  - “Scripture in Community of Christ”
  - “Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion”
  - “Dwelling in the Word”
- Pens or pencils

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 24:44–53 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 77–78, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Begin class by asking:

- What are some of your favorite scriptures? Why?
- What do these favorite scriptures say to you?
- What do you think is the importance of scripture?

Read the following statement taken from the Basic Beliefs section of *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 15:

Scripture is writing inspired by God’s Spirit and accepted by the church as the normative expression of its identity, message, and mission. We affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants—not to replace the witness of the Bible or improve on it,

but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. When responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied, scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for our discipleship.

As a follow-up question to the statement above, ask:

- When has scripture provided you with divine guidance and inspired insight?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Read Luke 24:44–53.

This passage follows the scripture passage found in lesson 20 (April 15). It begins with Jesus explaining scripture has been fulfilled, specifically from the Law of Moses, the psalms, and the prophets. Jesus opened their minds to understand the scripture. While we are unsure how Jesus

specifically did this, we can imagine him sitting with a group of his best friends explaining the passage and affirming them with a hopeful future.

One important way we can understand the fulfillment of scripture is through the lens of what God has done and what God is doing. The fulfillment may be understood as a record of God's redeeming acts in the world. Throughout the Old Testament, God is guiding and shaping the Hebrew people. The Old Testament can be seen as the Israelites understanding who God is and what God desires of God's people. When Jesus came to show humanity how to love one another and love God, Jesus fulfilled the scripture of the past. When he died and rose again, he fulfilled scripture. When Jesus asked his disciples to continue his mission of proclaiming repentance and forgiveness to the world, he fulfilled scripture. Now, as disciples, we are called to continue as his witnesses spreading God's love. When we work in soup kitchens, better our neighborhoods, serve at youth camps, or provide music at church, we are continuing God's redemptive acts in the world by serving God's kingdom.

Ask:

- What redeeming acts of love, compassion, community, and support do you witness in the world?
- How do you see yourself involved in the fulfillment of scripture of God's redemptive acts?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Prior to class print the "Scripture in Community of Christ" handout at the end of the lesson for each student.

In Luke 24:45 Jesus opened the disciples' minds to scripture. Doing so would help prepare them for the journey ahead as those who would promote the coming reign of God's kingdom. As 21st-century disciples we are called to appropriately interpret and discern scripture. Community of Christ has developed several affirmations (or common beliefs) about our views on scripture interpretation, appropriate use, inspiration, historical context, and more.

Give each student the "Scripture in Community of Christ" handout. If class members have copies of *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, they may use them. Go through each affirmation with the class. Get the students involved taking turns reading (read in a circle or popcorn style). After reading all affirmations, give each student the "Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion" handout. Give them time to reflect and answer the questions. After plenty of individual reflection

time, involve the class with their answers to the discussion questions (also found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, pp. 26–27).

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

One way we can dive deep into scripture is with the Dwelling in the Word spiritual practice. A spiritual practice invites us to take intentional time to be in relationship with God and sometimes others around us. While the following exercise is not a traditional Dwelling in the Word format of someone reading the passage to the student, it still allows him or her to read, discern, engage, and reflect.

Challenge:

- Take the "Dwelling in the Word" handout home.
- Find a scripture passage from the Gospels that speaks to you. (This encourages students to take time to explore the scriptures on their own.)
- Read the passage (at least two times).
- Use the handout as a tool of reflection.
- End with a prayer.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Read John 24:50–53.

Read: In verses 50–53, Jesus leads his followers to Bethany and blesses them before he ascends. The Greek word the author uses for bless means "to speak well of." So in this text Jesus speaks well of them and praises them. He is asking God to help them gain peace, wellbeing, and wholeness. We, too, receive Christ's blessing. As disciples, we are called to share that blessing with others. There are many among us who need blessing. We are to "speak well of" them and ask God's Spirit to give them peace and wholeness.

—*Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 77

Have students (or other class facilitators) find a partner. Have one partner share an affirming statement or positive characteristic with the other partner. Make sure everyone has a chance to affirm and be affirmed.

# Scripture in Community of Christ

*Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.*

## **Affirmation One**

We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).

## **Affirmation Two**

We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

## **Affirmation Three**

Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God’s revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

## **Affirmation Four**

Scripture’s authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should the books that point to him be treated as a servant of the saving purposes of God.

## **Affirmation Five**

Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in

nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

## **Affirmation Six**

Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer.

## **Affirmation Seven**

As the church tries to interpret scripture responsibly, it seeks the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into new truth (John 16:12–15). By the Spirit, the ancient words of scripture can become revelatory, allowing us to grasp what may not have been seen or heard before.

## **Affirmation Eight**

Disciples are called to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may ever increase in love for God, neighbor, and self (Matthew 22:37–40; Mosiah 1:49), uphold the dignity and worth of all persons (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–d), and faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ.

## **Affirmation Nine**

With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is “alive forever and ever” (Revelation 1:18).

*For our time we shall seek to live and interpret the witness of scripture by the Spirit, with the community, for the sake of mission, in the name of the Prince of Peace.*



# Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion

1. Prayerfully read the affirmations in their entirety. What is your overall reaction to what you have read?
2. Consider the preamble. How do you define the phrases “responsibly interpreted” and “faithfully applied”? How can your approach to scripture become more in keeping with these two criteria?
3. How do the first and second affirmations help distinguish between the Living Word (Christ) and the written word (scripture)? How do these two tend to become confused in the life of the church? What problems does such confusion create?
4. How have you discovered Christ “in and through scripture”(Affirmation Two)? How have you found God’s “saving, transforming message” in the witness of the scriptures?
5. How has an understanding of scripture’s cultural and historical context helped you responsibly interpret and faithfully apply specific texts to your life (Affirmation Three)?
6. How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture in your own life and in the life of the church (Affirmation Three)? What values do you find in both the unity and diversity of the scriptural witness?
7. How have you seen scripture used to oppress, control, and dominate (Affirmation Four)? How can you better use and understand scripture as servant, after the model of Jesus? How would this require you to change the way you use scripture?
8. How is it possible to believe that scripture is “true,” yet not inerrant? What does it mean for you to affirm that scripture is “trustworthy” and “unfailingly reliable” (Affirmation Five)?
9. How do you use faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship in your reading, understanding, and application of scripture (Affirmation Six)? Which do you tend to emphasize more than the others? Which might you benefit from giving more attention to?
10. How has the Holy Spirit blessed you in your understanding of scripture? How has the Spirit led you to new truth (Affirmation Seven)? How has scripture been revelatory to you?
11. How has scripture helped you more “faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ” (Affirmation Eight)? How has it helped you “increase in love for God, neighbor, and self”?
12. How do you understand the Bible to be foundational? What, then, is the role of the other two books of scripture (Affirmation Nine)? How has each of these three books of scripture functioned in your life and faith journey?

# Dwelling in the Word

As you engage with the scripture passage, listen to what the Spirit is trying to say to your soul.

What words, images, or phrases are speaking to me in this text?

What is God's invitation to me in this scripture?

What is God's invitation to our community in this scripture?

What is the relevance of this scripture in today's world?

What does this passage tell us about God?

# DAY OF PENTECOST/ ENDOWMENT SUNDAY

LESSON 25  
20 May 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Acts 2:1–21 and John 15:26–27, 16:4b–15

**Lesson Focus:** The Holy Spirit is with us.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- be affirmed God is present always.
- explore what the Holy Spirit represents in scripture and the theology of Community of Christ.
- discover how the Holy Spirit empowers us to live out the Mission Initiatives.

## Supplies

- Bible
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Flip chart paper
- Pens or pencils
- Markers

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Acts 2:1–21 and John 15:26–27, 16:4b–15 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 79–82, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today we have the opportunity to learn about an extraordinary event in the early years of the Christian church. However, today even in our own lives, extraordinary things can happen. Sometimes these extraordinary events surprise or amaze us. Other times they can make us uncomfortable or uneasy.

Share a time something extraordinary happened.

Ask:

- How did that event or experience change you?
- What did you learn or feel called to do in response to your experience, if any?
- How did you sense God’s presence in that experience?

Today we have the opportunity to talk about God and Jesus’ living force in the world: the Holy Spirit.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Today we celebrate the day of Pentecost.

- What do you know about Pentecost?

For the Jewish people, Pentecost was celebrated for two reasons: as a remembrance of receiving the Torah from Moses and to participate in a daylong harvest festival known as “The Festival of Weeks.” It is specifically celebrated 50 days after Passover. Pentecost literally translates to “fiftieth.” It is a day dedicated to celebrating all the good God has done. The beginning of this verse in Acts tells the readers the Spirit was given to all who attended the Pentecost celebration.

Ask the students to get comfortable; invite them to close their eyes and listen to the words you read.

Read Acts 2:1–21.

Ask:

- What images were you seeing as I was reading?

Read the passage again, this time inviting the students to place themselves in the story. Have them imagine they were someone there celebrating Pentecost.

Ask:

- Who did you imagine yourself to be in this story? Peter? A community member? A passerby? The Spirit?
- How would your character respond to this experience afterward?
- How would you respond today?
- What does this passage tell us about the Holy Spirit?

The Gospel of Luke ends with Christ telling his disciples to wait for a sign before continuing Christ's work. God's faithfulness to God's people was upheld. Jesus promised God's message of hope, liberation, love, and redemption would not end when he ascended. This Pentecost experience was the sign. People from all backgrounds and traditions could suddenly understand each other. Everyone understood the good news of Jesus Christ. Not only could Jewish Christians receive the Holy Spirit, but Arabs, visitors from Rome, Mesopotamians, Elamites, and others from around the world also experienced God's presence in the world.

Read John 15:26–27 directly followed by John 16:4b–15.

These passages come from the Gospel of John. While the Gospel of John and Acts are two different books in the New Testament, they both give us an idea of what the Holy Spirit is and what it means to us.

Ask:

- How does this passage differ from the previous one?

Jesus knew he was going to die, be resurrected, and ascend into heaven, yet the disciples believed they needed Christ. In John 20 after the death of Jesus, the disciples locked themselves up for fear of the Jews, unsure of their future. Then Christ returned to them and gave them the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. This passage is about a promise. The world would not be easy on the disciples, and they would be challenged and persecuted. But the Spirit would be their advocate and guide. Not only was the Spirit a guide for them, but it continues to call the church to carry out God's work.

Ask:

- How do you see the Spirit working today?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

Read:

Additionally, as Christians, we are called to provide hospitality to the stranger, to serve the needy, to feed the hungry, to relieve suffering, and to set free. All of these activities help us reconcile and forgive, granting us God's peace. Regardless of what the future might bring, the Paraclete teaches us and our community that true Christian hope is to share joyously in the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to witness to God's gift of grace and generosity with un-bounded love. We are to struggle against violence and inequality, to enter into solidarity with all who suffer, and to take risks for freedom, peace, and justice for all. True Christian hope is action in which we wholeheartedly work toward the consummation of life in communion with God and all of creation. On this Pentecost Sunday, these verses in John remind us that it is the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who guides us to speak the truth and to open ourselves to the grace and beauty of creation. The Triune God is acting and loving amid our lives and our world. We are called to follow the Holy Spirit, to join in service, and to share in Christian hope God's blessings to creation.

—*Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 81

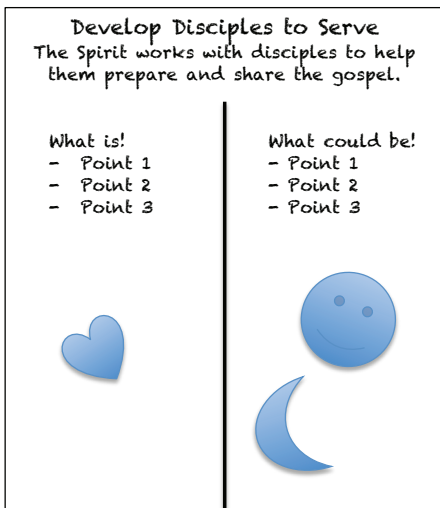
Receiving the Holy Spirit gives new life. It symbolized the birth of the Christian church's mission. As the Spirit guides us continuing God's call to those who need redemption, hope, liberation, and love, we must be ready for anything. Community of Christ has five Mission Initiatives that move the church forward. Not only are they goals we desire to achieve, but they represent the beating heart that pushes us toward God's vision of the Peaceable Kingdom, God's reign, heaven on earth, Zion.

Form pairs or groups of three. Hand out the flip chart paper, assigning a Mission Initiative to each group. If the

class is smaller you may do this activity with the whole group, going through each Mission Initiative. The students have several tasks to record on their flip chart paper:

- Write the Mission Initiative at the top of the paper as the heading.
- Create a subheading stating how the Holy Spirit works within that Mission Initiative.
- Draw a line down the middle of the paper vertically.
- On the left side draw or write examples of how that Mission Initiative is being lived out in your communities—what is!
- On the right side draw or write examples of how that Mission Initiative could be lived out more—what could be!

Here is an example:



|   |  |
|---|--|
|  | <b>Invite People to Christ</b> —Christ’s mission of evangelism                       |
|  | <b>Abolish Poverty, End Suffering</b> —Christ’s mission of compassion                |
|  | <b>Pursue Peace on Earth</b> —Christ’s mission of justice and peace                  |
|  | <b>Develop Disciples to Serve</b> —Equip individuals for Christ’s mission            |
|  | <b>Experience Congregations in Mission</b> —Equip congregations for Christ’s mission |

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

The Advocate or Spirit calls us to act! As a class pick one Mission Initiative and select an idea from the “What could be” section. Brainstorm a plan to make the “What could be” idea a “What is” act. With the Spirit guiding and shaping us, mission is always possible.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Sing “Spirit of the Living God” CCS 567.

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/TRINITY SUNDAY

LESSON 26  
27 May 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 3:1–17

**Lesson Focus:** We are called to be present with God and one another.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- reflect on their lives in relation to how new experiences shape us.
- explore how they can be more present in the lives of others.
- reflect on their baptism and how it calls them to live in the present to achieve God's kingdom.

## Supplies

- Bible
- *Visio Divina* handout, one for each student
- Pens or pencils
- "Being Present" handout, one for each student

**Note to teacher:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 3:1–17 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 83, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,  
prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

As the facilitator of the class, share a time you experienced something new. Some examples could be the birth of a child, beginning a new job, the loss of a loved one, graduating from school or career training. Share how that experience changed and molded you into the person you are today. Open up the space for some comfortable sharing.

Ask:

- What experience of newness have you had?
- How did that experience shape you?
- What have you learned from that experience?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Prior to class print, in color if possible, the *Visio Divina* handout provided at the end of this lesson. Fold them in half (so only the artwork is revealed) before distributing to the students.

Explain to the class they will now have time to explore scripture through art with a practice known as *Visio Divina*. Spiritual practices give us an opportunity to take intentional time connecting with God and ourselves, and sometimes our community. This practice shares roots in *Lectio Divina* with scripture, but instead we will be observing an art piece inspired by scripture. This practice invites us to connect with the Divine through images.

## Instructions for *Visio Divina*

1. Invite the students to keep their eyes solely on the artwork.
2. Ask them to keep their attention on the first thing that they are drawn to (color, feeling, person, pattern).
3. Have them focus on that piece of the artwork, taking deep breaths.
4. Allow them to gaze at the entire work, not missing a single part of the artwork.
5. Reflect on the image. Take several minutes, giving room for reflections and questions within the students' minds.
6. After an adequate reflection time, have them unfold their handouts revealing the questions. Take time to answer the questions.

If appropriate for your students, open up the class for discussion. Invite them to share their reflections, thoughts, and answers to the questions above.

—based on *Visio Divina*, <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>

Now read John 3:1–17. This passage bridges the artwork to something specific.

Nicodemus goes to Jesus seeking him out. He asks a series of questions and then comments based on Jesus' responses to him. The first big question comes from Jesus' response to Nicodemus asking about being born again. Nicodemus assumes Jesus is talking about a physical birth, but Jesus is referring to a spiritual rebirth. "To be born" has two meanings in its original context, a meaning the English language doesn't have one word for. It speaks of a time of birth (again) and a dwelling where new birth is produced (from above). When speaking of the "kingdom of God" it suggests a double meaning of both a time of God's reign and a dwelling in God's realm. "Born of water and Spirit" is a phrase Jesus uses for Nicodemus to understand being born again. He also uses the visual of wind. The spirit, like wind, blows where it desires. We know wind is present, but we cannot physically see it. What we physically see is how wind affects the objects it encounters. New birth is like the wind because it is a mystery we cannot control or influence.

This passage tells the readers eternal life will be given to those who believe in Jesus. John 3, however, is not

speaking of an eternal life of unending existence. To have eternal life is to live a life no longer constrained by human archetypes. Instead, eternal life is God's love knowing no bounds and calls us to live in community in the present. We are called to share that love, living in community, caring for those who need help, and partaking in God's redemptive message. We are given life as children of God and are called to embrace that life. The idea of eternal life in this Gospel focuses on present events.

This passage contains one of the most popular passages used—John 3:16. God loved humankind so much that God became human, became Jesus. Jesus ate, drank, slept, got angry, felt temptation, wept, told stories, built relationships, and died. Just like humans. If eternal life is living in God's current and present love, then it is imperative we are aware of what Christ did, and does, for us. Christ liberated, brought hope, healed, taught, and redeemed the world. Believing in Jesus means believing in love. If we believe in love, then how can we not have everlasting life? How can humankind not have everlasting life?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Being in relationship is not only an important human need, it is an important piece of who Community of Christ is. Whether it's friends going out for pizza, interacting in a book club, calling your parents when you are away, or sitting in a circle singing hymns, being in relationship with other people can happen anywhere. When we are in relationship with one another, we can experience God in fresh new ways. One cannot be in relationship without being present. In an ever-changing, busy world, it is easy to get lost in our business and the chaos of life. If we can recognize the times when we are distracted, we can learn and be aware of how we can become more focused on those around us.

Pass out the "Being Present" handout and give the students time to answer the questions. Share their responses afterward. We can learn from one another. Give the students plenty of time to have some dialogue on presence and being aware of those you care about who are around you.

# 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson  
might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Tell the class about your baptism experience or why you choose to follow Jesus. Ask:

- Who in your life has taught you about Jesus by the way they live, or by being present with you?
- If you have been baptized, who helped you make that choice?

Challenge:

- Tell someone outside of your church community about your baptism, and why you choose to be a disciple of Jesus.

# 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,  
blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" CCS 449.



## *Visio Divina*

*Nicodemus Visiting Jesus* by Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1899. Public domain.



1. Is there an emotion this image awakes in you?
2. What story do you think is being told as you engage with the art?
3. Does the image stir something inside of you? If so, what is stirring?
4. What drew you to the specific item toward the beginning of the practice? Why do you think you were drawn to that specific thing?
5. What do you think this art piece is saying to its audience?

# Being Present

What is an experience I have missed out on because I was not fully present?

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What were the things that kept me from being fully present?

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What are things that keep me from being present in other aspects of life?

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How I can stay present in the world and with the people around me?

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I will stay present by \_\_\_\_\_