



Jesus, Risen and Revealed

Birth of the Church

Note to Leaders:

As many congregations do not hold Christian education on Easter Sunday, this discussion guide has been extended, or lengthened, and is designed to be used flexibly. If your group does not meet on or near Easter Sunday, this lesson is to be used the following week. You may not be able to cover all components, but you can pick and choose what you can accomplish in the time frame you have. If you do meet on or near Easter Sunday, there are enough components, and the components are slightly more involved, so they will easily extend over two weeks.

About the Story

The Empty Tomb (Luke 24:1-12)

Our story begins on the third day after Jesus' death on the cross, at the location of Jesus' burial. Here several women come to the tomb, seeking to anoint Jesus' body with fragrant oils, as was the custom at the time. Our author, Luke, is known for masterful literary strategy, and today marks his story's climax. Just as the story seems over, and death has apparently won, the women instead find no body to anoint.

Before the perplexing moment can linger unexplained, two angelic figures appear to the women, asking the profound question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The "dazzling men" then begin redirecting the women's grief, telling them that Jesus has risen just as he promised he would do (see Luke 9:22). This recollection sparks the women's memory of Jesus' prediction and they quickly leave to tell others about his resurrection.

Upon hearing the news that Jesus had been raised from the dead, the followers of Jesus do not believe the women's story. In fact, they deem it *leros*, a Greek term the NRSV translates as "an idle tale" but is more accurately translated as "utter nonsense." Jesus? Alive? No way, they say. But Peter, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, goes to check out the scene himself. He arrives at the tomb and, seeing Jesus' burial cloths but not Jesus' body, returns home, amazed at what happened.

The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Our story continues on the same day: three days after Jesus' burial. Now we meet a man named Cleopas and his companion—who may be his wife or another friend; the text does not say. The two people are walking to Emmaus, a nearby village, talking about the mysterious

The Point:

The risen Jesus appears to his disciples. Our stories give two examples of God's presence in the midst of doubt: to the grieving women at the tomb and to the disappointed travelers on the road to Emmaus. For us, this is good news: God is with us even as we reel from the darkest times and the deepest sadness. In fact, these places are where God is often most clearly revealed.

events of recent days. Just then Jesus joins them on their walk, though they do not know the stranger is Jesus. (Luke, ever the clever writer, reveals the stranger's identity only to the reader.) Jesus asks the companions to fill him in on their conversation; in response, they say, "How have you not heard what has been going on?" They go on to tell him about Jesus of Nazareth—a prophet, they say, who performed amazing deeds but was crucified by local priests and other leaders. In a moment of deep grief, they tell the supposed stranger how they had hoped this Jesus had been the one to save their people—that is, the Israelites who had so long faced oppression and persecution. Revealing that word has spread about Jesus' resurrection, the companions tell the stranger of a recent rumor: some local women had visited the tomb of Jesus, only to find no body and instead angels proclaiming that he had risen from the dead.

At long last, the stranger (Jesus) responds to the companions' story. He asks a rhetorical question to remind them of Jesus' own foretelling of his death and resurrection. He then retells the story of Scripture, placing himself in the context of Israel's history.

Upon reaching their destination in Emmaus, the companions invite the stranger to stay with them, still uncertain of his identity but now strangely drawn to him. Jesus accepts the invitation and then shares bread and wine with his hosts. At the point of Jesus' breaking bread, the companions' "eyes were opened, and they recognized him." They suddenly understand who it was who had joined them on the road: the risen Lord Jesus. With this realization, they tell their story, noting that they discovered Jesus' precisely at the moment he broke bread with them.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we ended with the women ensuring Jesus' proper burial, which was to be performed following observation of the Sabbath. Today, the women discovered that Jesus' body was gone, for he had risen from the dead! We then met Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, where Jesus is revealed to them in the breaking of the bread. Next week, we will catch a glimpse into the newly-formed church. Unlike this week's unifying encounter with the resurrected Jesus over the breaking of the bread, next week's scene will begin in conflict—a reality not foreign to today's church.

Opening Prayer

Begin your gathering by checking in with the question, "How was God revealed to you this week? Or, in what places or times did you long for God to be revealed to you this week?" When all are ready, open with the following prayer:

Gracious God, we give thanks for the witness of the women at the tomb and Cleopas and his companion at Emmaus. As we study their witness, open our eyes to see you among us: in our study of Scripture, in one another, and in our community. In the name of the risen Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Into the Story

Discuss both or one of these questions, depending on whether you are doing one or both stories today:

Luke 24:1-12

- ❓ In your own experiences and traditions of Easter Sunday, what do you expect to see? At church? At home? (i.e., brass choir, Easter egg hunts, ham.)

Luke 24:13-35

- ❓ How, where, and when do you most often “see” Jesus?

Bible Connections

- ✚ The two men in dazzling clothes offer an unmistakable connection to the Transfiguration story (Luke 9:29-30).
- ✚ The Emmaus story is reminiscent of the Lord’s appearance to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15).
- ✚ At the breaking of the bread, Luke alludes to the first meal in the Bible (Genesis 3:6-7).

Learning the Story

In Luke 24:1-12 we follow several women to the tomb of Jesus, where they do not find what they expect to find. Then, in Luke 24:13-35, we join Cleopas and his companion on the road, where they are joined by the risen Jesus; the journeyers’ eyes, however, cannot immediately recognize him.

Read Luke 24:1-12 – An Unexpected Discovery

- ❓ How do you think the women felt as they entered the tomb?
- ❓ How do you imagine you would feel if you heard the angelic men’s story about Jesus’ resurrection?
- ❓ The apostles did not believe the women’s story. Have you ever shared a miraculous story no one believed?
- ❓ Peter needed to see the empty tomb for himself. Can you relate to this need for proof of God’s presence? If so, how have you found (or not found) the proof you have needed?

Read Luke 24:13-27 – An Unexpected Traveler

- ❓ The story does not say what kept the companions’ eyes from recognizing Jesus. What do you think it might have been? Talk about a time when your emotions have kept you from recognizing signs of God’s presence.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Images of God

The writers of Scripture use metaphors and image to discuss who and what God is. Many of these images arise in the Psalms, such as a shield (Psalm 3:3; Psalm 119:114), a rock (Psalm 18:2; Psalm 42:9), and a shepherd (Psalm 23:1; Psalm 80:1). Other images include fire (Deuteronomy 4:24) or an eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11). Isaiah uses the image of a mother multiple times (Isaiah 42:14, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 66:13). Jesus refers to God as Father (Luke 11:2). God is not fully explained by any of these images, but each reveals something about God and about God’s relationship with us.

- ❓ The companions allude to Jesus as a “prophet.” What is a prophet? How is this both an accurate and incomplete description of Jesus?
- ❓ Jesus retells the story of Scripture to the travelers, teaching them how the Scriptures relate to the Messiah (himself). What do you think he said? How do you think he told this story?

Read Luke 24:18-35 – An Unexpected Meal

- ❓ Cleopas and his companion invite the stranger, whom they do not know is Jesus, to stay with them. Why do you think they offered this invitation? When have you extended or received such hospitality to or from a stranger?
- ❓ Jesus breaks bread with his new traveling companions. How does this meal sound familiar? How does it sound entirely new?
- ❓ Cleopas and his companion only recognize Jesus when he breaks bread with them. What do you think it is about the breaking of the bread that makes them finally understand?
- ❓ What do these stories say about seeing (or not seeing) Jesus? How can you relate to these stories?

Living the Story: Worship

Whether you gather for one or two weeks for this lesson, center your Spiritual Practice time around the song “Wait for the Lord” from the Taizé Community in France. Look online for the music using the search term “Taizé Wait for the Lord.” As you will see, the song is simple and is intended to be repeated many times.

Before entering your time of singing, invite participants to reflect quietly and write down the ways they have seen God revealed—or the ways they are waiting for God to be revealed in their lives or in your community. Once you begin singing, you may wish to invite participants to share these things aloud between verses or remain in silence.

Repeat the song for at several minutes, as time allows. In the hustle and bustle of Easter Sunday, savor this contemplative time to reflect on the ways God has been and will be revealed among you.

Closing Prayer

Close your gathering with “popcorn” prayers, inviting participants to call out names, places, and times when they recognize God among them. Respond to each naming by saying together,

You are with us. God, we give thanks for the ways you are revealed to us:
 (...names/places...) Open our eyes to see you in these places and more, today and in the days to come. In the name of the risen Jesus, we pray. Amen.

At Home

- ✝ Share in a meal at a local meal service location, whether by serving the meal or by simply joining your neighbors. Look for signs of God as you break bread with your neighbors.
- ✝ Just as God is revealed to you in unexpected places, open yourself to being a sign of God's love to others. How can you share an unexpected sign of life and hope with someone each day this week?
- ✝ Today's stories emphasize Jesus' identity as the fulfillment of Scripture. Return to stories in the Old Testament to help you more deeply understand who Jesus is in light of this broader context. As one idea, read Isaiah 61:1-11.

Daily Readings

Sunday – Read Luke 24:13-35

Jesus is revealed to two traveling companions on the road to Emmaus. Pay attention to the strangers you encounter today, opening yourself to the ways Jesus might be revealed to you through them.

Monday – Read Luke 24:36-49

The risen Jesus reveals himself to the other apostles and calls them to stay until they receive power from God. Today reflect on something you are waiting for and write down your thoughts and feelings about your waiting.

Tuesday – Read Luke 24:50-53

The Ascension of Jesus. Now that the body of Jesus is no longer physically on earth, how can you still see him around you?

Wednesday – Read Acts 1:1-11

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit's presence among the apostles following his return to the Father. At the end of your day, write down or tell someone one way you say the Spirit's presence in your life.

Thursday – Read Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

The apostles elect Matthias to replace Judas as a leader among them. Encourage someone to be a leader today—perhaps a colleague on a project or a young person at your church.

Friday – Read Acts 3:11-26

Peter speaks in Solomon's portico about Jesus' place in the history of Israel. Today, give thanks for our common ancestry with persons of Jewish and Muslim faiths. Pray for your Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers.

Saturday – Read Acts 4:32-37

Believers share their possessions as one of the first indicators of Christian community. Today, determine one gift you can give away and one you can receive—either in your congregation or in your community.