

Easter Sunday, Year B (March 31, 2024): You Are Looking for Jesus

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants share, “What is your favorite memory of Easter Sunday?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Mark 16:1-8](#).

- Who were the women mentioned in Mark 16:1, and why did they go to the tomb? [Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome (Mark 16:1). They went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices.]
- Why did the young man inside the tomb say Jesus was not there? [Because he had been raised (Mark 16:6c).] How would you have reacted if you had heard that?
- Why do you think the young man inside the tomb mentioned Peter in Mark 16:7? [Perhaps so Peter would know Jesus' resurrection, considering Peter's denial of Jesus during the crucifixion events.]
- The Easter Preaching Notes mentioned:
 - Then Mark says an odd thing. He says they (the women) ran. In terror and amazement, they ran. And they said nothing. To anyone. The end. Most scholars agree this is Mark's original ending. **Silence, fear, and awe.** And running away. The early church didn't like that ending, so it gave us a more comfortable certainty in the verses that follow. But why would Mark do such a thing? Leave the story so unfinished? Because yours is unfinished too. Think about it. Mark is telling the story to people who knew that Jesus was alive, yet he says they told no one. How did the word get out? How did the word get past the stone of their fear? He rolled away the stone. Even the stone of our inadequacy. **Their silence wasn't the final word. God's hope was the final word.**
- What are your thoughts on the comment above?
- In what ways does the resurrection of Jesus impact our faith today? How does the resurrection message provide hope and assurance in the face of fear and uncertainty? How might you live in light of the resurrection?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, we thank You for the incredible hope we find in the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. As we leave this space, empower us to live as witnesses of this transformative message. Amen.

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 7, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Walk in the Light

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Have you ever been in a completely dark place without any light to orient you? Were you by yourself or with someone else? If you were with someone else, did that help you feel more secure? Why do you feel that being with someone else may be helpful or not?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Acts 4:32-35](#) and [1 John 1—2:2](#).

- The reading from 1 John affirms that our relationships with God and one another are related. Can you remember a time in which your feelings of sadness or anger about someone affected your time in church, your interactions with others, even with someone who had nothing to do with your problem?
- Confession is an ancient practice of the church. In some churches, congregants confess to a priest or a spiritual leader. There is a prayer of confession in the Order of Worship for Holy Communion of The United Methodist Church. A modern practice encourages us to examine our day and give thanks or ask God for forgiveness. Have you practiced any of these means of grace? In what way is confession helpful in your growth as a Christian disciple?
- “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2, NRSV). The reading for today invites us to confess but also gives us hope in God’s love. How do you feel knowing that if we confess, God’s love will be available?
- The readings of the Lectionary for today point us to the importance of being in a community. We need one another to support, encourage, and learn. In Acts 4:32-35, the church shared everything, even possessions. In modern times, individualism and privacy are prevalent. In fact, in some places, people do not speak to strangers, even in the church. But the readings today are an invitation to examine our values.
 - In what ways do you think you may show the Christian values of hospitality, generosity, companionship, and support in your personal life?
 - How can these values be applied in the church? Name specific ways.
- One of the comments we often hear from people who do not attend church is, “Why should I come to church if people act so badly and seem to be fighting with one another all the time?” Although the comment can be an excuse not to take Christian teachings seriously, do you think that the application of the values mentioned can help change the attitudes of some people? What can be your contribution to help others see your church as a welcoming place?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of mercy, we confess that we do not always live our lives free of anger, sadness, and other feelings. Help us to come to you to overcome our limitations; guide us, as members of this congregation, to lead Christian lives that invite others to learn about Jesus, our Savior, and all his teachings. In his name, we pray. Amen.

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 14, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Purify in Hope

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, "What did you learn from your family about how to dress for church, theatre, other social gatherings? Were there rules practiced all the time, or only when you had visits at home?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Luke 24:36b-48](#) and [1 John 3:1-7](#).

- Both the Gospel lesson as well as 1 John mention the presence of a new era. It began with Jesus' resurrection. In the Gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples. In the epistle, the writer refers to hope based on our faith. What is the difference between these two experiences? Do you need to see or experience something to accept it?
- How did you begin to come to church? Did you come with your family or a friend? When and how did you begin to feel that the church and your relationship to God by your faith in Jesus was important?
- The epistle mentions purification and sin: "No one who abides in him sins" (1John 3:6, NRSV). This is a difficult verse. The key word may be "abides," which can also mean "living in union with Christ." Sometimes that union gives us an inner assurance that helps us avoid some situations. At other times, somebody or something (a hymn or song, an object) helps us choose between options. Have you ever had that kind of experience?
- How important do you feel faith and hope are to live according to your values? In what ways do you want to be your best self before God?
- What are ways to abide in Christ? How do you try to maintain your communion with God in your daily life? What helps you to be reminded to act according to your values?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, we want to abide in you and live our lives according to the faith we have in Jesus Christ. Help us to maintain our hope and faith in the midst of changes, temptations, and discouragement. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 21, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Abide in Christ

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, "What do you do when you see people asking for money or when you see homeless men or women?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 10:11-18](#) and [1 John 3:16-24](#).

- Do you know people you would describe as generous? Why? What are the characteristics of a generous person?
- One of the most difficult things to do is to decide whom to help and how to help others, particularly if you do not feel you have that much. How do you decide? What are specific ways to help others? Give away what you do not use, share something you made or cooked, volunteer somewhere, contribute to some cause?
- The reading of the Gospel today describes Jesus as the good shepherd "who lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11, NRSV). What relationship do you see between that verse and generosity? Does generosity include sacrifice?
- 1 John 3:18 says: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (NRSV). What is the difference between loving in word and loving in action? Can you eliminate one of them? How important is speech in love? How do you express your love in action?
- According to our reading in 1 John, Christ abides in us when we are obedient in love for others and when we live as Christ lived. If you examine yourself based on this principle, are you a loving person? Do you see your group, your church, and your community as good examples of love in the world? If not, what specific needs to be added? A program that serves children, youth, adults with special needs, or the homeless?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, there is so much need in the world that some days, it is overwhelming. Help us to be loving and generous Christians with a generous attitude wherever we can help. Show us ways to act or express love to anyone who needs a kind word or a generous gift. Amen.

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Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 28, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Bear Fruit

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to you when you hear the word “fruitful”?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 15:1-8](#)

- Who is “the true vine” and “vinegrower”? [Jesus is the true vine, and God is the vinegrower. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower” (John 15:1).
- What happens to branches that do not bear fruit? [“He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit...” (John 15:2a).]
- “Abide in me as I abide in you,” verse 4a, is translated in different ways. “Abide” was defined as “remain” (Common English Bible), “dwell” (AMPC Amplified Bible, Classic Edition), and “stay joined to me” (Contemporary English Version).
 - Which translation of the word do you prefer and why?
- The Preaching Notes for April 28 say, “There is also a warning – watch out for pruning. Not because of being cut off so much as being left out. We always read this as judgment, and it is. But the real power of the image is that what is pruned misses the vitality of connection; you miss the verdant life offered; you miss out on the sustenance and strengthening and the glory of growth and life and joy. And you miss the opportunity to produce fruit.”
 - What does it mean to you that we need to “watch out for pruning”?
- Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5a). How might you be more fruitful in your life and your church as his branch? Are there things you can do this week to abide more in Jesus?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, we come before You as branches seeking nourishment from Jesus, our true Vine. Help us to abide in Him, so that we may bear abundant fruit that glorifies Your name. May our lives reflect Your love and grace to all around us. Amen.