

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible at the center of your group. Place beside it a lighted candle and a loaf of sweet-tasting bread for breaking and sharing at the end of your session.

LEADER: Jesus, like your disciples on the way to Emmaus—

ALL: We recognize you in the breaking of bread.

LEADER: Like your disciples gathered in Jerusalem—

ALL: We welcome you into our midst as our guest.

LEADER: Open our minds to the scriptures—

ALL: That we might remember and live your words in our world.

Jesus' crucifixion ends the story his disciples thought they were living by following him. They believed Jesus was Israel's long-awaited messiah, but his death seemed to disprove that.

His resurrection begins a new story. It is a new day of creation, an eighth day. Small wonder that fear, amazement, doubt, questioning, confusion mix together in Luke 24, the chapter on Jesus' resurrection appearances.

Luke writes about A.D. 85. The Church has been telling Jesus' new story and handing it on orally for more than 50 years. Luke explains in his opening verses that many have written orderly accounts of the

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events that have been fulfilled among us, that were handed down by eyewitnesses and servants of the word. He has investigated everything carefully from the very first and writes so friends of God can know the truth. For Luke, Jesus' story is one of fulfillment.

Our time also calls for some recalibrating of who God is.

Some people cling to past certainties. Many disaffiliate from institutional religions. Church scandals have sent

many Catholics into the ranks of the non-affiliated. Others retreat from doctrines built on worldviews people today no longer hold.

Some of us stay and seek fresh insights in dialogue with science, technology, and other religions. For example, we recognize that evolution doesn't conflict with faith, that God is more than we previously imagined, not static and fixed.

God's creative love unfolds in the cosmos dynamically from inanimate to living and conscious creatures. It's a

wow and a wonder. God addresses us as much from the future as from the past, luring us toward all we can become.

My own faith in resurrection rests not only on the gospel testimony of the first witnesses but my experience of being with my mother in her last days. Her spirit became increasingly transparent in her body. This and creation itself keep me open to the impossible coming to be.

● How do you express your faith in the resurrection, that something new is possible?



GOSPEL

The risen Jesus brings peace.

NARRATOR 1: The two disciples returned to Jerusalem and explained to the eleven and those gathered with them what had happened on the road to Emmaus and how Jesus was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

NARRATOR 2: While they were still speaking about all this, Jesus himself stood among them.

JESUS: Peace be with you.

NARRATOR 1: They were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.

JESUS: Why are you so shaken? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; it is really I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I have.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus showed them his hands and feet. In their joy his followers were still disbelieving and amazed.

JESUS: Have you anything here to eat?

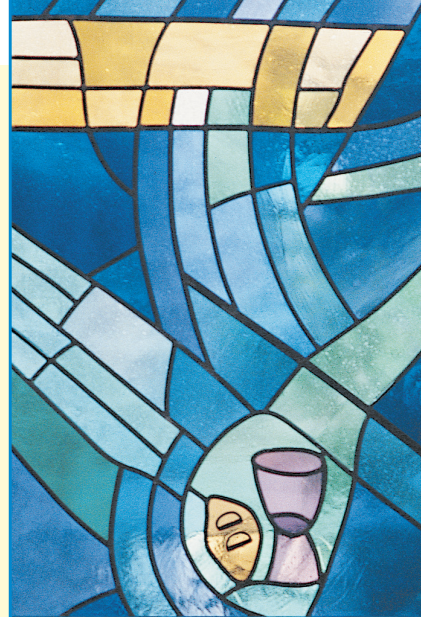
NARRATOR 1: They handed him a piece of broiled fish, which he took and ate before them.

JESUS: This is what I told you while I was still with you—that all the things written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and psalms must be fulfilled.

NARRATOR 2: Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

JESUS: Thus it was written and so it happened that the messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. In his name, repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24.35-48



handed over to sinners, crucified, and on the third day rise (24.6).

The women do indeed remember Jesus' words, which

shows that Jesus taught them along with the men disciples. The women rush to tell the eleven and the rest of Jesus' disciples, but the apostles regard the women's witness as "an idle tale" (24.11).

Luke's second Easter story focuses on two disciples walking home to the village of Emmaus. They are remembering and talking over all that happened to Jesus. When a stranger asks what they are talking about, the two tell how Jesus was delivered up and crucified, how they hoped he would redeem Israel, how the women's report amazed them.

The two disciples don't recognize the stranger is the risen Jesus, accompanying them. The stranger calls them foolish and slow of heart, remembering and reinterpreting for them what the prophets say about the messiah. "Was it not necessary that the messiah should suffer these things to enter into his glory?" the stranger asks.

In this story Luke reflects the experience of the

Remember what Jesus taught.

The three Easter stories in Luke 24 build toward the verses we read this Sunday, in which the risen Jesus appears to the whole company of his disciples. In each story disciples are remembering Jesus' teaching and reinterpreting the apparent failure of his crucifixion in light of the unfolding news of his resurrection. A lot happens between dawn and evening the first Easter.

In Luke's first Easter story, Jesus' women disciples Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women go to the tomb early on the first day of the week with spices to anoint Jesus' dead body properly. They find the stone at the door of the tomb rolled back and the tomb empty. Two men appear and invite them to remember that Jesus told them he would be

Christian community after Jesus' resurrection. As Jesus' followers continue to use Israel's scriptures in worship, they hear them in a new light. Jesus fulfills the scriptures in ways they do not expect. Jesus is the stone the builders reject that becomes the cornerstone (Psalm 118.2). Jesus is the suffering servant in the prophetic poetry of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 53).

Not until Jesus blesses and breaks bread with them do the



two disciples recognize him. Then they remember how their hearts burned within as they listened to the stranger on the road. The process of remembering and trying to understand events stirs their deepest hopes to new life. We continue this process each time we wrestle with the meaning of the scriptures for ourselves.

- **What do you most often remember about what Jesus taught?**
- **Where do you go with your questions about God? With whom do you reflect?**

Luke's third Easter story is Sunday's gospel. It begins with the two disciples reporting their encounter with Jesus. The whole company of Jesus' followers has assembled. The Eleven are there, including the amazed Peter, who went to see the tomb for himself after Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James reported their experience. The women are there, their report no longer an idle tale. In the midst of sharing their experience, the risen Jesus appears, greeting the community with peace and stretching their capacity to take in his presence.

In this scene this larger company sees Jesus' wounded hands and feet, watches him eat, and hears him explain his teaching that he must fulfill the scripture. He calls them to be his witnesses. He invites them to touch his body with its wounds. He eats fish. Both actions show the risen Jesus is also the human Jesus.

After he eats, Jesus again reinterprets scripture as he did for the two on the road to Emmaus. Jesus insists, "All the things written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and psalms must be fulfilled" (24.44).

Two verses later Jesus affirms a third time the order and divine plan Luke wants us to see fulfilled in the events of Jesus' life. "Thus it was written and so it happened that the Messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day" (24.46).

The Center for Applied Research at Georgetown University finds Jesus' resurrection the item most frequently marked very important in their survey of American Catholics. Which items below are very important to you?

Jesus' resurrection	73%
Helping the poor	67%
Mary	64%
Sacraments	63%
Prayer	46%
Opposition to abortion	40%

Christians still keep Sunday by gathering, remembering Jesus, interpreting events in our world in the light of scripture, and breaking bread together as he asked. In small Christian communities Christians gather to interpret their lives and events in the world in the light of scripture.

- **What touches you most in these appearances of Jesus risen?**
- **When have you found Jesus alive in the midst of the Christian community with whom you open the scriptures and break bread?**
- **How Easter centered is the story that you tell about Jesus?**

FIRST READING

Jesus' disciples witness his resurrection.

The first Christian community forms in Jerusalem. Luke tells their story in the Acts of the Apostles, the sequel to his gospel. Their story continues Jesus' story.

In Acts Luke writes sermons, which he puts in Peter's mouth, that interpret what Israel's scriptures say of a messiah who suffers. We hear Peter's second sermon in Sunday's first reading. Peter and John visit the temple in midafternoon. A lame man asks for alms, instead Peter heals him, then sits down, and teaches the people who gather around. He proclaims God has raised up the prophet whom the people rejected. Faith in him heals and forgives sins.

In his sermon Peter refers to Jesus as the "Holy and Righteous One." This continues Luke's characterization in his gospel of Jesus as a righteous and innocent man. Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent of any crime (Luke 23.14). The good thief recognizes Jesus is innocent of any crime and asks Jesus to remember him when

he comes into his kingdom (23.42). The centurion supervising Jesus' crucifixion says after his death, "Certainly this man was innocent."

Sunday's gospel leaves off with Jesus' call to his disciples to become witnesses of his resurrection and to preach repentance to all nations. In Acts Peter and the other disciples fulfill Jesus' commission. They invite people to change their minds and accept Jesus as the messiah, God's Son. They insist the God of Israel's ancestors glorified Jesus, whom they call God's servant.

Turn to God and be forgiven.

Peter said to the people, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified Jesus, God's servant, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, who had decided to release him.

But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God

fulfilled what God had foretold through all the prophets—that the messiah would suffer. Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

Acts 3.13-15,17-19

● What do you say about Jesus to people who know nothing about him or his teachings?

PRAY

Identify a way your reflection together has opened the Sunday scriptures and made them nourishing for you. Share this with your group. Then bless and share the sweet-tasting bread.

LEADER: Jesus, you promise to be the guest of all who call on your name. We find you among us as we open the scriptures for one another.

ALL: We share this bread as a sign of the nourishment you give us.



Break off a piece of bread for the person beside you and pray, "May you be nourished by the scriptures."

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DO SOMETHING

CHARITY **JUSTICE**

- Plan an Earth Day activity for your parish. Connect with interested teens.
- Participate in Earth Day clean-ups in local parks.
- Work with young people in a parish gardening project.

KEEP EASTER ALIVE!

Go to goodgroundpress.com to download *Celebrate Easter*, prayers and practices for the seven weeks of the Easter season.