



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

23 APRIL 2017–11 JUNE 2017

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 A: New Testament*, available through Herald House.

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, spiritual practices, 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.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 22

23 April 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: John 20:19–31

Lesson Focus: Faith is a journey of doubt and trust which transforms belief into kingdom-building action.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on experiences of resurrection hope.
- explore how the focus scripture passage relates to personal faith journeys.
- consider what it means to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Poster paper or large writing surface and markers

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 20:19–31 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 64–65, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Spend a few moments at the beginning of this session reflecting on the experiences of Easter Week. Respond to one of the following questions as a large group, in small sharing groups, or on Response Sheets.

- How have you witnessed or experienced resurrection hope in the past week?
- Who is someone in your life who most embodies resurrection hope? Explain.

Read or sing verses one and two of “The Risen Christ” CCS 477.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Even though John’s Gospel was written many years after Jesus’ resurrection, it remains a powerful witness to all that transpired. It clarifies many of the author’s concerns for the early struggling church. Today’s passage provides an example of individuals coming to belief in the midst of fear and doubt.

Read John 20:19–31. On large poster paper, flip chart, or erasable writing surface, make two columns. At the top of one column write “Particular,” and at the top of the other column write “Universal.” In the “Particular” column, make a list of important elements from the passage and discuss the significance at the time of the occurrence. Then, in the “Universal” column, discuss the broader, universal understanding of the particular element, and how it applies to circumstances today. You may choose to assign small groups of two or three a “Particular,” have them discuss the “Universal,” then share with the larger group.

Example:

Particular

Jesus came and stood among the disciples who were hiding behind locked doors. They had not seen the Risen Christ and were in fear of what might happen to them.

Universal

We can experience divine peace amid our fears and uncertainties. Sometimes this happens in unexpected ways.

For further reflection, read and discuss the following scriptures and questions.

John 20:19–23

- “Peace be with you” was a typical Jewish greeting, but here it represents fulfillment of Jesus’ promise.
- “So I send you.” The Resurrection was not just an individual and private religious experience. It was a reality that involved a mission to the world. It represents a continuation of God’s mission in sending Jesus and of Christ’s mission.
- “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The breath of Jesus, in this passage, is like the Pentecost experience recorded in Acts. Jesus speaks words which comfort, encourage, and strengthen the disciples.
 - What examples do you see today of disciples “hiding” as a result of fear, doubt, or uncertainty?
 - What are the “locked doors” we sometimes hide behind?

John 20:24–31

- John’s Gospel is the most graphic in its account of the Crucifixion. It is the only one with nails, blood, and a spear. In this passage, Thomas cannot believe in the Resurrection without personal witness of Jesus’ wounded body.
- “My Lord and my God.” The original Gospel account ended with this climactic note suggesting to the reader that it is God who has become incarnate in Christ. (Most scholars consider chapter 21 was

added after the original composition of the main body.)

- “[T]hat you may come to believe...” directly addresses the reader and signals a shift from an account to a summary of the intent through the Gospel’s witness “...that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”
 - In what ways can doubt increase one’s faith?
 - How have you (or someone you know) struggled with doubts and uncertainty on your journey of faith, but then come to a place of trust and belief?
 - How did this transformation take place?

3 RESPOND

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

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 reconcile and restore 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.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*,
3rd Edition, p. 7

- How does your concept of Zion compare with sharing the peace of Jesus Christ as reflected above? In what ways are they the same or different?
- What does it mean to “share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions”?
- How is sharing the peace of Jesus Christ reflected in specific congregational ministries?

4

SEND

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

We proclaim Jesus Christ, yet we can also doubt, just like Thomas. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” For John, to believe in the promises of God through Christ is to trust the healing, saving action of God in the world and live as if it were true. Belief leads to action.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a (see Response Sheet) and prayerfully consider how you would complete the statements which follow.

I long for divine peace in the midst of

I will share the peace of Jesus Christ with

by

5

BLESS

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

Read or sing verse four of “The Risen Christ” CCS 477.

LESSON 22 RESPONSE SHEET

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

23 April 2017

How have you witnessed or experienced resurrection hope in the past week? Who is someone in your life who most embodies resurrection hope? Explain.

John 20:19–31 (NRSV)

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen

the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Read the following passage and prayerfully consider how you would complete the statements which follow.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a

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.

I long for divine peace in the midst of

I will share the peace of Jesus Christ with

by

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 23
30 April 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:13–35

Lesson Focus: God reveals God's self to ordinary people.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences of invitation and hospitality.
- discuss sections of the focus scripture passage.
- explore connections between themes from Luke's passage and Community of Christ understanding of discipleship, scripture, sacrament, and mission.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Luke 24:13–35 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 66, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Share responses to the following question in groups of two or three, or with the larger group.

- When have you experienced the Risen Christ through simple acts of invitation and hospitality? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Luke 24:13–35. Form three small discussion groups, and give each group one of the following passages. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. Luke 24:13–25
 2. Luke 24:25–27
 3. Luke 24:28–35
- What happened in this part of the story?
 - How does this part of the story influence the lives of believers?
 - What do you understand in a new way this Easter?

3 RESPOND

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

The story of Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke's Gospel. This story of the Risen Christ's revelation to disciples contains important themes for disciples today. With the same three discussion groups, assign one of the following themes. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem is filled with lessons about being a disciple. It represents following Jesus as The Way. In today's passage, Jesus meets the two disciples on a road going away from Jerusalem.

- What is significant about this journey compared to Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem?
- What is significant about this journey moving away from Jerusalem?

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d reads: "Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple."

- What connections can be made between this counsel and the above theme from Luke?
- How does this passage and Luke's passage challenge disciples in Christ's mission?

2. Luke makes a point that Jesus interprets the meaning of scripture revealed through him. It is the beginning of disciples understanding scripture through the lens of the Risen Christ.

- How does the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus change the way we interpret scripture?

Affirmation One of "Scripture in Community of Christ" (see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 25) reads: "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)."

- How does this statement affirm what Jesus reveals to the disciples on the road to Emmaus?
- How does this statement and Luke's passage uphold the importance of responsibly interpreting and faithfully applying scripture?

- How does this statement, as well as Luke's passage, shape an understanding of the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation?
3. Only when Jesus breaks bread with the disciples do they recognize him, which points to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- What blocks our ability to recognize the Risen Christ?
 - How have you experienced the Risen Christ through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

Community of Christ has received the following counsel: "You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body" (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d). "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" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b).

- How does this counsel connect with the theme from Luke?
- In what ways do this counsel and Luke's theme connect sacraments with mission?

4 SEND

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

Prayerfully consider how you would complete the following prayer statements. Make this part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Living God, thank you for the ways you are revealed in...
Help me to know your Living Word as I...
As a blessing of your love and peace, I will share...
Amen.

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing verses three and four of "The Risen Christ" CCS 477.

LESSON 23 RESPONSE SHEET

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

30 April 2017

Luke 24:13–35 (NRSV)

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was

talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The story of Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke's Gospel. This story of the Risen Christ's revelation to disciples contains important themes for disciples today.

1. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem is filled with lessons about being a disciple. It represents following Jesus as The Way. In today's passage, Jesus meets the two disciples on a road going away from Jerusalem.

- What is significant about this journey compared to Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem?
- What is significant about this journey moving away from Jerusalem?

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d reads: "Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple."

- What connections can be made between this counsel and the above theme from Luke?
 - How do this passage and Luke's passage challenge disciples in Christ's mission?
2. Luke makes a point that Jesus interprets the meaning of scripture revealed through him. It is the beginning of disciples understanding scripture through the lens of the Risen Christ.
- How does the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus change the way we interpret scripture?

Affirmation One of "Scripture in Community of Christ" (see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 25) reads: "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)."

- How does this statement affirm what Jesus reveals to the disciples on the road to Emmaus?

- How do this statement and Luke’s passage uphold the importance of responsibly interpreting and faithfully applying scripture?
- How does this statement, as well as Luke’s passage, shape an understanding of the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation?

3. Only when Jesus breaks bread with the disciples do they recognize him, which points to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
 - What blocks our ability to recognize the Risen Christ?
 - How have you experienced the Risen Christ through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper?

Community of Christ has received the following counsel: “You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d). “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” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b).

- How does this counsel connect with the theme from Luke?
- In what ways do this counsel and Luke’s theme connect sacraments with mission?

Prayerfully consider how you would complete the following prayer statements. Make this part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Living God, thank you for the ways you are revealed in...
 Help me to know your Living Word as I...
 As a blessing of your love and peace, I will share...
 Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 24
7 April 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: John 10:1–10

Lesson Focus: We are called and supported by the Good Shepherd but also sent to be a shepherd for others.

Objectives

The learners will...

- prayerfully reflect on Psalm 23.
- discuss the significance of metaphors in John 10:1–10.
- explore the invitation for disciples to respond as shepherds for others.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 10:1–10 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 67–68, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Read Psalm 23. As the passage is read, prayerfully consider the following:

- What words or phrases are most comforting to you?
- What do you hear in a new way this Easter?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today’s focus passage is referred to as the Good Shepherd speech. Read John 10:1–10 and discuss the following questions.

- How does this passage express the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

- What Enduring Principles (see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, pp. 12–14) are expressed through the relationship between shepherd and sheep?
- In what ways are shepherds both leaders and servants? What does this reveal about the ministry of disciples?
- How do these statements expand an understanding of following the Good Shepherd?
- How do these statements reinforce the importance of living as a disciple in community?

In this passage, the use of metaphor shifts from shepherd to gate. This is reinforced in John 14:6 when Jesus refers to himself as “the way, and the truth, and the life.”

- What is significant about this shift from shepherd to gate?
- How do you understand Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life?
- Discuss how this metaphor connects with Community of Christ’s mission statement: We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

3 RESPOND

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

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

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

“By entering the gate and following the Good Shepherd, we are brought closer to God and to one another.”

—*Sermon & Class Helps*,
Year A: New Testament, p. 67

4 SEND

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

As disciples of the Good Shepherd, we are called to be shepherds to others through invitation, hospitality, and witness of the peace of Jesus Christ. Prayerfully consider your response to the following statements of commitment. Make this part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

I will respond as a shepherd to others by...

I will invite _____ to abundant life in Christ.

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing verse three of “We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” CCS 301 as a shared commitment.

LESSON 24 RESPONSE SHEET

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

7 May 2017

Psalm 23—The Divine Shepherd

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

John 10:1–10 (NRSV)

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

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

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

"By entering the gate and following the Good Shepherd, we are brought closer to God and to one another."

—*Sermon & Class Helps*,
Year A: New Testament, p. 67

As disciples of the Good Shepherd, we are called to be shepherds to others through invitation, hospitality, and witness of the peace of Jesus Christ. Prayerfully consider your response to the following statements of commitment. Make this part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

I will respond as a shepherd to others by...

I will invite _____ to abundant life in Christ.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 25
14 May 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: John 14:1–14

Lesson Focus: Jesus represents a way of life for disciples in relationship with God and with others in Christ's mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- discuss themes found in John 14:1–14.
- explore the whole mission of Jesus Christ.
- respond in new ways to Christ's mission.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 14:1–14 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 69–70, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

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

Share in groups of two or three, or as a larger group, your response to the following questions.

- What do Jesus' words "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" mean to you?
- What has shaped your understanding of these words?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Jesus' words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," are part of today's passage, which is the beginning of what is known as the "farewell speech" in John's Gospel (*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 69). In today's passage, disciples then and today find words of comfort as well as words of commission.

Read John 14:1–14 and discuss the following themes. You may choose to form four smaller groups to discuss each theme and share insights, or discuss together as a larger group.

1. **“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.”**

The word for “house” is better translated as household or family, not building. “Many dwelling places” indicates room for all, Jews and Gentiles.

- How has this been represented literally in Christian beliefs?
- What is the meaning of God’s hospitality when this is understood as metaphor?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

2. **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

According to John’s theology, Jesus represents God. Jesus’ response to Thomas’ question is not to be understood as Christian exclusivism, where believers of other religions are doomed. Rather, it is the good news that all have access to the one and only God because of what God has done and revealed in Jesus Christ.

- How has this passage been misrepresented in Christian beliefs and practices?
- In what ways does this passage affirm or challenge your understanding of who Jesus is?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

3. **“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”**

Philip’s request to Jesus indicates how the disciples continue to hear Jesus’ words with a literal, earthly understanding. Jesus’ response to Philip again affirms John’s theology of Jesus’ unity with God.

- What does this passage reveal about the nature of God?
- How does this affirm or challenge your understanding of who Jesus is?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

4. **“...[T]he one who believes in me...will do greater works than these...”**

This is a message of hope to John’s audience of the early church. It is a prelude to the following passage which tells of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is both

a statement of commission to the disciples while on earth, and an invitation to the promise of eternal life.

- What are some of the “greater works” of the church then and today?
- What does this passage reveal about Christ’s mission?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

3 RESPOND

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

Christ’s Mission Is Our Mission

The kingdom was present in Jesus’ ministry as described in John’s Gospel. The first believers continued Christ’s mission by proclaiming the Living Christ, inviting all people into community, valuing the worth of each person, generously and compassionately meeting their needs, and pursuing justice and peace for everyone.

Our call is to reclaim that same vision and passion for the whole mission of Jesus Christ today through five life-changing, church-changing, and world-changing Mission Initiatives:

- **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*

“We will be a prophetic people characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ!”

—“We Share a Mission,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd edition, p. 9

- How have the Mission Initiatives articulated a new way of being as disciples? As a congregation or community? As a church?
- What new congregational ministries have resulted from embracing the Mission Initiatives?

- How can you reimagine old ways of being (old habits or old ways of doing church) to increase your capacity, or your congregation's capacity, to respond in Christ's mission?
- With whom are you called to share Christ's love and peace?
- What do you need to give up or take on to respond to the whole mission of Jesus Christ?

4 SEND

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

Make the Mission Prayer a part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s). Pay attention to how you respond in new ways to the following questions.

- How is the Holy Spirit calling you into new opportunities for Christ's mission?

5 BLESS

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

Recite together the Mission Prayer:

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

LESSON 25 RESPONSE SHEET

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

14 May 2017

John 14:1–14 (NRSV)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Themes and questions for discussion

1. **"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places."**

The word for "house" is better translated as household or family, not building. "Many dwelling places" indicates room for all, Jews and Gentiles.

- How has this been represented literally in Christian beliefs?
- What is the meaning of God's hospitality when this is understood as metaphor?

- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

2. **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

According to John's theology, Jesus represents God. Jesus' response to Thomas' question is not to be understood as Christian exclusivism, where believers of other religions are doomed. Rather, it is the good news that all have access to the one and only God because of what God has done and revealed in Jesus Christ.

- How has this passage been misrepresented in Christian beliefs and practices?
- In what ways does this passage affirm or challenge your understanding of who Jesus is?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

3. **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."**

Philip's request to Jesus indicates how the disciples continue to hear Jesus' words with a literal, earthly understanding. Jesus' response to Philip again affirms John's theology of Jesus' unity with God.

- What does this passage reveal about the nature of God?
- How does this affirm or challenge your understanding of who Jesus is?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

4. **"...[T]he one who believes in me...will do greater works than these..."**

This is a message of hope to John's audience of the early church. It is a prelude to the following passage which tells of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is both a statement of commission to the disciples while on earth, and an invitation to the promise of eternal life.

- What are some of the "greater works" of the church then and today?
- What does this passage reveal about Christ's mission?
- What is the invitation for disciples and communities in this passage?

Mission Prayer

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

Make the Mission Prayer a part of your personal
spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Pay attention to how you respond in new ways to the
following questions.

- How is the Holy Spirit calling you into new opportunities for Christ's mission?
- With whom are you called to share Christ's love and peace?
- What do you need to give up or take on to respond to the whole mission of Jesus Christ?

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LESSON 26

21 May 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: John 14:15–21

Lesson Focus: Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to continue in loving relationship with the community of believers.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences of the Holy Spirit.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- discover new ways of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in community.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for John 14:15–21 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 71, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Share in groups of two or three, or with the larger group, responses to one of the following questions.

- How have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- How have you witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of others? In your congregation or community? In the church?

Read or sing “Wa Wa Wa Emimimo” CCS 157 or “Come, Holy Spirit, Come” CCS 154 as a centering prayer for this time of learning and dialogue. Encourage the use of different languages affirming connection to the wider community through the Holy Spirit.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of lesson time)

Read John 14:15–21 and discuss the following as a large group or in smaller groups of two or three.

The first followers of Jesus struggled with their identity and community moving from the synagogue (place) to Jesus (mission). In his farewell speech, which begins in John 14, Jesus is preparing the community of believers to continue Christ’s mission of God’s divine purposes through the power of the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus offers three promises:

1. His followers will not be abandoned but will have the presence of the Holy Spirit (in Greek, Paraclete, from *parakletos* which means advocate or counselor) to comfort, encourage, and guide.

2. Jesus will return, which reconnects disciples with appearances of the resurrected Jesus.
3. Jesus promises divine peace. Rather than an absence of conflict (the peace the world gives), followers of Jesus live in mutual love and promote wholeness, justice, and right relationships in the midst of the struggles of life.

Form three small groups and assign one of the above promises to each group. Discuss the following questions as they relate to the promise, and share insights with the larger group.

- What does this promise reveal about the nature of the Triune God?
- What does this promise reveal about personal relationships to God?
- What does this promise reveal about relationships in community?

3 RESPOND

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

John's Gospel teaches disciples about being in relationship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, but the relationship is realized and lived in community. It is personal, but it is not individualistic. This is affirmed through Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Read the following statements and discuss the questions that follow in groups of two or three.

The Holy Spirit

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

- With which description of the Holy Spirit do you most identify? Explain.
- What connections can be made between this statement and John 14:15–21?
- Can the Holy Spirit be at work with individuals apart from community? Explain.

The Church

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and with

other disciples in service to the world. The church of Jesus Christ is made of all those who respond to Jesus' call. Community of Christ is part of the whole body of Christ. We are called to be a prophetic people, proclaiming the peace of Jesus Christ and creating communities where all will be welcomed and brought into renewed relationship with God, and where there will be no poor.

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

- With which statement about the church do you most identify? Explain.
- What connections can be made between this statement and John 14:15–21?
- Can a person experience the church apart from community? Explain.

Share insights with the larger group and respond to the following questions.

- Drawing from John 14:15–21 and the statements above, how would you respond to persons who claim they do not need to worship in a church to have a relationship with God?
- How can the church best respond to the growing number of people who identify as spiritual but not religious? What new expressions of ministry in your congregation have made, or can make, this possible?

4 SEND

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

Think about your ministry as a disciple or priesthood member. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions in quiet meditation, by writing on the Response Sheet, or by sharing in groups of two or three.

- How does your ministry find expression within the church?
- How does your ministry find expression outside the church?
- How is the Holy Spirit leading you to new expressions of ministry?

5 BLESS

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

Invite four individuals to each read a verse of "Holy Spirit, Come, Confirm Us" CCS 505 as a closing prayer.

LESSON 26 RESPONSE SHEET

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

21 May 2017

John 14:15–21 (NRSV)

¹⁵If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

The Holy Spirit

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

The Church

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and with other disciples in service to the world. The church of Jesus Christ is made of all those who respond to Jesus' call. Community of Christ is part of the whole body of Christ. We are called to be a prophetic people, proclaiming the peace of Jesus Christ and creating communities where all will be welcomed and brought into renewed relationship with God, and where there will be no poor.

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

Think about your ministry as a disciple or priesthood member. Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions in quiet meditation, by writing on the Response Sheet, or by sharing in groups of two or three.

- How does your ministry find expression within the church?

- How does your ministry find expression outside the church?

- How is the Holy Spirit leading you to new expressions of ministry?

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, ASCENSION OF THE LORD

LESSON 27
28 May 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 24:44–53/24:43–52 IV

Lesson Focus: Christ is proclaimed through the sacred story of scripture and the church.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on past, present, and future experiences with the Risen Christ.
- discuss the focus scripture passage.
- explore Community of Christ affirmations of scripture and connections to the focus passage.
- discover Christ's call through the sacred story of individuals and community.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.pdf (optional)

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 24:44–53 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 72–73, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

In the weeks of Easter, we have focused on passages from John's Gospel. Today's passage is the final passage of Luke's Gospel, which culminates with the ascension of the Lord. Spend a few moments reflecting on your

journey as a disciple and respond to one of the following as a large group, in small groups of two or three, or on Response Sheets.

- How has the risen Christ been revealed to you in the past?
- How is the risen Christ revealed to you in the present?
- How will the risen Christ be revealed in the future?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration
and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Read Luke 24:44–53.

The closing passage of Luke’s Gospel affirms the message found throughout the entire book: Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel. The Gospel closes with the Risen Christ commissioning his disciples to bear the good news to the world of what God has done in Christ. The community of Jesus’ disciples is called to be more than a support group for personal salvation and spirituality. It is called to continue the story of God’s mission to the world. The closing passage connects the past (Israel), the present (Jesus), and the future (the church), which is a foundational message for the author of Luke and Acts.

The disciples’ response to Jesus’ death included fear, loss, and uncertainty. In this passage, after the resurrected Jesus blessed and commissioned the disciples, and after the Ascension, the disciples respond in joy and blessing. The Greek word for “bless” literally means “to speak well of.” Jesus speaks well of his disciples, who in turn speak well of God. We are called to “speak well of” God by the way we live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Respond to the following questions as a large group or in small groups of two or three.

- What traditions (congregation, church, or broader Christian tradition) “speak well of” the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ?
- In what ways have you seen the Christian message represented in ways that did not “speak well of” God?
- Luke’s author records that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures. How has your mind been opened to the scriptures?
- What was Jesus revealing to the disciples about scripture in this passage?

3 RESPOND

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

Today’s passage reveals an important understanding of scripture. It is reflected in Community of Christ affirmations about scripture. These affirmations are found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd

Edition, www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.pdf. They reflect and expand our understanding of the Enduring Principle Continuing Revelation. Note to instructor: If possible, provide copies of “Scripture in Community of Christ” from pp. 25–26 of *Sharing in Community of Christ*. If time permits, read each affirmation and consider how it connects with today’s passage.

Read and discuss the preamble and following affirmations of scripture in Community of Christ.

Preamble

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.

- How does each affirmation reflect “Jesus opening minds of disciples” to understand scripture?
- How is the author of Luke’s message that Jesus is the fulfillment of scripture reflected in each affirmation?
- What is important for us to understand about responsibly interpreting and faithfully applying scripture?

4 SEND

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

We Share a Sacred Story

The sacred story is the unfolding drama of God’s reconciling work in the world. This story reveals God as the One who calls humanity into

relationship and who seeks the well-being of all creation. This revelation, first made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, continues in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. This library of books called the Bible roots the church in the sacred story and nurtures and informs Community of Christ's faith, identity, and mission to the world.

The story of God's transforming work in the world did not end with the testimony of the biblical writers. It continued in the life and witness of the whole Christian church, as well as in other places. The sacred story is the all-encompassing saga of God's redeeming action in the world. Generations of Christian followers have written new chapters to this continuing story. The sacred story, as found in scripture and in the larger Christian tradition, anchors and nurtures our understanding of ourselves and our call. Our unique identity includes claiming our place within the wide circle of those who in every time and place have called on the Lord

Jesus Christ. With them, we continue to write new chapters to the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, p. 10

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Reflect on these questions as part of your daily spiritual practice in the coming week.

- How have you been shaped by the sacred story of Jesus and his love?
- How are you being called to continue the sacred story in your life as a disciple? In your congregation? In your community?

5 BLESS

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

Read or sing "God, Whose Grace Redeems Our Story" CCS 570 to close this time of learning and sharing.

LESSON 27 RESPONSE SHEET

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, ASCENSION OF THE LORD

28 May 2017

Spend a few moments reflecting on your journey as a disciple and respond to one of the following questions.

- How has the risen Christ been revealed to you in the past?

- How is the risen Christ revealed to you in the present?

- How will the risen Christ be revealed in the future?

Luke 24:44–53 (NRSV)

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,

beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Scripture in Community of Christ

Preamble

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.

We Share a Sacred Story

The sacred story is the unfolding drama of God’s reconciling work in the world. This story reveals God as the One who calls humanity into relationship, and who seeks the well-being of all creation. This revelation, first made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, continues in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. This library of books called the Bible roots the church in the sacred story and nurtures and informs Community of Christ’s faith, identity, and mission to the world.

The story of God’s transforming work in the world did not end with the testimony of the biblical writers. It continued in the life and witness of the whole Christian church, as well as in other places. The sacred story is the all-encompassing saga of God’s redeeming action

in the world. Generations of Christian followers have written new chapters to this continuing story. The sacred story, as found in scripture and in the larger Christian tradition, anchors and nurtures our understanding of ourselves and our call. Our unique identity includes claiming our place within the wide circle of those who in every time and place have called on the Lord Jesus Christ. With them, we continue to write new chapters to the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, p. 10

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Reflect on these questions as part of your daily spiritual practice in the coming week.

- How have you been shaped by the sacred story of Jesus and his love?

- How are you being called to continue the sacred story in your life as a disciple? In your congregation? In your community?

DAY OF PENTECOST/ ENDOWMENT SUNDAY

LESSON 28

4 June 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Acts 2:1–21

Lesson Focus: The Holy Spirit strengthens the church for mission.

Objectives

The learners will...

- express personal understanding of the Holy Spirit through hymns.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and connections between Jesus Christ and the church through the Holy Spirit.
- explore Community of Christ understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Acts 2:1–21 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 74–75, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Passover. In the Christian tradition, Endowment Sunday is celebrated fifty days after Easter. It signifies the Holy Spirit’s endowment of the church.

Form three small groups and assign each one of the following hymns. Read the verses and discuss the following questions. Share with the larger group.

“Breath of the Living God” CCS 43

“Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart” CCS 48

“Wind upon the Waters” CCS 49

- How does this hymn describe the Holy Spirit?
- What images or phrases in this hymn best express your understanding of the Holy Spirit? Explain.
- What images or phrases, if any, challenge your understanding of the Holy Spirit? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

For the author of Luke and Acts, the Holy Spirit is present in the life and work of Jesus in Luke and the church in Acts. "The promise of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 that people would be baptized by the Holy Spirit and by fire is fulfilled in today's text. The Spirit that descended on Jesus (Luke 3:22) now descends on the disciples giving power to the church. Just as Jesus began his ministry filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples are beginning their ministry filled with the Spirit."

—*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 74

Read Acts 2:1–21 and discuss the following questions as a large group or in small groups of two or three.

- The Holy Spirit is described as a rush of wind (from the same word as spirit and breath) and tongues of fire (representing divine energy). How have you experienced the Holy Spirit as "breath" or "divine energy"? How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
- Describe a personal or community experience when you were filled with the Holy Spirit.
- In this passage, all who were present could understand the experience of the Holy Spirit in their own way. Some who were skeptical thought those speaking in different languages were drunk. When has the Holy Spirit disrupted your life? Your congregation or community? The church? What change, if any, occurred as a result of this disruption?
- Peter's proclamation to the crowd in this passage was the first public Christian witness. When have you witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of another?

3 RESPOND

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

In the same three small groups formed in the Gather section of this lesson, have each group discuss one of the following passages. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. "Community of Christ believes in the Holy Spirit. We experience the Spirit's revealing, redeeming, restoring, renewing presence in our midst. The Spirit, who through the prophets called Israel to walk justly,

is calling us to the same path today. The Spirit poured out on Jesus is calling us in his name to make real today God's vision of the world that will be."

—Anthony J. Chvala-Smith,
Understanding the Way, Revised Edition, pp. 39–40

2. Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

—Doctrine and Covenants 10:6

3. Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe. That Spirit is even now touching alive the souls of those who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within. Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e, 3b

- How is the Holy Spirit described in this passage?
- What does the passage reveal about Community of Christ identity and beliefs?
- What is the call to disciples and to the church in this passage?

4 SEND

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

The Holy Spirit fulfills Jesus' promise to his disciples that he will return and they will not be abandoned. We are to hear the same promise of comfort and challenge today. Prayerfully consider your response to the following statements. Make these prayer statements part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Like a rushing wind, the Holy Spirit is challenging me to live Christ's mission by...

The Holy Spirit is breathing new life in me by...

I see the Holy Spirit at work in my congregation or community when...

5 BLESS

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

Select a phrase or verse from the hymn discussed previously in this lesson that best expresses your understanding of the Holy Spirit. Close by inviting each person to share their selected phrase or verse.

LESSON 28 RESPONSE SHEET

DAY OF PENTECOST/ ENDOWMENT SUNDAY

4 June 2017

Acts 2:1–21 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and
glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the
Lord shall be saved.'

Responding to the Holy Spirit in Community

In the same three small groups formed in the Gather section of this lesson, have each group discuss one of the following passages. Discuss the questions which follow and share insights with the larger group.

1. "Community of Christ believes in the Holy Spirit. We experience the Spirit's revealing, redeeming, restoring, renewing presence in our midst. The Spirit, who through the prophets called Israel to walk justly, is calling us to the same path today. The Spirit poured out on Jesus is calling us in his name to make real today God's vision of the world that will be."

—Anthony J. Chvala-Smith,

Understanding the Way, Revised Edition, pp. 39–40

2. Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

—Doctrine and Covenants 10:6

3. Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe. That Spirit is even now touching alive the souls of those who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within. Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e, 3b

- How is the Holy Spirit described in this passage?
- What does the passage reveal about Community of Christ identity and beliefs?
- What is the call to disciples and to the church in this passage?

The Holy Spirit fulfills Jesus' promise to his disciples that he will return and they will not be abandoned. We are to hear the same promise of comfort and challenge today. Prayerfully consider your response to the following statements. Make these prayer statements part of your daily spiritual practice throughout the coming week(s).

Like a rushing wind, the Holy Spirit is challenging me to live Christ's mission by...

The Holy Spirit is breathing new life in me by...

I see the Holy Spirit at work in my congregation or community when...

TRINITY SUNDAY

LESSON 29

11 June 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 28:16–20

Lesson Focus: Disciples go forth in mission with the confidence that Jesus goes with them.

Objectives

The learners will...

- reflect on different descriptions of the Triune God.
- discuss themes from the Great Commission and compare with recent counsel to the church.
- explore new opportunities for living Christ's mission.
- write a modern-day version of the Great Commission.

Supplies

- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 28:16–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, pp. 78–79, available through Herald House.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

In the Christian liturgical calendar, the first Sunday after Pentecost is Trinity Sunday. It invites the church to reflect on what it means to believe in the Trinity or Triune God.

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond

understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

—“We Share Basic Beliefs,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

Share responses to the following questions as a large group or in small groups of two or three. Note: the Trinity is a complex theological idea. Encourage all to respond however they are comfortable. Accept all responses without discussion.

The following have been used to describe the Trinity or Triune God:

Father, Son, Holy Spirit
God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer
Lover, Beloved, All Loving
Giver, Gift, Giving

- With which description do you most closely connect? How does it describe the nature of God?
- How would you describe the Trinity to a new disciple? How has it been described to you?
- In what ways are we limited by language in describing the Trinity?

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of lesson time)

Today's passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel is known as the Great Commission. Although it is a brief passage, it contains important themes for all disciples. Read Matthew 28:16–20. Discuss the following themes and compare with recent counsel to Community of Christ. You may choose to form four small groups to discuss each and share with the larger group.

1. **Go:** Being a disciple of Jesus involves active and intentional engagement in Christ's mission of invitation.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 162:7d.

- What is the invitation to disciples in this theme?
- How is this theme supported through Doctrine and Covenants 162:7d?
- How is this theme expressed in Community of Christ Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives?

2. **All nations:** Rather than political boundaries or countries, all nations means cultural and ethnic groups, strangers, or people considered as "other."

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a.

- What is the invitation to disciples in this theme?
- How is this theme supported through Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a?
- How is this theme expressed in Community of Christ Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives?

3. **Make disciples:** Making disciples includes baptism and confirmation, but also includes teaching.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c.

- What is the invitation to disciples in this theme?
- How is this theme supported through Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c?
- How is this theme expressed in Community of Christ Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives?

4. **I am with you always:** Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to strengthen disciples in mission.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:7.

- What is the invitation to disciples in this theme?
- How is this theme supported through Doctrine and Covenants 162:7d?
- How is this theme expressed in Community of Christ Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives?

3 RESPOND

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

Read Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–f and discuss the following questions.

- What connections can be made between this passage and the Great Commission?
- How are the above themes from the Great Commission expressed in this passage?
- What is the commission to disciples and the church today in this passage?
- What opportunities abound in your community for disciples to respond in Christ's mission?

4 SEND

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

Write a modern-day version of the Great Commission. To whom is it directed? What are disciples commissioned to do today? How would it be delivered?

5 BLESS

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

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11–13, Paul's commission to the saints in Corinth, as a closing blessing.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

LESSON 29 RESPONSE SHEET

TRINITY SUNDAY

11 June 2017

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

—“We Share Basic Beliefs,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14

The following have been used to describe the Trinity or Triune God:

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Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer
Lover, Beloved, All Loving
Giver, Gift, Giving

Matthew 28:16–20 (NRSV)

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Go: Being a disciple of Jesus involves active and intentional engagement in Christ’s mission of invitation.

Doctrine and Covenants 162:7d

The call to respond is urgent. Look to the needs of your own congregations, but look also beyond your walls to the far-flung places where the church must go. Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls also yearning for a spiritual resting place.

All nations: Rather than political boundaries or countries, *all nations* means cultural and ethnic groups, strangers, or people considered as “other.”

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a

Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

Make disciples: Making disciples includes baptism and confirmation, but also includes teaching.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c

Let the educational and community development endeavors of the church equip people of all ages to carry the ethics of Christ’s peace into all arenas of life. Prepare new generations of disciples to bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems of poverty, disease, war, and environmental deterioration. Their contributions will be multiplied if their hearts are focused on God’s will for creation.

I am with you always: Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to strengthen disciples in mission.

Doctrine and Covenants 161:7

The Spirit of the One you follow is the spirit of love and peace. That Spirit seeks to abide in the hearts of those who would embrace its call and live its message. The path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear, but the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and those who live the truth will know the hope and the joy of discipleship in the community of Christ. Amen.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–f

a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

c. Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

e. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration.

f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

Write a modern-day version of the Great Commission. To whom is it directed? What are disciples commissioned to do today? How would it be delivered?
