

Trust and Rejoice

When the greater-than-our-imagination Incarnate God greets us, “Peace be with you,” we are invited to receive God’s gift with trust and joy. With the psalmist, we lift our voices to God and proclaim, “In your presence there is fullness of joy!” Like the early followers of Jesus, we share this wonderful news with others.

Focus scripture: John 20:19–31

Let the hallelujahs from Easter Sunday this past week continue to be raised! For this week, the Easter morning story continues in John 20:19–31. The grieving disciples are fearfully gathered together later on the same day as when Simon Peter and “the other disciple” had seen the empty tomb after being summoned there by Mary Magdalene. And they have heard from Mary who, obedient to Jesus’ instructions, told them, “I have seen the Lord!” and shared his words “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Their direct encounter with the risen Christ results in joy and in the gifts of peace, the Holy Spirit, and a sending forth with responsibility and reminder of the power of forgiveness. For whatever reason Thomas was gone at the time, a week later he too receives the gift of direct encounter with the risen Christ. From this comes Thomas’ proclamation to Jesus, “my Lord and my God!” – profound words of faith, trust, belief. Even up to today, these events share patterns with how people’s joyful sharing of their encounters with Christ can result in others responding in a variety of ways – with joy, curiosity, doubt, derision...

For example, we hear Peter’s testimony in **Acts 2:14a, 22–32** seven weeks later in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival 50 days after Passover. This is in response to questions from the Jews “from every nation” who had witnessed the followers of Christ speaking in others’ native languages by the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s response about the life and resurrection of

Jesus as God’s Messiah includes the words of the prophet Joel and from **Psalms 16**, grounding his testimony in their shared scriptures, history, and heritage.

This psalm of King David is a prayer to God seeking protection and declaring fidelity to God and God alone. Part of the shared heritage with the psalmist for the disciples in the time of Jesus and for God’s people throughout time is the gift of gladness and joy as God is trusted to “show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy!”

And years later, after the first Easter morning, letters are being written to followers of Jesus who are scattered throughout regions of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. **1 Peter 1: 3–9** is the beginning of a letter attributed to Peter, with scholars varied in their opinions as to whether Peter, a scribe, or someone writing in Peter’s name actually penned it. This passage brings words of encouragement and love, a blessing! Many years later, people who did not personally encounter Jesus in the flesh are living in trust of the “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” This way of living as Christ followers is one of joy, even in the presence of alienation from the surrounding culture and the reality of suffering.

• • • • •

So today, as we hear the good news of Jesus’ life and resurrection from death, we are invited to trust God with our lives. Do you? And does doing so fill you with joy?



Focus scripture

John 20:19–31

Additional scriptures

Psalms 16

Acts 2:12a, 22–32

1 Peter 1:3–9

Dear God, open our hearts and minds to you and your presence. Help us to trust you with our lives. May we know your joyful presence in all of our lives. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week’s scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Young children rely on their senses to understand what is real. Their reality is what they can see, touch, hear, smell, or taste. Yet they also enjoy using their imaginations and hearing fairy tales. Older children are still open to wonder and imagination, and can be quite passionate about what they believe or don't believe, what is real and what is impossible.

On this first Sunday after Easter, some children may be wondering what really happened in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. As their ability to think abstractly

increases, older children can become more skeptical, questioning beliefs accepted earlier. They may connect with Thomas in his questions and his desire to see things for himself.

Children understand that someone's presence can still be experienced even after that person has left the room or died as they remember special times they had together. These experiences help them understand the way in which Jesus is also with them. Pray that the children will experience the presence of the risen Christ deep down and all around them.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 20:19–31, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 59).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white, gold, or yellow cloth, candle, and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring a green plant in a pot.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song "As Long as We Follow/Na Nzela Na Lola" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Surprise Visitor](#)."
- ❑ **Feelings group:** resource sheet "[Surprise Visitor](#)" (p. 64)
- ❑ **Discussion group:** copy of section "[Thinking about the story](#)" (on bottom of p. 63)

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Easter zone:** recording of song "The Peace of the Earth" (#10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)
- ❑ **Community zone:** fabric squares (about 20 cm/8 in), fabric pens
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Peace Plaque](#)," plastic CD cases, ribbon
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** small boxes or gift bags, craft supplies, small toys, books, stickers, edible treats (individually packaged); contact community organizations that work with children (such as a women's shelter or a refugee centre) for list of needs and make arrangements for delivery of packages.
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Coded Message](#)"

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



Trust and Rejoice

Scripture

John 20:19–31

FOCUS To wonder about Jesus' presence with the disciples after the resurrection

Gather

Welcome the children and invite them to talk about their experiences over the Easter holiday. Explain that we are now in a new season in the church year, the Season of Easter.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and point out the new colour of cloth. Explain that today is the second Sunday in the Season of Easter, a time when we celebrate Jesus alive in a new way.

Lead the children in the ritual, inviting them to participate as indicated:

We light this candle to celebrate the light of God's presence in our lives.

(Invite a child to light the candle.)

During the Easter season we celebrate our new life in Christ.

(Invite a child to place the plant on the worship table.)

We are witnesses to God's love and light, as we follow Jesus, the risen Christ.

All: Alleluia!

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God,

we know you are here with us.

May we grow in love

as we follow the ways of Jesus. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to talk about what they did and saw during the Easter holidays. Comment on how we sometimes hear about things that other people have seen or done. Invite the children to think about times when they have heard the words, "I don't believe it!" or read about things that are hard to believe.

■ How do you decide if something is true or not?

Explain that in this week's story one of Jesus' friends, named Thomas, had to see for himself in order to believe something.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Review the events of Palm/Passion Sunday and Holy Week. (You could scan the headings from **Matthew 21:1–11** and **Matthew 26:14–27:61** to remember the stories of Jesus' last supper with his friends, his arrest, his trial and execution, and his burial in a cave tomb.) Review the story of Easter Sunday from **John 20:1–18** and the surprising news that Jesus was alive again in a new way. Explain that this week's story happens later on that same day.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Surprise Visitor](#)" to tell the story based on **John 20:19–31**.

Wondering questions Use some or all of the following questions to wonder together:

■ **What are the surprises in this story?**

■ **What happens to help Thomas believe that Jesus is alive again in a new way?**

■ **What questions do you have about this story?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Feelings group This group will have the opportunity to name the emotions and feelings that are described in the focus passage. Review the story on the resource sheet “[Surprise Visitor](#),” pausing after each paragraph for children to name feelings and emotions. As each of these is named write it on a piece of paper and place on the worship table.

Discussion group This group will have the opportunity to explore the story with their imagina-

tions. Use the section “[Thinking about the story](#)” (on the bottom of p. 63) to lead the discussion.

Reporting Invite the feelings group to name the emotions they named, and invite the discussion group to share a few of their thoughts and responses.

The Bible story and us

Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” Ask:

■ **In what ways can we share the gift of peace with others and with creation?**

Passing the peace Teach the children how to “pass the peace” according to your tradition. For example, shake hands and say, “Peace be with you” with the response, “And also with you.”

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Easter zone: Peace rhythms** Jesus gave the disciples the gift of peace. We too can share the peace of God. Invite the children to listen to the song “The Peace of the Earth” (#10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9). Then ask them to use their bodies to add rhythm to the song. Demonstrate the variety of sounds that can be made, such as slapping thighs, sliding hands together, open mouth cheek patting, snapping fingers, and tapping feet. Keep playing the song as the group accompanies the music with rhythm sounds. Then talk together about some of the things that help to make peace happen in our world.
- ❑ **Community zone: Banner** The followers of Jesus sensed with their whole selves that Jesus was with them again as they continued to share God’s love with each other. Distribute fabric squares and invite the children to use fabric markers to draw pictures of the ways that your church community shares God’s love. Tape the squares together onto a fabric backing to show the group what the banner will look like. Sew it together during the week.
- ❑ **Craft zone: Plaques** Like Thomas, we look for signs of Jesus’ presence in our world. Explain to children that one of the ways we can sense



Jesus’ presence is through a deep feeling of peace. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Peace Plaque](#)” and supplies and review the instructions together. Talk together about where the reminder plaques could be hung.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Service project** As followers of Jesus we are sent to share God’s love with others. Invite the children to make gift boxes or bags to give to children in need in your community, such as those who meet at a refugee centre or who are staying with their mothers in a women’s shelter. Have them decorate bags or boxes with craft materials and fill them with small toys, craft supplies, packaged snacks, and/or books. Talk together about who will receive these gifts and how the group will deliver the gifts to the organization that has been chosen.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Jesus’ message** Jesus’ sudden appearance in a locked room surprised the disciples. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Coded Message](#)” and invite children to solve the puzzle to recall how Jesus greeted the disciples. (Answer: Receive the Holy Spirit and peace be with you.) Then invite them to write coded messages on the back of their pages for their families to solve.



Bless

Gather around the worship area, light the candle again, and invite children to spend a few moments in silence looking at the flame.

Sing if possible, the song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Lead the children in the following simple breath prayer. Begin by breathing in and out, slowly and

deeply. Read each line slowly and quietly. Repeat the prayer several times.

As you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be..."

As you breathe out, say silently, "with you."

Then, as you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be..."

As you breathe out, say silently, "with me."

Blessing Offer the following blessing: "God's peace goes with you."

Reflect

How did the activities and conversations seem to deepen the children's sense of knowing deep within the peace of the risen Christ? How do you validate their questions and doubts as an important part of the journey of faith?

Thinking about the story

Say: Imagine that you were hiding in that room with the disciples when Jesus suddenly appeared.

■ **How would you feel? What would you want to do?**

Say: Jesus breathed a special breath and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

■ **What do you think that means?**

Say: Thomas missed seeing Jesus that first time.

■ **What questions do you think he asked about that?**

Say: We are still reading this story thousands of years after it was written.

■ **What would you like to tell someone today about this story?**





Surprise Visitor

(based on John 20:19–31)

Use your whole body to tell
this story of wonder
and surprise.

On the morning of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. She was surprised to find the stone rolled away from the entrance and the tomb empty! She reported this wonder to other followers of Jesus.

Later that day, in the evening, the disciples were gathered in a house behind locked doors. They were afraid that the religious leaders would come after them, now that Jesus had been killed. Suddenly Jesus was standing in the middle of the room, yet the doors had not been unlocked.

“Peace be with you,” said Jesus. Then Jesus showed them the scars on his hands and feet from the crucifixion. The disciples were overjoyed to see Jesus. They blinked their eyes to make sure Jesus was really there. Again, Jesus said, “Peace be with you. As God sent me, so I send you.”

As the disciples stood there, hardly able to believe what they were seeing, Jesus breathed on them. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” Jesus said to them, “it will help you follow in my way and do my work.”

Now when this happened, Thomas, who was also called the Twin and who was one of the twelve, was not with them. When he returned, they told him what had happened. In a jumble of excited voices, they announced, “We have seen Jesus.”

Thomas wasn’t sure what had happened. Their stories simply didn’t make sense. “Unless I see the scars on his hands and feet myself, I will not believe,” said Thomas.

One week went by. The disciples who had seen Jesus were still excited. Thomas still couldn’t believe what they were telling him. Then, again when the doors were shut and locked, Jesus appeared before them. Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” Turning to Thomas, Jesus said, “Look at my hands. Put your finger in this scar. Don’t doubt what you have heard, believe.”

Stunned, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus looked at Thomas, perhaps with a smile, and said, “You believed because you saw me. Imagine the joy of those who have not seen me and still believe.”

After this day, Jesus appeared many times to the disciples, but they are not written down here. These are written down so that you can believe that Jesus is the Messiah and have life in Jesus’ name.

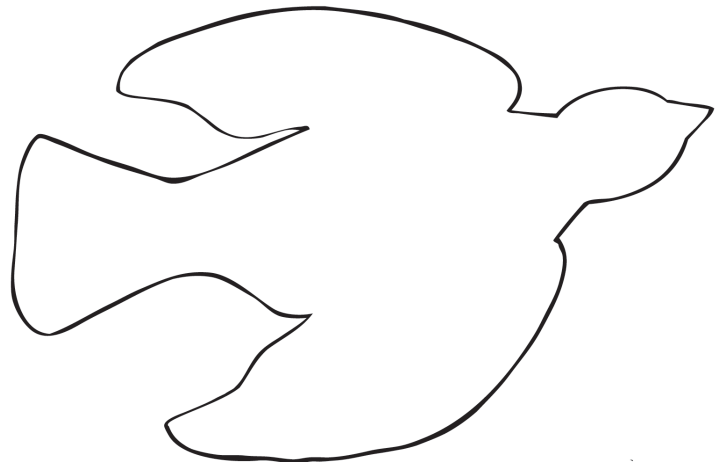


PEACE PLAQUE

Like Thomas, we also look for signs of Jesus' presence in our world. One of the ways we can sense that Jesus is still with us is through a deep feeling of peace. Make a plaque to hang as a reminder that Jesus' spirit of peace is always with you, helping you to live in God's way.

Directions:

1. Draw or cut out one of these symbols of peace and decorate it.
2. Open a plastic CD case and attach your symbol to the inside of the back cover, using rolls of clear tape on the undecorated side of the symbol.
3. Add a length of ribbon by taping an end to each side of the back cover.
4. Hang your plaque up at home or in the garden, as a daily reminder of Jesus' gift of peace.





**CODED
MESSAGE**

Find the letter to replace each number.

Then you will have a message from Jesus.

a = 4 b = 5 c = 6 d = 7 e = 8 h = 9

i = 10 l = 12 n = 13 o = 14 p = 15 r = 16

s = 17 t = 18 u = 19 v = 20 w = 22 y = 23

16 - 8 - 6 - 8 - 10 - 20 - 8 18 - 9 - 8 9 - 14 - 12 - 23

17 - 15 - 10 - 16 - 10 - 18 4 - 13 - 7 15 - 8 - 4 - 6 - 8

5 - 8 22 - 10 - 18 - 9 23 - 14 - 19

Write a coded message about Jesus for your family to solve. If you need more letters, add them and assign numbers to them.