

Body Language

Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of the day of resurrection, when Jesus breathed God's Spirit on them. We, like Thomas, are given that same Spirit the disciples received that first Easter Day. The risen Christ is with us always, showing us the path of life in God's ways and empowering us to witness to God's saving love.

Focus scripture: John 20:19-31

On the evening of the day of the Resurrection, the disciples are hiding behind locked doors. Now that the Passover is over, the leaders are free to act against them. (The reference to the "Jews" here means the religious authorities who brought Jesus to trial; those in hiding are Jews also.) Jesus unexpectedly appears, saying "Peace be with you." This traditional Jewish greeting is now forever transformed by the presence of the risen Christ. Christians, in the centuries since, have greeted each other in this way.

In an echo of the creation story, Jesus breathes on the disciples and God's Spirit is given. The word used for "receive" the Spirit is the same word used in Communion – "take" and eat. This is one version of the story of the giving of the Spirit – a quiet room, a small band of Jesus' friends. Acts 2 offers a different account – sound like a rushing wind, tongues as of fire, and voices so loud that people on the street could hear.

However this gift of Spirit – promised by Jesus in John 14:15–31 – is given, the effect is the same. Disciples are empowered to act in Jesus' name. They are sent out to preach the good news. They are given authority to announce forgiveness in the name of Christ and to warn the community of the danger of continuing in disobedient ways ("retaining sin"). God's Spirit empowers the community to bodily and boldly take on the ministry and mission of Jesus.

Thomas is not present at this meeting with Jesus – we don't know why – and Thomas wants to see for himself. Thomas is not a "doubter," as some later interpretations depict him. Earlier, Thomas called on the disciples to go with Jesus (John 11:16). The other disciples did not believe Mary Magdalene's

news of resurrection at first either, until they experienced it themselves. Perhaps an experience of the heart helps one accept the new reality of resurrection life.

A week later the disciples are again in the house. Is the first day of the week (Sunday) already being commemorated as the day of resurrection, a day when Jesus' followers gather to remember? Jesus comes with the same greeting of peace, and gives Thomas what he needs in order to believe. Thomas confesses his belief that Jesus is the risen Christ.

John concludes this passage with a statement of the purpose of this written record. These stories have been written so that all may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed saviour.

The reading from Acts 2:14a, 22–32 shows the transformation of the disciples from a frightened group in hiding to powerful witnesses to Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter preaches that Jesus completes the story of God's saving love. The resurrected Christ is the fulfillment of scripture. Peter quotes Psalm 16 in his sermon. God protects and gives counsel; in God's presence there is fullness of joy.

In 1 Peter 1:3–9, the writer gives thanks for the living hope that disciples receive through the Resurrection. Baptism is both a dying to old life and a rising to new life and hope. Like Thomas and the early Christians, we can believe and rejoice even though we have not seen the risen Christ with our own eyes.

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Jesus says to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe." Who has embodied faith for you? What would it mean for you – as an individual and as the church – to embody the ways of Christ?



May 1, 2011

Focus Scripture
John 20:19–31

Additional Scriptures
Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3–9

O God, we, like Thomas, were not in that room when Jesus first came among the disciples, breathing peace. Help us to know that the risen Christ is with us always. May we embody your grace and carry to a waiting world the good news of your saving love. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Perhaps you are concerned about how you will explain this incredulous story to the children. Not to worry. Children generally accept these wondrous stories with fewer questions than adults bring to them. After all, children take in information almost daily that seems amazing to them. How can a heavy plane stay up in the skies? Where does the water come from when you turn on a faucet or tap? Don't force them to ask questions of the story that they do not have.

Because the children do not question the story does not mean that they don't find awe and wonder in it. Two Respond zones provide a space for them to ponder this wonder. The quiet zone encourages the use of the breath prayer, while the simple activity of a coded message in the surprise zone gives them another opportunity to think about the words of Jesus to the disciples and to them.

Pray that the children in your group will extend their wonder of the Resurrection the weeks after Easter.

May 1, 2011



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 20:19–31, and biblical background material (p. 59). How do you experience the risen Christ?
- ❑ Also read "Prayer as Deepening Awareness" (p. 126). Prayer is a significant feature of these sessions during the Easter season. This article will help you think about helping children to pray.
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see "This Season, So..." on p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring songs "Alleluia" and "I Send You Out" (pp. 1 and 10–12 in *Music Section*, also #8 and #23 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Print the Easter gather words from "Gather Rituals" (p. 116) on newsprint.

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *white or gold cloth, pillar candle, matches, offering basket, and Bible*. Place *bookmark* at John.
- ❑ Display *Easter gather words* (p. 116).

- ❑ Bring *tall drinking glass, paper towel, and large bowl of water*.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "Surprise Visitor"*.
- ❑ For choral presentation group, bring *copies of today's resource sheet "Peace Be With You" and directions* (p. 62).

Respond

- ❑ **Outreach zone:** church members involved in ministries to others, such as food programs, visitation programs
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** poster "Lo the Green Blade Rises" and *directions*
- ❑ **Art zone:** *used or new CD cases, construction paper, decorative paper, ribbon, hot glue, and glue gun*
- ❑ **Music zone:** songs "Alleluia" and "Pass It On" (pp. 1 and 8 in *Music Section*, also #8 and #7 on *Seasons Music CD*)
- ❑ **Surprise zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Coded Message"*



Body Language

Scripture

John 20:19–31

FOCUS To rejoice with the disciples that Jesus is still with us.

GATHER

Welcome Greet the children as they arrive. Welcome children who have been absent or who are new. Introduce yourself to new children and them to the group. Invite everyone to join you at the worship table.

Song Light the pillar candle, noting that this is the Christ candle. Play the song “Alleluia” (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #8 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to sing it with you. During the song, have a child receive the offering.

Litany Lead the group in the Easter gather words (p. 116).

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

Connecting with the focus

Hard-to-believe experiment Show the children the glass and paper towel. Scrunch a paper towel

into the bottom of a glass. Pack it tightly so it will not fall out when the glass is turned upside down. Ask:

■ **Do you believe that this paper towel can stay dry when this glass is turned upside down in a container of water?**

After the children have talked about the question, fill the container with water, about two-thirds full. Turn the glass upside down and plunge it into the water. Submerge it for a few seconds. Then, slowly and carefully lift it straight up out of the water. Remove the dry paper towel from the glass.

How did this happen? The water could not get into the glass because it is full of air. The air cannot get out because it is lighter than water and cannot escape under the rim of the glass.

ENGAGE

Preparing for the story

Gospel of John Have a child get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Invite the child to read the name of the book of the Bible. Remind the children that the gospel of John is one of the books that tells the stories about Jesus.

The Bible story

Jesus returns Tell the story on today’s resource sheet “Surprise Visitor,” based on **John 20:19–31**.

Ask:

■ **What is the surprise in this story?**

Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Meditation group The children will recall the story as they think about the ways the people felt.

Invite the children to sit in relaxed positions, but not so relaxed they will fall asleep. Read the story again, pausing to ask these questions:

■ **After reading the second paragraph, ask: If they are behind locked doors, how do you think the disciples are feeling?**

■ **After reading the fourth paragraph, say: Imagine in your minds how you think the faces of the disciples looked when they saw Jesus.**

■ **After reading the fifth paragraph, ask: How do you think Thomas felt when he heard the others say that they had seen Jesus?**

■ **After reading the seventh paragraph, ask: What might Thomas be thinking when he sees the scars on Jesus’ body?**

■ **At the end of the story, ask: Many years later, when followers of Jesus heard this story, how do you think they felt?**

Choral reading group These children will prepare a choral reading that focuses on the Bible text. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Peace Be With You" and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "Peace Be With You."
- 2 Look over it. Notice that the "Reader" parts provide information to help you think about the story and when it was written.
- 3 Decide who will be the leader and who will be the readers. Combine parts, if necessary.
- 4 Practice reading it aloud together. Prepare to read it for the others.



Perhaps these children can present this reading in the service of worship.

The Bible story and us

Play the song "I Send You Out" (pp. 10–12, *Music Section*, also #23 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal for the children to gather together. Invite the children to present the choral reading. Ask:

- **How do you think the people who heard this story so long ago felt?**
- **How does it make you feel today?**

Accept a variety of answers to this question. Surely the people in the early church had a myriad of feelings.

3 RESPOND

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

- **Outreach zone: Sent out** In the Bible story, Jesus told the disciples that they were sent as God sent Jesus. Christians today are also sent out to show and tell God's love to others. Invite people from your congregation who have been sent out to work in food ministries or who visit people who are sick or confined to their homes. Have them describe what they do and why they feel called to minister in that way.

- **Quiet zone: Breath prayer** The spiritual practice of breath prayer is one that children as young as five can do. Display the poster *Lo the Green Blade Rises* so those children who wish can focus on it as they pray. Provide the directions below in this zone and situate it so the children are in a place where they will not be distracted, but can be observed by leaders.



- 1 The breath prayer is one you can pray anytime and anywhere. And no one needs to know you are praying!
- 2 Jesus' words to the disciples make a good breath prayer: "Peace be with you."
- 3 Practice breathing slowly and deeply. Breathe in and out three or four times to quiet your body.
- 4 Then begin the breath prayer. As you breathe in, think, "Peace be."
- 5 As you breathe out, think, "with you."
- 6 If you find it helpful, look at the poster *Lo the Green Blade Rises* as you pray.
- 7 Repeat this as long as you want.



Provide help for children who cannot read or find the directions difficult to follow.

- ❑ **Art zone: CD case art** Christians today also rejoice that Jesus' love is with us. Have the children make reminders of this joy. Provide construction paper or decorative paper for the children to cut out symbols of peace, using their own designs or patterns that you provide (see "Symbols of Peace" on p. 118). They can glue them to paper cut to the size of a CD case, which will become a frame for the symbol. Attach a ribbon hanger to the back of the CD case with hot glue.
- ❑ **Music zone: Songs of joy** The Gather song for these Sundays after Easter is "Alleluia" (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #8 on *Seasons Music CD*). While it is not a difficult song, the children will sing it more confidently if they have time to rehearse it. Sing it together several

times. Add clapping hands or slapping thighs to it. Then sing the third stanza of "Pass It On" (p. 8 in *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*). Help the children connect this stanza with the words of Jesus to the disciples.

- ❑ **Surprise zone: Coded message** Nothing could be more of a surprise than the sudden appearance of Jesus in the locked room. In this zone, the children will solve a coded puzzle. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Coded Message" and pencils. Some children may want to write a coded message for their families as suggested on the resource sheet, so provide additional writing paper in this zone. (Answer: Receive the Holy Spirit and peace be with you.)



Gather Play "I Send You Out" (pp. 10–12 in *Music Section*, also #23 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather in a circle around the worship table.

Sing the song "Alleluia" (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #8 on *Seasons Music CD*). Encourage the children from the music zone to sing enthusiastically and provide leadership for the others.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

God, we too are amazed at the presence of Jesus. We rejoice at this good news. Amen.

Blessing To a child next to you, say, "(Child's name), go out knowing that the love of Jesus is with you." Continue the blessing until each child and leader has been blessed.



Which children had questions about the appearance of Jesus? How did they accept Jesus' message, "Peace be with you"? If guests from the

congregation were present, how can you help the children thank them?



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 Be With You

A choral reading based on John 20:19–31

- Leader:** When 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 religious authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”
- Reader 1:** Peace: a place where there is no hostility or fighting.
- Leader:** Having said this, Jesus showed them Jesus’ hands and side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”
- Reader 2:** Peace: a state of harmony and understanding.
- Leader:** “As God has sent me, so I send you.” Having said this, Jesus breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in Jesus’ hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in Jesus’ side, I will not believe.” A week later the 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.”
- Reader 3:** Peace: freedom from upsetting thoughts and feelings.
- Leader:** Then Jesus 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.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!”
- Reader 4:** These words, “My Lord and my God,” are the most complete confession of Christ in the entire gospel of John.
- Leader:** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”
- Reader 5:** John’s gospel was written a long time after Jesus was on Earth, so this was good news to the first readers of the gospel, who did not have the opportunity Thomas had.
- Leader:** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the child of God, and that through believing you may have life in Jesus’ name.

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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

65 42 1 99 67 82 1 8 3 16 15 9 7 56

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

14
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0
0
0

1 4 65 42 21 0 8 68 94 6 91 9 1 48 0

Gather Rituals

Lenten gathering litany

(Place the purple cloth on the worship table.)

One: During Lent we think deeply about God and how we are living in God's ways.

All: And God is with us.

(Place the purple ribbon as a path across the cloth on the table.)

One: As we move through Lent, we ask questions of God and of ourselves.

All: And God is with us.

(Place six stones on the purple ribbon.)

One: During Lent, we hear and explore stories of journey, close relationship with God, challenge and opportunities, needs met, and strength.

All: And God is with us.

(Place six votive candles on the purple ribbon and light them.)

One: With every question and every story, we learn more about God and God's ways.

All: And God is with us.

Easter
gather
words

**In the Easter season,
we celebrate Jesus
alive in a new way.**

*(Invite the children to repeat each
line after you.)*

Together we show Jesus' love
to each other
And show Jesus' love
to the world.
We gather in love
to be the church.



Prayer as Deepening Awareness

By Michael Morwood

God, the Divine Presence, the Spirit of Life and Love – whatever names we use for this Mystery permeating and holding all things in existence – comes to visibility in the human reality we are. Prayer for all of us, adults and children, is the means we have to deepen awareness of this wonderful privilege. It is the means to deepen awareness that every human person shares the same privilege, regardless of race and religion. It is the means to deepen awareness that we are intimately connected and bonded with our planet, our universe and all that is in this Presence. It is the means to accept our responsibility for making the Presence of God visible and effective in the human species. Prayer is a way to express our commitment to give the best possible expression we can to this sacred presence. Prayer has to both encourage and challenge us: we pray to be better than we are.

Prayer is not about words addressed to an elsewhere God. Prayer is about reflecting on life and the interconnectedness of everyone and all things within God's presence. Prayer is an affirmation of this presence and of our dignity. Through prayer we express gratitude for life and for all that is good and beautiful in our lives. Our gratitude is not addressed to a listening deity. It has more to do with standing and facing life in a spirit of appreciation and gratitude and allowing this spirit of appreciation to shape who we are and what we do.

Prayer should also express our longings, joys, and fears. It should help us do what the great spiritual leaders throughout the ages assert is necessary for a worthwhile spiritual life: to be in touch with our inner selves. This cannot be done without periods of silence and reflection.

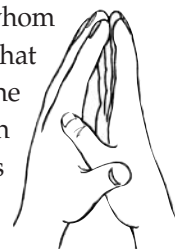
Prayer should steep children in the conviction that everything in the universe is inter-related and that the Divine permeates all that is. Prayer should lead us beyond our own personal concerns to contemplation of the Divine Presence everywhere and to the challenges such contemplation will inevitably raise. It will lead us to reflect on respect for other people, how we protect

the environment, our concern for economic and political injustice, our involvement in breaking down social and ethnic barriers, and our willingness to take action against the materialism and selfishness to which young minds are exposed.

The heart of Jesus' preaching to people was his ability to name everyday human activity as the arena of the Divine. Look at, reflect on your everyday activity, your visiting, being neighbour, feeding the family, sharing food – and start saying to yourself and convince yourself that this is what gives expression to the Divine Presence. Your loving and caring and generosity are indicators that this Presence is active in your life. So keep doing it, and make the "reign" of God visible in your families and in society. Be neighbour to all. That was Jesus' dream.

This is perhaps the greatest insight we can have about ourselves from contemplating the message of Jesus: we give human expression to whatever God is. Undoubtedly, Jesus would want children to learn from his insights. Here, then, is the key we are looking for in helping children to pray: keep naming and affirming everyday experiences of good behaviour as the Divine coming to wonderful expression in their lives. Keep telling children this good news and keep reminding them how privileged we all are to know this. Keep challenging them to show this Presence in all they do and say. What a solid grounding for a wholesome spirituality to take into their teenage years and beyond.

We can connect prayer with personal experience by encouraging children to talk about their daily lives. For example, what has happened, whom they have met, what did it feel like, what are they thankful for, and so on. The prayerful aspect lies in leading children to an awareness that the Spirit of God is present with and active in them in their everyday activities.



Children Praying a New Story: a Resource for Parents, Grandparents, and Teachers. Michael Morwood. 188 pages, 2009. Available from www.morwood.org. Used by permission.