

Three stylized birds in flight, colored in shades of brown and tan, are positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page.

Easter

ENCOUNTERS



SERMON SERIES GUIDE

Easter Encounters

Sermon Series

April 27- June 14, 2025

**Join us as we live out the Easter Resurrection
through the Holy Encounters of Christ**

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Resources:

ELCA Lectionary Year C

Prepared by Pam Miller, Adult Ministry Coordinator

April 27, 2025

Wounded Encounter

In spite of all we have heard and all we have seen, it is often hard to believe. Because it is hard to believe, we will invest ourselves in the Easter mystery for fifty days (a week of weeks). Because it is hard to believe, John the evangelist will provide sign after sign celebrating Jesus' victory over death. Because it is hard to believe, the risen Jesus will return to us again and again in the mystery of holy communion, inviting us to touch and taste his presence, and offering us his peace.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31

The unprecedented events of the day of resurrection continue as the risen Jesus appears to his fearful disciples. A week later, after Thomas worships Jesus, Jesus pronounces that the blessings of the resurrection are also for those who "have not seen and yet believe."

Daily Discipleship

John 20:19-31

Prayers of Discipleship: *To Believe With a Trusting Heart*

Focus Question: *How do you come to believe the Good News of the resurrection?*

word of life

“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.’” (John 20:27)

Read John 20:19-31

The story of “doubting Thomas” from the Gospel of John is the appointed reading every year for the Second Sunday of Easter; and rightly so. In a few brief verses, the disciples of every age come to know the implications of and the gifts bestowed through the resurrection of Christ – the gifts of peace (“peace be with you” vs. 19) and joy (“the disciples rejoiced” vs. 20); the gift of the presence of the risen Christ in the Holy Spirit (“receive the Holy Spirit” vs. 22); the gift of faith (“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” vs. 29); and the calling and mission (“as the Father has sent me, so I send you” vs. 21). All these gifts are expressed through the story of one who needed to see in order to believe – the disciple Thomas.

1. *What other gifts do we receive because of the resurrection of Christ?*
2. *What do you know about the disciple Thomas?*
3. *What does Thomas require in order to believe that Jesus is raised from the dead? Is this a reasonable request?*

Some would say that Thomas has been given a bad “rap” throughout the course of Christian history. Thomas simply desires what the other disciples have experienced; he wants to see living, unmistakable proof that Jesus – the same Jesus nailed to the cross and pierced by the soldier’s spear, the Jesus who died and was buried – has been raised from death.

4. *What “proof” or evidence can you give of Jesus’ resurrection?*

To focus solely on Thomas would be to miss the power of the message of the narrative. For the Gospel writer John, the experiences of the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost are all present in these verses. The risen Jesus stands among them and breathes on the disciples gathered (vs. 22) – evidence of life, evidence of God’s power to create life out of that which had no life (See Genesis 2:7 where God “breathed life” into the dust of the ground to create humanity.) The risen Christ gives them the Holy Spirit – the gift of Pentecost. (See Acts 2.) And the risen Christ gives the disciples their mission – “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (See the mission mandate spoken by Jesus at the Ascension in Acts 1:8.)

5. *When in our life of faith are we joined to the risen Christ, given the gift of the Spirit, and sent out in mission?*

The story concludes with a blessing for disciples of every time and place. Not all were present on that first Easter morning. Not all were able to physically touch the wounded hands and side of Jesus. But the story is told in order that those who hear it might come to believe; and in believing, might know life in Christ’s name (vs. 31).

Maybe the familiar saying is reversed. Perhaps it’s not, “Seeing is believing,” but rather, “Believing is seeing.” Through the eyes of faith, we see the presence of the risen Christ in our midst, giving us the gift of life, forgiveness, and peace, and sending us forth to tell the Good News!

6. *What are some examples of “believing is seeing?”*

word among us

Hands ... We use them quite a bit. It is said that you can tell a great deal about a person by their hands. The way someone shakes your hand; the rough, calloused hands of a manual laborer; the smooth, soft hands of a baby; the gnarled, arthritic hands of an elder worker – all tell us something about that person's work and life experiences.

1. *What are some other examples of how hands are used?*

Take a few moments to look at your hands.

2. *What do you see?*
3. *What do they say about you and your life experiences?*

As I look at my hands, I see a callous on my right middle finger where I hold my pen, a reminder that I spend time writing. I see two visible, constant reminders of two relationships in my life – my wedding band, and a ring given to me at my ordination as a pastor. I also see a visible reminder of prior work experiences and how fragile life is. There is a deep scar in the palm of my right hand – a scar from working on a piece of machinery on the farm. My whole hand – my whole arm – could have been caught in it; instead, just a deep scar as a constant reminder that life is a fragile gift.

On that first Easter evening, the grieving, fearful disciples were locked in a room. Suddenly, Jesus came and said, "Peace be with you." And then he showed them his hands. Just as our hands tell a great deal about ourselves, so too does Jesus' hands tell us a great deal about him. We see hands of healing giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and strength to the weak. We see hands that bless little children, that raise the dead, and that calm the troubled soul.

Most of all, we see wounded hands. The imprint of the nails of the cross on Jesus' hands is more than a mark of identification for the disciples. It tells of his love for them, and for us. His wounded hands reveal the price God paid to save us.

4. *What would it mean for you to look at the wounded hands of Jesus?*

Jesus came and stood among them and showed them his hands. To Mary Magdalene; to the fearful disciples; to those who doubted; to Thomas, who needed to see in order to believe; to the apostle Paul; to faithful followers – the risen Christ came; and he showed them his wounded hands. And he comes now and shows his wounded hands for our eyes of faith to see – in the breaking of bread, in hands folded in prayer, in healing hands of surgeons, nurses, and caregivers, in hands that reach out in concern for others, providing food for the hungry, offering care, comfort, and support, and guiding our work and our witness.

5. *Where do you see Christ's hands at work and present in your life?*
6. *How might you be used as the hands of Christ to extend care to those in need?*

Prayer

O risen Christ, grant us eyes to see your hands at work in our lives. Use us as your hands of love and care to those in need. Amen

Dig Deeper

Acts 5:27-32

last word

Look for examples of Christ's hands at work
in your everyday life.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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May 4, 2025

Breakfast Encounter

The disciples make a big splash and eat breakfast with the risen Jesus. Wading in the water (remembering baptism) and eating with Jesus (celebrating holy communion) is our weekly encounter with the risen Christ. Jesus asks us again and again: Do you love me? And Jesus invites us, again and again, to follow him, bringing the Easter life to others.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 21:1-19

The risen Christ appears again to his disciples by the sea where they were first called. After echoes of the fishing and feeding miracles, he gives a final reminder of the cost of a disciple's love and obedience.

Daily Discipleship

John 21:1-19

Prayers of Discipleship *To Love Jesus*

Focus Question: *Jesus asks you, "Do you love me?"*

word of life

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" John 21:15 (NRSV)

Read John 21:1-19

After Jesus rose from the dead, life for those disciples would never be the same. His appearances and conversations following his resurrection answered some questions but opened the door to many others. The disciples were walking on uncharted territory, living in a post-Easter world. Sometimes when life is turned upside down, people resort to doing what they know. In the case of Simon Peter, that meant fishing. Some of the other disciples joined him, but on that night no one caught anything.

1. *Does it seem strange to you for Peter to go fishing? Why or why not?*
2. *When the fishermen caught nothing, what story about Jesus did you recall?*

Jesus appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) where he first called Simon Peter to be his disciple. In a parallel story, Jesus advised the fisherman about where to cast their nets. Consequently, they caught many fish. (Luke 5:1-11) This time, Peter did not realize the fishing advisor was Jesus himself. It took the beloved disciple of Jesus to figure it out. Peter was naked, so he put on clothes and jumped into the sea. Meanwhile, the other disciples got into the boat.

3. *How do you explain the behavior of Peter?*
4. *How might Peter have been feeling as he encountered Jesus? (Remember Peter denied knowing Jesus.)*

Jesus proceeded to share a breakfast of fish and bread with his hard-working disciples. This was only the third time for Jesus to appear to the disciples, but nobody asked who he was. His identity was clear.

5. *Imagine that breakfast conversation. If you had been at that meal, what would you have asked Jesus?*
6. *How might that conversation been similar or different than previous breakfast conversations with Jesus?*

After breakfast, Jesus gave Simon Peter a pop quiz of three questions. The questions are brief and direct. After all, Simon Peter had been fishing all night. No doubt he was tired and perhaps frustrated from a night of catching no fish. In reality, Jesus didn't ask three different questions, but asked the same question three times. Jesus wanted to know, "Do you love me?" It is the type of question deserving a yes or no answer.

7. *Why ask the same question of Simon Peter three times?*
8. *What connection is there between this series of questions and Simon Peter denying Jesus three times?*

Peter affirmed his love for Jesus after each question. Jesus responded to Peter by giving him the following tasks, "feed my lambs", "tend my sheep", and "feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17). Jesus also foretold the type of martyr's death of Peter. It is not an easy call to follow Jesus.

9. *What does it mean to feed and tend to lambs and sheep?*
10. *If you and Jesus had this exchange, what would you be thinking or feeling?*

word among us

Eric had studied hard for his final examination of the year. He felt pressure because he had to pass this test. His future life and dreams were at stake. Slowly, he opened the booklet and discovered the same question on each of the three pages of the exam.

1. *What would you think if you had a test with the same question asked three times?*
2. *What would you tend to remember about that experience?*

Simon Peter denied Jesus three times just as Jesus had predicted. After the pain of the crucifixion and the joy of the resurrection, Jesus gives Simon Peter three opportunities to affirm his love. There are ministry and mission opportunities ahead for the disciples. Jesus has forgiven Simon Peter and wants him to move on with the tasks of feeding and tending to sheep. Simon Peter's three-time affirmation of love offsets his three-time denial of Jesus.

3. *How might the memory of Simon Peter's denial have hindered him in his serving Christ?*
4. *Does Simon Peter need to let go of guilt associated with his denial of Jesus? Why or why not?*
5. *What makes it difficult to forgive ourselves?*

There is a level of intensity with this exchange between Jesus and Peter. Rightly so. Jesus is asking Simon Peter directly to confess his love and his loyalty. The first question is broadest, "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15) Imagine to what "these" refers. Is Jesus pointing to the fish, the fishing boats, the disciples, or something else? Jesus knows Simon Peter well. He knows what would draw Simon Peter's loyalty and love.

6. *If Jesus would stand beside you and ask the same question, what would "these" mean?*
7. *What takes your time, energy, and your attention from Jesus?*

In the play and movie, *My Fair Lady*, "Liza Dolittle sings to the man courting her to not speak or sing of his love, but to show it. Words come easy, but is this suitor willing to back up those words with actions? She is tired of words, words, and words.

8. *How are we expected to show our love toward Jesus?*
9. *When it comes to love, which comes first – our words or actions?*
10. *How can we be consistent with our words and actions of love toward Jesus?*

This passage of love followed by the request to feed and tend to the flock is often read when a pastor is ordained and/or installed at a congregation. A pastor is asked to follow in the footsteps of Simon Peter and tenderly care for a flock.

11. *What are your expectations for a pastor to feed and tend to a congregation?*
12. *What happens if a congregation does not want to be fed or tended to?*
13. *How might a congregation take on some of the responsibilities to feed and tend to others?*
14. *What do you want to remember from this story?*

Prayer

Jesus, we hear your question about loving you. We hear it thee times. Please, hear our answer. Yes. Yes. Yes. We love you, now and forever. Amen

Dig Deeper: Psalm 30

last word

Ponder this question by Jesus,
"Do you love me?"

Be sure to ask yourself the question three times.



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May 11, 2025

Encountering the Voice

The gift of new life, of eternal life, is the gift of the risen Christ. It is the promise of Jesus. It was true for Dorcas in Joppa. It was true for those “who have come out of the great ordeal” in the Revelation vision. It is true for us and for all the baptized: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 10:22-30

Jesus responds to questions about his identity with the remarkable claim that he and the Father are one. Those who understand this are his sheep; they hear his voice, follow, and will never be snatched from his hand.

Daily Discipleship

John 10:22-30

Prayers of Discipleship *To Hear the Voice of the Good Shepherd*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to listen to Jesus?*

word of life

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28 (NRSV)

Read John 10:22-30

The Fourth Sunday of Easter has long been called "Good Shepherd Sunday". Typically, Psalm 23 is read or sung. As we savor the mystery and joy of the resurrection of Jesus, we are reminded of Jesus as savior, but also as shepherd.

1. *What do you know about sheep?*
2. *What does it mean to be a "good shepherd"?*

John is quite detailed in his description of Jesus in the temple during the festival of the Dedication, Hanukkah. The Jews gather around him to discuss his identity. They want a clear, precise, concise, and direct answer concerning his identity. Is he the Messiah or not? This is not the first time for the Jews to try to sort out his identity.

On previous occasions, Jesus has talked with them and backed up his words with actions. He has given sight to the blind, healed the sick, fed thousands, and proclaimed good news; but they cannot grasp his identity,

3. *What seems to be blocking the Jews from understanding Jesus as the Messiah?*
4. *Why do others more easily grasp the identity of Jesus?*

Since Jesus has already answered their questions, he speaks directly to them. "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." (John 10:25-26)

5. *How does one become part of the flock of Jesus?*
6. *Why would someone choose not to belong?*

Jesus describes what it means to belong to his own flock. His sheep know his voice and choose to follow. But Jesus is not the only voice vying for attention and listeners. His call may go unheeded as people chase after other shepherds. It is one thing to listen, but it is something else to listen and respond accordingly. This raises the question about listening skills and discerning. The Jews might have heard his words, but they did not respond with any kind of commitment or action. Jesus extends his call and voice, expecting people to follow him.

7. *How do we make sure we listen to the true and good shepherd of Jesus?*
8. *What does it mean to be known by Jesus?*

Jesus promises eternal life and safety, saying "No one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28) These are significant and desirable promises made by Jesus. They might serve as motivation for all who listen to really try to grasp the words of the one whom they question. Jesus makes these claims because he is one with God. Their unity cannot be denied. This connection to God only strengthens his claims and promises.

9. *How might the crowd have responded?*
10. *How do the words of Jesus carry more strength because of his unity with God?*

word among us

It is not unusual for tennis fans to applaud after a good point in a tennis game. At a junior tennis match, it was noted one parent had a unique rhythm in his clapping as he clapped for his son's good point. It was obvious to the crowd that the father wanted his son to hear his encouragement through his unique style of applause.

1. *How might that feel for a young tennis player to hear the rhythm of his father's clapping and realize his presence in the crowd?*
2. *How might the father feel, knowing he was able to add extra support and encouragement to his son?*

The congregation gathered for their annual spring picnic on the lawn of the church. Laughter filled the air as people waited in line for their food. Over the noise of the crowd, a child's shrill scream was heard followed by the sound of wailing. A young woman left her plate of food and quickly dashed to the scene. She looked back and said, "I recognize that cry. That's my child."

3. *How does a parent learn the cry of his or her child?*
4. *At what point does a child recognize the voice of a parent?*
5. *Any ideas why teenagers sometimes lose that ability to hear their parent's voice?*

Jesus is confident that his sheep hear his voice and respond. His voice must be unique enough to be clearly heard by all who listen, but there is the dilemma. What if a person is not in a relationship with Jesus? How would a person recognize the voice of the shepherd? Would it not be the voice of a stranger? Hopefully, those who grew up in church have the advantage of learning to listen to Jesus through Word and Sacrament.

Take a few minutes to reflect on those people in your life who taught you about prayer and listening to Jesus. Ponder their lives. Recall their stories about how and when they learned to listen to Jesus. Consider the patterns and rhythms in their own prayer life.

6. *Who are some of the people who taught you to listen to Jesus?*
7. *What have they taught you about prayer?*
8. *When it comes to listening to Jesus, what is important to know?*
9. *How confident are you to hear Jesus?*
10. *How might you increase your listening skills towards Jesus?*

Learning to listen to Jesus is a life-long process. Listening to Jesus serves as an anchor in this world. Hopefully, you are blessed by those in your life who take prayer seriously and encourage your prayer life to flourish. If not, seek out those who can nurture your prayer life. And also, take advantage of opportunities to encourage others in their prayer life and discernment skills.

11. *Who have you instructed on listening to Jesus?*
12. *What prevents you from doing more of this type of instruction?*
13. *How might you set aside this coming week for listening to Jesus?*

Prayer

Good shepherd, thank you for calling, caring, and extending eternal life. Open our spirits and hearts, so we might hear you. Amen

Dig Deeper:

Psalm 23

last word

Find a pastoral, serene setting and be open to listen to the good shepherd.



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May 18, 2025

Encountering Love

Easter initiates a new day. It anticipates a new heaven and a new earth. The risen Christ is making all things new. In the mystery of holy baptism God has made new people of us. Today Jesus invites us to see everyone in a new light—through the lens of love.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: 13:31-35

After washing the disciples' feet, predicting his betrayal, and then revealing his betrayer, Jesus speaks of his glorification on the cross. This deep complicated love of Jesus, even to death on the cross, will be the distinctive mark of Jesus, community.

Daily Discipleship

John 13:31-35

Prayers of Discipleship *To Love Another*

Focus Question: *How can I show my love for God by loving people?*

word of life

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” John 13:34 (NRSV)

Read John 13:31-35

On the night of his arrest, Jesus gathers his disciples together to celebrate the festival of the Passover. It is his last supper with the disciples. Not only had he taught them, but he had healed people, walked on water, and performed other miracles. They had learned much from him, but there was much yet to learn.

To show his love for the disciples and those whom they would be called to serve, Jesus knelt down and washed their dirty and dusty feet. (John 13:1-20) Cleaning feet was an act reserved for servants. Precisely. Jesus took the form of a servant and washed their feet.

1. *What would it have felt like to have your feet washed by Jesus?*
2. *What comes to your mind when you hear this passage?*

Jesus predicts the betrayal of one person at the table. This baffles the disciples; they try to determine who among them might do such a thing. They trust each other and their good intentions. Nevertheless, it is Judas who leaves that intimate scene to do just that.

After Judas leaves, Jesus shares some final words with his students. It is not a speech of gloom, but rather points to God's glory. The path of Jesus towards death and resurrection is a path which ultimately brings glory. Jesus knows the coming days will not make sense to the followers gathered in that room. It is too much for them to comprehend.

His words become tender as Jesus addresses them by calling them “little children.” As much as Jesus loves them, he knows he needs to leave them in order for God's glory to come to fruition. He alone must walk this path to his death and to resurrected life. The disciples may think they are ready to accompany Jesus, but he knows they are not yet ready.

3. *What does it mean for Jesus to call his disciples “little children”?*
4. *What does Jesus mean when he says “Where I am going, you cannot go”?*

Then Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment. It is short and easy to remember. Jesus mandates his disciples to love one another. That command might not seem too hard, until Jesus defines the standard of love. These very human disciples are to love as Jesus loves. That means washing the feet of people, forgiving others, and even giving one's life for them. His model of love is that of God.

5. *What does it mean to love like Jesus?*

Jesus knows people will be watching his disciples. Will they give up after Jesus is no longer with them? Is Jesus merely a fad? Jesus knows these disciples will be a positive witness to Jesus and his love if and when they love one another as Jesus loves them. Love like Jesus. It is a tall order, but those are the final words of Jesus to his disciples of every age.

6. *How do actions of students reflect their teacher?*

word among us

The principal of the high school stopped by the baseball field to see his team play in their first baseball game of the season. Having been a baseball player in high school and college, he was always eager for that first pitch of the season. But it was a painful game for the principal to watch. His high school team played horribly. The catcher couldn't catch the ball. Not at all. What a disappointment!

As the principal walked to the parking lot, he noticed the catcher staring at a flat tire on the player's car. That same catcher who couldn't catch the baseball was proving he couldn't change a tire either. The principal sighed and offered to help. As the principal rolled up his sleeves, he began to sweat in the heat of the day. The student protested, "No, you are my principal. You can't get dirty while changing my tire. This is not right."

But the principal kept on with his task, getting more sweaty and dirty with each passing moment. And in each moment, a special relationship between the principal and the catcher was being forged.

1. *How might that relationship between the principal and catcher change once they work together on the tire?*
2. *What are some other examples of a teacher or leader who reverses things by taking on the role of a servant?*
3. *If Jesus lived today, what parallel task of a servant might he have done, instead of washing feet?*

Jesus follows up his action of love by commanding the disciples to love another. Love, love, Love! It seems that is all Jesus talks about.

4. *Why does Jesus keep repeating this message of love?*
5. *What makes it challenging to love the people in your world?*

Just because someone, even Jesus, commands us to love, it just doesn't happen automatically. But clearly, Jesus places love as a high priority on his list. The standard is *his* kind of loving.

6. *How does the way Jesus shares love compares or contrasts with what is presented on television or in movies?*
7. *Who is teaching you to love like Jesus?*

Loving like Jesus becomes a powerful witness to Jesus. People can observe our behavior and learn something about Jesus and his way of loving.

8. *As people observe you, what might they learn about your teacher Jesus?*
9. *In what situation, do you best reflect the love of Jesus?*
10. *In what situations is it difficult to love?*
11. *Based on these insights, how might God assist you in loving like Jesus?*

Prayer

Loving Jesus, we hear your commandment to love. We are willing, but show us to live your love in a consistent, ongoing way. Amen

Dig Deeper: Revelations 21:1-6

last word

Write LOA on a piece of paper.
Use it to remind yourself to Love One Another.



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May 25, 2025

Encountering Healing

Visions abound in the readings for the sixth Sunday of Easter. Paul has a vision about what to do. John has a vision of what will be. Jesus provides visions of peace that surpasses human understanding and power beyond human imagination.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 14:23-29

As Jesus talks of returning to the Father, he promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach Jesus' followers and remind them of all that Jesus taught. Even more, those in whom God makes a home will experience a peace that overcomes fear.

Daily Discipleship

John 14:23-29

Prayers of Discipleship *To Keep God's Word*

Focus Question: *How do you show your love for God by keeping God's word in your life?*

word of life

Jesus answered, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." John 14:23 (NRSV)

Read John 14:23-29

Jesus continues his final instructions to his disciples at his last supper before his death. He has already washed the feet of his disciples and given them a new commandment to love one another. As a teacher who loves his students, Jesus gently prepares them for the time when he will not be with them. It is clear to Jesus that he needs to go and prepare a place for them.

But Jesus is committed to not leaving the disciples alone. Take a moment and read through John 14. Jesus explains with great compassion his expectations for his followers after he has departed. Again the theme is love, but with an emphasis on the fruits of love. He urges each disciple to keep his commandments as an expression of love. They are not obligated to do so, but love compels people to act in such ways to complement and reflect favorably on the loved one.

1. *How does following the commandments of Jesus help people to love?*
2. *How easy is it for humans to follow the commandments of Jesus?*

In John 14:23, Jesus makes a reference to his Father and himself making a home with those who keep the commandments. This Greek word used for "home" is used only twice in the New Testament and both times are found in John 14. First, Jesus uses the word in John 14:2 to express the heavenly dwelling places within his Father's house. In verse 23, Jesus uses the word to describe God settling in our lives while on this earth. Consequently, by using the same word, Jesus connects our heavenly home with God *and* God at home in us on this earth. Imagine, God setting up residence in your life.

3. *Describe what it means for God to make a home within you.*
4. *What does that type of home look like?*

Jesus teaches and expects those who love Jesus will bear fruit. In order to so, followers of Jesus need to stay close to his teachings and ways. But this teaching is not solely made by Jesus; instead he speaks on behalf of his Father in heaven.

5. *Is this a reasonable expectation? Why or why not?*
6. *How do the life and teachings of Jesus help clarify God's word?*

Jesus speaks to his disciples as one who has lived among them, sharing their joys and troubles of this life. But soon Jesus will depart from them. He knows that. Thus, his gift to them is the Holy Spirit, often called Advocate or Helper. They need not fear because they will not be alone. The Spirit will continue to teach, remind, encourage, and give them peace. Yet, the peace given is not a removal from troubled times. Jesus knows the coming days will bring agony and grief to his followers. He hopes his words of preparation will assure his disciples of the active presence and plan of God.

7. *How might the disciples have felt as they listened to the words by Jesus?*
8. *Compare the kind of peace given by this world to the peace described by Jesus in John 14:27.*

word among us

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in August, 2005, over 1,000,000 people evacuated from the New Orleans area. A study from the Louisiana State University sociology department showed over 50% of homes in Baton Rouge became a shelter for someone. Families, friends, and acquaintances sought refuge and sanctuary from the storm.

Most people expected this evacuation to be like those of the past and last a few days. Pets, refrigerated food, and some clothing were brought. But, the levees were breached and the flooding began. Instead of a few days, these homes became shelters for weeks and even months. September, October, and November passed. It was one thing to open your home for a short-time to someone in need; it was something else for the guests to make your home their long-term residence.

1. *What stories have you heard about the hospitality extended during Hurricane Katrina?*
2. *Describe what it would like to host guests in your home for three months.*
3. *What changes would you need to make in your lifestyle and home to accommodate long-term guests?*

Jesus teaches that those who love him will keep his word, thus providing an opening for God to make a home in their lives. It is quite fascinating to imagine God moving into our lives on a permanent basis.

4. *What would it be like for you to have God set up residence in your life?*
5. *What changes would you need to make in your lifestyle to accommodate God?*

Hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes are just some of the acts of nature which can grieve people on this earth. The list can be expanded to include illness, death, accidents, and even human acts against one another. Life can be difficult. It is hard to go through this world alone or isolated from others. Jesus knows this. Thus, he promises the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives to encourage, advocate, and help. It is the Spirit who nudges us to follow Jesus and keep his word, but also to have peace despite the troubles of this life.

6. *Read John 14:26-27 again. What gift of the Holy Spirit do you need this week?*
7. *What of these words give you hope?*
8. *What do you need the Holy Spirit to help you to hear today?*

When someone we love departs from us, it hurts. This might be a long-time neighbor or a colleague at work. It is especially true when that loved one departs due to death. Even if death follows a long, painful illness, it is painful to be left alone. It may feel like our anchor is gone. Jesus prepares for his departure and the departures of others in our lives. He reminds us that we are not alone. He sends the best – his own Spirit – to serve as a helper. It is that Spirit which gives us peace to endure the troubles of this world and to anticipate the joys of the next world.

9. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Come O Advocate; Come Holy Spirit, Come set up residence in our lives. Keep us closely connected to the teachings of Jesus. Hold us steadfast in faith. Give us peace; and take away our fears. In Christ, we pray. Amen

Dig Deeper: John 14

last word

This week, visualize God coming into your life to establish a home.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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June 1, 2025 .
Encountering Unity

It is possible to hear in Jesus' high priestly prayer, a prayer he offered shortly before his death, the petitions of the ascended Christ for his own throughout history—to our day—and beyond. Come, Lord Jesus, and be our guest. Come, Lord Jesus, and open our eyes to see your presence with us now. Come, Lord Jesus, and bring to fulfillment your promises for all your faithful people. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Jesus prays for us. In holy baptism we become believers in God, have our robes washed in the flood of Christ's forgiveness, and receive the gift of life forever with all the saints.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 17:20-26

Jesus prays that the life of his followers will be characterized by an intimate unity of identity with God. To be so identified with God means also to share in God's mission: to proclaim the work that will bring others into this same unity.

Daily Discipleship

John 17:20-26

Prayers of Discipleship *To Pray as Jesus*

Focus Question: *How do I pray as Jesus?*

word of life

[Jesus prayed:] “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.” John 17:20 (NRSV)

Read John 17:20-26

The setting of chapters 13-17 in the Gospel of John is the final supper of Jesus with his disciples. Overall, the theme is love as Jesus urges his followers to love one another. Jesus reminds them to stay in his word and allow the Holy Spirit to guide them to love. Take a moment to skim through John 13-17.

1. *Why does Jesus keep repeating this theme of love?*
2. *How might love define Christians?*
3. *What is the message to those outside the church if Christians do not love each other?*

Jesus concludes his discourse with a prayer. It is often called the “high priestly prayer”. We learn much about the priority of Jesus as we listen to him praying. One might expect his prayer on the night he was betrayed to focus on his own pending death and sacrifice. Instead, this prayer totally focuses on his beloved disciples.

Take a moment to read John 17:6-11. Jesus prays for protection for his disciples. Once more, he appears not to be concerned about his own well-being and protection. Like a good priest, he intervenes on behalf of those with special needs – his own disciples. It is not clear if his disciples are even aware of their need for protection and strength. But Jesus knows their needs and prays of behalf of others.

4. *Why do his disciples need protection?*
5. *Why is Jesus so concerned for his disciples?*

The climax of the prayer begins in John 17:20 when Jesus prays for unity for his followers. The phrase “that they may all be one” is a dream to be realized as the disciples stay in the word and allow the Holy Spirit to bring them together. The witness of Christian unity is a convincing testimony to a watching world.

6. *When have you witnessed unity among Christians?*
7. *What does disunity within a congregation or Christianity teach?*

Jesus also prays on behalf of those who do not yet believe but who may be converted to belief due to the witness of his followers. Consequently, this is not only a prayer of a concerned teacher, but also an evangelist. He prays people will be transformed by the positive witness of his followers and be drawn into the community of faith and a relationship with God.

8. *How often do you hear a prayer for those who do not yet believe?*
9. *What happens to us as we pray on behalf of those who do not yet believe?*

As Christianity has spread throughout the world to diverse cultures and lands, this prayer for unity continues to be an ongoing petition. This is true within any congregation. Jesus sees God receiving glory as unity among Christians is lived out.

10. *Where do you see the prayer of Jesus being lived out in the world or in your local community?*

word among us

The themes during this spring *Daily Discipleships* have lifted up prayer. As disciples who strive to follow Jesus Christ, how do we call upon God in prayer to help us live as disciples on a daily basis? How does God's word compel us to pray? What do we include in our prayers? Do our regular prayer routines need to be revisited and given new life? How is the Holy Spirit infusing vitality into our spirits through our prayers?

These are just some of the questions prompted by the spring sessions. Prayers during the spring have included serving God alone, finishing one's work, learning to be patient, dwelling in God's grace, and learning to love Jesus as well as others. Thus, it seems timely and appropriate that the final session before we enter into the Pentecost season encourages us to pray like Jesus. We conclude with words prayed by Jesus in his high priestly prayer.

1. *What does it mean to pray like Jesus?*
2. *How would you evaluate your own prayer life?*
3. *What might Jesus say about your prayer life?*

Jesus' compassion for his disciples is clear as he prays on their behalf. Not only does Jesus pray for their protection, but also for their unity.

4. *How united are the Christians you know?*
5. *Do we still need to be praying this prayer of Jesus?*

Take a few moments to review other prayers of Jesus, including:

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4)

Jesus' Prayer at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-42)

Besides these prayers, Jesus also taught his disciples about prayer. Take a few minutes to think about Jesus and his teachings on prayer. Glean wisdom from his own prayers during difficult times in his own life.

6. *If Jesus were to offer a seminar on prayer, what would he teach?*
7. *If we modeled our prayer life after Jesus, what would it look like?*
8. *How might we strengthen our prayer life?*

Jesus prays on behalf of his disciples, but it is not clear if the disciples are fully aware of his concern. Not only that, Jesus prays for those who do not yet believe. His own time was short on this earth. He entrusted his ministry to the disciples and their witness. No wonder, he prays for the Holy Spirit to come and encourage his followers. No wonder, he prays for unity.

9. *Take a few extra moments to end this session in prayer. Pray for unity and for those who do not yet know God. Listen to God.*

Prayer

Mighty God, we pray on behalf of those who do not believe in you. We pray for unity among your followers. Help us to witness to your love as we learn to extend love to each other. Send your Holy Spirit to keep us connected to your word and your ways. Amen.

Dig Deeper

John 17

last word

Pull out your church directory of names.
This week pray for each by name.



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June 8, 2025

Day of Pentecost

On Pentecost, we celebrate that we have been given an Advocate to accompany us. Poured out in wind and fire, water, wine, and bread, the Holy Spirit abides in and among us. We give thanks that God speaks to each of us, no matter our origins, language, or life path. Filled with the Spirit of truth, we go out from worship to proclaim the saving power of Christ's love and the freedom of God's grace with all the world.

Opening Prayer: O Risen Christ, we praise you for your glorious resurrection which makes all things new. Help us to live as Easter people, proclaiming life and hope in all we say and do; through Christ our Lord. Impact our lives and our purpose with your truth. Open our eyes to see the opportunities around us to serve you and to grow in your blessings and favor. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Gospel Reading: John 14:8-17

Though the disciples struggle with Jesus' nature and identity, they receive the promise that they too will be identified with God and God's mission. Though he must leave them now, Jesus promises the coming of the Advocate whom God will send to comfort and enlighten them.

Daily Discipleship

John 14:8-17

Stories of Discipleship: An Advocate's Story

Focus Question: *What is the Holy Spirit doing this week in your life?*

word of life

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

John 14:16 (NRSV)

Read John 14:8-17

John 14 begins with Jesus encouraging the disciples to believe in God and not to be troubled. He tries to explain his own journey and preparations for them. “And 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.” (John 14:3 NRSV)

But Philip feels lost and not satisfied with the situation. Things are disconnected. Philip simply wants to be shown the Father. That's all. Then, Philip will be satisfied.

1. *What does it feel like to not quite grasp the situation?*
2. *How easy is it to ask for direction and assistance?*
3. *Is Philip's request reasonable? How so?*

Jesus is not convinced an appearance by the Father will persuade Philip. Has Philip not been paying attention to Jesus and his words? How can Philip look at Jesus and not see the Father at work in him? Who does Philip think Jesus is?

4. *How do you explain Philip's confusion?*
5. *How do you explain the relationship between the Father and the Son?*

There is no doubt for Jesus that the essence of his own being flows from the Father. The two cannot be separated, but are united in all aspects of being. Thus, seeing Jesus *is* seeing the Father. Interacting with Jesus *is* interacting with the Father. Grounded in that close connection, Jesus encourages his disciples to ask directly to him for those things which are needed. “If in my name you ask me for anything I will do it.” (John 15:14 NRSV)

6. *How might this response have helped Philip?*
7. *How might it have left him confused?*

Carefully, Jesus weaves into the discussion another aspect about the essence of God – the Holy Spirit. Jesus has been their advocate on earth, but Jesus intends to give them the Holy Spirit as another Advocate. This is not a one-time gift, but rather the Holy Spirit is forever. If Philip and his followers are having a difficult time grasping the connection between the Father and Jesus, these words by Jesus might compound their confusion.

8. *How do you explain the work of the Holy Spirit?*
9. *How might the Holy Spirit help Philip understand the words of Jesus?*
10. *How important is it to struggle with issues of faith in order to grow in faith?*

The word advocate means “to stand beside.” As an Advocate, it is the Holy Spirit who stands beside and within a disciple, actively working to give clarity of truth, strengthen faith, and shed light on confusion. Amazingly, the Advocate is not distant, but this is Jesus choosing to abide in the life of a disciple through the Holy Spirit. The Advocate connects a disciple to God and the faith community.

11. *What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to abide in disciples?*

word among us

The young girl walked sadly and quietly into the courtroom with a police escort. In a flash, her familiar life and beloved family had been snatched away. Now, she was about to learn what it meant to be a ward of the state. Fortunately, she had been assigned an advocate who would speak on her behalf.

Outside the courtroom was a park filled with children. Some were playing baseball, but a few of the older guys wouldn't let one of the younger ones play with them. He was a good enough player, but they were having a fun giving him a hard time. Finally, his big brother intervened with a simple bark, "Hey, let him play! He can be on my team." A huge grin came on the face of the young boy as he thought to himself, "Wow! My brother stood up for me!"

Advocates come in all shapes and sizes.

1. *Define advocate.*
2. *Give an example of an advocate in your life.*
3. *What does it feel like to have an advocate?*
4. *Give an example of being an advocate for someone else.*

The relationship of Jesus with his disciples was multi-dimensional. Certainly, his primary role was teacher, but Jesus also served as their advocate. As his death became near, Jesus realized how devastating the crucifixion would be for them. He also recognized he could not stay with his followers on this earth. So, he made plans to send another Advocate.

5. *How was Jesus an advocate for his disciples while he was on this earth?*
6. *How is the sending of the Advocate an act of advocacy?*
7. *What does it mean for you to have Jesus send you the Advocate?*

Advocacy includes a certain degree of cheerleading, but the Spirit does not simply root on people to live life. The Holy Spirit is not a life coach to help a person get the successes and riches of the good life portrayed in commercials. Instead, the Advocate connects people to God and the faith community. It is the Holy Spirit which calls, gathers, and enlightens disciples, using the truth of God's Word to keep true faith.

The Holy Spirit abides in us. Reflect on the space you have given the Holy Spirit to abide in your life. Consider how much time, space, and energy you have allowed for helping the Holy Spirit to settle into your life.

8. *What evidence do you have the Holy Spirit is abiding in your life?*
9. *Imagine the Advocate is asked to describe what it has been like to work in your life. What would the Advocate say?*
10. *What changes might need to be made in order to be more open to the Advocate in your life?*

Prayer

Holy Spirit, it is so reassuring to hear of your presence in my life. Come, be an Advocate for my faith. Draw me closer to Jesus in all that I do. Hold me tight and do not let me stray. Amen

Dig Deeper:

Romans 8:14-17

last word

Each morning call upon the Advocate
to lead you in all your actions.



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