



**REAL**

**LIFE**

# Sermon Series Guide ~ April 12 - May 24, 2026

## REAL LIFE

We have arrived at the Easter season. Jesus has been resurrected from the dead, and we circle back around to one of Jesus' most pertinent teachings about himself: "I am the way and the truth and the [life](#)." (John 14:6). Jesus is [life](#).

While we'd love to start Easter with all the disciples on fire for Jesus, running through the streets and telling everyone what the women disciples have shared with them about Jesus' resurrection, we do not. Instead, we encounter them locked in a room, terrified of the Jewish leadership, likely concerned for their own mortality, and clearly not convinced that the women were telling the truth. Ah, the humanity of it all! It's [real life](#).

We have likely faced a time when something seemed too good to be true or when we've had trouble exercising our faith when we needed it the most. This is a good opportunity to speak a word of grace over those whose faith may be failing in the face of an excruciating [life](#) experience. After all, who hasn't struggled with the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

Sometimes, as frail human beings, we need Jesus to meet us just where we are. Whether it is in a locked room with the promise of peace, or on the Emmaus road in the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, sometimes we need Jesus to show up and stay with us a while amid our heartache, pain, and wavering faith. When [life](#) seems too much to bear, Jesus says to us, "I come that you may have abundance of [life](#)!" (see John 10:10). In a world filled with scarcity-thinking, Jesus promises more than enough. Preachers, how can we help our listeners this Easter season to notice the abundance promised by God?

This is terribly countercultural. When the "demons" of scarcity are breathing down our necks, telling us that there is not enough—there is never enough—Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the [life](#)" (John 14:6). In other words, "I am enough!"

The truth is that there is always enough inside the beloved community formed and held together by God. Perhaps that is why Jesus turns our attention to living in love for God and neighbor. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

On that first Ascension Day, the disciples watched as Jesus was taken into heaven. But they had been promised an Advocate, a Comforter, a Spirit who would never leave them. That is why, finally, they could exit the locked rooms of their fear and indecision and return to Jerusalem with great joy, continually blessing God in the public space of the temple. Their fear was unlocked through the power of love and community! This is why Jesus prayed for his disciples then and now on the eve of his death, "Make them one, as we are one" (see John 17:11).

Now be careful: Oneness does not denote sameness. Everyone does not need to be the same; diversity of all types is celebrated in the kingdom of God. Oneness in this case means being of one heart and mind, united in the love of God, determined to follow the Spirit into the neighborhood as we join together in "giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world" (ELW, p. 231).

Pentecost is at hand! Once again, we understand that we have a common language of the heart. While we may speak with many regional dialects, come from different places and backgrounds, hold fast to various political persuasions and attitudes, there is one thing all Christians have in common. It is the belief that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). This is the good-news message of the Easter season. May it be so in our churches, communities, neighborhoods, and world!

# Sunday Lent Series: REAL LIFE

## April 12, 2026 - DOUBT → TRUST

Real life contains **doubt**. The resurrected life transforms doubt into **trust**.

- **Scripture Reading:** John 20:19-31      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

**Key Ideas:** The risen Jesus appears to his disciples, offering them a benediction, a commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But one of their number is missing, and his unbelief prompts another visit from the Lord.

- **Daily Discipleship:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## April 19, 2026 – LOSS → PROMISE

Real life is full of **loss**. The resurrected life offers **promise** in times of loss

- **Scripture Reading:** Luke 24:13-35
- **Key Ideas:** Today’s gospel begins with two disciples walking to Emmaus, overcome with sadness, loss, and disappointment. They had hoped Jesus, who was crucified, would be the one to redeem Israel! Yet the risen Christ walks with them and then opens their eyes in the breaking of the bread. Each Sunday our hearts burn within us as the scriptures are proclaimed and Christ appears to us as bread is broken and wine is poured. The story of Emmaus becomes the pattern of our worship each Lord’s Day.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## April 26, 2026 – WORRY → ABUNDANCE

Real life causes **worry**. The resurrected life shifts our mindset to one of **abundance**.

- **Scripture Reading:** John 10:1-10
- **Key Ideas:** Today is sometimes called “Good Shepherd Sunday.” Jesus is called the “gate” of the sheep in today’s gospel. The risen Christ opens the way to abundant life. He anoints our heads with oil and guides us beside the still waters of our baptism. Each Sunday he spreads a feast before us amid the world’s violence and war. We go forth to be signs of the resurrection and extend God’s tender care to all creation.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## May 3, 2026 – LONELINESS → COMMUNITY

Real life gets **lonely**. The resurrected life is rooted in **community**.

- **Scripture Reading:** John 14:1-14
- **Key Ideas:** As we continue to celebrate the fifty days of Easter, today’s gospel includes Jesus’ promise that he goes to prepare a place for his followers in his Father’s house. Our baptism commissions us to share Jesus’ mission in the world. As 1 Peter reminds us, we are a holy people, called to proclaim the one who called us out of darkness into light. In words and deeds we bear witness to the risen Christ—our way, our truth, our life.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## May 10, 2026 – HELPLESSNESS → ABIDE

Real life can leave us feeling **helpless**. The resurrected life **abides** in Christ.

- **Scripture Reading:** John 14:15-21

**Key Ideas:** Jesus does not abandon his followers. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering around the Lord's table the Spirit will transform us to be the body of the risen Christ in the world.

- **Daily Discipleship:** 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## May 17, 2026 – DIVISION → UNITY

When real life **divides**, the resurrected life **unites**.

- **Scripture Reading:** John 17:1-11
- **Key Ideas:** In these days between Ascension and Pentecost, we gather with the disciples in the upper room, waiting for the Spirit to transform the church around the world. In today's gospel Jesus prays for his followers and for their mission in his name. Amid religious, social, and economic divisions, we seek the unity that Jesus had with his Father. Made one in baptism, we go forth to live our faith in the world, eager for the unity that God intends for the whole human family.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

## May 24, 2026: Pentecost Sunday!

- **Scripture Reading:** John 20:19-23
- **Key Ideas:** Pentecost derives its name from the Jewish festival celebrating the harvest and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai fifty days after Passover. Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the Holy Spirit as God's presence within and among us. In Acts the Spirit arrives in rushing wind and flame, bringing God's presence to all people. Paul reminds us that though we each have different capacities, we are unified in the Spirit that equips us with these gifts. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to forgive sin. We celebrate that we too are given the breath of the Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world.
- **Daily Discipleship:** Pentecost Sunday      <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-easter-2/>

# Daily Discipleship

## Second Sunday of Easter (A) – John 20:19-31

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Prayer*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of prayer?*

### **word of life**

**“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”** John 20:21 (NRSV)

Read John 20:19-31

On the day Jesus rose from the dead, he appears to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb and sends her as an ambassador to tell the others, “I have seen the Lord.” (John 20:11-18 NRSV) On that same evening, Jesus appears to the disciples even though they are behind locked doors. Despite, or perhaps because of Mary’s proclamation, the disciples are filled with fear of the Jews.

1. *What do you imagine the disciples did, thought, or felt from Easter dawn when Mary talked with Jesus at the tomb until he appeared in the evening to the disciples?*
2. *What might the disciples have been afraid of?*

The first words to the disciples from the resurrected Jesus are, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19 NRSV) After showing them his hands and side, Jesus repeats those words but adds a mission, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (John 20:21 NRSV) Then, Jesus gives them the Holy Spirit. They are not sent out into the world by themselves, but are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

3. *What are the disciples sent to do?*
4. *How is peace related to being sent?*
5. *How is the Holy Spirit related to being sent?*

God comes into the lives of disciples in concrete ways. Most certainly, the presence of the crucified and resurrected Jesus with his wounded hands and side is significant, but the disciples are also given God’s peace and God’s Spirit.

Not all the disciples are present to bear witness to the risen Jesus. Thomas in particular wants to see some proof. He can not believe the words of the other disciples or Mary. It takes a week for Thomas to get his concrete proof. Again, Jesus appears in the room although the doors are shut. Once more, Jesus extends peace to his followers. Thomas is allowed to touch Jesus’ wounds. Jesus pleads with Thomas, “Do not doubt, but believe.” (John 20:27 NRSV)

6. *What might have prevented Thomas from believing?*
7. *What about the faith of all those who never get to touch the wounded hands and side of Jesus?*

Jesus recognizes and responds to the limited faith of Thomas by allowing Thomas to touch him. At the same time he praises those who believe without tangible proof. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29 NRSV) Jesus blesses the generations who come after the first followers, those who will not be able to physically touch Jesus.

8. *What can be said today to those who have doubts about Jesus?*
9. *What kind of witness might Thomas have become?*

Jesus works with people in different ways depending on their needs. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God transforms fears and doubts into courage and conviction. Followers throughout the ages are encouraged to believe and trust in Jesus Christ.

## **word** *among us*

Reinhold Niebuhr was on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York. In 1943 he was living at his summer home near Heath, Massachusetts when he preached at a small church. He included the following prayer:

*O God, give us*

*Serenity to accept what cannot be changed*

*Courage to change what should be changed and*

*Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.*

Howard Chandler Robbins asked for a copy and Niebuhr gave him the original. Supposedly, Niebuhr said, "Here, take the prayer. I have no further use for it." Robbins printed the prayer in a pamphlet. Later it was published as part of the Alcoholics Anonymous resource materials. Over the years, it has been simplified as such:

*God grant me the*

*Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,*

*Courage to change the things I can, and*

*Wisdom to know the difference.*

Today, the "Serenity Prayer" is one of our most familiar and popular prayers. It is simple enough to be easily memorized, yet profound enough to give direction in many aspects of our lives.

1. *When did you first hear the prayer?*
2. *How might this prayer impact the pray-er?*

The prayer begins easily enough with the words "God grant me." But when we call upon God it is an admission that we are not the Ultimate One. It is not in our ability to be able to grant all things. As humans, we can go through much turmoil and wrestling to come to terms with our limitations. We try to be God or live independently from God. That is called sin. It is the story of Adam and Eve in the garden trying to live on their terms, disregarding God and God's desires.

Despite it all, God chose to send Jesus Christ into our lives to show us another path. Jesus came, was crucified, and defeated death. Then, he came physically to the disciples to grant them peace and also the Holy Spirit. It is not clear if after the resurrection the scared disciples knew they needed such gifts. Out of great love, Jesus came to his disciples to guide them through that first week. He blessed them with his presence, peace and Holy Spirit.

3. *What does it mean to you to be able to approach God in prayer?*
4. *What do you want God to grant to you?*
5. *When has God given you the gift of peace?*
6. *How is the Holy Spirit at work in your life?*

## **Prayer**

God, grant me a humble heart which allows me to come into your presence with thanksgiving, ready to receive your grace and wisdom. Amen

## **Dig Deeper**

1 Peter 1:3-9

## *last word*

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and  
wisdom to know the difference.



*Daily Discipleship*

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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# Daily Discipleship

## Third Sunday of Easter (A) – Luke 24:13-35

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Serenity*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of serenity?*

### word of life

**“When [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.”** (Luke 24: 30-31 NRSV)

Read Luke 24:13-35

Much had taken place in Jerusalem the week Jesus died and rose from death. Life no longer made sense to the followers of Jesus, and some had already left Jerusalem talking about the events of the week. Jesus appears to two men who were walking from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus. As Jesus walks with them, they do not recognize him.

These anxious and disturbed men are a contrast to the serene Jesus. Patiently, Jesus listens as they recount the events occurring to Jesus, but they do not recognize the risen Jesus beside them.

1. *Describe the possible feelings of the men on the road to Emmaus.*
2. *What might have prevented the men from seeing Jesus at this part of the walk?*

Jesus tells these two men they are foolish for not being able to make sense and believe in the risen Christ. He then proceeds to interpret those things recounted in the Old Testament from Moses through the prophets. As Jesus teaches, he connects the events from the past to the current reality.

3. *What would it have been like to walk with Jesus on the road to Emmaus?*
4. *If you were on that walk, what questions would you ask Jesus?*
5. *How do you connect the Old Testament with the life and death of Jesus?*

The two men still do not perceive it is Jesus who is walking with them and teaching them. How can that be? They urge Jesus to stay with them for dinner. The scene is reminiscent of the last supper. Again, Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it, then gives it to them. It is in the breaking of the bread the disciples have their eyes open so that they truly see Jesus. As soon as they recognize Jesus, he disappears.

6. *What connections might be made between this meal and the last supper?*
7. *Why do you think Jesus disappeared so quickly?*
8. *What else might the disciples have asked if Jesus had not disappeared?*

The anxiety of the disciples is transformed into energetic joy. The words of the women and disciples are true. Jesus is alive. “They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’” (Luke 24:32 NRSV)

9. *What would it have been like to have your heart burn because of the teaching of Jesus?*
10. *By the end of the walk, what prevented these followers of Jesus from recognizing him?*

Within the hour, they began walking the return trip of over seven miles from Emmaus to Jerusalem. They could not wait to join others in the Easter proclamation, “The Lord has risen indeed!” (Luke 24:34 NRSV)

11. *How would this proclamation have been received by the others?*

## **word** *among us*

Their grandfather sat out on the patio near the garden. He was a picture of serenity. Yet in the house, there was chaos. Many would call the family “dysfunctional”. The family thought their yelling and fighting were typical of all families. The children did not know any different pattern of family life.

Since their grandfather had moved in with them, things were changing slowly. It was strange. Their grandfather never yelled back. Consequently, there seemed to be less yelling and swearing by others. It was hard to describe, but their grandfather was so calm. He had an inner peace which was a bit unnerving to the household. Yet, it was also attractive.

1. *How would you define “serenity”?*
2. *How does one obtain “serenity”?*
3. *If by chance someone develops the characteristic of “serenity”, how does one keep such a perspective?*
4. *How can a serene person be both unsettling and attractive to others?*

Throughout the season of Easter, *Daily Discipleship* is using the Serenity Prayer in its reflection. Reflect on the word *serenity* as you pray, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

5. *Who in your life has modeled “serenity”?*
6. *Describe a time in your life when you felt the gift of “serenity”?*
7. *What has or needs to change in your life so that you experience more serenity?*

As Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he might have been described as serene. His calmness was certainly a contrast from the anxious and distraught disciples. They had witnessed events which turned their world upside down. Jesus attempted to help them make sense by returning to the Scriptures. He did not hash over the injustice of the crucifixion, nor did he spend time describing the pain of the experience. Jesus helped connect the teaching of the old with the reality of the resurrection.

The disciples seemed to have understood, but not fully. Because they could not grasp who was teaching them, there was a significant missing piece to the puzzle. For whatever reasons, they could not see Jesus. Once Jesus was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread, then things began to make sense. They had an “Aha!” moment. At that point, those disciples could not contain or limit their excitement. They were willing to walk over seven miles from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell the good news about Jesus Christ.

8. *What might prevent us from seeing and hearing Jesus?*
9. *What are we willing to do in order to tell someone about Jesus Christ?*

### **Prayer**

God, grant me serenity to face the challenges and opportunities today. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

Psalm 116

## *last word*

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and  
wisdom to know the difference.



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# Daily Discipleship

## Fourth Sunday of Easter (A) – John 10:1-10

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Acceptance*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of acceptance?*

### word of life

**“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”** John 10:10 (NRSV)

Read John 10:1-10

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is celebrated in many churches as “Good Shepherd Sunday”. The tenth chapter of the Gospel of John elaborates on the image of Jesus as a good shepherd. Jesus makes the claim, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11 NRSV)

1. *What does it mean for Jesus to be a shepherd?*
2. *What is the difference between a good and bad shepherd?*

John 10 begins with a description of a thief or bandit who might approach the sheep through a back way. Jesus offers words of caution about false shepherds, ones who do not have the best interest of the sheep in mind.

The good shepherd enters through the main gate for all to see. But what is more important, the sheep know his voice. Healthy sheep are not fooled and led by an impostor. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd because they have heard his voice and received his loving care. The shepherd has responded to their needs and is worthy of their trust. Jesus describes the shepherd as one who knows each of the sheep by name. The shepherd and sheep are not strangers to each other, but are connected in a special way. This is a powerful and assuring image.

3. *How does one learn the voice of a shepherd?*
4. *How is one not fooled by others?*
5. *What does it mean to be known by name by Jesus Christ?*

Those listening to Jesus do not understand his words and the metaphor. The audience might be the disciples of Jesus described in the previous section of John 9 when Jesus encounters the blind man whom he heals. (See John 9:2) Yet, John 9 is primarily about the Pharisees who try to grasp the healing of the blind man by Jesus. By the end of the chapter, it is the Pharisees who ask themselves if they are spiritually blind. In many ways the Pharisees have opportunities to shepherd God’s people of faith, but do they?

6. *Do you think Jesus was speaking directly to the Pharisees? How so?*
7. *How might Jesus have been addressing his disciples?*

At this point, Jesus departs from the image of being a shepherd and claims to be the gate. Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. . . I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.” (John 10:7, 9 NRSV) In Jesus’ day, this would have been a powerful imagery. The shepherd would literally lie down in the opening of the enclosure to protect the sheep.

This section ends with the explanation from Jesus as to his purpose, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10 NRSV)

8. *Can Jesus give abundant life to those who do not hear him or believe in him? How so?*
9. *What does it mean for you to have abundant life from Jesus?*

## **word among us**

Jake loved Frank Sinatra. He loved watching his movies and listening to Sinatra's music. For as long as he could remember, Jake's personal theme song was Sinatra's "My Way" with the repeated line, "I did it my way."

Jake lived defiantly with loud music and parties. He was not concerned about the opinions of others. He often ran into trouble with relationships, but he would rationalize people didn't try to understand and accept *his way*. It was always *their* problem. Jake would complain, "Why don't people just let me do it *my way*? His mother would lecture him, "Jake, you are not two years old anymore. You don't get to set your own rules and only do it *your way*. You have got to grow up and start thinking about other people." Jake could not accept his mother's words to him.

1. *What do you expect Jake's future will be like?*
2. *What would it be like to be in a relationship with Jake?*
3. *What do you think of his mother's words?*
4. *What else might you want to say to Jake?*
5. *How might Jake become more accepting?*

Living life *our way* and only on *our terms* is a description of sin. It simply does not work. We are limited in our understandings of this world and other people. We cannot become all-knowing or all-loving. We cannot change our finite abilities. We are not God. Let us accept that reality as something we cannot change.

Instead, we are in need of God. We are in need of a savior who comes to our rescue and shows us a new path. Jesus says clearly, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10 NRSV) Why choose to live life without a wise guide? Why choose to turn away from One who desires to give us abundant life?

6. *What is hard for you to accept?*
7. *What are some things you cannot change?*
8. *What does it feel like to realize you cannot change something?*
9. *How might we turn over those things we cannot change to God?*
10. *What might that feel like?*

Jesus is a caring shepherd who tends to our needs. He is One who knows us personally. Jesus does not desire to be a stranger, but One who is known by name and who knows us on a first name basis. He is one to nurture us when we cannot change the circumstances of our lives, but guides us to a path of abundant life.

11. *What do you hope to remember from this passage?*
12. *Take a moment to read or recite Psalm 23. Pause for prayer.*

### **Prayer**

Good Shepherd, help me accept the things I cannot change in my life. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

Psalm 23

## **last word**

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and  
wisdom to know the difference.



*Daily Discipleship*

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# Daily Discipleship

## Fifth Sunday of Easter (A) – John 14:1-14

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Courage*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of courage?*

### word of life

**“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”** John 14:1 (NRSV)

Read John 14:1-14

The last supper described in John 13 is an intimate meal for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus has told the disciples on several occasions of his pending death. Thus, this final meal takes on significance not only because of its finality, but because of unique actions taken by Jesus as he washes the feet of his disciples, gives them the commandment to love one another, and connects the Passover meal with his own body and blood.

John 13 concludes with the disciples being concerned not about the future of Jesus as much as themselves. What will they do without Jesus? Jesus reassures them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1 NRSV)

1. *Describe those things which might have troubled the hearts of the disciples.*
2. *How does Jesus respond to the troubled hearts of the disciples?*

John 14 continues the love theme of the last supper. Just as Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another, Jesus sees, hears, and responds to the concerns of his troubled disciples. Just as some of the disciples had made preparations to secure the upper room for their last supper, so Jesus promises to prepare rooms for his disciples. He does this out of his love for them.

3. *When Jesus describes preparing a place for his disciples, what is he talking about?*
4. *How might the preparation of a place be an act of love?*

Unfortunately, this promise by Jesus is not reassuring, but confusing to the disciples. They are baffled how to follow Jesus if he is no longer living. Despite walking beside Jesus during his ministry and learning from his teachings, they do not know the way of Jesus. Plus, what might it mean for Jesus to come again to get the disciples and bring them to Jesus? It is as if Jesus does not grasp the finality of death. If Jesus is to die, then the disciples will be alone. There will be no second chance to be with Jesus.

5. *Describe the confusion of the disciples.*
6. *How will the resurrection of Jesus help to give clarity to the disciples?*

It is Thomas who dares to ask the core question, “How can we know the way?” (John 14:5 NRSV) This is the same disciple who will not believe in the risen Jesus until he touches his wounds. Thomas appears to be a man of practicality. He wants the facts. Jesus responds, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6 NRSV)

7. *Do you think the answer by Jesus would have satisfied Thomas? How so?*
8. *How is the way of Jesus connected to truth?*
9. *How is the way of Jesus connected to life?*
10. *How is the way of Jesus connected to God?*

When we go through difficulties and have lost our way, these verses can give us hope and courage. Jesus is working on our behalf to prepare a place for each of us. Thanks be to God!

11. *What does John 14:1 mean to you?*

## **word among us**

The school year was finally coming to an end. Amanda's friends were thrilled as they made plans for the summer vacation, but Amanda was filled with such sadness and anxiety she could barely concentrate on her studies. Amanda wasn't sure why she had not told any of her friends about her family's plans to move out of state the week after school was out. She couldn't quite find the right time to share the news.

1. *What things might have troubled the heart of Amanda?*
2. *How might the secrecy of the move compounded Amanda's anxiety?*

Amanda's father had already moved and started his new job. He had found a house and was busy making preparations for the family. The plan was for the movers to pick up the furniture from the old house, travel to the new home, and arrange the furniture *before* the family arrived. During the final weeks before the move, it helped Amanda to see the photographs of the new house and neighborhood. Amanda appreciated her father had gone ahead and prepared the way for her family. Saying goodbye was still hard, but Amanda knew she was heading to a place of love.

3. *Describe a situation where someone went ahead of you and made preparations. What was that like?*
4. *How does it feel like to go somewhere new?*

As we face new or difficult circumstances, Jesus does not want our hearts to be troubled, but invites us to believe and trust in him. From belief comes a desire to know Jesus and to discern his way and teachings. Discernment leads us to follow Jesus on a path of daily discipleship. Because the way of Jesus is the way of God, it is also the way of truth. One thing leads to another, but the way of Jesus leads to the Father who sent Jesus to us.

5. *How would you describe the way of Jesus?*
6. *How does believing in Jesus help our hearts not to be troubled?*

This week's prayer theme is that of courage, specifically the petition to have the "courage to change the things I can." Any of us can take paths away from God instead of towards God. All of us can go through troubled times where our hearts are burdened. Yet, how reassuring to hear the words from Jesus about trusting in him and not letting our hearts be troubled. There is another way.

Sometimes it takes courage to follow Jesus and to make decisions to align ourselves with the way of Jesus. It also can take courage to name the things we can change and those things we cannot change. Courage is a gift from God and helps us to face our reality, trusting in the promises of Jesus.

7. *What verse in John 14:1-14 do you hope to remember?*
8. *What situations in your life do you need courage to change?*

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, grant me courage to change the things I can change. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

1 Peter 2:2-10

## **last word**

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and  
wisdom to know the difference



*Daily Discipleship*

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# Daily Discipleship

## Sixth Sunday of Easter (A) – John 14:15-21

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Change*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of change?*

### word of life

**“If you love me, you will keep the commandments.”** John 14:15 (NRSV)

Read John 14:15-21

Jesus does not simply ask his followers to speak of their love for him. He wants them to show love by living a consistent life based on his commandments. The preceding chapter in John’s Gospel describes Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and commanding them to love one another.

1. *What is the connection between love and obedience?*
2. *What happens when a disciple commits to love without an attitude of obedience?*

This section of verses begins with a key word *if*. It would follow that *if* a person does not love Jesus, then that person would have no desire to follow his teachings or commandments. Conversely, a person who loves Jesus would choose a lived response of obedience to the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus promises not to leave his followers alone and orphaned, but asks for the Advocate to be with his followers forever. This Advocate is understood to be the Holy Spirit present in the lives of his disciples.

3. *What does it mean personally for you to have the Advocate given to you?*
4. *What do you understand the role of the Advocate?*

Jesus describes the Advocate as the Spirit of Truth. It is one thing to have an advocate to speak on our behalf and to support; it is something entirely different to expand the role of advocate to include truth. So, what is truth? That is Pilate’s question to Jesus in John 18:38 before Jesus is sentenced to death.

5. *What does truth have to do with obedience to Jesus and love for him?*
6. *How do you answer the question, “What is truth?”*

Jesus embodies the truth of God. He sees clearly the motives behind people’s actions – whether it is for good or harm. His connection with God provides clarity, but also consistency of living.

Jesus recognizes the world will not understand any of this because the world is not connected to God. Consequently, it is difficult to remain on a path of discipleship without having Jesus right beside on the journey. Even with Jesus walking with the disciples through the streets of Jerusalem, Galilee, and other towns, the disciples become confused. There is no doubt a disciple living at all times in history needs God’s presence of the Holy Spirit to pursue a path of truth.

The words of Jesus are intended to reassure the disciples. It is the Spirit who helps a person to follow the commandments of Jesus and to love. The disciples are to trust in Jesus and his promise to be with them through the work of the Holy Spirit.

7. *Would Jesus’ words be reassuring to the disciples? How so?*
8. *What questions might the words of Jesus stir in the disciples?*

## **word among us**

Have you heard that expression? “The only person who likes *change* is a baby.”

1. *How do you respond to change?*
2. *Are you a change agent? Why or why not?*
3. *Is there a difference between choosing change and having change forced upon you? Give examples.*

When Jesus gathered his disciples together in the upper room for his final Passover meal with them, he began to change things. He took the bread of the Passover meal and said, “‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) Words such as these had never been uttered before. Jesus was bringing something new to the tradition of Passover.

4. *How might the disciples have responded to Jesus changing the words of the Passover meal?*
5. *How have the changes made to the Passover meal by Jesus become a blessing for us?*

Jesus also wanted the disciples to change their behavior and adopt an attitude of obedience to Jesus in all phases of life. He wanted his disciples to demonstrate their love for him by living a life of love. No doubt this would mean a certain degree of change.

6. *What does it mean for you to be obedient to Jesus?*
7. *What areas of your life do not reflect an obedient attitude towards Jesus?*
8. *Take a moment to prayerfully and silently ponder those areas of your life needing to be changed in order to walk and live closer to Jesus Christ. Write down on a piece of paper one change which you feel called to begin today.*

Change can be tough. Sometimes it can get lonely. Fortunately, Jesus sends his very own Spirit to reside in our lives and to serve as our Advocate.

We are not orphaned, but are given the Advocate as well as a family of Christ to support and encourage us. That family of Christ is the church. When the church operates at its best, it is an open, supportive and welcoming body of Christ which recognizes each person as one being shaped by the Holy Spirit. We encourage each other at the same time we are being changed and transformed by that same Spirit.

9. *How do you know God’s Spirit wants you to change?*
10. *What does it feel like to change and grow closer to Christ?*
11. *Will God ever get content with us and stop trying to change us? Why or why not?*
12. *Would it be a good thing for the Spirit to stop trying to change us? Why or why not?*
13. *How can we support each other through change?*

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, let me be open to change in my life. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

1 Peter 3:13-22

## ***last word***

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.



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# Daily Discipleship

## Seventh Sunday of Easter (A) – John 17:1-11

**Discipleship:** *An Instrument of Wisdom*

**Focus Question:** *This week how might you be an instrument of wisdom?*

### word of life

**“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”** John 17:11 (NRSV)

Read John 17:1-11

Jesus prays throughout his life, but the prayers he offers at the end of his life are particularly noteworthy. The prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane following his last supper with his disciples is offered as he waits for Judas to betray him and the guards to arrest him. His prayer in the garden is, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Matthew 26:39 NRSV. See Luke 22:39-42; Mark 14:32-36)

The Gospel of John does not include the scene of the Garden of Gethsemane. Some Biblical scholars understand the prayer in John 17 to be parallel to the one Jesus prays at Gethsemane.

1. *Why pay attention to the final prayer of Jesus?*
2. *How do you explain the omission of the Garden of Gethsemane scene from the Gospel of John?*

The prayer in John 17 continues the theme found throughout the Gospel of John of the glory of Jesus. We read in the first chapter of John, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14 NRSV)

Jesus prays for glory, but not in a selfish way. Jesus knows his death will point back to God and give God all glory. His death will complete and fulfill God’s glory so that people may know God. The prayer of Jesus for glory is in actuality a prayer for his disciples.

3. *Why do you believe Jesus is praying for glory?*
4. *Does this prayer for glory fit your understanding of a humble Jesus?*
5. *How might his death be perceived as glorious?*

The prayer of Jesus reflects a unity between the Father and the Son. Jesus confirms his mission of working with the people whom God gave to him. Jesus not only cares and protects his followers, but Jesus also makes an intentional connection between his disciples and his Father.

Jesus prays not on behalf of strangers or those who do not believe. The petition is for those whom God already knows. Jesus returns to God what was first claimed by God.

6. *What might those disciples have been thinking as they overheard this prayer?*
7. *What questions do you have about this prayer?*

Jesus knows he is departing, but does not want to leave these disciples alone or without a protector. He desires the disciples to be connected to God just as Jesus is connected. This is a prayer for unity.

8. *What might it be like to be connected with God as Jesus was connected to God?*
9. *What might it feel like for you to have such unity?*

## **word among us**

Christian had spent hours and hours throwing a baseball to his son. In the beginning, his son had difficulty focusing on the ball. Instead, the boy would be distracted by butterflies and bugs. Christian had little hope his son would share his own love for the game. But around the age of twelve, Christian's son entered a zone. He lived and breathed baseball. Christian beamed at his son's first home run and later, at his first no-hitter. As people patted Christian on his back, he shook his head and pointed to his son.

1. *Describe the joy when a parent watches his or her child do something well.*
2. *How do you explain parents who sacrifice so that their children can succeed?*
3. *Can it become unhealthy for a parent to get glory through a child's successes? How so?*

Jesus prayed for glory, but only so that it would help his disciples to believe and know God. Glory came to Jesus, but not in a typical way. He did not hit a home run, win a lottery, or find success through popularity. His glory came through his crucifixion, followed by resurrection. Death on a cross is not the expected path towards glory. It is no wonder his disciples were baffled and overwhelmed by the events following his last supper with them.

4. *How do you define "glory"?*
5. *What in your life gives God glory?*
6. *What about your church gives God glory?*

The prayer by Jesus is not a selfish prayer, but provides an insight into the heart and wisdom of Jesus. He was able to see the big picture despite his approaching sacrificial death. This wisdom of Jesus is rooted in his connectedness to God.

Not all people gain in wisdom as they age. Wisdom does increase with the number of gray hairs on the head. Now and then, a child is described as wise beyond his or her years.

7. *How do you define "wisdom"?*
8. *How have you grown in wisdom over the years?*

Throughout the season of Easter, *Daily Discipleship* has included the Serenity Prayer as part of its reflection. This prayer concludes with a petition for wisdom to make wise choices. We can be tempted after those things which give us glory. It is so easy to get caught up in ourselves and our path to self-glorification. Jesus in his prayer of John 17 reminds us to redirect our energy towards those things which gives God glory.

9. *Where in your life do you need wisdom?*
10. *What is God calling you to change?*

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, give me wisdom to know the difference between those things which I cannot change and that worth investing energy to change. Guide me in ways to daily give you glory. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

Psalm 68:1-10

## **last word**

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:  
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.



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# Daily Discipleship

## Sunday, Pentecost (A) – John 7:37-39

**Tips of Discipleship:** *Be Open to the Spirit*

**Focus Question:** *How has the Spirit been at work in your life during the last week?*

### word of life

**“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.”** John 7:37 (NRSV)

Read John 7:37-38

Jesus is participating in the annual Festival of Booths. (John 7:2) This seven-day autumn event is sometimes referred to as the “Festival of Tabernacles”. People gather at this agricultural festival to pray and celebrate the autumn rains needed for a healthy crop during the following year.

Each morning people join a processional to the fountain of Gihon near Jerusalem to watch the priest take water from the fountain. The crowd moves from the fountain back to Jerusalem carrying symbols of the fruits of the harvest and singing songs. The final day is the most solemn.

In the middle of the festival Jesus teaches at the temple and stirs up the Jews. They are baffled by his authority and his identity. Tension mounts. The Pharisees and chief priests send the temple police to arrest Jesus. (See John 7:10-36)

On the final and climatic day of the festival Jesus stands and cries out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:37-38 NRSV)

1. *What do the words of Jesus mean to you?*
2. *When do people get thirsty for things other than water?*
3. *How does the speech of Jesus about water connect with the Festival of Booths?*

Jesus quotes scripture in these verses, but his reference is unclear. Bible scholars attribute this quote to either Psalm 78:16, “He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers” (NRSV) or Zechariah 14:8, “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.” (NRSV)

These images of water flowing freely from rocks and out of the desert are powerful. Most of Israel is a dry, barren land with minimal sources of water. Thus, when Jesus claims to be the source of water and invites those who are thirsty to come to him, people listen. Jesus realizes everyone in his crowd is a person who gets thirsty. Consequently, his words have the potential of touching a chord with each person who hears. He invites each person to come to him to be satisfied. Yet, Jesus is addressing more than water. He is promising living water, the same water described to the woman at the well in John 4. Jesus promises not just a drop or two, but flowing water to every believer through the Holy Spirit.

4. *What does “out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” mean to you?*
5. *How do those rivers of living water flow today in your life?*

## **word** *among us*

The red geraniums surrounded the chancel in the sanctuary and red streamers hung from every corner of the church. This congregation had been planning for some weeks to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost with red banners, paraments, and wonderful music. It had been a particularly tough six months for the small close-knit group of believers as they attended heart-wrenching funerals for four active members of their congregation. Each died under different circumstances, but each death was sudden and premature.

This congregation wanted the Holy Spirit to pick them up, console them, give them hope, and bring them to new life. And so, they hoped Pentecost might be a celebration as large as Christmas or Easter. Each person was encouraged to wear bright red clothing. And sure enough, red filled that sanctuary. Young girls had red ribbons woven into their flowing hair. Men wore red shirts and ties with splashes of red. The oldest man of the church came through on his promise and borrowed his neighbor's red pants. He admitted those pants were the ugliest thing he had ever worn in his life. All that red helped, but it could not compare to the renewing and soothing presence of God's Spirit on that day.

1. *What is your understanding of Pentecost?*
2. *Take time to read the story in Acts 2:1-21 of the Holy Spirit coming to the disciples on Pentecost. What would that have been like for the disciples?*

When the disciples gathered in Galilee, they were filled with fear and for good reason. Their rabbi and leader had been arrested, beaten, mocked and crucified. Yet, it was the Holy Spirit who transformed them from frightened followers of Jesus to those empowered by the Spirit to openly proclaim a risen Christ as they were launched into mission work. Pentecost is often considered the birthday of the church because of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the disciples.

3. *Where in your life do you need transformed by the Holy Spirit?*
4. *Where do you need courage?*

Just because the Holy Spirit is given to disciples, it does not necessarily mean life will become easy. Instead some days can feel like a parched desert. We get thirsty for meaning and substance. Jesus says to each of us, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living waters." (John 7:38 NRSV)

5. *What does it feel like to get thirsty?*
6. *How does Jesus provide living waters to you?*
7. *How might you invite someone else to know about Jesus and his living waters?*
8. *How might the Holy Spirit empower and guide you in that conversation?*

## **Prayer**

Holy Spirit, come into my life and fill me with courage and joy to follow Jesus every day of my life. Amen

## **Dig Deeper**

Acts 2:1-21

## *last word*

Each day this week,  
take a moment  
to breathe deeply and  
pray for God's Spirit to fill your heart.



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Pentecost (A)

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