

We Are Witnesses

A thread running through this week's texts is that of being a witness – of what has been, of what is unfolding, of something to be revealed. To be a witness, as these texts understand it, is to exist in complex tensions of doubt and evidence, astonishment and faith, terror and peace, disbelief and joy, of distress and hope, of who we are and who we could be. To be a witness is to have an encounter with God that transforms us and compels us to act.

Focus scripture: Luke 24:36b–48

Luke 24:36b–48 continues the narrative that began earlier in v. 13 with Cleopas and his companion encountering Jesus on the Emmaus road. “They” (v. 36) are the 11 disciples plus their companions, gathered and listening to the Emmaus pair tell of meeting and sharing a meal with Jesus.

These events mirror the events of last week's text from John 20. This time, however, the disciples are in the position of Thomas. They are hearing another's account of meeting the risen Jesus and are not able to overcome their doubt without the evidence of their sight and their touch.

This text presents two significant and interlocking themes. First, as also happens in Acts 3, a miraculous event occurs, and, as a response, those who are witnesses to the event are called to repent. To be a witness is not a passive event. It is a call to action. The gathered followers are not only observers of an amazing story; they are to be participants in that amazing story.

Second, repentance is an act of devotion to God, an act of worship, as is sacrifice (Psalm 4:5) and purification (1 John 3:3). In Luke, Jesus shares food (v. 41) and word (v. 44) with his followers. These are sacred acts. Luke 24, along with the week's other texts, makes a deep connection between being witnesses to the love of God and participating in the worship of God.

Acts 3:12–19 recounts Peter's sermon following his and John's healing encounter with a person who has been lame since birth (v. 2). Peter speaks of the people in condemning terms, depicting them as having rejected

Jesus, painting a stark contrast to those whose lives are marked by the power of faith in the resurrected Christ, evidenced in the wholly transformed life of the formerly lame man.

Like the disciples in **Luke 24:36b–48** are invited to “touch and see” Jesus, those present “see and know” this man and are witnesses to his story and the power of faith. The good news of Peter's sermon is that, through repentance, all those present may be forgiven and restored to wholeness.

Psalm 4 bears the characteristics of an individual lament, where a complainant addresses God with a plea for help, acknowledges their sinfulness while expressing confidence in God, and offers an anticipatory thanksgiving for coming deliverance. Verse one expresses the tension of being “in distress” alongside the expectant hope embedded in a command for God to “answer me...”

In **1 John 3:1–7**, community is understood as a gift from God, part of our identity as children of God. Again, tension is present in this community of witnesses who “see” (v. 1) God's love. They await a future revelatory encounter with God, one that will transform them; yet they know that being children of God requires a response, imperfect as it is.

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To be a witness is to respond to the call of God. Each of this week's texts asserts that we all bear the burden of the sins we have perpetrated and are called to repentance. Each text is equally clear that God's complete forgiveness is perpetually offered to all. How might we express repentance as part of our response to God's call to be witnesses?



Focus scripture
Luke 24:36b–48

Additional scriptures
Acts 3:12–19
Psalm 4
1 John 3:1–7

Present God, we desire your transformative spirit among us. Yet we confess that many times we only stare, mouths gaping and knees trembling, at the sight of your miraculous presence. Forgive us for the times we stand in disbelief. Fill us with Christ's peace, Peter's conviction, and the healed one's joy so that we may be your witnesses. Amen.

Lection Connection

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

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children's understanding grows as they explore ideas and stories from different perspectives and at different times in their lives. As children grow and become more able to think abstractly, they build on their understanding based on previous knowledge. They have probably heard different versions of the same story in fairy tales and folk stories. In this week's session, they will hear another story of the events of that first Easter, this time as recorded in the gospel of Luke. There is no need to try to reconcile this with the story from John's gospel that they heard last week. If older children question the differences, simply remind them that each story was told and saved by different groups of believers. In the readings from

both gospels, children hear how the disciples' understanding gradually unfolds as they encounter Jesus' presence at different times and in different situations.

Meal times are often times when the whole family or group is gathered together. Children know that family gathering times are important because it is here that children absorb the idea and the feeling of what community is all about. They share in the joyful times, the sad times, and the serious times. As Jesus' friends gathered together and supported each other, they were better able to help spread the good news and help the community grow. Pray that the children in your group will discover they can be and are participants in sharing the good news of Jesus.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 24:36b–48, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 63).
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with a gold or yellow cloth, white pillar candle, gold spiral and tealights (see resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)," p. 111).
- ❑ Bring matches, taper, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p.111); save copies for following Sundays.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring children's books that present different versions of the same fairytale or story.

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[Meeting Jesus](#)."

- ❑ **Symbol group:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Fish Symbol](#)"
- ❑ **Image group:** picture of a person talking to an individual (maybe over coffee or a meal) or to small group of people

Respond

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

- ❑ **Quiet zone:** print "Peace be with you" on newsprint
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Fish Symbol](#)," pipe cleaners, beads, string, suction cup hangers
- ❑ **Baking zone:** frozen bread dough (thawed), pieces of construction paper, yarn; access to ovens.
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Peace Plaques](#)," materials listed on sheet
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7, #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ **Easter zone:** question box from previous week, slips of paper

Bless

- ❑ Bring the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



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We Are Witnesses

Scripture

Luke 24:36b–48

FOCUS To join the Easter community in experiencing the presence and invitation of Jesus

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce newcomers.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite children to gather in the worship space and explain that we are in the Season of Easter. Lead the children in the traditional Easter greeting used each Sunday of this season by followers of Jesus around the world:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Children: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Easter ritual Invite a child to read the "Gathering prayer" on the resource sheet "[Easter Season](#)

[Resources](#)" (p. 111), with the rest of the group responding with "Alleluia!" after each line. Invite another child to light the Christ candle and use a taper to light the first and second tealights in the spiral.

Sing, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Look together at the children's storybooks, and the variety of versions of the same story or fairytale. Notice the differences in illustrations. Invite the children to recall different versions of familiar fairytales or folk tales that they know.

■ Why does a story change when told by a different storyteller?

Explain that this week they will hear another story about Jesus appearing to disciples that is similar to last week's story.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Point out the four gospels at the beginning of the New Testament. Each of these writers told similar stories about Jesus but in slightly different ways. Use the bookmark to find this week's reading from the gospel of Luke, which is similar to the one heard last week from the gospel of John ([John 20:19–31](#)).

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Meeting Jesus](#)" to tell the story based on [Luke 24:36b–48](#), inviting two older children to read the parts for "Disciple 1" and "Disciple 2." In last week's story and the story this week, Jesus says, "Peace be with you."

■ Why do you think Jesus says this?

■ Why do you think Jesus wanted his friends to go out and share God's love?

Exploring the story further

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

Symbol group The children in this group will have an opportunity to explore how the fish became a symbol for the early Christian community. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Fish Symbol](#)" and read the information at the top of the page. Work in pairs to write some coded notes in the fish-shaped spaces to share with the whole group.

Image group The children in this group will have an opportunity to use their imaginations. In both of the stories, from John and from Luke, Jesus gave the disciples a job to do: to go and spread the good news about God's love. Invite children to look at the image and imagine that this person is telling the other person, or people, about Jesus and about God's love.

■ **What are some things this person might say?**

Reporting Invite the symbol group to share information about the fish symbol and read some coded messages, and the image group to share some good news messages.

The Bible story and us

We can also share the good news of Jesus. Invite children to use quiet voices to whisper, "Jesus is alive," "God loves us," and, "Peace to you." Then invite them to use loud voices to shout the same phrases. We know that Jesus isn't alive anymore in the same way that we are alive, but Jesus' spirit of love is alive. Invite children to think about their church.

■ **How is Jesus' spirit of love here in our church?**

■ **What are some things we can do to live in the way that Jesus taught, and to share his message?**

Respond

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

❑ **Quiet zone: Breath prayer** Jesus' words of peace can be used as a prayer. Teach the children how to do a breath prayer, breathing in deeply as they say silently, "Peace be," and saying, "with you" as they exhale deeply. Lead the children in this breath prayer several times, helping them to set a pace that will calm their bodies.



❑ **Craft zone: Fish hangers** The fish shape has become an important symbol for Christians. Provide copies of the resource sheet "[Fish Symbol](#)" and review again the information about the fish symbol. Help children make fish-shaped hangers with the pipe cleaners and beads, following instructions on the sheet.

❑ **Baking zone: Bread messages** Jesus asked the disciples to share the message of God's love and we can too. Invite children to roll pieces of bread dough into thin lengths and form these into fish shapes (see shape on resource sheet "[Fish Symbol](#)"). Place on greased trays and bake about 10 minutes in a hot oven. While bread is baking, have children write messages on pieces of paper (such as, "Peace be with you" or "God loves you"); punch holes and thread with lengths of yarn to tie onto the "fish breads." Share these messages with family and friends.

❑ **Music zone: Song message** The song "I've Got a Voice" describes ways the children can join the community of Easter people and witness to the love of God (pp. 20–21 in the *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca). Teach the song by singing one line at a time and inviting children to repeat it. Talk about the ways the children, individually and as a group, can use their voices, hands, and hearts to share the good news.

❑ **Outreach zone: Peace plaques** Jesus calmed the disciples' fear with the words, "Peace be with you." This message is an important one in our world today too. Provide copies of the resource sheet "[Peace Plaques](#)" and materials, and invite children to each choose one type of plaque to make. Encourage children to display their plaques at home.

❑ **Easter zone: Question box** If a "Question box" was made last week, encourage children to add more questions.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candles.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God,
Help us to feel Jesus with us,
when we share his message of peace
and share God's love with others. Amen.

Sing the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), may God's peace go with you."

Reflect

In what ways is Jesus a living presence for the children in your group? How can you nurture that presence in your life and theirs?



Meeting Jesus

based on Luke 24:36b–48

Adding two more voices into
the narration of the story
helps focus
attention.

Later on that same Easter day, two of Jesus' friends hurried back to Jerusalem, even though it was getting dark. They were so excited to tell the disciples something that had happened that they couldn't wait until morning.

When they got to the house in Jerusalem, the words just tumbled out of their mouths. They had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus (EM-EH-US). When Jesus spoke to them, they did not recognize him.

Disciple 1: "We asked him to stay and eat with us."

Disciple 2: "When he took the bread and broke it in half, we saw who he was."

Disciple 1: "Then he was gone, vanished."

Disciple 2: "I know it sounds crazy, but it is true. Jesus is risen. Jesus is alive."

Disciple 1: "We remembered how excited we got as we walked and talked with Jesus on the road."

Disciple 2: "We came to tell you immediately. Jesus is risen. Jesus is alive."

The followers of Jesus in the room on that day were astonished. Could this be true? Was Jesus alive?

Then someone said, "Peace be with you." Everyone turned toward the voice. It was Jesus! "Peace be with you."

At first they were frightened. Was this a ghost? Were they imagining things? "Peace be with you."

Jesus stretched out his arms and opened his hands. "Look at my hands and my feet. See that I am myself. Go ahead. Touch me. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see on me. Peace be with you."

Jesus looked at their faces. There was grief, joy, questions, sorrow, and happiness. Jesus also saw confusion. Then he asked the most ordinary question. "Do you have something to eat?"

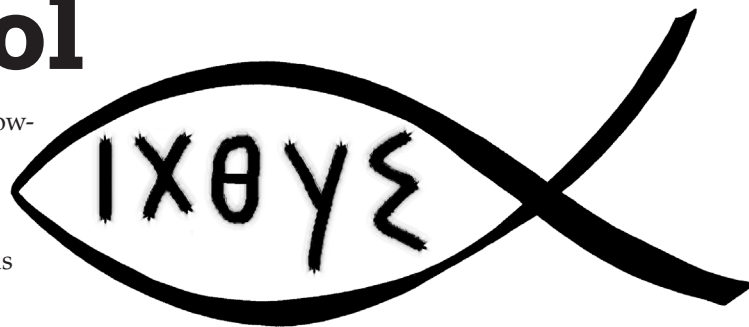
They gave Jesus broiled fish and he ate it. It was truly Jesus. Jesus was alive. Here Jesus was, eating fish.

Slowly the minds of the people in that room opened to the promise of new life. They felt a new strength grow among them, a strength that would help them understand God's word, a strength that would help them tell the good news of Jesus to all the people.



Fish Symbol

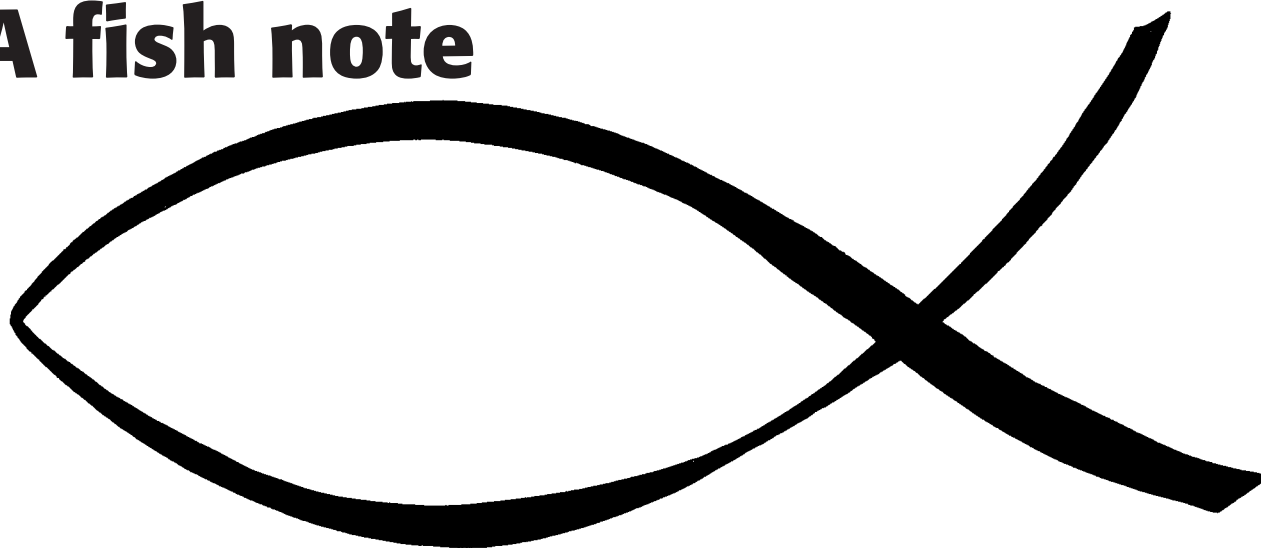
FISH AND FISHERS Some of Jesus' first followers were fishers and the fish became one of the most important symbols for the early church. The letters of the Greek word for fish – *ichthys* – were the same as the first letter of each word in the phrase "Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour."



A SECRET CODE During the time when Christians were being persecuted by the Roman government, the fish symbol was used like a password to find out if another person was a Christian. Someone would draw a half circle in the sand with their toe and if other Christians were nearby they would casually draw the other half of the circle to make a fish shape. The symbol could be quickly erased before any Roman authorities noticed.

THE FISH SYMBOL Fish symbols have been found carved and painted all over the walls of the catacombs – tunnels under Rome where Christians used to meet secretly 2000 years ago. The fish symbol is still very popular today and it still means, "I am a follower of Jesus."

A fish note



CODE

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

A fish hanger

Make a fish symbol to hang in a window or on a mirror.

1. Bend a pipe cleaner in half.
2. Thread one bead up to the bend in the middle and twist the pipe cleaner to secure the bead (the "nose" of the fish).
3. Thread beads onto the rest of the pipe cleaner, leaving both ends empty.
4. Twist these ends together to make the tail, making sure the beads are snug against each other.
5. Thread beads onto each "tail" end, twisting the pipe cleaner ends over each last bead to secure.
6. Attach a length of string to the top of the fish and hang from a suction cup.



Peace Plaques

Paper plate plaque

Materials

- ☐ plain white paper plates
- ☐ craft knives or sharp-pointed scissors
- ☐ yarn

Instructions

1. Draw the peace symbol in the middle of a paper plate and colour it in.
2. Around the rim or edges of the plate print the words "Peace be with you." This phrase can be repeated all the way around the rim.
3. Using sharp scissors or a craft knife, cut away some of the background so the peace symbol remains.
4. Punch a hole in the top of the paper plate and attach a yarn hanger.



Simple plaque

Materials

- ☐ craft foam in different colours
- ☐ glitter glue
- ☐ craft supplies such as stickers, sequins, confetti
- ☐ yarn or string

Instructions

1. Cut craft foam into desired shape (such as rectangle, shield, oval, triangle).
2. Print the words "Peace be with you" in the middle of the plaque.
3. The letters of the word "Peace" can be outlined using glitter glue.
4. Add stickers and other decorations around the edges of the plaque.
5. Punch holes in the top of the plaque and add a yarn hanger.



Rituals for Lent

Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

May God’s love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

Lent 1

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.
(*Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 2

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. (*Place a star beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 3

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. (*Place an object from nature beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 4

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for giving us hope when times are hard. (*Place a stone beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 5

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for your love that is deep in our hearts. (*Place a heart beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.



Easter Season Resources

Prepare an Easter worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold or yellow cloth and place a white pillar candle in the middle.
2. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
3. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
4. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

Gathering prayer

Reader: Loving God, we celebrate this Season of Easter, a time of new life and joy.

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to be witnesses to the new life in Christ. (*Light the central Christ candle.*)

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to spread the light of this good news. (*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

All: Alleluia!

Somlandela

Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Somlandela, yonke indawo.
Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Lapho eyakhona somlandela.

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
We will follow, we will follow him.
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
Wherever he will lead us we will follow.

Traditional Zulu song

Prayer lines (May 20)

I thank God for your gift of music in our church community.

I thank God for your leadership in our church community.

I thank God for the way you care for our church building.

I thank God for the ways you help lead worship.

I thank God for your visits to people who are sick or can't get to church.

Thank you hand cards (May 20)

Fold construction paper in half and trace a hand outline.
(See illustration #1.)

Cut out the shape, leaving the folded side intact to make a card.

Choose a prayer line, cut it out, and glue it inside the card.
(See illustration #2.)

Write your name below the message.

On the outside of the card, print the name of the person chosen to receive the card.



Illustration #1



Illustration #2

