

# Lent Bible Study 2017

This study is for groups and/or individuals. It uses the Scripture passages that we will use in Sunday morning worship throughout Lent - plus there's an additional, bonus lesson for Ash Wednesday as well. It would be appropriate to do each week's lesson either before or after the given Sunday, so you can set your own schedule.

## Introduction to Lent

Lent is the period beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending at Easter, during which Christians have traditionally fasted and devoted themselves to prayer in anticipation of Christ's death and resurrection. Just as Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:1-11), so too do Christians fast and pray for the same forty days and nights.<sup>1</sup>

Fasting is, of course, not very popular these days. We don't like to deny ourselves anything, which is perhaps why it's especially good for us to fast. Traditionally fasting literally meant abstaining from food for some period (or skipping a meal or certain foods). Among other things, this kind of fasting makes us aware that we are creatures who need our daily bread to survive, and it presents an opportunity to pray. Our hunger can be redirected to God.

Fasting from food is not the only possibility and today many decide to give up something (like alcohol, television, Facebook, etc.) which also creates both the space and the reminder to pray and to remember our need for God. In this spirit, many also decide to *add* something during Lent, like a spiritual discipline (i.e., praying every morning) or an act of service.

Whatever we decide to give up - or add - it should be a real sacrifice, even if a small one. It is ok - even good - for us to "suffer" a little, not least because it focuses our thoughts on Christ's own suffering. But just as Christ's own suffering on Good Friday makes Easter possible, so too do we trust that, during Lent, our own sacrifices, through Christ, will lead to new life. And if these Lenten practices bear fruit, they can certainly be continued after Easter! So I encourage you to consider what you might do for Lent this year.

## Intro lesson: Ash Wednesday - Matthew 6:16-21

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, so named because Christians traditionally placed ashes on their foreheads, accompanied by the words of Scripture, "From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return." Here we are invited to contemplate our own mortality; we are creatures; there was a time before us, and there will be a time after us. We will die. Before we can rejoice at the

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<sup>1</sup> There are, however, forty-six days during Lent because the Sundays do not count as its considered improper to fast on the Lord's Day (at least by Protestants and Catholics - the Orthodox Church celebrates Lent over forty days). This means that, if you fast during Lent, you're allowed - even encouraged - to break your fast during the six Sundays because these are all like "little Easters".

work of Christ we need to see the reality of our situation. Lent is sobering, but it moves us toward a fuller reception of the Good News.

Ash Wednesday is also the day when Christians have traditionally begun Lenten fasting,<sup>2</sup> accompanied by the reading of this passage from Matthew. Strikingly, Jesus doesn't say, "if you fast," but "*when* you fast." He takes it for granted that his followers will fast. This isn't exactly a command, but it's pretty close: we should be fasting too.

In this passage, Jesus doesn't put the emphasis of the details; he doesn't specify the when, where, why, and how. His whole counsel is that, when we fast, we do so for a heavenly reward - not to impress others. Of course, we don't live in a world in which many are likely to be impressed by our fasting, but we might still try to convince others - and ourselves - that we are particularly righteous. Jesus even tells us that we should go out of our way to conceal our fasting. Motive apparently makes all the difference. If we fast only for the Father in secret, He will reward us.

- 1. *What is the purpose of fasting? What are its rewards?***
- 2. *Does Jesus expect us to fast? Should fasting be a regular, consistent part of discipleship? How much fasting is enough?***
- 3. *In what ways might we be tempted, even today, to display our own righteousness? to practice our piety for others?***
- 4. *Although Jesus told us to keep it secret (at least while we're fasting), it's still good for us to humbly share our experiences fasting in order to encourage one another. Have you fasted? What was your experience? Did it help you pray, bring you closer to God, etc.? Or were you just hungry!? Do you think fasting is worthwhile?***

## **First Sunday of Lent - Matthew 4:1-11**

In the passage immediately prior, Jesus was baptized in by John in the Jordan and the Spirit descended upon him. Now the same Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted/tested<sup>3</sup> by the devil. This is perhaps not the sort of things we expect the Spirit to do; isn't temptation something to be avoided? And yet, that seems to be exactly the purpose here. Immediately following this passage, Jesus will begin his ministry and calling disciples. This time of prayer, fasting, and - yes, temptation/testing - seems to be preparation for all that is to come.

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights, a period which - whatever spiritual strength Jesus gained - rendered him hungry and tired, just like it would any human. And this is when the tempter appears. The devil's first temptation is to turn stones into bread - something which must've been quite appealing in Jesus's condition. And wouldn't this be rather harmless? No one would even need to know? But, as he will three times, Jesus responds with Scripture. With

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<sup>2</sup> Although it's never too late to start!

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word can be translated both tempt or test. Most Bible translations opt for "tempt," but it's helpful to remember that the word has this additional connotation. That's why I choose to use tempt/test. An additional question might be, ***What is the difference between these two words?***

the words of Deuteronomy, Jesus replies that his source of life is not bread alone, but God's word (Deut 8:3).

The devil then takes Jesus to Jerusalem and sets him on the pinnacle of the temple, then commanded Jesus to throw himself down to be saved by the angels - and this time the devil quotes Scripture (Psalm 91:11-12). If Jesus did what the devil suggests, it would create a dramatic spectacle proving to everyone that he was the Son of God. Wouldn't that be a good thing? But Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deut 6:16).

Finally the devil takes Jesus to a high mountains and shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. He tells Jesus that these can all be his if he would only bow down and worship the devil. But these kingdoms are not really the devil's to give, and Jesus responds "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Deut 6:13)

There are several things to note here. One is that Jesus, as a human, can be tempted. It would be misleading for Scripture to call these temptations/tests if they weren't really just that. And it's also worth noting that Jesus responds to these temptations by quoting Scripture, Deuteronomy in particular. If we want to faithfully follow God like Jesus did, it is essential to know the Scriptures. However, clearly it is not enough to simply know the Scriptures, because the devil can quote them as well.

In all three instances, the devil tempts Jesus to use his power and authority in a self-serving way. He is essentially tempting Jesus to be a different Christ, to not be faithful to the Father and head to the cross, but instead to seek his own glory and comfort. And that Jesus prayed in the Garden the night before his crucifixion that the cup would pass from him shows us that Jesus - like any person - would rather not suffer the cross. Perhaps Jesus was then wrestling with this same old temptation, to show his power, to give the people what they want, to rule the world. But, of course, he continues, "Yet not my will, but yours be done." This is the defining principle of Jesus's life, revealed from first to last.

- 1. Why did the Spirit send Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted/tested? Is there something he needs to learn or prove? Can temptation be good for us?**
- 2. Why would the devil - among all possible temptations - choose these three? Do you think Jesus was really tempted to do any of them? Was there ever any doubt how he'd respond?**
- 3. It's fairly obvious why Jesus couldn't give in to the third temptation, but the first two are less clear; why did he have to refuse to do these things?**
- 4. How does knowing the Scripture help us respond to temptation? What does it mean that the devil can quote Scripture? How is knowing the Scripture not enough?**
- 5. What do these temptations - and Jesus's response - teach us about who he is and his mission?**

## Second Sunday of Lent - John 3:1-17

This is certainly among the most well-known passages in the Bible (or, at least, it contains one of the most famous verses), but often our supposed familiarity can prevent us from paying close attention. The Gospel of John is very different from the other three, and offers a very different account of the beginning of Jesus's life and ministry. In John, after the prologue (in which we learn that Jesus is the Word made flesh) immediately Jesus begins calling disciples, then he changes water into wine at the wedding in Cana, followed by a cleansing of the Temple.

In every Gospel, the adult Jesus appears on the scene as if from out of nowhere, ready to begin his ministry. At these early stages people were trying to figure out what to make of him - including Nicodemus, a Pharisee who believed that Jesus was a "teacher come from God" because of the miraculous signs he'd performed. But Nicodemus still doesn't know who Jesus really is, and Jesus doesn't waste any time making this abundantly clear! He comes straight out and says, "Truly I say to you, unless you are born again/anew, you cannot see the kingdom of God.

This conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus hinges on the fact that the word Jesus uses can be translated both "born again" and "born anew". Nicodemus takes it quite literally, as if Jesus is saying that a person must reenter the mother's womb. Presumably Nicodemus was a bright enough fellow, but here he comes across as fairly dim. The gap between his understanding and the meaning of the message suggests just how remarkable Jesus's words were - and are.

But, of course, Jesus is speaking of a spiritual rebirth, something like what Paul described as "new creation" or what Jesus, speaking in Revelation, meant when he said, "Behold, I make all things new." Jesus makes clear that being born again/anew is the work of the Spirit, which, like the wind, cannot be seen or grasped, but whose effects are obvious. Nicodemus still seems stuck on his first thought, and Jesus doesn't seem to have much patience for a teacher who does not himself understand. Nicodemus has his mind on earthly things (like the womb) instead of heavenly things. Otherwise he would recognize Jesus who comes from heaven, the only Son of the Father, sent to give eternal life, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

- 1. At this early stage, could/should Nicodemus have known who Jesus was? Is Nicodemus in this story more of a positive or negative example? What do we learn from him?**
- 2. Jesus's teaching is difficult for Nicodemus to understand; is this intentional? Why does Jesus respond as he does? Do you ever feel like Jesus's teachings are unnecessarily cryptic? Why does he often teach this way?**
- 3. How do we know when to take Jesus - and the rest of the Bible - literally? and when is this a bad idea?**
- 4. What does it mean to be born again/anew? How does this happen, according to Jesus? What role does the Spirit play?**
- 5. Read Numbers 21:4-9. How is Jesus like the serpent that Moses lifted up? And how is Jesus different?**
- 6. What does it mean to "believe in" Jesus?**

## Third Sunday of Lent - John 4:1-42

This is one of the most inexhaustible stories in the Bible. There's a lot going on here on many different levels; there's not just one thing to learn. In fact, this passage is a bit like the never-ending stream of water about which it speaks: it continuously gives life. So we won't receive from this story everything it has to give in a single session. This is good news, except perhaps to those who like to think they've understood something before moving on to the next thing.

The passages for the previous two weeks both addressed what is the source of life. Jesus, tempted by the devil to turn stone into bread, responded "Man does not live by bread, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". Nicodemus received a little lecture about the importance of being born anew/again in order to really live. And in this passage, themes of fasting and the source of life appear again.

Jesus's disciples have gone into the village to buy food, but he stays behind at the well (v7). The passage gives us no reason for his decision. When the disciples return they implore him to eat something (v31), to which Jesus responds, "I have food about which you do not know." Not unlike Nicodemus, the disciples take this unnecessarily literally and begin to wonder if someone else has brought food to satisfy Jesus's hunger. But, of course, Jesus is peaking of "spiritual food" - "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (v34).

The implication, it seems, is that Jesus - while the disciples were away - received just this food in his conversation with the unnamed Samaritan woman. She comes to the well to fetch water and there encounters a strange man, a Jew, who asks for a drink of water. Jesus may prefer the spiritual sustenance, but he is still human. Of course, this request leads quickly to a conversation in which Jesus tells her that whoever drinks this water will soon thirst again, but that Jesus can provide living water (v14). Only the long-awaited Christ could do such a thing; Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you, am he" (v26). She seems convinced - not least because he's quite aware of her marital situation(s)! - and soon goes to the village to invite others to meet Jesus (v28-29).

- 1. Just like Jesus, we need both "spiritual food" and ordinary food to live; do the pursuit of these two necessities go together? Or are they sometimes in tension? Can focussing on earthly food prevent us from seeking spiritual food? Do we sometimes need to forego earthly food (by fasting) in order to receive spiritual food?**
- 2. Do you think Jesus wanted - or even asked - the disciples to go buy food? Are there times when we need to focus first on earthly things?**
- 3. Why do you think the Samaritan woman was receptive to - and apparently received - Jesus's message that he was the Christ, the source of living water? Was she especially thirsty?**
- 4. In your experience, have you received this spiritual food (doing the will of the Father)? If so, does it always satisfy? Do we get hungry again?**
- 5. Jesus said that whoever drinks the water he gives will never thirst again. Have you received Jesus yet still felt spiritually thirsty? What does this mean?**

## Fourth Sunday of Lent - John 9:1-42

The entire chapter of John is taken up with Jesus performing a miracle (vv 1-7) followed by a long investigation/confrontation as to its significance (vv 8-42). The disciples see a man born blind (how they know he was born this way is unclear) and ask Jesus whether his blindness is the result of his sin or the sin of his parents. Their assumption, widely (universally?) held by Jews of the time, was that such disabilities were the result of sin. It had to be somebody's fault, so who? But Jesus overturns this assumption; the man was not born blind because of sin, but as an opportunity for God to work. Jesus certainly seems to be suggesting that the man was born blind for exactly this moment, but I think we should be hesitant to draw that conclusion too strongly. What we do know for sure is that suffering is always an opportunity for Jesus to bring deliverance. Jesus redirects the attention from the cause of the blindness to his ability to heal the man. The important question is not who is at fault? but rather, What can Jesus do?

During Lent we are invited to remember that we are all sinners, feeble and frail; from dust we have come and to dust we shall return. We need to be reminded of this reality - and be called to repentance - but it is not a condition we can escape on our own. And while we ought to consider the causes of our sin and turn away from these things, there is little sense in preoccupation about who or what is to blame. Righteousness is not produced by finding fault; guilt is not a virtue. We are reminded of our sin primarily so that we see our need for a savior, and our brokenness provides God the opportunity to demonstrate His restorative power. As always, the attention should be on God, not us.

The man's healing led to all kinds of arguments. The first argument is about whether or not the man who now apparently can see is indeed the same man who was born blind. Maybe he only resembles him? Then the Pharisees investigate how and when the miracle was performed, which leads to argument about whether it could be from God since it was performed on the Sabbath. Apparently unable to reconcile the "when" with the "what", they return to the question of whether the man really was born blind, even calling in his parents, who are afraid to get caught up in the controversy. The Pharisees insistence on Sabbath observance overrides the undeniably miraculous; they conclude that Jesus must be a "sinner". The man born blind is called in to give his opinion. Having previously declared Jesus a prophet (v17), the man argues that, whoever Jesus is, certainly the fact that he can open the eyes of the blind indicates that God is with him. The Pharisees, indignant that he would presume to contradict them, cast him out.

At this point he meets Jesus again. It's important to remember that Jesus earlier put mud on his eyes then sent him to wash in the pool. His eyes were opened on the way there, after he'd left Jesus. Then man hadn't seen Jesus since being healed. Jesus declares himself to be the Son of man and the formerly blind man confesses his faith in Jesus and worships him. And then the conclusion: to the blind, Jesus gives sight, but those who think they can already see remain blind.

- 1. When you see people with disabilities, do you wonder at the cause? Is it the effect of sin? If so, whose? What does this passage teach us about our imperfections?***

2. ***Does God make some people disabled (or cause them to suffer in other ways) in order to give Him the opportunity to reveal Himself? Or is our brokenness just an unavoidable reality of our fallenness?***
3. ***Do we ever spend more time blaming ourselves or others instead of redirecting our attention to Jesus? Do we focus more on the sickness and its symptoms rather than the cure?***
4. ***Why do people in the story struggle to believe that the man who was healed was indeed born blind? Why do the Pharisees, despite the evident miracle, insist that Jesus must be a sinner? Why do they avoid the obvious conclusion? Or is it obvious?***
5. ***Is it better to lead a “sinful” life but recognize your need for God than to live a “righteous” life but give yourself the credit? Do we really believe that God’s grace is greater than our sin?***

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent - John 11:1-44**

*(This is the Sunday of the inter-church service)*

This story, though only midway through the Gospel of John, is the climax of Jesus’s public ministry. His miracles have become increasingly.... miraculous, from turning water to wine, to healing the lame, to restoring the sight of the blind, to finally raising Lazarus from the dead - a miracle which foreshadows Jesus’s own resurrection.

One of the questions this passage immediately raises is why Jesus, after hearing that Lazarus is ill, did not go to see him but stayed two days longer here he was? Did Jesus have important work to do there? Or was he perhaps, like the disciples, reluctant to return to Judea? In the meantime, Lazarus died (or, euphemistically, “fallen asleep”) about which Jesus makes the somewhat unsettling statement that he was glad he was not there, for the sake of the disciples (v15).<sup>4</sup> Thomas, perhaps speaking for everyone, is hardly looking forward to what is to come and declares, with both resignation and foreboding, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (v16).

This is not a happy moment. Jesus and the disciples then journeyed to Bethany, arriving four days after Lazarus had been buried.<sup>5</sup> Martha runs out of the village to meet Jesus on the road, which leads to an important conversation. Martha seems comforted that Jesus has arrive but also regretful that he did not arrive sooner. There is something of both praise and rebuke when she says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” But she continues, “And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” The rest of the dialogue is worth quoting in full:

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said

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<sup>4</sup> This recalls Jesus’s explanation for the man’s blindness in John 9.

<sup>5</sup> Jews then and now make every possible effort to bury their dead before sundown the same day.

to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Jesus made a remarkable statement about himself, followed immediately by a remarkable confession from Martha. And he's about to demonstrate the truth about what he says, about what Martha believes.

Back at their home, Mary is still with the other mourners. She too then runs to meet Jesus and says the the same thing to Jesus as did her sister: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." But she says no more; this is for her a time of sorrow, not for hope. Jesus requests to see the tomb, and then he weeps. Jesus commands the stone to be rolled away, only to have Martha reply that Lazarus will surely stink by now. Despite her confession, she still doesn't realize that Jesus can do what he's about to do.

Jesus then makes (what seems to me, anyway) a strange prayer. He addresses the Father, but his real audience seems to be the gathered crowd - something which Jesus also tells us the Father. He wants the Father to raise Lazarus so that people will believe in the Son, and thus the Father. Then Jesus command, "Lazarus, come out." The formerly dead man emerges, and Jesus orders his grave clothes removed, or - in other translations - "unbind him." We're meant to hear clear overtones that Jesus can overthrow the power of sin and death.

- 1. Why does Jesus not journey to Bethany immediately? Did he want Lazarus to die just so that he could raise him from the dead? Does Jesus sometimes appear callous in this story? And other times compassionate?**
- 2. Why does Jesus tell the disciples that Lazarus has fallen asleep - which produces confusion - rather than just tell them that he died, which he eventually does anyway?**
- 3. Martha believes in the resurrection at the last day, but Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life." What new thing is Jesus claiming here? And what does he mean when he says "whoever lives and believes in me will never die"?**
- 4. Martha and Mary say the same words when they meet Jesus, but from then how do their responses differ? Are we meant to conclude that one is better than the other? Whose response do you imagine would be more like your own?**
- 5. Why does Jesus weep?**
- 6. What would Lazarus say about all this!? He died, then he's raised only to die again. Is this good or bad for him? And how is his rising from the dead different than Jesus's own?**

## **Sixth Sunday of Lent - Palm Sunday - Matthew 21:1-11**

Jesus's entire life has been pointed toward Jerusalem. He always known how things will end there, and still he goes. We began Lent with Jesus's temptation (Matt 4:1-11), immediately after which we read, "That Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" He has been proclaiming the coming kingdom for the start, and now he enters Jerusalem hailed as a king. The king of the kingdom has come... riding of a donkey?



Kings don't ride donkeys. Jesus does this to fulfill Scripture (see Zech 9:9) but then that only pushes the obvious question back a step: Why does Scripture prophesy that the king will arrive like this? All at once, Jesus is both fulfilling and subverting people's expectations of what the messiah would be like. Many of the people in Jerusalem waving palm branches had never seen or heard Jesus, but they were caught up in hope that he would be the one to redeem Israel. And the predominant hope at that time was that the messiah would overthrow Roman rule and set Israel free (not unlike the way Moses had delivered the Hebrews out of captivity in Egypt). They expected a powerful, triumphant king, and instead they got one riding a donkey.

And this recalls again Jesus's temptation in the wilderness, where the essential nature of all three temptations is for him to abuse his power, to be some other kind of messiah than the one he knows he must be. The devil tempted him to do something spectacular, something crowd-pleasing, and Jesus refused. He was (and is) often not who the people wanted him to be. He comes not triumphant and exalted but rather humble and lowly. There is something profoundly ironic about the people's praises: they are right to shout "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" - but they don't really understand why. The next few days are not going to unfold as they anticipated. By Good Friday the crowds (the same crowds!?) are chanting "crucify him!"

- 1. Why did Jesus ride a donkey? What does it signify? How does Jesus meet - and defy - people's expectations?***
- 2. In many ways this is impossible, but still: Imagine you were in Jerusalem on that day; what would you have hoped for? What would be your expectation for the messiah? Would you have expected to hail a man king who would die a few days later?***
- 3. Do you think the crowds had real hope about who Jesus was and what he would do? Or was this an instance of mob mentality? Or is it both?***
- 4. The crowds chant, "Hosanna!", then days later the crowds chant, "Crucify him!" Why this dramatic change? Are these (at all) the same crowds?***
- 5. How do you imagine Jesus felt as he rode the donkey as people sang his praises? Do you think he was ever tempted to give them what they really wanted?***
- 6. How does Jesus, in his humility, continue to surprise and even disappoint us? Do we ever place wrong expectations upon Jesus?***

## **Easter Sunday - Matthew 28:1-20**

Less than forty-eight hours earlier, Jesus was laid in the tomb. Pilate ordered that the tomb be guarded in order to prevent the disciples from coming to take the body then claiming Jesus had been raised from the dead (27:62-66). But truthfully, the disciples had all scattered and were nowhere to be found. It was only the two Marys (Magdalene and the "other") who apparently had the faith/temerity/curiosity to go to the tomb on Sunday morning to see if anything would happen at the tomb. When they arrived, there was a great earthquake, and an angel of the Lord descended to roll away the stone (which he then sat on!). The angel said what angels always say, "Do not be afraid"(which is easier said than done) then told them that Jesus is risen, and charged them to tell the disciples the Good News - and that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. As they joyfully depart, Jesus himself meets them on the road, and they worship him. The detail, "they took hold of his feet" (v9) is not accidental - it's there to emphasize that Jesus was raised in the flesh. His is a bodily - not just spiritual resurrection.

And then a remarkable interlude: the guards reported to the authorities “all that had taken place.” They

too saw the angel and, it seems, testifies that Jesus rose from the dead. But instead of rejoicing, this testimony leads to a coverup. The “official” story is that the disciples came and stole Jesus’s body! They can’t receive the Good News because for them the empty tomb is perceived as an inconvenience, not as a transformative reality. They “know” but refuse to let it make any difference. After all, they have jobs to preserve. They’re invested in the world as it is and so suppress the truth that all things have been made new.

The eleven disciples go to Galilee as Jesus directed them. “And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted.” Not unlike the guard, some disciples struggled to accept the reality of what they saw. We might see this as a lack of faith, a hard heart, etc., but then again: how often does someone rise from the dead!? Some couldn’t believe what they saw; they searched for another explanation. At least in Matthew’s account, Jesus doesn’t respond directly to their doubt. Instead, he declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth “has been given to me” - and then, what Christians often refer to as the “Great Commission” - “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you” - and finally a comforting promise - “and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Jesus concludes with a statement about who he is, gives a mandate to his followers, then assures them of his abiding presence with them. He stands before them disciples as the resurrected Lord, telling them to go make more disciples - disciples of “all nations”, if you’ve ever wondered where ANCL got its name. And though his charge is brief, Jesus does specify baptism as important - and a Trinitarian baptism at that. This is the clearest formulation of the Trinity in the Gospels, and one we still use today when we baptize. And in the work to which he calls us, Jesus is with us, now and forever.

- 1. Why are the two Marys the only ones who go the tomb on Easter morning? What is the significance of two women - not the disciples - who first hear the Good News and see the risen Lord?**
- 2. Why does Jesus meet the women on the road instead of at the tomb? And why must the disciples journey to Galilee to see him?**
- 3. What do we learn from the guards’ response to what he saw? Why wasn’t it Good News for him?**
- 4. Why do some of the disciples doubt even when they see the risen Lord? What does this teach us about faith? How do you imagine you might have reacted?**
- 5. What does the “Great Commission” teach us about evangelism? What does Jesus want from his disciples? What does this teach us about the Gospel? Why is baptism emphasized?**
- 6. How is Jesus with us now?**