

Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: John 20:19-31

Background: Easter - the unearned gift of grace. The reflective season of “going in” that Lent provided (no matter what disciplines we undertook, nor even how well we attended to them) explodes on Easter. Of course, we cannot “figure it out.” How comforting, then, to have these Scriptures, showing first how the disciples struggled to grasp what had happened and then stories of Jesus before the crucifixion, which are written in the light of the Resurrection.

As Easter people we know, as Paul said, that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God. We are people who expect life out of death. And so, in Eastertide we celebrate the wonder and prepare ourselves to take the awesome message out into the world on Pentecost.

A Notation for this Week's Gospel

In fear, the disciples huddled behind locked doors – an obvious response to the crucifixion. (“Are we next?”) Suddenly, Jesus is right there, sensitively inviting the disciples to convince themselves that it is he – showing them the marks on his body. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says. The disciples are now to carry on the work Jesus had begun. Jesus breathes the power of the Holy Spirit upon them. As God sent Jesus, now the disciples are sent out. Their message is handed on to us, the torch of peace, so we can hand it on to those who come after us.

Theme: Peace Be with You

Before Class: You will need Bibles, preferably all the same translation, or copies of the Scripture and possibly one for each person. Option: a small pack of Post-it notes.

Beginning: Often a new season creates a slightly different configuration to a class. If you notice that this is the case, be sure to incorporate new members or members you might not have seen for a while. Obviously, if not everyone knows each other, spend time getting to know names and information people choose to share. You might also remind the group that although all the Easter candy in stores is half-price – or gone – Easter continues for us as a season right up to Pentecost.

Opening Prayer: *Amid all that is going on in our lives and in our world, we have the assurance of your Peace with us, in us, and in all we do. Help us to calm our anxieties and commit ourselves to fall into this Peace. Amen.*

The Scripture: John 20:19-31 Make sure each person has access to a Bible or copies of the lesson. Invite people to read one sentence of the passage, going around the room until it is read. When the entire passage has been read, allow a moment or two of silence. If time permits, you could invite the group to read it out loud again, but this time having one person read all the parts Jesus says, another read all that Thomas says, and a third read all the rest. There is an outline at the end of the lesson if you need it.

Reflection Questions: Begin with some questions to make sure all are aware of the setting.

- When is this happening? (Soon after the crucifixion.)
- Why are the disciples so terrified? (Jesus was killed and they are worried they might be next.)
- Why do you suppose the first thing Jesus says to them is “Peace be with you”? (Perhaps they had heard him say it so often they would immediately know it was Jesus or possibly because he was keenly aware of their stress and knew that nothing he said would be heard until he could help them calm down.)

- Why would Jesus “breathe” on them? (The word for “breath” and “spirit” are the same in Hebrew. His disciples understood that life and spirit come from the breath of God.)
- In verse 23 we understand that what Jesus is saying has to do with the priest’s power to accept penance and pronounce forgiveness. How might this be applied to each of us? (Look in the Prayer Book, page 364, at the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us...”)
- Notice how Jesus deals with Thomas’ doubt. What implications do we see for helping others in their doubt?
- I wonder where you find yourself in this story?
- I wonder what we would do if we were one of the disciples and Jesus appeared in our midst.
- Can you think of a time Jesus appeared in your midst? What was that like?

Getting Closure: Ask the group to remain silent for a moment or two and picture themselves there, in the room with the disciples and Jesus, receiving the blessing and the breathing of Jesus on them.

Closing Prayer: *Say the Lord’s Prayer together.*

John 20:19-31

Reader: ¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

Jesus: “Peace be with you.”

Reader: ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again,

Jesus: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Reader: ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,

Jesus: "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Reader: ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them,

Thomas: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Reader: ²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

Jesus: "Peace be with you."

Reader: ²⁷Then he said to Thomas,

Jesus: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Reader: ²⁸Thomas answered him,

Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

Reader: ²⁹Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Reader: ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.