

Christ among Us

Jesus' first followers responded in awe to the risen Christ. As they gained a bigger understanding of the situation, they grew in awareness of God's presence and purpose. They were transformed to go in new directions, telling the good news to all. Modern disciples are also called to embrace Christ – alive in our midst and empowering us for learning, serving, and witnessing as a community of God's children.

Focus Scripture: Luke 24:36b–48

Following the Resurrection, Jesus' mission to proclaim the good news of God's reign had to continue through the words and deeds of his followers. Jesus had told the disciples he would return to them on the third day. On the third day after the crucifixion, however, Luke reports the disciples are terrified when Jesus appears. The disciples are yet to gain a broader understanding of their own testimony: "The Lord has risen indeed!" (Luke 24:24). Jesus blesses the disciples with peace. This conventional Sabbath greeting, "Peace be with you," marks a turning point from the fear surrounding the crucifixion to the joy that erupts in the coming of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, the disciples do not recognize Jesus. The language in verse 36, "Jesus himself stood among them" is similar to language used to describe the visits of angels in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Genesis 18:2, 1 Chronicles 21:15–16, Daniel 8:15). The disciples, however, thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus presents his hands and feet as a testimony to his identity – this resurrected life is an embodied one.

The disciples are still wondering, though filled with joy. Jesus' second proof of his identity is the request for food. By eating a piece of fish in the presence of the disciples, Jesus establishes that he is not a ghost.

Finally, Jesus recalls his prior teaching, and opens their minds to understand the scriptures. Being able to recognize Jesus after the Resurrection requires the disciples to understand the scriptures in a new way. Indeed, the disciples' "minds were opened" (v. 45), an echo of "their eyes were opened" (v. 31). As with the disciples in Emmaus, recognition comes in recollection of God's word and the

sharing of a meal. Jesus' presence has eased the doubts and fears of these first disciples, and they receive the commission to be witnesses.

Christ remains present and active, empowering disciples of every era in ministry. In Acts 3:12–19, we encounter Peter's healing of a lame person. Jesus' continuing power is revealed in this healing. The people are amazed. Peter uses this as an opportunity to teach about Jesus – the risen Christ – as being present and active. Jesus revealed the true meaning of events to the disciples; now Peter is doing the same with this crowd.

The readers addressed by 1 John 3:1–7 belong to the early Christian community. They do not fully realize the broad implications of God's relationship with them. The author calls them to live according to the love and hope they do know. They are called to live as the children of God that they know themselves to be.

We come to recognize God's steadfast love through practices of faith that help open our hearts and minds to see and know it. Psalm 4, likely used in temple worship, offers the assurance of God's help. Its liturgical formula is simple: a cry for help plus the honouring of God results in perceiving God's help.

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God, in Christ, moves among us, and we are awestruck. The texts this week encourage a broader understanding of God's reign in our midst, and also illustrate our human limitations in perceiving it. We are called to live as God's children. What does it mean to be open to the transformation that Christ brings, and then move in new ways and directions with the gospel?

April 26, 2009

Focus Scripture
Luke 24:36b–48

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

Amazing Creator,
send your Spirit to
create us anew this
day. Transform our
hearts and minds
to follow more
closely in the way
of Christ, speaking
the good news of
your reign of love.
Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

