



Faith in Action

“Dancing Together”

“...He breathed on them and said,
‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”
John 20:22

Lesson: The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus' followers had laid low after the Christ's crucifixion “for fear of the Jews” (20:19). Their trepidation was not unfounded. Their leader had after all been murdered by Rome at the urging of their own people; as Jesus' followers, all of their lives were at stake. The Evangelist doesn't tell us exactly who these disciples were that huddled together under lock and key that first Easter night, nor does he relate how many there were. What John does tell us, however, is that the resurrected Christ suddenly appeared among them, bearing both his wounds fresh from the cross and God's peace or *shalom*. Jesus' peace serves as the prelude to his commission, the sending out of his followers into the world, that is, to do the work God sent Jesus himself to begin. For this work, Jesus gives them his breath or the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't pretend or unrealistically promise his disciples that his indwelling presence in the person of the Holy Spirit will protect them from the same hostility, persecution, and even death, that he also faced when he was on the earth; proclaiming the risen Christ will always be met with opposition, resistance, and sometimes even violence and hate. Instead, the Holy Spirit is meant to bring forth life from the ruins of spiritual death and fear so to empower Jesus' followers – then and now – to boldly proclaim God's life-giving grace to a dark and dying world.

This week, spend some time with these disciples who were moved by the Holy Spirit to put their faith in action!

A Planter of Faith

Mary Magdalene has long been called the “Apostle to the Apostles” and with good reason. When Jesus makes his first resurrected appearance to this faithful follower, or disciple, in the garden outside of his tomb, Mary doesn't keep the *good news* to herself. Instead, she runs to tell Jesus' other disciples that Jesus had come back to life like any good Apostle, or messenger, would do (John 20:11-18).

Legend has it that the first Easter morning would also launch the first female Apostle's preaching career. According to tradition, Mary hopped a boat to France after Jesus' ascension to Heaven in order to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) as per Jesus' Great Commission. Her apostleship even led her to the court of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar where she bravely evangelized both him and other government officials using an egg before retiring as a mystic and hermit.

This week, let Mary of Magdala do what she does best – testify that is to the Gospel good news of Jesus' resurrection and promise of salvation to your child/children by reading her garden story together. Then commemorate this planter of faith by planting a garden filled with new life using an egg crate leftover from Easter. Your child/children can even share a plant or two with family and friends as their proclamation that “The Lord has risen indeed!”

<https://rainorshinemamma.com/egg-carton-seed-starter-for-kids/>

I'll Follow the Son

Some say he was; some say he wasn't. Whether the Apostle Philip was the same person as the Evangelist Philip is a matter of debate. What scripture does tell us for certain, however, is that over 2,000 years ago a devout disciple of Jesus named Philip followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit down a desert road leading to Gaza from Jerusalem. Here, Philip found an Ethiopian court official struggling to understand the prophetic writings of Isaiah concerning the Messiah. And because Philip was not afraid to either follow the Holy Spirit's lead and/or preach the Good News to strangers, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized (Acts 8:26-36). As a man of prestige and power in the Queen of Ethiopia's court, there is no telling how far the news of and the faith in the resurrected Jesus traveled all because Philip wasn't afraid to say, “yes” to God's Holy Spirit!

This week, let Philip show your child/children that they don't have to be afraid to share their faith in the risen Lord either. One of these two delightfully fun videos can help lead you and them in the right direction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMBuudfV15U>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGEqN7_teFo

Then talk to your child/children about their own Baptism. Use the UMC Baptismal Covenant to point out their own role in evangelism <https://umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship-the-baptismal-covenant-i>

You've Gotta Have Faith!

Jesus' disciple, Thomas, is living proof of just how hard it is for us humans to let go of past mistakes, especially when they're not ours! One small lapse of faith and the next thing you know, Thomas is labeled an eternal doubter! Poor Thomas! Poor us! Chalking Thomas up as the "poster disciple" for skepticism and disbelief robs him of his inner conviction and us of an invaluable model for our own faith. After all, while the disciple Thomas may have needed to see the risen Christ's wounds to believe, the Apostle Thomas was in fact the very first person to profess Jesus to be "Lord and God" (John 20:24-28). In other words, "the greatest doubter became the greatest believer" (Donovan, sermonwriter.com)!

Legend has it that the "Greatest Believer" took his faith following Jesus' commission to India where he, with the help of the Holy Spirit, founded 7 Churches! Some of India's oldest Christian communities today can trace their roots over 2K years ago all the way back to Thomas. Thomas is believed to have died for his faith in India after being speared.

This week, let Thomas show your child/children the human side of faith that often takes testing and questioning to grow by sharing his story of faith. The following video and fact sheet (with cool pictures) can help:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOsA5MTO9AQ>
<https://kids.kiddle.co/Thomas the Apostle>

Then help your child/children also see and believe by taking a faith walk together somewhere quiet where you can discover different ways to discern the Lord's presence in creation.

King of the Road

The disciple Cleopas isn't exactly one of Jesus' most famous followers. He wasn't one of the Twelve, which means you won't find him in any artistic rendition of the Lord's Supper. In fact, you just might not find him in the Bible at all unless, that is, you're specifically looking for him. That's because his name appears only once (Luke 24:18). Not to underrate him! Cleopas no less served as one of the first Apostles to the budding Apostles after meeting the resurrected Christ with an unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

Of course, it took more than a little while, some enlightenment, and a loaf of bread for Jesus to convince good old, forlorn Cleopas that he really was the prophesized Messiah (sufferings and all). But once Cleopas got it, there was no stopping him and his unnamed friend (who some speculate may have been his wife). They ran all the way back to Jerusalem (a road trip of about 7 miles) to share the good news with their more famous peers. The Lord is risen indeed!

Easter day may be behind us, but thanks to the personal witness of disciples like Cleopas, our hope, trust, and joy in the new life the resurrected Christ gives us is just beginning! This week, help your child/children be a joyful witness for the risen Lord like Cleopas. Start by sharing his story with one of these videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3Q7sKLU2o>
<https://youtbue.com/watch?v=8YlzWPPiH4A>

Then help your child/children create a witness book for the week, listing all the ways they encountered the risen Lord. Talk about how they can share their encounters with others.

Tell It Like It Is

The Apostle John may have been Jesus' beloved disciple, but historical evidence as to how this member of the Christ's inner circle actually fulfilled his Teacher's Great Commission after Jesus' ascension to Heaven is lacking. The Book of Acts confirms that he had remained in Jerusalem with Peter after being given the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Here, he labored at converting Jews to Christianity, thus becoming one of the 3 pillars of the emerging Church next to Peter and James. Tradition credits him as being John the Elder who wrote the Book of Revelation after receiving a vision of end times from Jesus while the aging Apostle was exiled on the island of Patmos during the persecutions of the Roman Emperor Domitian; while Church history further contends that John's eyewitness account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection at least forms the basis for the 4th Gospel, perhaps being written by one of John's disciples as he was dying (Joh 21:24). Whether John actually penned these Books or any of the 3 New Testament epistles bearing his name is pure speculation. If so, this collection of writings provides us with a rare opportunity to see how a life lived in faith with the Christ can transform us.

This week, let John give your child/children the gift of his faith and evangelism. A great place to start is John 21:24 and 20:30 where the Apostle himself is identified as the eyewitness source to the truths in the Gospel, whose desire is for us to believe so that we too may have eternal life (how goose bumpy is that!!??!!). Next, share one or two of the following videos about John.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csjERTqKd9o>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJyomfnUDjM>

Then craft some of these colors of faith beaded bracelets to wear and to share your family's faith in Christ so that everyone can believe in Jesus too – just like the Apostle John did!

<https://www.sswe.com/blog/colors-of-christ-bracelet-religious-craft-activiy/>

Good News Goodies!

The fact that it is women who first discover the Christ's tomb empty on Easter morning is no casual observation on the part of the Gospel writers. Jewesses in the first century, such as Mary Magdalene, Jesus' Mother, Mary, Joanna, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Salome, would have been ineligible to be legal witnesses under Jewish Law. By crediting women as the first eyewitnesses and heralds of the Good News to men, the Gospels not only validate the historical accuracy of the Christ's resurrection, but they also substantiate the fact that Jesus had come to change the world and its bias views. A new life of liberation and equality was ushered in inside of that empty tomb and it was women who dared to share that news with the world!

This week, dare your child/children to share the Good News of the new life and new world Jesus has ushered in by sharing the stories of these pioneer disciples (Luke 24:1-19) over a batch or two of these "resurrection rolls" <https://yummyhealthyeasy.com/easter-resurrection-rolls/>. On second thought, make two (or three) batches to share with the world!