

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 7, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Walk in the Light

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Have you ever been in a completely dark place without any light to orient you? Were you by yourself or with someone else? If you were with someone else, did that help you feel more secure? Why do you feel that being with someone else may be helpful or not?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Acts 4:32-35](#) and [1 John 1—2:2](#).

- The reading from 1 John affirms that our relationships with God and one another are related. Can you remember a time in which your feelings of sadness or anger about someone affected your time in church, your interactions with others, even with someone who had nothing to do with your problem?
- Confession is an ancient practice of the church. In some churches, congregants confess to a priest or a spiritual leader. There is a prayer of confession in the Order of Worship for Holy Communion of The United Methodist Church. A modern practice encourages us to examine our day and give thanks or ask God for forgiveness. Have you practiced any of these means of grace? In what way is confession helpful in your growth as a Christian disciple?
- “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2, NRSV). The reading for today invites us to confess but also gives us hope in God’s love. How do you feel knowing that if we confess, God’s love will be available?
- The readings of the Lectionary for today point us to the importance of being in a community. We need one another to support, encourage, and learn. In Acts 4:32-35, the church shared everything, even possessions. In modern times, individualism and privacy are prevalent. In fact, in some places, people do not speak to strangers, even in the church. But the readings today are an invitation to examine our values.
 - In what ways do you think you may show the Christian values of hospitality, generosity, companionship, and support in your personal life?
 - How can these values be applied in the church? Name specific ways.
- One of the comments we often hear from people who do not attend church is, “Why should I come to church if people act so badly and seem to be fighting with one another all the time?” Although the comment can be an excuse not to take Christian teachings seriously, do you think that the application of the values mentioned can help change the attitudes of some people? What can be your contribution to help others see your church as a welcoming place?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God of mercy, we confess that we do not always live our lives free of anger, sadness, and other feelings. Help us to come to you to overcome our limitations; guide us, as members of this congregation, to lead Christian lives that invite others to learn about Jesus, our Savior, and all his teachings. In his name, we pray. Amen.

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 14, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Purify in Hope

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, "What did you learn from your family about how to dress for church, theatre, other social gatherings? Were there rules practiced all the time, or only when you had visits at home?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read Luke 24:36b-48 and 1 John 3:1-7.

- Both the Gospel lesson as well as 1 John mention the presence of a new era. It began with Jesus' resurrection. In the Gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples. In the epistle, the writer refers to hope based on our faith. What is the difference between these two experiences? Do you need to see or experience something to accept it?
- How did you begin to come to church? Did you come with your family or a friend? When and how did you begin to feel that the church and your relationship to God by your faith in Jesus was important?
- The epistle mentions purification and sin: "No one who abides in him sins" (1John 3:6, NRSV). This is a difficult verse. The key word may be "abides," which can also mean "living in union with Christ." Sometimes that union gives us an inner assurance that helps us avoid some situations. At other times, somebody or something (a hymn or song, an object) helps us choose between options. Have you ever had that kind of experience?
- How important do you feel faith and hope are to live according to your values? In what ways do you want to be your best self before God?
- What are ways to abide in Christ? How do you try to maintain your communion with God in your daily life? What helps you to be reminded to act according to your values?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, we want to abide in you and live our lives according to the faith we have in Jesus Christ. Help us to maintain our hope and faith in the midst of changes, temptations, and discouragement. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 21, 2024): How Shall We Live – We Abide in Christ

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, "What do you do when you see people asking for money or when you see homeless men or women?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read John 10:11-18 and 1 John 3:16-24.

- Do you know people you would describe as generous? Why? What are the characteristics of a generous person?
- One of the most difficult things to do is to decide whom to help and how to help others, particularly if you do not feel you have that much. How do you decide? What are specific ways to help others? Give away what you do not use, share something you made or cooked, volunteer somewhere, contribute to some cause?
- The reading of the Gospel today describes Jesus as the good shepherd "who lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11, NRSV). What relationship do you see between that verse and generosity? Does generosity include sacrifice?
- 1 John 3:18 says: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (NRSV). What is the difference between loving in word and loving in action? Can you eliminate one of them? How important is speech in love? How do you express your love in action?
- According to our reading in 1 John, Christ abides in us when we are obedient in love for others and when we live as Christ lived. If you examine yourself based on this principle, are you a loving person? Do you see your group, your church, and your community as good examples of love in the world? If not, what specific needs to be added? A program that serves children, youth, adults with special needs, or the homeless?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, there is so much need in the world that some days, it is overwhelming. Help us to be loving and generous Christians with a generous attitude wherever we can help. Show us ways to act or express love to anyone who needs a kind word or a generous gift. Amen.

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