

LITURGICAL ACTION

KNOWING JESUS IN A NEW WAY, PART 1: KNOWN IN ABSENCE

LESSON NOTES

**FOCUS: KNOWN IN ABSENCE (MARK 16:1-7, MATTHEW 28:1-8,
LUKE 24:1-11, JOHN 20:1-10)**

- LITURGICAL ACTION
- CORE PRESENTATION

THE MATERIAL

- LOCATION: THE MYSTERY OF PENTECOST SHELF, TOP SHELF—FIRST LESSON
- PIECES: 6 PLAQUES ILLUSTRATED WITH THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS, 1 PLAQUE ILLUSTRATED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST, A STAND TO HOLD ALL 7 PLAQUES
- UNDERLAY: 6 WHITE PANELS AND 1 RED PANEL SEPARATED BY NARROW, GOLD PIECES OF WOOD

BACKGROUND

The season of Easter (Eastertide) extends the experience of Easter Sunday for six weeks, but it also helps prepare for the coming of the Mystery of Pentecost. This period is a transition between Jesus' earthly ministry and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is a time when the disciples and others began to know Jesus in a new way. He is neither simply human nor simply spiritual. He is completely both in a way that is anything but simple.

Jesus' appearances have fascinated people from the disciples, to the opponents of the early Christians, to the present. What did they experience? Clearly it was something very powerful. Paul was an opponent of the Followers of the Way, yet his experience of Jesus after the Resurrection completely changed his life. It turned him around and toward what would later be called "Christian."

Paul provided us with the earliest written list of appearances still available to us. It can be found in what we today call his "first" letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:3-11). His list began with Cephas, which means "Peter" in Aramaic. It continues with the disciples and then "more than five hundred...most...still alive." James was listed next. He is only the second person Paul specifically named as a participant in this experience in addition to himself, "the least of the apostles." Our task here, however, is not to explain or analyze. It is to tell the story, drawing on the season of Eastertide to guide us by its structure, as we make our way toward Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples and in our own.

This is not to say that the time, place and identity of those experiencing Jesus in this new way and related matters are not interesting and significant. They are. This is only to say that such talk would shift the emphasis in this introduction from guiding the storytelling to an analysis of the texts and their context, which is a very different kind of communication. Such an analysis can be saved for another time. For now it is enough to say that the scriptural texts each presentation draws on in this series are indicated at the beginning of each lesson.

Our focus here is on Jesus' followers, as they experienced the fearful wonder and astonishment of this transition time. It was a vast adjustment to learn how to know Jesus in this new way. Furthermore, in all of the appearances there is at least an implied call to mission. The disciples were commissioned to spread the good news of the reality they experienced during the transition and in Pentecost. There was no precedent for this. They were called to help God create a new and unknown world! Such a vocation was overwhelming for them, as it is for us today, but we, at least, have this story to guide us. They did not. They had to create God's creation anew, as we must also do in our own time guided by Eastertide and Pentecost.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

Everything you need for this presentation is located on the Pentecost shelf. The rack, sitting on the top shelf, holds both the underlay and the seven images depicting the six appearances and Pentecost. The images stand up in this rack so the children can see the art and be drawn to it.

This presentation is like the Faces of Easter, although it begins where the Faces ends. The underlay is unrolled back toward the storyteller from the middle of the circle rather than away from the storyteller. In the Faces, the storyteller helps give birth to the narrative of the One who becomes Easter. In this lesson the storyteller is reborn in narrative by the loss, astonishment and longing of the disciples, as they move inward to receive the Holy Spirit in Pentecost.

This lesson ends like Faces with a change of color. The change is from white to red and marks the shift from preparation encounters to the Mystery of Pentecost itself. The moving out in the Faces of Easter returns inward with the Pentecost lesson. It marks the new reality that the disciples learned to know and trust. God's elusive presence is not only beyond in the creation and beside us as Jesus, the redemptive companion of the Gospels, but is also within to motivate and sustain us to move on in our journey. The divinity and humanity of Jesus, a coincidence of opposites, is clarified experientially by this process to provide a new way to conceive of what is really good and true and beautiful in life and death.

The rhythm of moving out and within again requires two different kinds of art. In the Faces of Easter, the art shows the changing face of the One who is Easter, drawing on the theme of faces in the Old and New Testaments, such as how the face of Moses glowed when he emerged from the Tabernacle. It also draws on the way of saying "intimate presence" in Hebrew with the lovely phrase "face to face." In this series of lessons, however, Jesus' presence is suggested by the faces of the disciples. The children are invited into the perplexity and wonder of the disciples as they see Jesus in this new way. It is the space between them and Jesus that the children are invited to enter, so the centuries can dissolve, enabling the children to be there, as Jesus is here.

SPECIAL NOTES

In conclusion there is an important similarity between this lesson and the Faces of Easter that needs special emphasis. At the end of each presentation during the six Sundays of Eastertide the children are invited to choose materials from around the room that will help tell more of the story or that their intuition tells them need to be placed next to each picture, even if they can't articulate why.

For example, when you tell the story of the women at the empty tomb, one child might bring the Mary figure from the Holy Family on the altar/focal shelf to put beside the image. Another child might bring the crucifixion marker from Jesus and Jerusalem or the whole box of crosses from the enrichment lesson on Crosses to put beside the tile. Be open to the surprising connections children make, as they explore the meaning embodied in the stories of the disciples' encounters with the risen Christ. There is much to be learned from them as we make this journey together in Godly Play.

WHERE TO FIND THE MATERIAL

As we have said, the seven parts to the lesson Knowing Jesus in a New Way are found on the top shelf of the Pentecost shelf unit. The classroom map suggests where this might be, but your Godly Play room may not be as fully developed as this one or look exactly like it. You will need to find a way to be creative, following the principles of how the room is laid out. For example, your Godly Play room may not be a perfect rectangle. What do you do then? You do the best you can.