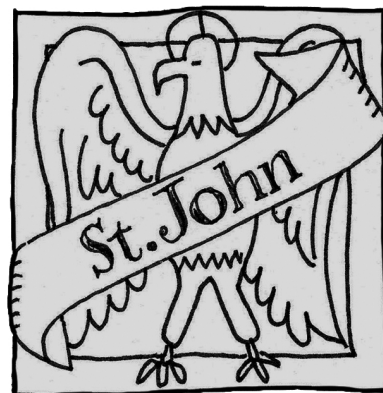


YEAR A

Drawn *to the Gospels*

An Illustrated Lectionary



JAY SIDEBOTHAM

 CHURCH
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*This book is dedicated to Frances,
who after many years of marriage remains kind enough
to chuckle at my cartoons.*

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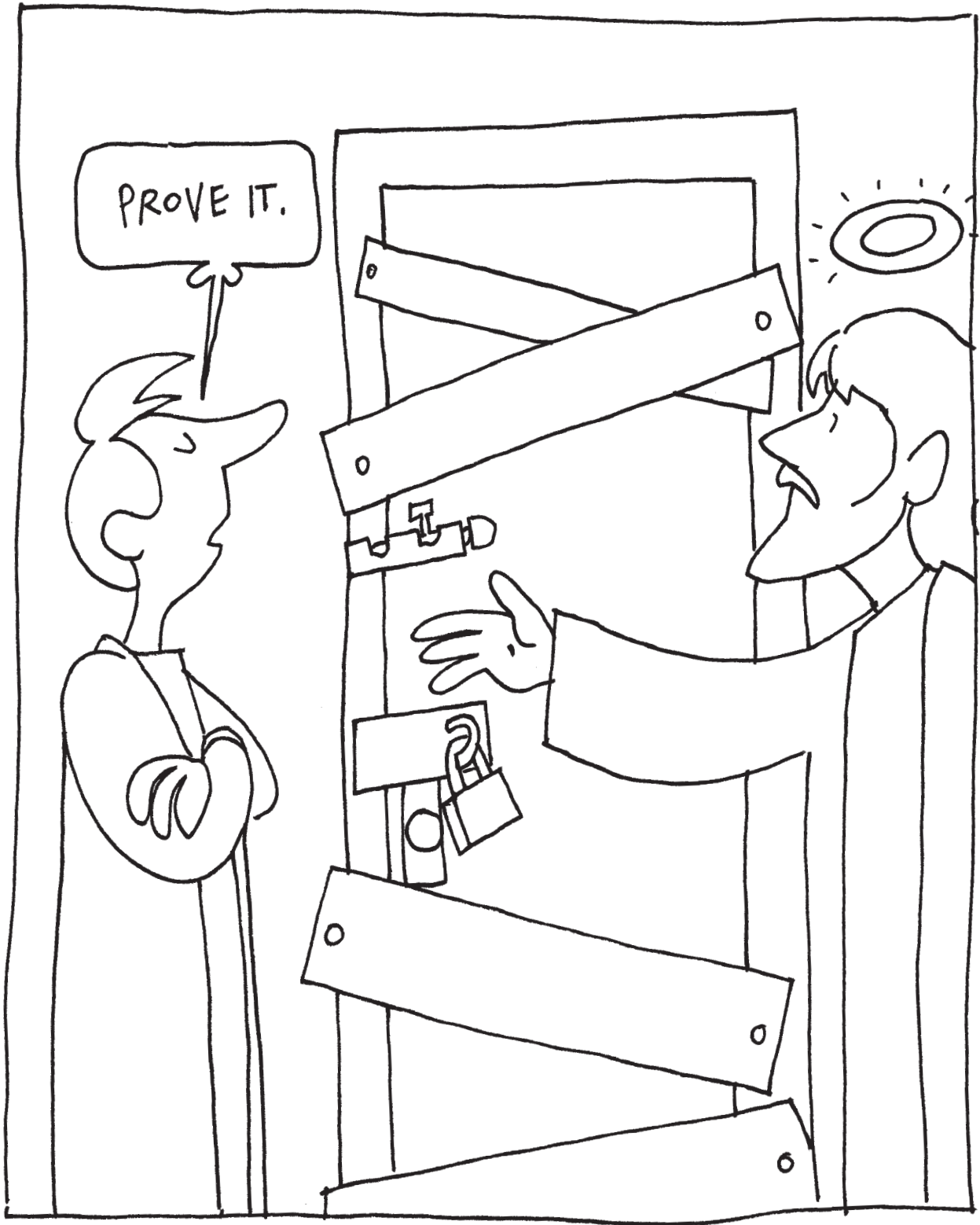
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Second Sunday of Easter

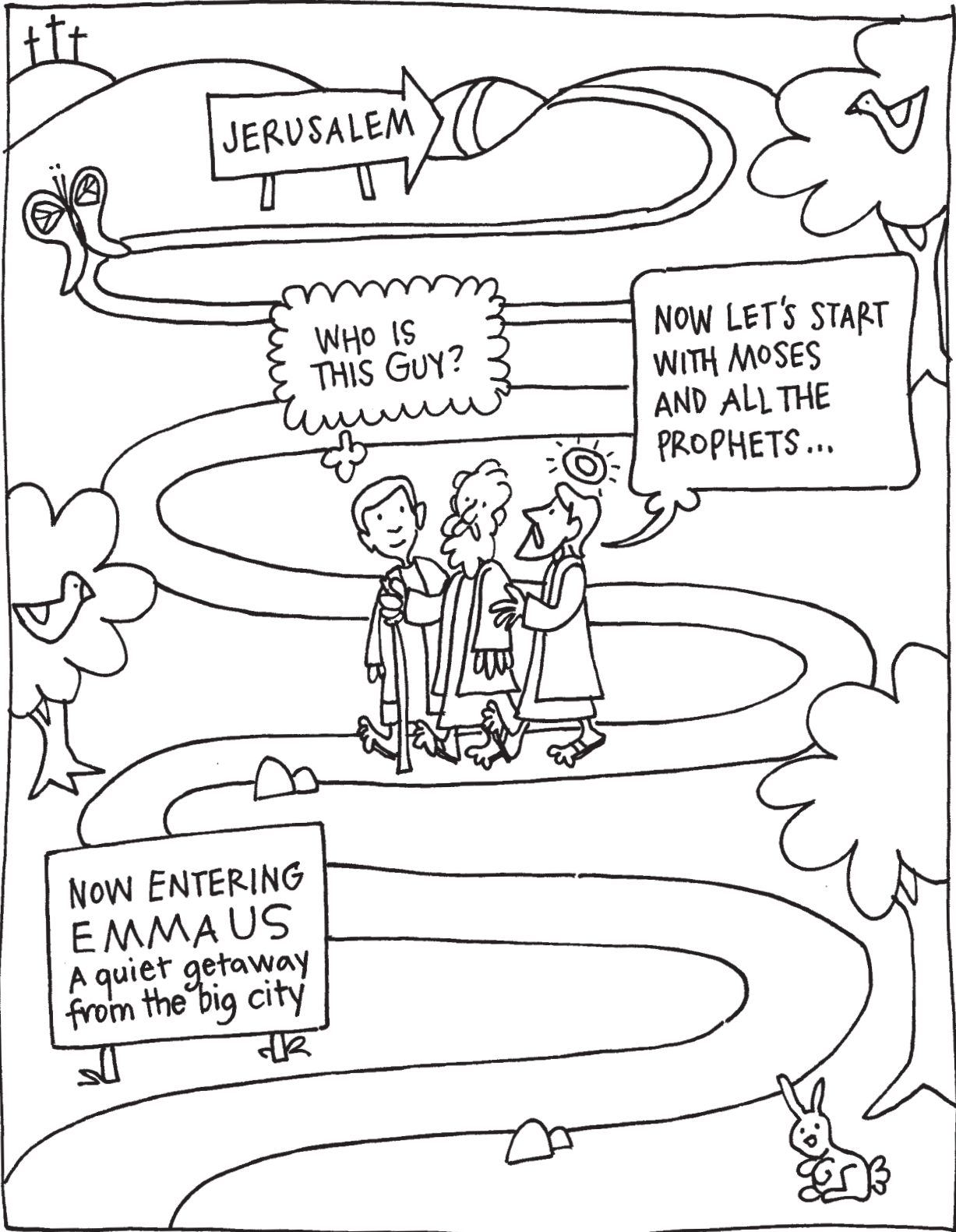
John 20:19-31

Notes on This Reading

Every year on this Second Sunday after Easter, we read about Thomas of doubting fame. It is a recognition that while there was wonder and amazement among those who first saw Jesus after the Resurrection, there was also a good deal of doubt, skepticism, and confusion. For some people, there was gradual realization that the Good News of Resurrection was true. It didn't happen instantly for everyone. While it might seem like a bit of a downer to speak of doubt on the heels of last week's great celebration, the Good News in the message is that doubt is okay. Frederick Buechner said that doubt is the ants in the pants of faith. It can lead to the kind of deeper faith that Thomas discovered when he finally saw the risen Jesus and said, "My Lord and my God."

Questions

1. What's your impression of doubting Thomas?
2. Why do you think that the stories of resurrection include so many occasions when people doubted? Wouldn't it have been better to edit out those stories?
3. What has caused you to believe? What has been convincing? What has triggered your doubts? Have those doubts been resolved?
4. Do you believe because of what someone has told you, or do you have to see for yourself?



Third Sunday of Easter

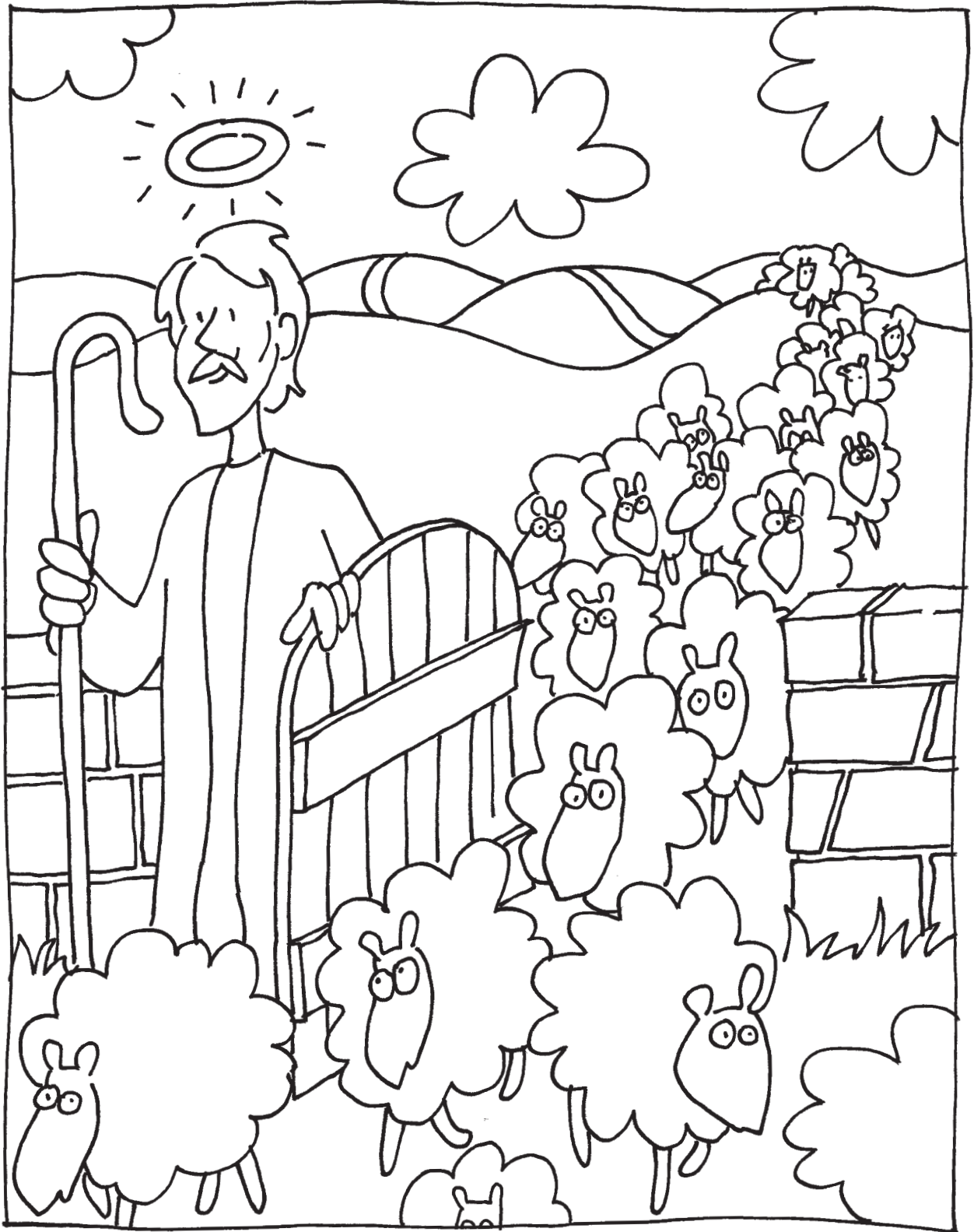
Luke 24:13-35

Notes on This Reading

The story of the road to Emmaus is told only in the Gospel of Luke. We owe a great debt to Luke because it's one of the most beautiful, poignant stories in the gospels. Two disciples leave Jerusalem after Jesus has died. They are dispirited and disappointed. They speak of how they had hoped that Jesus was the one they had waited for. Their grief blinds them to Jesus's presence with them on the road. As they travel toward Emmaus, Jesus teaches them about what his life and death meant. They invite him to join them for dinner when they arrive at their destination. Mysteriously, as the invited guest, he becomes the host, breaking and blessing the bread. At that point, the disciples realize that Jesus had been with them. They run back to Jerusalem to share this amazing news.

Questions

1. What are the range of emotions that these disciples might have been feeling as they left Jerusalem? What might they have thought about their time with Jesus?
2. Why do you think they didn't recognize Jesus?
3. The meal that they all share that evening sounds in many ways like the eucharist. Do you think that is coincidence or is it intentional?
4. Has the eucharist ever made it possible for you to see Jesus more clearly?



Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:1-10

Notes on This Reading

This Sunday is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday, tapping into the persistent scriptural metaphor that we all need a good shepherd, and that God provides that kind of pastoral leadership and care for us. Readings on this Sunday always include some portion of John 10. This year we read the first ten verses of that chapter, in which Jesus contrasts the shepherd of the sheep with those who are thieves. Jesus speaks of one who knows the sheep by name, a touching image of God's intimate love for each one of us. Doesn't it feel great when someone knows your name? Jesus mixes his metaphors a bit, and says, "I am the gate, the means of entry into the safety of the fold, the one who comes to bring abundant life, a great gift." If you have some extra time, read John 10 in its entirety. See what it has to teach you about a good shepherd.

Questions

1. What do you think it means that Jesus is the gatekeeper?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is the gate?
3. Who might be thieves and bandits?
4. In verse 10, Jesus promises to bring abundant life. What does abundant life look like for you? When have you experienced it? To what do you attribute it?

I am the way,
the truth,
and the life.



Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 14:1-14

Notes on This Reading

On this Sunday, we read a short portion of a long speech that Jesus gives to his disciples on the night before he died. So why do we read this in Easter season? Isn't it more appropriate for Holy Week? Perhaps it is because this passage is so filled with hope, even as it anticipates Jesus's death. Maybe that is why this passage is so often read at funerals. These verses speak of the promise that in death, life is changed, not ended. It speaks of God's preparation of a place for us. It encourages us to resist anxiety. And it calls us to discover the way, the truth and the life, in Jesus.

Questions

1. Why do you imagine that Jesus needed to tell the disciples not to be troubled? What might have made them anxious?
2. What does it mean to believe in God? Is it a matter of the head or the heart, or both?
3. Thomas asks: How can we know the way? Is that a question you have ever asked? What do you think of Jesus's answer?
4. Jesus says: If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. Do you believe that? What do you think Jesus meant by that?

I will not leave
you as orphans.
I will come
to you.



Sixth Sunday of Easter

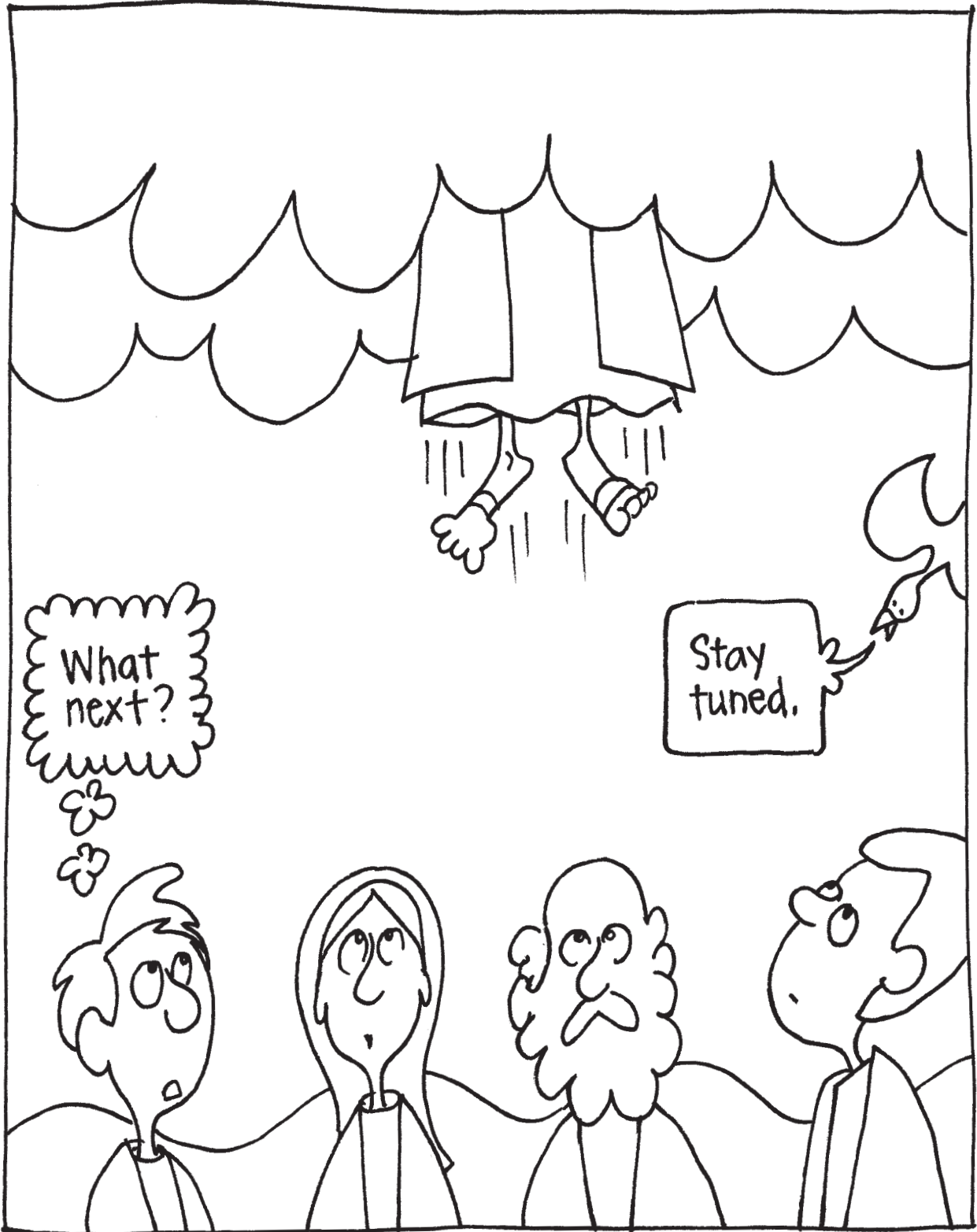
John 14:15-21

Notes on This Reading

We pick up where we left off last Sunday, as Jesus continues to coach his disciples before he leaves them, giving them counsel about how they are to live in the world after he has ascended. As we approach the day of Pentecost when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, we read about the promised gift of the Spirit—an advocate, a comforter. The word in Greek is *paraclete*, and it literally means one who comes along side. As the disciples await this divine presence, Jesus encourages them to keep his commandments, summed up in the call to love God and neighbor.

Questions

1. How do you think the disciples were feeling as they anticipated Jesus's departure?
2. Why is the Holy Spirit described as an advocate? When have you felt like you needed a spiritual advocate?
3. Jesus promises that the disciples will see him even when the world sees him no longer. What do you think he meant? How do we see Jesus today?



Ascension Day

Luke 24:44-53

Notes on This Reading

Forty days after Easter we celebrate Ascension Day, which always places it on a Thursday, so it may not get the attention that a feast that falls on a Sunday often gets. But it's an important story, described in both Luke's gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus gives final instructions to his disciples. Then, in some mysterious way, he is taken up into heaven. In all its mystery, this feast day seeks to answer a few questions. What happened to Jesus after he was resurrected? What is next for the disciples?

Questions

1. What do you think is significant about the Feast of the Ascension? What would our faith be like if we didn't have this feast?
2. How would you feel if you were among the disciples that saw Jesus's ascent? What would be the range of emotions?
3. What was next for the disciples? How do you as a disciple move forward into an uncertain future? When have you had to do that?

WHAT WOULD JESUS PRAY?

That they may
all be one...



Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:1-11

Notes on This Reading

We continue on this last Sunday of the Easter season to read from Jesus's long farewell address found in John 13–18. Chapter 17 allows us to eavesdrop on a prayer that Jesus offers, structured in three parts. Jesus prays first for himself, and for the ordeal he is about to undergo. Then he prays for the disciples who are with him, that they will be given strength. Finally, he prays for those who will come to faith through the disciples, which includes you and me. Read the whole chapter for insight into how Jesus prayed. And focus this year on that first part of the prayer, in which Jesus speaks of his desire to glorify God, and his deep care for his disciples as he leaves them. Ironically, the Gospel of John presents Jesus's death as his hour of glory, where God's sacrificial self-offering can be seen. That's quite a distinctive vision of glory.

Questions

1. What do you think you would pray for on the night before an experience like Jesus had?
2. What does it mean that Jesus glorified his Father while on earth? What does it mean to glorify another person?
3. Jesus prays for protection for his disciples. Why would they stand in need of protection?
4. What would you want Jesus to pray for you?