

**Scriptures**

John 14:1-10

1 Peter 2:9

Psalm 31

# The Way, Truth and Life

# session essentials



## Jesus is our way to God and reveals God to us.

- ◆ Jesus, speaking with his beloved disciples at the Last Supper, promises to bring all God's people to God's own home.
- ◆ Older children readily connect to their own homes, but may wonder what Jesus means by a home with God. We can acknowledge both Jesus' firm promise and the enduring mystery of what his words mean.
- ◆ Today's session continues to celebrate the 50 days of Easter as it explores Jesus' comforting promise.

### Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Today's Gospel
- ◆ Game (*yarn or string*)
- ◆ Praying Together

### Enrichment

- ◆ Explore the Good News
- ◆ Movement and Psalms
- ◆ Art: Bibikow's *Photo of African House* (*junk materials, such as cardboard tubes, empty boxes, etc.*)
- ◆ Easter Tree Craft (*branches, flowerpot, sand, eggs, nut pick or manicure scissors, bowl, ribbons, seeds, scraps of paper, cotton balls, toothpicks; optional: food colors*)
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

### Helps for Leaders

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ Our Christian Heritage: Baptism
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Hellenists

## ✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Participants describe places where they experience belonging.

Ask one participant to open the session by leading participants in the Easter greeting:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
*The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Distribute paper and drawing materials. *Directions to the participants:*

- ◆ Think of a place where you feel as if you really belong—a friend’s house, your grandparents’ house, a place outdoors no one knows but you or any place you choose.
- ◆ Draw a picture of this place.

After 5-10 minutes’ work, invite volunteers to share and explain their pictures. Discuss:

- ◆ Have we ever been somewhere where we felt we did not belong? Where? What did we feel? do?
- ◆ Where do we feel as if we *do* belong? What does belonging feel like?
- ◆ What makes the difference between belonging and not belonging?

Conclude:

- ◆ Today Jesus tells us about a place where we *all* belong.

## ✓ Today’s Gospel (10-15 minutes)

Help participants find **John 14:1-7**. Ask them to follow along as you read aloud.

After the reading, discuss:

- ◆ What is Jesus going to prepare for his disciples?
- ◆ What do you think Jesus means by preparing a place for them?
- ◆ How do you think God’s “house” is different from the houses we live in?
- ◆ What do you think it would be like to live with God? Why?
- ◆ What does Thomas ask? What is Jesus’ answer?
- ◆ Jesus says that he is the way to God’s house. How do you think Jesus can help us get to God’s house?
- ◆ How do you think we can help one another get to God’s house?

Invite participants to read another Bible verse about belonging to God’s family.

## ✓ Game (10-20 minutes)

Participants play a game of proclaiming God’s acts.

Help participants find **1 Peter 2:9**. Ask them to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

After the reading, discuss:

- ◆ This verse tells us that each of us belongs to God’s family. How does the writer describe God’s family?
- ◆ What do you like or not like about belonging to God’s family?
- ◆ What does this verse say that we were chosen to do?
- ◆ What does the word *proclaim* mean? (*As necessary, define proclaim as telling aloud.*)

Invite participants to play the Proclaim Game. Ask a volunteer to make a mock scroll from paper and yarn or string. *Directions to the participants:*

- ◆ Sit in a circle.
- ◆ In ancient times, people with news often proclaimed it from a scroll. Today we will use a scroll to proclaim good news about God.
- ◆ Pass the scroll around the circle.
- ◆ The first player holding the scroll proclaims—tells aloud—one of “the wonderful acts of God” (1 Peter 2:9).
- ◆ The second player holding the scroll repeats the first piece of good news, then adds a second.
- ◆ Continue passing the scroll. Help one another keep the proclamation going as long as possible!

## ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Light the candle. Invite participants to continue experimenting with using scripture verses as prayer. Help the participants memorize these words from **John 14:6**: *Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”*

Memorize the verse together by saying it together slowly and rhythmically several times. Then pause and say:

- ◆ Think about where you want to go in your life. Use your own words to tell Jesus what you want.

Pause, then slowly repeat once more the scripture verse above. Close by praying:

- ◆ Lord Jesus, thank you for helping each one of us find our way to God. *Amen.*

**Note:** Distribute this week’s *At Home with the Good News* to group members (or e-mail it to families).

## □ Explore the Good News

(5-15 minutes)

On page 1 of today's *Explore the Good News* you'll find a scripture skills activity that invites group members to further explore today's story. Ask group members to complete this activity together.

On page 2 group members will find a collection of psalm verses that use the same metaphor of "God's house" found in today's gospel. Use these verses and the accompanying questions to help group members reflect on this metaphor. You'll also find an activity called Amazing Appearances. This ongoing activity is designed to help older children practice scripture skills as they explore the variety of resurrection stories in the gospels.

## □ Movement and Psalms

(10-20 minutes)

Group members use movement to explore the parallelism of the psalms. In the 4th Sunday of Easter, we explored the device of extension. In today's session we look at the device of reversal. We repeat the introduction in each session to help familiarize group members with both movement and psalm basics.

First invite group members to make shapes that are different from the standing or sitting shapes they usually make during the day. Ask for a high shape (stretched out), a low shape (crouched, squatting, etc.) and a shape in the middle. Ask them to vary their shapes in other ways:

- ◆ Make an open shape.
- ◆ Make a closed shape.
- ◆ Make a stretched-out shape.
- ◆ Make a tense, tight shape.

Then ask group members to form pairs. Explain:

- ◆ First, one of you will make a shape.
- ◆ Then, the other will make a shape that responds to your partner.
- ◆ Remember to keep enough space between you so that you aren't touching, but your bodies together make one new shape.

Invite participants to try this response several times. Then ask:

- ◆ Can you make a shape that reverses your partner's shape? That is, take at least one basic element of your partner's shape and reverse it. If your partner is making an open shape, you can make a closed one.

Encourage group members to find several ways to reverse their partner's shapes.

Then explain that Hebrew poetry in the psalms uses a unique way of building a poem. When English poets wrote poems long ago, they might make words rhyme, as they do in nursery rhymes. Invite group members to think of rhymes they know.

But rhyme only works well in its original language. The poetry of Hebrew psalms works in any translation because they "rhyme" thoughts instead of words. Read group members this verse:

Your presence fills me with joy  
and brings me pleasure forever.

—Psalm 16:11

Explain that the second line echoes the first one. It has the same basic idea, said in a slightly different way. Now read another verse:

I call to the Lord for help,  
And from his sacred hill he answers me.

—Psalm 3:4

This time, the second line extends the first one, just as we extended movements in our warm-up. You don't know the whole idea until you hear both parts. Here's one more verse:

The Lord will take away the strength of the wicked,  
but protect those who are good.

—Psalm 37:17

This time, the second line reverses the first. The whole verse tells about two events that are opposite to each other. Ask group members to read together Psalm 31:6-7, which has two examples of *reversal*. Ask them to look for other verses in **Psalm 31** in which the second half of the verse reverses the idea of the first half of the verse.

## □ Art (15-30 minutes)

### Bibikow's Photo of African House

Participants use “junk art” to illustrate today's gospel.

Gather group members around the photograph of the *African House*, attached to this document. Encourage group members to talk about the house in the picture. How does the house in the picture look like their own homes? How does the house in the picture look different from their own homes? Ask group members to look at the picture as you reread **John 14:1-3**.

Briefly review the gospel:

- ◆ In scripture, many psalms and passages refer to God's home. For example, in Psalm 23 we read, “Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of our life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”
- ◆ These words might mean different things. They could mean that the writer wanted to spend much time in the temple at Jerusalem, where people gathered to praise God. They could mean that the writer felt very close to God and wanted to feel that close for his or her whole life. They could mean that the writer felt at home being part of God's people.
- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus promises to take us to God's home. We don't know everything that Jesus meant, but we do know that he used the language of his people. Jesus is promising us that we can live close to God forever, happy to be with God and happy to be with all God's people.
- ◆ With Jesus, let's think about imaginative ways to talk about God's house. What people could we find in God's house? What could people do in God's house? What words might we hear said in God's house? Why would we want “many rooms” in God's house?

Make available a collection of “junk” materials: discarded boxes and juice cans, cardboard tubes from paper products, construction paper, paint, brushes, markers, glue and scissors. Invite group members to work in pairs or twos to make homes that illustrate God's house as described in today's gospel and in the group's discussion.

#### Note:

- ◆ You can find more information about this style of house painting online at <http://academic.evergreen.edu/projects/wallpainting/about.htm>.

## □ Easter Tree Craft (15-30 minutes)

Participants continue decorating the Easter tree begun in the session for the 2nd Sunday of Easter.

*Directions to the participants:*

- ◆ Use a nut pick or pair of manicure scissors to make a tiny hole in each end of the egg. Blow through one end to force the egg into a bowl.
- ◆ Now use the scissors to cut away a window in your egg. (*The eggs may be dyed first. Make each dye by mixing ¾ cup water, 1 teaspoon vinegar and 10-20 drops food color in a cup.*)
- ◆ Use collage materials, such as seeds, scraps of paper, cotton balls and toothpicks, to make an Easter scene inside your egg. You can show what you think God's house might look like; you can show Jesus risen from the dead; or you can make up your own idea.
- ◆ You can add any other trim or decorations that you like to the outside of the egg.
- ◆ Use ribbon to hang your finished egg.

## INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
  - An optional (and ongoing) *Faith Skills* activity, this week exploring Holy Communion.
  - A helpful article looking at *Older Children and the Gospel*.
  - The photograph titled *African House*, to be used in today's Art activity.
  - A family paper, *At Home with the Good News*, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.
- ◆ Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Spring-A's *Models of the Faith*.
  - A printable article exploring the possibility of *Using Music and Musical Activities* to enhance faith-formation.
  - A printable article examining ways of *Keeping Easter*.
  - The *Introduction for Intermediate* for **Living the Good News**.



## More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings invite us to consider our lives as a journey with Christ to a glorious, final home with God. In Acts, that journey includes misunderstanding and suffering at the hands of those opposed to the gospel of Christ. In 1 Peter, journeying with Jesus means being joined with him into a spiritual house, members of a holy nation. Jesus assures his disciples that their earthly journey culminates in an eternal home with their heavenly Father.

### Acts 7:55-60

Luke records in detail the death of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Early in the Church's life, followers of Jesus of Nazareth enjoyed "the goodwill of all the people" (2:47). After some time, however, the community's size attracted considerable attention, some positive and some negative, from those outside the fellowship.

Those who resisted the growing Christian community latched on to its unique teachings and used them as weapons against Stephen. Stephen understood that faith in Jesus would eventually change the traditional forms of worship. This forceful teaching stirred up the anger and jealousy of his opponents.

The final straw came when Stephen declared that he saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Stephen's audience understood the enormous significance of this claim and resisted it, fulfilling Stephen's description of their nature (7:51-53).

### 1 Peter 2:2-10

In today's reading, the Christian community is described in several interwoven images. It is a spiritual house. The symbol of Jesus as the cornerstone was frequently used in the early preaching, especially as a touchstone for response to him. To some he is precious, but to others he is a stumbling block. The community is also a holy priesthood appointed to offer the spiritual sacrifice of obedience.

Finally, the titles given to Israel are extended to Christians. Their duty is to declare the Lord's deeds. They are now a family, a nation, a people transcending all ethnic barriers, for they are God's own who have received mercy.

### John 14:1-14

The gospel readings for the fifth through the seventh Sundays of Easter in all three cycles are taken from the great farewell discourse of Jesus (13:31–17:26), explaining the significance and implications of his glorification. As God's glory is revealed in Jesus' obedient suffering, so Jesus' glory will be seen in his exaltation by God. Thus, his glorification requires his return to the Father and his departure from the disciples.

But surprisingly, his departure will not bring separation from his disciples but a deeper, more pervasive fellowship. He will abide with them always in the Christian community—the body of Christ.

Philip's request to see the Father and so be satisfied expresses the human longing for a real and intimate knowledge of God. This desire is answered in the present. Jesus is the abiding revelation of God in words and works.

## Reflection

In this section of the farewell discourse, Jesus tries to prepare his friends for the necessity of his leaving them. He does so with tender concern, giving them not an abstraction, but the concrete image of a house which he will prepare where they can be together.

Any physical house exists to protect and nourish the lives within, so that they become what Jesus describes: homes for each other, the shelter of each other.

In the novel *Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry, a widow remembers how she and her husband built an imaginary house. They planned every detail in their imaginations. She says:

"Of all the kind things he did for me, that house was the kindest. I could see that love is a great room with a lot of doors where we are invited to knock and come in. Though it contains all the world, the sun, moon and stars, it is so small as to be also in our hearts...In the presence of that long flow of love, even grief could not stand..."

The house is a metaphor for the self—so in creating for us a new home, Jesus makes us new, more loving people.

## Our Christian Heritage

### Baptism

The sacrament of baptism celebrates the full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's body, the Church. Through baptism, a person enters into the Christian community and is recognized as a child of God, marked as Christ's own forever. It is not repeatable and not denominational.

Baptism evokes images of cleansing, new life, death and resurrection. It recalls biblical themes of Israel's exodus through the sea, John the Baptist's call for repentance, Christ's burial and resurrection. It enacts theological concepts such as repentance, forgiveness, adoption and new life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The early Church referred to the practices of baptism and eucharist as mysteries (Greek, *mysterion*), a term later replaced in the western Church by sacraments (Latin, *sacramentum*). A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace that it confers through Christ.

### Ancient Baptism

The rite of baptism has its roots in ancient practice. A convert to Judaism was immersed in water to signify that person's crossing of the Red Sea and accepting the heritage of the Jewish people.

John the Baptist preached repentance and baptized Jews to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. When he baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the dove, descended upon Jesus and the voice of God proclaimed Jesus as beloved Son.

Thus baptism in the early Christian community took its form from the Jewish initiation of converts reinterpreted now to link repentance, cleansing, new birth, adoption, death and resurrection with deliverance through the waters. Christian converts were immersed in water, signifying death to old ways and new life with Christ (Romans 6:3-11).

### Baptism in the New Testament Time

In the New Testament time, baptism was often immediate upon confession of faith. Over the next 200 years, however, a more complex process developed, perhaps because Gentile converts might be completely ignorant of the tradition from which Christianity came, perhaps because Christians were persecuted and hoped to avoid spies in their midst.

## The World of the Bible

### Hellenists

Hellenists (derived from the Greek word for Greece, *Hellas*) were those from other nations who spoke Greek and were more receptive to the influence of Greek culture.

Though the Romans ruled the Mediterranean nations, Greek literature and ideas formed the basis for education and the Greek language was used for international communication and business. To be educated often meant to be able to speak and read Greek (like St. Paul and the other New Testament authors who all wrote in Greek).

For Jews, Hellenism posed a threat because its education was rooted in religious beliefs and social values that were not compatible with the Jewish belief that Yahweh was the one and only God (exclusive monotheism) who had chosen them as God's covenant community guided by God's instruction (*Torah*).