

25 THE ROAD INTO LIFE

Josie was weeding her family's vegetable garden. She noticed a cocoon attached to a branch of a bush. It was grey and lifeless. Suddenly it began to move and split open from top to bottom. As she watched, something emerged from the split in the cocoon. First a moist head appeared and then wings. It was a butterfly.

The butterfly crawled out of the cocoon, spread its wings to dry in the warm air and then flew away. Josie touched the cocoon with her finger. It was like an empty tomb.

3 STATEMENTS

- In the resurrection of Jesus, God lifts us out of the pain of death and surprises us with new life.
- Jesus' resurrection is not a simple happy ending. It is a new beginning and a fresh start.
- Death was defeated. Because of the resurrection, death has lost its grasp on Jesus and us.

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Source

SURPRISE ON THE THIRD DAY

Our modern age has removed some of the reality of death from families and friends. People usually die in clean, well-lit hospitals. And when they die, there are people whose job it is to take care of the body to prepare it for burial. Most often the family will not see their loved one for a day or two as the body is being prepared.

Not too many years ago, the family did all the burial preparation. In the time of Jesus, it was unheard of that you should hire someone outside the family to take care of the dead.

When Jesus died on the cross, his "family" took his body and completed a minimum amount of preparation. Because Jesus had been placed in the tomb in so great a hurry, only part of the customary burial preparations were completed. They made plans to finish the sad job on the first day of the week. Read Luke 23:50-56.

Often words cannot express our innermost feelings and thoughts as clearly as can our body language. Working in pairs, designate one of you as the sculptor and the other as the clay or stone. The sculptor is to shape the clay or stone into a statue that expresses how the women were feeling as they approached the tomb that Sunday at day-break.

Read Luke 24:1-12. As you read these verses, think about the mood the women showed before they came to the tomb and how that mood suddenly changed.

The women had been with Jesus throughout his ministry and had heard him say that he would be crucified and on the third day rise.

1. Why do you think they came to the tomb expecting to find a lifeless body?

2. Why do you think you would have come with the same thought of finding a lifeless body?

These women were the very first gospel preachers, yet they were like so many others then and now. They and the other disciples to whom they told this good news could not see beyond their own pain and sorrow. They were blind to the way of the kingdom that Jesus had told them about in his ser-

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mon in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19). *In the resurrection of Jesus, God lifts us out of the pain of death and surprises us with new life.*

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

People like happy endings. Most people like movies and television shows to end, "And they lived happily ever after." After the most horrible and life-threatening situations, the hero of the story often solves the problem or is rescued from certain death.

Respond to the following statements by placing an X along the continuum to indicate your response.

1. The resurrection of Jesus is simply a happy ending to a sad story.

_____ |
 Agree Disagree

2. Jesus did not need to be raised from the dead to make our forgiveness possible.

_____ |
 Agree Disagree

3. Easter has no connection with the events of Jesus' death on the cross.

_____ |
 Agree Disagree

4. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are really two parts of the same event.

_____ |
 Agree Disagree

5. The resurrection is important for Jesus, but not for my life today.

_____ |
 Agree Disagree

In the crucifixion, Jesus took upon himself all the things that life and sin could throw at him. He took on all that keeps men and women from God.

Satan had Jesus right where Satan wanted him—nailed to a cross. The religious leaders had Jesus right where they wanted him—nailed to a cross. For them it was true what was written in Scripture, that the reward of sin is death. Even for the disciples like Peter

and you, Jesus was right where they wanted him—out of the way.

Jesus died. His friends buried him in a borrowed tomb. The women and men who had followed him went sadly away. They went back to life as usual.

But it was not over for God. God raised Jesus from the dead. It was as if God were saying, "You thought you were rid of me, but I'm back!"

Sin could not hold Jesus. Death could not hold Jesus. Because Jesus was made alive again in a new way, we too have the sure promise of forgiveness of sin. We have the sure promise of freedom from bondage to death.

Jesus' resurrection is not a simple happy ending. It is a new beginning and a fresh start. A new day has dawned for all people. You have God's word on that written, large in an empty tomb.

THE RESURRECTED LIFE

"Jesus is risen! He is risen, indeed!" was the first confession of the church. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him a new life. *Death was defeated. Because of the resurrection, death has lost its grasp on Jesus and us.*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11. Here Paul wrote about Jesus' death and listed the appearances of the risen Christ.

1. Do you think Paul was believed by his opponents? Why or why not?

2. Have such eyewitness reports been convincing to you? Why or why not?

3. How do you know Jesus' resurrection is true?

Paul did not spend much time trying to figure out the intellectual and theological meaning of the resurrection. Paul knew that such knowledge

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Picturegold

was beyond human reach and understanding. What was really important for Paul was what happened in the resurrection. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26.

4. What does it mean to you that Christ was "the first fruits of those who have died"?

Death was defeated. Because of the resurrection, death has lost its grasp on Jesus and us.

5. How did death come into the world?

6. How is death overcome?

7. In the original Greek, Paul talks about death as "falling asleep." What does that say to you about the Christian view of death?

As Paul did not spend much time speculating about the resurrection, he did not spend much time speculating about heaven or what the resurrected body looks like. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the third day. God gave Jesus new life and promises to give us the same new life. But this life was not like the life Jesus had given back to Jairus's daughter or the widow's son in the town of Nain, or his friend Lazarus. They would die a physical death again. Jesus' life was a new and different life.

Shaping life

SIGHT GIVEN IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Two other disciples also were blind to the good news of Jesus' resurrection. For them, the glory days of life with Jesus were over. They were leaving Jerusalem. Perhaps they were frightened that the Jewish leaders might hunt them down and put them to death, too. Perhaps they were just going

home after following Jesus. After his death, there did not seem to be any reason to go on as a community. For them, it was time to go home and to pick up their lives where they had left off. Read Luke 24:13-35 as a skit. You will need a narrator, two disciples, and Jesus. After you have completed the skit, discuss the following questions.

- If you had been with Jesus during his ministry, what fears or worries would you have had?
- What would you have talked about on the way home?
- Why do you think these two disciples were kept from recognizing Jesus?
- How are the hopes and dreams that these disciples talked about similar to yours?



As they walked along, Jesus spoke with them, although they still did not recognize him. But Jesus did not leave them in their blindness. Through the Scriptures, Jesus showed these disciples that their Lord Jesus truly was the Christ or Messiah they had been looking for.

When they reached the village of Emmaus, they stopped and asked Jesus to join them. They must have been comforted by what he had told them and wanted to hear more. It was at a meal that these two disciples received their sight. Read Luke 24:30-31 again.

These verses are a clue to recognizing the risen Jesus. Complete the following chart, listing the three things Jesus did in each verse.

Reference	Three-part action
Luke 9:16	
Luke 22:19	
Luke 24:30	

Suddenly the eyes of the disciples were opened and they recognized Jesus; and he vanished out of their sight. But they were never to be the same again. They ran back to Jerusalem and told the other disciples what had happened. By then the blindness of the others had disappeared, too. When these two Emmaus disciples arrived, they heard the others say, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

Was that so strange that the disciples' blindness should disappear after Jesus broke the bread? It is not so different for us today. The risen Lord Jesus reveals himself through Scripture and the breaking of bread—the Lord's Supper.

Each time Christians gather on the first day of the week it is in celebration of that first First Day—the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like those early disciples, we see Jesus in the Word preached, read, prayed, eaten and drunk, and sung. Our eyes are opened to the way of God's kingdom of forgiveness and freedom in the breaking of bread. Christ is just as present for us in the Word and in the sacraments as he was for the women and for the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

As Lutherans, we believe that through hearing and believing the Word and by receiving the sacraments we receive the risen Jesus Christ. We receive forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Our Christian faith calls us to a new way of looking at life. God calls us to a journey that does not end. It is a wonderful gift of God who takes part in our lives every day and who promises to be with us forever. We have something to look forward to, and a reason

to be full of joy. With a God like ours, we can have hope and joy now and forever.

So, how do Christians live? Write in the blanks what you think are signs of this new life that Christians have been given because of Jesus' resurrection. The first has been done for you.

- Joy _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul compared Christian Baptism to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Read Romans 6:1-4.

1. What do you think corresponds to being plunged under water during Baptism?

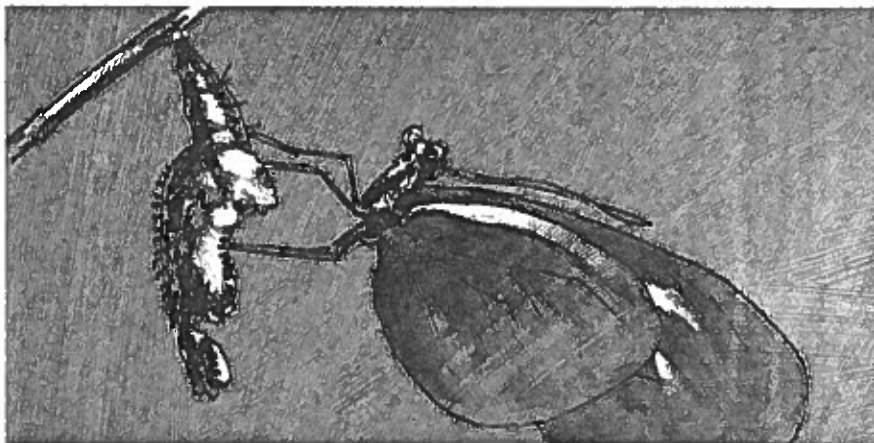
2. What do you think corresponds to coming up out of the water?

Just as Jesus received a new kind of life in his resurrection, Paul says a new kind of life is led by those who are baptized. A Christian can say, "I have a reason to be joyful! I have a reason to love others! I have a reason to face the future without fear!"

3. What do you think are the reasons Christians can say this with complete confidence?



Jim Whitton



FURTHER

opportunities

Mishna Minutes

The gospel of John records that when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the first Easter day, Thomas was not with them. Read the story of Thomas and Jesus in John 20:24-29 once each day this week. Put yourself in the place of Thomas. What sort of questions do you have that are like those Thomas had? Think about the relationship between seeing and believing, and believing because others have told you.

Memorize John 20:26-29. Carry it with you in your heart when you are tempted to not believe.

Activity 1

Make a poster with one or more symbols of the resurrection. If you need help finding them, ask your pastor or teacher, or use another resource. Be ready to explain the symbols.

Activity 2

Find out from your pastor or teacher what an Easter vigil is, what it has to do with Easter, and why it is sometimes held late at night. You may wish to help plan an Easter vigil for your congregation.

Activity 3

Write down what your typical day looks like and what some of your choices and opportunities are to "walk in newness of life." Compose a prayer of thanks to God for the gift of new life.

FOCUS

ON THE TOMB OF JESUS

There are two places in Jerusalem said to be where Jesus was buried. One is a tomb that still exists. It is near a hill that looks like a large skull. Jesus was crucified at a place called Golgotha, meaning "place of the skull." The Bible says it was near where he was buried. But chances are these similarities are a coincidence.

The other place does not look right at all. One sees only an old church in need of repair. But the story behind the church is a fascinating one.

From A.D. 63 on it was against Roman law to be a Christian. Then in A.D. 313, the emperor Constantine, the first emperor to become a Christian, declared that Christianity was to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Tradition says that Constantine's mother went to find where Jesus had died and been buried. In Jerusalem she found a Roman temple to the goddess Venus that people said was built over the place where Jesus had been buried. In A.D. 135 the emperor Hadrian built the temple to defile the Christians' holy place. He had no idea he was really preserving its location for later generations.

Constantine ordered the temple to be torn down and the workmen discovered a stone tomb beneath its foundation. The hillside was cut away except for the tomb itself and a Christian church was built over it.

About 300 years later a powerful Moslem ruler ordered the tomb and church to be destroyed. But people remembered where the tomb had been. Later the church was rebuilt. The church still stands in Jerusalem today. It is called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.