

Acts 10:34–43
 or **Isa. 25:6–9**
Ps. 118:1–2, 14–24
1 Cor. 15:1–11
 or **Acts 10:34–43**
Mark 16:1–8

What Next?

Goal for the Session

Tweens will wonder, with the women at the empty tomb, about the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 16:1–8

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Beverly Roberts Gaventa

Generations of interpreters have been so disturbed by Mark's ending that they have rushed to supply their own. But Mark's story defies such control. The final words of the young man, words from Jesus himself, remain to be fulfilled. They are not to be fulfilled by the faithfulness of the disciples, since the disciples are not heard from again. Neither will they be fulfilled by the obedience of Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome, whose terrified departure is not to be smoothed over by reference to other Gospel traditions. Only God's faithfulness will complete this story.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Serene Jones

God breaks through the wall that our flight from God has constructed around us, just as God also breaks through the waves of grief that flow out from us when we refuse to flee from the horror and stand speechless and undone in its presence. Both of these breaks are needed for an honest account of who we are as people of faith. We are always both the faithless abandoners and killers of God and the faithful mourners and lovers of God. Here, where we expect to find Jesus dead, the tomb does not hold him. And with often unspoken force, grace abounds.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” D. Cameron Murchison

Dealing with death is inevitably complex. Grief is almost always in the forefront. But other feelings swirl through the experience as well—relief, to name one. The women on their way to anoint Jesus' body in the tomb were making peace not only with the death of Jesus but with the death of Jesus' claim to embody the reign of God for the well-being of the world. In Mark, a tension is manifest between the trustworthiness of the message of God's present and powerful reign and the fearful response of disciples more ready to make peace with the death of the gospel than to enter into its promise.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Gail R. O'Day

“He has been raised” puts the focus on Jesus as the object of the action done by another. That the women flee in “terror and amazement” indicates that they know exactly the identity of the unnamed subject of that verb. Terror and amazement are words that describe one's response to a revelation of God. It is God who has raised Jesus and altered the rules of their known world. Silence is not a failed or inadequate response. The women's silence creates a space for the voice and presence of God to resound. We also stand hushed in awe at the cosmic power of God to take away death's sting.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 16:1–8

Focus on Your Teaching

On the first Easter, God defeated death by raising the crucified Jesus to new life. Some tweens, like some adults, struggle with this crucial claim. They may have heard Christianity's critics question the resurrection as a delusion or a hoax. They may worry that believing it means ignoring the fact of human mortality or rejecting their own grief when family members and friends die. Help learners appreciate how Mark's account honors the confusion and fear Christians of all ages may feel in the face of the resurrection, even as it encourages us to go and tell the good news.

Living Jesus, give me grace to embrace the Easter message, trusting that you journey with me each day. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ white cloth
- ☐ gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ Easter treat
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1, supplies listed
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ whistle
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ Color Pack 11, 12, 30, 32
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ bowl of water

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: paper, pens
- ☐ option 2: Resource Sheet 1, Color Pack 12
- ☐ option 3: toy bowling set, sticky notes, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

As tweens arrive, greet each by name at the entrance to your meeting space, saying, “(Name), the Lord is risen!” Teach learners to respond to your words with, “He is risen indeed!”

Invite tweens to help you arrange the white cloth in the center of your meeting space. Place the candle on it and arrange gold or yellow streamers in a festive design. As you light the candle, say: “The light of the risen Christ is with us!” Pass the candle from person to person. When tweens are holding the candle, invite them to tell any news from their lives or to name prayer requests they have. Once all have had a chance to speak, offer this prayer:

Great God, your raising of Jesus from the dead on the first Easter Day is marvelous in our eyes. Surround us with your Spirit, that we may rejoice in the presence of Christ and be open to what he is calling us to do. Let all God's people say . . . Amen.

Distribute an Easter treat to enjoy while you perform “A Magical Trick” as described on Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources). *Don't give away the secret to the trick!* Instead, invite tweens to call out words describing their reactions to the trick. Discuss:

✿ What things have you seen that you can't explain?

Were You There?

Were you there when they
crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they
crucified my Lord?
Oh!
Sometimes it causes me
to tremble, tremble,
tremble.
Were you there when they
crucified my Lord?

Mark 16 is the earliest Gospel account of Easter (written between CE 65 and 75). However, about the year 55, Paul gave the earliest known written testimony to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11. This also is a lectionary reading for this Sunday.

Studying the Bible as textual and literary scholars do sometimes makes Christian youth feel uneasy. Reassure any worried students that the Spirit worked through biblical writers' individual talents and intellects to communicate God's Word.

EXPLORING

Invite learners to join you in singing “Were You There?” (Color Pack 32; track 24 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Point out that there are other verses to this African-American spiritual, including “Were you there when they nailed him to the tree . . .” and “Were you there when they laid him in the tomb . . .” Show Color Pack 11, a photo of a tomb that may be like the one where Jesus’ body was placed. Read aloud Mark 15:43–47. Ask:

- ✂ What do you imagine these women thought and felt as they watched the stone being rolled against the opening to the tomb?

Ask tweens to find Mark 16 in their Bibles. Ask a volunteer to begin reading at Mark 16:1. At the end of verse 8, blow a loud whistle, grab the Bible, and slam it shut.

After a moment, explain that while most Bibles include verses 9–20 in Mark 16, the oldest and best manuscripts of Mark end the story at verse 8. As a group, note any ways in which your Bibles set off verses 9–20, such as brackets, italics, headings, or notes. Discuss:

- ✂ How surprising is it to you that Mark’s original account of Easter most likely ended at verse 8? Why?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (First Easter FAQ). Read the information together, using it as is helpful as you discuss the following questions:

- ✂ Why did the women go to Jesus’ tomb? What do you imagine they talked about as they walked to the tomb that morning?
- ✂ Why is the detail of the “very large” stone “already [having been] rolled back” (Mark 16:4) important?
- ✂ Who is in the tomb? What does this person know and tell the women?
- ✂ Where is Jesus in this story?

Invite learners to recall their reactions to the magical trick in Gathering. Suggest that the women likely felt all that and more because Jesus’ resurrection was no illusion, but a new reality. Read Gail R. O’Day’s insight from today’s “Homiletical Perspective”: God has “altered the rules of [the women’s] known world.” Ask:

- ✂ What’s your opinion about the women’s reaction to news of Jesus’ resurrection? (v. 8)
- ✂ How do you react to the news of Jesus’ resurrection? Why?
- ✂ It seems the women eventually overcame their fear to tell someone, maybe Mark himself—if not, Mark would not have their story to tell! Why, then, do you think Mark mentioned the women’s initial shock and fear?
- ✂ What else do you wish you knew about Jesus’ resurrection?
- ✂ What can you tell others with certainty about Jesus’ resurrection, even if you don’t understand all that you’d like to?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Write Your Own Ending** Continue to explore the reality of Jesus' resurrection by inviting tweens to look at Mark 16:9–20 and also, if printed in their Bibles, the “shorter ending.” Invite tweens to tell if they prefer these endings to ending with verse 8. Why? To respond to God's call to proclaim the Easter message, challenge learners to tell their own endings to this story. What has happened between verse 8 and their lives today? Offer these questions to help them get started: How did you first learn of Jesus' resurrection? Who has helped you grow in understanding why God raised Jesus from the dead? What difference does Jesus' resurrection make in your life? Encourage them to illustrate the stories they write. With their permission, gather the stories to be shared with the congregation via photocopies, a Web site, or a bulletin board.
- 2. Pray with an Icon** To reflect on the meaning of Jesus' resurrection, guide learners in a time of prayer. Display Color Pack 12. Explain that this is an icon. Painted icons have been important in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition for centuries. When worshipers pray before an icon, they are not worshiping the picture but are expectantly waiting for God to communicate with them through the artwork. Referring to the “Pray with an Icon” section of Resource Sheet 1, lead a time of prayer.
- 3. Rolling Stone** To continue building connections between the first Easter and the lives of Christians today, invite tweens to think of the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb as a symbol of anything that people use to try to “seal up” themselves or shut out God's power and love today, such as greed, envy, hatred, fear, not worshiping, and lying. Have learners write these things on sticky notes and attach them to toy bowling pins. Set up the pins. Comment that in Jesus' resurrection, God rolls away the things that block people from the love and power of Christ. Invite learners to take turns rolling the ball to knock down the pins, naming one reason they are thankful for Jesus' resurrection before they roll the ball.

CLOSING

Gather the group around the white fabric and light the candle. Place a bowl of water on the fabric. Dip your hand in the water several times, letting water splash back into the bowl, as you say: “In baptism, we are called by Christ Jesus into a new and changed life.” Invite each tween to dip a hand in the water as they name one new thing they have learned about Jesus' resurrection or one thing they still want to find out.

Close by singing “Amazing Grace” (Color Pack 30; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

Extinguish the candle.

Say farewell to each tween by name.

March 31, 2024
What Next?

Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

Session Resources

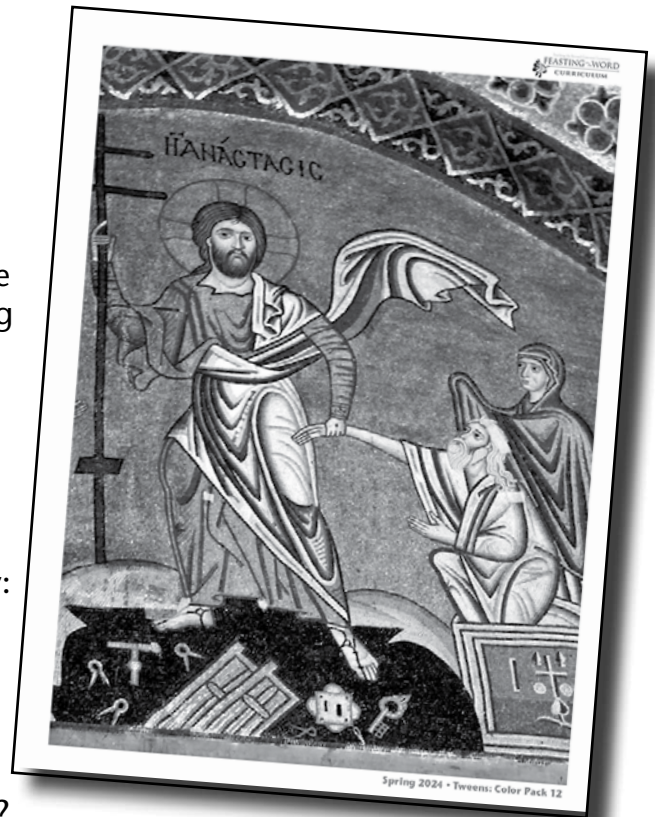


A Magical Trick

Ask for a volunteer with change in her or his pocket or purse. Turn your back. Ask the volunteer to think of any number, double it, add 8, divide by 2, subtract the original number, and then add the amount of pocket change. When the volunteer tells you the result, mentally subtract 4. The new result will be the amount of pocket change, which you dramatically announce!

Pray with an Icon

1. Invite tweens, if they are comfortable doing so, to stand with palms turned up as they look at the icon on Color Pack 12. This is a posture indicating openness toward God.
2. Say: "Look closely at the icon. Give it your full attention."
3. After a moment of silence, invite learners to consider their answers to these questions silently:
 - How would you describe Jesus' posture?
 - How would you describe Jesus' robes?
 - What do you think Jesus is looking at?
 - Jesus carries this cross in the same way that Roman military leaders carried the Empire's flag into battle. Why do you think he does so? (2 Corinthians 2:14)
 - Why do you think the artist shows Jesus standing on broken doors, locks, and keys? (Revelation 1:17–18)
 - The Greek word at the top is *anastasis*, which means "resurrection." Literally, this Greek word is translated "standing up again." When have you felt the risen Jesus empowering you to "stand up again"?
4. Close the time of meditation by inviting tweens to offer a silent prayer of thanks for Jesus' resurrection.
5. After a quiet moment, invite learners to tell their reactions to this form of prayer.



March 31, 2024
What Next?

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

First Easter FAQ

Why did they bury Jesus right away?

Jesus had to be buried quickly because he died just as Sabbath would begin at sundown. Sabbath was the holy day of rest, on which no work was allowed (Exodus 20:8–10). Ordinarily, corpses were anointed with oil and washed with water before burial. Spices could be used to reduce the odors of the decomposing body. On the warm days of spring in Jerusalem, this odor would start quickly.

What was Jesus' tomb like?

In Jesus' day, a tomb commonly was carved in rock, like a shallow cave. The entrance was sealed by a disc-shaped stone. The heavy stone sat in a groove, like a track, that ran in front of the tomb's entrance. This stone was so heavy that more than one strong man was needed to roll it.

What does the Bible mean by a "man dressed in white"?

Ancient Jewish literature often describes angels as men dressed in white. Often, people respond in fear when meeting an angel. Mark 9:3 describes Jesus at the Transfiguration as wearing clothes that "became dazzling white."

Who is the Son of Man?

Before Jesus' death, Jesus says he will be seen as the "Son of Man," "seated at the right hand" of God (Mark 9:62). This is a position of honor and authority. The Son of Man is an image of God's ultimate victory over all evil in the world (Daniel 7:13–14).

