



BIBLE STUDY ALONG THE WAY SESSION 3

ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

by Julie A. Kanarr



Materials you will need

- Postcards (or blank 3x4 or 4x6 index cards)
- Optional: paper and colored pencils/pens/markers for faith/life map activity
- Bible
- *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*

Theme Verse

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

(Luke 24:35)

Road Map

Throughout this study, we have been traveling with a variety of biblical travelers. In this final session, we explore two different journeys of faith, listening in on two different conversations with those who met Jesus “along the way.” First, we will join the woman who met Jesus as he traveled through Samaria. Then we will walk along with Cleopas and his companion as they make their way to Emmaus. Along the way, we will ponder how Christ meets us in our journey of faith. In what places are we surprised to dis-

cover how Christ has come among us? Among whom are we led to share the good news of Jesus Christ?

Preparing the Way

Sing “Let us ever walk with Jesus” (*ELW* 802)

Reflect on a time when you have been surprised by someone you have met along the way. Perhaps it was a casual conversation that went deeper. Perhaps you participated in an unexpected act of hospitality that resulted in you seeing another person in a whole new way. What happened?

Conversation at the Well

READ JOHN 4:1-26.

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman as he journeys through Samaria on his

way from Judea to Galilee. She—like many others in John’s Gospel—serves as a representative figure. Jesus not only speaks to her, but speaks through her to us, as we listen in on their conversation.

The mutual dislike between the Judeans and the Samaritans was rooted in the ancient political, tribal, and religious divisions between northern and southern kingdoms of Israel that began centuries before the time of Jesus. While they shared a common ancestry and a common faith, significant religious differences held them apart.

The Samaritans honored Jacob as their great patriarch, believed that the Messiah would be a prophetic figure like Moses, and viewed Mt. Gerizim as their sacred mountain and place of worship. In contrast, the Judeans (“the Jews” of John’s Gospel) centered their hopes on the Messiah as a kingly figure like David who would restore Israel’s monarchy and centered their worship life in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Throughout their conversation, the Samaritan woman is exploring whether this man at the well may be the Messiah. When he offers her living water, she playfully challenges him that he doesn’t seem to have the necessary tools to deliver on his promises and questions his underlying claim that he is greater than their ancestor Jacob.

When he asks her to call her husband, she acknowledges that she doesn’t have one. While many interpreters of this passage have assumed that Jesus is passing judgment on her personal life, one can also hear his statement about her five husbands as a reference to Samaria’s history. The prophet Hosea had indicted Israel for its adultery and idolatry for their intermarriages, political alliances, and religious syncretism (see Hosea 2:2).

When the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., they had brought people from five different nations into Samaria to colonize it (2 Kings 17:24). These foreigners occupied the land and

intermarried with the local people. The status of having had “five husbands” and now committing adultery with a sixth would sum up the Judeans’ low opinion about the Samaritans.

Her recognition of Jesus’ prophetic voice is about his naming the truth, not his ability to perceive secrets. Her concern is not about personal morality or family values. She is not trying to distract him by flattery and changing the subject.

After connecting him with Jacob and identifying him as a prophet, now she quizzes this potential Messiah about worship. With this question, she has now addressed all three aspects of messianic credentials that were important to the Samaritans. Jesus transcends her either-or question and speaks of worship in spirit and truth. When she directly expresses her hopes for the coming Messiah, Jesus responds with the words “I am,” echoing the divine name God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (see Exodus 3:14). Their entire conversation has been leading to this point.

REST STOP

1. What are the surprising features of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman?
2. Imagine that you have come to the well and found Jesus sitting there. What would your conversation be like?

Come and See, Go and Tell

READ JOHN 4:27–42.

She runs back to the village and invites others to come and see, leading them to Christ. What began with the woman’s first-person confession (“I know that the messiah is coming”) broadens into the plural (“he will declare to us”) and in response to the woman’s testimony, stretches out to the Samaritans’ acclamation of Jesus as the savior of the world (4:42).

Although some have interpreted the Samaritan community’s response to her testimony as dismissive,

it follows a common pattern in John's Gospel. Those who first hear about Jesus from others are invited to come and see for themselves. There are no indirect disciples in John.

John the Baptist points Andrew toward following Jesus. When Andrew responds to Jesus' invitation to "come and see," he invites Simon to join him. When Jesus calls Philip to follow him, Philip invites Nathaniel, encouraging him to "come and see" (see 1:35–46). In John 12:21 some Greeks approach Philip, wishing to see Jesus. After the resurrection, when the other disciples tell Thomas that they have seen the risen Lord, he responds that he needs to see for himself (John 20:24–29). The Samaritan woman's invitation to her community shares this pattern. Her testimony forms the bridge for the Samaritan community to come to faith in Christ.

Jesus, who had to go through Samaria geographically in order to travel from Judea to Samaria, leads his followers to grasp the divine necessity of reaching out to Samaria. Samaria is not a place to pass through, but a destination for mission in its own right. Jesus notes that the fields are ripe and ready for harvest. Jesus' travels to Samaria where he initiates a conversation with the woman at the well, sets a pattern for the Christian community's pattern of missionary outreach.

REST STOP

3. In what ways is the Samaritan woman transformed through her conversation with Christ?
4. Where is Samaria for you? Is it a place that you go to, go through, live in, or avoid?

Write a postcard from Samaria, noting your thoughts, feelings, questions, and reflections. You might want to write from the stance of the Samaritan woman about the stranger she met at the well.

On the Road to Emmaus

READ LUKE 24:13–27.

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, the two disciples walking to Emmaus also serve as representative figures, through whom we are invited into the story to consider how Jesus meets us "along the way." They are Cleopas and a companion. Luke does not offer any information about the companion's identity or gender. The absence of detail leaves open the possibility that Cleopas' companion may be his wife, and that they may be on their way back to their home in Emmaus following a Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

As they walk along, they discuss the events which had led to the crucifixion of Jesus and the amazing story about his rising from the dead. They are joined by a mysterious stranger who meets them along the way. They speak of their dashed hopes.

Their traveling companion listens to their story, and in turn, offers them a fresh perspective. He leads them to a new, deepened understanding of the Hebrew scriptures that resurrects their hope. As they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they also journey from despair to hope.

REST STOP

5. Imagine that you are walking with two disciples on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. What is their journey like? What are they seeing and hearing? How are they feeling? What are they thinking about?
6. In your own journey of faith, what do you struggle with or wonder about?

In the Breaking of the Bread

READ LUKE 24:28–35.

As they arrive in Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion invite the stranger to stay with them, a customary gesture of hospitality. On the road, this stranger had become the guide and teacher. Now he shifts from the

role of guest to that of host, taking bread, blessing it, and giving it to them.

They recognize the presence of the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread, and reflect back on their conversation with him on the road, how their hearts had burned within them as he opened the scriptures to them. The two disciples rise from the table, and quickly retrace their steps. They return to Jerusalem to share the good news with the others. They follow the same path, but on a different journey, as they joyfully tell their story to the rest of the gathered community.

Although the risen Christ has “vanished from sight,” he is not absent. In their conversation on the road, and in sharing in the breaking of the bread, he remains among his followers. By his presence, we are fed for the journey and strengthened for mission.

REST STOP

7. What do you think the disciples' journey was like as they traveled from Emmaus back to Jerusalem?
8. Where is Emmaus for you? Has there been a time when the Scripture has opened to you, where you have moved to a new or deeper understanding of them?

Write a postcard from Emmaus, noting your questions, insights, and reflections about the text and your own journey of faith. You might wish to write from the stance of Cleopas or his companion as they talk about their trip to Jerusalem.

At journey's end

In these three sessions, we have met and traveled with a variety of different biblical characters. While each of their journeys has been different, they have shared common paths. Along the way, each has encountered God, and experienced transformation. Jacob wrestles with God, receives a new name, and emerges with a limp and a promise. The ancient Israelites are fed with daily

manna, even as they walk a rocky path of complaining and learning to trust in God. The prophet Elijah escapes from danger, is fed and strengthened, and sent back with a new mission. The Samaritan woman and the disciples going to Emmaus encounter Christ. They joyfully share the good news, leading others to faith. As we have walked with them, may we also be encouraged and strengthened for our own journey of faith.

Optional: Further Exploration

Complete the faith/life map (or maps) that you have been working on during this study. You may wish to draw in those who have been companions and guides along the way. You may also wish to mark those times and places where you have had significant conversations or come to new and deeper understandings of God's presence and love.

Are there wellsprings of living water? Are there roads where your “heart has burned within you?” Are there places like Emmaus where you have recognized Christ in the breaking of the bread? Identify those times and places on your map.

Closing

Gather your postcards. Re-read them, and share them with your group as you desire. You may also show and describe your faith/life map(s).

After a time for silence, pray together:

Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ELW, page 76) 🌿

The Rev. Julie A. Kanarr an ELCA pastor from Port Townsend, Wash., enjoys bicycling, sea kayaking, hiking, camping, and writing.



LEADER GUIDE ALONG THE WAY SESSION 3

ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

by Julie A. Kanarr



Session Overview

While the three sessions of this study share the common theme of a journey, each session stands on its own as an independent unit. There are two questions at the end of each section. The first is intended to guide participants in reflecting on the meaning of the text, and the second invites participants to reflect on their own life and faith journey in light of the text. While the leader guide provides some suggested responses, there are no right or wrong answers. The responses in the leader guide may serve to jump-start stalled conversations among participants or open up new avenues for reflection.

Conversation at the Well

1. The woman is surprised because by talking with her, Jesus is crossing two social barriers: one between Jews and Samaritans, and the other between men and women. By initiating a conversation with her, Jesus demonstrates openness, outreach, and hospitality. Jesus listens to the Samaritan woman and responds

to her probing questions. They engage in a serious conversation about genuine matters of faith that are of concern for her. Like the well they are sitting at, the conversation moves ever deeper, until it reaches the living water of understanding and faith, and bubbles up to new life.

2. Participants may have a wide variety of responses. Some participants may wonder who would begin the conversation. Some may have questions that they would like to ask Jesus. Some may be drawn to the idea of Jesus listening to them with compassion and openness.

Come and See, Go and Tell

3. The Samaritan woman is transformed from an inquirer, who is curious about Jesus and what he has to offer, to an evangelist, who tells others about Jesus and draws them to Christ. Along the way, she engages in theological dialogue with Jesus and confesses her faith. Her initial surprise that Jesus would initiate a conversation with her is transformed to confident faith and joy.

4. Participants may identify a wide variety of places as Samaria for them. Some participants may find that they need to reflect deeply in order to respond to the question. For some, Samaria may be a place of “living water” where all are welcome at the well. For others, Samaria may be a place where they have experienced prejudice. For others, Samaria may be a place to reach out and share God’s love. For some, Samaria may be that place where they find it challenging to welcome those who they have cast in the role of “other.” For others, Samaria may be a place where they are surprised to find Christ. For some, Samaria may be a place where Jesus sits down with them and responds to their questions.

On the Road to Emmaus

5. The past tense of the verb “hoped” suggests the depth of despair Cleopas and his companion felt about the death of their friend Jesus. They are also grieving the loss of their hope. They may be walking slowly, feeling sad and confused, and worried about their future. They may be wondering what to believe. They may be trying to make sense of the rumors they had heard. They may be having doubts or a crisis of faith. It may have been the longest seven mile walk of their lives. They may be surprised that the person who joins them seems unaware of the recent events that were so important for them.
6. Participants may express a variety of responses. Some may experience doubts and questions. Some may experience their “hearts burning within them.” Some may be struggling with despair or loss of hope. Others may wonder where Christ is present within the world today. Some may be yearning for a closer walk with Jesus. Some may be thankful for a steady faith.

In the Breaking of the Bread

7. Their journey back to Jerusalem was quick and joyful. Having trudged from Jerusalem to Emmaus, now they’re back, practically bursting through the door to tell the others about their encounter with the risen Christ. As they look back in hindsight, they are able to connect their experience of recognizing the Risen Christ in the breaking of the bread to their recognition

of his presence with them on the road. They see that Christ, walking with them, becomes the guide for their understanding of the Scripture. With joy and amazement, they asked each other “did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the Scripture to us?”

8. Participants may experience Emmaus as any place where they recognize Christ in their midst. Some may name Holy Communion as their Emmaus. Emmaus may be the place that they are “on the road to find.” Participants may reflect on the ways that the gospel speaks to them. Some may choose to share stories from their own lives about people, such as pastors, parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, and others, who have helped them to understand the Scripture and grow in faith.

Optional: Further Exploration

Provide paper and writing/drawing materials for participants to map their journey of life and faith. Some may desire to continue to work on the map they began in session 1. Some may wish to create a new map. Invite participants to think about those who have been companions on their journey, especially those who have served as guides and teachers along the way. Encourage them also to look for places where, like the disciples at Emmaus, may have had their hearts burning within them.

At Journey’s End

At the end of your study, you may wish to use this blessing and dismissal after the closing prayer.

LEADER: The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keeps our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

ALL: Amen.

LEADER: Go in peace, Christ be with you.

ALL: Thanks be to God. 🌿