



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Witnesses
to the
Risen Christ**

**Thomas the
disciple**

**The
disciples on
the road to
Emmaus**

**Peter by
the sea**

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

2015

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NAC Catechism

4.5.2 Election in the New Testament

Jesus elected the Apostles from among His disciples and sent them to all the nations in order to teach and baptize (Matthew 28: 19–20; Luke 6: 13). The Lord elects the people of the new covenant from among both Jews and Gentiles. Those who make their election sure accept the gospel believingly and allow themselves to be baptized with water and the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter 2: 9 we read as follows concerning the people of the new covenant: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” From this it also follows that all those who belong to the people of the new covenant are obliged to bear witness—in both word and conduct—of the favors they have received from God (2 Peter 1: 10–11).

Christ brought joy and belief. In every record of the resurrection the witnesses are either told, “*Do not be afraid!*” or “*Peace be with you.*” The angels at the grave told the women, “*Come, see...*”, meaning: Come, see what God has done and how He has made a beginning out of what seemed to you to be an ending.

These witnesses included: Mary, who is so overcome with grief that it is difficult for her to see who is standing in front of her; the disciples who gathered in the locked room; Thomas, who doubted; the disciples on the road to Emmaus whose eyes were opened; and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who see Christ and are moved from mourning to worship.

Christ changes us. He refocuses our direction and calls us to action. The good news of the resurrection isn’t only to be observed, but to be acted out. The early church came to be by the disciples’ actions, not simply their amazement. These men couldn’t go back to the way they lived before. They were, and we are, called to walk the path of discipleship; to work, to risk, to challenge, and to take up the cross. Following the Risen Lord means living differently than the way we did before He changed us.

Consider these examples: John 20:17-18 and Matthew 28: 16-20

When Christ resurrected and finally ascended, He left us with a great work to continue. He has called us to be an active part of His church; and this church continues to evangelize, baptize, and preach the Gospel today.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Jesus only appear to those in His closest circle? When do you feel your relationship with Jesus needed restoration? What brought you to that point? How did Jesus restore your relationship with Him? Has this only happened once?

From the video: *The Risen Christ restored relationships and reconciled His closest followers to Himself. Their past failures were forgiven and forgotten.*

2. Do you think the Church of Christ would’ve been spread across the world without this restoration?

Going Deeper

It is not about us...

Many people gather in our churches under the misapprehension that church is mostly about them. Church is where I come to get pumped up to do my bit to fix the world, to be given strength for my daily living, to see where I have taken the wrong path and how I can get on the right path, to discover what I'm searching for.

The story before us is not about us. It is a narrative of a God who is not simply love, but love for us, love in action, taking on our battles with sin and death, doing for us that which we could not do for ourselves. Petty, humanistic moralizing in daily life wilts in the face of eternal death. (Romans 6:23) There is a force loose in the world stronger than death, more powerful than Caesar's legions or our betrayal and infidelity. Here is a story that defies our tendency to reduce preaching either to pastoral care, as if our greatest need were for comfort and pacification, or to ethics, as if charitable human action could change the world. This story rises above, "What am I to do?" and pushes us to think about, "What is God doing?"

No exclusively human help is sufficient for us and our deepest need. Therefore the most interesting character in this drama is not us, or even the women who bravely testify. The most interesting is a God who raises the dead and makes a way when we thought there was no way. This is the new "normal." Dare we come to church in the darkness of the unknown and peer with the women into so great and inexplicable a wonder? The women leave the tomb with "fear and great joy" (v.8) Any Sunday we contend with this story we leave church with a mix of emotion: joy at God's great victory through Jesus Christ and fear at the earthshaking implications of God's great disruptive shaking of the world by resurrection.

With excerpts from William H. Willimon
Feasting on the Gospels

Who is our focus on when we walk into church? When was the last time you left church with "fear and great joy"? What caused these feelings?

3. When in your life has God made a beginning when you thought there was only an end? How can fear get in the way of belief? Can you think of a time when fear was turned to great joy in your life?

4. The barriers the disciples struggled with were shame, fear, grief, and doubt. Have you struggled with these in your journey of faith? What other barriers are difficult to overcome?

5. Christ approached each person in the way they needed Him. Describe a time in your life when you have felt Him come to you in this way.

6. What do you think caused those who experienced the risen Christ to change so dramatically? The following was stated in the video, *Following the Risen Lord means living differently than the way we did before He changed us*. What does "living differently" mean to you?

7. Think of a time when you have been refocused by the Gospel. Share it with the group.

8. In what ways do you feel called? How does Christ equip you for that purpose?

9. What would've happened if the disciples went on living like they had before Christ's resurrection? What does this mean for us?

10. *"To work. To risk. To challenge. To take up the cross..."* What do these words mean to you?

11. Why do you think God planned the resurrection this way? Wouldn't it have been more impactful if Christ resurrected in front of all of Jerusalem? Why didn't He appear to Pontius Pilate or the High Priests?

Habakkuk 3:18 *Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

12. Discuss some areas of your life or in the world today that would benefit from the "joy and belief" that Jesus brings.

Going Deeper

Thomas & Habakkuk

We can compare Thomas's encouragement to our Chief Apostle's year beginning word from Habakkuk 3:18. Let's look briefly at the verse previous:

VERSE 17

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—

We can see from verse 17 that everything was going wrong. Similarly, there were a whole list of reasons for Jesus not to go to Judea: Lazarus was dead, the people wanted to stone Jesus and the disciples. But then comes verse 18:

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Joy and belief in God overcame the circumstances of verse 17. So too, Thomas says to the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," encouraging the disciples along. He believed in the leadership of Jesus and was prepared to face any challenges that came with following Him.

How have you made the leap from the realities in your life to the strength that comes from the knowledge that The Lord is your greatest joy, and in trouble the God who will deliver you?

How have you been encouraged by the examples of others who follow in the steps of Jesus no matter the challenges in their life?

Where can we find the strength to encourage ourselves and others in difficult times?

We have been critical of Thomas in the past when in fact this story is not so much about Thomas at all, but rather the incredibly approachable God of the New Testament through Jesus Christ who Thomas discovers in his moment of weakness.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read John 20:24-29. What themes or key points do you see in this story of Thomas' encounter with Jesus?

2. Discuss the ways in which you personally identify or relate to Thomas' behavior.

3. Share the characteristics of a deep and healthy personal relationship. How might you develop those same characteristics in your relationship with Jesus?

4. Discuss the ways that you approach God.

5. How will you assess yourself to answer the question, "am I really attached to Christ?"

Jesus continued the conversation by teaching the two disciples what the prophets had said about Him in the Scriptures. As they reached their destination, Jesus continued on as if He was going further. The disciples urged Him to stay with them, and so he did. While sitting at the table together, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. In that moment their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord. Then Jesus disappeared from their sight.

That very hour that they realized this fellow traveler was Christ, these two disciples returned back to Jerusalem to share their story and to bring hope to their fellow disciples. In our moments of disappointment and hopelessness, sometimes unbeknownst to us, Jesus walks with us and changes our perspective. The power of the resurrection alive in us fills us with confidence that Jesus is with us and can change our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did the disciples leave the fellowship in Jerusalem to go to Emmaus?

2. What kind of disappointments could you experience today that may cause you to leave the fellowship of the believers? How can these disappointments work to divide you from your family, friends, and congregation?

3. What are some ways to overcome disappointments and feelings of hopelessness?

4. Describe a time when you failed to recognize the Lord walking with you but recognized it later.

5. Between today and a year ago, how has Jesus changed your life?

6. “How foolish you are...” Jesus’ words sound harsh, but where in this passage do you find words of restoration, trust, and patience?

7. Share ways that you can relate to the disciples traveling to Emmaus.

8. Discuss what you imagine Christ was thinking when He first joined the men travelling to Emmaus and heard their disappointment.

9. How do you suspect Jesus feels when He “travels” with you in your life and hears your complaints and disappointments?

10. How do disappointments, uncertainty and frustration cloud your ability to see Jesus?

11. How do you experience Jesus walking with you in daily life?

Session 4: Peter by the sea

Bible References

John 21: 1-19

Video/Discussion notes:

In this encounter, Jesus reaches very directly to Peter and restores their relationship that was damaged during the fearful moments of Jesus' arrest, suffering and crucifixion. He publically expresses His trust in Peter within the circle of disciples by placing the care of His church into his hands.

In the 21st chapter of John we find his testimony of a unique encounter and conversation between Jesus and Peter at the seaside after Jesus' resurrection. The Lord speaks directly and publicly to Peter with the disciples as witnesses. It is interesting to note that Christ does not remind Peter of his moments of weakness nor does He demand an accounting. He doesn't say "I told you so!" Rather, He asks him three times "*Do you love me?*" Peter had denied Him three times, and now the Lord requires Peter to affirm his love for Christ three times.

Each time that Peter says "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,*" Jesus responds with a different command: "*Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.*"

Additional Content

**Excerpt from Chief Apostle
Schneider's service in
Stadtgarten, Germany
December 7, 2014**

"Peter, do you love Me?" If the Lord had asked Peter this question before His death and resurrection, He would most likely have said, "Yes! Of course I love You!" After all, he also told the Lord that he would gladly die for Him and that he did not want to be parted from Him. In the meantime, however, he had made the experience that—under the pressure, and in fear for his own life—he actually denied the Lord.

Now, after the Lord had resurrected, He came back to Peter and never even mentioned this denial. Peter had thus discovered how much greater the Lord Jesus was now, this Lord Jesus who had given His life, who had forgiven His own, who had gained the victory over hell and death, and who now stood before Him without wasting a single word on Peter's denial. Jesus, who now appeared so great in his eyes, was now asking him the question, "Do you love Me?"

And when the Lord posed this question the third time, we read that "Peter was grieved" (John 21: 17). Why did he become so sad? It was because He had now understood just who was asking this question. He had now become aware of exactly who it was that was standing in front of him! This was no longer merely his good friend, not just the man who had performed all those miracles, not merely the preacher whom he had followed all this time, but the God of love, the God of grace, the God of mercy, the Perfect One, the Victor! Now he was finally aware of the fact that he would never be able to love Him adequately in return! That was the reason for his sadness! He was no longer concerned about saying, "But I have proven to You that I love You!" He simply said, "Lord, You know that I love You! Even though I denied You, just look at my heart!"

These are all "pastoral" references, meant to give Peter a sense of his future ministry. Most importantly, he reestablishes His trust in Peter's leadership. I hope Peter's experience can give you a similar hope and eagerness to reach out to the Lord. Even when you've sinned and denied the Lord, He makes it known to you and to others that there's still a hope and a future for you.

Discussion Questions:

Read John 21:1-17.

1. Put yourself in Peter's shoes. How do you think he was feeling when he saw Jesus again at the Sea of Tiberias after denying him a few days earlier?

2. Why do you think that Jesus chose to have this conversation with Peter after His Resurrection?

3. Why is the testimony of John regarding this conversation important to our understanding of Peter's role within the church of Christ? What evidence do you have of this from the Biblical description in John 21?

4. What effect do you think this interaction between Jesus and Peter had on Peter's life as a disciple at that moment? In the future as an apostle of Christ?

5. Assuming you have disappointed someone important to you at some point in your life, what does a restoral of their trust and confidence feel like to you?

In John 21:16 we read: *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"*

6. What is Jesus referring to when He says "more than these"? What/who are "these"?

Do you love me more than you love being a fisherman?

Do you love me more than you love your friends?

7. What "message" is Christ communicating to His church through His choice of questions to Peter?

8. What relevance does this encounter have to you within your life of service to Christ and your sense of calling to serve others?

9. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Why do you think He asked him three times? How does Jesus ask you, "Do you love me?"

10. Share what it means to you to know that there is always hope, forgiveness and restoration when you sin and disappoint God.
