

## Bible Challenge April 3 - 9, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

*In spite of all we have heard and all that we have seen, it is often hard to believe. Because it is hard to believe, we will invest ourselves in the Easter mystery for fifty days (a week of weeks). Because it is hard to believe, John the evangelist will provide sign after sign celebrating Jesus' victory over death. Because it is hard to believe, the Lord Jesus will return to us again and again in the mystery of the Holy Communion, inviting us to touch and taste his presence, and offering us his peace.*

### FIRST READING: Acts 5:27-32

*Peter has been arrested for proclaiming the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. His response to the charges of the high priest summarizes the early church's proclamation of forgiveness of sin through repentance.*

<sup>27</sup>When they had brought [the apostles], they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup>saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." <sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. <sup>30</sup>The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

**Adventure Challenge:** Acts 5: 12-42. (In this larger reading we learn how the council responded to Peter's assertions and what Gamaliel counseled them to do.)

**Explorer Challenge:** Acts 5:17 identifies the high priest with the sect of the Sadducees. Research what is known about the Sadducees and why they, in particular, might oppose what the Apostles were saying about Jesus.

### PSALM: Psalm 118:14-29

*You are my God, and I will exalt you. (Ps. 118:28)*

<sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength and my song,  
and has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup>Shouts of rejoicing and salvation echo in the tents of the righteous:  
"The right hand of the LORD acts valiantly!"

<sup>16</sup>The right hand of the LORD is exalted!  
The right hand of the LORD acts valiantly!"

<sup>17</sup>I shall not die, but live,  
and declare the works of the LORD.

<sup>18</sup>The LORD indeed punished me sorely,  
but did not hand me over to death.

<sup>19</sup>Open for me the gates of righteousness;  
I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD.

<sup>20</sup>"This is the gate of the LORD;  
here the righteous may enter."

<sup>21</sup>I give thanks to you, for you have answered me  
and you have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup>The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup>By the LORD has this been done;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup>This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup>Hosanna! O LORD, save us!

We pray to you, LORD, prosper our days!

<sup>26</sup>Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;  
we bless you from the house of the LORD.

<sup>27</sup>The LORD is God and has given us light.

Form a procession with branches up to the corners of the altar.

<sup>28</sup>You are my God, and I will thank you;  
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

<sup>29</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good;  
God's mercy endures forever.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 118.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research “cornerstone” to learn the original purpose and importance of this stone in ancient construction (as opposed to later, more ceremonial uses). Why might builders reject a stone for this purpose?

*Option B.* The phrase “the stone that the builders rejected” is quoted several times in the New Testament” and has developed a rich history of interpretation. Use the internet or Bible commentaries to learn how this phrase has been understood.

## **SECOND READING: Revelation 1:4-8**

*The book of Revelation recounts a mystical vision of the risen Christ, experienced by a Christian prophet named John. Here he describes Christ as a timeless redeemer, the beginning, present, and end of all time.*

<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup>and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>7</sup>Look! He is coming with the clouds;  
every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

<sup>8</sup>I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

**Adventure Challenge:** Revelation 1

**Explorer Challenge:** The reference in verse 4 to *seven spirits who are before his throne* may come from the book of Tobit 12:15. Learn more about Tobit and why this story might be particularly relevant to Christians at the time when Revelations was being written.

## **GOSPEL: John 20:19-31**

*The unprecedented events of the day of resurrection continue as the risen Jesus appears to his fearful disciples. A week later, after Thomas worships Jesus, Jesus pronounces that the blessings of the resurrection are also for those who "have not seen and yet believe."*

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So

the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

<sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

<sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**Adventure Challenge:** John 20.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Compare John 20:22 with Genesis 2:7. How does the similarity provide a connection with the New Testament concept of "a new creation"?

*Option B.* Research possible meanings for the phrase *life in his name*. In Scripture, what other words or ideas are modified by the phrase *in his name*?

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O God of life, you reach out to us amid our fears with the wounded hands of your risen Son. By your Spirit's breath revive our faith in your mercy, and strengthen us to be the body of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. (John 20:29)