

**What a Gift! (Pentecost Sunday)**

Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b\*

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27 and John 16:4b-15



**Key Verse:** “The helper will come—the Spirit who reveals the truth about God.”  
(John 15:26a)

Aim: To embrace the power of the Spirit.

**Background**

Today is Pentecost, the joyous celebration of the gift of the Spirit to the Church. The word “Spirit” (meaning wind or breath) is echoed often in today’s passages. In the reading from Ezekiel, the Spirit is the breath of life itself, bringing dry bones back to life. Psalm 104 praises God as Creator, whose breath gives vitality to all creation. In Acts 2, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem and the Spirit, symbolized in wind and fire, comes upon them. In today’s reading from Romans, Paul compares the whole creation to a woman in childbirth: the Spirit, our midwife, stands with us, comforting and helping as we attempt to express our faith. In the reading from John, Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit to his followers: a gift of courage, counsel, and power. God’s Spirit birthed the early Christian Church, breathed new life into Jesus’ followers, and is with us today, bringing comfort, assurance, and empowerment. What a gift!

**Faith Sharing**

1. Read “The Birthday of the Church” in *The Family Story Bible* pages 269-70. What do you like about the story? What are you wondering about? How do you know God’s Spirit is in the world today?
2. Plan a Pentecost party with church friends: make more “wind” and “fire” streamers to wave as you play celebratory music; serve “Flame and Dove Cookies” (make a sugar cookie dough, chill, roll out and cut cookies in bird and flame shapes); and do some “paper painting” in Pentecost colors (orange, red, and yellow). Lay torn pieces of colored tissue paper on white paper, mist with water and move tissue pieces around to create designs and mix colors. When paper is dry, make into Pentecost cards and enclose a Pentecost birthday gift of money, for people in need locally or in other parts of the world (check your denominational relief agencies).
3. If you can, have an evening campfire: sing songs and watch the magic of the dancing flames (tongues of fire). Listen to the wind in the trees. What do wind and fire have the power to do? What does the Spirit give you power to do?
4. Look ahead to the summer months. What can your family do together to renew and re-create itself? Plan spending time in God’s beautiful creation, in quiet stillness, and in community with friends and relatives.



Easter is the high point of the Christian year. At the center of this special time stands the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the return to life of the Human One who suffered innocently and was killed, we see God’s love overcoming the powers of sin and evil in a broken world. At Easter we are reminded that God is with us today, despite the suffering and struggle many of us have to face. Easter reminds us that destruction and death are not the final word. God’s love transforms even in death.

The themes in the scripture readings for this Unit include joy, uncertainty, gradual awareness, encouragement, and reassurance. As we move from Easter to Pentecost we also hear stories about the emerging Christian community, growing in strength and conviction, transformed by the Good News of God’s presence and all-encompassing love.

The logo for Unit VI expresses Christ’s call to share God’s love with others. People are moving from the cross through the empty tomb and out into all the world. Like the people in the logo, we have a responsibility to express God’s love and justice in the wider world. We do not have to do this work of transformation alone—the Holy Spirit will guide and empower us as we share and live out our faith.

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|-------|----|--|
| April | 8  | Astounding News ( <i>Easter Sunday</i> )           |
|       | 15 | Forgiving and Restoring                            |
|       | 22 | In Joy and Disbelief                               |
|       | 29 | Love’s Power                                       |
| May   | 6  | Beyond Jerusalem                                   |
|       | 13 | Sing a New Song ( <i>Christian Family Sunday</i> ) |
|       | 20 | Renewing the Community                             |
|       | 29 | What a Gift! ( <i>Pentecost Sunday</i> )           |

### Using This Leaflet

This leaflet is intended to help members of the congregation follow up at home on the things we have been learning and thinking about in church school, worship, and adult study groups. Each week the children's lesson focuses particularly on 1 of the 4 readings which is marked with an asterisk (\*). We encourage you to use some of the ideas below to enhance your family faith-sharing time together.

Week 1 — April 8, 2012

### Astounding News! (Easter Sunday)

Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8



**Key Verse:** “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”  
(Mark 16:3b)

Aim: To experience the mixed emotions of Easter.

### Background

Today marks the beginning of the 50-day Easter Season, a time to reflect on the astounding news of the Resurrection. In Acts 10, Peter has a dream calling him to be open to those who do not follow traditional Jewish practice, thus revealing a new vision for the early Christian community: that God's love includes everyone not just a chosen people. Today we hear the sermon of Good News preached to the Gentiles at Cornelius' home. The picture of God's inclusive love is also found in the reading from Isaiah which provides a vivid picture of a royal banquet set out by God for people of all nations. The Gospel readings for today tell of the witness of the women at the tomb. The stories contain elements of grief, amazement, fear, disbelief, and joyful realization. How do we, living in the 21st century, recognize and understand the astonishing news of the risen Christ?

### Faith Sharing

1. Gather around the worship table created last week (during Holy Week); add an Easter lily or other flowers and replace the purple candle with a large white candle. Using permanent felt markers draw Easter symbols on white parchment paper; paint a thin layer of diluted white glue on the candle, smooth on drawings and paint another layer of glue. Light the candle each day during Easter Season saying “Christ is Risen!” and responding “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”
2. Write feeling words, on strips of paper, from story “Mary of Magdala Sees Jesus” from *The Family Story Bible* pages 258-59. Place in plastic eggs and hide around house or yard. After reading the story invite children to find the eggs. Open eggs together to find the feeling words. Discuss who experienced those feelings in the story and why.

Week 7 — May 20, 2012

### Renewing Community

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26\*

Psalm 1

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19



**Key Verse:** “Jesus prays, ‘May [my followers] be one, as you God and I are one.’”  
(John 17:11b)

Aim: To explore how the disciples found ways to move on.

### Background

Today's Bible readings explore how members of the early Christian church struggled to be a community in the face of changes in membership and challenges from the world around them. In the Acts reading we hear the story of choosing a replacement for Judas to restore the number of disciples to 12 (a number symbolizing wholeness) and to help carry on Jesus' ministry. Psalm 1 provides a contrast between those who act unfaithfully (who will be blown away like straw) with those who follow in God's way (bearing fruit). Today's reading from 1 John describes the way to eternal life—believing in Jesus' way results in transformed, renewed lives in relationship with God and one another. Jesus' prayer, in the reading from the Gospel of John, reminds us that we are to be living symbols of Jesus' continuing presence and ministry in the world, living out our discipleship in the face of changing times.

### Faith Sharing

1. One of the reasons the disciples chose a replacement for Judas was to bring “wholeness” to their group again. What makes your family group feel whole? Walk around your home and each choose something that is a symbol, for you, of your family. Gather around the Easter candle and lay your symbols in a circle. Pray that your family circle of love will give you strength to reach out to others.
2. What brings wholeness to your church community? How does your church family renew itself as a community? Could you help plan a church retreat? a church picnic? Or other church togetherness event?

2. Some children will have made drums today to celebrate African musical heritage. Sing some of your favorite Easter songs, using the drums to keep the beat.
3. Share a snack of different kinds of fruit that are grown in a variety of countries. Read John 15:5-6 and discuss what these verses mean to you. If possible, visit a vineyard or orchard and learn about caring for the vines or trees and the importance of pruning.

Week 6—May 13, 2012

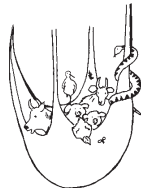
### Sing a New Song (Christian Family Sunday)

Acts 10:44-48\*

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17



**Key Verse:** “Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things.”  
(Psalm 98:1)

Aim: To discover how the Spirit leads us to new understandings of God’s inclusive love.

#### Background

In today’s readings we reflect on how God invites us to love and accept *all* people as part of God’s family. The passage from Acts is a continuation of the story of Peter’s visit with Cornelius. God’s Spirit is poured out onto the people gathered in the centurion’s home, showing that it didn’t matter that they were Gentiles, Romans or soldiers; they were still welcome as full members in Jesus’ community of justice. Psalm 98 invites God’s people to sing a new song in praise of the wonderful things God has done. In the reading from 1 John, the writer encourages those who are being persecuted to hold fast to their faith. Today’s reading from John’s Gospel reminds us that Christ chooses who belongs to God’s household, and this may include those who disturb us! Our call is to express God’s inclusive love in our world today.

#### Faith Sharing

1. A popular song tells us that love is like magic pennies that multiply when given away. Gather some pennies; make them shiny by soaking in vinegar; and give them away as symbols of love this week: lay them on pillows, tuck them into school lunch bags, leave them on sidewalks, place them on office desks, etc.
2. Read “Cornelius becomes a Christian” in *The Family Story Bible* pages 279-80. What people in your community or country are not “included”? What actions can you take on their behalf?
3. Praise God for the gift of creation: take a walk and rejoice in the Spring beauty; make flower chains; sing hymns celebrating creation; write poems about God’s love; etc.
4. If you have a “church directory” that contains pictures of the people who attend your church, look through it together and talk about how these people are our relatives in our church family. Who might you think of as a grandparent or aunt or uncle or cousins?

Week 2—April 15, 2012

### Forgiving and Restoring

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1—2:2

John 20:19-31\*



**Key Verse:** “How wonderful it is, how pleasant for God’s people to live together in harmony.”  
(Psalm 133:1)

Aim: To learn how we participate with the risen Christ in shaping God’s community.

#### Background

In today’s readings the risen Christ restores a sense of faith and unity to the disciples. In the Book of Acts we hear about how the apostles worked together as a community to support one another with physical necessities and in the task of giving witness to the Resurrection. The message of communal harmony is echoed in Psalm 133 and the reading from 1 John emphasizes that God and Christ stand at the center of our lives as a Christian community. In the Gospel story, Jesus appears to the frightened disciples, restoring them to community with the words “Peace be with you.” Thomas’ cry “My Lord and my God,” is the cry of a believer whose disbelief has been transformed. Jesus gives the disciples the power and responsibility to proclaim God’s forgiveness and bring about a just world, a task that has been passed on to us today.

#### Faith Sharing

1. Invite children to tell you what they learned about Thomas in church school. The story of Thomas tells us it is all right to doubt and ask questions. Make a family “question box” and have each person write down questions about anything they are wondering about. During the coming week read questions and look for answers together.
2. Write today’s key verse on a strip of paper and tape onto a globe or world map. Place a sticker on countries where there is war. Pray together, using sentence prayers, that people will live in harmony and peace.

Week 3—April 22, 2012

### In Joy and Disbelief

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48\*



**Key Verse:** “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them: ‘Have you anything here to eat?’”  
(Luke 24:41)

Aim: To explore the Good News that the disciples are sent to tell.

### Background

During the days after the Resurrection the disciples moved from pain, fear and disbelief to joy and renewed faith. This led them to share their experience of Christ with others. In Acts 3, Peter and John, acting with the authority of the risen Christ, heal a lame man and encourage the awestruck crowd to repent and be reconciled with God. In Psalm 4, the psalmist, with deep faith, joyfully proclaims God's saving power. We are reminded in 1 John that God's love is a gift, freely given; our response is to reach out in love to others. In the passage from Luke, the disciples—confronted by the risen Christ—react in disbelief which turns to joy as Jesus sits down to share a meal with them. Commissioned by Jesus, the disciples were called to share their experiences with “all nations.”

### Faith Sharing

1. Read “The disciples believe” from *The Family Story Bible* pages 262-63. Jesus shows his friends that he is truly alive by sitting down and eating with them. Invite friends over to share a special brunch or snack this week: make “empty tomb buns” by wrapping bread dough around a marshmallow and baking (the melted marshmallow leaves a hollow).
2. Jesus' first words to his friends were “Peace be with you.” Write the Hebrew word for peace, “Shalom,” on a large paper and list things that make a peaceful family, community, and world. Greet one another with “Shalom” during the coming week.
3. Read Luke 24:45 in the *Good News Bible*. What do you think this phrase means? At home and in worship, the scriptures are often a key tool in helping us spread the Good News. Make some bookmarks to use in the Bible and other books about God's love: press some spring flowers; place on strips of construction paper or poster board and cover with clear contact paper.

Week 4—April 29, 2012

### Love's Power

Acts 4:5-12\*

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18



**Key Verse:** “My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action.” (1 John 3:18)

Aim: To carry on the work the apostles inherited from Jesus.

### Background

This week's readings explore the power of love, expressed in the lives of our biblical ancestors. In Acts, author Luke describes the power of love for the risen Christ, which gives Peter and John, “ordinary men,” courage to witness to their faith. Psalm 23 has long provided people with courage and peace in the midst of crisis. The

reading from 1 John affirms that true love shows itself in actions as well as words. The image of a loving shepherd, from the Psalm, is echoed in the reading from the Gospel of John. For Christians, a powerful symbol of love is the empty cross. It conveys God's never-ending compassion and fidelity, a love which transcends death. Today, that same love continues to transform and heal, giving people courage and commitment.

### Faith Sharing

1. Write the phrase “True Love Shows Itself in Action” on a large sheet of paper. Each evening, share ways in which your actions that day showed God's love; place a paper heart on your “poster” for each action.
2. God's love transformed Jesus' death into resurrection. As a symbol of the hope and love of the Easter Season make “New Life” collages. Overlap pictures of flowers, chicks, butterflies, etc. onto cross shapes cut from construction paper.
3. If possible visit a farm with new lambs; talk with the farmer about caring for the sheep. Bring home some sheep's wool and make small sheep by wrapping wool around pipe cleaners while you read the paraphrase of Psalm 23 in *The Family Story Bible* page 132.

Week 5—May 6, 2012

### Beyond Jerusalem

Acts 8:26-40\*

Psalm 22:25-31

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8



**Key Verse:** “I am the vine; you are the branches.” (John 15:5a)

Aim: To recognize our African Christian heritage.

### Background

Today's reading from Acts tells the story of the Good News reaching out beyond Jerusalem, southward into Africa. The story of the Ethiopian official, and his encounter with Philip, reminds us that Christianity spread into Africa right at the beginning of Church. Psalm 22 continues the same theme of God's love reaching out into all the world. Today's reading from 1 John urges us to see God in the face of our neighbors, loving one another as we are loved by God. Our connection to God and our neighbors around the world is emphasized in the familiar “vine and branches” passage from John 15. Through our sharing of God's love, the “living branches” of the church bear fruit in many different parts of the world.

### Faith Sharing

1. On a wall map or globe locate Jerusalem, Gaza (where the Ethiopian met Philip), and Ethiopia. Think about things you have read in the newspaper recently regarding Gaza or Ethiopia. Pray for our Christian Family members in these countries.