



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Study Guides for

Easter

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore the riches of the Easter season. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days 2

There is no scriptural requirement for us to celebrate Easter for fifty days, or even one day, for that matter. But there is nothing in the Bible that would prohibit joyful remembrance of the resurrection for any length of time. In fact, there is much to commend the practice of celebrating Eastertide.

The Paschal Triduum 4

The Paschal Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, originally was geared toward catechumens being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But the customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday continue to hold great significance for the Church as a whole.

“He Descended into Hell” 6

In the Apostle’s Creed we affirm that Jesus Christ “descended into hell.” Exactly what and where is this hell to which he descended? Why did he have to go there? What did he do when he arrived in hell? And why are his descent and our confession of it central to our faith?

Raised to Walk in Newness of Life 8

Christ’s resurrection guides us into “newness of life,” which is life here and now, but with a new, eschatological dimension. It leads us to examine everything we feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and Christ’s body (which is the Church) ever more seriously.

On Beyond Easter 10

The power of Christ’s resurrection is realized most, not in our building of monuments or institutions, but in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us.

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Focus Article:

- 📖 Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days
(*Easter*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 Between Easter Eggs and the Empty Tomb
(*Easter*, pp. 77-81)

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Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days

There is no scriptural requirement for us to celebrate Easter for fifty days, or even one day, for that matter. But there is nothing in the Bible that would prohibit joyful remembrance of the resurrection for any length of time. In fact, there is much to commend the practice of celebrating Eastertide.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

Meditation†

Resurrection changes everything.... This is why I need more than just Easter Day. If Easter were only a single day, I would never have time to let its incredible reality settle over me, settle into me. I would trudge through my life with a disconnect between what I say I believe about resurrection and how I live (or fail to live) my life in light of it.

Thanks be to God, our forebears in faith had people like me in mind when they decided that we simply cannot celebrate Easter in a single day, or even a single week. No, they decided, we need fifty days, seven Sundays, to even begin to plumb the depths of this event.

Kimberlee Conway Ireton

Reflection

“The implications of the resurrection lavishly overflow a one-day container,” Mark Roberts notes in his winsome invitation to celebrate Eastertide, the fifty-day season to mark Christ’s resurrection which begins on Easter Sunday. We need the extra time to explore, savor, and grow into those amazing implications. Roberts encourages us to be innovative in our worship during this season because it “is relatively unencumbered by beloved customs and set expectations.”

Eastertide is an ancient and widespread practice. In the first few centuries Christians marked special events that occurred between Christ’s resurrection and the formative events on Pentecost (which means “fiftieth day” in Greek). Today Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate the Easter season for forty days, until the ascension of Jesus. Roman Catholics and many Protestants honor a fifty-day Easter; their lectionaries provide special readings through the Seventh Sunday after Easter.

Thus, according to Roberts, joining with Christian believers in earlier centuries and across various traditions and using this time to draw on the rich resources of the church year are two good reasons to celebrate Easter for fifty days. But the most persuasive reason is that the implications of Christ’s resurrection deserve such extensive attention. “Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the God who raised Jesus from the dead deserves our attention,” he writes. “Moreover, we deserve to have our faith stretched, deepened, and renewed through a season of reflection upon and celebration of the resurrection of our Lord.”



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One example comes from his reflection on Ephesians 1:15-23, which is a lectionary reading for Ascension of the Lord Day or for the last Sunday of Eastertide. In Paul's prayer, "the resurrection...illustrates the 'immeasurable greatness of [God's] power for us who believe' (1:19), Roberts observes. "In a time when so many of us feel powerless, it would be wonderful to rediscover the power of the resurrection." This text also portrays "the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus... as two parts of one sweeping action of God. As a result of the resurrection-ascension, Jesus now reigns above all cosmic authorities." The implications of Christ's lordship cannot be developed on one Sunday, but are "worth examining during the whole of Eastertide."

In the next passage, Ephesians 2:1-7, Paul applies this to our salvation. Roberts continues, "In a stunning use of the metaphor of resurrection, this passage envisions us as already having been raised with Christ and exalted with him to heaven. Yet, we still look forward to 'the immeasurable riches' of God's grace that will be showered upon us in the future."

"Eastertide invites us to be creative, both in personal devotions and corporate worship," Roberts concludes. It leads us to ask: "How can we worship God in light of the resurrection?" "How do we experience the reality of our own resurrection from death to life through the grace of God in Christ?" "How might we live for fifty days – and beyond – as resurrection people?"

Study Questions

1. What are the best reasons, according to Mark Roberts, to celebrate Easter for fifty days?
2. Recall the themes that are usually addressed in your congregation's Easter morning worship service. What new directions might Ephesians 1:15-23 and 2:1-7 take your reflection on the meaning of Christ's resurrection during Eastertide?
3. What might you actually do during the fifty days of Easter? Work together with others to sketch out a series of seven personal devotions or corporate worship services on Easter themes. (You might start by reading the lectionary scripture passages and hymns associated with Easter.)
4. In what Mark McClintock calls "the glitter and gluttony of the holiday marketplace," what has become alluring about Easter to children (and some adults)? How can these facets confuse children?
5. What age-appropriate themes does McClintock recommend for children during Easter? Consider how those themes might form the basis of church worship such that "everyone in the congregation may hear the Easter story in a new way."

Departing Hymn: "The First Day of Creation"

† Kimberlee Conway Ireton, *The Circle of Seasons: Meeting God in the Church Year* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 94.



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Focus Article:

- 📖 The Paschal Triduum
(Easter, pp. 19-26)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 The “Real Presence” in Footwashing
(Easter, pp. 74-76)
- 📖 Christ’s Last Words from the Cross
(Easter, pp. 82-87)

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The Paschal Triduum

The Paschal Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, originally was geared toward catechumens being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But the customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday continue to hold great significance for the Church as a whole.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-9

Responsive Reading[†]

Let those who are devout and love God rejoice in this beautiful, radiant Feast.

Let those who are grateful servants be glad and enter into the joy of the Lord. ...

Christ is risen, and death is destroyed!

Christ is risen, and the powers of Satan are defeated!

Christ is risen, and the angels celebrate!

Christ is risen, and life has been set free!

Christ is risen, and the grave has given up the dead,
for Christ, in his resurrection,
has become the first-fruits of those that sleep.

To him be the glory and the power throughout all eternity. Amen.

John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

Reflection

The mystery of Easter “is no mere series of past historical events, but an ongoing, life-giving reality into which we are called to enter every day of our lives and especially during its annual commemoration,” Michael Foley notes. Early Christian practices to mark Jesus’ saving passion, death, and resurrection, as well as the creative regional devotions of Christians through the years, can provide rich resources for entering the reality of Easter.

The traditions of the Triduum – the three days from Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday – are best seen against the backdrop of Lent and the preparation of fourth century catechumens for baptism. Their fasts and vigils have been adapted in many ways by other faithful Christians preparing themselves for Easter.

- ▶ *Maundy Thursday* is named for the *Mandatum novum* or “new commandment” – to love one another as he loved them – that Christ gave the Apostles while washing their feet before the last supper. Christian monarchs once washed their poorest subjects’ feet on Holy Thursday in commemoration; some Baptists have foot-washing services on that day; and the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, still celebrated in the Catholic Church and Anglican communion, incorporates foot-washing. *Tenebrae*, a special form of Matins and Lauds (the Divine Office prayers around dawn) on Maundy Thursday, uses darkness, light, and chaotic sounds to help worshipers experience the confusion and hope of Christ’s death and resurrection. Many denominations celebrate forms of *Tenebrae*.
- ▶ *Good Friday*, the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, has been a day of lamentation and fasting since the Church sheltered in the catacombs. Even after the forty-day Lent became universal, some Christians observed Good Friday fasts with added rigor; for instance, the Irish consumed



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nothing but water or tea. Ironically, this day also became associated with special foods: in England, hot cross buns (originating in the fourteenth century) were only distributed on Good Friday. Other practices like the veneration of the cross during worship, performing special Passion music, and holding devotions on the Seven Last Words of Christ developed gradually.

- ▶ *Holy Saturday* in the early church concluded with an all-night Easter Vigil. Catechumens were baptized with great ceremony in the darkness before the light of Easter morning. In the second century the faithful kept a forty-hour “Passion Fast” from the hour Christ died on Good Friday until the hour he rose from the dead on Sunday morning, spending Holy Saturday in prayerful waiting. But, unofficially, there was much activity in homes preparing for the great feast of Easter.

Observing the Triduum helps us to fulfill the wise exhortation of Pope Leo the Great (d. 461): “Because the entire Paschal Mystery was instituted for the remission of sins, let us imitate what we hope to celebrate.” As we celebrate these holy days, we join Christ as he journeys from the upper room to the open tomb.

Study Questions

1. How do the worship services of the Triduum invite us into the biblical story?
2. Review the worship practices that Michael Foley, Bill Leonard, and Arthur Boers mention in their articles. How does the history behind these traditions deepen your understanding and engagement in them?
3. Which Triduum practices of the early Church and different Christian cultural traditions already help your congregation and family engage with the reality of Easter? Which new-to-you practices might benefit your congregation?

Departing Hymn: “We Welcome Glad Easter”

We welcome glad Easter when Jesus arose
and won a great victory over his foes.
*Then raise your glad voices, all Christians, and sing,
bring glad Easter praises to Jesus, your King.*

We tell how the women came early that day
and there at the tomb found the stone rolled away.
Refrain

We sing of the angel who said: “Do not fear!
Your Savior is risen and he is not here.”
Refrain

We think of the promise which Jesus did give:
“That he who believes in me also shall live!”
Refrain

Anonymous
Tune: ST. DENIO

† John Chrysostom, “Easter Sermon,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily.



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Focus Article:

📖 "He Descended into Hell"
(Easter, pp. 27-34)

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"He Descended into Hell"

In the Apostle's Creed we affirm that Christ "descended into hell." What and where is this hell to which he descended? Why did he have to go there and what did he do there? And why are his descent and our confession of it central to our faith?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-4:6

Meditation†

Do not fear death; the Savior's death has brought freedom.

He endured death and thus destroyed it.

He descended into Hell and destroyed it.

Even as Hell tasted his flesh he threw it into chaos.

All this was foretold by Isaiah, who said, "Hell below is moved to meet you at your coming." [Isaiah 14:9]

Hell was in chaos because it was annihilated.

It was in chaos because it was cheated.

It was in chaos because it was done away with.

It was in chaos because it was defeated.

It was in chaos because it was led away captive.

Hell swallowed humanity and discovered divinity.

It swallowed earth and experienced heaven.

It swallowed the visible

and was defeated by the invisible.

O death, where is your sting?

O grave, where is your victory?

John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

Reflection

The stirring passage above from John Chrysostom's Easter sermon and Ambrose's exultant poetry in the concluding hymn are expansions on the early Christian interpretation of 1 Peter 3:13-4:6. The central idea, Keith Johnson explains, is that "in the time between his death and resurrection—the time identified with Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday—Christ descended into the realm of the dead in order to preach the gospel to the dead who resided there."

These early pastors were clearly jubilant regarding Christ's descent. But what does it mean for our life of discipleship? To answer this requires "theological reasoning that goes beyond the letter of Scripture into the realm of faithful speculation," Johnson admits. "We have to think *through* Scripture by following its trajectory to trace out what must be true about Christ's descent into hell in light of everything else Scripture says about God, Christ, and salvation." He outlines three primary interpretations of the descent that have emerged over the centuries.

- ▶ On the traditional view of *Christ as triumphant king*, Christ descends to announce his victory over sin, death, and the devil and to proclaim God's salvation to the *righteous* dead, such as David, the prophets, and John the Baptist. This view suggests "Christ saved us on the cross not primarily by fulfilling the standards of divine justice or accepting the fullness of God's wrath," Johnson explains. "Rather, he saved us by embracing the physical death that comes as a consequence of our sin."



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▶ On the view of *Christ as the crucified servant*, held by John Calvin and many Reformed thinkers, Christ's descent is figurative, not literal. It's a way of saying that when Christ died, the dead gained clarity – the faithful knew “the grace which they had only tasted in hope was then manifested to the world” and the wicked knew “they were excluded from all salvation.” It also means Christ suffered not only physically, but *spiritually* as he bore God's vengeance against human sin.

▶ The view of *Christ as the Godforsaken*, associated most with Hans Urs von Balthasar, draws upon the first two: with the tradition it holds Christ literally descended to hell, but with the Reformed view it says this reveals the depth of Christ's woe, not his triumph. “Christ's suffering in hell marks his second death, one that extends the suffering of the cross into a new dimension,” Johnson explains. “On the cross, Christ actively embraces the burden of human sin and God's wrath against it; in hell, Christ passively exists in solidarity with the dead by accepting the absolute rejection of God.”

Johnson finds insights in each of these views, but offers a further proposal. “What if we interpreted the meaning of Christ's descent primarily in light of the *living* Jesus Christ himself?” he writes. To confess “he descended into hell” means “the Christ who dwells in us is the *same* Christ who did not regard the borders of death and hell as barriers blocking him from saving us.” And this implies that we, the Church, in and through whom Christ lives, “can face outward into the world, toward the sometimes brutal and terrifying edges of human life, without fear.”

Study Questions

1. How is the doctrine of Christ's descent fashioned from biblical resources? What questions remain unanswered by them?
2. How does each view of Christ's descent understand the consequence of human sin and Christ's actions to overcome it?
3. Keith Johnson thinks each view interprets Christ's descent through the lens of another event – the resurrection or crucifixion. What does he mean? Does his proposal avoid this?
4. How would you summarize the meaning of Christ's descent for the life of discipleship?

Departing Hymn: “Heaven with Rosy Morn Is Glowing” (verses 1 and 3b)

Heaven with rosy morn is glowing,
songs of triumph fill the air,
strains of praise from earth are flowing,
Hell is writhing in despair.

Earth's great king, in glory springing
from the deep sepulchral night,
while loud anthems round are ringing,
leads his saints to life and light.

Praise the Father, earth and heaven,
praise the Son, who rose this day,
to the Spirit praise be given –
three in one, and one in three.

Ambrose of Milan (340-397); translated by John Williams (1845)
Suggested Tunes: STUTTGART or RESTORATION

† John Chrysostom, “Easter Sermon,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily.



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Focus Article:

- 📖 Raised to Walk in Newness of Life
(Easter, pp. 35-43)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Charting the Christian Hope
(Easter, pp. 88-93)
- 📖 Anticipation
(Easter, pp. 46-49)

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Raised to Walk in Newness of Life

Christ's resurrection guides us into "newness of life," which is life here and now, but with a new, eschatological dimension. It leads us to examine everything we feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and Christ's body (the Church) ever more seriously.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:10-14

Meditation†

It is the purpose and intention of the Lord Jesus to make this world entirely new. You recollect how it was made at first—pure and perfect. It sang with its sister-spheres the song of joy and reverence. It was a fair world, full of everything that was lovely, beautiful, happy, holy. ... But there came a serpent, and his craft spoiled it all. He whispered into the ears of a mother Eve; she fell, and we fell with her, and what a world this now is! If people walk about in it with their eyes open, they will see it to be a horrible sphere. I do not mean that its rivers, its lakes, its valleys, its mountains are repulsive. Nay, it is a world fit for angels, naturally; but it is a horrible world morally. ...

Truly, truly, this seems to me to be a glorious purpose. To make a world is something wonderful, but to make a world new is something more wonderful still.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Reflection

As believers we can adopt a new stance toward sin, a stance that is grounded in Christ's resurrection and prefigured in our baptism. "We have been buried with him by baptism into death," Paul explains, "so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We are no longer enslaved partners to distorted desires and sinful habits, but can actively resist them. This new orientation toward sinfulness is not our accomplishment, but something so amazing that it reveals "the glory of the Father" in the same way Christ's resurrection does.

Paul identifies this line of causation, which runs from the event of Christ's bodily resurrection to the divinely empowered life of his disciples, as "the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). This power does not merely give us a jump start for discipleship by freeing us from sin and making it possible for us to resist our distorted practices and desires, it also enables and guides our growth into Christlike virtues throughout our lives.

Because God's power to enliven us spiritually is 'channeled' to us (so to speak) through the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus, it provides the following distinctive shape to our moral life.

- ▶ *We take our present bodies seriously.* Christ's resurrection signaled the importance of the human body in the economy of God's redemptive plan. Therefore, we should treat our own and other human bodies with the great respect and care they deserve as a prime locus of God's redemptive work. We should provide urgent or long-term care directly to particular human bodies in need, but also work to correct the broken social systems that endanger many human



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bodies. And, in a less corrective or defensive mode, we might employ the creative arts, literature, teaching, or counseling to encourage a rightly ordered appreciation of the human body.

- ▶ *We take our resurrectional bodies seriously.* From the teachings of Jesus and Paul and the descriptions of Jesus' resurrected body, we hope that in a mysterious way our present bodies will be involved in God's raising to life our resurrectional bodies. The latter will be wonderfully different – more glorified and powerful, and totally incorruptible – but informed in appearance, habits, and loving gestures by the embodied lives we are living now. As we take our resurrectional bodies seriously, we revalue our present bodies from a fresh, eschatological perspective. We are empowered to resist how culture sexualizes young bodies, denigrates aging ones, siphons off medical resources to preserve advantaged persons' lives with extreme measures, and so on. We may embrace courageous acts of service to others and even martyrdom.
- ▶ *We take the Body of Christ, which is the Church, seriously.* We have been raised from the waters of baptism to be “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11), the latter being Paul's favorite way to describe our membership together through the risen Christ in the Church. Given this new identity in Christ, we no longer allow identities of family heritage, nationality, race, and gender (cf. Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11) – or things like wealth, social status, and political affiliations – to set ultimate norms for our behavior, but we examine these with a wary eye. We do not withdraw from involvement in the world, but learn to approach it through the Church's worship and practices that enable us to discern and embrace what God is doing in the world.

Study Questions

1. Using the outline of taking your body, your resurrectional body, and the Body of Christ seriously, identify specific ways your discipleship has been shaped by Christ's resurrection.
2. Discuss Cameron Jorgenson's view: “The Christian hope is not that someday believers will ‘fly away,’” for that hope is “firmly fixed on the promise of the risen Lord who comforts his people by saying, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”
3. How are both the surprise and power of Christ's resurrection depicted in Eugène Burnand's painting *Les Disciples* (1898)?

Departing Hymn: “The First Day of Creation” (verse 2a, 3b)

The day of resurrection
God once again turned night
to joyful adoration
and anthems of delight.
Rejoice in celebration,
your voices all as one,
to sing the new creation
in Christ, God's risen Son

David W. Music (2013)
Tune: AURELIA

† Adapted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “A New Creation,” Sermon 3467, www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3467.htm.



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 On Beyond Easter
(Easter, pp. 67-73)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 The Power of the Resurrection
(Easter, pp. 44-45)

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On Beyond Easter

The power of Christ's resurrection is realized most, not in our building of monuments or institutions, but in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-14

Meditation†

Surely Christian ethics should ask different questions: Who are we as baptized persons who profess faith in the resurrection? Who or what does the risen Christ want us to become?

Gerald O'Collins, S.J.

Reflection

In the Gospel stories that go "on beyond Easter" – those in which the risen Jesus appears to his disciples – we glimpse how they (and we) are called to keep learning about and spreading the good news of God's kingdom. "Jesus' resurrection is not the culmination of the [gospel] story, but the beginning," Milton Brasher-Cunningham explains. "The story continues with us."

"The way the Gospel writers...tell the story, Jesus started by doing something after the resurrection he had not done before: he cooked. He endured the cross and the grave, came back from the dead, and made breakfast," Brasher-Cunningham wittily observes. "The meal is no small matter."

What is the significance of this meal on the beach in John 21? How might it inform our discipleship "on beyond Easter"?

- ▶ *The meal restores the disciples' hope.* A thread runs through the appearances of the risen Jesus: when he speaks to Mary in the grave yard (John 20:11-18), walks with two disciples to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), visits the room where everyone is gathered (John 20:19-29), and comes to seven disciples who are fishing (John 21), his disciples do not recognize him at first. Perhaps the stories that Jesus was alive could not erase their confusion or quell their grief over his absence. "Things were not as they had been and they could not be fixed," Brasher-Cunningham notes. "They did not yet have the rituals of the Church to comfort them. There were no chapels to go to, no Communion to share. They only knew of their last supper with him and that things had not been right since."

But now Jesus makes breakfast for his seven friends, including the one, Peter, who had disowned him. In this way Jesus offers Peter "the grace to know his betrayal was not the last word. There was something on beyond the courtyard, the cross, and the cemetery, even on beyond the fretful and fruitless night they had just lived through."

- ▶ *The meal brings the disciples together with Christ.* Compare this breakfast to the Last Supper, the meal that we reenact through Communion in order to "remember" Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Brasher-Cunningham explains, "we come to the table to put ourselves back together in Jesus' name. We re-member the Body of Christ as we share the bread and wine, which is an ongoing and difficult task."



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At this breakfast, Jesus asks the disciples to remember him once more. "With all the days together, it seems safe to say they ate together as much as they did anything else. Some of the meals made the Gospels, but most were just daily bread: the sharing of sustenance as they went about their lives and work." The disciples are to remember their life together with the Lord and then extend it to others.

- ▶ *The meal reminds us who we are to be.* "Here is the story of the Easter breakfast: Jesus was back at work, remembering those whom he loved, feeding them, forgiving them, and calling them to go and do likewise," Brasher-Cunningham writes. "What if all our meals were markers – altars of forgiveness and belonging? ... Come to the table. Lay down your burdens. Offer forgiveness. Ask for it, too. And bring anyone else you can find. Christ is risen! – pass the potatoes."

"If Communion is the meal that galvanizes us, then perhaps the breakfast on the beach is the meal that reminds us who we are and who we are called to be, and reminds us Easter is the beginning of the gospel, not the final chapter. Go out into the highways and byways of life, to the bars and the beaches, go out on beyond Easter and compel them to come to breakfast."

Study Questions

1. What occurs at (what Milton Brasher-Cunningham calls) "the last breakfast" to restore the disciples' hope? What do the disciples learn about their role in God's kingdom?
2. What role have meals played in bringing your family and your congregation together with Christ?
3. Discuss how communal meals might enrich your celebration of Eastertide.
4. Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ* takes the unusual tack for Christian art of imagining the triumphant moment of resurrection itself. How does it depict the world before and after of Christ's resurrection?

Departing Hymn: "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread"

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There eat with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

James Montgomery (1825), alt.
Tune: ST. AGNES

† Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 168.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Ephesians 1:15-23	1 Peter 1:3-9
Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (all sections)	Plan a study/worship series for Eastertide
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 4, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the reasons for celebrating Easter for fifty days.
2. To discuss age-appropriate themes for children during the celebration of Easter.
3. To plan a personal or corporate study or worship series for the season of Eastertide.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Mark Roberts first celebrated Eastertide when he became senior pastor of Irvine Presbyterian Church in Southern California. He recalls, "the worship director...explained to me that he ordered the worship of our church according to the liturgical year" and that this included "celebrating Easter for fifty days, beginning on Easter Sunday and ending the day before Pentecost."

"...All of this felt peculiar to me. Yet it also felt surprisingly right. I appreciated the chance to focus in worship on the resurrection for more than just one Sunday a year. As I stood in front of my congregation and proclaimed, 'Christ is risen!' I was glad to remind them of this truth and to be encouraged by their response, 'He is risen, indeed!' I began to sense unexpected value in having our Easter worship spill over into the weeks after Easter. I wondered how this elongated celebration might influence the soul of my church and even my own relationship with the Lord.

"...I believe our recognition of the season of Easter enriched our worship. More importantly, it helped my congregation and me to 'know Christ and the power of his resurrection' (Philippians 3:10) in new and deeper ways." (*Easter*, 12-13)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to fill members' hearts with the joy and hope that come to us through Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ephesians 1:15-23 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study Mark Roberts shares three reasons for celebrating Eastertide and shows how we might focus on the implications of Christ's resurrection for the life of discipleship during the season. The next four studies explore some of those implications more closely.

Your group might want to devote a second session to planning a seven-week study or worship series either for individuals or for the congregation during Eastertide.

Study Questions

1. The best reason to mark Easter for fifty days, according to Mark Roberts, is that the God who raised Jesus from the dead deserves such attention. Celebrating Eastertide can draw us closer to God and help us “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10) in new and deeper ways. The other two reasons that Roberts offers – taking this opportunity to join in ancient and widespread practices and to participate in the church year through commemorative days and scripture lectionaries – reveal how this celebration can draw us closer to Christian believers in other traditions and eras.
2. “One-day Easter celebrations usually focus on the story of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus... to instill awe and wonder, as well as to invite unbelieving visitors to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior,” Roberts notes. This is important, but it only scratches the surface of the resurrection’s implications for the life of discipleship. Ephesians 1:15-23 portrays Christ’s resurrection and ascension as demonstrations of God’s great power that establishes Christ’s lordship over all things. In Ephesians 2:1-7 the resurrection grounds our deliverance from the deadly power of sinful desires and actions. These passages can help us see how (in Kimberlee Conway Ireton’s words) “resurrection changes everything.”
3. Decide on your format: will you create seven personal devotions, group studies, or worship services? For each week in Eastertide, you can find scripture readings (from several church lectionaries), suggested hymns, reflections, movies, artwork, and other resources, at www.textweek.com moderated by Jenee Woodward. Other websites offer daily lectionary readings for the season.
Here are two ways to use such lectionary-based resources. You might select a day during Eastertide and use resources collected for that day; or you might select a favorite resurrection-themed scripture passage or hymn and then explore how it is connected with other resources on the websites. “I assume that we have the freedom to be creative in the worship of Eastertide, based on biblical themes associated with resurrection,” Roberts writes. His own use of Ephesians is a model of this freedom: Ephesians 1:15-23 is a lection for Ascension Day or for the Seventh Sunday after Easter, but he has added Ephesians 2:1-7 to the mix.
4. Mark McClintock notes the allure of Easter bunnies, baskets of candy, colored eggs, and chicks. He would not purge these from Easter celebrations. “Myth is not the enemy of truth,” he explains. “Young children build their understanding of the world through a blend of personal experience and fantasy. ... Children who can envisage a friendly though unseen bunny who shares joy through gifts can begin to contemplate a divinity whose nature is love and who delights in sharing.” Yet, he continues, “Fun and fancy are well and good (they help awaken children to the excitement of the Easter season), but leave the baskets at home. ... Why? Preschoolers naturally weave together different narrative strands, and on the ride home from church may explain to a bemused parent, ‘Jesus died in a hole in the hill, and every year the Easter bunny comes out of the hole with eggs for everyone.’ In the postmodern age that sees all truth as relative, it is important that children be able to distinguish between the biblical and the secular.”
5. McClintock advises us to “focus on the biblical narrative; engage children’s senses; pay attention to the feelings in the story – fear, surprise, sadness, and especially joy; and include children in your worship rituals and plan a few surprises.” Elementary school children “will resonate with the victory of justice” in Christ’s resurrection. Jesus is their hero, and his heroic qualities can be modeled by adults in their lives. Even young children can identify with the sadness of the disciples after Jesus’s death, and “can comprehend that some people did not like what Jesus taught; they did not want Jesus to change things, and so they put him on a cross to die.” He suggests avoiding the grisly details of the crucifixion: “Scary manipulation can subvert children’s belief in the loving nature of God and actually lead to protective, secretive, self-absorbed behaviors – quite the opposite of what Jesus teaches.” He offers specific ways to help children join in the congregation’s rejoicing in Easter morning worship.

Departing Hymn

“The First Day of Creation” is on pp. 53-55 of *Easter*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Paschal Triduum

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the origin and elements of the Triduum.
2. To discuss ways of celebrating the Triduum in congregations today.
3. To consider how we can enter the life-giving reality of the Easter season.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “We Welcome Glad Easter” locate the familiar tune ST. DENIO in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

The worship services during the Triduum have long been a way for Christians to imaginatively join Christ on the final stages of his ministry from the Last Supper through the Resurrection. For example, many Christians celebrate a Tenebrae service in the darkness before Maundy Thursday. Fifteen candles on a triangular candelabrum called a “hearse” are extinguished one by one after each psalm or canticle, until only the topmost candle remains. When that candle is hidden, representing Christ’s burial in the tomb, worshippers make a chaos of noise (stomping their feet or banging their hymnals against pews) to commemorate the confusion of nature at the death of its Creator and God. The candle is then restored, anticipating Christ’s glorious resurrection.

As Tenebrae (and other worship services in the Triduum) engage the senses and capture the imagination in wonderful ways, we begin to interpret all of life through the lens of Christ’s death and resurrection. This is beautifully illustrated by the character Cordelia in Evelyn Waugh’s most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited*:

“They’ve closed the chapel at Brideshead...mummy’s Requiem was the last mass said there. After she was buried the priest came in—I was there alone. I don’t think he saw me—and took out the altar stone and put it in his bag; then he burned the wads of wool with the holy oil on them and threw the ash outside; he emptied the holy-water stoop and blew out the lamp in the sanctuary, and left the tabernacle open and empty, as though from now on it was always to be Good Friday. I suppose none of this makes any sense to you, Charles, poor agnostic. I stayed there till he was gone, and then, suddenly, there wasn’t any chapel there any more, just an oddly decorated room. I can’t tell you what it felt like. You’ve never been to Tenebrae, I suppose?”

“Never.”

“Well, if you had you’d know what the Jews felt about their temple. *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* [how lonely sits the city]...it’s a beautiful chant. You ought to go once, just to hear it.” (Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, [New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2012 (1944)], 253-254.)

In this study of the Triduum, we will consider how we can draw upon the Church’s worship traditions to enter the life-giving reality of the Easter season.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to unite you with Christ this Triduum as you participate through worship and personal devotion in his journey to the empty tomb.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 28:1-9 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This study focuses on how Christians in different places and times have observed the Triduum in corporate worship, personal devotions, and cultural practices. Allow the rich history of the Triduum to inspire renewed commitment to following Christ on his journey from the upper room on Maundy Thursday to Gethsemane, the cross on Good Friday, the grave on Holy Saturday, and the Resurrection on Easter morning.

Study Questions

1. Maundy Thursday marks the day that Christ celebrated the Passover with his Apostles in the upper room. Many traditions incorporate footwashing into their worship to commemorate Christ washing his Apostles' feet and saying "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).
Good Friday is the day that Christ was crucified, which is why it is the most observed day of fasting and self-denial in the Church. Many Christians incorporate the veneration of the cross in their worship on this day, and participate in devotions like the Seven Last Words of Christ to remember the sacrifice of Jesus as described in the Bible.
Holy Saturday is the day when Christ was buried in the tomb. Many traditions hold long vigil services in the evening, which help members participate in the painful grief of Jesus' disciples who saw him die.
Easter Sunday is the day commemorating Christ's resurrection. This day of great feasting and joy often begins with early worship as members join Mary Magdalene in greeting Jesus on the morning of his resurrection.
2. Knowing where our forms of worship and practices of devotion came from and how they developed can deepen our understanding of how they are meant to shape our discipleship. This helps us to value them more. Ask members to choose one thing they learned from reading Michael Foley's article and describe how it increased their understanding of and appreciation for the worship and practices of the Triduum.
3. Divide members into two groups. Invite the first group to consider how your congregation already celebrates the Triduum. Ask the group to make connections between the worship practices of your church and the history of the Triduum that Michael Foley describes in his article, the valuable practice of footwashing that Bill Leonard describes, and the rich devotion of the Seven Last Words of Christ that Arthur Boers writes about in his review.
Invite the second group to discuss the worship and devotion practices that were new to them. Which ones are interesting or inspiring? Which ones seem strange? Are there any practices which would be suited to your congregation in worship or in personal devotion?
If the Triduum is totally new to your congregation, stay in one group and discuss what seems most valuable in celebrating Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday before jumping into the joy of Easter Sunday.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

“He Descended into Hell”

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the biblical basis for the confession that Christ “descended into hell.”
2. To weigh three theological interpretations of Christ’s descent.
3. To discuss the implications of Christ’s descent for the life of discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Heaven with Rosy Morn Is Glowing” locate one of the familiar tunes STUTTGART or RESTORATION in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

“Whenever my church prints the Apostle’s Creed in the Sunday worship bulletin,” Keith Johnson reports, “one phrase has an asterisk attached to it: ‘he descended into hell*...’ An explanation is provided at the bottom of the page: ‘hell refers to the realm of the dead rather than the place of punishment.’ I have long found the presence of this asterisk and explanation disheartening. After all, if John Calvin is right that the Apostle’s Creed contains ‘a summary of our faith, full and complete in all details,’ then doesn’t our need to *asterisk* the Creed signify that we do not truly understand what we believe? Wouldn’t better catechesis be a more fitting solution? On my better days, however, I can hardly blame my church leaders for making the addition, because I know that they are simply trying to address a real point of confusion in my church and others like it. Many sincere Christians recite the Apostle’s Creed every week without knowing what it means to confess that Jesus Christ ‘descended into hell.’” (*Easter*, p. 27)

In this study, Johnson recounts the biblical basis for this doctrine and explores three primary ways of interpreting its implications for our discipleship.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide your reflection on the implications of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Peter 3:13-4:6 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Perhaps Holy Saturday is the most misunderstood element of the Triduum. In this study, Keith Johnson reviews the three primary theological interpretations of the events between Christ’s death and resurrection. Included within the traditional view is the idea of the harrowing of hell when Christ proclaimed God’s salvation to the righteous dead. For more on this aspect of the traditional view, see Ralph C. Wood’s article

“The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail,” *Heaven and Hell*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics 2 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2002), 31-34.

Study Questions

1. The doctrine of Christ’s descent to proclaim the gospel to the dead in a distinct realm, which is often identified with the Old Testament *Sheol* or Greek *Hades*, is based primarily on a reading of 1 Peter 3:18-22 and 4:6. The timing of the event is based on interpretations of Romans 10:6-17 and Ephesians 4:8-10. It is connected to Acts 2:27, which quotes Psalm 16. Some unanswered questions are: Exactly what and where is this hell to which he descended? Why did he have to go there? What did he do when he arrived in hell? And why are his descent and our confession of it central to our faith?
2. Keith Johnson contrasts the three theological approaches to Christ’s descent in terms of how they understand the consequence of human sin and Christ’s actions to overcome it. He writes, “Those who hold to the traditional approach see sin primarily in terms of the death that results from it, and they believe the cross is sufficient to save us because death’s power is exhausted on Christ. As a result, they import Christ’s Easter triumph into Holy Saturday and view the descent as the first movement of Christ’s victorious reign. Those who follow Calvin’s approach see sin primarily in terms of God’s wrath against it, and they hold that the cross is sufficient to save us because it is where Christ’s bears this wrath. Accordingly, they import the events of Holy Saturday into Good Friday and view the cross through the lens of the descent. Balthasar sees sin in terms of both death and wrath, and he thinks we are freed from them because Christ suffered both on the cross *and* in hell. He thus extends Good Friday into Holy Saturday, joining them together as two stages of suffering necessary for the sake of our redemption.”
3. In the answer above, we see how Johnson thinks the traditional view interprets the descent as the first stage of Christ’s reign through the resurrection, the Reformed view borrows the language of descent to explain Christ’s suffering on the cross, and Balthasar relates the crucifixion to the descent as stages in Christ’s suffering. Here is a summary:

<i>Christ as Triumphant King</i> (traditional)		Holy Saturday ← Easter
<i>Christ as Crucified Servant</i> (Reformed)	Good Friday ←	Holy Saturday
<i>Christ as Godforsaken</i> (Balthasar)	Good Friday —	Holy Saturday
<i>Christ as Living Lord</i> (Johnson)		Holy Saturday

Johnson searches for meaning within each day of the Triduum by relating their events to the living Christ. “The Apostle’s Creed, after all, is a confession of faith, and the primary object of our faith is the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ,” he writes. “He is not in hell but lives and reigns here and now through his Holy Spirit. And one of the ways he does so is through *us*: ‘it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20). When we confess that Christ ‘descended into hell,’ we are not merely making a claim about an event that happened in the past; we are making a claim about the One who lives in and through us in the present.” Regarding the descent, “Doesn’t Christ’s saving work allow us to follow him wherever he may lead, even if doing so means ‘becoming like him in his death’ (Philippians 3:10)? Is not the Church able to go to any place in this world and face any horror because we know that Christ has been to the ‘darkest valley’ and faced our enemies before us (Psalm 23:4-5)?”

4. Invite four small groups to research the meaning of the descent for discipleship in each of the three historic views and Johnson’s own proposal. To what extent can elements from these views be combined?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Raised to Walk in Newness of Life

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To outline the distinctive shape that the event of Christ's bodily resurrection gives to the Christian moral life.
2. To discuss how this distinctive shape is prefigured in baptism.
3. To consider how the human impact of Christ's resurrection is depicted in Eugène Burnand's *Les Disciples*.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

This is how I recall my baptism. "My dad asked quietly, 'Are you ready?' It was the signal for me to draw a deep breath and pinch my nostrils shut with my right hand. Then he intoned 'Buried with him by baptism into death' as he lowered me back and under the water's surface where I could not breathe. 'Raised to walk in newness of life' he announced in a louder voice as he pulled me, gasping for air, back out. Because being baptized as a believer into the body of Christ is the most publicly vulnerable thing I have ever done (and, I suspect, that anyone could ever do), I remember it well fifty years later." (*Easter*, p. 35)

The baptismal formula that my father used, drawing from Romans 6:3-4, portends that discipleship involves participating ever more fully in Christ's death and resurrection. In this study we will explore how Christ's bodily resurrection gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life – which is to say, how believers ought to feel, think, and act in regard to one another, other created things, and God.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members' reflection on the resurrectional meaning of their baptism.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Philippians 3:10-14 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The event of Christ's bodily resurrection provides a distinctive shape, motivation, and enabling power for the Christian moral life. It is Christ's *resurrection* – not his resuscitation, revivification, or reanimation – that gives shape to our discipleship, and this event must be interpreted within the narrative of God's work through the people of Israel and the Church. I draw a three-part outline of this distinctive shape – taking our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and the Body of Christ (which is the Church) seriously – from an early baptismal confession: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, / and in his only begotten Son / our Lord Jesus Christ, / and in the Holy Spirit, / and in the resurrection of the flesh, / and in the holy catholic church." In the focus article I suggest that the three aspects are nested in this way: taking our resurrectional bodies seriously does

not lead us to devalue our present bodies, but to value them rightly (i.e., within a new, eschatological perspective); and taking the Body of Christ (the Church) seriously does not lead us to value the other identities and morally formative relationships less than we should, but to value them rightly (i.e., within a new, ecclesial perspective).

Study Questions

1. Form three small groups to brainstorm specific examples of how discipleship is formed in the ways mentioned in the outline. In regard to taking our present bodies seriously, I mention three sorts of examples: “providing urgent or long-term care directly to particular human bodies in need – for instance, to those who are unborn, very young, disabled, sick, or dying,” “working to correct the broken social systems that endanger many human bodies – such as material poverty, unjust and unhealthy food production, disordered constructions of sexuality, or predatory warfare,” and employing “the creative arts, literature, teaching, or counseling to encourage a rightly ordered appreciation of the human body.”

In regard to taking our resurrectional bodies seriously, I suggest that we begin to see our “present embodied lives as wonderful gifts from God which [we], in turn, can donate to one another and back to God” in preparation for life together with God. Thus, we have reason to resist the various ways that society tempts us to worship the human body – by sexualizing young bodies, denigrating older or disabled bodies, and distorting medical care to extend the present life of those who can afford it. And in some situations we may be called to risk our present lives and health for the sake of God’s kingdom.

In regard to taking the Body of Christ (which is the Church) seriously, I mention taking our identity and growth as members in Christ’s body as more fundamental than other “identities of family heritage, nationality, race, and gender ... [and] wealth, social status, and political affiliations.” We take on some moral projects through the Church and in concert with other members, but we evaluate all of our moral projects (and loyalties) through the lens of the commitments and habits that we form in worship.

2. Cameron Jorgenson laments that “modern spiritual sensibilities have led both Christians and Jews to conceive of the afterlife in wholly ethereal terms.” Indeed, with “our imaginations shaped more by Plato than by Jesus, we pine for the release of our souls from the prison-house of our bodies.” This is clearly illustrated in the American folk-hymn that exults: “when I die, hallelujah, by and by, I’ll fly away!”

By contrast, Jorgenson explains, the Christian hope for life after death should be centered on Christ’s *bodily* resurrection. Christ proclaims “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5) in the context of John the Revelator’s vision of “a new earth” where risen believers will dwell bodily. The meditation quoted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s sermon “A New Creation” is a reflection on this proclamation.

Relate the three books that Jorgenson reviews to the outline in this study. All three emphasize that our hope for life after death must take our present bodies more seriously. Matthew Levering, especially, highlights the need to distinguish resurrectional bodies from present bodies, and to value the latter in light of the former. All three interpret resurrectional hope in the context of membership in God’s people.

3. As a naturalist, Eugène Burnand depicts the effect of Christ’s resurrection through the very human actions and passions of two disciples, Peter and (according to tradition) John, as they race to the empty tomb. Their surprise and concern are realistically portrayed in both figures’ faces and in John’s clutched hands. Yet they also run with hope. “They are running away from the three crosses on the lower right of the composition and towards the light of the dawn,” Heidi Hornik explains. “The liturgical colors of both Easter and Lent (purple, gold, and white), found on the horizon and through the sky, are reflected by John’s robe.”

Departing Hymn

“The First Day of Creation” is on pp. 53-55 of *Easter*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

On Beyond Easter

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the significance of the breakfast that the risen Christ cooked and served to his disciples.
2. To consider how communal meals can bind us together with one another before Christ.
3. To explore the depiction of the power of Christ's resurrection in Christian art.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of Easter (Christian Reflection) and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread" locate the familiar tune ST. AGNES in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

Milton Brasher-Cunningham writes, "One of the Dr. Seuss books I remember best from my childhood because of how much my father loved it was called *On Beyond Zebra*. The story centers around one boy telling his younger friend how much more he could imagine if he refused to be confined by the prescribed alphabet: there were words and worlds to discover if one kept going 'on beyond zebra.' Dad read it as a metaphor of faith. He was on to something.

In the places I go there are things that I see
That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z.
I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends.
My alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends!" (*Easter*, pp. 68-69)

The opening sentence of Mark's gospel is: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It signals that Jesus' story is the beginning of the gospel. The good news continues with us—as we learn to go on beyond Easter with Christ.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members as they eat with one another and others as Christ's disciples.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 21:1-14 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study Milton Brasher-Cunningham, a writer and chef who blogs at "Don't Eat Alone" (www.donteatalone.com), traces the implications for our discipleship of the risen Jesus appearing to his disciples to cook their

breakfast. You might connect his reflections to the articles and reviews in the *Food and Hunger* issue of Christian Reflection. Here I use his thoughts to help us plan for Eastertide.

Study Questions

1. Milton Brasher-Cunningham suggests three ways that Jesus restores the disciples' hope. First, Jesus restores normalcy to their lives by reminding them of the many meals they had shared together. Brasher-Cunningham explains, "With all the days together, it seems safe to say they ate together as much as they did anything else. Some of the meals made the Gospels, but most were just daily bread: the sharing of sustenance as they went about their lives and work." Furthermore, through the act of cooking the meal Jesus offers forgiveness to Peter, who had disowned him. Finally, when Jesus commissions Peter to "feed my sheep," he gives Peter and the others direction for their discipleship "on beyond Easter."

Brasher-Cunningham summarizes what those first disciples (and we) might learn from this meal about our role in God's kingdom: "Our faith calls us to go on beyond Communion, on beyond the Cross, on beyond the Empty Tomb, to meet each other for breakfast, lunch, and dinner to re-member to keep looking for new words and worlds to describe the indefatigable love of God that breathed us into being, holds us as we walk through these days, and welcomes us when we move beyond this life. We are called to come to the same table. We take our turn as we feed one another, and as we feed the world. The early church gathered for their love feasts, sharing food from house to house, as Acts points out. Whatever they had to do, they knew they had to eat, and so they fed one another. 'As often as you do this' [1 Corinthians 11:26] might mean more than simply observing the Lord's Supper. What if Jesus had in mind that we would re-member every time we broke bread or sat down at the table together? What if Jesus was calling us to widen our sense of every table to include those who harvested the crops and raised the animals, and to make sure they are paid fairly and treated justly?"

3. In regard to their families, members might mention how offering table-grace binds the family together – sometimes across widely-separated places and through generations. Perhaps they remember moments of prayer or worship during special meals at weddings, baptisms, funerals, and so on, or at times of family vacation or celebration.

In regard to your congregation, discuss how Communion is celebrated in regular or seasonal worship services. Have you taken Communion to shut-in members, to those in a nursing home, or shared it with other groups beyond your congregation? Also consider the role of fellowship meals in your congregation, whether they occur on a regular or seasonal basis. Does your congregation provide meals to the elderly or poor in the community, to members with special needs (due to sickness or death), or to those who come to visit your church? How is Christ re-membered on these occasions?

3. Examine the list of family and congregational meals from the previous question. Consider how meals like those might be incorporated into your Eastertide celebration. Discuss how a family or congregational meal and worship time might commemorate (what Brasher-Cunningham calls) "the last breakfast" in John 21.
4. In 'The Power of the Resurrection,' Heidi Hornik describes Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ* (1463-1465) as 'one of the most enduring images of Christian victory in Western art.' She explains a visual before-and-after perspective on the resurrection: 'On the left side of Christ the trees in the background are stark and dead, awaiting rebirth, while those on the right are flourishing, symbolizing the rebirth of humanity.' There is an implied, temporal before-and-after perspective as well: the imperial guards who once were watchful and in control are now sleeping, while the Christ who once was dead is now alive and ruling in the world.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.