

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series A

Lent 1–Easter 7

By Ken Behnken



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Lesson 10

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 10:1–10

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Three-Year Lectionary, the Holy Gospels lead us through the chapter and its metaphors in three selections. These first verses of the Good Shepherd chapter relate to what preceded. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind and identified Himself to him as the Son of Man. As the man, with new sight and new insight, knelt and worshiped Him, Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Some Pharisees asked, “Are we also blind?” Jesus told them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” (9:39–41).

Speaking of the Lord as Israel’s Shepherd and of their religious leaders as shepherds was a familiar metaphor of the Old Testament (see Psalm 78:52; Jeremiah 23:1–4). When you keep the interaction with the Pharisees in mind, you readily understand the point of Jesus’ “he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way.” In their willful blindness, the religious leaders were deceiving themselves. As false shepherds, they were harming God’s flock.

158. In Jesus’ figure of speech, what is the key factor that distinguishes the shepherd from the thief? How is the true shepherd’s identity verified in his interaction with the sheep in the pen?

159. Why did the Pharisees not understand this seemingly obvious figure of speech?

In this section, Jesus did not refer to Himself as the ____ but as the ____.

160. As He referred to Himself as the door of the sheep, what was Jesus boldly saying had to happen if the people and their leaders were to be saved and come in and go out and find pasture?

Jesus’ “I am the door” is another of His emphatic “I am”—*egō eimi*—statements that are keys to appreciating John’s Gospel. Jesus’ saying “all who came before Me are thieves and robbers” is a general statement that Jesus made for impact. It was true only by comparison with God’s own Shepherd in the case of those who were faithful shepherds. Old Testament history records the service of many faithful judges and prophets and priests, but all fell short of the ideal Shepherd.

161. How was the religious establishment of Jesus’ day guilty of being “thieves and robbers”?

Verse 10 leads toward Jesus' picture of Himself as the Good Shepherd. In it, Jesus contrasted Himself and His reason for coming with the motivation of thieving false shepherds. The tense of the Greek verbs is significant. "The thief comes" is present tense, showing continuing action—he "keeps on coming" and is a constant danger because he comes to steal and kill and destroy. In contrast, Jesus said, "I came" (the emphatic *egō*)—a decisive coming that does not have to be repeated (see Hebrews 9:24–28). The lasting result: "They may have life"—a present tense with the thrust of "they may keep on having."

162. For what reason(s) might believers imagine they do not have the Shepherd's gift of life and the abundance of its accompanying blessings?

The First Lesson: Acts 2:42–47

It is significant that a description of the continuing fellowship of believers follows immediately after the account of their conversions and Baptisms. It would be hard to think of them experiencing this dramatic turnaround and just going back to life as usual. Relating to Jesus Christ, the Head, in faith always calls people to relate to one another in love in the fellowship of the Body of Christ. About the first Christians, we're told, "They devoted themselves to ___ and ___, to ___ and ___."

163. What encouragement is there in each of these for our Easter faith and life?

These first Christians immediately displayed their love of Christ in their love and concern for one another. Luke's account gives you a feeling of a "camp" or "retreat" experience, which could not have continued indefinitely. But their enthusiastic love and joy gave them favor with all and attracted others into their fellowship. Church-growth studies often refer to this quality as "the love quotient."

164. How would you rate our congregation's love quotient? What can we do to improve our practice of Christian love?

165. How does this First Lesson relate to the theme of today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 2:19–25

Peter wrote: "This is a gracious thing, when, ___, one ___ while ___." This surely related to what some Christian slaves were experiencing at the hand of their pagan masters. We, too, may be in situations in which we "do good and suffer for it."

166. What was the "secret" of Jesus' being able to suffer unjustly without retaliating, and how can we follow His example? (See Romans 12:17–21.)

As our substitute, Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree.” Because of His atonement, we are forgiven—declared to be righteous—assured of eternal life. But here Peter was pointing beyond justification by faith in Christ to its effect on daily living as Christians.

167. Identify the three phrases by which Peter pointed to the life-renewing results of Jesus’ suffering for us. State how each encourages us to be conscientious in our discipleship.

Lesson 11

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 14:1–14

Jesus and His disciples were in the Upper Room to eat the Passover. John's Gospel records their interaction during that momentous evening in significant detail, providing us with the farewell discourses of Jesus that have meant so much to Christians of every era. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, giving them yet another example of willing service to encourage their own willing service. He then pointedly predicted that Judas would betray Him and told them, "Yet a little while I am with you" (13:33). He commanded them to love one another as He loved them, and He told them, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples" (v. 35). He predicted that Peter would deny Him. The mood around the Passover table was somber—heavy with thought and concern. At that point, Jesus spoke the comforting and encouraging words of this Holy Gospel. He reassured His puzzled apostles in the best way possible, by reminding them of who He is and of why He had come into the world. We, too, find reassurance in His words.

"Let not your hearts be troubled," said Jesus. That's easier said than done—especially when facing the prospect of losing Him, as the disciples were.

168. What did Jesus say would calm their troubled hearts? What did Jesus add to "Believe in God" by saying "believe also in Me"?

169. What assurances are given to us through each of Jesus' promises: "In My Father's house are many rooms"; "I go to prepare a place for you"; and "I will come again and will take you to Myself"?

Jesus' disciples had a lot to learn. Their slowness to understand helps us as we deal with our own spiritual dullness. Their slowness to understand became a source of blessing for us because it prompted Jesus to speak more great words regarding His person and mission: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." This is the last of the *egō eimi* statements featured in John's Gospel. The Greek verb *eimi* itself means "I am." When the pronoun *egō* is added, it becomes most emphatic. "I am" related directly in the minds of Jews to Yahweh, "I AM," the name by which their covenant Lord revealed Himself. The emphasis has Jesus saying, "I, I only, am the way, the truth, and the life."

170. How do the three concepts of way, truth, and life relate to and interplay with one another?

Jesus' "no one comes to the Father except through Me" completes the exclusiveness of the claim that He is making. In our pluralistic society, exclusive religious claims are not well received. They are seen as bigotry. "God as you understand Him" allows anything and everything. "Whatever works for you" is as specific as many get.

171. What is it about Jesus Christ that makes it essential that our Christian testimony point clearly to Him as mankind's only Savior?

172. What, according to Jesus, is the way for people to know and see the Father? In what two ways did Jesus evidence in His life and ministry the truth of His claim "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me"?

173. In what sense does anyone who has faith in Jesus do what He was doing—and even greater works than Jesus did during His ministry? How does Jesus' assurance that He will do whatever His disciples ask in His name enter into this?

174. What does it mean for your faith and your discipleship that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life?

The First Lesson: Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

Growth brought problems to the Jerusalem congregation as it included "Hebrews" and "Hellenists." "Hebrews" were natives of Palestine and were proud of their authentic Jewishness. They spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Scriptures in their synagogues. "Hellenists" were Jews from other parts of the Mediterranean world and often had lived in Palestine for generations. They were more familiar with their native languages and Greek than with Aramaic and Hebrew. The Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek, was used in their synagogues. But they were Jews. Every Jew in the Dispersion hoped to worship in the temple at least once, and some retired as permanent residents in Jerusalem. It was these Grecian Jews who had marveled at the Pentecost gift of tongues (Acts 2:5–12), and Peter had addressed both groups (2:14).

There was tension between these two kinds of Jews, and it carried over into the Christian congregation. It was the Hellenists who complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (Acts 4:32–35).

175. As they suggested organizing the group to take care of such matters, what was the concern of the apostles about themselves and their work? What does their recommendation say to us about all organizational structure in the Church and the people who implement the Church's programs?

176. What do the names of the seven chosen for this assignment suggest as an approach to solving problems in the life of the Church?

Stephen is singled out as a man full of ___ and ___. He was elected to “wait on tables” but soon became involved in the ministry of the Word. He went to the Synagogue of the Freedmen. Luke tells us that the Hellenistic Jews there “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” Failing in their arguments, Stephen’s opponents arranged for false witnesses, who accused Stephen of speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and God.” They testified before the Council, “[He speaks] against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us” (see Acts 6:10–14).

The second part of this lesson is the climax of Stephen’s speech before the Council. He had recounted the history of Israel at some length, emphasizing the covenant through Moses and the frequent defections of Israel and their subsequent exile. Then, in talking about the temple, Stephen was aroused against the leaders before whom he stood, for whom the temple itself had become central and who had reduced the faith to perfunctory temple ritual. His words became direct and biting.

177. Of what did Stephen accuse the religious leaders with his “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears”? In what ways did Stephen say that these men, who prided themselves in perpetuating the traditions of the fathers, were acting “as your fathers did”? How could Stephen say these men, who had surrounded the law with 613 protective rules to assure their obedience, had “received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it”?

178. What testimony by Stephen finally led to the Council’s determination to execute him? How did Stephen imitate his Lord in his dying moments?

With this account of Stephen’s martyrdom, Luke introduced Saul, who became the apostle Paul, whose story was Luke’s main thrust in Acts. The Early Church said, “The Church owes Paul to the death of Stephen.” God’s hand was at work to provide the Church with its greatest missionary and theologian.

179. How does this First Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 2:2–10

180. Do we ever outgrow our need for the “mother’s milk” of the Gospel? What is implied by Peter’s “by it you may grow up to salvation”? (See Hebrews 5:12–6:3.)

Cornerstones were carefully prepared and placed in ancient times, for they determined the direction of the exterior lines of buildings. Peter’s concern was that those who came to Christ would mature into a holy ___, offering ___. We need to be ___ stones, properly aligned with the living ___ who is Zion’s (the Church’s) ___.

181. What added significance can you see in the fact that it was Peter who was using this analogy of a building constructed of living stones?

182. What is the result of our being a spiritual house of living stones who trust in the Cornerstone?

183. How is the either/or nature of Jesus and His Gospel shown in this lesson?

“As they were destined for to do” cannot mean that God predestined them to stumble from eternity, for He desires that all be saved (see 1 Timothy 2:1–7). It is their own disobeying the message that makes stumbling the destiny of unbelievers. It is this rejection of Christ that God foreknew from eternity.

Our society is obsessed with “self-image” and aims at fostering self-esteem in many humanistic ways. Peter points us to our true self-image and worth in God’s grace in Christ. The titles he confers were drawn from the Old Testament. “A chosen race” (Isaiah 44:1–2): “Chosen” was used in verse 4 also in regard to Christ Himself, which adds to our appreciation of the title. “A royal priesthood” (Exodus 19:5–6): As spiritual priests, we offer ourselves to the One who offered Himself for us. “A holy nation” (Deuteronomy 28:9): We are holy through Christ’s imputed righteousness; we are set apart by God for His purpose and glory. “A people for His own possession” (Deuteronomy 14:2): We are His creatures, but more than that, His creatures redeemed by the blood of Christ for life in His kingdom.

184. What function does Peter point to that validates all of these titles in our lives as Christians?

185. Why must we say, “Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God’s people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy”?

Lesson 12

Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 14:15–21

The Sundays of Easter have moved us closer to the end of the period of forty days during which Jesus appeared to His apostles and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. The thrust is moving toward next Thursday, when the Church will celebrate the Ascension of our Lord and then remember the waiting in Jerusalem for the promised gift from above, the baptism with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:3–4). Today’s Holy Gospel continues our study of Jesus’ farewell discourses with His disciples in the Upper Room. It is part of Jesus’ promise of His continuing presence with them and in them through the Holy Spirit. We rejoice to know that His promise extends also to us to bless us in the same way.

“If you love Me” calls for more than the love of affection or friendship. The Greek is *agapate*. It calls for a willed, determined love in response to the willed, determined love that took Jesus to the cross for us. Its present tense calls for constancy. It might be translated, “If you make up your mind to keep on loving Me.”

186. What, according to Jesus, is the evidence of such determined love for Him? (See 1 John 2:1–11; 4:19–5:5.)

187. How may we see a glimpse of the three-personed nature of God in Jesus’ promise to send another Counselor?

“Counselor” is the Greek *parakletos*, which means “one called to stand beside” to encourage, to strengthen, and to defend.

188. Why did Jesus call the Counselor “the Spirit of truth”? (See John 14:25–26; 15:26; 16:12–15.)

189. Why can’t “the world” see, know, and accept this Holy Spirit? (See 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, 12–14.)

190. Why did Jesus follow His “you know Him, for He dwells with you” with “and will be in you”?

Jesus was preparing the apostles for what lay ahead: His suffering and dying. He assured them He would not leave them as orphans, just on their own, but would come to them. He did this as the risen Jesus through the Counselor the Father sent them.

191. What great events lay ahead that would convince the apostles of the truth of Jesus' "I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you"?

There is a circle of blessing in our faith and life as we know Jesus and the indwelling Spirit. Motivated by the realization that Jesus, our Savior, is in the Father and in us, we make it our aim to obey His commands and show our love for Him. In turn, the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit love us and live in us, and we grow in the peace and hope and joy that are ours in Christ. This circle of blessing may best be appreciated when you look at its opposite—when people do not have Jesus and His Father living in them through faith in Jesus, God's commands to love Him and our neighbor are not obeyed, the Spirit of Jesus is rejected, and people spiral down into deeper unbelief, sin, and death.

192. What happens in the experience of a Christian who begins to refuse or neglect to obey the commands of Jesus?

The First Lesson: Acts 17:16–31

193. Paul "reasoned" with the Jews and the God-fearers in the synagogue. What did this always involve? He spoke also with anyone in the marketplace who would listen to him. What did he proclaim there that caused the Greeks to call him "this babblers"?

Faithful to his apostolic duties, Paul could not just sit and wait, and his aggressiveness was rewarded. He was brought to a meeting of philosophers on the Areopagus. The events that led to this opportunity, which Paul was happy to grasp, are recorded in the paragraph that precedes his speech at the Areopagus (16–21).

Christian witnesses are encouraged to meet people where they are. This establishes a common ground from which to move to a proclamation of Christ. Paul met the Athenian philosophers on the common ground of natural religion, the truths about God that are available to all. Many Greeks had intellectually rejected the crass idolatry of paganism, which deified nature and saw gods or goddesses relating to every human emotion or earthly circumstance. This is why so many Greeks were attracted to the spirituality and the higher morality of Judaism. The men of the Areopagus who listened to Paul had not become God-fearers, and Paul was not meeting them in a Jewish synagogue, but he did not lack ready ears to listen to him tell about the God they acknowledged as the Unknown God.

194. What points of natural theology did Paul present that he knew would be philosophically acceptable to his hearers?

195. How did Paul finally bring his remarks around to focus on Jesus Christ?

Paul's mentioning the resurrection of Jesus produced a mixed reaction (vv. 32–34).
196. How does this First Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 3:13–22

Peter was writing to Christians who were under threat of persecution if they did not participate in burning incense to the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome. He urged them to stand strong in their faithfulness to Jesus and told them, "Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed"; then he added, "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled."

Peter suggested that we will be equipped for the needed decisiveness if in our hearts we will _____. The Greek *kurion ton Christon* is the confession that Jesus Christ is God. (*Kurios* was used in the Septuagint, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, for "the Lord God, Yahweh.") Its use in the New Testament for Jesus also proclaims His deity. *Hagiaste*, "set apart," calls on us to sanctify Him, to keep Him holy in our hearts.

197. What does it mean for us in our daily living when we "in [our] hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy"?

Jesus told His apostles that they would be brought before kings and governors on account of His name and that this would result in opportunities to be His witnesses. He told them not to worry beforehand how to defend themselves because He would give them words of wisdom their adversaries would not be able to resist or contradict. But here Peter tells Christians that part of their needed decisiveness involve their "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

198. How do you reconcile Jesus' assurance about the Spirit's giving words of wisdom and Peter's instruction to be prepared to witness to your faith in Jesus? How can you prepare yourself to be ready to use opportunities "to make a defense" and give "a reason for the hope that is in you"?

199. Why is it important to bring your witness with gentleness and respect, especially with regard to those who may be disinterested and even antagonistic?

200. Why are we to be willing to suffer wrong as a result of our Christian witness and not think of returning evil for evil? (See Romans 12:9–21.)

This lesson includes words that are a "seat of doctrine" for the article of faith that we state in the Apostles' Creed: "He descended into hell." Peter said that Jesus was "made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison." His descent into hell, then, really was the first display of the exaltation of the God-man after completing His saving work. He did not descend into hell to suffer for sin. He had done that once for all in the eternal moment on the cross when His Father turned from Him (see

Matthew 27:45–46). But He had said, “It is finished”—*tetelestai*, “paid in full.” Nor did He go to preach “a second chance” to the disobedient in hell (see Hebrews 9:27–28). It helps us to note that the Greek word for “proclaimed” is not *euangelizo*, “to preach Good News,” but *kerusso*, “to make a proclamation.” What Jesus did as the first step of His exaltation was to go into the camp of the enemy to make a proclamation of His complete and final victory!

201. How is the ark riding above the waters of the flood a symbol of Holy Baptism? What gives Baptism its saving power?

Lesson 13

Ascension of Our Lord

The Holy Gospel: Luke 24:44–53

In the Upper Room, on that Easter Sunday evening, there stood Jesus in the midst of His disciples. They were startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus went out of His way to let His followers know that it truly was He—the same Jesus they had known before His death. He called attention to His hands and feet, where the wounds caused by the nails were visible. He invited them to touch Him and see for themselves that He had truly risen from the dead. He ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Luke's Greek text uses the word *sarka*, translated “flesh”—a word that pointedly pertained to the physical body. Paul made our salvation dependent on the truth of Jesus' resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

There in the Upper Room, Jesus reassured His disciples that His suffering and death were all part of the saving plan. He reminded them that He had told them beforehand that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. This text has Jesus saying, “The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.” The Greek text uses the little word *dei*, meaning “it is necessary.” His suffering, dying, and resurrection *had* to happen! God's saving will *had* to be done! Luke said that Jesus had “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,” especially His suffering and dying and resurrection as the climax of God's saving plan.

202. According to Jesus' words to the disciples in the Upper Room, what is the key to understanding the Bible?

203. Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim “repentance and forgiveness of sins” in His name to all nations. Why did He tell His disciples first to stay in the city instead of telling them to get right to work with their mission? What does this say to us about our own mission of representing Jesus in our world? How may we be clothed with power from on high for our mission?

204. The reaction of those who witnessed Jesus' ascension was to return to Jerusalem with great joy and to continually bless God in the temple. Why is Jesus' ascension, His return to heaven, a source of joy and a reason for praising God also for us?

The First Lesson: Acts 1:1–11

Luke wrote his Gospel to instruct Theophilus regarding the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Theophilus* means “friend of God.” Most scholars see him as an individual, probably of some position and prominence, for in his Gospel, Luke addressed him as “most excellent Theophilus.” Some, because of the name’s meaning, think Luke used it to address anyone who wants to be a friend of God. Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel. It focuses on Jesus’ continuing presence and power and direction in the apostles through the Holy Spirit. Acts is sometimes called “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus “ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.” The apostles had been commissioned by Jesus and blessed with the Holy Spirit already in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday. In this lesson, Luke tells of Jesus giving them instructions through the Holy Spirit during the weeks that followed the resurrection.

205. Why didn’t Jesus just tell them, “You have your assignment; get to work!”

The apostles still didn’t understand the nature of the Kingdom Jesus was establishing. They asked, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

206. How are we too at times tempted to force our agenda on the Lord’s kingdom?

207. What did Jesus say His gift of the Holy Spirit would do for the apostles?

Jesus outlined the mission they would carry out for Him. Paraphrase Jesus’ words to fit our own location. As we hear Him describe its outreach, we can use adjectives to say that the mission is to be ____, ____, ____, and ____.

Jesus’ ascension came to a climax when “a cloud took Him out of their sight.” Clouds were frequently the setting for theophanies in Scripture. Witnessing this event assured the apostles again that Jesus is ____.

208. What assurance did the angels bring the wondering apostles?

Luke listed the eleven apostles and the group who waited with them, which included Jesus’ mother, Mary, and His brothers, and tells us they “joined together constantly in prayer”—no doubt praising their living Lord and asking that His promise of power in the Holy Spirit be fulfilled (see 1:12–14). In our worship life, we, too, are “waiting” for Pentecost. We still exult in Easter praise, but we recognize also our need of power in the Holy Spirit to be faithful disciples as we carry out our commission to represent Jesus in our world.

209. How does this First Lesson tie in with the emphasis of today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Ephesians 1:15–23

Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they had gained a reputation for ___ in the Lord Jesus and ___ toward all the saints.

210. Does our congregation enjoy a reputation like that of the Ephesian Christians?

211. What spiritual blessing did Paul keep asking God to give them?

212. If we know we have been saved by grace through Jesus, and we even believe that in His grace God chose us in Christ before He created the world, why should we, like Paul, keep on praying for “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him”? How may we work at gaining that spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him that God wants to give us?

Paul tells us that it is when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened that we will be able to know the ___ to which He has called us, “the ___ of His ___ in the saints,” and “the ___ toward us who believe.”

213. What amazing thing did Paul say about the Christ—now exalted to God’s right hand, under whose feet God has place all things—in His relationship to the Church?

214. What equally amazing thing does he say about the Church in its relationship with its Lord Jesus as the Head of everything as it carries out the mission He has assigned to us?

Lesson 14

Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 17:1–11

What is called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer provides the Holy Gospel for this Sunday in all three series of the Three-Year Lectionary. His instructional discourses in the Upper Room concluded, Jesus turned to prayer, praying aloud so His apostles could be strengthened by His words and by the mood they displayed.

Jesus said to His Father, "The hour has come." The hour of the culmination of His ministry, of His reason for coming into the world, of His giving Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, was at hand.

215. How did Jesus refer to what lay ahead of Him and what it would mean for Him? (See Philippians 2:5–11; Revelation 5:11–14.) How would the glorification of the Son glorify the Father?

216. What, according to Jesus, is the key to knowing the only true God and enjoying eternal life with Him?

Having joyfully rededicated Himself, Jesus turned to prayer for those with Him in the Upper Room. "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world." God is known and revealed in part by many names in Scripture, such as ____.

217. What name for God did Jesus point to that expresses the new relationship we have with Him through faith in His Son? (See Matthew 6:9; John 20:17.)

Today's feminist movement suggests that calling God "Father" might be sexist and that we might just as appropriately call "her" "our Mother in heaven."

218. How might this influence our view of God and our relationship with Him?

219. What is the full, peculiarly Christian name for God that Jesus gave us, and what does it proclaim about God? (See Matthew 28:18–19.)

Jesus acknowledged that His disciples were a gift from His heavenly Father and said that He had led them to confidence in Him by giving them _____. It was for them that He was praying, because though He was returning to His Father, they would remain in the world with work to do for Him. He asked His Father to _____ them by the power _____.

220. What was to be a result of their being protected by the power of God's name?

Jesus based His confident request on a sweeping statement: "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." This makes the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus very powerful. We are listening in as the Son of God, in His humility as the Son of Man, exults in His coming to be our Savior, and then we hear Him pray for us that we be protected and made one in Him.

221. How does our High Priest implement what He prayed for in our lives?

The First Lesson: Acts 1:12–26

222. How did the apostles occupy themselves as they waited for what Jesus promised them? Was the upper room where they were staying the same room in which Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper and later appeared to the apostles as the Risen One?

The group in the upper room included women who had traveled with Jesus and the apostles. Only Mary the mother of Jesus is named.

223. Jesus' brothers were there. Who were they?

The Gospels tell us that earlier the brothers of Jesus had not been believers. They were convinced by His resurrection. Paul later said that the risen Jesus had appeared to James, who in time became the acknowledged head of the Church in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; Acts 15:5–21).

The Day of Pentecost was ahead, but first came a time of preparation as the apostles and the others waited for what Jesus had promised them. They joined constantly in prayer, as we have seen. Peter "stood up among the brothers" to recommend that Judas Iscariot be replaced by someone to fill out the number of apostles. "Brothers" is used here for the first time in Acts, but later it was the standard term for the community of Christians. In Jewish tradition, it was the men who counted as the congregation in the synagogues. Today we would say "brothers and sisters."

224. Why did Peter and the others think it was important that there be twelve apostles?

Peter used two Scriptures from Psalms to validate the action as God's will. The first is from an imprecatory psalm in which David was calling for God's judgment of those bringing him distress (see Psalm 69:22–25). Peter applied it to the property purchased by the chief priests with the "blood money" (Matthew

27:6) they had paid Judas. The second is part of a psalm in which David tells what his enemies were saying about him (Psalm 109:6–8).

225. How do you feel about Peter’s appropriating of passages of Scripture and applying them out of context to the situation they were considering? What qualification was considered to be essential for nomination as the twelfth apostle?

Two men met this qualification. Their names were written on small stones and put into a clay jar. After prayer for God’s guidance, the pot was shaken until one stone flew out, bearing the name of the one God had elected. Matthias was chosen in this way.

226. Why do we not imitate the first Christians (and the Old Testament people) and make our decisions and elect people by casting lots today?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

Peter wrote to Christians in Asia Minor who were beginning to feel the pressure of official persecution. Emperor Nero had declared Christianity to be an illegal religion. Church tradition says that later his opposition led to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome. Emperor worship was rising—an attempt to hold a decaying empire together. To refuse to acknowledge the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome meant political and economic disadvantage and even the threat of execution. Christians found themselves facing a choice between confessing “Jesus is Lord” and burning incense to the emperor as divine.

227. Why did Peter say their suffering and being insulted for the name of Christ should not surprise them “as though something strange were happening to you”? (See John 15:18–21.) Why should Christians rejoice when circumstances come to them in which they “share Christ’s sufferings”?

228. Why is it appropriate that judgment begin with the family of God?

229. What circumstance have you experienced in your life that forced you to stand up and be counted as a Christian?

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.” Peter is not saying that God is the cause of His people’s suffering. But he is reminding us that God’s hand is involved. He *allows* circumstances, and He *uses* circumstances to _____. And Peter wants us to know that the devil can be at work in the same circumstances to _____.

230. How can we effectively resist the devil and learn to cast our anxiety on God? (See Philippians 4:4–7.) How does the fact that other Christians throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering affect us?

231. What assurance does Peter tell us we may have in all of this?