

ENCOUNTER: DISCOVERING JESUS



Liz Lemon Swindle, Without Purse or Script

**A Middle School
Experience for Discovering Jesus**



DISCOVERING JESUS

Back to Basics

The core message of the Gospel is called the *kerygma*. This is the Gospel message in its simplest form that is designed to be shared with others.

Consider, for example, soccer. There are a lot of details regarding the game to understand how it works. But at its simplest, the essence of soccer is that two teams play against each other to score a goal by kicking a ball into the net of the other team.

If you were to boil the Bible down to five lessons, which ones would you choose?

(You can let the students choose the lessons that they would include by prompting them a little if you have time. After identifying these lessons and having the class share them in small groups, you can move on to talk about the five lessons of the Diocese of Green Bay's *kerygma* experience.)

These five lessons are: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Salvation, and Re-Creation.

- I. **Creation:** God is love and has created me for relationship with Him.
- II. **Fall:** I have broken my relationship with God by my sin.
- III. **Redemption:** Jesus restores my relationship with God through His life, death, and resurrection.
- IV. **Salvation:** Jesus invites me to trust him, to turn from sin, and to give my life to Him.
- V. **Re-Creation:** Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit into my heart to bring me to new life in His Church and sends His Church on mission so that others can experience new life.

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Del Parson, Perfect Love

DISCOVERING JESUS

Introduction

Note: As a teacher or catechist, you can share the basic outline of the kerygma experience using this script. Feel free to adapt for your class.

Preparation for the Experience:

Share with the class that this experience might be their first time hearing this message or it may be a message that they feel that they know well and have heard many times.

Let them know that during this experience, they may feel a great sense of joy, peace or sadness or points of resistance or obstacles. Tell them that it is important to acknowledge how they feel. Ask them to make a note of any specific feelings or people that come to mind during the experience.

Let them know that they shouldn't be afraid to confront these obstacles as God already knows them and will help them through them.

Point out that they have the image, Scripture, reflection questions, and prayers right along in their participant guide and that during the experience they can follow along through this experience.

Directions for the Experience:

- Sometimes it is helpful to have a moment of silence before you begin.
- For each of the five lessons:
 - * Begin by sharing the image that goes along with each lesson and reading the number of the lesson. For example, "Lesson I: God is love and has created me for relationship with Him."
 - * Then read the Scripture. Read the reflection and the reflection questions.
 - * End each lesson with prayer.
 - * There are five lessons so be sure to go through each one.
- Close the entire experience thanking the class for their attention. You might want to end the experience with some follow up questions (in small groups or larger class depending on the level of comfort and trust established in the class) such as:
 - * As you reflect upon the overall experience, how do you feel?
 - * What was the hardest for you? Why?
 - * Who can you share your experience with?
 - * How did this experience help you to see Jesus more clearly?
- End with a prayer of your choosing.

DISCOVERING JESUS

I. God is love and has created me for relationship with Him.

Scripture:

The Word of the Lord came to me: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. "Ah Lord God" I said, "I do not know how to speak, I am too young."

But the Lord answered me, Do not say, "I am too young." To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Then the Lord extended his hand and touched my mouth, saying to me, See, I place my words in your mouth.

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you – oracle of the Lord.

- Jeremiah 1:4-9

Reflection:

What is going on in your life right now?

When you think of God, what comes to mind?

What is your purpose?

We have been told, God loves us more than we can imagine – we are part of God's plan – we are wonderfully made... And we are! But how often do you really think about that and truly THANK God for this gift we each have been given?

Prayer: God, thank you for knowing me and loving me from the beginning of time.



DISCOVERING JESUS

I. God is love and has created me for relationship with Him.

Reflection:

Sitting here, I know you have a lot of questions on your heart. Some of these questions are about things that are going on in your life. Some of the questions are bigger.

- Is God real?
- Why am I here?
- What is my purpose?

On our journey to today, in this thing called life, we each have been told, and have read again and again that God is love. Every time we experience love, we experience God. God is real. He is love.

We have been told, God loves us more than we can imagine – we are part of God’s plan – we are wonderfully made... And we are! But how often do you really think about that and truly THANK God for this gift we each have been given?

As we listen to the following song, please take some time to reflect on “Father’s Love Letter” on the next page in your packet.

Song: “Wonderfully Made” (Sarah Hart)

Together, we pray:

God, thank you for knowing me and loving me from the beginning of time.

FATHER'S LOVE LETTER

An intimate message from God to you.

My Child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. Psalm 139:1 I know when you sit down and when you rise up. Psalm 139:2 I am familiar with all your ways. Psalm 139:3 Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. Matthew 10:29-31 For you were made in my image. Genesis 1:27 In me you live and move and have your being. Acts 17:28 For you are my offspring. Acts 17:28 I knew you even before you were conceived. Jeremiah 1:4-5 I chose you when I planned creation. Ephesians 1:11-12 You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. Psalm 139:15-16 I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. Acts 17:26 You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:14 I knit you together in your mother's womb. Psalm 139:13 And brought you forth on the day you were born. Psalm 71:6 I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. John 8:41-44 I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love. 1 John 4:16 And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. 1 John 3:1 Simply because you are my child and I am your Father. 1 John 3:1 I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. Matthew 7:11 For I am the perfect father. Matthew 5:48 Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand. James 1:17 For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. Matthew 6:31-33 My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. Jeremiah 29:11 Because I love you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3 My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. Psalm 139:17-18 And I rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17 I will never stop doing good to you. Jeremiah 32:40 For you are my treasured possession. Exodus 19:5 I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. Jeremiah 32:41 And I want to show you great and marvelous things. Jeremiah 33:3 If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. Deuteronomy 4:29 Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4 For it is I who gave you those desires. Philippians 2:13 I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. Ephesians 3:20 For I am your greatest encourager. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you. Psalm 34:18 As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. Isaiah 40:11 One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Revelation 21:3-4 And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. Revelation 21:3-4 I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. John 17:23 For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. John 17:26 He is the exact representation of my being. Hebrews 1:3 He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you. Romans 8:31 And to tell you that I am not counting your sins. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. 1 John 4:10 I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love. Romans 8:31-32 If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. 1 John 2:23 And nothing will ever separate you from my love again. Romans 8:38-39 Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. Luke 15:7 I have always been Father, and will always be Father. Ephesians 3:14-15
My question is... Will you be my child? John 1:12-13
I am waiting for you. Luke 15:11-32

Love, Your Dad
Almighty God



DISCOVERING JESUS

II. I have broken my relationship with God by my sin.

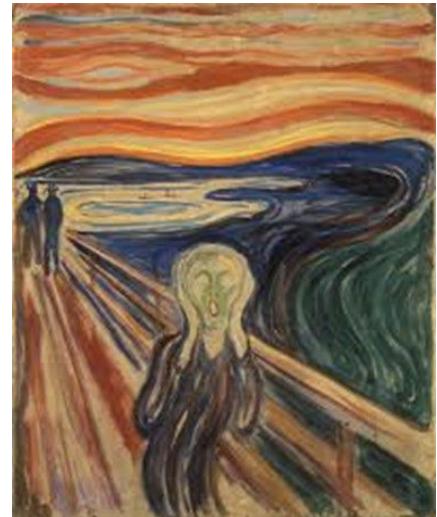
Scripture:

So submit yourself to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. Be to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Do not speak evil of one another, brothers. Whoever speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge...

So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, it is a sin.

- James 1:7-11, 17



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*

Reflection:

When you are in a relationship with someone and you continuously hurt them, your relationship becomes broken. Our relationship with God is broken because of sin. A sin is any choice that goes against God's love. Sin is how we say "no" to God. *We sin, when we try to protect a friend's feelings, and tell a little white lie. We sin when we gossip about a person in class.*

Many times, through our actions, we have turned from God and refused to admit our failures and wrong doing. We hurt ourselves, hurt those we love and damage our relationship with God.

Prayer—Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and faith to do good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
To do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

DISCOVERING JESUS

II. I have broken my relationship with God by my sin.

Reflection:

Supplies needed: Roll of plastic wrap (saran wrap), fake money (one \$100 bill and 3-4 smaller bills), scissors

When you are in a relationship with someone and you continuously hurt them, your relationship becomes broken. Our relationship with God is broken because of sin. A sin is any choice that goes against God's love. Sin is how we say "no" to God.

Over the last few years around Christmas Time, a video pops up on social media. It is the one with the big ball of plastic wrap filled with little prizes and one big prize in the middle (usually \$20 - \$50). Family members sit around a table and are each given 15-20 seconds to unwrap as much of the ball as possible to get a prize. The only catch is that when they are doing this they are wearing oven mitts.

This \$100 bill, the big prize is your relationship with God. A parent asks, "What did you do after practice this afternoon?" You say "nothing," when in fact you ran to Subway and spent the money you were supposed to turn in for a school fundraiser. (*Cover the money with a few feet of plastic wrap.*)

To protect a friend's feelings, you tell a little white lie. (*Wrap a lesser bill into the ball.*)

You gossip about a person in your class. (*Wrap another 2 feet around the ball.*)

As you can see, the ball gets bigger and bigger with layers of lies, layers of sin. This is what we have done to God. He is the prize in the center. How do we get to him?

Alternative Reflection: Show video "#FallingPlates" (Cru)

Many times, through our actions, we have turned from God and refused to admit our failures and wrong doing. We hurt ourselves, hurt those we love and damage our relationship with God.

Song: "Broken Halos" (Chris Stapleton) OR "Jesus Friend of Sinners" (Casting Crowns)

As we listen to this song, I ask that you to think about one thing that you can do or stop doing to help peel the layers of wrap back and bring you to Jesus. Ask Jesus to help you!

Let us pray together the Act of Contrition:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart...

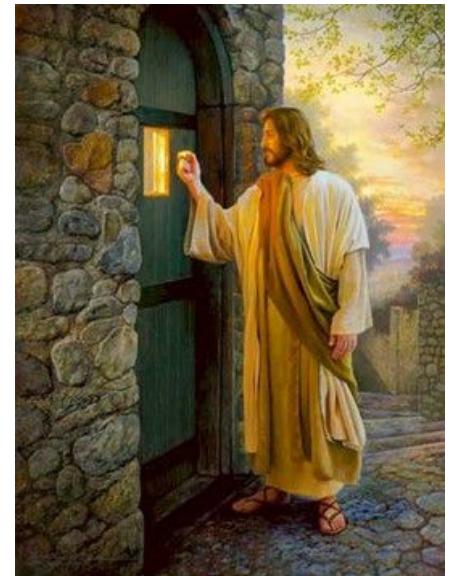
DISCOVERING JESUS

III. Jesus restores my relationship with God through His life, death, and resurrection.

Scripture:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.

- Revelations 3:20



Reflection:

Jesus is standing at the door knocking. This door is your heart. The door does not have a handle, so you need to be the one to let Him in. Jesus came to live with us and teach us how to truly and unselfishly love. Jesus, free from sin, took the burden of our sins and laid them at the foot of the cross. He suffered, died, and rose again for us. For you and me... Jesus is God, knocking on the door of your heart ready for a relationship with YOU. You just have to open the door.

Take some time to think about everything that has been weighing you down, all the burdens you feel like you have been carrying.

Prayer—The Creed

Leader: Lord, Jesus, we thank you for the deep, unending love you have for us. Come into our hearts and strengthen us with the love and peace we can only find in you. Deepen our relationship with you and your Holy Bride the Church, as together we pray:

All: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

DISCOVERING JESUS

III. Jesus restores my relationship with God through His life, death, and resurrection.

Reflection:

Jesus is standing at the door knocking. This door is your heart. The door does not have a handle, so you need to be the one to let him in. Jesus came to live with us and teach us how to truly and unselfishly love. Jesus, free from sin, took the burden of our sins and laid them at the foot of the cross. He suffered, died, and rose again for us. For you and me... Jesus is God, knocking on the door of your heart ready for a relationship with YOU. You just have to open the door.

Take some time to think about everything that has been weighing you down, all the burdens you feel like you have been carrying. The time has come to let the Lord into the place in your heart you keep hidden and secret from all other people.. He is knocking and inviting you to open the door to him.

Take one hand and rest it, palm up, on your leg. Then take the other hand and place it over your heart.

If you can, physically "pull out" each of your burdens, your brokenness, the sorrow over your sin -- name them quietly and place each of them in your open hand. Close your eyes if you feel more comfortable. Continue until there is nothing left to pull out as you listen to the following song.

Song: "Reckless Love" (Cory Asbury) **OR** "Glorious Day" (Casting Crowns)

Let us pray:

Leader: Lord, Jesus, we thank you for the deep, unending love you have for us...

All: I believe in God, the Father Almighty...

DISCOVERING JESUS

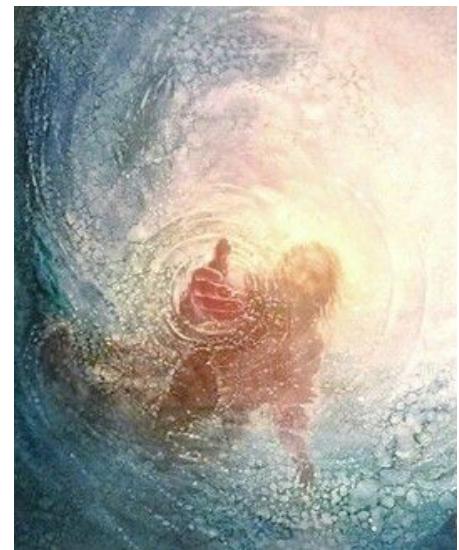
IV. Jesus invites me to trust Him, to turn from sin, and to give my life to Him.

Scripture:

Then he made the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening, he was alone. Meanwhile, the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once [Jesus] spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water towards Jesus. But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

- Matthew 14:22-33



Yongsung Kim, *The Hand of God*

Reflection:

Peter doubted. Peter was afraid. Yet Jesus, took his hand and brought him safely back to the boat. We all have fears, and maybe doubts that are keeping us from God.

What is holding you back from a deeper relationship with God?

Prayer—Suscipe, St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess, you have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more. Amen.

DISCOVERING JESUS

IV. Jesus invites me to trust Him, to turn from sin, and to give my life to Him.

Video: "Jesus and Peter Walk on the Water Oceans" (Son of God)

Reflection:

Note: Distribute a paper heart to each participant at this point (or if time allows, invite each student to cut out their own heart shape from construction paper).

Peter doubted. Peter was afraid. Yet Jesus, took his hand and brought him safely back to the boat. We all have fears, and maybe doubts that are keeping us from God. While we listen to the following song, prayerfully think about what is holding you back from a deeper relationship with God. Write a word or two on your "heart."

Song:

- "So Will I, 100 Billion X" (Hillsong) **OR** "Come to the Table" (Sidewalk Prophets)
- "Be Not Afraid" **OR** "To Jesus Christ, Our Sovereign King"

Leader: Put this paper heart in your Bible or some other special place. Over the next few weeks prayerfully ask God to help you let go of whatever it is that is holding you back from a deeper relationship with Him.

Let's pray this prayer from St. Ignatius together:

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty...

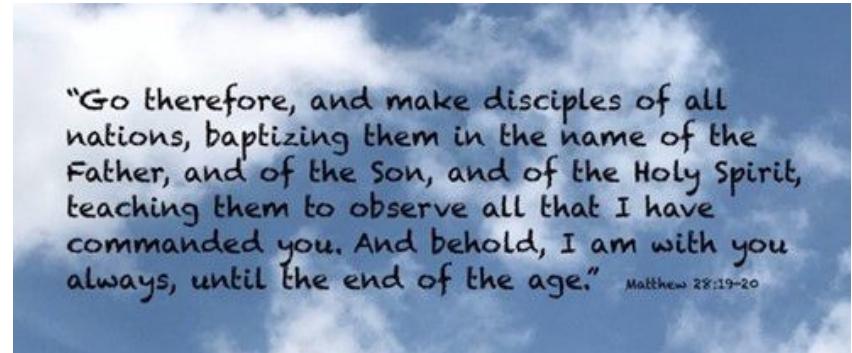
DISCOVERING JESUS

V. Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit into my heart to bring me to new life in His Church and sends us (the Church) on mission so that others can experience new life.

Scripture: (see image)

Reflection:

Through our baptism, each one of us has been called by God to spread His Good News. Each one of us has been given special gifts to do this. You might not have thought about this before.



What gifts have you been given to spread the Good News?

What are you doing right now to build up God's kingdom? Keep doing this!

What could you be doing to build up God's kingdom? Get going!

What are you doing that is NOT helping build the kingdom and might even be harming your efforts? Get rid of it!

Prayer—Prayer to the Holy Spirit, St. Augustine

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.
Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy. Amen.

DISCOVERING JESUS

V. Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit into my heart to bring me to new life in His Church and sends us (the Church) on mission so that others can experience new life.

Reflection:

Through our baptism, each one of us has been called by God to spread his Good News. Each one of us has been given special gifts to do this. You might not have thought about this before.

As we move forward from here, I challenge each one of you to consider four things to show how you will live this calling.

- What gifts have you been given to spread the Good News?
- What are you doing right now to build up God's kingdom? Keep doing this!
- What could you be doing to build up God's kingdom? Get going!
- What are you doing that is NOT helping build the kingdom and might even be harming your efforts? Get rid of it!

Optional:

Distribute "Keep – Start – Stop" sheet for the students to use as reflection during the song.

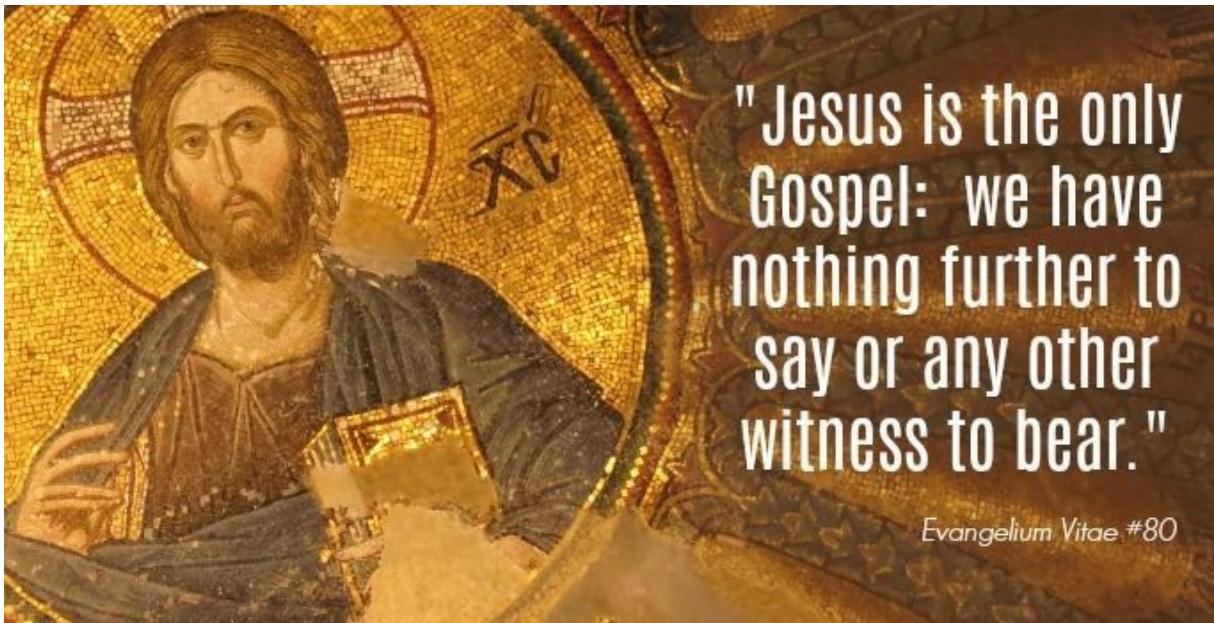
Song: "I Will Go" (Hillsong) OR "Wake" (Hillsong) OR "We Are Called"

Together, let's call upon the power of the Holy Spirit in prayer:

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit...

DISCOVERING JESUS

Processing the Experience



It has been said that we need to hear the *kerygma* (or core message of the Gospel) proclaimed as the *kerygma* many times in order for it to take root in our hearts. This may be your first time hearing this message or it may be a message that you know well and have heard many times.

During this exercise, you may feel a great sense of joy, peace, sadness, points of resistance, or obstacles. Acknowledge how you feel. Don't be afraid to confront these obstacles; God already knows them and will help you through them. Take time to give thanks for the opportunity to hear the Gospel in this way.

- As you reflect upon the overall experience, how do you feel?
- What was the hardest for you? Why?
- Who can you share your experience with?
- How did this experience help you to see Jesus more clearly?

Prayer—Christ Has No Body but Mine, Adapted from St. Theresa of Avila

Christ has no body now but my body,
No hands, no feet on heart but my hands, my feet,
It is my eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but my body.



Carl Bloch, Sermon on the Mount



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