

# Walking with Jesus – Youth Session

By: Jane Angha

Time: 90 minutes

## **Purpose**

This faith learning session is designed to bring young people a little closer to Christ during the Lenten season, focusing on authenticity. Participants will look closely at a map for life, their journey and which direction they are headed.

## **Catechism References**

CCC # 512

## **Session at a Glance**

Gathering and Welcome (5 minutes)

Community Builder (20 minutes)

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

The Walk – Being Authentic in Our Faith (30 minutes)

True North – Jesus Guides Our Journey (15 minutes)

Closing Prayer and Announcements (10 minutes)

## **Materials Needed**

- Small compass ( one for every 4-5 people)
- Paper
- Clipboard
- Pencil
- Paper with an “X” on it and paper with “Start Here”
- Markers, post- it notes, stickers
- Items for Activity 2: satchel for the journey (suitcase or back pack), clothes, shoes, toothbrush and toothpaste, etc.
- Friendship-type bracelet for each participant

## Prepare in Advance

1. Make a copy of the “X “and “Start here” handouts for each group (with four to five in a group).
2. Make copies of Handouts 2, 3 and 4 for each participant.
3. Set up a prayer space by covering a table with a cloth. Place a Bible, candle, compass and cross on the table with matches or lightstick.
4. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with check-in sheet and nametags and registration information (have a few extra packets on hand for walk-ins). **Hospitality is important!** As the leader, spend the arrival time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.
5. Invite a musician to assist in selecting music and leading the singing for the opening prayer and closing prayer.
6. Ask four people to read for the opening prayer. Mark their place in the Bible. Give them a chance to practice.

## Session Outline

### Gathering and Welcome (5 minutes)

Warmly greet and welcome young people as they arrive. Let them know where to go and make sure there is someone to mingle and visit with them. Invite them to make a name tag.

Once all have arrived, invite them to the gathering space and welcome them again.

Welcome! We are really glad you have joined us! We have a lot of great things planned that will help you on your Lenten journey and give you a sense of purpose and direction. That is a little hint: direction...purpose! Let's begin our time with prayer.

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

We begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord, we gather together, bound by our belief in you, baptized in water, signed with oil. We are a community on a journey. Be with us as we learn more about you, find ways to grow closer to you, and make plans for Lent that keep you as our priority. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus. Amen.

Reader 1:

"Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation ..." (Psalm 25:4)

Reader 2:

"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go.' " (Isaiah 48:17)

Reader 3:

"For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death." (Psalm 48:14)

Reader 4:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5)

Teach us your ways, Lord, help us to lean on you and to let you guide our lives and our futures. We ask this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

### **Community Builder - Direction Challenge** (20 minutes)

Teams will use a compass to create a trail for another team to follow.

Divide the group into teams of 4-5. Using the compass, each team will determine a trail for another team to follow (e.g., North 10 steps, NW three steps, East 34 steps). The trail should take the other team to the end where X marks the spot!

Tell the teams that someone in their group should take notes and write down the directions for the trail. This list will be given to another team to follow. They must also come up with a prize at the end of the trail for the other group to find.

*This activity can be done outside or inside and the prize can be a message or something fun.*

### Alternates for virtual/video streaming retreats

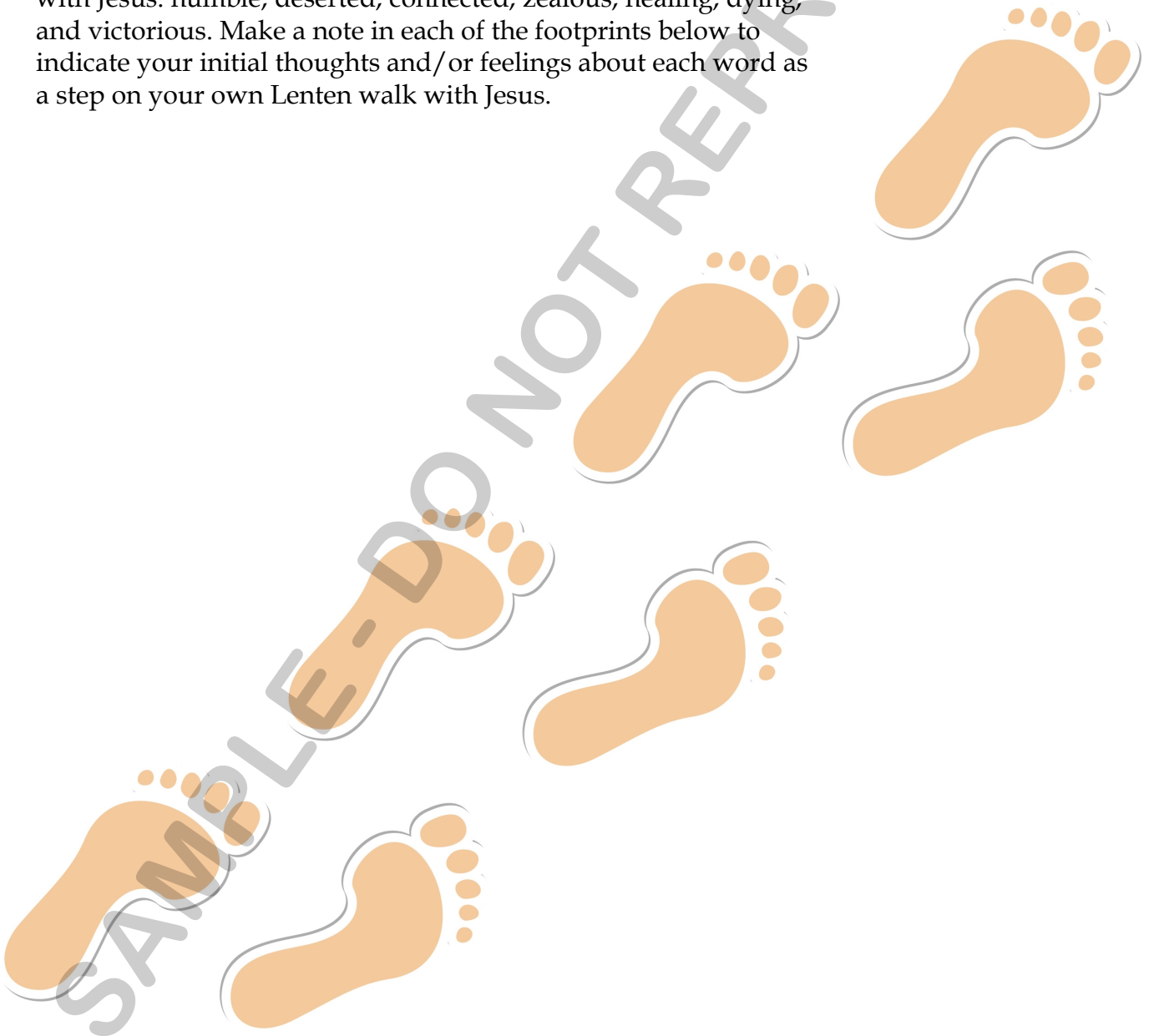
- Play a variation of the above game using Google Street View, perhaps starting at the church building. Have some directions be based on visual clues (e.g. turn right right after you see the pink house), so they are not trivial to follow based on the regular map view. Group participants using breakout rooms or separate video chat sessions.
- Play the online game Zoomtastic ([ZoomtasticGame.com](https://ZoomtasticGame.com)). Share a screen with game and have all participants compete to chat message the answer to a leader. You could assign different point based on who is first, second, third, etc. for each round. Or group participants into breakout rooms and have them guess cooperatively as a team.

# Walking with Jesus this Lent: A Gospel Journey, Year B Facilitator Background

By Jim Merhaut

## Engage

Consider the following words as seven steps for a Lenten walk with Jesus: humble, deserted, connected, zealous, healing, dying, and victorious. Make a note in each of the footprints below to indicate your initial thoughts and/or feelings about each word as a step on your own Lenten walk with Jesus.



## Reflect

How would you apply each of the Lenten steps above to Jesus?

Who comes to mind as you ponder each of the words that represent the seven steps?

Carry with you these reflections as you read through the seven steps outlined below. Revisit them as part of your own meditation on each step. Make adjustments to them as you gain new insights during your reading.

## Explore

Spiritual writers often discuss Lent as a journey with Easter as the destination. Spiritual practices such as Stations of the Cross are also journey-oriented. This essay proposes a Gospel journey through Lent which can be divided into seven meaningful steps that disciples are called to walk with Jesus.

The first step of the journey is Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is followed by five additional steps called the Sundays of Lent. The seventh step is Palm Sunday. Each step has a distinctive character, but they are all woven together by the thread of the Lenten theme of transformation. This essay will focus on the Year B Gospel readings from Ash Wednesday through the procession of palms on Palm Sunday.

All disciples are welcomed to begin wherever they are on Ash Wednesday. The journey does not begin with judgment; rather, it begins with your life exactly as it is at this moment. We are all sinners in need of Gospel transformation. It doesn't matter what kind of sinner you are; it only matters that you are willing to move from where you are to a place that is closer to God. Then we are called to walk through the seven steps and be transformed into something new by Palm Sunday.

This extended Lenten retreat is a prelude to the central truth of Christianity: the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus celebrated in the Triduum that immediately follows Lent. The walk with Jesus during Lent sets us up to celebrate our transformation as we sing glory to God for the paradigmatic transformation that happened to Jesus on the first Easter Sunday.

### Step 1: Ash Wednesday – The Humble Step

The reading for Ash Wednesday is Mt 6:1-6, 16-18.

Every Ash Wednesday is a call to joyful, not gloomy, repentance. It's a call to become more authentic and less showy. It is a step into humility. The Gospel reading reminds us not to parade our faith practices in front of others in order to be noticed. The Lenten journey is not characterized by a proud and triumphant march. It is more like the earthy, deliberate, bare-footed steps of a gardener careful not to trample the tender plants emerging from the soil. Gardeners who bring focus to the plants rather than to themselves reap rich harvests. "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)

We are also taught to be generous, primarily because it is our call and our identity. There is nothing superhuman about generosity. It is simply who we are. Being generous makes us more human... more down-to-earth... more humble. Generous giving is not a

way to measure social status; rather, it is a way to participate in the life of God who is generous beyond measure. (James 1:5)

Wealthy individuals or families who make large donations to organizations or even charitable causes are often rewarded with great social recognition. While it is possible to do this with integrity, there are clear warnings from Jesus to be vigilant about the desire for social praise. “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:2-4)

Even prayer is not good or helpful when our hearts are in the wrong place. “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:5-6)

Jesus speaks often about rewards in the Ash Wednesday Gospel. Rewards are important and a necessary part of life. Human beings are wired to respond to rewards. This in itself is a humble recognition. We are more like our brothers and sisters in the animal kingdom who respond instinctively to positive reinforcement than we care to admit. To acknowledge our primal need for rewards is both honest and humble. The important question for Jesus seems to revolve around the kinds of rewards a person seeks. The Ash Wednesday Gospel suggests that the prideful person seeks the reward of recognition. The humble person seeks the reward of joy.

Humility and joy are partners. They work together to build an authentic Christian expression of faith. “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” (Luke 1:47-48) Jesus instructs us to walk with humility and rewards us with joy, empowering us to avoid a “dismal” look, even as we humble ourselves with fasting and the other disciplines of Lent.

## **Step 2: First Sunday of Lent – The Deserted Step**

The reading for the first Sunday of Lent is Mark 1:12-15.

Jesus is driven by the Spirit to a deserted place at the beginning of Lent. “And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.” (Mark 1:12-13) He will again be deserted at the end of Lent but it will be a different kind of desertion. This early desert experience is willful, purposeful and designed to build



his spiritual strength. The desertion at the end of Lent when his friends flee from his side is not something he would have chosen. It was an experience of isolation that was thrust upon him as a result of weakness and sin on the part of his disciples.

Being alone and being lonely are very different experiences. One can be empowering while the other is physically and spiritually draining. The deserted step on this first Sunday of Lent is a necessary time of soul searching. It is the time, hopefully daily even if only for a few minutes, when we make sense of our busy-ness and our many interactions with others. The deserted step is a step of integration and empowerment. We reflect upon our lives in solitude to put the pieces together with the silent guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are then empowered to move back into the hustle and bustle of daily life with a new perspective and a refreshed spirit.

If we nurture a place in our spirit for solitude, then we have an ever-present retreat place where we can go to gather our thoughts and feelings at any given moment. For example, someone does something or says something that triggers anger in me. If I have no experience of the desert, no place for solitude, then my only option is to remain engaged in the encounter with my anger as the context. I will fight! But if I can retreat from the encounter, even for a moment, and let the energy of the anger drive me into the desert, then I can return to the encounter when I am ready with a more deliberate response, one that I won't regret.

### **Step 3: Second Sunday of Lent – The Connected Step**

The reading for the second Sunday of Lent is Mark 9:2-10.

This step reminds us that we never need to feel lonely even if we are alone. The Communion of Saints is perhaps the most consoling tenet of Catholic faith. Christians are a deeply connected people. We are a unified body in Christ. We are in communion with those who are living and with those who are dead. We commune with divinity in the Eucharistic celebration. We draw our deepest strength from our connectedness. Our most important teaching is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. It is a teaching about staying connected.

The Gospel turning point for Mark is the highly connected experience of the transfiguration. Jesus, at this point in Mark's Gospel, begins to move more deliberately toward the cross empowered by intimate communion with his closest friends (Peter, James and John), two key Old Testament figures (Moses & Elijah) and his heavenly father:

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on