

# Vision Beautiful

Today we begin a five-week exploration of a collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' radical vision of what God's reign on earth might look like is a vision of wholeness for all people. Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is different from worldly wisdom. Micah and the psalmist describe ways to live this vision beautiful.

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

After Jesus' baptism, he calls a group of disciples. They travel throughout Galilee teaching and healing, sharing the good news that God's realm is breaking into the world. It is a message that the gospel writer's own community desperately needs to hear. Matthew is written to a group of new Christians after disaster has happened. The temple has been destroyed, the people scattered. Jesus is no longer present in the flesh. What laws will govern the community now? What will the new community look like? What is the good news for those trying to be faithful in a hostile world?

Of the four gospels, Matthew most wants to show that Jesus fulfills Israel's experience. In this gospel, Jesus is shown as the new Moses, teaching from the mountain as Moses did when he gave Israel the law. The gospel writer arranges Jesus' words in five blocks of teaching, reminding readers of the "five books of Moses." Chapters 5 to 7 – the Sermon on the Mount – form the first block.

The Beatitudes begin the Sermon on the Mount. They are a series of sentences beginning with the word *blessed*, or *happy* in some translations. Blessing is God's free gift to humankind, a sign of covenant relationship with God. Such blessing may look very different from the world's idea of happiness. In these sayings, Jesus turns human notions of happiness upside down. What kind of living brings God's blessing? Jesus teaches that the blessed ones are those who are humble of heart ("poor in spirit"), who are gentle, who show mercy, who hunger and thirst for God's ways. Those who mourn will be comforted; those who make peace will be called God's children. Those who are persecuted in the cause of justice will find themselves part of God's transforming reality.

There is urgency in Jesus' teaching. He uses the present tense – this is happening right now. In Jesus' coming, God's love is revealed and made manifest. This teaching is directed to the disciples, the Twelve and the larger group of men and women who accompany Jesus. The Beatitudes describe the way of life for those who commit themselves to follow. For Matthew's community, this vision beautiful is what life should be like.

Living in right relationship with God and neighbour brings blessing – calling out the best in us and others. The other readings spell out this vision of wholeness. **Micah 6:1–8** describes a dramatic confrontation, a lawsuit between God and Israel. What must Israel do to be in a right relationship with God? Verse 8 summarizes: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. **Psalms 15** gives a similar response. The psalmist asks who may come before God in the temple. It is those who do what is right, speak the truth, and do no evil to their neighbours.

In **1 Corinthians 1:18–31**, Paul echoes Matthew's theme of worldly values turned upside down. God's wisdom seems like foolishness to the present age. God overturns the established order. God chooses us to play our part in God's plan. In Christ we are strengthened to bring about God's reign of justice and peace.

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Our experience today is, in many ways, similar to that of Matthew's community. We may not be persecuted for our faith, but the ways of faith often seem foolish compared with the values of society. In what ways do the gospel values challenge contemporary views – turn them upside down? What challenges do you find in trying to live according to the standards expressed in today's readings?



January 30, 2011

**Focus Scripture**  
**Matthew 5:1–12**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**Micah 6:1–8**  
**Psalms 15**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18–31**

**O God, you turn things upside down, calling the wise to embrace your folly. Help us to grow in acknowledging our need for you. Open us to the vision of your reign on earth, and strengthen us to do our part. Amen.**

Check out Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Spirit Sighting are posted weekly prior to the date of use.

## The Focus for Ages 6–8

Children aged six to eight years like playing with others. They have moved from the stage of playing alone to participating in group activities. Their peers take on a greater role and they are more selective in their friends. They are still learning how to get along with others. They have sympathy for needs close at hand and are growing in their awareness of the world around them. They will connect with today's focus passage where Jesus imagines a world filled with peacemakers.

This session begins a five-week exploration of Jesus' teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. These sessions are connected to each other because they show us how to live as God's special community. Since attendance may be inconsistent over the five weeks, be prepared to help the children make connections from week to week.

As you learn alongside the children, pray that their imaginations will be filled with God's holy vision of peace and that the peace of Christ will fill your words and actions.

January 30, 2011



### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Read and reflect upon this week's focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material on page 59 and imagine this world.
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player*. *Seasons.mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).
- ❑ Bring items for the worship area: *green cloth, small toy people (like Lego® or Playmobil®), offering basket, matches, white pillar candle, and Bible with bookmark at Matthew 5.*

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Be God's" (pp. 10–11 in *Music Section*, also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*). For your convenience, lyrics for the songs in the *Music Section* can be found in the Library of [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca), and in "Song Lyrics" folder of *SeasonsDisk*.

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring *today's resource sheet "Blessed in God."*
- ❑ Bring *green fabric, poster "Christ in Cookham," coloured glass beads, glass bowl.*

- ❑ Make *picture frame* from *black construction paper*. The frame should be large enough to frame two people in the poster "Christ in Cookham."
- ❑ Four *signs*: school, home, community, creation.

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.

- ❑ **Peace doves:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Peace Dove," string or yarn, wire hanger*
- ❑ **Covenant of peace:** *paint, paint brush, mural paper or poster board, bowl of soapy water for washing hands*
- ❑ **Jesus' teachings:** words to the song "Be God's" (pp. 10–11 in *Music Section*, also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*), *card stock cut in business card-sized pieces*

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring song "Pass it On" (p. 12 in *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring *coloured glass beads, one for each child.*



# Vision Beautiful

**Scripture**

Matthew 5:1–12

**FOCUS** To imagine with Jesus a world filled with peacemakers.

## GATHER

**Welcome** the children to the Season after the Epiphany. Recall that this is a time when all creation grows in God's love.

**Opening ritual**

**Gather** around the worship table and invite the children to help you place the green cloth, Bible, and pillar candle on the table. Add toy people to represent a community of learners.

**Candle lighting litany**

*Invite the children to do the actions with you and say their part.*

**Leader:** God's love shines deep down and all around (*light the pillar candle*).

We open our ears to hear God's stories (*lift up the Bible*).

We open our hearts to receive God's love for creation (*place open palms upwards*).

We open our hands to live together in God's way (*place hands on shoulders next to you*).

**Children:** We grow in love together.

**Listen to the song** "Be God's" (pp. 10–11 in *Music Section*, also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite a volunteer to gather the offering.

**Pray** Say this prayer or one of your own.

Loving God,  
we are glad to be here with you  
and with our friends.  
We want to discover  
more about your peace.  
Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the gathering ritual has ended.

**Connecting life and theme**

Ask the children to listen to the statements you share. If the statement is something that helps them get along with others, they should find a partner and link arms. If the statement is something that hurts their friendship with others they should find a place where they are standing alone. Use statements such as share toys, feed a pet, throw rubbish on the ground, make fun of someone. Invite the children to find as many different partners as possible. We will hear a story today that helps us imagine what the world is like when people get along with one another.

## 2

ENGAGE

**Preparing for the story**

Invite a volunteer to bring the Bible from the worship area. Open the Bible to the bookmark at Matthew 5. Mention that Jesus is beginning his teachings about how to live as God's special community. The church calls this the Sermon on the Mount because the writer imagines Jesus sitting on a mountainside as he teaches.

**The Bible story**

Tell the story from the resource sheet, "Blessed in God."

**After hearing the story**

**Poster** Look at the poster *Christ in Cookham*. Use the paper frame to study the people more closely. Invite the children, one at a time, to place the frame over a small group of people who do not seem to be getting along. Then place the frame over a group of people who do seem to be getting along.

- **What differences do you see between the two groups?**
- **What signs tell you the people are getting along?**

**Activity** Read the four signs displayed on the wall. Invite the children to imagine taking a picture of people getting along at school, at home, in your community, and in creation. Explain that when you call out one of these places (such as “school”) they are to move to the wall with that sign. Think of one way to get

along in this place and strike this pose within the group. They might want to create a pose with a partner. After observing the group picture, have each child put a glass bead in the container and say, “We are happy when we live in God’s way.” Continue with the activity as long as the children are interested.

# 3

**RESPOND**

Choose one or two of the following options.

- ❑ **Peace doves** Today’s Bible story invites us to imagine with Jesus a world filled with peacemakers. Follow the directions on today’s resource sheet “Peace Dove” to make doves, a symbol of peace for many people. Hang the doves from a wire hanger to create a group mobile.
- ❑ **Covenant of peace** Jesus’ words encourage us to live as peacemakers. On easel paper or poster board, print the title “Our Covenant of Peace.” Then decide upon four or five important suggestions for getting along together as a group. Print these ideas on the paper or poster board. Then ask the children to place their hands in paint and add their handprints to the poster to agree to this covenant.

- ❑ **Jesus’ teachings** Jesus’ teachings show us a vision of peace for all people. Invite the children to write words from the song “Be God’s” on business card-sized pieces of card stock: “Be God’s mercy,” “Be God’s hope,” etc. Place these cards around the church building to encourage your community to live out Jesus’ vision.



# 4

**BLESS**

**Pray** Say this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God,  
we are thankful for Jesus  
who showed us how to live in your way.  
May we be your loving community.  
Amen.

**Sing** “Pass it On” (p. 12 in *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Send** the children out with a blessing. Place a glass bead in each child’s hands with the words, “Go and be God’s peace.” Extinguish the candle.

# REFLECT

Think back over your time with the children. What ideas did they have for getting along with others? How did you affirm their peace-

ful words and actions as they interacted with each other?



# Blessed in God

(based on Matthew 5:1–12, especially verse 9)

## Story Tip

Repetition helps reinforce new words and concepts.

(Have green felt, the poster Christ in Cookham, coloured glass beads, and a glass bowl nearby. Divide the children into three groups and have each group practice one of these phrases to say when you cue them:

“You’re blessed!”

“You’re happy!”

“You’re fortunate!”

Jesus moved around the countryside of Galilee sharing God’s way. (Place green fabric in front of you and smooth with your hands.) Great crowds of people followed Jesus – old people and teenagers, men and women, boys and girls. (Place poster Christ in Cookham on green fabric.) They wanted to learn more about how to live in God’s ways.

When Jesus saw the huge crowds, he climbed up a hillside and sat down. Jesus’ disciples gathered around him in the hope that he would tell them more about living in God’s way. Here is what Jesus said:

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you work hard to get along with others instead of fighting. (Add glass bead to the container.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you speak up for someone who is being hurt or cannot speak up for themselves. (Add glass bead.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you share what you have so everyone has what they need to live a good life. (Add glass bead.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you help others work out their problems in a peaceful way (Add glass bead.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you use kind words instead of words that hurt. (Add glass bead.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you cooperate so everyone is a winner and feels good. (Add glass bead.)

(Cue children.) You’re blessed, happy, fortunate... when you forgive someone who has done something wrong to you. (Add glass bead.)

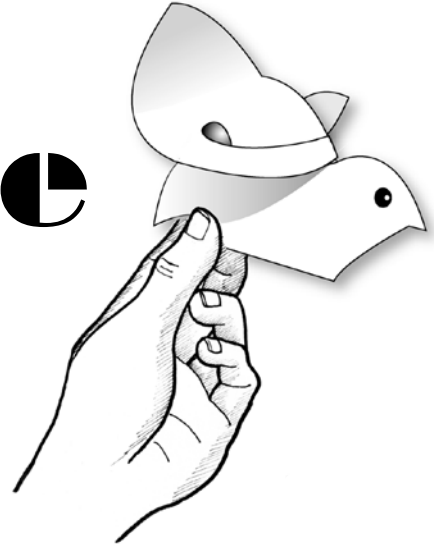
Everyone sat quietly and thought about what Jesus said. They imagined with Jesus a world filled with people living in God’s way.



# Peace dove

## Supplies:

- construction paper
- copy of the dove pattern
- string or yarn
- scissors
- pen or marker
- wire hanger



## Instructions:

1. Cut out the pattern on this page. Fold a piece of construction paper in half diagonally. Put the pattern along the fold on the construction paper and trace around it.
2. Cut along the lines of the construction paper.
3. On the dove, print one way you can live in God's way of peace.
4. To round out the dove's shape, pull the strip under the body and around the head. Have the strip rest along the top as shown. This strip makes the wings and they should now be spread apart.
5. Hang the dove with a piece of string or yarn. Slip the string between both layers of paper, behind the cross-over piece on its back. Trace the pattern onto other paper to make more doves.
6. Hang the doves from a wire hanger to make a group mobile.

