ResouRces for Worship and Faith Formation
For Communities of Practice

Lent, Easter
Mar 5 to Jun 4, 2017
(Revised Common Lectionary YEAR A)

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Contents

SeasonsFUSION
About Lent and Easter 2017 ................................................. 1
SeasonsFUSION: For the Many Ways We Worship, Learn, and Serve Together .......... 2–3
Connecting with the Art – Lent, Easter 2017 Margaret Kyle ................................. 4–5
The Practice of Building Community during Lent and Easter 2017 ......................... 6–9
The Practice of Nurturing Leadership during Lent and Easter 2017 ......................... 10
Lenten Light ............................................................................ 11
Communion Prayers .................................................................. 12–13
Song: “Catch the Light!” Bruce Harding ............................................. 14
Song: “Jesus, Live in Us” Daniel Charles Damon ............................................ 15
Gathering for All Ages: Lent 2017 .................................................. 16–17
Gathering for All Ages: Pentecost 2017 .............................................. 18–21
Ash Wednesday .......................................................................... 22–24
Living the Seasons at Home

Weekly resources

March 5, 2017 • And So It Begins .................................................. 25
March 12, 2017 • Glimpses of Grace .............................................. 37
March 19, 2017 • Finding Refreshment ........................................... 49
March 26, 2017 • Seeing with Heart .............................................. 61
April 2, 2017 • Hope Against All Hope ........................................ 73
April 9, 2017 • Passion Amidst Palms ............................................ 85
April 13, 2017 • Maundy Thursday ............................................ 97
April 14, 2017 • Good Friday .................................................. 99
April 16, 2017 • Yes! .......................................................... 101
April 23, 2017 • It’s True .......................................................... 113
April 30, 2017 • Followers of the Way .......................................... 125
May 7, 2017 • Glad and Generous Hearts ................................... 137
May 14, 2017 • Stand Firm...................................................... 149
May 21, 2017 • Called Alongside ................................................ 161
May 28, 2017 • All My Relations ................................................ 173
June 4, 2017 • Pentecost ........................................................... 185

A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 Seasons Songbooks can be found at www.seasonsonline.ca. Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

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Seasons of the Spirit resources for Lent, Easter 2017 were a collaborative effort of an international and ecumenical community that includes participation by Seasons writers, editors, resource persons, and members of the Seasons Production, Marketing/Interpretation, Customer Service, Business Operations, and Publishing Teams.

Lent, Easter 2017 resources were created in community with discussion partners from Ladner United Church, Delta, British Columbia, Canada – building also on past resources.

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Seasons of the Spirit resources are printed on SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) certified and chlorine-free papers using vegetable oil inks suitable for children’s packaging. Wherever possible, we offer digital options on Seasons products.
About Lent and Easter 2017

This resource covers two seasons of the Christian year, Lent and Easter, and takes us on a journey of discovery of God’s presence throughout history and in our lives today.

Lent is usually a sombre season, denoted by the colour purple – often referred to as an “I’m sorry” colour. Certainly, much of the mood of that season is of growing sorrow, and growing awareness of the inevitability of Good Friday. Yet, interestingly, the scripture readings this season evoke a sense of light. There is an increasing sense that people become aware of new ways to see, new ways to understand, and that the light of Christ is growing around them. Consequently, part of this season will involve the growing of light throughout the season; the contrast then becomes all the richer when these lights are extinguished on Palm/Passion Sunday.

In the Easter season the light returns as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet there is an odd slowness to this – the Sunday after Easter we read of the disciples in hiding out of fear of the religious authorities, and of Thomas coming even more slowly to a realization that Christ is risen. We read of disciples travelling in uncertainty, only recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Yet the light does grow, the faith does grow, and the church does grow. Indeed, throughout this season we begin to capture a sense of the unstoppable nature of the Christian church. While the authorities try to squelch it by killing Stephen, the light only shines brighter. Faith in the risen Christ is contagious!

The art images for this season capture some of this sense of duality. *Fish Boat with Net* depicts a boat in calm waters, surrounded by clouds. Yet there is some light on the shore, offering a place to steer, a place to call home. We may at times feel adrift, individually and as faith communities, and yet there is always something to guide us to shore.

The image *Stones* captures, strongly, the sense of light and shadows that exists in both these seasons. This photograph of stones in the Arizona desert reminds us that God’s light shines in the shadows, and the shadows may at times seem strong. But they do not win.
The resources in SeasonsFUSION support congregational life as we worship, live, learn, and grow as disciples, and as communities of faith. The resources are designed for time together, as well as apart that is holistic, for all ages, and invites us into creativity. At the heart of all this, is the assumption that SeasonsFUSION will serve as a starting point for your congregation to plan and adapt what will work best for you.

The resources you will find included for each week:

- **Planning** is a weekly calendar page that lists liturgical and ecumenical observances for the week, as well as including the lectionary readings.
- **Biblical background** offers a brief commentary on the readings for the day, and the theme direction.
- **Reflecting on the word** offers reflective and thought-provoking questions. You may find this page useful for adult studies, youth discussion, lay worship teams, young adults preparing alternative worship, sermon seeds for clergy, and so on.
- **Focus for worship, learning, and serving** considers what is going on in the lives of those who will gather on this day, and how the theme might intersect and connect with our lives.
- **Worship outline** – three pages of worship resources designed with all ages in mind; providing a wide variety of different experiences each week.
- **Information about saints and interfaith days**
- **Poetry and prose** titles are listed below.
- **Bible story** for use in church, and for growing faith and discipleship at home. The story for each week is designed to work across all ages. An audio is also available in MP3 format on the in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.
- **Stations** These activities are designed to affirm and foster the way we live, learn, and grow as disciples, and can be used in a variety of ways. You might choose one, two, or more to set up in or around the worship space, so people remain within the worship space; this is especially suitable for congregations where there are fewer children and young people. Some will want to offer them for children, youth, and others who leave worship for 20 minutes, usually during the sermon time; these will best be set up in a space away from the worship area. They can also be used in mid-week settings, or the ideas adapted for use in the worship.
- **Extra resource sheets** can be found in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.
- **Children's activity leaflets** – with a story, activity, and something to create. The leaflet might be used by the very young in church time and/or as a take home; provide a story, activity, and something to create for church school, or one of the stations. It could be posted to the church website for downloading, mailed, or taken to families when visiting.

**On the weekly poetry and prose pages**

- “Reclaiming Wilderness” Donald Schmidt....................... 31
- “How John Tells a Story” Craig Koester......................... 43
- “Living Water: a Meditation on John 4:5–42”
  Donald Schmidt.......................................................... 55
Jesus, Live in Us

Catch the Light!

– readings and titles for each week of “The Practice of Building Community”

Before the seasons begin gather a planning team (probably looking at several weeks at a time) to decide which resources to use. As you explore the weekly scriptures you will note themes that apply to your church, and then plan to use or adapt some of the worship resources to suit your needs. Recruiting a wide variety of the laity to help lead each week’s worship is key to helping this resource feel like it “belongs” to the whole congregation.

Next, decide which faith stations you wish to have, and when and where they might be used. This will depend on your setting and interests, as well as the ages and numbers of people likely to participate.

Those who have left worship in the middle will be invited to rejoin the congregation for the end of worship time; this helps tie the events together and provide a cohesive sense of worshipping, learning, and growing together.

Additional resources to help you celebrate, learn, and serve in these seasons

- “The Practice of Building Community” and “The Practice of Nurturing Leadership” on pp. 6–10 offer suggestions to build community within and beyond the group that gathers for worship, and to nurture church leadership.
- “Lenten Light” (p. 11) by Donald Schmidt describes the Lenten Light ritual that is included in the worship outlines during Lent.
- “Communion Prayers” (p. 12–13)
- “Catch the Light!” (p. 14) a song by Bruce Harding accompanies us through Lent.
- “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15) a song by Daniel Charles Damon accompanies us through the Season of Easter.
- “Gathering for All Ages: Lent” (p. 16) and “Gathering for All Ages: Pentecost” (p. 18) include a meal, activities, and worship. Suitable for all ages, and for people with little or no church background.

The following can be accessed at www.seasonsonline.ca

- Virtual Resource Booklet with craft ideas, recipes, patterns, and more; click on “Library”
- Click on “Planning-Overview” for Season at a Glance – readings and titles for each week of Lent and Easter 2017
- Lectionary Bookmarks – with dates and readings for Lent and Easter 2017
- Looking Ahead – with dates and readings for Pentecost 1 2017; Season of Creation, Pentecost 2 2017.* Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2017–18

* Also available in the Planning Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

Are you feeling a little overwhelmed by the wealth of material before you? While SeasonsFUSION may seem a lot to digest at first, you will soon find ways to tailor the resources to fit the needs, hopes, and dreams of your congregation. We invite you to share your insights with the Seasons community on the Seasons Facebook page.
Connecting with the Art – Lent, Easter 2017

The images chosen for Lent and Easter 2017 evoke the mood and colours of the seasons – seasons of deep sadness, introspection, solitude leading to Good Friday, but also joy, new life, and transformation. Spend time with each image and notice the colours and the textures, as well as any stories from your own life experience, or from scripture passages that these images bring to mind. Create a Lent, Easter journal where you can write down these thoughts about the images, as well as any quotes or poems you come across during these seasons. Choose some of the suggested ways below to make deeper connections and explore the images from a metaphoric/symbolic perspective. This is your Lent, Easter journey and the images are meant to inspire and challenge you to see and understand in new ways.

Fish Boat with Net, watercolour painting,
Copyright © Cim MacDonald – Fine Art Photography & Paintings, Chemainus, BC, Canada.
www.cimmacdonald.ca
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Fish Boat with Net – Art engagement suggestions for individuals or groups

Faith is like floating in a deep ocean Marcus Borg, in Experiencing the Heart of Christianity, cites a metaphor used by Soren Kierkegaard, a well-known 19th-century progressive Christian philosopher, who claimed that faith was like floating in a deep ocean. “If we panic and struggle,” Borg says, “if we tense up and thrash about, we will eventually sink. But if we relax and trust, we will float, no matter how deep the water.”

Look at the image, Fish Boat with Net with this perspective in mind and journal about times in your life when it has served you well to face the future without fear, knowing God is with everyone during times of uncertainty as well as times when we can see clearly. Follow your journal writing with a prayer of gratitude. With art supplies, create your own picture or poem expressing what faith is like to you.

Watercolour technique – wet into wet:
Materials good quality watercolour paper in small sizes, one or two tubes of watercolour, palette, flat and round brushes, water container, scrap of cloth or sponge

The painting, Fish Boat with Net catches a moody atmosphere by painting pigment onto wet paper. It is a typical technique in watercolour painting, used especially on backgrounds. In Cim MacDonald’s painting, the sky and ocean run together to give “soft” edges and a watery atmosphere. Try this wet into wet technique yourself, but first watch this video from Vook by Stephanie Sachs that gives simple, clear instructions to help you get started: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDw783KmYX8. Use only one to three colours – perhaps in the Lenten colour of purple – and let the pigment wash together on the paper. Try several until you are satisfied with a few. This technique takes practice and patience, but is also fun to do.

Use all your senses Imagine what it must be like to be on this fishing boat. What sights meet your eyes, sounds come to your ears, smells reach your nose, and tastes might be present? What sensations might you feel touching your skin, hands, and face? Do you notice how the fog muffles the sounds? Is the boat rocking back and forth? Can you see light coming from the distance to help you find your way home in the fog? Are you calm or feeling apprehensive? Spend a few moments in quiet meditation about your imagined experience of this fishing boat and remember stories of boats and fishing from your own life or from scripture.
Roddy Hamilton, Minister at New Kilpatrick Parish Church, Glasgow, Scotland employs the arts in his work as a minister, and as part of his exploration of the spirit at work in the world.

This photograph is of stones in the Arizona desert. Notice the contrasting cool blue/purple colours of the shadow areas and the warm yellow and pink colours of the sunlit stones. Both sunlight and shadow are important to give this photograph depth and to help distinguish the shapes. Both sunlit and shadow times are part of our lives and are also important. As theologian Richard Rohr says in *The Naked Now*, “And this, too, is the goal for all of us: unitive (non-dual) consciousness is the only way to deal with the big issues like God, love, suffering, death, and infinity.” Wonder and journal about times when you have moved from a shadow time into a lighted time filled with love and clarity. How important was moving through the shadow time in your spiritual journey and in becoming who you are at this moment?

**Stones – Art engagement suggestions for individuals or groups**

**Lent, Easter stone collection** Do you have a rock collection of stones that have significance to you because you have picked them up from a walk on the beach or on your travels? What is it about the stones that attracted you to pick them up – shape, texture, colour(s), location, uniqueness, and/or markings? Create a Lent, Easter stone collection by gathering one stone per day, or one per week. Wash each and place them in a special bowl where you can see your collection and reflect with gratitude the many ways God has been with you in the shadow and sunlit times of your life.

**Stone mosaic fish**

**Materials** small stones or mosaic tiles – in different types and colours or in black and white; tile glue, grout; square of wood or tile on which to build the mosaic

Stones are abundant throughout the Mediterranean lands. Since antiquity, humans have created beautiful mosaic artworks with pebbles, stones, and marble pieces, including mosaics of fish, which played a significant role in the culture. Early Christians adopted the fish shape as a secret symbol of faith, forming the Greek word for fish, ICHTHYS, into an acrostic for “Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter, or “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.”

Create a simple fish shape to fill with mosaic stones. Do an Internet search for ideas and methods. Read information and look at the photos in the following link to see how to create a pebble stepping stone for your yard or for the grounds of your church: [http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/how-to/step/0,,20365717_20780052,00.html](http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/how-to/step/0,,20365717_20780052,00.html).

**Outdoor sacred garden**

**Materials** stones, rock plants

Find a spot where you can plant a few rock-garden plants around rocks you have gathered and placed in a way that is pleasing to your eye. You may choose to mimic the placement of rocks in the photograph by Roddy Hamilton. Make this your “sacred garden” where you can go and watch the light and shadow transform the rocks and plants, sit and meditate, and take time to reconnect with nature and the God-spirit within and without.

**Indoor or outdoor Zen garden**

**Materials** clean sand, small rocks, small rake or back scratcher, container or wooden box

A Zen garden is a meditation tool that mimics nature in a confined space. You can create your own small version using the following method in this link: [http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Zen-Garden](http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Zen-Garden).

**Stones in the Bible** Take time to research references to stones in the Bible, or in hymns. A few might be the time Jesus spent in the wilderness and a voice that spoke of turning stones into bread; stones rolled away for Lazarus and Jesus; the throwing of stones; Jesus the cornerstone... Reflect on these references and their significance to your faith and relationships with others.

*Margaret Kyle (artist & illustrator) – The Lectionary Story Bible, Year A, B, C, by Ralph Milton and one of the illustrators for Seasons of the Spirit™ published by Wood Lake Publishing. www.woodlake.com*
Lent, Easter 2017

The Practice of Building Community during Lent and Easter 2017

Below you will find suggestions for how to build community within and beyond the group that gathers for worship. The resources in this section are available to your congregation for use during Seasons of Lent and Easter 2017; March 5 – June 4, 2017.

Gathering for All Ages: Lent and Easter and Gathering for All Ages: Pentecost contain outlines for gatherings that are suitable not just for people of all ages but for people of any or no church background, and include activities, worship, and a meal. Here are some additional suggestions for how to use these events:

- Send personal handwritten invitations to a gathering for all ages to individuals and families who have been away from church for a while, encouraging them to reconnect during this special time of year.
- Invite other churches to share an active, lively interdenominational celebration for the whole family, hosted by your church using a Gathering for All Ages outline.
- Use these outlines to build bridges with a refugee, migrant worker, or newcomer group by hosting a seasonal celebration adapted just for them. Use the basic outlines and add culturally appropriate music, food, and stories.
- Extend a wider invitation to celebrate with your community, and host the family-friendly Gathering for All Ages event in a familiar community space such as a recreation centre, community hall, or park.

Along with a list of the focus passages, consider posting “About Lent and Easter 2017” (p. 1), “Wilderness time,” and “Moving stones” on your church’s website, or including them in your newsletter for these seasons. Add a few reflective questions, as suggested below. This is particularly helpful in building community when and where young people and adults are not able to be with the gathered community for Sunday worship.

For your convenience “The Practice of Building Community” is available as a Word file (for copying, cutting, and pasting) in the Planning Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

Lent

Wilderness time

During the Season of Lent we travel with Jesus on a journey. We start in the wilderness – away from the things that normally comfort and sustain us – and continue in the steps of Jesus’ ministry and through to the last days of his life. At this – like maybe no other – time of year, we are invited to examine our spiritual lives and identify those parts of ourselves that need improvement. Where are we falling short? What relationships need attention? How do we dig deeper into our relationship with God? What parts of our lives have become too much about us and not enough about God?

Trappist monk Thomas Merton said, “The whole Christian life is a life in which…the more we progress, the poorer we get so that the man who has progressed most, is totally poor – he has to depend directly on God. He’s got nothing left in himself.”

When was the last time you heard someone say they wanted to be “totally poor”? The human tendency is to accomplish, acquire, and ascend – always looking to gain, not to become poor. Merton’s “totally poor” is a life that’s progressed the most, a life that’s getting closer to God and further away from worries about money, possessions, and power.

As we begin Lent, we find ourselves at the edge of “wilderness time,” at the edge of total and complete dependence on God for everything we need. Scary? Yes. Completely and totally fulfilling in the spiritual sense? Absolutely.

Entering and participating in a Lent that empties you of selfish desires and temptations and puts your complete faith and trust in God isn’t easy. As we will read in the Bible stories of the Lenten season, Jesus’ explanation of the Reign of God and the movement of the Spirit in our lives weren’t always understood by those who heard it – even the disciples who were closest to Jesus.
So, in the wilderness, we needn’t despair when we don’t get everything right. But we are called to put an intense focus on our relationship with God and how we show God to others in our lives. Our progress on this journey won’t be measured in success, but by how empty we become, how much room we are able to make for God in our lives.

- What scares you the most about depending completely on God to provide in your life?
- What parts of your life do you try to control – instead of letting God control them?
- What one spiritual practice will you take on this Lent that makes more room for God in your life and less room for your personal desires?

## Easter

### Moving stones

*Roll away your stone, I’ll roll away mine /
Together we can see what we will find /
Don’t leave me alone at this time /
For I am afraid of what I will discover inside.*

*Mumford & Sons, “Roll Away Your Stone”

The journey through Easter is one of movement. From rolling away the stone at Jesus’ tomb to stones flying at the Church’s first martyr. From the women rushing to tell the disciples that Jesus is gone to the members of the early church gathering and supporting one another. From Jesus walking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus to the movement of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The experience of Easter and the days that follow are at the same time personal and communal. Jesus has individual encounters with some of his disciples (Mary Magdalene, Thomas) after the Resurrection, but he encourages them – and all of his disciples – to go and share his message of love, justice, and peace with the whole world. As the disciples go about laying the foundation of the early church, Jesus beseeches them to remember his commandments, gather in unity, and lean on the Holy Spirit as a guide.

I don’t know if Mumford & Sons were thinking about the Resurrection when they wrote the lyrics to “Roll Away Your Stone,” but I like the way it personalizes the idea of uncovering the unknown while escorted by God’s grace. When the stone is rolled away on Easter – Jesus is gone! But he soon reappears – the risen Christ – to his friends and disciples. Their fear and sadness turn to joy!

As Easter people we are called to be witnesses to the everlasting life, hope, and renewal that are part of the Resurrection. There are plenty of times when we as individuals and as a church need God’s grace and love to see us through times when we doubt and disagree, but our Easter call is clear! Christ is risen! We can respond “Christ is risen indeed!” through our words and our actions as witnesses to the power of God’s love.

If you have older youth or adults who are not able to be with the congregation for Sunday worship, consider posting “Moving Stones” in its entirety on your church’s website or including it in your newsletter for this season, along with a list of the weekly focus passages. Add a few reflection questions, such as:

- In what ways do you identify with the disciples in the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection?
- What are you afraid you might find when you roll away the stone and encounter the risen Christ? What is God asking of you this Easter season?

### Focus passages for the Season of Lent

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<th>Focus</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 5, 2017</td>
<td>Matthew 4:1–11</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>John 3:1–17</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>John 4:5–42</td>
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<td>March 26</td>
<td>John 9:1–41</td>
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<td>April 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>Matthew 21:1–11, 26:14—27:66</td>
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### Focus passages for the Season of Easter

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<td>May 7</td>
<td>Acts 2:42–47</td>
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<td>May 14</td>
<td>Acts 7:55–60</td>
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<td>May 21</td>
<td>John 14:15–21</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 28</td>
<td>John 17:1–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>Acts 2:1–21</td>
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### Weekly e-mails

You might also send weekly e-mails to the people on your e-mail list throughout Lent and Easter, copying or adapting the suggestions below.

## Lent

### March 5 – And So It Begins

*Matthew 4:1–11*

As part of Jesus’ – and our own individual – spiritual journey, Jesus goes into the Spirit wilderness, where he’s tested. It’s during this time that Jesus chooses who he will be and whose he will be with his responses to the tempter’s suggestions. The decisions we face about how we live our lives today are no different. The choices we make about what will feed us and sustain us physically and spiritually can reflect God’s love in our lives.
This week, choose a “wilderness” area in your life—perhaps a place where temptations (physical or spiritual) seem to creep up on you. Invite God into this wilderness and depend on God when you are tempted.

March 12 – Glimpses of Grace
John 3:1–17
As our Lenten journey continues, we see in Nicodemus the parts of ourselves that struggle with the truth Jesus teaches about living in God’s ways. Nicodemus only sees the impossibilities in what Jesus is teaching and does not hear the spiritual truths. How many times do we look at things only through our own personal experience without understanding other, deeper meanings? Trusting God and trusting the Spirit will help us see beyond the promises of this world and experience the fullness of God’s love.

This week, spend at least 30 minutes outside that is dedicated to listening and feeling the wind blow and move around you. Listen for the movement of the Spirit.

March 19 – Finding Refreshment
John 4:5–42
We are reminded of the Lenten theme of deepening our relationship with God in this week’s focus passage. The woman at the well engages with Jesus in a conversation about water – the drinking kind and the “living” kind. As she talks with Jesus, she comes to understand that he is the Messiah! The one everyone’s been waiting for! With her own spiritual thirst quenched, she’s empowered to go and tell others about Jesus.

This week, share a story about your faith journey with someone and see how it helps you draw closer to God.

March 26 – Seeing with Heart
John 9:1–41
Our journey through Lent can at times feel like we’re searching in the dark for light; we’re blinded by selfish ambitions and personal needs and can’t see the spiritual fulfillment that comes from a life lived in God’s light. The blind man’s healing enrages the authorities, and his very real encounter with the divine has given him sight and he sees—physically and spiritually—more clearly. As we struggle in our own darkness this Lent, may we, like the blind man, see the movement of God in our lives and the world around us.

This week, at the end of each day, write down the ways and the people who helped you encounter the divine.

April 2 – Hope Against All Hope
John 11:1–45
At this point in Lent, we might feel some of Mary and Martha’s despair after the death of their brother. In raising Lazarus—a foreshadowing of his own resurrection—Jesus shows us the hope that leads us out of despair, the light that can lead us out of the darkness. As we approach the end of our Lenten journey and Jesus’ Passion, we, too, are called out of darkness and into light with new life and hope breathed into us.

This week, send a handwritten note to a friend (or even take her/him out for coffee or lunch) who is dealing with the despair of a personal loss.

April 9 – Passion Amidst Palms
Matthew 21:1–11
Matthew 26:14—27:66
At the end of Lent we journey with Jesus through his final days and hours on Earth. But even in their final moments together, the disciples abandon Jesus—betraying him, falling asleep, denying they know him—and he is left alone to face his execution. We can identify with the disciples’ fear and understand the great betrayal Jesus felt because we can point to times in our own lives when it seems we’re all alone and forgotten. But we must remember that God’s love endures and God is with us— with Jesus—even during the hardest moments of our lives.

This week, spend time reading and re-reading Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his Passion (the focus scriptures above). As you read, write down some of the moments from your own life when you are like the characters in the story (Jesus, Pilate, Judas, Peter, the angry crowd, the soldiers, and so on).

Easter Season

April 16 – Yes!
John 20:1–18
Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Much like Mary Magdalene at the tomb, we marvel at the Resurrection. The despair of only a few days ago has disappeared. Jesus’ body is gone. Has he risen from the grave? Yes, he has. And the joy of this moment is contagious! Mary Magdalene shares the news of the resurrected Jesus with the disciples. We, too, must share the news of resurrection, the joy of a living and loving God, with everyone around us.

This week, look for the joy of the Resurrection that’s around you. Find, read, and then share at least three joy-filled news stories with three people this week.

April 23 – It’s True
John 20:19–31
As Jesus continues to appear to his disciples and friends, someone is missing—Thomas. He had heard the message of Jesus’ resurrection, but it was the experience of seeing and the offer to touch the risen Christ that helped him fully
believe. How different is this experience from your own? Is hearing a lesson, reading it, or completing it going to help you understand it? There are many ways to experience the risen Christ, and we should be open to all the ways Christ is around us and working in the world today.

This week, experience the risen Christ in a tangible way by putting your faith into action. Volunteer at your church or a local ministry with the poor or reach out to someone in your community who could really use a helping hand.

April 30 – Followers of the Way
The disciples who meet Jesus along the road to Emmaus are at a sad point in their spiritual journeys. The man they had hoped and even dared to believe was the Messiah is dead and missing from his tomb. Their own grief and sadness blind them to the presence of the risen Christ among them. How often do we miss out on Christ’s presence in our midst? How often are we too preoccupied to see the moments of resurrection and new life around us?

This week, invite someone you’d like to get to know better to dinner (or cook her or him dinner) and be mindful of how important sharing meals can be in forming and building relationships.

May 7 – Glad and Generous Hearts
Acts 2:42–47
The early church sought ways to daily live and remember the power of Jesus’ ministry and his resurrection. In this week’s focus scripture, we read of how the church inspired devotion to prayer, fellowship, breaking bread, sharing with one another, and learning more about “The Way.” Their practices have become ours as the church of today. Our communities of faith are connected.

This week, share by giving away clothing you don’t need in your wardrobe this season, volunteering your time and gifts to your parish or another community ministry with the poor, or making a donation (or extra gift) to your parish or organization that is helping people in need.

May 14 – Stand Firm
Acts 7:55–60
The early church was not without its detractors. This scripture recounts the death of Christianity’s first martyr, Stephen. Stephen was killed after offering a great witness to the love of God. He was not afraid to die. He had courage – courage that led him to share his controversial message and courage that he would be united with Christ in death. While we aren’t all called to be martyrs, we can all be emboldened to share the message that God loves all of God’s people.

This week, learn more about Stephen or another martyr of the church, including martyrs of the modern era.

May 21 – Called Alongside
John 14:15–21
In this week’s focus scripture Jesus introduces the idea of the “Holy Spirit” – a force that will accompany them on their faith journeys when Jesus is no longer with them. Think back to the beginning of the Easter season. Jesus’ disciples are sad and afraid because their teacher and friend is dead, his body missing. When have you been disheartened and fearful about the future? The indwelling of the Spirit continues to gather the disciples and is the way that God intended for Jesus’ disciples – and us today – to remain connected as a faith community.

This week, write a note (no e-mail – put pen to paper!) to someone in your church community whom you haven’t seen in a while. Check in and let them know that you are thinking of them.

May 28 – All My Relations
John 17:1–11
As the Easter season draws to a close, we are called to unity in today’s focus scripture. Jesus prays for his disciples – the ones who would lead the early church – “so that they may be one.” Unity is tough. We might not always agree and, maybe more often then not, we disagree about things in the life of the church. But Jesus’ prayer for the disciples is one we can pray today. We ask that God be glorified in all of our actions and that we might become one in glorifying God.

This week, spend more time in prayer. Set aside at least 15 minutes each day for prayer. You might try meditative prayer or focus on a theme for your prayer time – for example, Christian unity, your local church community, the global Christian church...

June 4 – Pentecost
Acts 2:1–21
The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is often referred to as the “birthday” of the church. The Holy Spirit – advocate, comforter, divine presence – has come! We see how the church has moved forward after Jesus’ death, yet remains grounded in his teachings and even the teachings of prophets like Joel who declared, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” We continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to be poured out over us today and that we might feel its movement in our hearts and lives.

This week, be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life. At the end of each day, jot down your Holy Spirit moments.
The Practice of Nurturing Leadership during Lent and Easter 2017

The articles “Wilderness time” and “Moving stones” (pp. 6–7) may be suitable for use as devotionals or reflections to be read at the beginning of a meeting or group gathering. The weekly reflections in “Building Community during Lent and Easter 2017” (pp. 6–9) could also be used to start discussions at a weekly Bible study during these seasons. Text files of the articles and the reflections are available for printing, cutting and pasting, adapting, or copying and can be found in the Planning Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

Lent

- As a leadership team, commit to setting aside time this Lent for fasting and prayer that focuses on how your team can work and grow together. You might decide to fast from one meal each week – and spend the time you would spend preparing/eating the meal in prayer. Or, if fasting from a meal is difficult, fast from your favourite television show or for a period of time from Facebook or e-mail or your mobile device. The point is to make a sacrifice as a team and spend time praying about how you – as leaders in your congregation – can lead to the best of your abilities and follow God’s desires for your church. Check in at leadership team meetings about your time of fasting and prayer, and invite team members to share any insights.

- At the beginning of one of your leadership team meetings during Lent, read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5–42). As a team, discuss the opportunities you see to empower members of your congregation to greater steps in their faith and invite them to be witnesses to God’s love – much like Jesus with the Samaritan woman who shared the news of meeting the Messiah with others. Ask everyone to write down the names of at least three people’s names they can contact to help with worship, or a program, or activity that is happening at your church during Lent (or even Easter).

Easter

- Easter is a time in the church year where things (literally) become alive! Before your next leadership team gathering, ask members to think of 3–4 things that have either been dormant or inactive in your congregation or that might be waiting underground to get started. Share your ideas at the meeting and decide what new thing you might grow in your congregation this Easter season.
Lenten Light

Many people are used to a tradition of “giving something up for Lent.” This has been around for many years, and there is nothing wrong with it. However, some people have looked for other ways to observe the season and make it meaningful. A nun in Minnesota was well-known in her convent for taking on “40 fun things for Lent.”

In a similar way, for many there is a sense that in the Season of Lent we have a sense of pending darkness and gloom. This not only reinforces the stereotype that darkness = bad or negative things, but also does not always fit with the scriptures. The focus passages this year, rather than encouraging giving something up or moving toward darkness, tend to promote growing and expanding light, newness, and hope. It is only in the specific context of the Passion story that we realize the light was dimmed by our actions.

This year, we are suggesting the image of light growing during the season, and then being diminished on Passion Sunday as we move toward the enclosed tomb. As we read the passages from John during Lent (other than the first week, when the gospel is from Matthew) we see the amazing life that God gives, how God is repeatedly expanding the boundaries and opening doors to us and other outsiders. We celebrate the light that seems to grow as we observe God’s activity in our world. And yet, on Passion Sunday, we recognize our participation in enclosing Jesus in the darkness of the tomb, as if we, too, like the Roman powers two millennia ago, believe we can somehow extinguish the powerful message that Jesus brought. It is an astonishing indictment.

How to increase the light

We suggest you find a way that works for your congregation to increase the light each of the five weeks of Lent. The goal is to have a total of 15 lights on Palm/Passion Sunday, which will then be extinguished – or carried out – during the reading of the Passion narrative.

The type of light can vary: you might choose to use a total of 15 candles, and these in turn can all be the same type, or could be different styles and sizes and colours. Alternatively, you might wish to light a variety of different lights over the course of the weeks: candles, a torch/flashlight, lanterns, lamps, and so on.

Similarly, you can begin with three lights/candles the first week, and simply increase by three each week. Or, you could begin with one, add two on the second week, three on the third week, four on the fourth week, and five on week five. Either way will arrive at fifteen.

There will not be much mention of the growing light – only the simple statement at the outset of worship each week, as the light grows, and the song “Catch the Light!” that will accompany us during Lent. People who attend regularly will undoubtedly notice, and then it will be made clear on Palm/Passion Sunday that the light has arrived, and indeed God has enabled it to grow in our midst, and yet we participate in acts that attempt to put it out. Ultimately, however, God has the final word, for on Easter Sunday Jesus is resurrected in a way that empowers us and the whole universe with light. Thus, as part of your planning it will be important to make sure that somehow light is well represented on Easter Sunday – in whatever combination of candles, lights, banners, flowers, you wish to have.

Explore this concept and make it work in a way that is meaningful for your congregation.
Communion Prayers

A Prayer for the Season of Lent

As we journey through Lent, O God,
we recognize the strangeness of this time.
We are aware that we approach Good Friday
with its ominous sense of emptiness,
its foreboding nature of death and endings.
Yet we are also aware that we approach Easter Sunday
and the unbridled celebration of your power over death
and ability to bring life into even the most hopeless places.

In a season of shadows, still your light shines.
In a season of bewilderment, still your light shines.
In a season of confusion, still your light shines.

And so, in the strangeness of this season,
we seek balance in this sacrament:
we remember how Jesus,
the very night he was betrayed to the authorities,
gathered with some of his closest friends.
As they were eating, Jesus took bread.
He blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.
“Eat this,” he said. “And know that whenever you do this
I will be with you.”

After supper, Jesus took a cup of wine.
He blessed it, and shared it amongst his friends.
“Drink this,” he said. “And know that your sins are
forgiven.”

And so we, removed from that night by vast measures
of time and space,
nonetheless take this simple bread and this simple cup,
and as we share them,
we remember Jesus here, present with us,
offering us light to lead us forward.

Easter Day

Friends, hear the good news.
Christ is risen. Alleluia!
A day begun in mourning and fear
has turned to joy and witness.
Christ is risen. Alleluia!
A table left for the shadows of the garden
has become a table drenched
in the light of One mistaken for a gardener.

Christ is risen. Alleluia!
Come from the north and the south,
the east and the west,
come from your fears and your grievings,
your lost hopes and forgotten dreams –
and come to a table set
with grace and power that will not be deterred.
For Christ is risen. Alleluia!

We come with joy,
into the brightness of this new day and season,
to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ.
We remember how at the Last Supper
Jesus said, “I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in God’s realm.”
We remember, too, how some disciples recognized him
on that first Easter Sunday
when he broke bread at a meal in Emmaus.

And so we too break bread this day,
and celebrate the presence of the risen Christ,
here in our very midst.

Come, Creator God, you who brought forth life
from the earth in grain and grape,
and who brought forth life from the tomb
in our risen Saviour.
Bless these gifts we bring to this table,
that as we share them we might know the presence of Christ
in our hearts and minds,
in our church and in the world,
and that we might be your people to take the Christ-light
into our community. Amen.
Pentecost Day

The disciples gathered in one place,
uncertain of the next moment.
Suddenly, something beyond description,
a moment when time stood still,
wind, and fire, and new life
burst in upon them:
your Spirit, O God, blowing through them anew.

As they spoke, they found they could understand one
another.
As they gazed in wonder, they found new truths
shared in voices they had not heard before.

As the Spirit came upon them then, O God,
send it to be upon us now:
on young and old, women and men.
As we share these elements that reconnect us to Christ
help us to dream dreams, and see visions,
and in all this know that you are our God,
and we are your people.
Nourish us,
strengthen us,
renew us,
and send us forth into the world to do your work.

We remember how Jesus took bread,
broke it, shared it, and declared:
“My body, for you.”
Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.
We remember how Jesus took a cup of wine,
shared it amongst them, and declared:
“My blood, for you.”

Be present for us again, living Christ.
Infuse us again with your Spirit of new life. Amen.
Lent, Easter 2017

Catch the Light!

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Evensong Worship Resources www.evensong.ca

From March 5, 2017 through to June 4, 2017, you may make copies of the words only of this song for use in your congregation. Please include the copyright information. All copies are to be destroyed after this time period. Lyrics are available as text files on the Lent, Easter 2017 CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION. Recording of this song is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2.
Jesus, Live in Us

Words and music: Daniel Charles Damon
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(G)

Jesus, live in us, your body here.
Jesus, live in us, to make us strong.
Jesus, live in us, when hearts are numb,
Jesus, live in us, to serve and share.

C

(repeat first verse)

Jesus, live in us, cast out our fear.
Jesus, live in us, in work and song.
Jesus, live in us, when trials come.
Jesus, live in us, each breath a prayer.

G

From March 5, 2017 through to June 4, 2017, you may make copies of the words only of this song for use in your congregation. Please include the copyright information. All copies are to be destroyed after this time period. Lyrics are available as text files on the Lent, Easter 2017 CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION. Recording of this song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca.
Gathering for All Ages: Lent 2017

**Gatherings for All Ages** are suitable not just for people of all ages but also for people of any or no church background. These gatherings connect those inside the church with those who have little or no connection with regular Sunday worship.

**NOTE:** All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Set the stations as described in Times of Creativity.
- Set a worship space with a Lenten scene. Use sand and/or beige-colour cloth, driftwood, and a border of blue cloth to represent the sea, which for the Pacific Island people is a vast wilderness-like space, and for the Hebrew people represented chaos.
- Bring Bibles.
- Arrange for volunteers to prepare the meal and help set it up for serving.
- Recruit volunteers to initiate cleanup when the meal is finished.

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**Prepare**

Welcome everyone to the gathering. Explain clearly (but briefly) what will be happening throughout the gathering.

**Gathering**

Lent is a time of journeying – with Jesus towards Jerusalem but also deep within ourselves. The journey may bring experiences that stretch and challenge, or times that frustrate and make us stumble, but the journey can also bring growth, expanding light, newness, and hope.

**Light** the Christ candle, symbol of Christ’s presence with us.

**Prayer**
We gather this day and we see the light of Christ burning in our midst.
We ask for renewed vision as we prepare our hearts and minds for Lent.


**Worship**

**Bible story** Explain that during Lent we meet several people who knew and spoke with Jesus. One of the people we meet this Lent is a man who was born blind, and we will explore his story today. Invite the people to break into three groups. Give each group some Bibles and assign one section of the story to each group: John 9:1–12, John 9:13–34, and John 9:35–41. Explain that each group will help us see its section of the story in a new way. One group might tell its section as though it is a news report with eyewitnesses. Another group might tell its section from the perspective of animals who were looking on. Or a group might tell its section in the form of a rap song. There are many possibilities.

**After the story**
After hearing the story, extinguish the candle and invite people into a time of creativity, explaining the options available.

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**Time of Creativity**

For your convenience these directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder on the Lent, Easter CD, and the web version of SeasonsFUSION.
**Lenten stones**

**Materials** pocket-sized rocks, paint, brushes, newsprint to cover the table(s), the poster Stones and a copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

**Directions**
- When people travel they sometimes pick up stones to remind them they are on a journey. The stones remind them where they have been.
- 1. Decorate some pocket-sized rocks as reminders that God is with us all along the way.
- 2. Everyone at the table might then take their rocks to the worship space and form the rocks into a spiral shape, to gather around during the closing.

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**New vision mural**

**Materials** magazines, scissors, poster board, glue stick, and markers, copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

**Directions**
- 1. Look through magazines and cut out as many eyes as you can.
- 2. Use the eye cut-outs to create a mural on poster board by laying the eyes in a pattern. For example, create a large flame, an alpha and omega sign, a shepherd’s crook, or a lamb.
- 3. Glue the eyes to the poster board.
- 4. Together write a simple prayer asking God to help us see things in a new way this Season of Lent.
- 6. Lay your prayer on the poster.
- 7. Display the poster at the entrance of the worship space during Lent.

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**Lenten offering box**

**Materials** plastic containers with a slot cut in the lids, strips of tissue paper in different shades of purple, diluted glue, and paintbrushes, copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

**Directions**
- 1. Use a paintbrush and diluted glue to attach the tissue paper to the sides of your container.
- 2. Think about giving up something for Lent that costs money, such as going out to eat, renting videos, or buying special treats. Put the money you save in the offering box.
- 3. Then decide on a project you might “take on” during Lent, something you would like to support personally, or maybe a church related project.
- 4. Together decide on how the money might be spent, and on Easter day bring your offering to church, deliver to your chosen project, or spend it as you discerned together.

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**Eating Together**

Plan a simple but enjoyable meal for all to share together. The menu is not as important as the occasion. The occasion is not as important as those participating. This is a time for people to relax, chat, have fun, eat and drink, and enjoy one another's company.

Try to plan the layout of the room so that it reflects the communal aspects of the gathering together, but be aware that for some, eating in this way is a completely new and perhaps unnerving situation.

Ask volunteers to prepare the meal. Select a simple and healthy menu, preferably including locally grown fruits and vegetables that are in season and other locally made food items (e.g., raw vegetables/fruit with dip, salad, homemade soup, a pasta or rice dish with local vegetables, bread). You might ask the cooks to share their recipes with the group.

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**Blessing**

**Gather** in the worship area. Allow time for people to talk about the activity in which they participated.

**Light** the Christ candle again. Ask someone from the group that made the mural to offer the prayer they wrote.

**Sing** “Catch the Light!” again.

**Sending** Extinguish the candle saying:
- The light has not gone, the light continues on, lit in our hearts by God’s love.
- Enter this season in peace.
Gathering for All Ages: Pentecost 2017

Gatherings for All Ages are suitable not just for people of all ages but also for people of any or no church background. These gatherings connect those inside the church with those who have little or no connection with regular Sunday worship.

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Set the stations as described in Times of Creativity.
- Set a worship table with a red cloth, candle, and open Bible.
- Arrange for a volunteer storyteller to present the story “The Birthday of the Church” on p. 21, and two volunteers for the two voices in the sending.
- Arrange for volunteers to prepare the meal and help set it up for serving.
- Bring songs “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa, Eminimo” (p. 190 and #10 on Seasons Music CD, vol. 5) and Jesus, Live in Us (p. 15; recording of the song available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Recruit volunteers to initiate cleanup when the meal is finished.

Prepare

Welcome participants as pilgrims who have journeyed to a great festival. Recognize that they have come from the north and the south and the east and the west, from all around.

Pentecost is a time of celebration. We celebrate God’s Spirit that was active in building a community that involves everyone with their differing gifts and abilities. We celebrate the beginning of the Christian church.

Light the Christ candle, symbol of Christ’s presence with us.

Prayer
Holy Spirit, diverse and varied as we are, you gather us together, like a mother bird stretching wide her wings.

Worship

Today we draw strength from your life and energy, and lift our hearts in praise to you. Amen.

Sing “Come, O Holy Spirit” (p. 190)

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “The Birthday of the Church” on p. 21.

After the story
After hearing the story, extinguish the candle and invite people into a time of creativity, explaining the options available.
**Time of Creativity**

For your convenience these directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web versions of SeasonsFUSION.

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**Bubble hoops**

**Materials** bendable craft wire that has been cut into 30 cm/12 in pieces, bubble soap, trays for the soap, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**
1. Bend one end of the wire and twist around the remaining base to create a hoop.
2. Bend the hoop into a creative shape.
3. Dip the wire into a tray of bubble soap and try blowing a bubble.
4. Change the shape and see what happens.
5. Fill the air with bubbles and let them settle over the people.

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**Paper flames**

**Materials** red, yellow, and orange construction paper, glitter, kitchen foil, reusable adhesive, scissors, glue, “tongues of fire” templates (see “flame patterns” in the Virtual Resource Booklet at the library at www.seasonsonline.ca), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**
1. Cut the red, yellow, and orange paper into small tongues of fire.
2. Layer and glue the tongues to create a flame.
3. Decorate further with glitter and kitchen foil.
4. You might use the flames to decorate the worship space on Pentecost Sunday.

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**Pentecost pompoms**

**Materials** red, yellow, and orange tissue paper, scissors, craft sticks, masking tape, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**
1. Cut the red, yellow, and orange tissue paper into strips that are 2.5 cm/1 in wide and 30 cm/12 in long.
2. Gather a number of strips, divide in half, and place the ends of the strips on either side of a craft stick.
3. Secure the tissue paper by wrapping masking tape around the stick.
4. If possible make several pompoms and distribute for use in the closing worship.

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**Eating Together**

Set and decorate tables for a birthday party. Plan a simple but enjoyable meal for all to share together. The menu is not as important as the occasion. The occasion is not as important as those participating. This is a time for people to relax, chat, have fun, eat and drink, and enjoy one another’s company. For this session, be sure to provide a birthday cake (or cakes, depending on dietary requirements).

Try to plan the layout of the room so that it reflects the communal aspects of the gathering together. For this session set and decorate tables for a birthday party.

Ask volunteers to prepare the meal, preferably including locally grown fruits and vegetables that are in season and other locally made food items (e.g., raw vegetables/fruit with dip, salad, homemade soup, a pasta or rice dish with local vegetables, bread). You might ask the cooks to share their recipes with the group.
Gather in the worship area, and relight the candle.

Litany
Have those who created the Pentecost pompoms to distribute them amongst the people. Before leading the litany invite the people to wave their pompoms, or wave arms back and forth and wiggle fingers as they say “God’s Spirit blew,” and raise their arms as they say “the church grew.” Show the prompt you will give as a cue for them to speak the response and do the action. Have a strip of red crepe paper or ribbon nearby.

Long, long ago when Jesus’ disciples were all together, they sang and they prayed to God. But the disciples were waiting, waiting for something to happen. They were waiting for God’s Spirit to move through them and with them in a new way, just as Jesus had promised.

Suddenly a wind blew, blew right through the room. Then they knew, knew that God’s Spirit had come. And that was the beginning of the church!

Where people didn’t know God’s love (prompt):
God’s Spirit blew and the church grew. Just like that.

Where people were tired and sick (prompt):
God’s Spirit blew and the church grew. Just like that.

Where people were ready to grow and spread the good news (prompt):
God’s Spirit blew and the church grew. Just like that.

And the church spread on and on and on and on...until it spread right here to our church (name your church)! Hooray for God’s Spirit and for the Christian church sent all around the world!

Light the Christ candle again.

Sing “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15).

Sending extinguish the candle as two voices say:
Voice 1: The Spirit is life,
Voice 2: and we will live in the Spirit.
Voice 1: The Spirit is truth,
Voice 2: and we will speak in the Spirit.
Voice 1: The Spirit is imagination,
Voice 2: and we will dream in the Spirit.
Voice 1: The Spirit is direction,
Voice 2: and we will go in the Spirit.
The Birthday of the Church
Based on Acts 2

It was seven weeks since Jesus died. But the disciples knew Jesus was still alive.

One day, the disciples were all together, with many other people. It was the day of Pentecost, an important time for Jewish people.

Then something very strange happened. Some said there was the sound of a strong wind. Others said there were little bits of fire dancing around among the disciples.

The strangest part was that the disciples began to talk in new ways. Nobody was sure what kind of languages they spoke. Even the disciples weren’t sure about the new words they heard themselves saying.

But others understood. “Hey!” someone said. “I come from a place where we speak a different language. How come I can understand what he’s saying?”

People were there from many faraway places. They understood many different languages. Yet they could each understand what the disciples were saying.

“What is going on here?” people asked.

“You drank too much wine!” somebody said to Peter. “No,” said Peter. Then he stood up and talked to all the people who had come together for Pentecost.

“My friends,” said Peter, “we’re not drunk. Something very important has happened here.” Then Peter told them the whole story, beginning many, many years ago with Abraham and Sarah, right up until the time of Jesus. Then Peter told them how Jesus was God’s Messiah.

Peter explained that from now on, God’s Spirit would be with everyone who believed in Jesus. We would not be able to see Jesus alive again the way the disciples had seen him. But Jesus would be alive in our hearts. Peter called it “the Holy Spirit.”

“What should we do?” someone asked.

“Be sorry for the wrong things you have done,” said Peter. “Believe that God really loves you.”

Many people said, “Yes, we want to do that.” So they were baptized in water. Being baptized was a way of saying, “I want to live in God’s way.”

The disciples were happy. Now they knew what Jesus wanted them to do. Jesus wanted the disciples to help everyone know about God’s love.

So the disciples went to many places. They told people about Jesus and about God’s promise.

Many people came to the disciples and said, “Yes, I believe that Jesus is God’s Messiah. I want to live in God’s way.”

Soon there were people in many places who knew about Jesus. These people got together to help each other, to eat together, to remember the things that Jesus said, and to talk about living in God’s way. When people came together like this, they called it a church.

From Lectionary Story Bible: Year C by Ralph Milton. Copyright © 2009 Wood Lake Publishing Inc.
Ash Wednesday

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Choose the resources you wish to use this week and make any necessary preparations. Note that this is not a complete worship outline, but simply a set of resources that might be blended into your own liturgy.
- Arrange for volunteers to carry forward symbols for the gathering, and two for the scripture reading.
- Bring symbols for the gathering: a candle, stones, broken twigs, bowl of ashes (or items that will be burned to create ash) and a bowl of olive oil.
- If possible, prepare to project the image Stones (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD).
- Depending on a number of factors, including the time of day of the worship service, whether children and youth are likely to be present, and your congregation’s familiarity with Ash Wednesday, you may wish to use the “Talking with children” piece below, adapting it as necessary for use with adults. Because in some traditions this worship service is still relatively new, and/or many people are not familiar with its traditions, a short explanation can add power to the rituals of the service. Alternatively, you may wish to preach a brief reflection on one of the scriptures. This should be relatively short—perhaps 5 to 10 minutes.
- Provide some ashes and a little olive oil, which will be mixed together during the service. In some traditions, palms from the previous year’s Palm Sunday are burned to create the ashes for Ash Wednesday.

Music Suggestions

Without Seeing You
David Haas; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6
Blessing Song
Traditional; Seasons Songbook, vol. 3
What Does Our God Require of Us?
Jim Strathdee; Seasons Songbook, vol. 3
Your Will Be Done/Mayenziwe ‘Ntando Yakho
Xhosa language South African song of praise; Seasons Songbook, vol. 3
Dust and Ashes Touch Our Face
Brian Wren, Ron Klusmeier
Great God, Your Lord
Brian Wren
Take this Moment
John Bell, Graham Maule

Gather

During this gathering, symbols of confession are placed in the worship area. A candle, which is lit, is surrounded with a circle of stones representing burdens offered, then a circle of broken twigs representing confession, and finally a bowl of ashes (or the items that will be burned to create the ash) and a bowl of olive oil representing our old lives renewed. If possible, project the image Stones in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

One: Surrounded by the world, we gather to ready ourselves,
All: to confess our dishonesty and seek Christ’s light.
(The candle is lit.)
One: Surrounded by the world, we gather to ready ourselves,
All: to confess our brokenness and touch Christ’s healing.
(Several people each bring forward a broken twig and place it in a circle around the stones.)
One: Surrounded by the world, we gather to ready ourselves,
All: to confess our old lives and be renewed in Christ’s love.
(Two people bring forward a bowl of ashes and a bowl of oil and place on Communion table/altar.)

ONE: We take the hurts, the pains, the sins of the past (lift ashes) and this powerful symbol of God’s healing (lift oil).

God holds all we have done, and heals it, and loves it into a new shape (mix the ash and oil together, unless choosing to do this later with the children), and in the ashes of all we seek to leave behind we are born anew in God’s forgiveness.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Engage

Scripture reading
Two people read Isaiah 58:1–12, one person representing God and the other person representing the people. Have them stand at opposite sides of the worship area. For the dialogue to flow better, follow the scheme below and, if appropriate, add in the extra lines to help make sense of the reading. Alternatively, the congregation could read the part of the people, in which case it would be helpful to print the entire text in the worship bulletin.

God: verses 1–2
People: verse 3a
God: verses 3b–5
People: What kind of fasting do you wish?
God: verses 6–7
People: We confess we have not fasted correctly.
God: verses 8–9
People: This is the kind of fasting we shall follow.
God: verses 10–12

Talking with children
Making changes
Preparation: bring the ashes and oil, or the items that will be burned to create ashes, if you will be burning them later in the worship service.

Talk about the ashes. Explain that in ancient times, the Jewish people used ashes as a symbol to show God that they were sorry for things. Talk about how this day, Ash Wednesday, begins a season called Lent, a time to think about things we do wrong, and spend some time telling God we’re sorry. It’s a time not just to say we’re sorry, but also to ask God to help us change from doing things that are wrong, to doing things that are right. Explain the process for creating ashes in your church, and for imposing them, and discuss how they are a symbol of how each and every one of us – young and old, people who go to church and people who do not, ministers and lay people – all do things that hurt God, all do things that are not what God wants.

Next, talk about the oil. Mention that oil was an ancient symbol of healing. You could mix the oil and ashes at this time, if appropriate, or simply talk about how they are, or will be, mixed together. This reminds us that God is always wanting to forgive us – to heal us from the things we have done wrong. No matter what we do wrong, God forgives us. God loves us so much, God sent Jesus into the world to save us and show us God’s love. That’s the other part of this Season of Lent – remembering God’s love in Jesus. And so, while we think of things we have done wrong and how each of us is a sinner, we also remember how each and every one of us is forgiven.

Respond

Imposition of ashes
During the imposition, sing “Your Will Be Done” from the Seasons Songbook, vol. 3 several times through, or play it from the Seasons Music CD, vol. 3, #11, setting the CD player to repeat.

ONE: When time was new and the world was fresh, God took a handful of earth and, filling God’s almighty lungs, blew a long breath into the soil and watched as it flew and tumbled through the air, swirling and turning, shaping itself into the form of a human being.

And God saw the world, and what was once good had turned sour, and God sent a flood to renew, and prophets to rekindle, and leaders to redirect. And God sent Jesus to forgive, and a cross opened a new way through death, each time taking the old and in its place offering a new creation.

Invite people to come forward to receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads or backs of their hands saying words such as:

Remember you are from the earth, and to the earth you shall return.
or
You are loved, renewed, reborn. Go now into your new life.
or
You are a sinner. You are forgiven.
Lent, Easter 2017

Response to receiving the ashes

ONE: An ending and a beginning:
   the end of our old selves,
   and a new beginning in faith.

ALL: In the ashes of my old life, a new life is born.

ONE: An ending and a beginning:
   the end of living in the shadows,
   and a beginning to living within the light.

ALL: In the ashes of my old life, a new life is born.

ONE: An ending and a beginning:
   the end of a life that brings hurt,
   and a beginning to a life that offers healing.

(Ask people to slowly turn during the blessing, facing the doors ready for the journey into Lent. They need not do this all at the same time.)

ONE: Journey now the pathway to new life.
   PEOPLE: We go on the way of the cross.

ONE: Travel now the road through death to resurrection.
   PEOPLE: We go on the way of the cross.

Worship Outline • March 1, 2017

ALL: In the ashes of my old life, a new life is born.

ONE: An ending and a beginning:
   the end of a journey of distraction,
   and a beginning to a journey to the cross.

ALL: In the ashes of my old life, a new life is born.

ONE: An ending and a beginning:
   the end of division and prejudice,
   and a beginning to community and travelling together.

ALL: In the ashes of my old life, a new life is born.

ONE: Set out with Jesus through wilderness to garden.
   PEOPLE: We go on the way of the cross.

ONE: And live the life of blessing,
   the way of truth,
   in the love that renews, rebirths, re-creates you.
   PEOPLE: We go on the way of the cross.
Living the Seasons at Home

Lent

The Season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday March 1, 2017 and lasts until Easter Sunday. It is a season of quiet reflection when we bring our deep thoughts and feelings to God. Often people will observe Lent with something the church calls spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, meditation, fasting, and service to others. What would help deepen your relationship with God and one another this season?

Audio stories Audio recordings of the weekly focus passages retold in ways that are accessible and engaging for people of all ages are available in MP3 format for purchase and download at www.seasonsonline.ca. The MP3 versions of the stories are also included on the Lent, Easter CD included with the SeasonsFUSION materials.
Stories for this Season of Lent

March 5 – And so it begins

Read Matthew 4:1-11 in an age-appropriate Bible or the story "A Day in the Wilderness" on p. 32 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Prayer and reflection ideas for the Easter season
• Using gathered stones, create a reflection or centering space in your home or even your office.
• Pick stones from your backyard, local park or gardens, and assemble them on a plate or placemat or in a basket or small bowl. Let them be a reminder of Jesus’ death and resurrection and our call to be living stones and witnesses to the story of love overcoming death. Each day, pick a different stone and carry it with you as a reminder of resurrection love.
• Reflect on the ways God might be calling you to be a living stone. If in your reflection a word or phrase keeps coming up, use a permanent marker and write it on one of the stones.

Activities for connecting during the Easter season

• If your group or family is looking for some ideas for connecting with one another or with new friends this season, consider the following:
  • Decorate Easter eggs as a family or group! Use the traditional dyes and hard-boiled eggs or cut out egg shapes from white construction paper to paint or color. You can turn the paper ones into Easter greetings for friends and family.
  • Get moving! Recalling Jesus’ encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, take on a more physical-spiritual practice this season. Ideas: Take weekly (or even daily) prayer walks where you focus on your prayer and listening to what God might be speaking to you. You could walk for an hour or less, bringing a favorite prayer or meditation to listen to as you walk and reflect on your day. You could try using guided imagery, focusing on Jesus in the road to Emmaus, or a different station of the cross. You could also use the road to Emmaus to reflect on what you have learned about Jesus and what you would like to learn more about.
  • Each week during the Easter season, bake a different kind of bread and bake enough to share with others. It was in the breaking of bread that the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus recognized him. It is in breaking bread together that we see Christ in one another. Share your bread with your family, your church community, or someone who is hungry.

Prayer
Dear God, thank you for Jesus who shows us the way to follow you.
Be with us as we begin the Season of Lent and help us to travel with Jesus each day.
Amen.

Serve God!

Thinking of them...
• Write or call someone who might like to receive a letter from your family.
• Prepare a meal for a neighbor or someone who is homebound.

Together this week
■ Think of someone who would like to receive a letter from your family.
Choose paper and envelopes with care; perhaps you would like to use a special pen. Share news of your family and include a photo or other memento to show you are thinking of them.

Prayer
Dear God, thank you for Jesus who shows us the way to follow you.
Be with us as we begin the Season of Lent and help us to travel with Jesus each day.
Follow your faith.
Thank you for Jesus who shows us the way to follow you.

Serve God!
March 12 – Glimpses of Grace
John 3:1–17

Read John 3:1–17 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Nicodemus, The Night Visitor” on p. 44 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
Nicodemus, the scholar, knew quite a bit about God’s way, but he still wondered, still asked questions, still wanted to grow in faith and understanding about God’s way. Jesus calls on Nicodemus – and on us – to believe in and trust the invisible power of God’s love. We do not need to depend on ourselves – it is God who loves and saves us.

Together this week
Filled with the Spirit, the community shared God’s love in ways others could understand.

■ Talk about the acts and words that express love for each person, such as doing a chore without being asked, making a meal, playing a game together, listening with full attention, or making a card.

■ Then find ways to share the love of God in a way that those around you can understand.

Prayer
Spirit within and among us, may Love spread through us like a cool wind on a hot summer’s day. Amen.
March 19 – Finding Refreshment
John 4:5–42

Read John 4:5–42 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Jesus Loves Everyone” on p. 56 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do

All of us understand the human need for water, and most of us can think of times when we played or spent time near to water. Jesus points out that God’s word and God’s loving care can be like the coolest and most pleasurable of water. God is as important as water for our survival and our happiness.

Together this week

■ Take a small gift you have made or bought to two or three friends who are important to you but to whom you rarely express your love. It could be a plant or flowers, or some cookies/biscuits, or some other small remembrance.

Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of water. Thank you for Jesus, whose love is like water for our thirsty souls. Help us to love others just as Jesus loves us. Amen.

Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of water. Thank you for Jesus, whose love is like water for our thirsty souls. Help us to love others just as Jesus loves us. Amen.

Prayer

Stay close to God. Help us to love others just as Jesus loves us. Amen.

Prayer

God wants his friends to stay close to God. Help us to love others just as Jesus loves us. Amen.

What gift can you give?

Prayer

Prayer

Prayer

Prayer

What gift can you give?
May 21 – Call From Alongside
John 14:15–21

Read John 14:15–21 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Friend” on p. 168 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
One day, Jesus spoke with the disciples about what it means to be his friends. “If you want to be my friend,” Jesus said, “you will show love to others like I do.” Jesus explained that he would not be alive forever. But when Jesus’ body is gone from Earth, Jesus promised his spirit would remain forever. The disciples trusted Jesus’ words. They knew Jesus would keep his promise. Later, when Jesus was no longer on Earth, the disciples would gather together for prayer. Whenever they prayed, they sensed with their whole selves that the Spirit of Jesus was with them, helping them to show Jesus’ love in the world.

Together this week
Prayer is one thing that helped the disciples sense the Spirit of Jesus was with them.

■ Review a typical week in your household. Name some of the happenings, ordinary and extraordinary. Say “Spirit is with me when (name activity).” Each time the others respond, “Alleluia!” What do you notice?

Prayer
As friends of Jesus,
may we show Jesus’ love to others.
As friends of Earth,
may we love and care for it.
As friends of one another,
may we share all that we are.
Amen.

March 26 – Seeing with Heart
John 9:1–41

Read John 9:1–41 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Seeing Something New” on p. 68 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
In this long and complicated story, one point is clear. Jesus loved the blind man enough to do something – in this case to restore his sight. All the friends were simply feeling sorry for him and wondering about the blindness. Jesus responds with action. We can trust that God responds to our problems with action. In turn, we are called and expected to respond to others’ needs with positive action.

Together this week
Prayer
As friends of Jesus,
may we show Jesus’ love to others.
As friends of Earth,
may we love and care for it.
As friends of one another,
may we share all that we are.
Amen.
April 2 – Hope Against All Hope

**John 11:1–45**

**Read**

John 11:1–45 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Lazarus” on p. 80 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

**Something to think about, talk about, or do**

Both Martha and Mary believe in Jesus’ power to heal the sick. They accuse him of dawdling and allowing Lazarus to die. But Jesus’ amazing act—raising Lazarus from the dead—demonstrates that God is more powerful than death. 

Together this week

■ ■

**Prayer**

Thank you for creating us with your love, Jesus. Thank you for sending us your love, Jesus. Amen.

May 14 – Stand Firm

**Acts 2:32–36**

**Read**

Acts 2:32–36 in an age-appropriate Bible or story bible.

**Something to think about, talk about, or do**

Leaders often need to explore new structures and ways of being the community of Christ’s followers. What do you see as the responsibility of caring for those whose lives are transformed by the community? Some within the community feel that they are not part of the community or that they must do the caring for the community without the community’s support. How can you support one another in doing the work of sharing the good news about the risen Jesus?

Together this week

■ ■

**Prayer**

Show love to one another. Leave notes or other tokens for each other—perhaps in a special place.

Prayer: may love be our purpose. May we give our all to the ways of love. Amen.
May 7 – Glad and Generous Hearts
Acts 2:42–47

Read Acts 2:42–47 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “The Early Church” on p. 144 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
Those who followed Jesus watched and learned how to live in loving ways. The followers of Jesus got together often to worship, eat a meal together, and recall the stories and teachings of Jesus. They would share whatever they had with one another. No one ever had to go without or be lonely. Those who were not part of this community saw the great love between them and often became part of the community themselves. The community of followers was filled with the spirit of Jesus and, through them, the loving ways of Jesus went on and on.

Together this week
When we share what we have with others, the love of Jesus grows in our world. What might you share with others?
■ Consider giving away clothes, toys, or books that you don’t use anymore.
■ Offer to make a meal for someone who has a difficult time cooking. Give your friendship to someone who is lonely.

Prayer
May the gifts of love we offer, help the ministry of Jesus go on and on in our world.
Amen.

April 9 – Passion Amidst Palms
Matthew 21:1–11
Matthew 26:14—27:66

Read Matthew 21:1–11 and Matthew 26:14—27:66 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Coming into Jerusalem” on p. 92 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
Jesus and the disciples travelled to Jerusalem to observe the festival of Passover. When they reached the outskirts of the city, Jesus asked the disciples to bring a donkey and a colt to him so Jesus could ride it into the city. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, a parade of people threw their coats and branches from nearby trees onto the path to pave the way for Jesus. They shouted “Hosanna!” This was the crowd’s way of praising Jesus as a special prophet of God. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem begins our journey through Holy Week, which we will take together.

Together this week
This is a sacred and quiet week in our faith when we remember Jesus’ last days. How will you observe this week together as a family?
■ Read again the stories of Jesus found in the focus scriptures from the gospel of Matthew.
■ Read stories and poems about the cycle of death and life in nature.
■ Observe together what is happening with the plants, trees, flowers, and creatures in your environment.

Prayer
Dear God, thank you for the great love of Jesus. Help us to remember always the love Jesus showed, and to love him and others as much as we can.
Amen.
Prayer and reflection ideas for Lent

• Create a “Photo-a-Day Prayer Journal” this Lent. Each day, snap a photo with your smartphone or tablet of something for which you are praying – it could be a photo of the day’s headlines from the day’s paper, someone you’re with, or even a photo of photos of family and friends. Look through your photos throughout Lent to remind you of those things you want to lift up in prayer.

• Dedicate 30 minutes each week – or even each day! – to group or family time for personal reflection. Gather as a family (or group) for this time, but allow individuals to find their own comfortable space for reflection. To focus your reflection time, you might pick a word or phrase like “sacrifice” or “walking in the light” or use the focus scripture for the week (or a verse or two from it). Play quiet instrumental music or even light a few candles as you begin your reflection time. When the time has ended, come back together and ask for a volunteer to pray to close your time together.

• Each week during Lent, read Matthew 4:1–11 – the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. Spend some time reflecting on Jesus’ temptations and choose something you think you can’t live without. When you feel tempted, return to God and your journal – reflect on the struggles you’re having and remember your dependency on God during this time.

• As you share the bread, discuss together where you see signs of love between you. After you share the bread, discuss together where you might see the bread of every day breaded or sown with whom we share a meal with others.

• Jesus’ spirit of love comes to life between us together this week.

Something to think about, talk about, or do

April 30 – Followers of the Way


Prayer

Lord, you have shown us the daily activities of life. Bake bread. Pray and play together. May Jesus’ spirit of love come to life wherever we are.

Prayer

You see signs of love between you. As you share the bread, discuss together where you see signs of love between you. After you share the bread, discuss together where you might see the bread of every day breaded or sown with whom we share a meal with others.

Jesus’ spirit of love comes to life between us together this week.

Something to think about, talk about, or do

April 30 – Followers of the Way


Prayer

Lord, you have shown us the daily activities of life. Bake bread. Pray and play together. May Jesus’ spirit of love come to life wherever we are.

Prayer

You see signs of love between you. As you share the bread, discuss together where you see signs of love between you. After you share the bread, discuss together where you might see the bread of every day breaded or sown with whom we share a meal with others.

Jesus’ spirit of love comes to life between us together this week.

Something to think about, talk about, or do

April 30 – Followers of the Way


April 23 – It’s True
John 20:19–31

Read John 20:19–31 in an age-appropriate Bible or story Bible, or the story “Questioning Thomas” on p. 120 of SeasonsFUSION (copies available from your church office).

Something to think about, talk about, or do
After Jesus’ death, the followers of Jesus gathered together in a room and locked the doors. They heard that Jesus was alive in a new way. This news filled them with joy. But they, too, showed love in ways that made others angry. So the followers were worried they might get in trouble, like Jesus, because they were friends with Jesus. Then something surprising happened. Jesus appeared within the community and shared a spirit of peace with them. When Jesus left, the spirit of peace remained and the community was able to continue sharing Jesus’ love with others.

Together this week
Jesus shared a spirit of peace with the community of followers.

■ Bring to mind the different ways people share peace today, such as holding up two fingers, shaking hands, or saying “Peace be with you” in worship.

■ Talk about ways how can you share peace and remind one another that Jesus’ spirit of peace is with you.

Prayer
May we know Love with us always and may peace enter our hearts with every breath we take. Amen.

Activities for connecting during Lent
If your group or family is looking for some ideas for connecting with one another or with new friends this season, consider the following:

• At the beginning of Lent, create a poster or smaller drawing representing a 40-day journey. You might draw a road divided into 40 segments to represent each day (think of a board game with different spaces). You can also use a calendar. Select different days for specific Lenten practices related to fasting, prayer, penance, repentance, and giving. Examples: “Pray for patience today when someone gets on your last nerve,” “Ask someone you know you’ve hurt for her/his forgiveness,” “Fast from one meal today and give the money you saved to a charity.” You might not fill every day but come up with at least four or five practices for each week. These can get more challenging as you go along, or you might repeat a practice once each week. Make copies for everyone in your family or group or display this where everyone can see it. Another option – individual group or family members might make their own unique calendars.

• Think about people or situations that are in need of God’s love and care. Write prayers for these people or situations on long strips or triangles of cloth or coloured paper and create prayer flags to hang around your room.

• In an effort to simplify, give away things you don’t need. Give everyone in your family or group one (or more) garbage or grocery bag and ask them to fill these during Lent. You might add a specific social justice theme to your giving (for example, give away items of clothing that were made in countries where there is a proliferation of child labour in sweat shops).

• Eat simply this Lent and commit to cooking and/or consuming food that you’d consider “minimal” compared to your normal meals. Here are a few ideas: Commit to eating a simple soup and bread dinner two–three (or more) times each week. Fast from fast food and takeout this Lent – prepare your own meals and your own lunch. Only cook/eat foods that are in season (maybe only what’s available at your local farmer’s market). If any of these seem too daunting for 40 days – try one day each week. You might also add a practice of “giving” to eating simply and prepare twice as much food as you need for a meal and share it with another family or someone in need in your congregation.
Easter

The purple of Lent does not last forever. Easter arrives, dressed in white and gold, and with a flurry of Alleluias! We celebrate with the disciples that Jesus is alive in a new way, and we move toward Pentecost when we welcome the Holy Spirit. The experience of Easter and the days that follow are at the same time personal and communal. Jesus has individual encounters with some of his disciples after the Resurrection, but he encourages them – and all of his disciples – to go and share his message of love, justice, and peace with the whole world. As the disciples go about laying the foundation of the early church, Jesus urges them to remember his commandments, gather in unity, and lean on the Holy Spirit as a guide and a partner in the work of sharing the Good News of the kingdom of God.

Together this week:

- Look for the joy of the Resurrection that’s around you. Signs of love alive are all around us, Alleluia!
- Life is continuously made new, Alleluia! Love does not die, Alleluia!
- Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Prayer:

Love does not die, Alleluia! Life is continually made new, Alleluia! Signs of love alive are all around us.

Prayer:

“Look for the joy of the Resurrection that’s around you.”

Prayer:

Love does not die, Alleluia! Life is continually made new, Alleluia! Signs of love alive are all around us.

Prayer:

“Look for the joy of the Resurrection that’s around you.”

Prayer:

Love does not die, Alleluia! Life is continually made new, Alleluia! Signs of love alive are all around us.

Prayer:

“Look for the joy of the Resurrection that’s around you.”

Stories for this Season of Easter

Read John 20:1-18, an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

April 16 – Yes!

John 20:1–18

Read John 20:1–18 in an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

Prayer:

Yes!

John 20:1–18

Read John 20:1–18 in an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

Prayer:

Yes!

John 20:1–18

Read John 20:1–18 in an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

Prayer:

Yes!

John 20:1–18

Read John 20:1–18 in an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

Prayer:

Yes!

John 20:1–18

Read John 20:1–18 in an age-appropriate Bible or story about Easter.

Prayer:

Yes!
Planning

Things to keep in mind this week...

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

- Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7
- Psalm 32
- Romans 5:12–19
- Matthew 4:1–11

Planning ahead...

Liturgical colour:
violet/purple

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino

March 2017

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April 2017

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Lent i
And So It Begins

Life is full of movement – sometimes toward something new, sometimes away from something bad, but always an adventure. The readings for this week could be seen as inviting us into an adventure that will last throughout the Season of Lent. Each of the weekly focus passages – primarily from the gospel of John – may be familiar to us, but they contain a sense of surprise and adventure for those in the stories themselves, as they find certainty in the midst of uncertainty.

Focus scripture: Matthew 4:1–11
This week’s reading from the gospel of Matthew tells a story of the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus is led by God’s spirit into the wilderness to be tested. Wilderness is a place of seeking, journeying, and struggling with the possibilities. It is a powerful image in the Hebrew Scriptures: the people of Israel and the prophets Elijah and Elisha all had wilderness experiences that forced them into choices and decisions. It is as if Jesus is faced with the same tests as the people of Israel when Moses led them out of Egypt.

The role of the devil here is much like the role of Satan in the book of Job – a tester, rather than an inherently evil being. In fact, Jesus addresses the devil as Satan. The temptations have a strong sense of challenge – almost an “I dare you” quality.

It seems to be a war of words, using the Torah as a weapon; but the questions are vital. Satan appeals to self-interest: “If [or ‘since’] you are the Son of God…you can do what you like.” Jesus replies with the principle, “It is written.” The Torah, the way of living with God, is the touchstone.

Each temptation or test Jesus faces increases in complexity, from the physical needs of hunger in the wilderness, to the possibilities of political and religious power in Jerusalem, to the mountaintop where one might meet with God. Should he use his power to feed himself, to draw people to his cause by working miracles, or perhaps use undue influence to bring change? Jesus relies on the grace of God to rebuff Satan and to choose wisely.

Often, when we are setting out on a journey or beginning a new project we find ourselves facing choices. How do we respond? How do our choices influence the outcome?

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7 is a story about the beginnings of humankind’s relationship with God. The lectionary has taken out some major portions of the reading, perhaps most importantly the main point – that because of the behaviours of the man, woman, and snake, life is difficult. Woman have pain in childbirth (and in ancient times often died) and men have to toil long and hard hours simply to survive. The story was probably not meant to be as pivotal as later theology made it, but rather was presented to explain some of the harsh realities of life.

Psalm 32, a penitential psalm, explores our relationship with a loving God who forgives sin. Happiness is found in forgiveness, and the psalmist encourages us to trust in God for our safety and fulfillment.

In Romans 5:12–19, Paul writes of the relationship between sin and grace and of the difference between Adam and Christ. Yet the climax of the passage is not to tell us that sin is rampant, even universal, but rather that grace, offered by Christ, is universal. Jesus allows us to start life anew, to begin again, because the “righteous requirements necessary for life are met for everything through the righteous act of one person” (5:18 Common English Bible).

We may not know where we are going, but we are invited to set out – to begin the adventure that is Lent. We do so knowing we can challenge temptations we might face, knowing that despite our mistakes God is still with us, and that grace is greater than sin. How supported do these things make you feel as you embark on this season?
Reflecting on the Word

Connecting with life
Some people love to start new adventures, and others approach them with a little more trepidation. No matter how we generally approach such things, however, there is always a certain degree of anxiety based on the things that we do not know, on the uncertainties that every new situation presents to us. Think about a time you have undertaken something new.

Did you find yourself spending time “in the wilderness” to prepare?

Read the poem “Reclaiming Wilderness.”

Where have you found life, hope, or comfort in the dark, the desert, or the wilderness?

Scripture
Matthew 4:1–11 The setup to this story is an intriguing challenge.

How do you respond to verse 1?

Do you think God’s spirit sets us up to be tested or challenged?

Note that Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights – thought by many scholars to be a Hebrew euphemism for “a long time.” Whether we take it literally or not, the point is that Jesus is in the wilderness for a lot more time than this brief encounter with the devil would require.

What other things do you imagine Jesus might have faced during his time in the wilderness?

The word translated “wilderness” can also be translated as “desert” – the point of the original word is a place that is desolate. Yet it is not always to be understood as a negative; sometimes it is good to “get away from it all.”

What do you think is the role or symbolism of the wilderness in this story?

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7 In Genesis 2:15–17 God tells the man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on that day “you will surely die.”

What might it mean to have this kind of tree in the middle of the garden (or more figuratively, in the middle of our living space)?

Note that the statement is not “or I will put you to death” but simply “you will die.” Do you think God is threatening here, or just stating a fact? What difference might that make?

History has injected a lot of meaning into this story that probably does not really have a place in it. For example, the Bible does not tell us that the woman tempted the man to eat the fruit, simply that she gave him a piece and he – presumably with full knowledge of what he was doing – chose to eat it.

Why do you think the story has been interpreted to place the blame on the woman?

Why do you think history has clung to the notion that the woman tempted the man?

Romans 5:12–19 In a similar way to the Genesis story, this passage from Paul has also been used often to extract an emphasis that the author probably did not intend.

If you read the text carefully, pretending to have never heard it before, do you think Paul is wanting to emphasize grace or sin?

Which do you think he believes is more important – that all have sinned, or that all can now receive grace?

Connecting scripture and life
Sometimes, when we head out on new adventures we receive a lot of advice from others. Sometimes, conflicts can arise, as people disagree in their advice, and/or the advice contradicts what we might have believed or thought.

How do we make sense of the options available to us?

How can we know that we are following the will of God as we enter a new adventure?

What can we do if we discover, along the path, that we are not in line with God’s will?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
Everyone knows what it is to start out on a new undertaking. Even young children are aware of some of the feelings associated with a first day at preschool, or the anticipation of a vacation, or other big event. For those of us who are older, we can readily recall the feelings we connect with starting any number of activities. What has that been like for you? What do you imagine that has been like for various people in your faith community? Are there major events in the life of the community at large that represented new beginnings for people?

The notion of a new beginning may not seem alien at the start of the Lenten season, but the feeling of actually starting an adventure might be. How might we see Lent as an adventure to which God invites us? What are ways we can express the sense of adventure, and keep it alive over the next 5 weeks?
And So It Begins

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one for the Lenten Light (see p. 11); three for prayers of confession, one (preferably a woman) for the reading from Genesis.
- Choose an option for hearing Matthew 4:1–11. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “A Day in the Wilderness” on p. 32. For the drama, arrange for three people to make still poses, with one wearing everyday clothes, one in sand colour, and one in purple/blue.
- Bring items for setting the worship space. Read the article “Lenten Light” (p. 11) and choose a pattern for lights that you will use throughout this season. Prepare this week’s light(s) and recruit a person to do the lighting.
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- For prayers of the people, provide leaf shapes with the words “When I am in the wilderness I think of…” (pattern for copying is in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). Make sure each person worshipping gets a leaf and a writing implement. Place a large barren “tree” at the front of the worship space – this could be an outline on paper, or a portion of a barren tree that has several branches. The tree should be large enough to include one leaf for each person present in worship.
- Set stations as described on pp. 33–34.

Press

Music Suggestions

Catch the Light!
Bruce Harding; p. 14
All Are Welcome
Marty Haugen; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9
Be God’s
Danielle Rose; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9
Still I Search for My God
Francisco F. Feliciano; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9
Be Still and Know
John Bell, Graham Maule; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6
Me Alone
Traditional Jamaican
A Light Is Gleaming
Linnea Good

At the opening of worship, the special Lenten light(s) should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on “Lenten Light” p. 11 for more information on this project, which will continue throughout Lent. After the lighting, the person doing the lighting says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and then departs.

Call to worship

ONE: Come into the wilderness. Come to this place away from the world.
ALL: We come to find ourselves ever more in the presence of God.
ONE: Come, as Jesus did, and rest a while.

All: When we rest, we find ourselves refreshed and renewed.
ONE: Come, knowing that wilderness is not a place to be feared, but a place to be enjoyed.
ALL: We come to find ourselves in this place.
ONE: Come into this sacred place, and let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Loving God, today we begin our Lenten adventure, a time of anticipation and wonder, yet always overshadowed by the reality of the cross. We come to this season hoping that we might hear again in the stories of scripture truths about your love for your people, and find ourselves renewed in faith. Amen.
Worship Outline • March 5, 2017

Prayer of confession
This could be led by one voice, or three different voices could read the various temptations.

Leader: The Bible tells us of three temptations Jesus endured in the wilderness. Each time, he rejected them, and found himself strengthened by that process. Let us now take some time to ponder these temptations, and how they apply to our own lives, that we too might find ourselves strengthened.

One: Jesus was challenged to turn stones into bread. He was invited to take the easy way out, and he chose not to do that. When are we tempted to take shortcuts, at the expense of others, or at the risk of injustice, or in the knowledge that it is against God’s will? Let us think on this, and offer it to God. (Pause.) We do not live by bread alone, but by every word spoken by God.

Two: Jesus was challenged to throw himself off a high place, trusting that God would rescue him and prevent him from coming to harm. When we do tempt fate, or place ourselves in harmful and difficult positions, trusting simply that God will rescue us? (Pause.) Do not test your God.

Three: Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world if he would turn from God, and worship the tempter. When are we tempted to turn away from God, to turn towards ourselves, and worship our own success? (Pause.) Let us worship God alone.

Words of affirmation

One: Know that, just as Jesus resisted the temptations that came to him in the wilderness, so God will help us resist temptations if we but turn to God in honesty and openness. Do so, and know that you are forgiven.

All: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

You might have someone read this brief introduction to the story: History has done a lot with the stories of the first man and woman that are recorded in Genesis 2 and 3. Most importantly – and perhaps most tragically – we have injected into the text many pieces which are not there. It is often assumed, or proclaimed as truth, that the woman entices the man to eat the fruit, or that she tricks him. Yet that is not a part of the story – only an assumption, based on little. Later, in chapter 3 the man blames the woman, and the woman blames the serpent, but the reality of it is that they each know they have done something wrong; the key element here is not that one is more guilty than the other, but that both want to pass blame on to others. This is a part of the human condition – that we look for scapegoats. How sad that a story that teaches us that simple truth has been used to scamper millions of people, for this story has often been used as a condemnation of women. Hear it again in a new light, and let it speak to you anew. Follow with a reading of the text. It would be wonderful to have it read by a woman.

Moving into the focus scripture

Sometimes the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness takes on lots of other connotations. We might imagine the Satan having horns and carrying a pitchfork, or we hear Jesus’ statements in flowery, religious terms, and we lose sight of part of the simple reality: this is a person, being tempted by real things. And yet they see through them and move beyond them. Think on a time when you were tempted to do something that you knew you did not really want to do and yet which enticed you. What did you do? What strengthened you? What weakened you?

Matthew 4:1–11

Option: Use the song “Me Alone” (traditional Jamaican) as a simple call/response song to frame the reading from the gospel. Sing it once or twice before the gospel text, and then once or twice again after.

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “A Day in the Wilderness” on page 32.

Dramatic reading Have three people take up a still pose, allowing time for the people to reflect. Person 1: dressed in everyday clothes, Person 2 dressed in sand-coloured clothes, Person 3 dressed in blue/purple clothes.

Matthew 4:1, 2

Person 2 leads or beckons Person 1 towards the front of worship space.

Matthew 4:3–4

Person 3 faces Person 1 with a welcoming smile, with outstretched hands as if offering a gift.

Matthew 4:5–7

Change position or direction or stand on raised area or box.

Matthew 4:8–10

Change position or direction again.

Matthew 4:11

Person 1 takes centre stage with drooping head and shoulders and Person 2 places arms round Person 1’s shoulders in comforting way.
After the focus scripture
Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Catch the Light” as people gather together again (p. 14; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2).

Prayers of the people
Distribute leaves with the words “When I am in the wilderness I think of…” on them (unless these were already made available as inserts in the worship bulletins). Invite everyone to take a few moments to think of how they might finish that sentence. Are they in the wilderness now, wanting to be rescued? Do they believe the community, or nation, or humanity is in the wilderness, and needs to be transformed by something? Are there people who are sick, or hurting, or grieving? Invite them to write these prayer concerns on their leaves and then to come forward and tape them to the tree – bringing the “wilderness” to life with our prayers. When all have done this, a worship leader might offer the following prayer:

As Jesus went to the wilderness to be alone with you, loving Creator, so when we find ourselves in wilderness, in desert, in lonely and seemingly destitute places, lead us to turn to you. May we find you in all the places of our lives: in places of joy and hope, and in places of despair and heartache; in times of wonder and imagining, and in times of anxiety and fear. Help us to know that, wherever we are, and whatever is going on in our lives, you hear us, and you respond to us – and above all that you love and care for us. Amen.

People could be invited to each take a leaf home after worship and pray for the concerns listed on it during their weekly prayers.

Prayer of dedication
Take these gifts we offer, loving God, and use them for your work. Take our very selves – our hopes, our dreams, our plans, our wonderings – and use them, too, to make your world a better place. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Bless**

**ONE:** Even in times of temptations,
**ALL:** God provides guidance and strength.
**ONE:** Even when we do things wrong,
**ALL:** God does not stop loving us and forgiving us.
**ONE:** Even when we are in the Season of Lent, moving towards Good Friday,
**ALL:** still there is light, and the promise of Easter.
**ONE:** So go into the world – and into this season – filled with thanksgiving for the God who never abandons us, no matter what, and know that God will be with you always.
**ALL:** Amen.
Reclaiming Wilderness

It’s time to reclaim the wilderness
   I think
to revisit it and recognize
the life that is there.

Too often I have heard people
   I have heard myself
say that the desert is a lifeless place,
that it is full of despair and hopelessness,
a place of desolation and the ending of things.

But when I sit there
   when I pause from my everyday life
   and just sit there
I find it teeming with life,
filled to overflowing with little mysteries
I might otherwise overlook.

I think the biblical people had it right
when they used one word
for wilderness and desert: both places that
   in our modern, busy, proper world,
we have forgotten, ignored,
tried to escape from,
tried to insulate ourselves from.

But it’s time we revisited them for,
like the dark of night,
there is so much life to be found there,
and hope,
and newness.
It is in the night
   in the desert
   in the wilderness –
when I let go of me –
that I can truly grab hold
of the one who made me.

Donald Schmidt © 2016
A Day in the Wilderness

Based on Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus and the disciples were sitting around the campfire one night.

“You know,” one of them said to Jesus, “you never really told us how you started your ministry.”

“Yeah,” said another one. “You said you were off in the wilderness for a while. What was that like?”

“Let me tell you,” Jesus replied.

“I went to the wilderness to think. You know how sometimes it’s good to get away from others, to have some time alone with God? Well that’s what I did.

“While I was there, I went without food for a while, so I could focus all my thinking on God. After a while, I got pretty hungry! And I heard a voice telling me I could turn some stones into bread.”

“Did you do it?” one of the disciples asked. “After all, you can do some pretty amazing things.”

Jesus smiled. “Yes, I can do some amazing things. But I thought: turning some stones into bread would only last for a fleeting moment. What I really needed was what I had gone out to the wilderness to get, and that was the presence of God. That was much more important than bread.

“Then, I heard the voice a second time. It said, ‘If you really trust God, jump off this cliff. God will save you.’ But I thought, no, it’s silly to put God to that kind of a test.

“And then I heard the voice one last time. ‘Leave God behind,’ it said. ‘Leave God behind and just look out for yourself; you’ll do better.’”

Jesus paused for a moment. “And you know, that was just what I needed to hear. Because I had gone to the wilderness to be with God, and in that moment I knew that I needed God. I needed to put God first in my life, or I just wouldn’t get anywhere. So that’s when I left the wilderness – and went to have something to eat!”

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “A Day in the Wilderness,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions
1. Listen to the story “A Day in the Wilderness.”
2. When do you find comfort in being in the wilderness, or a quiet space?
3. Write or draw a favourite place that is like the wilderness for you.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples
The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Mandalas
Materials copies of mandalas from an adult colouring book (or sourced from the Internet), a variety of colouring implements such as pencil crayons, markers, pastels; copy of the directions displayed where all can see
Note: try to provide a variety of simple as well as more difficult mandalas

The practice of reflecting
Directions
Jesus spent time in the wilderness to reflect and be alone with God. Many people find drawing mandalas a helpful way to meditate and spend time with God.
1. Choose a mandala and colour it. Remember, any pattern or combination of hues is great!

Suitable for all ages

Lenten activities
Materials sheets of paper, pens, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of getting closer to God
Directions
Over history people have given something up for Lent as a way to draw closer to God. Others have taken things on, such as acts of justice or kindness, to draw closer to God.
1. Make a list of some things you might do to draw closer to God during the 40 days of Lent.
2. You don’t need a list of 40, but see what kinds of things you can come up with.
Some ideas might be:
• going for a walk
• taking some food to someone
• donating some time to the food bank, or other organization
• planting a tree, cleaning up a park or street
• skipping dessert and giving the money saved to a charity
• making a new friend
• reading the Bible
3. See what other things you can come up with. Take your list home and use it to inspire you to do some things in Lent to draw closer to God.

Suitable for all ages
Door hanger

**Materials** resource sheet “doorknob hanger” copied onto heavy paper/card (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD), colouring implements such as crayons, markers, pencil crayons, pastels, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of taking time with God**

**Directions**
Sometimes we like to have some time alone in our own space, just to think – kind of like Jesus did in the wilderness. Make a doorknob hanger that you can hang on your door to let others know you are taking some time alone with God.

1. Decorate a doorknob hanger. Take it home and hang it on your door when you want some time alone.

Sand art

**Materials** sand tray/box, plastic sheet or mat, trowels, small rakes, small jug of water, driftwood, shells, stones, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of connecting**

**Directions**
Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness where he thought about making wise choices in life. Sand art and sand/or Zen/dry landscape gardens can be fun to create, and are both meditative and healing.

1. Use the sand tray and objects to create sand art, or a sand/Zen garden, as you think about Jesus finding his way in and through this wilderness experience.

In the news

**Materials** Saturday’s newspaper(s), paper, pens, pencils, votive candles, sand or water tray, matches, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of growing community**

**Directions**
People going through times of difficulty and hardship sometimes refer to their experience as “wilderness times.” This station provides an opportunity to offer support to those in this situation.

1. Read one or two news items; reflect on the people whose lives have been affected in this report.
2. Write a prayer that expresses these concerns.
3. Pray your prayer on your own, or with others in the group, lighting a candle if you wish.
4. Ensure that candles are extinguished before leaving this space and keep matches in a safe place.
5. Take the article and prayer home with you and continue to keep the situation in your thoughts and prayers. Consider how you might express your concern in a practical way, such as writing a letter of support or sympathy, signing a petition, or writing to a politician or council member.
### In the Wilderness

**Based on Matthew 4:1–11**

It was early in the morning. Up in the trees, birds were singing.

Outside the house, a dog barked.

In the carpenter’s shop, a man hammered some nails into wood.

Outside, women were getting water from the well.

Jesus liked to hear all these sounds, but one morning he needed a quiet place to think.

Jesus stayed out in that quiet place for a very long, long time.

Jesus knew that God was with him.

Jesus knew what God wanted him to do.

And Jesus knew he could say “no” when he needed to.

Soon Jesus was ready to go back to the noisy, busy village.

Jesus knew that God was with him in the village, just as God had been with him in the quiet place.

And God is with us, too!

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**Lenten Calendar**

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Lent is 40 days long and 6 Sundays. The Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent. This calendar can help you mark off the days until Easter. Use crayons, markers, or pencils to fill in the first four squares, or you might use stickers on each square. Beginning on Monday, fill in one square for each day, but resting from Lent on Sunday (the picture).
Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness thinking about what God wanted him to do. While he was there, he might have seen on the ground, in the distance, or in the sky. Add them to the picture.
Planning

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalm 121
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17

Liturgical colour: violet/purple

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

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Glimpses of Grace

A man in Hawaii was lost at sea, alone, in a boat. When he made it back to shore after several days afloat, he exclaimed that he found his way back by watching at night – the sky was filled with stars, but the pure darkness ahead he knew was land, and he moved towards it. Too often we reject the dark as a place where life can be revealed and yet, for Nicodemus, it is a meeting with Jesus at night that offers him the chance of transformation.

Focus scripture: John 3:1–17

Most of the focus passages through the Seasons of Lent and Easter this year are from the gospel of John. It is an interesting gospel, for it is written to be quite metaphorical. This does not at all mean that the stories are not historically factual, but only that the writer was far less concerned with that than with making a point. For example, in today’s story about Nicodemus visiting Jesus at night – the night is hardly incidental, but undoubtedly is full of meaning.

Nicodemus, a learned scholar, a man who studied and thought he knew the Jewish law, goes under cover of night to visit Jesus. “We know you are a teacher who has come from God,” Nicodemus declares. Yet the fact that he has visited at night can suggest he is unsure.

Jesus challenges him with several new images: one must be born again (or anew, or from above – the Greek is enticingly ambiguous). Does this mean only once? The text does not imply that, and so we are left wondering if Jesus rather means we can start over (the meaning of “repent”) many times, that rebirth is something that happens frequently with God.

Secondly, Jesus points out that God’s spirit/wind/breath (again, the Greek is ambiguous) blows where it will – we cannot stop it, nor can we see it, but we certainly see and know what it does.

Lastly, Jesus points out that he must be lifted up, just as Moses lifted up a snake in the wilderness. In that story, the people of Israel were told to look at the image of a snake, the thing they feared and which was destroying them, as a means of overpowering it. Perhaps, Jesus is suggesting that by facing even his persecution and death, we can overcome death and find new life. If we looked at symbolic crosses on churches and in other places as being representations of a method of torture and execution, this story perhaps comes home in a new way.

The closing verses are almost too well-known in our culture, and are sometimes used in a contradictory way to what would seem to be their intent. The statement that whoever believes will have eternal life does not imply that those who do not believe will not have eternal life. This wonderful statement of inclusion of all who follow Christ must never be seen as condemning those who do not.

The idea of being something more comes through in Genesis 12:1–4a wherein Abram and Sarai (later identified as Abraham and Sarah) are blessed by God, and in turn are a source of blessing for all Earth’s families.

Psalm 121 suggests we need not look elsewhere for strength and protection, but rather look to God’s spirit which is within us. In verse 7 the word sometimes translated “life” is understood more as “soul” as if the writer is saying, “they can hurt my body, but they cannot have my soul.”

In Romans 4:1–5, 13–17 Paul points out that it is through the mystery of grace and faith that we receive God’s blessing; it is almost as if it comes to us in the dark of night. Or, to look at it another way, when we dare to empty ourselves, we can become filled.

Sometimes it is in those moments when we are most timid that God reveals new insights to us. It is when we dare to open ourselves to uncertainty that God provides answers. What does it feel like to admit that you do not have all the answers? What does it feel like to step out into the dark, wondering what God might have in store for you?
Reflecting on the Word

Connecting with life
Wilderness can be a wild place filled with brambles, tangled branches, and wild animals. It can also be a desert, endless sand seemingly devoid of life. “Wilderness” can also happen in the middle of the ocean. Look at the image *Fish Boat with Net*.

- Do you find this image comforting or disturbing?
- Imagine for a moment that you are on that boat. Would you like to stay, or would you want to head for shore?
- If you were heading for shore, what might help guide you?
- What if the navigational tools you are used to using were not available to you – what else might you use?

Scripture
*John 3:1–17*
In all this week’s readings, people seem to get glimpses of grace, but only by venturing forth. Nicodemus goes out at night to meet with Jesus.

- What do you think is the reason Nicodemus went out at night?
- What might Nicodemus have been wanting to learn?
- How do you think Jesus’ answers might have sat with Nicodemus?
We encounter God’s love and grace through Jesus. Faith invites us to make that affirmation our own. Place yourself in the shoes of Nicodemus.

- What questions or affirmations would you bring to Jesus?
- In what ways have you experienced birthing to new life, or life from above?

“John 3:16” is often displayed at sporting events and other public venues, which would suggest that it is being shared as an amazing statement of good news for all people. However, some have taken from the text an opposite meaning, hearing it say “those who do not believe in Jesus will not have eternal life.”

- How does this verse take on a different meaning when read with John 3:17?
- How can this be good news for all people?
- Where in these two verses do we glimpse grace?

*Genesis 12:1–4a* and *Romans 4:1–5, 13–17* Our faith ancestors responded to God’s call to venture into the unknown, setting.

- What do you think might have drawn them to leave the old and venture into the new?
- What helps you to trust in God’s promises and grace and respond to the call to embrace new opportunities?
- What does “righteous through faith” look like to you?

Connecting scripture and life
When we step out, we can find glimpses of grace (God’s undeserved favour).

- Are glimpses enough for you, or do you need more?
- How can mere glimpses sustain us, in the world in which we live?
- How can we, as individuals and as church, help those glimpses of grace to grow?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
What sustains us on our journeys? What is it that can help us get through the day? What if you only had a crumb to eat, and you were starving, would you eat it?

Sometimes we face those kinds of questions in various ways – we are not sure what it is that sustains us each day. Yet obviously there are millions of things that do. One of these is God’s grace, which scripture reveals in many forms. Yet we may not always be overwhelmed by an abundance of it – sometimes it is a mere glimpse, a tidbit.

The scriptures this week help us see that sometimes answers are incomplete, sometimes instructions are incomplete, sometimes we do not get all the information we might like. And yet somehow it can be enough, at least to start out, and to grow in trust that God will continue supporting us on our journey. Know that, however great or small, glimpses of grace can lead us to ever more grace.
Glimpses of Grace

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: a candle lighter for Lenten Light, one for the words of affirmation, a group to perform the motions for the reading from the Psalms.
- Choose an option for hearing John 3:1-17. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Nicodemus, the Night Visitor” on p. 44. For the dramatic reading arrange for up to three readers (Nicodemus, Jesus, and Narrator (optional), and props as appropriate. You might also arrange for some “disciples” to form a tableau.
- Bring items for setting the worship space: the lights you are adding (according to the pattern you have chosen from the article “Lenten Light” on p. 11). Arrange to have two chairs for the prayer of confession.
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Set stations as described on pp. 45-46.

Music Suggestions

- Catch the Light!
  Bruce Harding; p. 14
- Strength for the Journey
  Michael John Poirier; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9
- I Want Jesus to Go with Me
  Traditional African-American; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6
- Like a Candle
  Craig Mitchell; Seasons Songbook, vol. 3
- Here I Am, Lord
  Daniel L. Schutte
- This Little Light of Mine
  Traditional African-American
- What Wondrous Love Is This?
  American folk hymn

At the opening of worship, the special Lenten lights should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on p. 11 for more information on this project, which continues throughout Lent. The person doing the lighting then says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and departs.

Call to worship

ONE: I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?

ALL: Our help comes from God, maker of heaven and earth.

ONE: God will not let us slip or fall. Our protector will not fall asleep on the job.

ALL: Indeed, our protector never sleeps or rests.

ONE: God is our protector, as close as our very shadow.

ALL: Let us worship our Creator!

Opening prayer

God of darkness and of light, we dare to venture out into the unknown – to come to you in this time of worship even though we know that the future is always uncertain.

We come to this place knowing full well there are a thousand other things we could be doing. But we have gathered here out of love for you, because you first loved us, and because we know that, when we spend time with you, life can make sense in new and exciting ways. Inspire us in this time, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Prayer of confession

This guided meditation imagines us sitting by Jesus as Nicodemus did. Place two chairs facing each other and invite people to imagine sitting in one chair with Jesus in the other. If possible, dim the lights.

Jesus, here I sit by you – the night around us – and I find myself shaping many questions about my life and my times and my living in this world. You say I cannot enter your realm without being born anew. Yet I confess the ways I cling to the habits and the patterns that keep me from living and sharing my life to the full. Hear me, my Saviour, hear me. (silence)
Worship Outline • March 12, 2017

I hear your words: “What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.”

Hear me, my Saviour, as I confess the ways I live by the flesh, and turn away from your Spirit, following the ways of the world, rather than the greater truth of your way.

Hear me. (silence)

I hear your words that God loved this world so much that you were sent to live among us.

Hear me, my Saviour, as I ask for your forgiveness, trusting the love that opens the way of life to me for your compassion is greater than any of my sins.

Hear me.

(silence)

Words of affirmation

Offer these words from a place where the reader is heard but not seen. Introduce the words of affirmation by saying, “Hear the words of Christ.”

Thank you for talking with me; I have listened to your questions and concerns. You have heard my words and my word to you is this: you are forgiven.

For I have been sent into the world not to condemn it but to save it and I have come to save you, my child.

Receive this forgiveness and may my spirit birth new life within you.

Opening the word

Psalm 121

Read the psalm with a liturgical group performing the motions.

I lift up my eyes to the hills
(bring hand to brow as if looking into the distance),
from where will my help come? (shrug shoulders)

My help comes from God
(raise palms upwards),
who made heaven and earth
(roll hands over each other and then open out in welcoming gesture).

God will not let your foot be moved
(stamp feet).

The one who keeps you will not slumber
(bend head to side as if sleeping).

The one who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep
(stretch arms out).

God is your keeper
(hold hands together tightly),
your shade at your right hand
(place open hand upwards on right).

The sun will not strike you by day
(hold both hands over head like shade),
nor the moon by night
(hands in same place but close eyes).

God will keep you from all evil
(hands out, palms facing front).

God will keep your life
(hands like a cradle).

God will keep your going out and your coming in
(gesture going out and coming in movements),
from this time on and forevermore
(hold hands out as if embracing everything).

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(an adaptation using the New Revised Standard Version Bible,
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Romans 4:1–5, 13–17 is especially powerful when read from THE MESSAGE.

Moving into the focus scripture

The story of Nicodemus and Jesus is a story about questions. Nicodemus is a learned man, who probably thought he had most of the answers. Yet the very method he and his peers would have used to study and learn would have been to ask each other questions. Thus it is hardly surprising that he would go to Jesus with questions.

Imagine that you are Nicodemus, and you have come to see Jesus. You knock on the door, and he beckons you to come in. And he tells you that he will answer one question; what might your question be? (Allow time for people to reflect on this, and/or to discuss it with the person beside them.)

John 3:1–17

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Nicodemus, the Night Visitor” on page 44.

Dramatic reading A small amount of drama can add great power to John 3:1–17. Someone portraying Nicodemus comes to visit Jesus at night. If you have access to dramatic props, you might have a door in place with Jesus and some disciples on one side in full light and Nicodemus in less light arriving at the other side. Without a door, this could simply be done with Nicodemus entering from one side. Nicodemus and Jesus could simply read portions of the scripture passage as appropriate. You could have a narrator to read the additional portions although these might not be necessary if things are presented dramatically. A key piece would be the facial expressions and body responses, which you will want to discuss and prepare ahead of time. Is Nicodemus disturbed or relieved or overwhelmed by Jesus’ statements? How does Jesus welcome this stranger – with open arms, or warily? Is Jesus being sarcastic or gentle in calling Nicodemus a great teacher of Israel? And so on. Such preparation will greatly enliven the presentation.
Alternatively, you could arrange to present it more than one time, with different responses each time, and base the sermon on exploring the story’s significance depending on how it is read/interpreted.

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Catch the Light!” as people gather together again (p. 14; recording is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2).

Prayers of the people

Ever present God,
we come to you in prayer
for people of our world who find themselves
in places and moments of transition.
For those who journey into unknown and unseen places,
saying “yes” to you without knowing where the path may lead,
we pray that their feet will not slip.
For those who dare to step out into the night,

Prayer of dedication

We bring you gifts, O God, knowing that they are but a small offering. Yet we know you can take what we offer, and use it in amazing ways to do amazing work. Amen.

Go out onto your journey.
Know that the sun will not hurt you by day,
or the moon by night,

Special Days Commentary

March 12 – Purim (Judaism)

Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jews of ancient Persia from a plot to destroy them, as detailed in the book of Esther. The word purim means “lots” or “dice” because Haman cast lots to determine on what day he would wipe out the Jewish community of Shushan. However, the intervention of Queen Esther and her Uncle Mordecai prevented this from happening.

The first day of the festival is spent fasting, to recall how Esther and the Jews fasted for three days. As night falls, Jews gather to read the book of Esther. People dress in costumes, and hold noisemakers. Each time the villain Haman’s name is mentioned, the congregation erupts with great noise. Special foods – particularly a triangular-shaped pastry called Hamantaschen, or Haman’s pockets – are eaten as part of the great celebration.

The next morning, friends exchange gifts with one another and send gifts of charity. The scroll is read again during the worship service, and each time the villain Haman’s name is mentioned, the congregation makes noise.

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

to venture into uncertain places to be with those who are in need,
we pray for your presence also.
and that they will always know your care.
For those who dare to give voice to their questions,
to demonstrate a desire to know more,
to challenge voices that deride, put down, and condemn,
who will not accept partial or unsuitable answers,
we pray they are reminded
that their souls are in your very hands,
and that no matter what happens,
they are still yours.
Protect us on all our journeys, O God,
that wherever we go we may find glimpses of grace. Amen.

Prayer of dedication

We bring you gifts, O God, knowing that they are but a small offering. Yet we know you can take what we offer, and use it in amazing ways to do amazing work. Amen.

March 13 – Holi (Hinduism)

This day is a Hindu Spring festival – a carnival occasion featuring bright colours, pilgrimages, and bonfires.

March 17 – St. Patrick

Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was born in 390 CE in England. At the age of 16 he was taken as a slave to Ireland. Six years later, he escaped and returned to England. He studied theology in France and was ordained a priest. Patrick later returned to Ireland as a bishop, travelling throughout the island preaching the gospel.

The patron saint of Ireland, was born in 390 CE in Ireland. At the age of 16 he was taken as a slave to Ireland. Six years later, he escaped and returned to Ireland. He studied theology in France and was ordained a priest. Patrick later returned to Ireland as a bishop, travelling throughout the island preaching the gospel.

Legends claim that Patrick taught the people about the Trinity by using a three-leafed shamrock, and that he drove the snakes out of Ireland. Patrick died on March 17, 460 CE, and this day is observed in Irish communities in many parts of the world with parades and merrymaking. In Ireland, however, the day is more solemn, and many people attend worship services.
How John Tells a Story

Craig Koester

John’s gospel tells the story of Jesus in ways that often seem simple on the surface.

Yet a closer reading reveals complexities that many preachers find daunting. People in the pew often like John’s gospel because it makes simple statements of the gospel message, like the one found in John 3:16. Yet the preacher reading through all of John 3 finds that the story takes twists and turns that make preaching a real challenge. There are tools that can help bring clarity to one’s reading and preaching on John’s gospel.

John’s gospel often uses expressions that have more than one meaning, and the choice is either/or. For example, when Jesus tells the woman at the well about “living water” (4:10), he uses an expression that can mean different things. In ordinary usage, living water is flowing water, like that found in a stream or spring, as opposed to the water stored up in a cistern. But in the theological sense, living water is a metaphor for what brings life in relationship with God. The woman tries to understand the expression in the ordinary sense of flowing H₂O, but that approach does not work. Instead, we must understand it as a metaphor for the gift of God’s Spirit.

There are also places in John where the choice is both/and. When Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Son of Man will be “lifted up” (3:14), he uses an expression that can mean being lifted up physically, like the serpent on the pole, and lifted up in the sense of honor or majesty. The point is that both meanings are true. For Jesus to be lifted up in crucifixion is the way he is lifted up in honor. The cross is where the Messiah’s kingship is announced. Both meanings must be taken together. When preaching, it is helpful to identify both meanings and to bring them together.

Irony is a major feature of John’s gospel. It can be useful in preaching if it can be made clear. Working with a good definition of irony is a first step: Irony is when, on one level, something appears to be true; yet on another level, the opposite is true. The heart of irony, for John, is the contrast between appearance and reality. If the preacher can make this distinction clear, it can be helpful in proclaiming the story. For example, Nicodemus initially appears to know who Jesus is (3:2). But in reality, he proves incapable of understanding what Jesus says (3:9–10). The irony shows us who someone really is. Similarly, the man born blind initially appeared to be the sinner, since his blindness seemed to be punishment for sin. But in reality, sin is manifested in the blindness of unbelief, not in a lack of physical eyesight (9:2, 39–41). Irony adds “edge” to preaching if one can say, “This is how something appears” but from the perspective of the gospel “here is what is really going on.”

Imagery is one of the most powerful aspects of John’s gospel, yet it too presents challenges for the preacher. Some of the Lenten texts make use of images of light and darkness. Each of these images has multiple dimensions of meaning. Try thinking about the imagery as you would think about a shaft of ordinary light. Ordinary light has a spectrum of colors within it. When the light shines through a prism, one can see each of the colors more distinctly. This is also true of the imagery.

The gospel narrative is like a prism in that it allows us to see some of the hues within an image. For example, note how light and darkness are linked to other contrasting pairs in 3:16–21:

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<th>Light</th>
<th>Darkness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Perishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Unbelief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not judged</td>
<td>Judged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Hate</td>
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The pairing in John 9 is similar but not identical. There, seeing is associated with life and faith, whereas blindness connotes unbelief.

The images of light and darkness have a kind of immediacy that can be appealing. They suggest all of the following meanings in ways that we can picture. The specific ideas associated with the image give clarity to the message. The challenge is to give some clarity to the imagery without flattening it out. This can be done by creating word pictures that are analogous to those in the gospel. We might depict scenes in which those who like the darkness do so because they think it shields them from judgment. A thief works during the night so as not to be seen. Those who have nothing to hide want to work in the day. The point is that the light of divine love has come in Christ. The light has come to draw us to God, like we are drawn to the light of a new day. To turn away from the light would be like retreating into the darkness.

The gospel does not use this imagery simply to describe the human situation. The imagery is designed to move people toward renewed faith. The categories of light and darkness are not static. Rather, the purpose of the sharp contrasts is to say that life is different from death, love is different from hate, and faith is different from unfaith. Jesus has come as the light to draw us into God’s light.

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Courtesy of Professor Craig Koester.
Used by permission.
Nicodemus, the Night Visitor
Based on John 3:1–17

Nicodemus had always been a confident man: sure of God, sure of his faith, sure of himself and sure of the answers – after all, wasn’t he a great teacher?

But now, he was confused: unsure of God, unsure of his faith, and unsure of himself; and he wasn’t even sure of the questions, let alone the answers.

It had all started when he met Jesus, a young man from Nazareth. Jesus had caused a bit of a scene in the temple, upsetting the tables of the moneychangers and upsetting the religious leaders. The ordinary people seemed to hang on his words, listening to his teaching and believing that he was someone special because of the way he helped and healed people. Nicodemus hung around at the back listening; firstly out of curiosity, then out of real interest, and now in confusion.

So, Nicodemus decided to visit Jesus and find out more. He waited until it was night, for when else was there time and quiet to engage in good conversation? That way, fewer people would see him, too.

As he knocked on the door, Nicodemus wasn’t quite sure of what question he was going to ask. So, when he actually sat down with Jesus, he thought of a statement instead.

“Teacher, we know you must be from God. No one could do the wonderful things you do unless God was with him.”

Jesus smiled. “I tell you honestly, no one can see God at work without being born from above.”

Nicodemus was still confused – maybe it was time for a question!

“I’m becoming old! How could I possibly be born a second time?”

“Really,” replied Jesus “to be part of God’s realm you need to be born of the Spirit as well as flesh! It’s a bit like the wind, blowing here and there. You don’t know where it comes from or where it is going, but you hear it and see it all right. The realm of God is like that: you can’t see where it starts or where it will end but you can know you are part of it.”

“How can it be?” Nicodemus puzzled.

Jesus responded with a twinkle in his eye. “Is this one of Israel’s great teachers without an answer to these questions? Truly, I can only tell you what I have known and seen. You teachers find it so hard to accept. What if I tried to tell you about the God-life beyond? Only the Son of Man has been there. That’s where he has come from and where he is going. Our stories of faith are models for life, encouraging you to trust in the Son of Man. Do you know how much God loves the world and the people in it? So very, very much. So much as to give what is most precious, to share the very God-life with those who have faith. God didn’t send the Son of Man to put people down, but to give them life and wholeness! God’s right in front of you! Have faith!”

Nicodemus felt overwhelmed as he listened to Jesus. He couldn’t think of a question or an answer. But his heart was filled with a surge of hope and peace, trust and wonder; he realized how little he knew about God, and how much he wanted to know. He felt like a beginner, as if he was starting all over again. Then everything seemed to click into place – was this what Jesus mean by being born anew?

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story
Materials recording of today’s story “Nicodemus, the Night Visitor,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling
Directions
1. Listen to the story “Nicodemus, the Night Visitor.”
2. When do you find comfort in being in the wilderness or a quiet space?
3. Write or draw a favourite place that is like the wilderness for you.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Art

Materials  paper, tempera paint, drinking straws, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Note: if young children will be doing this craft, cut a small notch at the bottom of the straw to avoid accidental swallowing of paint.

The practice of creativity

Directions
Jesus told Nicodemus that God’s Spirit – like the wind – blows where it wants; we cannot see it, but we know it is there.

1. Place a small amount of paint on the paper.
2. Using the straw, blow the paint and watch it move over and around the paper.
3. Try using different colours, and notice how they interact.

Prayer flags

Materials  current newspapers, strips or long triangles of coloured paper or cloth, and permanent markers or fabric pens, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of prayer

Directions
1. Think about ways you sense the Spirit is moving in this nation/local community/church, using the newspapers for particular ideas if you wish. Alternatively, identify people and places who need to know God’s love and care.
2. Write prayers for these people and situations on the coloured strips or triangles.
3. Bring the completed prayer flags to the sanctuary to be read, or offered in silence for the prayers of the people.

Younger children  Think about places where you see God’s love in the world (or people who are showing God’s love) and draw or write thank-you prayers.

Poetry and prose

Materials  paper, pencils, copies of “Blown by the Spirit” (In the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION, copies of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of reflection

Directions
1. Read “Blown by the Spirit.”
2. Try to imagine the feelings and uncertainty, the hope and the desperation, of fleeing homeland and becoming a refugee. Think of how any in your community who may have arrived in these circumstances are supported by you and/or your church. What things of value might refugees leave behind? What might they gain?
3. If your own family have been migrants or refugees, how have you found a new identity in a different land and culture? Which traditions have you retained from your family’s culture?
4. How might you tell the story of God’s hand in your family history?
Making butterflies

**Materials** old magazines (especially ones with bright pictures), scissors, pipe cleaners, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Suitable for all ages working together**

The practice of recycling something into art

**Directions**

Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be born again. It’s kind of like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. This craft creates butterflies out of old magazines, so the idea of recycling is another way to think of being born anew.

1. Choose two magazine pages to use—preferably ones with bright colours on them.
2. Fold one page in half (bottom set of wings), and cut around the corners to make them round.
3. On the second page (the top set of wings), fold the top down on an angle and cut off the bottom strip, so that you end up with a square.
4. Unfold both pieces of paper.
5. Fold the bottom set of wings up from the bottom, accordion style.
6. Fold the top set of wings accordion style, but start at one of the corners and work diagonally.
7. Take a pipe cleaner and wind it around the middle of the two sets of wings a couple of times, to hold them together, and then form the ends of the pipe cleaner into antennae at the top.

**Younger children** may need assistance with cutting and folding.
Seasons of the Spirit™

SeasonsFusion Lent • Easter 2017

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Children’s Activity Leaflet • March 12, 2017

Create

Question Box

Nicodemus came to Jesus with questions. I wonder what new questions Nicodemus had as he talked with Jesus? Each day we might have new questions, too. Make a question box and when you have a question about God, or Jesus, or the way things are, write your question and pop it in your question box. Invite people to dip in and take one of your questions and together talk about your wonderings.

To make your box you will need

- a box with a lid, such as a shoe box or gift box
- pieces of colourful paper
- glue, scissors, writing pad, pen/pencil

Directions

1. Tear the paper into different shapes and sizes and glue over the box and lid – in a mosaic pattern.
2. Ask a grownup to cut a hole in the lid.
3. Place the lid on your box and place a pad and pencil next to the box.
4. Write your questions and “post” them in the box.
5. Set aside special time during Lent to talk with others about your questions.

Story Time

A Nighttime Visit

Based on John 3:1–17

Nicodemus stepped outside. It was getting dark, and all over the village people were lighting lamps in their homes. Some were beginning to climb the steps outside their homes to the roofs where they could sleep in the cool night air. The sun was setting and stars were beginning to glimmer in the velvety sky.

Nicodemus' steps slowed down as he walked around the corner. What would Jesus say, he wondered? Would Jesus be surprised to see him?

As Nicodemus reached the door, he could see Jesus sitting inside.

“Nicodemus, my friend,” said Jesus, “please come in and sit down.”

Nicodemus hurried to sit by Jesus' side.

“Jesus,” Nicodemus said, “I have so many questions to ask you! I know that you are a teacher of God’s love. I would like to learn more about what it means to live in God’s way.”

Jesus smiled. “Then let’s start, Nicodemus. What do you want to know?”

Nicodemus took a deep breath. Then Nicodemus began to ask Jesus about the things that he wanted to know. There were so many things to learn! And Jesus answered every question. Sometimes Jesus asked Nicodemus questions, too.

Jesus and Nicodemus talked and talked and talked. And then Jesus said to Nicodemus, “I have come to show God’s love to everyone. You can show God’s love to everyone, too!”

Soon it was time to return home. There would always be so much more to learn about God’s love and this wonderful teacher, Jesus. But, for now, Nicodemus knew that he wanted to show God’s love every day, every way, and to everyone!
Nicodemus learned about becoming a new person.  
A caterpillar becomes something new.  
Using markers, pencils, or crayons, decorate the stages of a butterfly’s life.
Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Things to keep in mind this week...

Planning ahead...

Liturgical colour: violet/purple

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Exodus 17:1–7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1–11
John 4:5–42

March 2017

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Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Lent 3
St. Joseph

Death of Oscar Romero

Feast of the Annunciation

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Finding Refreshment

Some psychologists believe that our natural attraction to “bling” – to jewellery and other shiny objects – comes from our primal search for sources of water. In a broad landscape, they appear to be small, shimmering and shining sites, not unlike the shimmering of a piece of jewellery. Water is necessary for human life; within the faith community we readily make the connection – as did Jesus – that our God is a similar necessity in our daily living. Today’s readings call us to remember that.

Focus scripture: John 4:5–42

Samaria was a region south of Galilee and north of Judah. The hatred between Samaritans and Jews went back to when the northern kingdom of Israel was overrun by Assyria. The Assyrians resettled Samaria with foreigners loyal to them, along with Israelites not taken captive. While Samaritans continued some Jewish practices and beliefs, they were viewed as outsiders to Judaism. This separation grew over the centuries. By the time of Jesus, the enmity between Jews and Samaritans was severe.

The gospel of John includes several long narratives, of which this is the first. Verse 4 is revealing: “But he had to go through Samaria.” Other routes were available for Jews to bypass Samaria. So for John to say Jesus had to go through Samaria suggests other reasons. At the head of that list would be Jesus’ ministry among those considered to be “outsiders.” Jesus enters Samaria, initiates conversation with a Samaritan woman, and accepts hospitality from the Samaritan community.

Such reversals continue through the story. In the synagogues of that day, men and women were seated in separate locations. Here at the well, Jesus and this woman sit and speak together about the things of God. Jesus asks this woman for water. In Psalm 95, God provides water; in Samaria this woman is placed in the role of providing water to Jesus. Even more surprising is the way in which Jesus and this woman engage together in theological discussion. She knows her traditions. She awaits the coming Messiah.

Wordplay occurs around the meaning of water. The woman misunderstands Jesus. She confuses Jesus’ offer of “living water” with “running water.” There are no streams here, only a well. Jesus turns the discussion from literal meanings to deeper ones. Living water is Jesus’ way of speaking about the gift of “eternal life.” As in John 3:16, “eternal life” has to do with the gracious possibility of life lived in the presence of God. Such life begins now in the recognition that Jesus is the gift of God (verse 10), who offers such life-giving water to our spirits.

The passage ends on the theme of witness. There is first the woman’s witness to her community. Her expression of both doubt and hope (“He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”) leaves room for the community to respond. And respond it does. Their confession of Jesus as the “Saviour of the World” offers one of the clearest statements of faith in the entire gospel.

Water and word interplay in our other lections. Exodus 17:1–7 begins with a need of water that finds answer in the promise of water. Psalm 95 offers a warning word – a caution against repeating the error of those Israelites who “tested” God in the wilderness. In Romans 5:1–11, the word of salvation takes form in God’s “pouring” love into our hearts.

Life is full of reversals: the Israelites complain that there is no water, and God provides it to them, in abundance. The woman at the well comes simply to fetch a bucket of water for her household, and yet Jesus offers her new life. Paul points out that, if we were brought close to God by the death of Jesus, how much closer will we be brought through his life? When have you been surprised by the reversals of life? When have you found reversals happening to widen the circle and include others?
Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life

■ When was a time you were needing water – perhaps during a long hike, or on a hot day? What did that feel like?
■ Think of the many ways you used water in the last day or so. How readily do you take it for granted?

Scripture
John 4:5–42
There was animosity between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day. Yet here Jesus is speaking with a Samaritan. Moreover, it is a Samaritan woman and Jewish rabbis would not speak with women in public.
■ Imagine you are this woman having a conversation with Jesus. What are you seeking? What do you receive?
By asking the woman to draw water from the well for him, Jesus takes one considered to be an outsider and places her in the role of a provider – just as God provided water for the Hebrews in Exodus 17:1−17.
■ Who is pushed to the margins by the laws, written or unwritten, of your community?
■ Who are surprising providers in your community?
The conversation between Jesus and the woman regarding her husbands, where Jesus points out she is living with a man to whom she is not married, is sometimes used to suggest that Jesus is condemning her. Yet there is nothing to indicate that in the text. Furthermore, Jesus continues speaking to her, as if he is giving tacit approval of her situation. Or maybe it does not matter.
■ Why do you think Jesus does not appear to make a fuss about this situation?

Materials
If you have access to a small desktop fountain, turn it on and let its sounds soothe you and run in the background of your thinking and reflecting.

Jesus immediately takes the conversation to a different level, discussing the need to worship God in spirit and truth.
■ What does the role of the woman become toward the end of the story?
■ What seems to be the long-term impact of this conversation?
■ What effect does this conversation have on the disciples?

Exodus 17:1–7 The Bedouin know how to find water in the desert. They know that God’s nourishment and resourcefulness is always around us; you just need to know where to look.
■ Where have you found God’s presence and supply during a barren time?
■ What are some tools that assist you in finding God?
■ How do you experience God providing refreshment in the midst of daily living?
■ Imagine you are the people of Israel in the Exodus story. What are you seeking? What do you receive?

Connecting scripture and life
In light of the metaphor of Living Water (John 4:5–42) and the gushing rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:1–7)
■ How do the expressed needs of your community impact you?
■ What answer might you, individually and as a church, want to give to each need that has been given voice?
■ When have you been thirsting for a spiritual presence in your life?
■ Metaphorically speaking, how can you, individually and as a church, help provide refreshment for those who are thirsting in your community?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

Sometimes the answers God gives us are right before us. We may find ourselves complaining and whining, only to discover that God has already answered our prayers.

Similarly, we may think we are excluded, shut out, not a part of the conversation or the party of important people, and yet something happens to indicate that in fact we are included. God has declared that we belong, and no one can take that away from us.

The scriptures this week remind us that, even when we are seeking, and thirsting, and believing ourselves in need, God may already be providing what we are wanting. In the midst of the everyday, we can discover that God is providing the refreshment we so desperately desire.
Finding Refreshment

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one for the Lenten Light, one to pour water into a bowl during prayer of confession, two for Opening the word.
- Choose an option for hearing John 4:5–42. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Jesus Loves Everyone” on p. 56. For the meditation, a woman actor might carry a large water jug/pitcher or bucket to present “Living Water” (p. 55).
- Bring items for setting the worship space: the Lenten lights you are adding (according to the pattern you have chosen from the article “Lenten Light” on p. 11), water jug/pitcher and bowl for prayer of confession.
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Set stations as described on pp. 57–58.

Prepare

Music Suggestions

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<th>Music Suggestion</th>
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<td><strong>Catch the Light!</strong></td>
<td>Bruce Harding</td>
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<td>Keri Wehlander</td>
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<td>Marty Haugen</td>
<td>Vol. 7</td>
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<td>Damien Halloran, Maria Millward</td>
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<td><strong>Guide My Feet</strong></td>
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<td><strong>As the Deer Pants for the Water</strong></td>
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At the opening of worship, the special Lenten lights should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on p. 11 for more information on this project, which is continuing throughout Lent. The person doing the lighting then says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and departs.

Call to worship

**One:** Come, let us sing a song to our God!
**All:** Let us raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation!
**One:** Let us come before God with thanks;
**All:** let us shout songs of joy to our Creator.
**One:** For God is great, ruler over all Creation.
**All:** Mountains and oceans are in God’s hands.
**One:** Come, let us worship God!

Opening prayer

**One:** In the driest desert, O God, you provided a rock that held a fountain for those who thirst.
**All:** Come, gracious God, and fill us with your love.

One: In a helpless world, at the right time, you sent Jesus to die for the ungodly.
All: Come, gracious God, and fill us with your love.
One: In a place of quarrelling, you provide an answer that holds life for those who hope.
All: Come, gracious God, and fill us with your love.
One: In a place of wonder, you provided living water, for those who met there.
All: Come, gracious God, and fill us with your love. Amen.

Prayer of confession

Arrange for someone to pour water into a bowl after each stanza; in a larger worship space, arrange to have this sound amplified with a microphone so it can be heard throughout the space.

When we quarrel, hear us, O God.
When our faith in you is thin, and we turn on each other, we thirst for unity.
Worship Outline • March 19, 2017

Forgive our words that hurt, O God, and may we drink again from the water of life.
(Pour water into a bowl.)

In our prejudice, hear us, O God.
When our insecurities bring on a fear of others, we thirst for trust.
Forgive our narrowness of grace, O God, and may we drink again from the water of life.
(Pour water into a bowl.)

Engage

Words of affirmation

ONE: Hear these words from our Creator God:
I am the water of life, come to me all who are thirsty and you will drink of the living waters and never be thirsty again.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

Exodus 17:1–7 and Romans 5:1–11

These passages take on new meaning when they are interwoven in the reading. Invite two readers to read the passages, interspersing verses are suggested here:

Exodus 17:1–2a (through to the people’s request for water)
Romans 5:1–2
Exodus 17:2b–3
Romans 5:3–4
Exodus 17:4
Romans 5:5–7
Exodus 17:5–6
Romans 5:8–10
Exodus 17:7
Romans 5:11

Moving into the focus scripture

In all of today’s readings there is a sense that God provides for us even when we do not ask, or at least even when we do not seem to be deserving. What does this say about us? What does this say about God?

John 4:5–42

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Jesus Loves Everyone” on page 56.

Meditation Use the meditation “Living Water” on p. 55 either in lieu of reading the scripture, or directly after it as a reflection on the text.

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Catch the Light!” as people gather together again (p. 14; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2).

Prayers of the people

ONE: Knowing that God is aware of all our needs let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into love.

ONE: Aware of global, human needs on scales often too vast to comprehend, let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into compassion.
(silence)

ONE: Attuned to the heartache of the earth, used and rendered in so many violent ways, let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into peace.
(silence)

ONE: Alarmed by growing divisions between rich and poor, yet clinging to our own resources, let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into righteousness.
(silence)
ONE: Disturbed by anger and tensions that seem to grow unchecked between people of different races, communities, backgrounds, let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into justice.

(silence)

ONE: Disillusioned by the energy needed to keep the church alive and relevant in an ever-changing world, let us boldly say:

ALL: We are listening. Journey with us into faith.

(silence)

Reconciled and restored to God, go out into the world in peace, to share the living water that God gives to us so freely, and in so doing, to restore others to hope and life.

Amen.

Prayer of dedication

Your love for us, gracious God, is overwhelming: in the midst of our complaining, you pour out abundant water for us. Now we respond in kind, giving you what we can for the work of your people. Take our gifts, and take us, and use us to share living water with others. Amen.

Bless

Reconciled and restored to God, go out into the world in peace, to share the living water that God gives to us so freely, and in so doing, to restore others to hope and life.

Amen.

Special Days Commentary

March 19 – St. Joseph

Joseph is mentioned only a few times in scripture, and all his appearances come at the beginning of Jesus’ life. The last time he appears is in Luke’s account of the trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years old, leading to traditional speculation that he died before Jesus was an adult.

Matthew’s gospel depicts Joseph as a good man who trusted God in the face of a difficult and scandalous situation. Joseph’s acceptance of Jesus as his own child established Jesus in the descent of David, thus fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the house and lineage of David.

Joseph also models a radical kind of justice when he refuses to follow the biblical mandate to kill Mary for being pregnant with what he can only assume is another man’s child (see the commandment in Deuteronomy 22:23–24). Instead, Joseph chooses not only to “allow” her to live, but marries her, thus keeping her from being a disgraced member of society.

March 21 – Naw-Ruz (Baha’i)

Naw-Ruz, the Baha’i New Year, is a holiday for members of the Baha’i faith, and they do not go to work or to school. There is no set ritual for the holiday, but many people will observe the day with feasting and special prayers.

March 25 – The Feast of the Annunciation

Falling exactly nine months before the celebration of Christmas, since the late fourth century the church has observed this date – officially the Annunciation of our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary – and recalled the angel Gabriel’s announcement in Luke 1:26–38. In England the day is known as Lady Day, and during the Middle Ages it marked the beginning of the new year.
Living Water

A meditation on John 4:5–42

A woman comes forward, perhaps out of darkness/shadow. As a prop she might carry a large water jug or bucket, although this is not necessary.

I always go to get my water in the middle of the day – it’s easier that way. You see, the other women of the village go in the early morning, before the sun is up and it becomes so unbearably hot. But I got tired of them shunning me, of them whispering behind my back, or scurrying away on the first sight of me (slight pause).

You see, I’m not the most popular woman in the village. Okay, that’s an understatement – most people cannot stand me (slight pause).

I’ve had five husbands. Good men, I might add. All older, though, and they have all died. People blamed me, which is rather silly, but there you go. People it seems are always looking for an excuse to blame someone else for something they don’t understand.

I live with a fellow now – a nice man, gentle and kind. We’re good friends, good companions. We’ve never really talked about marriage; it just sort of happened that one day he was living with me, and it seemed good and right. But for most people that was the last straw, and pretty much no one has said a word to me since. That’s why I gather my water in the heat of the day.

So it was in the middle of the day that I came and encountered a man sitting at the well – a Jewish man at that. I tried to ignore him and just get my water, but he began to talk to me. Of all people – a man and a Jew besides – asked me for a cup of water.

I was so taken aback I blurted out, “Why on earth would you, a Jewish man, ask me for a drink?”

“If you knew who I was,” he continued, “you would ask me for some living water.”

I didn’t understand at first, and I noticed he had no bucket, so I pointed that out. “You don’t think you’re better than Jacob who gave us this well, do you?”

“I offer something else,” the man continued. “I offer living water – the water that comes from God, the water that grows inside you and bubbles up and spills over in acts of love and justice. The water that leads you to eternal life.”

“I’d love some of that water,” I replied. I wasn’t quite sure what it was, but I knew I wanted it! “Give me a drink of that, please!”

“Go get your husband,” he said to me, and I was crushed. I dropped my head.

“I, I don’t have a husband,” I said, feeling instantly ashamed. Obviously he was just like the others. I waited for some humiliating comment. But instead he spoke again.

“I know that,” he said with a gentle smile. “It’s okay”

“You must be a prophet!” I exclaimed. And I added, “we worship here in this place, but you and your people, they say we must worship God in Jerusalem.”

“Some day people will come to realize that it doesn’t matter where we worship God,” the man said. “Some day we will realize that God is a spirit, that God is everywhere at all times. So we can worship God anywhere, and always. It doesn’t matter where we are.” He paused for a second, and looked straight at me. “It doesn’t matter who we are,” he finished.

“I know the Messiah will come some day,” I said. “And things will become clear.”

“I am he,” the man said.

Just then, some other men approached, and they began asking him why on earth he was talking to me, and I was so overwhelmed by everything he had said, I just left my bucket and ran back into the village. But I was overwhelmed with what he had said, and I found myself stopping people, shouting at them: “You’ve got to come and see this man,” I said, “he’s amazing! He offered me living water, and he says he’s the Messiah, and he says incredible things about what it is to worship God, and to be God’s people!” And you know what? I don’t know if it was my excitement, or just the surprise that I would dare to talk to folks, but they all seemed to want to come and hear him. And he talked for a long time. And we were changed (slight pause).

We were all changed. (Woman slowly turns and exits.)
Jesus Loves Everyone
Based on John 4:5–42

Jesus was travelling through a country called Samaria and came to the town of Sychar. It was a hot day and Jesus was thirsty. He knew that there was a well there; an old well that the people called Jacob’s Well because Jacob had dug it many, many years before. Jesus sat down by the well to have a drink and sent his disciples into the town to buy some food. Before long a woman came to get water. Jesus asked her if he could have a drink as well. The woman was surprised because she was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew. Jews and Samaritans were not good friends and wouldn’t usually talk to one another.

“Why are you talking to me?” she asked. “I’m a Samaritan, and you’re a Jew.”

Jesus looked at her and smiled. “I could give you some very special water, living water.”

The woman looked at him and laughed. “You can’t do that, you don’t have a bucket. How can you give me water?” Jesus replied, “You can drink water from this well, but after a while you will be thirsty again. If you drink the water I give you, you will never be thirsty again.”

Suddenly the woman understood what Jesus meant. Jesus was not talking about water as we know it, something we can drink, but about the Spirit of God. God’s Spirit is very much like a drink of water, fresh and satisfying.

“I would like some of that water,” the woman said. She sat there with Jesus and they talked about many things. How different groups of people worshipped God, and about God’s forgiveness for all people, no matter what they have done.

While they were talking, the disciples returned with some food. They could hardly believe what they saw – Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman. They said nothing.

The woman left them and ran home to tell her friends what had happened. They were so pleased that they invited Jesus to come and visit and talk with them. Jesus stayed with them for two days, talking about God and that God’s promise of love and forgiveness is for everyone.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story
Materials recording of today’s story “Jesus Loves Everyone,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling
Directions
1. Listen to the story “Jesus Loves Everyone.”
2. Use the materials provided to show what happened when the woman went back home and told her friends and family about meeting Jesus.
3. Have you ever made friends with someone who seemed very different from you? You may want to draw a picture of them on the back of the paper and write a message to say thank you for this friendship.
Stations • March 19, 2017

**Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples**

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

**Water bottle holder**

**Materials:** for each person: 2 socks (they need not match), water bottle, string, beads, scissors, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of creativity**

**Directions**

Water is a precious gift from God that we need each day. Make a water bottle holder so you can easily take water with you, and reuse a bottle instead of wasting others.

1. Cut the cuffs off 2 different socks.
2. Place one cuff over the bottle. Tie it closed at the bottom with a long (about 1.5 m/4 ft) piece of string.
3. Cut slits at the top of the socks and pull the string up and through the slits.
4. Place some beads on the string and then tie the strings closed.
5. Turn the second sock inside out and tie the cut end closed with string, then turn it right side out.
6. Pull the second sock over the first sock.

**Fish Boat with Net**

**Materials** poster *Fish Boat with Net* (also available in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of reflecting on art**

**Directions**

Water is vital for daily living, and yet it can also be overwhelming.

1. Look at the image of the *Fish Boat with Net*.
2. What mood does it give you?
3. If you were on that boat would you be comforted or scared?
4. What helps you feel comforted when you are out on the ocean or a lake?
5. What are some ways you have felt God near you when you were beside some water (such as the ocean, a lake, river, or stream)?
6. If there are others with you, discuss your responses to these questions and your thoughts about the picture.
Thinking about water usage

**Materials** copies of resource sheet “How Much Water Do You Use?” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION), pens, pencils, paper, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of being stewards**

**Directions**
The people of Israel received water in the wilderness. When Moses tapped a rock, water gushed forth. Unfortunately, today water is a much scarcer resource than we often like to admit.
1. Read the information on the sheet.
2. As a group, discuss the items on the sheet, and talk about ways you can save water.
3. On your own, write down some ideas you can think of to help save water.

Suitable for all ages working together

Water

**Materials** cloth, jug/pitcher of water, bowl; paper cups and art materials such as marker, glitter glue, stickers for younger children; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of prayer**

**Directions**
1. Think about a time when you were desperately thirsty. Where were you? How was your thirst quenched? How did the drink taste?
2. What do you think Jesus meant by “living water”?
3. Who might be in need of “living water” today? Share your response with others present if you wish.
4. Pour some of the water into the bowl as a prayer for those in need of living water; you may like to use words as well, prayed in silence or aloud.

**Younger children** Decorate paper cups with the art materials. Add a phrase or sentence to the cup such as “Water for the thirsty.” Pour some water into your cup. As you drink you might think of, and offer a prayer for, someone you know who is in need of God’s refreshing love.

Suitable for all ages working together
Come and See!
Based on John 4:5–42

I have come to a well to get some water for my family. It’s hard work. First I have to put the bucket down deep into the well. Then I have to lift it out and pour the water into my jar.

One afternoon, when I was going to the well, I noticed that someone was sitting by the well. I didn’t know who he was but I could tell he wasn’t from my village. The man looked at me, smiled, and said, “Could you please give me a drink of water? I’m thirsty and I don’t have a cup.”

I was surprised that he talked to me, but I was happy to share my cup with him. I gave him a drink of water and then we sat down and talked together.

“Who are you?” I asked.

The man told me his name was Jesus. He began to talk about God and God’s love. “God loves and cares for everyone,” Jesus said. “You are very important to God.”

I could tell that Jesus was a one of God’s special teachers. He was so kind! Jesus told me many things about myself, things that only I know. I thought to myself, “Jesus really knows who I am!”

I began to feel God’s love all around me.

Way up high, way down low, and deep, deep inside me.

I was so happy that I wanted to share this good news. I left my jar by the well and ran all the way back to the town. I told everyone, “Come and see! Come and see Jesus!”
God’s spirit is very much like a drink of water, fresh and satisfying. Help the people find their way to water.
Planning

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: violet/purple

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

March 2017

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Lent 4
Mothering Sunday (United Kingdom)

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

1 Samuel 16:1–13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8–14
John 9:1–41

China, Hong Kong, Macao
Seeing with Heart

It can be astonishing the lengths to which we will go to discredit others. When we don’t understand someone or something, we can try with great gusto to put others down, or to deride their stories. Such is the case in today’s gospel reading, where, instead of rejoicing in a healing, the Pharisees delve into minute details, and the story is ripped apart. The prophet Samuel comes to anoint a king and it is only after considerable disappointment that the disregarded youngest brother is recognized. How different things are when we see from our heart.

Focus scripture: John 9:1–41

Blindness and other ailments were often viewed in ancient times as punishment for sin. The disciples of Jesus and the leaders who oppose him assume this. Biblical scholar Richard Rohrbough speaks of an ancient custom of spitting in the presence of the blind in order to protect oneself from the “evil eye.” Jesus transforms that act of disdain into one of healing.

Sabbath keeping was the most visible mark of practicing Judaism. Its weekly ritual of renewal reflected – even as it worshipped – the God who “rested” (translating the Hebrew shabath) on the seventh day of creation (Genesis 2:2). In this story, Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath creates the initial controversy (verse 16). At issue is what can or cannot be done on Sabbath. Many oral traditions had developed to provide guidance. “Kneading” was technically forbidden. Jesus’ making of mud (verse 6) could be viewed as such activity. The larger question involves Sabbath and healing. Has Jesus broken or kept the law by performing this act?

The healing creates division within the community. Neighbours divide over whether this is the same man they had known (verse 9). Pharisees divide over whether Jesus is from God, or not (verse 16). The man’s parents distance themselves from their son for fear of the religious leaders (verses 21–22). The divisions within the narrative hint at divisions between church and synagogue in the author’s time. Verse 22’s threat of expulsion from the synagogue can be heard as reflecting that later state of affairs.

The transformation of the one who is healed is not just from blindness to sight. Initially, he is a passive recipient of Jesus’ actions. The healed one becomes more active as the story goes on. By reporting what has happened, he becomes a teacher of theology to the teachers of theology. Eventually this healed one becomes a disciple of the one who healed.

The story begins with Jesus seeing this man. From that seeing comes healing. Later Jesus finds this man, and from that finding comes belief. The story does not end there. Jesus and the religious leaders speak. On the surface, Jesus’ words levy judgment. The leaders’ presumption of seeing is interpreted as indication of sin (verse 41). But is that not where the text began? Did Jesus not heal and restore sight to one presumed to be a sinner? The text leaves it open as to whether these leaders, and the rest of us, may yet find healing.

God’s sight and oversight are central in the other texts. 1 Samuel 16:1–13 affirms that God sees beyond the superficial and into the heart. Psalm 23 witnesses the psalmist’s reliance upon the watchful care of the shepherd. Ephesians 5:8–14 uses the language of light and darkness to speak of coming in Christ to faith and new life.

*****

God sees and works beyond constricted perspectives so that opportunities to restore and anoint are not lost. Do we see and act that way? Or does fear of breaking with the old – or being open to the new – blind us?
**Reflecting on the Word**

*Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.*

**Connecting with life**

Look for a moment at the image *Fish Boat with Net* and then turn it over. Reflect for a moment on what you saw, and what you might not have seen.

- What are some of the things you recall from the painting?
- How many people are on the boat?
- How many birds are in the air?
- Did you notice the lights on the shoreline?

The point of this is not to feel like you did not see the picture well, but only to realize that we see different things at different times. Look at the picture again.

- What do you notice that you did not notice before?

**Scripture**

*John 9:1–41* makes a series of contrasts – between physical blindness and spiritual blindness, between innocent ignorance and willful refusal to accept, between those who claim they know and those who recognize the truth.

- With which character in the story do you most identify? Why?
- What happens to your attitude when you identify with a different character?

Reflect on what it might have been like for the one who was born blind to have eyes opened, seeing things in new ways.

- If our eyes were truly opened to our community, where would we see love? Where would we see pain?

Encounters with God move us out beyond what we have previously thought. Jesus healing the one born blind did that for the religious authorities.

- When have you been pushed beyond what you once thought so certain, both in faith and in terms of what you believed about people? What was that like? What helped you cope with the change? What did you learn?

**Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving**

Sometimes we are looking so hard for the answers we want to find, we miss what is really there. So convinced were David’s family that he could not possibly be the person God wanted for ruler that they never thought to call him in from the field. One of the first things the man born blind saw was the bickering of key leaders in the community over whether he was really healed, and/or whether or not he deserved to be healed.

For many people in our world, these stories are very real. Too many people feel ignored, feel like “also-rans,” or find others arguing, as if they weren’t there, about their rights to exist and be present. It is in the face of this that we are invited to read and celebrate these scriptures this week. Let their strong voices come out, reminding us of the powerful truth of *1 Samuel 16:7*: “God doesn’t look at things like humans do.” We see what we want to see, but God sees all of us.

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**Materials**

*poster Fish Boat with Net (also available in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION)*

- How open are you to new ways of being?

*1 Samuel 16:1–13* God breaks the tradition within Hebrew culture by choosing the youngest son, David, to be king of Israel. God saw beyond the traditions, beyond a shepherd child, and saw the heart of a godly king.

- How far do we need to look beyond our prejudices to see as God sees?
- What would encourage us to look with “the eyes of the heart”?

*Psalm 23* describes God’s complete provision and care for people. As you reflect on this, consider:

- Where is your “green pasture”? What is your “valley”?
- When does your “cup overflow”? Where are you finding “God’s dwelling place” as you live Lent?

*Ephesians 5:8–14* Living a life exposed to the light of Christ also means living a life exposed to the commentary of others.

- How careful are we about the way we live? How do we make wise choices?

**Connecting scripture and life**

A couple was living in a small, remote community on the west coast of Vancouver Island. One day the community was rocked by the news of a single woman’s suicide. Some time later, the couple were relating the story to some relatives.

“...what is really there. So convinced were David’s family that he could not possibly be the person God wanted for ruler that they never thought to call him in from the field. One of the first things the man born blind saw was the bickering of key leaders in the community over whether he was really healed, and/or whether or not he deserved to be healed.

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Worship Outline • March 26, 2017

Seeing with Heart

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one for Lenten Light.
- Choose an option for hearing John 9:1–41. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Seeing Something New” on p. 68. For the dramatic reading that is in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD, arrange for at least 7 readers. This number will be added to, depending on how many readers you choose for “disciples,” and “townspeople.”
- Bring items for setting the worship space; Lenten lights (according to the pattern you have chosen from the article “Lenten Light” on p. 11).
- For “Moving into the focus scripture” prepare slips of paper with one of these names on it: Person born blind; One of the disciples; One of the Pharisees; One of the townspeople; One of the blind person’s parents. Prepare enough so each person can have one.
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Catch the Light!” (p. 14; recording available for purchase and download at http://even

Music Suggestions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Song Suggestion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catch the Light!</td>
<td>Bruce Harding, p. 14</td>
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<td>Come, Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Hilary Raimondo; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Anointing</td>
<td>James Maher MSC; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9</td>
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<td>Behold, I Make All Things New</td>
<td>John Bell; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6</td>
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<td>Without Seeing You</td>
<td>David Hass; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open My Eyes That I Might See</td>
<td>Clara H. Scott</td>
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<tr>
<td>God Is My Shepherd</td>
<td>Scottish psalter, adapted by Lavon Baylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Am the Light of the World</td>
<td>Jim Strathdee</td>
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At the opening of worship, the Lenten lights should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on p. 11 for more information on this project that continues throughout Lent. The person doing the lighting says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and then departs.

Call to worship

One: God, our shepherd, calls us to this place.

All: God leads us beside quiet streams, and into lush meadows.

One: Even in dark and difficult places, God never abandons us.

All: God pursues us to the ends of Earth, upholding us in love.

One: Come, let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Loving God, we have come here today to hear your word and let it change us. We have come to be refreshed by your presence and reminded that we are never far from you. Open our hearts to receive you, and to reach out to others in love. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Prayer of confession

Invite all to respond with “forgive us,” which is in bold face. For those times when we have been too blind to see what is going on around us, forgive us. For those times when we have turned away, preferring not to see realities that we are uncertain about, forgive us.
Opening the word
Psalm 23
The words to Psalm 23 are so very familiar to many, it can be helpful to hear it sometimes in a fresh and new way so that we can receive the meaning of the words. Consider using this version from THE MESSAGE (presented here), or another translation or paraphrase.

God, my shepherd!
I don’t need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.
Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I’m not afraid
when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd’s crook makes me feel secure.
You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
your cup brims with blessing.
Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

Moving into the focus scripture
Prior to worship, distribute slips of paper with one of these names on it: Person born blind; One of the disciples; One of the Pharisees; One of the townspeople; One of the blind person’s parents. Invite people to look at their slips of paper and imagine they are that person or group of people as the gospel story is being read. What do they hear? How do they feel about what transpires? They might take some time, after the gospel reading, to discuss these questions with the persons sitting near them.

You also may wish to remind people that this story was written by someone from within the Jewish community, and thus when they speak negatively of “the Jews” they are criticizing certain elements of their own people; this is not at all the same as someone outside a group labelling the entire group as bad.

John 9:1–41
Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Seeing Something New” on page 68.

Dramatic reading of John 9:1-41 from The Voice (VOICE) translation
Arrange for at least 7 readers/actors to present the dramatic reading that is the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD.

Note: The VOICE is a translation that arranges passages such as this one for dramatic reading. They also add some small portions to the text on occasion to help it read more clearly; such additions are always in italics.

After the focus scripture
Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Words of affirmation
ONE: Hear these words from scripture:
“God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but [God] sees into your heart.” So know, friends, that God sees into your heart, and knows that it is good. God forgives you all that weighs upon you, and sets you free to new and everlasting life.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Engage
After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Catch the Light!” as people gather together again (p. 14; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2).

Prayers of the people
We bring to the light of God’s love some of the many shadows in today’s world.
We pray for the leaders of our local and global communities, especially... (names) that policy and decision-making will be shaped by generosity and a care for others.
We pray for religious leaders and people, especially... (names) that they/we may recognize and work with the Spirit of God among them/us.
We pray for those who face life with different abilities living in a society designed for success and achievement, that all people may know themselves loved and accepted.
We pray for those who experience the darkness of depression and inner despair, naming in silence any known to us; we ask that they may know peace and restoration of mind and soul. (Silence.)
In silence, we think of the shadows in our own lives that need the healing touch of God. (Silence.)
O God, you understand the heart of the world that bewilders and perplexes us; you continue to extend your love to people when we run out of good will; the brightness of your love reaches the deepest places.
Hear our prayers, silent and spoken, and help us to be part of the answer to these requests. Amen.

Prayer of dedication
Loving God, giver of all things, as people alive to your goodness we offer these gifts and the talents of this community to the service of all our children within our neighbourhood and beyond, throughout our nation and our world. Amen.

Go out into the world in peace and joy, knowing that in all your turnings God will restore your soul, and follow you with goodness and mercy each and every step of the way.
Amen.
PSALM 23

Mommy holds my hand

The only way to paraphrase such a familiar psalm is to take a totally different metaphor that still conveys the wonderful sense of trust of the original. One image that came to me was a small child walking down the street holding its mother’s hand.

1 God is like my Mommy.
   My Mommy holds my hand;
   I’m not afraid.

2 She takes me to school in the mornings;
   she lets me play in the playgrounds and the parks;
   she makes me feel good.
   She shows me how to cross the streets,
   because she loves me.

3 Even when we walk among the crowds and the cars,
   I am not afraid.
   If I can reach her hand or her coat,
   I know she’s with me,
   and I’m all right.

4 When I fall down and I’m all covered with mud
   and I come home crying,
   she picks me up in her arms.
   She wipes my hands and dries my tears,
   and I have to cry again,
   because she loves me so much.

5 How can anything go wrong
   with that kind of Mommy near me?
   I want to live all my life with Mommy,
   in my Mommy’s home for ever and ever.

Looking back on a full life

During a memorial service, John Smith suggested that Psalm 23 could have been written by an older person, reflecting on a long and full life. The first line of verse 6 is adapted from “A New Creed” of the United Church of Canada.

1 God has walked with me; I could ask nothing more.
2 God has given me green meadows to laugh in,
   clear streams to think beside, untrodden paths to explore.
3 When I thought the world rested on my shoulders,
   God put things into perspective.

When I lashed out at an unfair world, God calmed me down.
When I drifted into harmful ways, God straightened me out.

God was with me all the way.

4 I do not know what lies ahead, but I am not afraid.
   I know you will be with me.
   Even in death, I will not despair.
   You will comfort and support me.

5 Though my eye dims and my mind dulls,
   you will continue to care about me.
   Your touch will soothe the tension in my temples;
   my fears will fade away.
   I am content.

6 In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with me.
   All through life, I have found goodness in people.
   When life ends, I expect to be gathered
   into the ultimate goodness of God.

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Blessed relief

After a day of chasing through shopping malls,
Psalm 23 took on a new significance.

1 God keeps a cool café. What more could I ask?
2 She provides a comfortable chair
   to take the weight off my weary feet;
   she puts up an umbrella to shade me from the sun;
   she serves me iced tea.

3 Though I have battled with the crowds at the bargain counters,
   though I have suffered the scent of too many sweaty bodies,
   I don’t care.

4 I know what’s waiting for me at the end of the day.
   An ice cream cone.
   It drips over the edges, and I lick it up gratefully.
   I close my eyes;
   the sound system plays the gentle chuckles of waves
   lapping on a shore.

5 I am content.
   I would love to sit here forever.
   In God’s cool café.

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God Is My Shepherd

I think of God as my shepherd
Who gives me all that I need;
   Who lets me lie down,
   On soft green grass,
   Beside a quiet stream.

I think of God as my shepherd,
Who helps me do what is right.
God helps me feel strong
When I’m weak and afraid;

When I’m crying
   For someone who’s sad.

My shepherd is glad when I’m happy,
   And gives me good things to eat.
   I know I’m invited
   To live in God’s house
   For all the days of my life.

Published by Wood Lake Books. Used by permission.
Seeing Something New

Based on John 9:1–41

One day, Jesus ran into someone who had been blind all their life. Jesus wanted to help the person, so he made some mud and rubbed it in their eyes. Then he said, “go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.”

Figuring they had nothing to lose, the person went to the pool – with a friend’s help – and washed their eyes. Incredibly, when the mud came off their eyes they could see!

Some other people saw this, and they were amazed. “Isn’t this that person who used to sit and beg?” they asked.

“Yes,” said someone else. Another person said, “Nah, it just looks like him.”

But the person said, “Yes! It’s me! That Jesus fellow, he put some mud on my eyes, and when I washed it off I could see!”

It so happened that the day Jesus did this was the Sabbath, and the religious leaders were upset. You weren’t supposed to work on the Sabbath. (Although some people thought they were upset simply because Jesus could do something they couldn’t.)

“This Jesus can’t be from God if he heals on the Sabbath!” they said.

“I don’t know about that,” said the person who used to be blind, but could now see. “All I know is that I can see now. I don’t know how he did it; all I know is that this morning I couldn’t see, and now I can!”

The religious leaders kept grumbling, trying to pretend it hadn’t really happened. “Look,” the person said, “what’s so hard to grasp here? I was blind. Jesus rubbed some mud in my eyes, I washed them, and now I can see. Obviously it’s a miracle!”

The religious leaders kept grumbling and arguing. The person quietly stepped away and said to Jesus, “I want to follow you.” And there was no mistaking that he saw the big smile that came over Jesus’ face as they walked off, leaving the others to continue their grumbling.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Seeing Something New,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Seeing Something New.”
2. Think of the most beautiful sight you have seen and use the materials provided to make a picture of it.
3. Then, without showing it, use words to describe your picture to someone else.
Looking in new ways

**Materials** cardboard tubes  
*Option:* items for decorating the tubes, such as crayons, markers, stickers; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of seeing things differently**

**Directions**
When we look at things differently, we can be amazed by what we see that we might not have noticed when we were looking “normally.” Similarly, sometimes we see limited things, and appreciate it more when we can look with both eyes.

1. Take a cardboard tube and, using it like a telescope, close or cover your other eye and look around at things.
   - What do you see?
   - How do things look different?
   - What might you see through the focus or lens of the telescope that you don’t see when you are looking “normally”?
2. You might want to decorate your telescope and take it home. Use it in other settings to look at things, and notice what you see.

**Using a microscope**

**Materials** invite someone with a microscope to bring it, along with a variety of slides with different, unusual things on them; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of seeing anew**

**Directions**
The Bible tells us that God does not look just at what is on our outsides, but that God looks deep inside of us as well. What might we see when we look inside?

1. With assistance, look at different items through the microscope.
   - Can you guess what you are looking at?
   - How does it look different?
   - What surprises you about what is inside certain things?

**Property analysis**

**Materials** newsprint and marker, letter writing stationery, pens/pencils, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**The practice of hospitality**

**Directions**
1. We do not normally “see” or perceive our own environment from the perspective of another. How might this church be perceived by:
   - children
   - visitors/church members who do not know your language
   - people who are sight-impaired
   - people who are hearing-impaired
   - wheelchair users
   - people dependent on a walking frame?
   In particular, you may wish to think about the facets of Sunday worship for one or more from this list – arriving by bus, car, taxi, on foot; finding a seat in the worship space; following the service; locating any room where there may be a children's program or station; reaching any area where refreshments are served; using the toilet/bathroom facilities. Is there anything that could be changed to make the space accessible for all?
2. List your ideas on the sheet of newsprint.
3. Pass your ideas to your church leaders or property committee.
Game
Materials Make a copy of the directions and place where all can see.

The practice of learning about one another
Directions
How much do we really know about each other? Play this game to find out.
1. Invite each person to take a few minutes to think of three things about themselves.
   Two of the things should be factual statements, and one should be made up. Make sure that the made up one is believable, or at least is no more bizarre than at least one of the facts.
2. Take turns sharing the three things about you, and invite others to guess which one is made up.
   ■ Are you surprised with the things you learned about each other?
   Younger children may need assistance to think up things about themselves.

Writing a psalm
Materials Bibles (if possible in a variety of translations); copies of “Psalm 23” (p. 67); paper and pens, or a large sheet of newsprint and marker; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of revisiting scripture
Directions
Psalm 23 is very familiar. What are some other images that could help it to come alive? A group could work on this together, or people could write their own versions of the psalm.
1. Look at versions of Psalm 23 in the Bibles, and on the resource sheet.
2. Brainstorm some ideas that could form your own version. For example, what are some images you could use for God instead of shepherd?
3. Once you choose that, other things may come to mind. For example, if you said “God is my basketball coach. God helps me jump reach the hoop. God lets me score even when the other team is bearing down on me” and so on.
   These psalms might be shared in worship, and/or printed in a church publication such as a newsletter or website.

Art
Materials coloured pens, crayons, paints, and paper

The practice of creativity
Directions
1. Use the materials provided to portray how the one born blind might have seen the world after Jesus had given him sight.
2. Young people and adults may like to ponder:
   ■ What do you feel God might be asking you to see that is around you in a new way?

Lenten reflection
Materials paper, pens, pencils, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of journey
Directions
1. Recall times when you have gained an insight into a situation, or seen someone you thought you knew in a new, more understanding way.
   ■ What helped this process?
2. Consider what you believe to be your own “blind spot.”
   ■ In what ways and in what situations could you be closing your eyes to God at work among us?
   ■ In what circumstances of life now do you feel “in the dark” and long for greater insight?
God’s Love Is for Every Day

(Tune: “Mary Had A Little Lamb”)

God’s love is for every day, every day, every day, God’s love is for every day, today and every day!

(Clap as each day of the week is said…)

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

(Jump up and shout…) Every day!

Every Day

Based on John 9:1–41

One day Jesus and his friends saw a blind person sitting by the side of the road. A blind person is someone who cannot see.

This man could not see the green trees, or the yellow sun, or the blue sky. He could feel his mother’s face when she kissed him, but he could not see what she looked like. He could feel his father’s prickly beard and strong arms when he hugged him, but he could not see his striped robe.

But he could hear. And one day he heard someone walking along the road. It was Jesus and the blind man could hear Jesus’ friends talking to Jesus about him!

Suddenly, the man felt Jesus spread a little mud on his eyes.

The mud felt cool and wet! Then Jesus said, “Go and wash off the mud in the pool.”

The man knelt down at the pool and washed his eyelids until they were clean again.

When he opened his eyes he could see!

He could see the trees, and the sun, and his house – and Jesus! The man could also see some surprised faces. Some people wondered why Jesus would heal someone on that day, which was a day to worship God. They thought that Jesus should heal on another day!

But Jesus said, “God’s love is for today and every day!”

Help people know that God’s love is for every day by singing this song, and asking them to sing with you.
Imagine this person has difficulty with seeing things. How might these people, objects and actions help? Use markers and pencils to decorate the page and add anything else that might help.
Planning

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: violet/purple

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Ezekiel 37:1–14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6–11
John 11:1–45

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

April 2017

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Lent 5
Palm Sunday (Orthodox)

Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore
Hope Against All Hope

There are disappointing moments in life, times when it seems as though there may be no hope. And then there are those times when we are, literally, beyond hope – times when it would appear that, no matter what, there is no going back. Both Ezekiel and John present stories this week that would appear to be the latter, situations where there is no possibility. In both cases, we are reminded that with God the impossible is, at best, a slight inconvenience. As Paul points out in Romans 8:11, “if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, [this same Spirit] will give life to your human bodies also...”

Focus scripture: John 11:1-45

Additional scriptures
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11

Focus scripture: John 11:1–45

The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead can stretch the limits of our believing. But getting hung up on whether or not the story took place as written can distract us from the great point of the story. We know that John presents us with stories that are not in the synoptic gospels, and which (such as turning massive amounts of water into wine at Cana) seem questionable. But John’s points are not confined by fact; they are about something much more important.

Regardless of the factuality of the story, about John’s point there can be no mistake: Jesus can restore life when all hope, when all possibility, is gone. The point is not whether Lazarus was literally dead for three days or not; the point is larger than that: Jesus Christ brings life into lifeless times. Surely that is a message that resounded greatly in biblical times, and resounds well for us today.

Jesus does not need to rush into the situation – Jesus is not bound by any sense that “if you get here on time you can help” – for the point needs to be made that what Jesus offers can be offered at any time, in any situation. Jesus is not just fixing individual problems; he is offering something much greater – new life.

Jewish understanding was that it took three days for a soul to completely leave the body; thus it is important to note that Lazarus has been dead long enough that there is nothing left other than a body decaying rapidly in the desert heat. No wonder Jesus points out that this is an opportunity for God’s glory to be revealed.

Ultimately this also brings on the greatest point of all: for those in authority, Jesus must be stopped, for other than killing him, there can be no stopping the amazing power of God that appears to exist in him. And this, John wants us to know, is what it is really about. The authorities believed they had to kill Jesus because it was the only way to try and stop this. Except, of course, as all the gospels – and the last 2,000 years – have amply shown, you cannot stop God. The work of God in Christ did indeed, and does indeed, continue. The brief time of Jesus’ death is a mere blip in the ongoing story of God bringing new life and hope into situations that seem well beyond it.

New life also seems impossible in Ezekiel 37:1–14. The Spirit of God leads the prophet to what reads like the site of a terrible battle. Bones lay scattered; death appears to have had the final victory here. To those in Ezekiel’s time who grieved the separation of exile in Babylon, did the images in this account serve as a metaphor for their own struggle to find renewed life as God’s people? When God’s people today feel weighed down by separation and death, what hope do we draw from this image? As in the story of Lazarus and in the story of Genesis 1, when God speaks, new life arises. The Spirit (in Hebrew, ruach means both “spirit” and “breath”) gives life to hope.

Paul, in Romans 8:6–11, writes that to live in Christ is not to live in denial of death, but to live with hope in the face of death. We are safe in the hands of God, who breathes into us the same Spirit that breathed life into dry bones. Daily, we are raised to new life. In that hope is our life and peace.

In Psalm 130, the psalmist cries out in despair, trusting in a love powerful enough to save. Such hope is also expressed by Martha, Mary, Ezekiel, and Paul. The psalmist’s cry for deliverance (life) is their cry, and ours.

In a world overpowered by racism, xenophobia, terrorism, and the like, it is easy to give up hope. It is easy to assume that the end, whenever it comes, will not be a pleasant one. It is precisely in the face of this that God challenges – almost dares – us to read the stories of new life and new hope. How can we give in when God is so loudly proclaiming life in the midst of chaos? How can we share with others the hope that oozes from passages like these?
Reflection and Focus • April 2, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Connecting with life
Read “Dry Bones,” or listen to the recording, reflecting on the following:
- How are your dreams and wishes dead?
- Do you think they reach a point of being beyond all hope?
- What can give them life again?

Scripture
John 11:1–45 Some scholars would say that the story of Lazarus is simply a parable about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus is not mentioned in any other gospel, and his name, “the one God helps,” could be symbolic.
- How might this change your understanding of the story?
- What does “resurrection” mean for you?

Leaving aside the question of historicity, there are powerful symbolic pieces here.
- What do you make of Jesus’ decision not to respond immediately?
- If you were Martha or Mary, how might you react to the story?

Note that, while others speak, Lazarus does not.
- If you were Lazarus, what might be some of the things you would say to Jesus?

While the lectionary does not include verses 46–53, many see them as integral to the story, perhaps being the “point” of it all.
- What is your reaction to what goes on in those verses?

Ezekiel 37:1–14 The prophet Ezekiel stands at the edge of a desolate valley of dry and brittle bones.
- When have you stood on the edge of grief? What sustained you in this difficult time?

Sustained you in this difficult time?
- Who might be at the edge of such a valley within your community?

There was a presence with and for Ezekiel, as difficult and confronting as his reality may have been. There was a presence for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in John 11:1–45. Those deeply grieving welcome simple expressions of human kindness, offered without pretense or a need to say too much.
- When have you experienced God’s presence in and through the simple kindnesses of others?
- What difference did these expressions make?

Psalm 130 is a lament.
- What words would you use to describe the psalmist’s feelings?
- In what ways is lamenting part of your tradition or culture? In what ways is it not?
- How have you cried out to God in your life? Did you feel heard?
- How is crying out to God in your church? in your community? in the world?

Romans 8:6–11 Paul contrasts the “life of the flesh” with the “life of the Spirit.”
- How do you understand those two terms, “flesh” and “spirit”?
- What do you identify as things “of the flesh” in your everyday living?

Connecting scripture and life
- In what situations would you like to hear Jesus’ words to the community to “unbind and set free”?
- Regarding what issues does your community need to hear this command?
- What in your life and what in the world need these words of hope and possibility?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
For many people a sense of hopelessness is very real. We can readily relate to finding a valley filled with dry bones, and devoid of any sense of life. We experience collective grief at the loss of vast amounts of innocence, understanding, and camaraderie. We, like Mary and Martha, may find ourselves wanting to confront God with anger: if you had been here, such and such would not have happened.

Confronted with these kinds of realities, it is vital to explore the concept of hope, but not in a false and cheap kind of way. Hope that is transformative and lasting may need to come slowly. It also is far more important than getting bogged down in any arguments over whether things related in scripture actually “happened” or not. That is virtually never the point; the point that runs through all the readings this week is about God bringing us hope when that seems gone for us. We celebrate that even in despair, even when the world seems to be plotting against God, still God says, “I will bring life.”
Hope Against All Hope

**Prepare**

**NOTE:** All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one for Lenten Light, two for the prayer of confession and words of affirmation.
- Choose an option for hearing John 11:1–45. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Lazarus” on p. 80. For the reading in four sections, arrange for four voices.
- Bring items for setting the worship space: Lenten lights (according to the pattern you have chosen from the article “Lenten Light” on p. 11).
- For the reading from Ezekiel you might arrange to play a recording of “Dry Bones,” by Linnea Good. It can be found on her album “The Sunday Sessions” and is also available as a download at http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/linneagood7 for a minimal cost.
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Set stations as described on pp. 81–82.

**Music Suggestions**

**Catch the Light!**
Bruce Harding; p. 14

**Hold Us in Your Grace**
Keri Wehlander; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9

**I Want Jesus to Go with Me**
African-American spiritual; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6

**Behold, I Make All Things New**
John Bell; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6

**Justice Cry**
Trisha Watts; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6

**When We Go into the Night (Song of the Wilderness)**
Colin Gibson

**Lay Our Broken World**
Anna Briggs; Wild Goose

At the opening of worship, the special Lenten lights should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on p. 11 for more information on this project that continues throughout Lent. The person lighting then says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and departs.

**Call to worship**

ONE: Wait and watch for God!

ALL: Even when we feel in the depths of death and despair?

ONE: Wait and watch for God!

ALL: Even when life seems like a night that never ends?

ONE: Wait and watch for God! In God there is constant love and kindness.

ALL: We will wait and watch with hope.

**Opening prayer**

Gracious God,
in the midst of death, you offer life.

In the midst of despair, you offer hope.
In the midst of confusion and uncertainty, you offer a new way of seeing things, a new way of understanding things.
Help us to remember this always. Amen.

**Prayer of confession and words of affirmation**

Use Romans 8:6–11 (the epistle reading for today) as the prayer of confession and words of affirmation. One person will read the portions of the text that are appropriate to confession, and after a brief pause another person will read the words of affirmation. The version used here is from the Common English Bible; you may prefer to substitute another translation.

ONE: The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death,

TWO: (pause) but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace.
Worship Outline • April 2, 2017

ONE: So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s Law, because it can’t. People who are self-centred aren’t able to please God.

TWO: (pause) But you aren’t self-centred. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God’s Spirit lives in you.

ONE: If anyone doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ, they don’t belong to him.

TWO: If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God’s righteousness,

ONE: but the body is dead because of sin.

TWO: If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his spirit that lives in you.

ONE AND TWO: Know, friends, that the Spirit of God, the one who raised Jesus Christ to new life, does indeed live in you. You are forgiven.

PEOPLE: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

Ezekiel 37:1–14

Either in lieu of the reading, or as a complement to it, play a recording of Linnea Good’s tone poem “Dry Bones.” It can be found on her album “The Sunday Sessions” and is also available as a download at http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/linneagood7 for a minimal cost.

Moving into the focus scripture

This is a difficult story to listen to. It may help to remind the congregation that it may well be a metaphoric piece in the way in which John has presented it. This does not necessarily mean that the story is not based on historic events, but John has expanded and embellished it to make a greater and richer point. By emphasizing that Lazarus has been in the grave for several days, and that Jesus has intentionally delayed his arrival, John seems to be wanting us to realize that the presence of Jesus, and his ability to perform miracles, is not confined by our understandings of time. Similarly, the power of God in Jesus enables him to do the impossible.

This message can be one of great hope for us in a world of chaos and confusion.

John 11:1–45

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Lazarus” on page 80.

Reading in four sections You may wish to divide this rather lengthy reading into more manageable portions. Have a different voice reading each section from a different part of the worship area.

Section 1: verses 1–16 (journey)
Section 2: verses 17–27 (recognizing Jesus)
Section 3: verses 28–37 (meeting Jesus)
Section 4: verses 38–45 (new life)

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Prayers of the people

ONE: Life-giving God, like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, we are loved by you. We think of this family and the way they opened their home to others, providing care and companionship to Jesus and his friends. We pray for our homes, that they may be places where others can find life-giving relationships.

ALL: Spirit of God, breathe new life in us!

ONE: Also, like Martha, Mary and Lazarus, we are different from one another. Martha was practical and clear about what she believed. Thank you for those who use their skills and abilities to care for others. We pray that their faithfulness and dependability will bring hope to those who are not sure of their faith and find it hard to believe in you and in other people.

ALL: Spirit of God, breathe new life in them!

ONE: Mary loved deeply and felt the pain of loss and desertion. We pray for those who have experienced the loss of those they love, those for whom relationships have brought disappointment, those whose trust has not been honoured. May they may find comfort in their sadness and courage to reach out again to others.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Catch the Light!” as people gather together again (p. 14; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at http://evensong.ca/index.php/blogs/music/289-catch-the-light-in-seasons-of-the-spirit-2017-2).
All: Spirit of God, breathe new life in them!
One: Lazarus had faced illness and death. Pray for all who face life-threatening illness or injuries, those paralyzed by fear or anxiety and those for whom depression or difficulties make life painful or seem like not worth living. Help us all to face our mortality, knowing that there are limits to our energy and there will be an end to our life and strength, but never an end to your loving presence.
All: Spirit of God, breathe new life in us!
One: In a short time of silence we bring our own prayers to God. Silence.
   As we finish this time of prayer, we ask:
All: Spirit of God, breathe new life in us! Amen.

Prayer of dedication
In hope we offer these gifts:
   hope for a peaceful and fair world;
   hope for an equal distribution of food, medicines, natural resources, and love;
   hope for the well-being of Mother Earth;
   hope for many future generations.
In hope we bring these gifts as hope for a peaceful and fair world. Amen.

Go in peace,
and wait upon your God.
Know that, whatever happens, you are in God’s care
   and protection,
and that God will watch over you always.
No matter what may befall you,
you are not alone.
Amen.
Dry Bones

from a soundscape by Linnea Good

A recording of the song for listening can be purchased and downloaded from http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/linneagood7

Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God – prophesy to these bones!

I had another dream. The hand of God was upon me, and God brought me out by the spirit and set me down right in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. And God led me around among them; and behold, there were very many bones in this valley; and they were very…very…very…dry.

And God said to me, “O Human One, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Great God, you’re the one who knows that.”

Can these bones live?
You’re the one who knows!
Can these bones live?
You’re the one who knows!
Can these bones live?
Prophesy to these bones!

Again God said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of God.’”

Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God – prophesy to these bones!

This is what our Great God says to you bones:
“Behold, I am going to make breath to come into you and you shall live.
And I will put sinews upon you,
and I will make flesh to come upon you,
and cover you with skin,
and put breath in you,
and you shall live again;
and you shall know that I am your Great God.”

Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God – prophesy to these bones!

And so I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them – but…

There was no breath in them.

Then God said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, O Human One, and say, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of God.’”

Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God.
Oh dry bones, hear the word of God – prophesy to these bones!

“Come from the four winds, O breath and breathe upon these dead bones, so that they may live.” So I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an enormous number of living people!”

Then God said to me, “O Human One, these bones that were dry and dead are like those hopes which you can’t believe in anymore. They are dead. When all your hopes and your wishes seem dried up, prophesy to them, and my spirit will rush in like the four winds’ breath and bring them to life again.”

Copyright © 1993 Borealis Music (www.LinneaGood.com) From “Greatest of These” CD (version 1) now found on CDBaby.com as MP3. Used by permission.
Lazarus
Based on John 11:1–45

Where is he? Where can he be? Why hasn't he come?”

Martha and Mary stood in their doorway, looking anxiously down the road. They had sent a message to Jesus from their home in Bethany telling him how sick their brother Lazarus was. They had sat by their brother’s bedside watching him grow weaker and weaker, but still they waited for Jesus.

Why didn’t he come?

Jesus had gone to visit some people who lived east of the Jordan and when the messenger came from the sisters he sent him back saying he would come later. When the messenger returned by himself the sisters were both sad and angry. “Why hasn’t he come? He’s healed other people. We thought Jesus was our friend.” They sat by Lazarus’s side and watched him getting sicker and sicker, and eventually stop breathing and die.

Mary cried and cried and Martha comforted her. “Jesus let our brother die,” cried Mary. “He should have been here. We have buried Lazarus and he is gone forever.”

Four days later Martha and Mary were sitting outside their house when they saw Jesus coming down the road. “Where have you been? Lazarus is dead. You are too late to save him.” They were both speaking at once. “Martha, Mary,” said Jesus, “Show me where he is.” They took him to where they had laid Lazarus. “Take the stone away and open up the grave,” Jesus said.

Martha didn’t want them to do that, but some of the men moved the stone.

Jesus started to pray and some of the people prayed with him. Then he called out, “Lazarus, come to me.” Everyone was amazed when Lazarus walked out of the tomb. “Find him some clean clothes, and give him some water to drink,” Jesus said.

Lazarus was alive!

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Lazarus,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Lazarus.”
2. Use the colours or shades of black-grey-white to respond to what happened or how the people were feeling in this story.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Multi-coloured art

**Materials** paper; coloured pencils; wax crayons in darker colours; sharpish objects, such as unfolded paper clips, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a story where different moods and feelings come together, and something new is formed.

1. Use a variety of pencils to decorate a sheet of paper completely. Use different hues, and simply colour it in a haphazard manner.
2. Next, cover over that with a dark-coloured wax crayon.
3. Take an unfolded paper clip, and draw on the wax crayon. Notice how the colours beneath show through. You might draw a picture of Jesus raising Lazarus, or of something else, or just make a pattern of lines expressing your moods and feelings about this story.

Tomb with positive sayings

**Material** thin paper plates (2 per person), paper fasteners/split pins, scissors, pencils, crayons, markers, coloured pencils, option: newspapers and/or news magazines, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus helps us remember that even in the worst of times, God is with us and cares for us.

1. Place the plates back to back, and poke the paper fastener through, about 2.5 cm/1 in. from the edge. This will enable the top plate to swing away, revealing the lower one.
2. On the top plate, write or draw a scenario that feels desperate to you.
3. On the bottom plate, write a message of hope. It might be something simple like “God is with me” or “God brings new life.” Or you might come up with another saying that reminds you to have hope in the midst of despair.
4. Decorate the two plates as you wish.
5. Alternatively, cut headlines from the newspapers or magazines that depict difficult things going on in the world (or use letters to create your own headlines). On the bottom plate, write a message of hope.

Binding and unbinding

**Materials** thin strips of white cloth, wooden pegs (wrap some of the pegs in strips of cloth), markers, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**

Binding a body can be seen as the final act of respect and thanksgiving for a life that has reached its physical end; unbinding /releasing life with potential is an act of hope and promise.

1. Respond to your understanding of the story of Lazarus, binding, or unbinding the cloth strips and pegs. You may wish to write words on the pegs or cloth strips.
Offering and responding to welcome

Materials pens, paper, construction/ heavy paper, cushions, and jug/pitcher of water and glasses if appropriate, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages

The practice of hospitality

Directions

1. The gospel writer gives us the impression that Jesus enjoyed a close and supportive friendship with Lazarus and his sisters. Think of the hospitality offered and valued in your family, group of friends, or faith community and reflect on and discuss the following:

   ■ What makes people feel comfortable and at home with each other?
   ■ How could you extend the hospitality in your home and community?
   ■ Is there anyone you know who is in particular need of the friendship and support that you or your family/faith community can offer?
   ■ How could you include them during the week ahead?

Younger children Invite children to think of someone who is need of friendship and support. Use the construction paper to draw and cut out heart shapes. Decorate the heart shapes with warm, happy decorations and words of friendship. Arrange to deliver friendship greetings.
Jesus Cries
Based on John 11:1–45

Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, were special friends of Jesus.

One day, Lazarus became very, very sick. Mary and Martha sent a message for their dear friend Jesus to come and help. They waited and waited. They wondered where Jesus was. “Why is Jesus taking so long?” Lazarus got sicker and then he died. Everyone cried. They wrapped Lazarus in a clean white cloth and placed him in a cave.

Finally, Jesus arrived. When Jesus heard the news he was very sad, too. He put his arms around Martha and Mary and cried with them.

Then Jesus did a surprising thing. Jesus went to the cave where Lazarus was buried. Jesus prayed, “Please, God, hear me.”

Then Jesus called out, “Lazarus, come out!”

Suddenly, surprisingly, Lazarus was alive again!

Everyone cried again. But this time it was happy tears. Martha said to everyone, “I knew Jesus would help us!”

God is with us in happy times and sad times.

You will need a large heart shape cut from red construction paper, white construction paper, scissors, glue, pencils, crayons.

Directions
1. Have someone help you cut a “window” in the paper heart by folding the heart in half and making two horizontal cuts. Then cut vertically down the folded line. (see illustration).
2. Fold back the two “shutters.”
3. Write or have someone write on the heart shape, “God’s love is with us in happy and sad times.”
4. Glue some white construction paper to the back of the paper heart.
5. Turn the heart over, and draw a happy face and a sad face inside the window.

CREATE

Children’s Activity Leaflet • April 2, 2017

STORY TIME

God’s love is with us in happy & sad times.
Jesus was sad when he heard about Lazarus. In the box below, draw how they might have looked when Lazarus came out of the tomb.
Planning

Palm/Passion Sunday

Passover begins (Judaism)

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Liturgy of the Palms
Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29
Matthew 21:1–11

Liturgy of the Passion
Isaiah 50:4–9a
Psalm 31:9–16
Philippians 2:5–11
Matthew 26:14—27:66
or Matthew 27:11–54

Liturgical colour: red/scarlet or violet/purple

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

East Timor, Indonesia, Philippines

April 2017

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Passion Amidst Palms

No matter how one slices it or observes it, this is a day of contradictions. Even if one only read the Palm Sunday narrative, it is so steeped in the context of what is to come that we can hardly celebrate it with unbridled joy. For most churches, the celebration of palms at the beginning of worship will give way to a sombre reading of and reflection on the passion of Jesus. Each year we read it in all its grimy and painful details, and read other scriptures that simply help give some historic context. It is a painful and difficult day.

Focus scripture: Matthew 26:14—27:66
Matthew's account of Jesus’ last days of earthly life include Jesus’ cry: “My God, my God, why…?” (27:46). These words, taken from Psalm 22, are more than Jesus’ cry from the cross. These are our words as we encounter Judas’s betrayal, the disciples’ desertion, and the women’s faithful vigil at the cross and the tomb in this reading.

It seems that Matthew portrays Jesus’ twelve disciples in a harshly revealing light. Though Jesus asks them to keep watch with him in prayer (26:36), they fall asleep repeatedly. When Jesus is arrested, they flee into the night (26:56). These disciples are not at the cross, or the tomb as the women disciples keep vigil.

Matthew treats the religious and civil authorities involved in these events in an equally frank manner. Some have judged Matthew and the other gospel writers to be anti-Semitic because of the language they use in the Passion narratives. In Matthew’s account, the problem is not the religious beliefs of the leaders involved – the problem is leaders who are driven by fear and rush to judgment. The difficulties arise because of the choices made by certain leaders.

Pilate chooses to “go along to get along.” Undoubtedly, Matthew’s Jewish readers would have recognized a powerful symbolism in Pilate’s seemingly simple act of washing his hands. According to Deuteronomy 21:1–9, this could have been a way of declaring Jesus’ innocence, but Pilate – through his cowardice – reduces it to something meaningless.

Matthew strives to show how Jesus’ words and life fulfill the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, the tearing of the temple curtain in 27:51 heralds the end of the old temple system and the saints rising from the tombs in 27:52–53 hearken back to Ezekiel’s dry bones.

Matthew uses several titles for Jesus. “Son of Man” is the title that Jesus uses most often. Jesus is declared to be the “one who comes in the name of God” in the account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21:1–11. The title “Son of God” is used in the High Priest’s questioning of Jesus (26:63–64). Jesus’ answer – which does not deny this identity – sparks the capital charge of blasphemy. “King” or “Messiah” (christos in Greek, meaning “anointed one”) takes precedence in the trial before Pilate (27:11), because a “king” represented a political threat to Roman authority. “Son of God” is the confession by the Roman guards and centurion (27:54).

In spite of all that death can strip away, God’s people declare with the psalmist in Psalm 31:9–16 that “my times are in your hand.” The acclamation, “The Lord God helps me,” is spoken twice in Isaiah 50:4–9a, a statement of extraordinary trust when made in the midst of insults and physical abuse.

Philippians 2:5–11 declares that Jesus’ death is not a loss of hope. Jesus chooses God’s way over all. Jesus’ life is lived in love and obedience to God.

Even though nearly 2,000 years have passed since the events recounted on this day, for many the story is as real and as present as if it were being reported in real time. On the one hand, these are historic events, but on the other hand, in a very real way they are a description of the life we live each day. How is our world denying and rejecting Christ even today? How are we complicit in that?
Connecting with life
Look at Fish Boat with Net in the context of Palm Sunday. Imagine for a moment that Jesus is on this fishing boat, coming into the harbour. One would not expect people to be standing on the dock, waving him in, but there they are. They are acting as if their saviour is arriving, as if life is suddenly going to be better. Imagine you are Jesus, and are getting off the boat in the midst of this. The people demand that you address them. What would you say?

Scripture
Matthew 21:1–11
In Matthew’s view, those who follow Jesus are often on the margins of society, while those who reject him are at the centre. In this story, people on the outskirts of Jerusalem wave palm branches and praise Jesus, but once we enter the heart of the city, people express skepticism instead of praise.

■ Where do you find openness to Jesus in your community?
■ How might these voices of praise be brought to the centre of your worship or your outreach as a church?

Scholars in recent years have noted that it appears Jesus entered Jerusalem through one gate while Pilate and his entourage entered through another. Clearly the gospels want us to believe that all the attention was focused on Jesus.

■ Imagine you are Pilate. What thoughts and feelings are going through your head as you realize the attention of a crowd to Jesus, rather than you?

As you read Matthew 26:14—27:66 imagine you are outside the story, looking in. Perhaps you are Pilate.

■ What kinds of feelings fester and grow as the story progresses?

Connecting scripture and life
Matthew adds a curious detail to his version of this story that is not found in the other gospels: the curtain in the temple, that people had understood kept us from God.

■ How do you understand the death of Jesus giving us new access to God?
■ How is that a message that we can share with others, especially with those who struggle over the meaning of Jesus’ death?

■ What are some ways you, individually and as church, might share good news through this story?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
Palm/Passion Sunday begins Holy Week. Many churches will probably combine the two pieces in today’s activities, perhaps opening worship with a celebration and the waving of palm branches, and then at some point shifting the focus towards the story of the passion of Jesus.

You can tell the story simply, letting it live and breathe through its many details. Or you can choose to emphasize certain pieces that are somewhat unique to Matthew. For example, the tearing of the temple curtain; the story of bodies being resurrected (undoubtedly meant to be taken metaphorically rather than literally – if it were literal, one would assume the other gospels would mention it, too). Matthew also includes the odd little story of Pilate’s wife trying to talk him out of harming Jesus.

However you observe this Sunday, it will be important to recognize the whole story – and especially with the younger children to emphasize that the story does not end today, with the death of Jesus, but continues through the story of the Resurrection. Indeed, would we tell today’s story at all if we did not know that Easter Sunday is a part of it, too?
Passion Amidst Palms

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one for Lenten Light, six for the reading from Philippians.
- Choose an option for hearing Matthew 21:1–11 and Matthew 26:14–27:66. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Coming into Jerusalem” on p. 92. For the dramatic reading, option 1, arrange for 15 readers, and make copies of the instructions and outline that are in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD. For option 2 of the dramatic reading, arrange for readers to suit the size of your congregation and make copies of the reading at https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+26%3A16+-+27%3A66&version=VOICE
- Bring items for setting the worship space: plan the lights you are going to add (according to the pattern you have chosen from the article “Lenten Light” on p. 11).
- You might choose to print the art image Fish Boat with Net on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Set stations as described on pp. 93–94.

Gather

At the opening of worship, the special Lenten lights should be lit on the worship table, or on another table. See the article on p. 11 for more information on this project that has continued throughout Lent. Then the person lighting says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out, not even in the Season of Lent” and departs. Note: the light will be diminished this day as part of the reading of the scripture.

Entrance

If at all possible, begin your worship outdoors. If this is not possible, it would be good at least to present people with the option of beginning worship outside the normal worship area, so that you can process in with palm branches. You might choose to read Matthew 21:1–11 at the very beginning of worship, before processing in, to give a context to this special day. Sing a familiar song or chorus while you do this, such as “Pave the Way with Branches/Justice” by Bret Hesla, which can be found in the Seasons Songbook, vol. 2, or “This Is the Day,” an anonymous hymn set to a traditional Fijian folk tune; this song quotes the psalm for the Liturgy of the Palms.

Call to worship

ONE: Let us give thanks to God, for God is good.
ALL: God’s love lasts forever.
ONE: Let all the people proclaim it aloud:
ALL: God’s love lasts forever.
ONE: Come, let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Hosanna Saviour, we wave our palms and sing our praise as we remember your triumphal entry into Jerusalem. May your Spirit enter the heart of our worship this day giving us the strength to endure the journey which is ahead. Amen.

Prayer of confession

The version of Psalm 36 used here and in the words of affirmation is taken from the Good News Translation. You may choose to substitute another.

Hear these words from Psalm 36:1–4:
Worship Outline • April 9, 2017

Sin speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; they reject God and do not have reverence for him. Because they think so highly of themselves, they think that God will not discover their sin and condemn it. Their speech is wicked and full of lies; they no longer do what is wise and good. They make evil plans as they lie in bed; nothing they do is good, and they never reject anything evil. Allow time for silent confession.

Opening the word

Philippians 2:5–11

Hear the profession of faith from Philippians through the stories which have shaped the Lenten journey. Voice one will read the designated verses from Philippians standing behind the lectern or pulpit. Each section will be followed by verses from the Lenten focus passages and will be read from a variety of places within the worship space.

Voice One: Read Philippians 2:5, 6.
Voice Two: (from a high place) Read Matthew 4:8–10.
Voice One: Read Philippians 2:7a.
Voice Three: (from among the people) Read John 3:16, 17.
Voice Four: (from the baptismal font) Read John 4:13, 14.
Voice One: Read Philippians 2:10.
Voice Five: (from the back of the worship space) Read John 5:35–38.
Voice One: Read Philippians 2:11.
Voice Six: (from the front of the worship space) Read John 11:25–27.

Moving into the focus scripture

While the scripture is presented here, many churches will want to read it as the final act of today’s worship service, allowing people to leave in silence when it is done. One ancient tradition suggested that, because it was not appropriate to conclude our worship with the story of Jesus’ death, there is no formal benediction at the conclusion of today’s worship. Rather, worship is simply “suspended” through the week, and continues next week with the triumphant conclusion to the story.

Remind people that, throughout Lent, the light has increased, for the wonderful stories we read told us of marvellous things Jesus did that brought new light, new understanding, and new healing into our world. So we have celebrated that, even in this Lenten season, the presence of the light of Christ has increased. Now, however, as we read the story of Jesus’ last days, and are reminded of the ways in which we ourselves treat the Christ in our midst, we realize that through our actions the light fades.

Matthew 26:14—27:66

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Coming into Jerusalem” on page 92.

After the Bible story

At this point, you might invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word. Alternatively, you might incorporate the Holy Week stations into the worship service.

Dramatic reading of the Passion narrative

Option 1: A total of 15 people are needed for this reading. Instructions and outline are in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD for you to print copies for each reader.

Option 2: Read the scripture passage from The Voice (VOICE). This passage can be found at https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+26%3A16+-+27%3A66&version=VOICE.

This will involve some forethought and preparation, depending on your congregation. If you have a large congregation you can assign each of the various parts to different people, including a few disciples, some passersby, servants, and so on. If possible, include the entire congregation as “The Crowd” perhaps projecting their line, or teaching it ahead of time.

Words of affirmation

[God], your constant love reaches the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the skies. Your righteousness is towering like the mountains; your justice is like the depths of the sea. People and animals are in your care.

How precious, O God, is your constant love!

We find protection under the shadow of your wings.

We feast on the abundant food you provide; you let us drink from the river of your goodness.

You are the source of all life, and because of your light we see the light.

If you have fewer people, you can divide the scripture up into “scenes” and thus various people can play multiple roles for the various scenes.

One narrator can read the parts that are not introduced with any names. Another narrator could read the pieces that are indented and printed in bold – these pieces are not part of the scripture, but serve as convenient scene breaks, and help explain the story. Plan to extinguish the Lenten lights at these points:

**Respond**

**Prayers of the people**

**One:** Compassionate God,

we lift our palms of praise

with those who first sang out,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Like them, each hand that holds a palm

has a heart that holds a story –

a story of pain, of disappointment, of sorrow.

We share those stories with you now. *(Pause.)*

We pray to you, O God,

**All:** save us, Holy One.

**One:** Prince of Peace,

you came in humble obedience

and walked the path of enduring love

even in the face of violent rejection.

We confess that it is difficult to follow your path of peace.

and the violent road of abuse and war

is all too familiar to us.

We long for your peace, O God. *(Pause.)*

We pray to you, O God,

**All:** save us, Holy One.

**Prayer of dedication**

Gracious God, even on a day such as this, when more than any other we contemplate how we have failed to uphold your word and your work, still we offer you these gifts of our hands and our hearts, and pray that you will receive them and use them, that together we might continue to tell the world of your love. Amen.

We leave today in limbo, not sure how to feel.

We leave today knowing that the story is not finished.

We leave today knowing we have betrayed and denied and yet…

We leave today knowing that God will never let our stories end in death.

Amen.
Special Days Commentary

April 11 – Passover begins (Judaism)

If you have ever seen Cecil B. deMille’s epic movie *The Ten Commandments* or even caught Dreamworks’ animated feature *The Prince of Egypt*, take away Anne Baxter and the singing camels and you have a sense of what the festival of Passover celebrates. It is the Jewish community’s annual retelling of the Israelites’ redemption from slavery in Egypt, as originally told in the book of Exodus.

The focus on the celebration is the retelling of the story in interactive and multi-sensory fashion. An elaborate meal, called a *Seder*, is performed by Jews around the world. At this meal the story of redemption is retold with the help of special foods: **haroset** to resemble mortar used to make bricks in Egypt; salt water to remind them of tears; bitter herbs to remember the bitterness of slavery; and unleavened bread (*matzo*) to commemorate the bread that had no time to rise before the Israelites fled Egypt. Although the obligation to retell the story of redemption has its roots in the Bible, the actual Seder meal has evolved and developed over the centuries, adopting customs and practices from the myriad of communities in which Jews have resided.

For many Jews the Passover observance continues beyond the Seder, which is held on the first or second night of this seven- or eight-day festival (depending on which denomination one asks). Jews refrain from eating foods with leavening agents (*chametz*) in them. However, the understanding of what is or is not a leavening agent is wide open to interpretation. Matzo is eaten in place of bread and a flour-like substance (matzo meal) is used in many recipes as well. Observance of this part of the festival can be very particular, even including the changing of dishes for the duration of the holiday.

In contemporary surveys of the Jewish community, the ritual observed the most, by the most religious Jews to those who would describe themselves as secular Jews, is the Passover Seder. This is probably due to a number of reasons: it occurs in the home, lending itself to variant interpretations and creativity; it is a bridge to the past and between generations both living and dead; and, while the Seder is a retelling of the story of redemption, the story is told not merely to celebrate freedom but to remind Jews of their obligation to fight for freedom and justice in our world. This message is relevant to every Jew – and every human being – regardless of observance, theology, or affiliation.

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April 14 – Vaisakhi (Sikhism)

Sometimes spelled *Baisakhi*, this day marks the anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa (the army of the Pure Ones) in 1699. In populous Sikh centres the day is celebrated with colourful processions through the streets starting and finishing at the *gurdwara*, or place of worship. During the procession the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book is carried on a brightly decorated float, with Sikh believers following behind, singing verses from the holy Granth. Traditional sweets and other foods are shared with onlookers. Other activities to celebrate Vaisakhi include exhibitions of Sikh martial arts and sports, and activities at which funds are collected for local, national, and international charities.
Coming into Jerusalem

Based on Matthew 21:1–11

It was a very special day in Jerusalem. Once a year the Roman governor would come to town with lots of pomp and ceremony. There would be a big parade, and people would shout and wave.

It’s not that they necessarily wanted to do that, but they knew they were supposed to do that. The Roman governor wanted to know that people were happy to see him, even though most of the people – if you asked them – would tell you they were not happy to see him.

The Romans had conquered this land and ruled it in a very mean way. They told people how to look out only for themselves and not care a lot for others. They didn’t care about the poorest people, or about those who were disabled or unemployed, or women who had no husbands, and children who had no parents. No, the Romans pretty much only cared about themselves. So people didn’t really like the governor, but they knew they should wave and shout and let the governor think that they liked him. It was always a good idea to stay on his good side.

But this particular day, hardly anyone was there to welcome the governor when he rode into town. He had soldiers with him, and chariots, and a lot of very important looking people, but there were only a few people there to wave and shout.

Most people were on the other side of Jerusalem, where someone else was riding into town on the very same day. Unlike the Roman emperor, this person didn’t have horses and chariots – he was riding on a donkey! And he didn’t have soldiers and important-looking people with him, he had children! And poor people!

This was Jesus, and the people were so excited to see him they flocked to the streets, and shouted happy things. And they took branches off the trees to wave, because they wanted to wave something, anything, and celebrate that Jesus was there. Because unlike the Romans, Jesus told them how they should love one another, and care for one another. Jesus reminded the people that God loved them, and because of that they should love each other. If someone was in need, you shouldn’t turn away from them, Jesus taught. You should offer them whatever you can, and let them know that they are loved by God.

How excited the people were that Jesus was coming into town! They weren’t quite sure what would happen next, but they were excited because what Jesus taught made a lot more sense than what the Romans said.

Back on the other side of town, though, the Roman governor was not happy. “I wonder who’s stealing my thunder?” he muttered to some of the people with him. “We must find out. And we must do something about it.”

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Coming into Jerusalem,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions
1. Listen to the story “Coming into Jerusalem.”
2. Imagine the two different parades of people coming into Jerusalem.
3. Draw images that show the different parades, and the mood surrounding each one.
4. Think about which parade you would rather have been a part of.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

**Note:** while most weeks the stations are given as options, and you might choose only a few to use with the children, this week there are a total of seven stations, each of which is part of telling the story of the events leading up to Easter, and of Easter Sunday itself. To complete the story, you will want to set up the seven stations and invite the entire group to travel to all of them. It would be good to have these at seven different places, so there is a sense of movement as the group progresses from one to the next. However, if this is not possible, it could be done in one place. Try to involve some of the older children as readers. *Alternatively, this could be incorporated into the worship service.* For your convenience, text for each of the stations is formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

**Materials**

**Option A** Copy the cross that is on the resource sheet “Holy Week Resources #1” onto card stock/heavy paper for each participant (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD); bring several flower stickers so that each person can have a total of six flowers. They will receive the cross at the first station, and then add a flower at each of the following stations. This option emphasizes that, while this is a sad story, God turned it into a wonderful story in the end.

**Option B** Copy the cross that is on resource sheet “Holy Week Resources #2” onto card stock for each participant, along with a copy of the set of six symbols (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD); bring glue; Option: pencil crayons or fine-line markers. This option emphasizes the elements of the story, and the cross the participants make will help them remember some of the key pieces of the story.

**Setting the space** Set up the stations by copying and placing the text for each one at the station (see below). For option A, place the crosses at the first station, and a number of flower stickers at each of the others. For option B, place the crosses at the first station, and the symbols at the other stations, as indicated in the text.

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**Station #1 – Judas** *Invite one or two participants to read the following text to the group:*

**One:** Judas was one of Jesus’ disciples. Over the last few months, he had gotten upset with Jesus. It seems Jesus was always talking about how God loved all people, and Judas wanted more.

**Two:** Judas had wanted Jesus to be more revolutionary, to overthrow the Roman government and put others in charge. But that was not Jesus’ way. Jesus wanted people to change their hearts, and believed that if we did that we could change the world.

Distribute crosses; move to the next station.

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**Station #2 – The Last Supper** *Invite one or two participants to read the following text to the group:*

**One:** Even though he knew the end was near, Jesus gathered with his closest friends to celebrate a special meal.

**Two:** They ate bread and wine, and remembered how God was with them always.

**One:** Then Jesus did something very special. He took the bread and the wine, and he told the disciples these were like his body and his blood. Whenever they ate them again, they could remember that Jesus was with them.

Fix flower stickers or loaf and cup picture to your cross and move to the next station.

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**Station #3 – The Garden of Gethsemane** *Invite one or two participants to read the following text to the group:*

**One:** Jesus went to spend some time in prayer. He knew the next few hours of his life were going to be very hard.

**Two:** Jesus was by himself, and he prayed to God. “If there’s any way I can get out of this,” Jesus prayed, “I wish I could. But I will do whatever you want.”

**One:** When Jesus went back to the disciples, he found they had fallen asleep. Jesus was sad. He went and prayed again.

**Two:** Again, when he was done, he found the disciples still sleeping. He prayed once more, and then went back. “It’s time to go,” he said gently. And the disciples woke up.

Fix flower sticker, or picture of Jesus praying to your cross and then move to the next station.
Station #4 – Jesus is arrested

**One:** The biggest problem the people in charge had was that they didn’t have any real complaints about Jesus, because he hadn’t done anything wrong.

**Two:** Jesus had spent all his time helping people who felt lost and alone, and people who were sick and hurting. He made them feel special, and reminded them that God loved everyone, no matter what.

**One:** The people in charge knew that wasn’t a crime; they just didn’t like Jesus. So they had people make up stories to accuse Jesus.

**Two:** But Jesus didn’t say anything. He knew they wouldn’t believe him anyway. He knew that they were angry because he helped people feel better, especially those that the people in charge didn’t like very much – people who were poor, people who were sick, women, and children, and others.

Fix flower sticker, or picture of Jesus before Pilate and then move to the next station.

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Station #5 – Peter denies knowing Jesus

**One:** Peter was one of the Jesus’ closest friends. He loved the stories Jesus told, and the things Jesus did. But Peter got scared easily, too. He found it hard to trust that God would always be with him, no matter what.

**Two:** Some people had a fire going and Peter joined them so he could warm his hands. One of them said, “You were with Jesus.” But Peter got scared, so he said, “No – it wasn’t me. I don’t know anyone called Jesus.”

**One:** This happened a few more times, and then a rooster crowed. Peter remember Jesus saying, “before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times” and Peter felt badly that he had not supported his friend He went outside and cried.

**Two:** That’s not the end of his story, though. After Jesus rose from the dead, he talked to Peter, and forgave him, and told him to go and continue the work Jesus had begun.

Fix flower sticker, or picture of rooster and then move to the next station.

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Station #6 – Jesus is crucified

**One:** The people in charge knew they had to get rid of Jesus – they didn’t want everyone to know that God loved them! So they arranged to have him killed by nailing him to a cross.

**Two:** But before they did that, they beat him, and laughed at him. The crowd got excited and shouted for Jesus to be killed. Some of the people in charge were not so sure, but they didn’t want to upset the crowd, and so they went along with it.

**One:** Normally people had to carry their heavy cross to the place where they were to be crucified, but Jesus was too weak from being beaten, so they asked someone else to do it.

**Two:** Then they nailed Jesus to a cross, and left him to die. Some of the guards who had hurt Jesus were amazed by how quiet he had been, and how he did not fight back. They began to realize, “This man really was the son of God.” They felt bad for what they had done.

Fix flower sticker, or picture of Jesus on the cross to your cross and then move to the next station.

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Station #7 – The tomb

**One:** Someone called Joseph of Arimathea asked if he could have Jesus’ body so he could bury it in a tomb, and the leaders said yes. Some of the women disciples watched where Joseph buried Jesus, so they could come back later.

**Two:** There were guards outside the tomb to make sure no one took the body. The next day was the Sabbath, so no one could come to the tomb. But the day after – Sunday morning – Mary Magdalene and another woman came to look at the tomb.

**One:** There was a huge noise, and the stone rolled away from the front of the tomb. The guards were very scared! But an angel came and said to the women:

**Two:** “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified, but he’s not here. God has raised him from the dead. Run and tell his friends!” And so the women left the tomb...

Fix flower sticker or pictures of the women at the tomb to your cross. Sit quietly as you reflect on the story of Holy Week.
**Jesus Goes to Jerusalem**

**Based on Matthew 21:1–11; 26:14—27:66**

**A parade for Jesus**

One day Jesus and his friends were walking to the city of Jerusalem for a special holiday called the Passover. When they were almost there, Jesus said, “Go into the city and find a donkey for me to ride.” Soon his friends found a donkey and its colt and they brought it to Jesus. When the people saw Jesus coming they ran to greet him. They put their coats down in front of him. They waved palm branches over their heads. They shouted, “Hosanna! Hosanna!”

**A meal with Jesus**

As Jesus and his friends walked along, Jesus said, “Let’s go to this house where a special Passover meal will be ready for us.” Soon everyone was sitting down to a delicious meal. Then Jesus took some bread, prayed, broke it into pieces, and gave it to his friends. Jesus said, “When you eat this bread, remember me.”

Then Jesus took a cup, prayed, and gave a drink to his friends. “Drink this and remember me,” he said.

**Jesus in the garden**

After eating together, Jesus and his friends went to a beautiful garden to pray. It was dark and everyone was tired. Jesus was tired, too. Jesus was also sad because he knew that some people wanted to hurt him. Jesus said to his friends, “Wait here and stay awake while I pray.” Jesus walked away from them, and found a quiet spot and prayed to God. Jesus wanted God to help him do the right thing.

Jesus prayed for a long time. Finally, when Jesus returned to his friends, they were asleep! “Wake up,” Jesus said.

**Friends run away**

Jesus was talking to his sleepy friends in the garden when suddenly soldiers came and took Jesus away. Jesus’ friends were frightened. They ran away. Jesus had already warned his friend Peter that before the rooster crowed in the morning Peter would have said three times to three different people that he did not know Jesus. Peter was sure he would not do this, but he did.

**Jesus dies**

Some leaders were angry with Jesus and didn’t want Jesus around anymore. Jesus was put on a cross and died. Some of Jesus’ friends wrapped Jesus’ body in soft cloth and laid him in a cave in a garden. Then they pushed a big rock across the opening of the cave. Some of Jesus’ friends stayed nearby, watching and waiting. Finally, Jesus’ friends went home because there was nothing else to do.

**What will happen next?**

A few days later, two friends of Jesus, both named Mary, went back to the cave. They were so sad that their friend Jesus died and they wanted to be close by. Suddenly something so amazing happened that they didn’t know what to think. I wonder what it was? This is not the end of the story, we’ll wait until next Sunday to find out what amazing, wonderful surprise God gave to the people! What can we do while we wait?

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**CREATE**

**Hands up for God**

When Jesus went into Jerusalem, the crowds waved palm branches and shouted, “Hosanna.” But soon they were using their hands and voices to hurt Jesus. How can we use our hands for God and not to hurt?

**You will** need green construction paper, scissors, strip of poster board, glue stick, markers

**Directions**

1. Trace and cut out lots of hand shapes. Don’t trace between the fingers just around your finger tips (see illustration #1).
2. A grownup could help you do this by putting several sheets of green construction paper down and tracing around your hand.
3. Decorate the hand shapes.
4. Overlay the hand shapes on a strip of poster board and glue in place (see illustration #2).
5. Wave the “palm branch” and shout out praise to God.
6. Think about ways you can use your hands and voices to show God’s love.
Copy this page on heavy paper or card stock. Cut out the box and decorate the illustrations. Fold and tape the corners together. Turn your cube as you tell the story of Holy Week, from Palm Sunday to Good Friday.
Maundy Thursday

The Focus for worship

Maundy Thursday is a strange time. We know what is coming, and yet (in theory at least) the events of this day start off quite positively. While we know that the meal Jesus shared on this day with his disciples was his last, they presumably do not know that, and so it is an awesome time of close community, and when Jesus invests the meal with powerful new symbolism, presumably there is cause for celebration. Similarly, the act of washing the disciples’ feet (unique to John’s gospel) presumably leads to an immense sense of gratitude for the ways in which Jesus serves the disciples. It is odd, then, to celebrate these two events while also commemorating what follows: the prayer in Gethsemane and the arrest. It is good to hold this day’s worship within the vessel of that tension, and let each event simply speak for itself.

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship: one to portray Peter for the John reading, people to help with footwashing (if including this option) and some to help with stripping the sanctuary at the end of worship.
❑ Bring items needed for footwashing (again, if including this option): for each station a chair, basin of water, and several towels.
❑ Prepare to project the image Fish Boat with Net, and/or print in the worship bulletin (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION).
❑ Bring elements for Communion.
❑ Have available a simple candle and matches; candle should be placed on Communion table/altar at the very conclusion of the worship.

If possible, project the image Fish Boat with Net as a backdrop to the worship service. Alternatively, you might wish to print it on your worship bulletins.

Call to worship

ONE: We do not know quite where we are, O God. We celebrate the presence of Jesus in a great feast, and in the selfless act of washing the disciples’ feet.

ALL: Yet we also know that on this night we commemorate Jesus’ arrest, and betrayal, and desertion by so many of his closest friends.

ONE: We begin in a spirit of joy and festivity, and yet the evening ends with us feeling emptied, gutted, and quite alone.

ALL: Yet we dare to hold all the aspects of this night in our time of worship – reminding us that you are with us in all the seasons and turnings of life.

ONE: Come, friends, and let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Come to us, loving God, in this time of worship. Comfort us as we float adrift, unsure, surrounded by fog. Remind us that, as we feel lost and helpless in the storms of this week, still you are present with us through it all. And always, we worship you in the profound certainty that everything – everything – is always followed by resurrection. Amen.

Scripture reading

Arrange to have someone portray Peter and tell this story while seated at the Communion table.

It was the day before the Passover. We could tell that Jesus seemed distant. We gathered for supper on that night and while we were eating, Jesus got up from the table, took off his jacket and tied a towel around his waist. Then Jesus poured water into a basin (pour from pitcher into basin). Jesus started to wash all our feet and wipe them with the towel. Jesus came to me, Simon Peter, and I said, “Wait, what are you doing?” Jesus said to me, “Simon Peter, I know it doesn’t make sense now, but later you’ll get it.” I said, “No way; you’re never going to wash my feet. We have servants to do this kind of work for us.” But then Jesus said, “Unless you let me wash your feet, I can’t let you be a part of what we are doing.” Jesus knew how to get me where it counts. He knew I had given my life to him. Still not understanding completely...
I said, “Well then, not just my feet, wash my hands and head, too!”

Jesus smiled at me in the way he often did. “Your feet are enough, Peter,” he said, “But not everyone of you is clean. There are some messes I won’t be cleaning up tonight.” Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. Still, he treated us all the same; he loved and served us all to the end.

After Jesus washed everyone’s feet, he sat back down at the table and started teaching. He said, “I’m your teacher and have set an example for you. You should wash each other’s feet. If you know what to do, do it.”

It was difficult for us to understand what he meant at the time. Washing feet is a job for servants. Or, if a servant is not available, it is something we take care of ourselves. But, by his example, Jesus was asking us to serve one another.

That night, Jesus said, “Pretty soon I’ll be leaving you and where I go you cannot come. I give you a commandment: Love each other. As I’ve been loving you, love each other. That’s how people will know that you are my followers: if you love each other.”

We remembered these words and realized their meaning later when we started to become a community living in the Spirit of Jesus.

(If you are wanting to incorporate foot washing/hand washing into your service of worship, this would be the time to do it. Arrange to have a few stations, depending on the number of people anticipated. Have volunteers prepared to wash feet or hands of those who wish. Each station should have a chair for the person to sit in, a basin of water, and ample towels.)

Respond

Celebration of Communion

Invitation

On this day of remembrance, you are welcome at the table of love. Hosted by the Christ, we offer one another this bread and cup to nourish our service of faith.

Introduction to Communion

On this night, we remember Jesus and some of his closest friends gathered in a borrowed room, celebrating a sacred feast in which they remembered that God does not abandon us, but rather delivers us from slavery into new life, and new hope.

Into this celebration Jesus infused new meaning, inviting his friends to repeat the rituals of this feast whenever they wanted to remember Christ’s presence. And so we do the same, and remind ourselves that wherever we are, Jesus is in our very midst, inviting us into the new life God offers.

(Conclude by reading 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.)

Prayer

Loving God, bless this bread and wine/juice that we share this night, and through this sacred meal help us to remember that wherever two or more are gathered in Christ’s name, he is here in our very midst. Whenever we share this bread and this cup, we remember that Jesus is never far from us. Amen.

(Pass the bread and the cup in such a way that those gathered are able to serve another, if possible.)

Stripping the sanctuary

One: After the supper was over, Jesus and the disciples went out to the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus prayed, the disciples slept, seemingly oblivious to the heaviness that weighed upon Jesus’ heart.

Two: Jesus prayed, “O God, please let this cup pass from me” – a Hebrew euphemism that roughly meant “If you can, please help me avoid what I know is coming.”

One: And yet Jesus also prayed, “It’s not what I want that matters; I will do what you wish.”

Two: Jesus was saddened that the disciples slept. And then, Judas stepped out of the shadows and gave Jesus a kiss, signalling to the authorities that this was the one they were seeking. The end was now coming.

One: And so we remove the decorative features from our sanctuary at this time, symbolically recognizing, as we move into Good Friday, that the living Christ is not with us.

Two: It is the only time in the Christian year wherein the church dares to imagine life without Christ.

One: And even in all this, we will leave a candle burning – for even in the midst of death, still God offers life and hope.

(If you have been projecting the image Fish Boat with Net it should now be extinguished. Remove all that can be readily removed from the sanctuary; this will of course vary from church to church. This action should be performed by a small group of volunteers, and should be done slowly, methodically, and as silently as possible. Conclude it by lighting a simple candle in the middle of the Communion table/altar, and then departing. There is no benediction because, traditionally, we do not conclude the services of worship in this Holy Week, but only “suspend” them until Easter Sunday.)
Worship Outline • April 14, 2017

Good Friday

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- The worship space should be kept simple. If possible, have a simple, rough wooden cross in a central location, as a primary focus. If this is not possible, consider projecting an image of a cross, perhaps in an outdoor setting. Alternatively, if you have a cross, you might also project the image Stones as a backdrop (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD).
- Recruit volunteers to read the various parts assigned to Joseph of Arimathea, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary the mother of Jesus, Pilate, Nicodemus, and Mary Magdalene. As each person speaks, they should come forward, pause to observe the cross for a moment, and then speak. After they have spoken, they can simply return to their seats. Note that the person portraying Mary the mother of Jesus will be reading the gospel (John 18:1—19:47). This will take preparation, so that it can be read well. If this is not possible, Mary could simply read the introduction, and an additional reader could then present the gospel. While any translation can be appropriate, The Message is recommended as its style lends itself well to public reading, and allows people to hear the story in a rather new and challenging light.

Music Suggestions

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
What a Ponderous Love Is This?
Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Gather

Opening

J OSEPH O F A R I M A T H E A (speaking quietly and firmly): Hello. My name is Joseph; I am from Arimathea. You know, no one knows where that town was. Perhaps that’s best – my part in the gospels is a small one, almost an insignificant one. Where I come from is not important.

And yet, all four gospels tell how I was present at the time of the crucifixion. I didn’t do much – indeed, no one really knew I liked Jesus’ stories. I liked his message. I liked the things he taught. But, you understand, I was important in the community. What would people have said if I had spoken up for him? I was a member of the council, you see, and could have voted against putting him to death. But then so could Nicodemus, and he didn’t either. It wasn’t worth it.

Or was it? I wish I knew. So I did the best I could – I offered my tomb. Some will say, “too little, too late” And perhaps they are right. But it was something, I suppose.

So come, on this sad and heavy day, and listen again to the story. And imagine your place in it all. Reflect with me on how we could do things differently, on how the things we say and do proclaim the words of Jesus in our world.

Hymn  “What Wondrous Love Is This?” or “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”

Opening prayer

M A R Y, W I F E O F C L O P A S: I was one of the women who watched – who dared to stand until the end. I watched them nail Jesus to a cross, watched them abuse him to death. You have no idea what it was like, but I knew I had to stay there – to support his mother, and Mary Magdalene, and stand witness that, just as Jesus would not run away, we would not, either. Will you join me in prayer?

With heavy hearts and a heavy world, we meet you this day/this night, O Christ. In your clenched hands, stretched and nailed, you gather us.

In holy sorrow, we find silence our only friend. With strength only you can give, even now, and with a courage only you can know, may we find ourselves beside you, O God.

And as life teeters and eternity weeps, may we see through love’s pain, into love’s promise and love’s destiny. And may we even now, even now, hear the echo.
Scripture

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS: I am Jesus’ mother. Perhaps you are only used to me as a quiet character in the Christmas story. But I never went away – I stayed with Jesus through his ministry, challenging him when he needed it, and comforting him when he needed it. You will meet me again in one of the first stories of the early church, where I was a part of the group that decided we would carry on. I could only do that because I was there this day. Like Mary, the wife of Clopas, I could not turn my head away – I stood and watched, too. Do you know what it is like to watch your child die? To stand helpless as they beat him almost senseless, and caused him pain beyond my worst imagining? But I stayed. There was nowhere to go.

Listen, now, as I recount the story of Jesus’ last hours. (Reads John 18:1—19:47.)

Hymn “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” (1 or 2 verses)

PILATE: I am Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Yes, I know, you think I could have stopped it. And maybe I could have – but the crowd was so huge, and their anger was so intense. I’m sure you know what that’s like – the newspapers are full of stories of masses of people carrying a mood to extremes. I mean, I know I had the army and all that, but there must have been hundreds, even thousands of them. I could only do so much, you know?

I asked him why he was there, what it was all about. Was he trying to overthrow me? Did he want to sit on a throne somewhere? His answers didn’t make any sense: “I’m here to proclaim the truth,” he said. I don’t have time for that! I have to maintain order and discipline.

They could have had me release him, but they cried out for Barabbas. My hands were tied. You know what that’s like, don’t you? Some boats are just not worth rocking.

Hymn “Were You There...” (1 or 2 verses)

NICODEMUS: It is only John who tells my story – three small glimpses – but they say so much. Perhaps you can relate. My name is Nicodemus; you may recall that I went to see Jesus one night, filled with questions. What did he mean by being born again? Was someone like me – a leader of the people, an upstanding figure in the religious community, someone who had studied long and hard to find answers to life’s problems – was I supposed to start over? It seemed preposterous.

He said something curious to me: God’s Spirit goes where it will. It does what it wants – does what it must. I didn’t really understand it then.

Some time later when Jesus was speaking in Jerusalem, people were arguing: could he be the Messiah? I wanted the other leaders to give him a fair hearing, but they just sneered and said “the Messiah can’t come from Galilee.” I held my tongue after that. And look where it brought us: to this moment.

It was with a heavy heart that I brought some myrrh and ointment for his body. How might things have happened if I had acted differently? What if I had spoken up and said, “he doesn’t deserve to die”? What then? I was afraid they would kill him anyway, and perhaps me as well (pause). Now I suppose we’ll never know.

Hymn “Were You There...” (1 or 2 verses)

MARY MAGDALENE: I, too, was one of the women who stayed. What else could I do? Jesus had changed my life beyond measure.

I was despised before I met Jesus, and after as well. My name is Mary and I come from Magdala. I was one of the women who followed Jesus, and we were not treated well. As Jesus spoke of how God’s view of the world included all people, we felt welcome. The men tried to include us, but they had grown up in a world that didn’t give us much time and attention, and sometimes they resented that there were women in the group of followers.

I had struggled for many years with ailments that made it hard to function. Some say I had demons; I only know that I would have fits from time to time, and Jesus put an end to them. I was forever grateful, and stayed with him out of appreciation for what he had done. I wanted others to know that the message he brought and the things he did offered new life and new hope to all of us.

And yet I also knew that it would not last. No one can proclaim the things that Jesus did without raising serious opposition. No one can keep declaring that God’s love is for all people, without those in power and control needing to put a stop to it. Imagine! If the world understood that we are all sisters and brothers in God’s family, what might it be like?

History has not been kind to me – because I was such a powerful testimony to the message Jesus brought, they discredited me, claiming I was a prostitute and calling me all sorts of horrible things. As you know, that’s not the story the Bible tells. Only that I was Jesus’ friend.

I will come back. When the Sabbath is over, I shall return to this tomb, and spend time with Jesus once again. I will come here often, and pray that he might still speak to me and guide me. Will you do that, too?

(As Mary finishes, she leaves the worship space, as a signal that the worship service is ended. People are encouraged either to stay in a time of silent prayer, or to leave quietly. You might play one verse of “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” as a soft instrumental as she leaves.)
Planning

Things to keep in mind this week...

Planning ahead...

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 10:34–43 or
Jeremiah 31:1–6
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
Colossians 3:1–4 or
Acts 10:34–43
John 20:1–18 or
Matthew 28:1–10

Liturgical colour:
white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit
www.seasonsonline.ca
to access
Spirit Sightings for
connections between current
events and the focus passage.

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Japan, North Korea,
South Korea, Taiwan

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Biblical Background • April 16, 2017

God of resurrection joy, too often the world wants us to look at things dimly, pessimistically, as if there is no hope. In the midst of this, you come to us, and in acts such as raising Jesus from death, and calling us by name, you proclaim that your word is not “no” but is a never-ending and life-affirming “Yes!” Thank you. Amen.

Yes!

In 2016, major churches worldwide met to discuss a common date for Easter. Rather than it moving each year based on the cycles of the moon, they were proposing it always be the 2nd or 3rd Sunday of April. Does it matter? This moment – this awareness that Christ is risen – can come any time. Indeed, it must. This is what it is to be a Christian: to know somehow that Christ is risen. The “how” does not matter, nor the specific “when.” It is simply grasping the basic truth of this day: that God, not death, has the final word, and God’s word is a resounding “Yes!”

Focus scripture: John 20:1–18

The Easter account in John differs somewhat from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mary goes alone to the tomb in John. In the others, she goes with one or more other women. John says Peter and the beloved disciple go to the tomb after Mary’s witness. In the other gospels none of the male disciples venture into the tomb.

Mary Magdalene plays an extraordinary role in John’s Easter story. She alone goes to the tomb and returns to tell the disciples that Jesus is not there. Her later encounter with Jesus in the garden qualifies her as the first witness to Jesus’ resurrection. Beyond that, Jesus sends Mary to the other disciples to announce that she has seen the risen Christ. As with the Samaritan woman in John, Mary not only sees and believes – she sees and witnesses. Her words are the first Easter sermon. In being sent and then proclaiming, Mary becomes apostle to the apostles.

Small details shape John’s message. In the first eleven verses, “tomb” occurs nine times. The scene is a place of death. From verse 12 on, tomb is not mentioned. An empty tomb is replaced with the risen Christ. The transition between verses should be noted as ambiguous – is it telling us that John believed Jesus was resurrected, or simply believed what Mary had said, that the body was gone? Frankly, the latter is probably what is intended. Unlike Mary, they do not linger outside the tomb; they return home. “They did not understand.” Belief in resurrection does not come from an empty tomb. Belief in resurrection comes in a restored relationship. Belief in resurrection comes in Mary’s gospel preaching: “I have seen the Lord!”

A still unrecognized Jesus asks Mary, “Whom are you looking for?” (verse 15). Jesus asks a similar question of the first two followers in John 1:38. That was story of call. So is this. It is a call story for Mary Magdalene to be the first one to announce the news. It is a call story for John’s community and for us, to witness, with Mary, to what and whom we see and trust.

The other readings also bear witness to the power of God’s love as a source of new life. Jeremiah 31:1–6 affirms God as one whose love enabled Israel to find “grace in the wilderness.” Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 celebrates God’s steadfast love that empowers the hope of life.

Equally clear in these texts is the importance of witness and revealing. Acts 10:34–43 narrates Peter’s witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ, whose impartiality offers acceptance to all. The psalmist witnesses to God’s choice of the “stone” rejected by others. The twice-spoken “do not be afraid” of Matthew 28:1–10 reveals resurrection not to be a matter of fear, but of joyful faith. Colossians 3:1–4 links the revealing of Christ in God’s realm with our hope.

Upon hearing Jesus utter her name, Mary hears God’s “Yes!” When have you found yourself “named” and called by Christ? What do you hear in that moment, when Christ calls you by name? With whom can you share this astonishing message?
Reflection and Focus • April 16, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Connect with life

The Easter story is a story for the world and the community. Yet – especially in John’s gospel – it is intensely personal. Read the poem “Mary Magdalene’s Legacy” and reflect on a time when you felt belittled or discredited by someone’s words.

- What did that feel like?
- How did you find affirmation afterwards?
- Do you feel it came from God or from another source?

Scripture

John 20:1–18

As is the case with all the Bible’s Easter stories this one is overflowing with joy. Yet it is a different kind of joy coming subtly to Mary. Imagine yourself as Mary approaching the tomb, lingering there on the cusp of dawn.

- What words do you want to use to describe what you feel?
Some people believe verse 8 to mean that John (the other disciple) believed Jesus was risen, based on entering the empty tomb. However, verse 9 suggests that what he believed was simply Mary’s story, that someone had stolen the body.

- How does this change your understanding of the story?
- Imagine you are Peter or John. What feelings do you take as you go away from the tomb?
- Now, imagine you are hearing the risen Christ call you by name. How do you feel?

Many scholars consider Mary to be the first apostle of the church. She is the first to witness the risen Christ, and sent to proclaim.

Acts 10:34–43

Whereas the gospel readings tell us what happened that first Easter morning, this passage has sometimes been described as explaining what it all means. Read the passage, then re-read verse 34–35 and 43.

- What does it mean to “believe in Jesus”?
- Thinking about the story of the resurrection morning, and how people responded differently, what do you think people need to believe about that story? Which elements are vital, and which are less important?

Jeremiah 31:1–6

brings the message of renewed life. Here God tells the people to plant, to dance, to enjoy the fruit of the ground again. God’s faithfulness is everlasting.

- For whom might this promise of new life be most desperately needed in your community and world?

Connecting scripture and life

What does resurrection life mean for you today? Imagine you have gone to the tomb, found Jesus missing, been caught up in despair and anger and hopelessness. You hear your name, and the challenge to go out and proclaim the risen Christ.

- What would you proclaim? To whom do you proclaim it?
- How will you, individually and as a church, do that?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

Easter Sunday is the pivotal day in the Christian year. Some would say it is the day that defines us as Christians. Attendance at worship tends to increase for this day, and people are often caught up in an excited mood. As such, clearly the emphasis will be on one or more of the resurrection stories from the gospels. But what else? Other than proclaiming that Christ is risen, how will you honour this day?

As you prepare, you might want to reflect on this question: “What does it really mean that Christ is risen?” How will you proclaim that? How can you make this day about more than just flowers and bright music? If this day is God’s loud “Yes!” to Creation, how can you express that?
Worship Outline • April 16, 2017

Yes!

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: two women for the drama at the beginning of worship.
- Choose an option for hearing "Mary Magdalene's Legacy." For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “I Have Seen the Lord” on p. 108. For the dramatic reading, arrange for four actors to mime the actions.
- Bring items for setting the worship space; candles, extra lights, and lots of white/gold banners and sparklers, and so on. Arrange for a simple tomb at the front, where it can be easily seen. Arrange for two women, an angel, and narrator for the Entrance.
- Arrange for people to dramatize the gospel reading.
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 109–110.

Gather

After “growing” the light through Lent, and extinguishing it last Sunday, it will be important to ensure that the sanctuary feels filled with light this day: candles, extra lights, and lots of white/gold banners and sparklers, etc. can help enhance this mood.

Entrance

Have some kind of “tomb” at the front of the worship space. This could be as simple as a grey blanket over a table, coming down to the floor. A large box, covered with a similar blanket, could be off to the side of the end of the table, symbolizing the rock rolled away from the tomb. A couple of plants can help present the allure of a garden.

Two women enter, looking sombre and depressed, while a narrator reads Matthew 28:1–5a. The woman should be standing in front of the tomb at this point. Someone stands up from behind the tomb and proclaims:

Don’t be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn’t here, because he’s been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. Now hurry, go and tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead.

At this point the women, with brightened faces, turn to the congregation, one on each side, and go up to a few people saying things such as: “Good news – Jesus is risen!” “Christ is alive!” “Hallelujah!” “Isn’t it exciting? Christ is risen!” They encourage the people to turn and tell a neighbour, so that everyone has proclaimed the Easter message to at least one other person.

Call to worship

ONE: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!
ALL: Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah!
ONE: God has said a resounding “Yes!” to the world!
ALL: Come, let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Loving God, we lift our hearts in praise. This very day we know that life rules over death. All your promises to your people now hold new meaning. Christ is risen from the dead and we have new life because of that. You had proclaimed “Yes!” as a challenge to the problems of the world. As we hear that bold proclamation, help us to find new ways to make it our proclamation in our day-to-day living. Amen.

Prayer of confession

Note: as an alternative see the suggestion under “Opening the word.”

Teach the people that in response to the leader saying “…and we say” they will all say together “sorry.”
Worship Outline • April 16, 2017

As we reflect on the events we have commemorated this past week, different words and images come to mind. We imagine Peter’s feelings when he realized he had let Jesus down, and we say sorry. We think of Judas realizing his plan has gone horribly wrong, and the guilt he must have felt, and we say sorry. We think of Pilate, wishing he had an easy way out of a difficult situation, but not wanting to rock the boat and we say sorry. We remember the disciples who had promised to stick by Jesus no matter what, but who fled at the first sign of real trouble, and we say sorry.

Engage

Opening the word
Acts 10:34–43 This passage is especially powerful from the Message. It also could be read immediately following the prayer of confession, as wonderful words of assurance of forgiveness.

Peter fairly exploded with his good news: “It’s God’s own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favourites! It makes no difference who you are or where you’re from – if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The message he sent to the children of Israel – that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again – well, he’s doing it everywhere, among everyone.

“You know the story of what happened in Judea. It began in Galilee after John preached a total life-change. Then Jesus arrived from Nazareth, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, ready for action. He went through the country helping people and healing everyone who was beaten down by the Devil. He was able to do all this because God was with him.

“And we saw it, saw it all, everything he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem where they killed him, hung him from a cross. But in three days God had him up, alive, and out where he could be seen. Not everyone saw him – he wasn’t put on public display. Witnesses had been carefully handpicked by God beforehand – us! We were the ones, there to eat and drink with him after he came back from the dead. He commissioned us to announce this in public, to bear solemn witness that he is in fact the One whom God destined as Judge of the living and dead. But we’re not alone in this. Our witness that he is the means to forgiveness of sins is backed up by the witness of all the prophets.”

Moving into the focus scripture
If you did the opening with two women coming in, you may wish to point out the differences in the gospels. Here is one convenient way to explain it to those who might have questions:

The gospel accounts differ on some of the details. Most specifically they differ on the number of women, and which women, went to the tomb that first Easter Sunday morning. This isn’t surprising – often when we want to share exciting news about a great event, some of the details vary because, being so excited about the greater point of the story, the details simply do not matter. At the beginning of worship we shared part of Matthew’s gospel, which had 2 women going to the tomb. Now we read John’s gospel, featuring Mary Magdalene, Peter, and another (unnamed) disciple. The point of each of the stories is the same, though, and need not be questioned: however we understand it, Christ is risen.

As you hear the words of this story, imagine you are present in it – perhaps Mary, confused and hurt and angry, and then being transformed; or perhaps Peter or the other disciple, leaving the tomb in disbelief and doubt and wondering, only to have that transformed when Mary comes and proclaims her message.

Scripture
Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “I Have Seen the Lord” on page 108.

Dramaticreading Simple dramatization can make this story come alive while it is being read. Some actions are suggested here; you may wish to adapt it to suit your setting.

John 20:1–2 Mary Magdalene comes in silently, sees the empty tomb, and runs off, where she encounters Peter and the other disciple on the side and gestures to them as if speaking.

John 20:3–10 Peter and the other disciple might mime, as simply or with as much detail as seems appropriate, the actions as they are being read. Mary simply stands and watches. Toward the end of the reading, they look at each other with bewildered and confused expressions, and then go off.

John 20:11–13 Mary looks lost and forlorn. When she sees the angels, she offers a begging, pleading gesture, to no avail.

Words of affirmation

One: On this day of days we celebrate that, no matter what we may have said to God from time to time, God proclaims to us words of hope and forgiveness. No matter what we have done, know that God forgives you, and loves you, and invites you to celebrate new life.

All: Thanks be to God! Amen.
John 20:14–15 Mary turns and sees Jesus – her expression is one of bewilderment, for she does not recognize him. Jesus gestures a question to her, and she responds with a pleading look.

John 20:16 Jesus mouths the word “Mary” and she looks directly at him, surprised and overwhelmed and overjoyed.

John 20:17 Jesus appears to be explaining to Mary, who stands in pleasant shock.

John 20:18 Mary runs out, overjoyed. She could shout the words “I have seen the Lord” before exiting.

In response to the gospel, Mary could read “Mary Magdalene’s Legacy” found on p. 107.

After the focus scripture
Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again. (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

Prayers of the people

**ONE:** Loving God, on this day that you said “Yes!” to the world
we lift up to you those of your people who are hurting
and in need.
We especially think of those who are bullied, who are put down,
who have been told they are no good. May they hear you call them by name.
God, in your mercy,

**ALL:** hear our prayer.

**ONE:** We lift up to you all who find themselves shrouded in questions,
who may feel inadequate because they are unsure,
or because they do not appear to have all the answers.
May they hear you affirm their doubt as a pathway to faith.
God, in your mercy,

**ALL:** hear our prayer.

**ONE:** We pray for all who seek to proclaim your “Yes!” to others,
sometimes at great risk, through word and deed.
For all who seek to affirm others through acts of justice and compassion
we ask you to affirm them, and remind them that they are doing your work.
God, in your mercy,

**ALL:** hear our prayer. Amen.

Prayer of dedication
As the women drew near to the tomb on Easter morning, ready to give care to a loved one, may we reach out with actions of care and justice and compassion.
And as the women left the empty tomb and shared the amazing news of resurrection, may we witness to the life that is rising up within and all around us. Amen.

Go to proclaim to the world that Christ is risen!
Go to declare the death is not the final word!
Go to affirm that God says “Yes!” to all that is good!

Bless

Go and be Easter people.
Amen.

Special Days Commentary

**April 21 – Ridvan begins (Baha’i)**
This day begins the commemoration of the declaration of Baha’u’llah to his followers in 1863. Work is suspended on the first, ninth, and twelfth days of the commemoration.

**April 22 – Earth Day**
First observed in the United States in 1970, today Earth Day is celebrated worldwide as a time to focus on conservation and preservation of the world’s resources. Earth Day celebrations often feature educational programs and community activities such as cleaning up public parks and roadways, and participation in public recycling efforts. As stewards of God’s gifts, we are called to take care of God’s creation. Plan some Earth Day activities for your congregation, or partner with activities going on in your community.
Mary Magdalene’s Legacy

You have called me a whore from the very beginning, for two thousand years now and Eve before me: called us all whores and witches and worse.

Never bothered to get to know me; never wanted to ask me:
  why are you alone?
  what is your story?
  who are you, really?
  how are you feeling?

The other disciples from the twelve through countless thousands have discredited me discredited us called me a liar a trouble-maker a disruption a nuisance and worse.

I frustrate you. I confound you. For two thousand years you have quietly (and not so quietly) wished I would go away.

When the others turned and fled the cross, and the tomb, did you think I would flee, too? Did you think I would give up? How could I?

My life was too entangled with his. (Oh no, I won't satisfy your cheap curiosity with titillating gossip and spill the beans here.) No details except to say that had you not been so afraid of other’s stories you might have learned a little more about not only me but other disciples who ministered along-side Jesus,

learned of the work of so many more: the women, the children, the also-rans.

But all that aside, I never could have fled. Despite all I endured for three days, for two thousand years, I had to stay.

And in the silence, in the waiting, Christ came. And louder than all of the scorn and the ridicule and the fear and the hatred, louder than all of the lies and the misunderstandings and the abuse and the mistrust Christ spoke my name: “Mary.”

And I experienced resurrection.

It is that same Christ who commissioned me to go and tell.

So I am here – I have not gone away, I will not go away.

As long as anyone, anywhere, is rejected cast aside spat upon by the world – or, worse still, by the church – I am here to proclaim the same truth once told to me: Christ Jesus is risen for you, and calls you by name.

Let no one ever tell you otherwise.

Donald Schmidt © 2006 from Bible Wonderings: Familiar Tales Retold. Used by permission.
I Have Seen the Lord

Based on John 20:1–18

Mary couldn’t sleep. She couldn’t stop thinking about the terrible thing that had happened. She decided to get up. It was very early in the morning, but she wanted to go to the cave. They had hurried to put Jesus’ body in there before the start of the Sabbath. Mary wanted to check that everything was in order and to spend some time there. Maybe then, Jesus’ death would sink in.

She walked sadly to the cave. When she got close, she saw that someone had rolled away the large round stone used to cover the opening. Perhaps some of the other disciples couldn’t sleep either. But when Mary looked in, no one was there. Then, as she peered through the darkness, she realized that Jesus’ body wasn’t there. Mary was heartbroken. The Romans had killed Jesus and now someone had taken his body. Now they couldn’t even mourn him properly.

Not knowing what else to do, Mary ran to find the other disciples and give them the bad news. They ran at once to the tomb to see for themselves. Simon Peter went in to make sure that the body was really missing. He found the cloth that Jesus’ body had been wrapped in, but no body. The disciples went sadly home, but Mary stayed by the cave tomb and cried. She had loved Jesus so much it was hard to imagine life without him. As she wiped away her tears, a flash of bright white from the dim depths of the cave caught her eye. She looked in and to her surprise, she saw two people wearing dazzlingly white clothes sitting in the tomb. They asked why she was crying and she said, “Because someone has taken Jesus away and I don’t know where he is.”

Then Mary felt as though there was someone standing behind her. She thought one of the disciples must have come back and turned around. The tears in her eyes made it hard to see, but the man standing there wasn’t a disciple. Perhaps he was a gardener. Perhaps he had taken the body. The man asked Mary why she was crying. Mary said, “If you have taken Jesus away please tell me where he is.”

The man said her name – “Mary” – and all at once, Mary knew in her heart that it was Jesus. She had no more questions about where and how; she was just overjoyed to know that Jesus was with her. She longed to throw her arms about him and give him a big hug, but Jesus told her to go and tell the others.

Happily, she raced off and told the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “I Have Seen the Lord,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “I Have Seen the Lord.”
2. Imagine how Mary might have felt when Jesus spoke her name and she recognized who he was.
3. Use the materials provided to write or draw some of the feelings Mary might have experienced.
Stations • April 16, 2017

Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Joyful hats

Materials: paper plates (½ per person), long strips of sturdy paper (at least 50 cm/20 in. long), scissors, tape or stapler, items for decorating the hats: markers, crayons, ribbon, artificial flowers, glitter, and so on, copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

Directions:

The idea of wearing a new hat at Easter was to symbolize that God was doing something new. Often Easter bonnets were flamboyant as a way of saying “what God did was out of this world.”

1. Prepare hat bands by cutting paper plates in half. Starting at the middle of the straight edge, cut toward the outside of the plate, stopping about 5 cm/2 in. from the edge. Do this 2 or 3 more times. (See illustration #1.) Fold the cut portions up to form triangles. (See illustration #2.)

2. Give each child a paper band and a brim to decorate. Encourage older children to print “Alleluia” across their band. (You might help the younger ones.)

3. Place the band behind the brim’s points and secure the band to the points with tape or stapler. (See illustration #3.) Measure to the child’s head and staple into a hat.

Stained glass windows

Materials: pieces of black construction paper, one or more simple cross templates cut from cardboard (these should smaller than the openings to be cut in the black paper), onion skin paper, markers, glue or tape, copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

Directions:

The empty cross is a reminder to Christians that Jesus is alive – no longer on the cross. When we surround it with flowers and other bright colours it is a way of expressing our joy that Jesus is alive.

1. Make a frame by folding black paper into quarters and cutting away the middle section. (See illustration #1.)

2. Use cross pattern to trace a cross on this discarded middle piece.

3. Draw lead outlines with a black marker on a piece of onionskin paper.

4. Colour the “glass” sections of the onionskin in joyful colours.

5. Glue or tape the onionskin paper to the frame.

6. Glue cross silhouette to the “glass.”
Decorate Easter eggs

**Materials** hard-boiled eggs, non-toxic felt pens, stickers, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Directions**

1. Using the materials provided, decorate an egg with symbols of new life, being careful not to break the shell.
2. Take your egg home and prepare it as part of a meal; you could swap your egg with someone else!

**Suitable for all ages working together**

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The practice of hospitality

**Directions**

1. Using the materials provided, decorate an egg with symbols of new life, being careful not to break the shell.
2. Take your egg home and prepare it as part of a meal; you could swap your egg with someone else!

**Suitable for all ages working together**

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Scraperboard

**Materials** purchased or homemade scraperboard, scrapers, nibs or craft pens

**Suitable for all ages working together**

**Instructions** for homemade scraperboard (to be made in advance of the session):

1. Cut some card or heavy paper into (approx) 21 x 15 cm/8.5 x 6 in.
2. Paint with white PVA glue. Dry well and apply another coat if needed (texture does not need to be smooth). Dry well again.
3. Apply clear wax floor polish with a soft cloth; dry, polish lightly, and apply a second coat. Allow to dry and harden.
4. Paint on India ink with a large soft brush, persisting until the ink sticks and covers the white glue/PVA.
5. Allow to dry thoroughly.
6. Start scratching!

**Directions**

1. Use the scraperboard to depict new life revealed in Christ, using the contrasting colours to convey the transformation of resurrection.

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**Suitable for all ages working together**
Mary was laughing, and jumping, and dancing with joy; Mary had a wonderful message to deliver.

Celebrate the joy of Easter by waving streamers and singing, “Alleluia!”

You will need a plastic lid from container, variety of ribbons or crepe paper strips (90 cm/3 ft lengths)

Directions
1. Have a grownup cut out the middle of the plastic lid, to create a plastic ring.
2. Loop the ribbon or crepe paper around the ring (see illustration).
3. Wave your streamers as you sing to the tune of “London Bridge.”

Alleluia, shout hooray!
Shout hooray! Shout hooray!
Alleluia, shout hooray!
Jesus is alive!

Jesus Is Alive!
Based on John 20:1–18

Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus’ friends. She had stood and watched on that terrible day when Jesus died. Mary felt as if she would never smile again.

Early on Sunday morning Mary went to the place where they had put Jesus’ body. By the time Mary reached the tomb, the sun was just starting to come up. The sunrise turned the sky into a jumble of orange, yellow, and purple. Mary looked at the tomb and saw at once that the stone had been rolled away and Jesus’ body was gone. What a horrible shock.

Mary was very upset. She ran to call some of Jesus’ disciples. They came running to the tomb as fast as they could. They, too, saw that the tomb was empty. Where was Jesus? The disciples didn’t know what to do, so they went back home. Everyone was very puzzled.

But Mary didn’t want to go home. Mary stayed by the tomb to see if she could find out what had happened to Jesus. Mary was feeling really sad. First Jesus had died, and now Jesus’ body had gone. Could things get any worse? Mary cried and cried.

Then Mary turned around and saw someone standing there. Mary was crying so hard that the tears made it difficult to see.

“Why are you crying?” the figure asked. “Who are you looking for?”

Mary thought she was talking to the gardener. “Sir,” Mary sobbed, “if you have taken Jesus away, please tell me where the body is.”

“Mary,” the figure said.
As soon as Mary heard her name she knew who the figure was. It wasn’t the gardener; it was Jesus!

Mary couldn’t believe her eyes. Jesus had been dead but now he was alive! Mary’s tears disappeared in a flash and in their place was the biggest smile!

“Go and tell the other disciples what has happened,” said Jesus.

Mary ran as fast as she could to tell the disciples. She was laughing, and jumping, and dancing with joy.

“I have seen Jesus. Jesus is alive.”
It was very early in the morning when Mary went to the tomb. Choose some of the people from the Easter story and put them in the picture. Draw some plants, trees, animals, and birds that might have been in the garden. What might have been in the sky to celebrate on that first Easter morning? Add that to your picture.
Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasononline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Easter 2
St. George
Yom HaShoah (Judaism)

Armenian Martyrs’ Day

ANZAC Day (Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand)

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)
Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3–9
John 20:19–31

Djibouti, Somalia

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Seasons of the Spirit™ SeasonsFUSION Lent • Easter 2017

113
It’s True

For Christians, it is important to grasp the truth of the Easter story, to have faith in Christ’s resurrection. But is truth the same as fact? Facts are things that can be proven (and thus, presumably, can also be disproven). Truth, though, is different. Truth can be based on fact, or it can be based on faith. Today’s classic story about Thomas coming to the truth about the risen Christ can be helpful for those who struggle with aspects of this story today. As we will encounter again in a couple weeks, the facts of resurrection are bizarre, sometimes stretching the imagination a little too far. But the truth of it – that Christ is risen, and comes to be with us even in the midst of our greatest fears – is real.

Focus scripture: John 20:19–31

The opening verse connects locked doors with “fear of the Jews.” Yet the disciples were all Jews. The reference here more properly focuses on the Jewish religious authorities who opposed Jesus and sought his execution (19:6). The absence of Thomas from this gathering is not explained, nor is it condemned. After all, the disciples who gathered did so out of fear, not faith. In Acts 2, the gift of God’s Spirit comes during the Pentecost festival, fifty days after the first Easter. In John, the gift of Spirit comes on the evening of the first Easter. Jesus bestows Spirit upon the community for the exercise of forgiveness. Jesus’ “breathing” upon the disciples to empower them with Spirit recalls Genesis 2:7, where God breathes life into the one formed of dust. The same word in Greek means “breath” and “spirit.”

“Seeing and believing” dominate the encounter between Thomas and Jesus. This has been an ongoing theme in John. At the opening of this gospel, Jesus asks Nathaniel, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree?” (1:50). The story of the man born blind in John 9 is filled with nuances about sight and belief. In this focus passage, the only blessing spoken by Jesus and recorded in John falls on those who have not seen, but believe. That blessing reflects the life situation of the original community addressed by this gospel. Most, if not all, of John’s first readers would not have seen Jesus. Yet they believed. Jesus’ blessing of them is Jesus’ blessing of us as well.

This story is often used to berate doubt, based on verse 27. But the word translated as “doubt” there is not one of the common Greek words for doubt. It is ἀπιστος, whose literal meaning would be closer to “without faith” or “unbelief.” Jesus graciously provides Thomas what he needs to move from unbelief to belief. Faith does not remove all doubts and questions. Faith invites trust of and witness to the risen Christ. With Thomas’ confession, this chapter concludes with a statement of faith.

The additional scriptures call readers to witness to such faith and trust. Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14a, 22–32) points not just to himself, but to “all of us” who are witnesses to the risen Christ. Psalm 16 anchors a prayer for deliverance in witness to the God who shows us the path of life. 1 Peter 1:3–9 testifies to subsequent generations of faith: “although you have not seen [Jesus], you love him...even though you do not see [Jesus] now, you believe in him.”

It’s seldom explored, but perhaps Thomas didn’t join the other disciples in hiding out because he wasn’t afraid. Perhaps he somehow knew that God was still with him, even though he was not aware of the stories of Christ’s resurrection. What helps you believe in the Resurrection? What questions do you have about it? Where do doubt and faith – truth and fact – intersect for you?
Reflection and Focus • April 23, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life
We are in the Season of Easter, an unbridled celebration of Jesus alive again in a new way.

■ What does it mean to you to say we are Easter people?

Scripture
John 20:19–31
There is the potential for anti-Semitism in the statement that the disciples were hiding from “the Jews,” and also in Acts 2 where Peter speaks of how “you nailed him to a tree.”

■ Remembering that Jesus and the disciples are Jews, who were “the Jews” from whom the disciples are hiding?

■ What doors are we keeping shut through fear?

The Greek word often translated as “doubt” in verse 27 conveys a lack of trust, or loyalty. It is not cognitive acceptance of facts Jesus is looking for, but a heart-filled trust. See the article “Thomas Leads the Way.”

■ How might this definition of “doubt” colour what this passage is or is not saying to Thomas? To us?

Nothing keeps Jesus from coming to the disciples – not even locked doors.

■ What might John be trying to tell us about Jesus simply coming in, rather nonchalantly, and saying “peace be with you”?

■ How have you understood/experienced God’s Spirit?

■ What is the one specific instruction Jesus gives the disciples at this point?

In the translation The Message, verse 23 is rendered: “If you forgive someone’s sins they’re gone for good. If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?”

■ Is this translation helpful, or distracting?

■ If one does not offer forgiveness, what are the options for that person?

Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Faith does not remove all doubts and questions from our minds. Instead, faith invites trust of and witness to the risen Christ. The story about Thomas takes place Easter Day and a week later; this reading from Acts takes place some seven weeks later. On Easter Day, Peter was cowering in fear with the other disciples, a few days earlier he was denying knowing Jesus, Now he is putting forward a persuasive speech.

■ What has happened for Peter between Easter and now?

■ When have you received a fresh breath of faith and Spirit in a time of doubt?

■ What kind of process helped you change your mind?

1 Peter 1:3–9
Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we have a “pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish” (v. 4, Common English Bible).

■ What – if any – might be the conditions for receiving this inheritance?

■ To whom do you believe it is offered?

Connecting scripture and life
Sometimes we hide in fear, and sometimes we have questions.

■ How do these hamper your faith?

■ How do these help your faith to grow?

■ How might you encourage others who have fears, doubts, and questions, and remind them that these need not be impediments to faith?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
Easter Sunday is a vital, extravagant, wonderful celebration in the life of the Christian Church. This next Sunday has often been called “low Sunday” because many people feel they have “done it” at Easter and tend not to attend church this week. Yet this is another Sunday in the ongoing, exciting Season of Easter. How can you make the celebration of Christ’s resurrection more than just a one-day thing in the life of your church? How can you, through worship, learning, and serving, help the congregation to grasp that Easter is not just a day but a season, and beyond that a way of living?
Worship Outline • April 23, 2017

It’s True

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: two or more readers for reading 1 Peter 1:3–9
- Choose an option for hearing John 20:19–31. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Questioning Thomas” on p. 120. For the dramatic reading, arrange for someone to take on the role of Thomas using the version The Voice™ which can be found at https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020:19-31. For the reflection, arrange for someone to take the role of Thomas to present “Reflection by Thomas” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION).
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 121–122.

Music Suggestions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Music Title</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus, Live in Us</td>
<td>Daniel Charles Damon</td>
<td>p. 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Peace of the Earth</td>
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<td>Traditional; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pass It On</td>
<td>Kate Abba, Julia Abrahams</td>
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<td>Without Seeing You</td>
<td>David Haas</td>
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<td>Thine Is the Glory</td>
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A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 Seasons of the Spirit Music Volumes can be found at www.seasonsonline.ca. Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

Gather

At the beginning of the service create the sound of locking doors, or loudly shut the church doors. Allow the silence to hang for a short time.

Call to worship

ONE: When doors were shut and the world was kept out, ALL: resurrection found the disciples.
ONE: When the church gathers and the world waits outside, ALL: resurrection finds us.
ONE: When fear grew and new questions were found, ALL: resurrection found the disciples.
ONE: When faith leads us into new questions about life, ALL: resurrection finds us.
ONE: When suffering remained and the city was hostile, ALL: resurrection found the disciples.
ONE: When Christ gathers with his followers in living worship, ALL: resurrection finds us.
ONE: Come, let us worship God!

Opening prayer

God of great surprises, God of unbounded joy, into our uncertainties and faltering this day your voice echoes in our hearts: Breathe deeply, take good heart, do not be afraid.
Amen.

Prayer of confession

ONE: There are times when we judge others. Out of fear of being judged ourselves, we call them names, and put them down. We may discredit their faith, and write them off.
ALL: O God, forgive us.
ONE: When other people have a faith that differs from ours, we say it is not enough.
ALL: O God, forgive us.
ONE: Sometimes we believe that doubts are an impediment to faith.
ALL: O God, forgive us.
Worship Outline • April 23, 2017

Engage

One: Gracious God, in a world where there is such a vast rainbow of ways to have relationship with you, help us not to limit our vision and our understanding. We pray in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

Assurance of pardon

One: Jesus said to Thomas, “Even better blessings are in store for those who do not see and yet believe.” We have never seen Jesus, and yet we know that in mysterious and wonderful ways the risen Christ is with us even now, offering us forgiveness and new life.

All: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

1 Peter 1:3–9

Invite two or more readers to offer this scripture as a series of profound and exciting statements. They might alternate verses, or you might have several people at microphones throughout the worship area, perhaps standing up and proclaiming a verse or partial verse, with great enthusiasm.

Moving into the focus scripture

This week we read the story of a disciple named Thomas who comes to a wonderful and renewed faith in Jesus. What is interesting about Thomas is that, while the other disciples are hiding behind locked doors in fear of the religious leaders, Thomas does not seem to share that fear. Note, too, that even though the disciples proclaim to him that Jesus is risen, a week later they are still finding security behind locked doors.

John 20:19–31

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Questioning Thomas” on page 120.

Dramatic reading Arrange for someone to read the story of Thomas as a dramatic reading using the version The Voice (VOICE), which can be found at https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020:19-31

Note: The Voice is a translation that arranges passages such as this one for dramatic reading. They also add some small portions to the text on occasion to help it read more clearly; such additions are always in italics.

Reflection Either in lieu of the reading from the gospel, or in response to it, you could offer a reflection by Thomas that is in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of Seasons FUSION.

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at www.seasonsonline.ca).

Prayers of the people

One: Ever-present and loving God, we pray for those for whom life seems like a locked room. We think of those who feel afraid and unable to move (short time of silence); do not abandon them,

All: but show the path that leads to life.

One: We pray for those who suffer distress through injury or illness, unable to be free of pain or physical restrictions (short time of silence); do not abandon them,

All: but show the path that leads to life.

One: For leaders and forward thinkers whose ideas are thwarted by ignorance or biased legislation, we pray (short time of silence); do not abandon them,

All: but show the path that leads to life.
**Worship Outline • April 23, 2017**

**Bless**

**One:** We think of those who find it hard to believe in you without seeing you, confined by traditions or caught in conflicts of doctrine
*(short time of silence)*; do not abandon them,

**All:** but show the path that leads to life.

**One:** For ourselves, when we are unable to see beyond the boundaries of our narrow world, or lack the will to work for the good of others
*(short time of silence)*; do not abandon us,

**All:** but show the path that leads to life. Amen.

**Prayer of dedication**

We offer you these gifts, O God, as testament to the fact that we have come out of hiding. We are here, ready to go and proclaim your message of love, forgiveness, and hope to all the world. Use us, with all our doubts and questions, to proclaim this simple truth to the world. We pray in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

Go to live in the world as Christ’s disciples. Know that God accepts all questions and wonderings, and God is forever patient with us as we take the time we need to come to an understanding of God’s presence in our lives.

Amen.

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**Special Days Commentary**

**April 23 – Yom HaShoah (Judaism)**

This day memorializes the six million Jews, as well as homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Roma (gypsies) who died in the Holocaust. It is a day to emphasize respect for the dignity of all people and to work to prevent such horrors from ever happening again.

**April 23 – St. George**

George is believed to have been a soldier who was martyred in Lydda, Palestine, during the Diocletian persecution about 304 CE. While legend says that George slew a dragon, some authorities believe he was confused with St. Michael, who was usually depicted wearing armour in religious icons, or was mistakenly identified with Perseus, a mythological character from the area of Lydda who is said to have slain a sea monster. George replaced Edward the Confessor as patron saint of England following the Crusades, when returning soldiers brought back with them a renewed devotion to St. George.

**April 24 – Armenian Martyrs’ Day**

On April 24 of each year people remember the series of massacres on Armenian Christians that took place in Turkey between 1894 and 1915. Over one and one-half million people were killed, more than 6000 of whom were clergy.

**April 25 – St. Mark**

According to Acts 12, Mark (or John Mark) accompanied his cousin Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey to Perga. Later, he went to Cyprus with Barnabas and to Rome with first Paul and then Peter, thus earning his title “Evangelist.” The gospel attributed to Mark is generally recognized as the earliest, and is the shortest of the accounts of Jesus’ life. It is thought to have been written while Mark was in Rome and may have been based as much on Peter’s preaching as on Mark’s own memory of the events.

**April 25 – ANZAC Day (Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia)**

The anniversary of the World War I landing of the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps on Gallipoli in 1915 serves as an opportunity to honour the past and to recommit ourselves to working for peace and justice in the present and future.
For generations we have read and heard about doubting Thomas; that wayward disciple who only gets his act together when presented with the irrefutable proof of a resurrected Jesus and more particularly his hideous wounds. “Ah, do not be a doubting Thomas,” it is often said, “only believe (most times against common sense) and you shall be saved!”

In a post-enlightenment world, “doubt” has become synonymous with sheer skepticism. Whereas for the author of John’s gospel, the deliberate use of the Greek word ἀπιστός conveyed a lack of trust in or loyalty toward Jesus, not simply a doubting of so-called facts. In line with John’s theology, such a relational disbelief or hard-heartedness meant an inability to share in Christ’s life of extended grace and compassion. That’s why Jesus invites one whom he loves with the words, “Do not be faithless but faithful.”

According to the post-Easter story, what was at stake for Thomas – and now what is critical for the contemporary church – is not a pure and watertight belief system, but a radically open heart and mind. An openness that gives rise to and sustains the spiritual virtues of inclusion, trust, wonderment, and respect. For the writer of John, these virtues are the very core of an active and missional faith.

Given the highly relational emphasis of John, it is no accident that its brilliant author places on Thomas’ lips the celebrated faith affirmation, “My Lord and my God.” This affirmation is not a proof text of Christ’s divinity; rather it is a model of discipleship based in gratitude and praise. A discipleship that is more fully able to grow, adapt, and relate to the world around it.

With divisive stresses in many denominational circles around a true “orthodoxy,” it would be helpful to reflect again on the word’s real meaning of “right praise.” Free in that knowledge and experience, faith does not have to be about getting the complex sums right or toeing somebody else’s line without question. It has more to do with the joy of exploration; a meeting of text and experience, an interplay between tradition and reason.

Consequently, our re-telling of stories such as Thomas in the upper room, need not shun the imagination or the necessary questions. I would even go so far as to suggest that such accounts are fully dependent upon imaginative responses to make them live and breathe in our own lives. So often the Bible is presented as wooden prose or perhaps more accurately, it is read in a highly prosaic manner. In my experience, this rarely nourishes the soul or enflames the spirit. Rather, it can be deadly. Yet when we pause long enough to consider it, the subject matter of the Christian scriptures is the stuff of amazement and mystery. Therefore our thinking, language, and mission can be shaped accordingly.

It may well be that the faithlessness Jesus admonished Thomas for has more to do with needing to be certain and “right” in himself than it has to do with a genuinely searching and compassionate faith. As we know, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to be continually stretched and surprised.

According to the post-Easter story, what was at stake for Thomas – and now what is critical for the contemporary church – is not a pure and watertight belief system, but a radically open heart and mind. An openness that gives rise to and sustains the spiritual virtues of inclusion, trust, wonderment, and respect.

Sean Gilbert is a Minister of the Word with the Uniting Church in Australia, and Lecturer in Ministry Practice at Uniting College, Adelaide, South Australia.

He has a keen interest in the meeting place between the Christian faith and poetics. He is a songwriter, teacher, and preacher.
Questioning Thomas

Based on John 20:19–31

Thomas was with the other disciples when Mary rushed in and told them she had seen Jesus. Thomas found Mary’s story hard to believe. He was a sensible, practical man and only believed in things he could see and touch. Jesus was dead – how could Mary have seen him and talked to him? He decided that her grief must have made her crazy.

Despite Mary’s words, the disciples were scared. The Romans had killed Jesus, would they be next? Many of them stayed together, locking all the doors so they would be safe. However, Thomas decided that it would be safer to stay away from the other disciples. If he just carried on with his work, maybe no one would notice him.

The next day some of the disciples found Thomas in the marketplace. Instead of being sad and scared, they seemed confident and happy. They told Thomas that they had seen Jesus, too. They had been in a locked room when all of a sudden Jesus was there with them. He had said, “Peace be with you” and told them he was sending them to continue his work.

Thomas couldn’t believe his ears. Was everyone going crazy? Thomas wanted to believe their story but he was a sensible, practical man and only believed in things he could see and touch. Thomas told the disciples that he wouldn’t believe unless he could see the nail holes in Jesus’ hands and feet and touch the wound in his side.

However, there was a faint stirring of hope within Thomas. Something had made the disciples unafraid. He started to spend more time with them, trying to understand what had happened. And so Thomas was with the other disciples when, all of a sudden, Jesus was with them in the room. Thomas was a sensible, practical man and only believed in things he could see and touch. But now he saw Jesus and Jesus told him to touch his wounds. All at once, Thomas’ questions were answered and he believed. “My Lord and God,” he said.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials: recording of today’s story “Questioning Thomas,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story.

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Questioning Thomas.”
2. Use the art materials provided to show a “before” and “after” Thomas – how might he have looked before he saw Jesus for himself? How might he have looked afterwards?
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

Writing letters

Materials paper and pencils or pens, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

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Suitable for ages 3–adult

The practice of living into the story

It can be helpful to imagine ourselves in the midst of a biblical story, and to think through how it might have felt.

Directions

Imagine you are Thomas, or one of the other disciples. Write a letter to your home in Galilee, explaining what has just happened. Begin:

Dear <name>

You’ll never guess what just happened to me! We were all hiding out (you’d be proud of me for being so careful) when ....

Who was Thomas?

Materials copies of “Who Was Thomas?” resource sheet (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION), pens, Bible, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

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Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of digging deeper

Directions

1. Take a copy of the resource sheet “Who Was Thomas?” and a Bible, and try to answer the questions.
2. You might want to work in teams on this.

Tattoos

Materials modelling clay, or play dough pressed into plastic jar lids or something similar; wooden tool, such as toothpicks or kebab sticks; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

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Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of telling our stories

Directions

For Thomas, Jesus’ wounds told something of his story.
1. In some cultures, people wear tattoos that tell the story of their past, or the history of their ancestors. Sometimes, a wound is incorporated into a tattoo.
2. Design a tattoo to tell your story, creating it from dots/holes formed in the clay using the wooden tool.
3. If you wish, tell others in the group about your design and the story behind it.
Art
Materials  Bibles, variety of collage materials, glue, paper

The practice of imagination
Directions
1. Read Psalm 16 (the psalm for this week).
2. Think about the phrases “path to life” and “fullness of joy” from Psalm 16.
3. Use the materials provided to create a collage that conveys life and joy.
Younger children  Think about a place or time when you have felt safe and happy. Use the materials to show others what it is like.

Breath prayers
Materials  Bibles; space set with pillows, or chairs, set apart from each other; (optional) recording of quiet, meditative music, player; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of prayer
Directions
Adults  Matching the quiet or silent repetition of a simple prayer with our breathing helps to empty the mind of worries and opens us to God’s presence. Here are some ideas for practicing breath prayers.
1. Spend a few moments sitting quietly, with your eyes closed, breathing in and out slowly, focusing on each breath.
2. Create a personal prayer, with each phrase at least five to eight syllables long, to encourage relaxed breathing. Or,
3. Choose a psalm or other scripture reading, saying one phrase as you breathe in, and the next phrase as you breathe out. For example:
   Protect me, O God // for in you I take refuge.
   I bless the Lord // who gives me counsel;
   Therefore my heart is glad // and my soul rejoices.
   You show me the path of life // in your presence there is joy.
   (Selected verses from Psalm 16)

Young people  Our minds whisper messages to us constantly throughout the day. People talk to us. We hear traffic noises. Breath prayers can help fill our minds with God’s peace. Breath prayers are silent, so you can pray anytime, anywhere. Here are some ideas for practicing breath prayers.
1. Spend a few moments sitting quietly, with your eyes closed, breathing in and out slowly, focusing on each breath.
2. Create a short personal prayer (one or two sentences long) with words that say something that you hope for, or are thankful for. Make each phrase at least five to eight syllables long, to encourage relaxed breathing. For example,
   O God, open my mind to peace // open my heart to love.
   O God, be with me today // in what I do, in what I say.

Children  Explain that breath prayers are like silent rhymes to God. We say the first half of our holy rhyme as we breathe in and the second half as we breathe out. Invite children to sit quietly with their eyes closed; breathe in and out together, counting quietly to five with every breath in and out. Then teach them the following simple breath prayer by reading each line slowly and quietly.
   As you breathe in, say silently, “Peace be.”
   As you breathe out, say silently, “with me.”
   As you breathe in, say silently, “Peace be.”
   As you breathe out, say silently, “with you.”
Thomas Is Amazed

Based on John 20:19–31

After Jesus died, his friends were sad and afraid. They were sad because they thought they would never see Jesus again, and they were worried about what would happen to them. They stayed together, locking all the doors so they would be safe.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the room with them. The friends were amazed. Jesus was alive!

Jesus said to the friends, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus’ friends had so much to say to Jesus. They talked and talked to Jesus. Then Jesus went away.

Thomas was one of Jesus’ friends. Thomas wasn’t in the room that day and was still very sad.

“Thomas,” the friends said. “We saw Jesus!”

But Thomas said, “I don’t believe you. I want to see Jesus. Then I will know that Jesus is still with us.”

The next week, all the friends were in the same room again, including Thomas. Suddenly, Jesus was there, too. Everyone was amazed.

Jesus said to Thomas, “Touch my hands. I’m really here.” Thomas was amazed. Then Jesus turned to everyone and said, “My love will always be with you.”

Create

No matter what, Jesus’ love will always be with us. Like Thomas and the disciples, we can share the good news of Easter.

- Make copies of, or trace the pencil decoration. Make more than one.
- Decorate your pencil decorations with markers, pencils, and stickers.
- Cut out the decoration and punch holes where indicated.
- Slide a pencil through the holes.
- When you give these pencils to family or friends, you will be sharing the good news of Easter.

Children’s Activity Leaflet • April 23, 2017

Story Time

Thomas Is Amazed

Based on John 20:19–31

After Jesus died, his friends were sad and afraid. They were sad because they thought they would never see Jesus again, and they were worried about what would happen to them. They stayed together, locking all the doors so they would be safe.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the room with them. The friends were amazed. Jesus was alive!

Jesus said to the friends, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus’ friends had so much to say to Jesus. They talked and talked to Jesus. Then Jesus went away.
Here is the locked door. Draw a scene from the story of Thomas – you can draw your scene outside the door in the marketplace, or inside the room when Jesus appeared to his friends, the disciples.
Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 2:14a, 36–41
Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19
1 Peter 1:17–23

May 2017

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April 2017

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Eritrea, Ethiopia
Followers of the Way

Renowned Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan made a profound statement about this week’s gospel reading. “Emmaus never happened,” Crossan wrote. “Emmaus always happens.” What we are invited to grapple with in that statement is the truth that the factual (historical) significance of the resurrection stories is secondary to a more profound truth: the risen Christ is with us. Now. Here. That is what the early church began to learn, and it is what enabled them to move on.


The exact location of Emmaus is not known. Perhaps this uncertainty forms a commentary on the focus scripture. Emmaus may be anywhere. Hearts burning and eyes opening do not take place in only one place, either geographical or spiritual. Emmaus comes into sight wherever a path leads us toward communion with God and whenever we recognize the risen Christ among us.

On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, two disciples walk along the road to Emmaus with Jesus, informing this “stranger” about the events in Jerusalem over the past three days. The disciples know the details of the story, yet they do not understand the events they have witnessed. Jesus explains the scriptures and their hearts are burning, yet they still do not know why.

The disciples extend a gracious invitation to the “stranger” to stay and eat with them. The text tells us that Jesus “walked ahead as if he were going on.” This response speaks on several levels. Custom held that such an invitation should only be accepted when made with insistence. Luke records that the disciples “urged him strongly” to stay. Jesus’ preparation to continue ahead hints at another truth. Jesus does not force himself upon others. God’s grace does not barge in where not wanted, but neither will it stand apart when invited in.

Jesus’ actions during the meal are described with four verbs: take, bless, break, give. These same four verbs are used to describe the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:16). Three of these verbs also occur in Luke’s account of the Last Supper in Luke 22:14–20, with “give thanks” replacing “bless.” While the twelve disciples left that table not understanding fully, these two disciples leave the table at Emmaus with fresh understanding. They rush to declare, “Christ is risen indeed!”

On the Emmaus road, the hearts of the disciples burned as they listened to Jesus’ words. In Acts 2:14a, 36–41, Peter’s preaching on the Jerusalem streets “cut to the heart” of those who listened. At Emmaus and in Jerusalem, the presence of God is revealed in Jesus the Christ. For those to whom such revelation is made, witnessing is the response.

In Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19, the writer speaks of the “cup of salvation.” There is also a sense of crying out for “recognition” of the plight. This psalm shares with Peter’s sermon a strong witness to God as One who saves.

Exile and revelation in 1 Peter 1:17–23 parallel aspects of the Emmaus story. The closing words about “the living and enduring word of God” speak not only of the word that burned in the hearts of the two disciples, but also of the word that opened the hearts of the crowd in Acts. In both cases, the living word brings faith to life.

We do not always recognize God’s companionship on the road. We do not always sense “the living and enduring word of God” on our own. Jesus’ words and actions continue to call out to who we are and what we need. What encounters assure you of the presence of Christ? When you declare, “Christ is risen indeed!” what is your hope? How will you witness to this truth?
Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life

Ponder this quotation from John Dominic Crossan: “Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens.”
■ What might Crossan be trying to say?
■ How important to you is it that the resurrection stories in the Bible be factual?
■ How important to you is it that the resurrection stories in the Bible be metaphorical?

Scripture

Imagine you are one of the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus that day. Remember, this story takes place Easter Sunday afternoon. Some women told you this morning that Jesus was risen, but you know that can’t be true. Now, read the story.
■ At what point in the story might a light bulb have gone on for you?
■ What might it have felt like to hear this “stranger” explain faith history as you walked on the road?
■ When has someone outlined a piece of history as a way to make a present point?

Jesus meets the travellers where they are on the road, and in their need. He gives them space to speak and space to be themselves; recognition comes in its own way and in its own time. Jesus’ questions typically invite us to become more aware of what is happening within and beyond us.
■ What questions can we ask that might help people recognize Jesus in their lives and in our world today?
■ In whom do you recognize Jesus?
■ What has it been about them that has led to this recognition? (actions? words? qualities?)
■ In what ways do you recognize the presence of God in your own life?

Acts 2:14a, 36–41 and 1 Peter 1:17–23 share a common understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Both readings communicate an unwavering certainly that the events of Jesus’ life were not only fore-shadowed by the Hebrew Scriptures but were also necessary for salvation. The “Jews” listening to Peter’s testimony in Acts were convicted by this reality of salvation. In response, they confessed their sins and were baptized.
■ How might you explain God’s saving work to someone as you understand it?
■ What has been your response to a growing awareness of God’s salvation?

In response to Peter’s preaching earlier in the chapter, the people are “deeply troubled” (verse 37, Common English Bible) or “cut to the heart” (New International Version, New Revised Standard Version) or “acutely distressed” (New English Translation).
■ Why do you think this is their reaction?
Notice that Peter’s response in verses 38-40 encourages them, and some 3,000 respond.
■ What might have been your reaction to the sermon earlier in the chapter, and to the words in verses 38-40?

Connecting scripture and life

The fact that Jesus appears and disappears in this story, and that we do not know a location of the town of Emmaus, have led some scholars to speculate that the story may be a metaphor for the everyday moments when we encounter the risen Christ in our lives today.
■ When are some times you feel the risen Christ accompanying you on your life’s journey?
■ How important is this in the life of the church today?
■ How can we be both followers of Jesus, and followers of the way?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

There are many ways the risen Christ is with us now. Not physically, of course, but in a real spiritual way. Conveying that will be important in what we do this week, as we encounter this powerful story of two disciples coming to an awareness of the presence of Christ with them in their journeying. For people who want to know how Christ is with them today, this story provides a wonderful reminder that we can feel Jesus with us without having him physically there. For those who may struggle with some of the “facts” of resurrection, this story can help us realize that that is not the point — the point is an awareness of the risen Christ with us in the things we are doing and facing today.
Followers of the Way

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: three or more people for the dramatic reading of Acts 2:14a, 36–41.
- Prepare a series of slides of paths and roadways to be shown throughout worship (as described under “Gather”).
- Choose an option for hearing Luke 24:13–35. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “At Emmaus” on p. 132. For the dramatic reading, arrange for two voices. For the Emmaus drama, arrange for three actors to present the drama that is on p. 131.
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 133–134.

Opening prayer
We have heard the call, loving God, to come into your presence. We have heard the challenge to be baptized in the name of Christ and receive new life. We have heard the invitation to turn away from a society focused on greed and self-centeredness, and to turn our lives toward loving and serving one another. Guide us and lead us, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of confession
ONE: When we fail to recognize the Christ travelling beside us,
ALL: O God, forgive us.
ONE: When we fail to recognize the Christ in others all around us,
ALL: O God, forgive us.
ONE: When we fail to recognize the Christ in the world of which we are a part,
ALL: O God, forgive us.
ONE: When we fail to recognize the Christ in the headlines in the news and events that occur every day,
ALL: O God, forgive us.
Worship Outline • April 30, 2017

**One:** Open our eyes and our hearts, gracious God, to recognize that you travel among us always, and that you are present in any way we would otherwise ignore. Amen.

**Assurance of pardon**

**One:** No matter where we find ourselves on life’s journey, Jesus comes and travels with us. Jesus offers us forgiveness and new life at every turn of the path. So know, friends, that whenever you turn to God, God welcomes you and forgives you.

**All:** Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Opening the word**

**Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19**

While psalms are often read responsively by the congregation, the intensely personal nature of this psalm works well if it is led by one person, as if they are sharing some personal information with the congregation. It could be read by an individual in a way to suggest they are speaking spontaneously. A paraphrase such as *The Message* helps bring the message alive.

**Acts 2:14a, 36–41**

*This brief dramatic reading is taken from The Voice, which is a translation that arranges passages such as this one for dramatic reading. They also add some small portions to the text on occasion to help it read more clearly; such additions are always in italics.*

**Peter:** Everyone in Israel should now realize with certainty what God has done: God has made Jesus both Lord and Anointed King—this same Jesus whom you crucified.

**Narrator:** When the people heard this, their hearts were pierced; and they said to Peter and his fellow apostles, 

**Pilgrims:** Our brothers, what should we do?

**Peter:** Reconsider your lives; change your direction. Participate in the ceremonial washing of baptism in the name of Jesus God’s Anointed, the Liberating King. Then your sins will be forgiven, and the gift of the Holy Spirit will be yours. For the promise of the Spirit is for you, for your children, for all people—even those considered outsiders and outcasts—the Lord our God invites everyone to come to Him.

**Narrator:** Peter was pleading and offering many logical reasons to believe. Whoever made a place for his message in their hearts received the baptism; in fact, that day alone, about 3,000 people joined the disciples.

*Scripture taken from The Voice™. Copyright © 2008 by Ecclesia Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

**Moving into the focus scripture**

Invite people to think for a few moments of times when they have felt the presence of Christ with them. Does this happen in fleeting, occasional moments or is it more sustained? Does it happen only when we are in certain moods, or can it happen any time? Where are places where we especially feel Christ closest to us?

**Luke 24:13–35**

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

**Bible story** Have a storyteller present the story “At Emmaus” on page 132.

**Dramatic reading** Arrange for two voices to read out of sight of the congregation.

**One:** I felt such a fool!

**Two:** You may have felt a fool. I looked a fool! All that talking we did with him. All that “Are you the only one not to have heard?”

**One:** “Have you been hiding somewhere?”

**Two:** “Do you know nothing of what happened?”

**One:** How could we not have known?

**Two:** I can’t believe we didn’t recognize him!

**One:** Until the bread was broken!

**Two:** Yes, until he broke the bread.

**One:** Then all of heaven’s light reflected in those eyes.

**Two:** And his voice echoed round us as if we were sitting amidst heaven’s mountains.

**One:** And we stared.

**Two:** Silenced.

**One:** In awe.

**Two:** Shocked.

**One:** Comforted.

**Two:** Amazed.

**One:** Reassured.

**Two:** Astonished.

**One:** Loved.

**Two:** Yes, loved.

**One:** I still felt a fool.

**Two:** And I know I looked a fool.

**One:** It won’t be the last time.

**Two:** Let’s go and tell the others.

**Emmaus drama** Arrange for three actors to present the drama on p. 131.

**After the focus scripture**

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.
After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

Prayers of the people
Provide a substantial portion of silence between each stanza for reflection.

**One:** Bread for all, bread in all, we pray, O God:  
**All:** when we are orphans, hungry, oppressed. (silence)

**One:** Faith for all, faith in all, we pray, O God:  
**All:** to recognize faith in other ways, other texts, and other worshipping communities. (silence)

**One:** Grace for all, grace in all, we pray, O God:  
**All:** when we are estranged, alienated, scorned. (silence)

**One:** Wisdom for all, wisdom in all, we pray, O God:  
**All:** when we are disabled, neglected, impoverished. (silence)

**One:** Spirit for all, Spirit in all, We pray, O God:  
**All:** for Mother Earth, our children, and a shared, common future.

Prayer of dedication
What can we give back to you, O God, for all the good things you have done for us? We lift up the cup of salvation. We call on your name. We keep the promises we have made to be your people, proclaiming your goodness to all the world. Amen.

This is 1 Peter 1:20–23 from Good As New: a Radical Retelling of the Scriptures by John Hanson.

“You are changed people since you accepted the truth. You're learning the true meaning of love. Now you must love one another with honesty and enthusiasm. You've begun a new life. You no longer have the personality you inherited from your natural parents. You now have the new personality you've been given by God, your eternal Parent.”

So go in peace, and know that the risen Christ will travel beside you always. Amen.

Special Days Commentary

**May 1 – St. Philip and St. James**

In the gospel of John, Philip is the third disciple to be called by Jesus, and it is recorded that Philip then brought his friend Nathaniel to Jesus. Philip is also named in the account of the feeding of the 5000 (John 6), and in John’s account of the Last Supper. Philip’s request to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied” (14:8) leads to Jesus’ farewell discourse.

The James referred to this day is James, the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). Some scholars believe this is also the person referred to by Jerome as “James the Less,” and “James the Younger” who, in Mark’s gospel, is a witness at the crucifixion. James, the author of the epistle, is believed by some to be yet another man, most likely the brother of Jesus, mentioned by name in Matthew 13:55 and elsewhere.

Both Philip and James are celebrated on the same day because the church in Rome, where their relics rest, was dedicated on this day in the year 560 CE.

**May 6 – St. John the Evangelist**

Some churches commemorate John the apostle and evangelist on this day. (Other churches observe St. John’s Day on December 27.) Traditionally, John is thought to have been the youngest of the apostles. He was called by Jesus as he sat fishing in a boat with his father, Zebedee, and his brother, James. Known in scripture as “the one whom Jesus loved,” and the disciple whom Jesus entrusted with the care of his mother as he hung on the cross, John was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and was a witness to the empty tomb.
Emmaus drama

(Two disciples walking on the road; their demeanour is one of depression and defeat)

**One:** What do we do now?
**Two:** I don’t know.
**One:** Everything seemed so wonderful.
**Two:** Jesus gave us such hope (pause). And now it’s all over.
**One:** I know. Hardly feel like carrying on.
(Quite suddenly someone else appears – the two are surprised, as if the person just appeared out of nowhere.)

**Stranger:** (cheerfully) So, how’s it going? (They say nothing, only look at him.) What’s happening? You look like you’ve just lost your best friend.

**One:** (after a pause) We have.
**Two:** Are you the only person in all Jerusalem who doesn’t know what’s been going on?

**Stranger:** I guess so. What’s been happening?

**One:** Jesus, that’s what – or I guess I should say “who” – has been happening.

**Stranger:** Who’s Jesus?

**One:** (a little exasperated) Jesus of Nazareth. He was an incredible guy. He taught us about God, he did great things, people loved him.

**Two:** But he was killed. The religious leaders ganged up on him. They couldn’t stand the fact that he kept preaching good news, kept telling people who were on the margins – you know, women, children, the disabled, foreigners, the poor – that they were blessed, that they were loved by God. We even thought that maybe he was the Messiah.

**One:** Some of the women from our group said they went to his grave this morning, and his body was gone. They had some kind of vision of angels who said Jesus was alive. Some of the others went to check it out, but they didn’t see any angels. Story kind of doesn’t make sense, anyways.

**Two:** Like it or not, it’s over.

**Stranger:** I can’t believe you guys!

**One:** What do you mean? I swear it’s all true.

**Stranger:** No, I mean I can’t believe you’re being so thick-headed. You ever read the Bible?

**Two:** Like it or not, it’s over.

**Stranger:** I can’t believe you guys!

**One:** What do you mean? I swear it’s all true.

**Stranger:** No, I mean I can’t believe you’re being so thick-headed. You ever read the Bible?

**Two:** Well, yeah.

**Stranger:** What does it tell us? Page after page after page, the Bible is all about love. God’s love. God’s love for everybody. And just think of it, how God is always bringing about new life. Abraham and Sarah – old as the hills, and yet God promised them as many descendants as there’s sand at the sea. And at the age of 90, Sarah had a baby!

Or Noah even before that – God was angry, was set on destroying the whole world. But didn’t.

Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, who ended up saving God’s people.

Deborah, the judge who defeated the foreigners even when our people were outnumbered.

Ruth, a foreigner who nobody liked, but who ended up caring for Naomi and in fact being more loving and caring than anyone else.

David, her great-grandson, a king who made all kinds of mistakes, but God still loved him, and forgave him.

Esther, a woman in a unique situation who saved her people from total annihilation.

And the prophets! Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea – all reminding us that God loves us. No matter what. And God has promised to stick by us, no matter what. Forever. So, your friend? Maybe he isn’t really gone...

**One:** I’d like to believe you, but...

**Two:** Anyway, here we are. You want to come in for some dinner? It’s getting late, you must be starving.

**Stranger:** Okay, just for a little while.

(They go “inside” and sit down at a table. Stranger takes a loaf of bread.)

**Stranger:** Thank you, God, for this bread. (He breaks it, and gives them each a piece.) Do this, in remembrance of me... (he then leaves, as if instantly).

**One:** Whoa! Where’d he go?

**Two:** I don’t know! (pause) Who was he, anyway?

**One:** I don’t know – but...there’s something eerie. The way he broke that bread, it was just like when...

**Two:** I know. It was just like Jesus.

**One:** And the things he was talking about...sounded just like Jesus.

**Two:** And now he’s gone, just like Jesus (pause). Or is he?

**One:** You know, I felt on fire when he talked to us. I got this incredible sense of hope.

**Two:** Me too, as if Jesus were still here with us. As if, somehow, in a way I can’t explain, he never really left.

**One:** Maybe that’s what he wanted us to know – that no matter where we go, Jesus will always be with us. Whenever we do the things he taught us, he’ll always be with us. When we care for others, and work for justice, Jesus will always be with us.

**Two:** You don’t think that maybe that was...?

**One:** Nah. Well...maybe...(pause). Nah – couldn’t be. Well...
At Emmaus
Based on Luke 24:13–35

Look!” my little brother David, shouted. “They’re coming!”

I ran out to the road to see. “It can’t be them! I thought Uncle Cleopas and Aunt Tabitha were coming on their own, but I could see three people.” But David was right.

We ran to meet them. Our aunt and uncle live in Jerusalem and we hadn’t seen them for ages. “Please have a meal with us,” Uncle Cleopas was saying to the stranger, “I want the children to hear you talk about the scriptures, too.” Mum had warned us that he and Aunt Tabitha might not feel like talking with us much because they had been very sad since the teacher and prophet Jesus died a couple days ago. But they didn’t look sad – they looked excited.

David and I helped bring the rice, chickpeas, and vegetables to the table with the wine, and the rest of my family joined us. So did the stranger. My father was about to say a blessing on the meal, but the stranger asked if he could say it. He picked up the loaf of bread, closed his eyes, looked up and prayed, “Father, bless this bread.” Then he gave a piece to my uncle who was sitting next to me: “This is my body, Cleopas, broken for you,” he said. My uncle said, in a very shocked voice, “Jesus.” Aunt Tabitha said at the same time, “It’s Jesus!” I turned to the stranger, completely confused. But he wasn’t there anymore. There was just an empty chair. He’d gone.

My uncle and aunt looked around the room and then ran out to look for the man. David and I helped them but we couldn’t find anyone. Nobody could work out where Jesus had gone. Strangely, my uncle and aunt still didn’t seem sad.

We all went back to our seats. David asked the question we were all thinking: “How could the man sitting at our table in our house have been Jesus when Jesus died in Jerusalem last week?”

My aunt replied, “What the man did at our table is exactly what Jesus did with his closest friends just a few nights ago, the night before he was killed. He gave them the bread and the wine and he said those same words he said to Cleopas.”

My uncle said, “When he talked to us about the scriptures on the road here it was as if I understood what they really meant for the first time. He is the one we have been waiting for, the chosen one our prophet Isaiah talked about, the one who had to suffer for us. The women were right – Jesus is alive.”

Everybody had stopped eating – we were all so stunned. Aunt Tabitha and Uncle Cleopas stood up. “We have to go back to Jerusalem straight away,” said Cleopas, “to tell all the friends of Jesus that he is not dead – he is alive. There is no need to be sad and frightened any longer.”

After they had said goodbye, my father looked at us all. “I need to go to Jerusalem, too,” he said, “to find out more about this Jesus.” My mother smiled. “We must all go,” she replied.

Bible story
Materials recording of today’s story “At Emmaus,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling
Directions
1. Listen to the story “At Emmaus.”
2. Use the paper and crayons or pencils to draw or write about your response to Cleopas and Tabitha recognizing Jesus.
3. What questions do you have about this story?
4. Cleopas and Tabitha rushed immediately to tell their friends about Jesus being alive. Can you think of any other times when people rushed to tell those they knew about Jesus?
Stations • April 30, 2017

Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Cards: Breaking bread together

Materials loaf of bread, cards from resource sheet “Breaking Bread Together” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of sharing with others

Directions
In the story of the disciples journeying to Emmaus they recognized the presence of Jesus in the breaking and sharing of bread. One way we are able to live out our calling as followers of Jesus is through sharing with others.
1. Shuffle the cards, and place them face down next to the bread (with “last card” on the bottom).
2. One person takes a card, reads it, and does the action.
3. Repeat until you have used all the cards.

Suitable for all ages working together

Thank you cards

Materials construction paper, coloured pens and pencils, envelopes, stamps, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of gratitude

Directions
1. Think of three people who have walked alongside you on your journey of faith and made a difference to that journey, whether for a few hours or for a few years. Younger children think about one person who shows you Jesus’ way of love.
1. Make thank you cards to send to each of them. You might like to write how the person helped you.
2. Place each card in an envelope and place a stamp on it ready for mailing.

Suitable for all ages working together

Collage

Materials sheets of construction/heavy paper, scissors, pens, glue, old magazines – ideally copies of The National Geographic (old copies are often found in charity/thrift shops), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of reflection and discernment

Directions
1. Cut out pictures and words or phrases that connect with the ways you have experienced the presence of God in your life. It could be through people, words, events.
2. Glue them onto the heavy paper.
3. Are there any patterns that become clear when you look at the images and words you have chosen?
4. Find one last picture or word to represent where you see God in your life or the life of your faith community today.
Light holders

Materials  small jars, different colours of tissue paper, container of white glue thinned with water, paintbrushes, tealights, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Directions

1. The light of God’s love shone in Jesus’ life, and shines in ours, too. This light and love lives on.
2. Make candle holders to share as gifts through the pastoral care team visits.
3. Tear tissue paper into small pieces and apply to the jars by brushing a light coating of glue mixture onto a small section, placing tissue paper scraps over the glued area, and overlapping the papers slightly.
4. Paint over these layers with another layer of glue.
5. Continue until the jar is covered, and place tealights inside.
6. When dry, give to the congregational caring ministry.

Suitable for all ages
Jesus Is With Us
Based on Luke 24:13–25

One day, two people were walking along a road. They were going from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus. They were very sad because their dear friend, Jesus, had died. They missed him very much.

Soon someone came to walk beside them. As they all walked together, the person asked, “Why are you sad?” The two friends said, “Our good friend Jesus has died. We miss him so much.”

As they walked down the road together, the person told the two friends many stories about God. And the two friends listened and listened. When they arrived in the town of Emmaus, the two friends said, “Please come to our house and stay with us.”

When they sat at the table, their guest took the bread, said a prayer and broke the bread just like Jesus used to do. The friends looked at each other in amazement, “Jesus, lives on,” they said at the same time.

The two friends were so excited they had to tell everyone the good news. They didn’t care that it was almost dark. They didn’t care that they had just walked a long way. They jumped up from the table and ran out, all the way back to Jerusalem. “Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus is still with us,” they shouted to everyone who would listen.
The Road to Emmaus

The two friends were so excited they went back to Jerusalem telling everyone who would listen, “Jesus is still with us.”
### Sunday, May 7 – Saturday, May 13 • 2017

#### Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

**Easter 4**
- **Good Shepherd Sunday**

#### Things to keep in mind this week…

- Visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) for Spirit Sightings to access connections between current events and the focus passage.

**Liturgical colour:** white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

### May 2017

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- **Easter 4**
- **Good Shepherd Sunday**
- **Acts 2:42–47**
- Psalm 23
- 1 Peter 2:19–25
- John 10:1–10

Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda
Glad and Generous Hearts

The image of Jesus as Good Shepherd is the most common one to be found in the catacombs. In days when Christianity was not yet legal, this symbol clearly evoked Jesus to those within the community, but was just another image for those outside. One source for this image is the parable of the shepherd who hunts for a lost sheep; another is the 10th chapter of John in which Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. Yet there are other images, too, such as descriptions of things the early church did that were “shepherd-like” in caring for others. How we emulate the shepherd we follow is a key part of being Christian.

Focus scripture: Acts 2:42–47

As noted in verse 42, the rituals and practices of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer define the early Christians. Their life together sets the stage for the Spirit’s continuing work of empowering witnesses to proclaim, in word and deed, God’s saving love that comes through Christ.

This community of Jesus’ followers is gathered and waiting for Christ to return in glory. To some extent, this is the reason they can sell everything and live sharing all that they have. Their common faith leads to the holding of goods in common. Possessions serve the common good and respond to any in need. Leviticus 25 taught the tradition of Jubilee – an appointed time when debts would be forgiven and slaves would be set free. The redistribution of goods in this community embodies Jubilee and is a witness to their neighbours. The things that give life are shared.

Imagine the questions the neighbours of this group might have asked when observing the way they lived together! Then, as today, the church’s witness is not limited to the words spoken by its members or their deeds of mercy. Sometimes, the most powerful witness of the Christian community is in the testimony of the way it conducts its life together.

Acts 2:47 reports that this community of Jesus’ followers enjoyed the “goodwill of all the people.” “Goodwill” is a translation of a Greek word that also means “grace.” Perhaps such feelings of goodwill made it easier for the Body of Christ in that place to make God’s grace known to their neighbours.

In closing, the passage notes the community’s growth. The writer declares that such transformation comes from God through the power of the Spirit. This is a witness to the church in all times about how growth is a gift of God’s provision of grace, nurture, and feeding.

The writer of Psalm 23 offers a bold proclamation of the ways that God – our shepherd – provides an overflowing abundance of what is needed for life: sustenance, water, safety, and direction. God’s people can move with trust and faith into such abundant life.

In 1 Peter 2:19–25, there is a powerful witness to Christ as “the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” Written to Christians who were being persecuted, 1 Peter does not discount the reality of suffering. Even when facing such challenges, the example of Christ guides and the community of Christ sustains.

Each year on this Good Shepherd Sunday the gospel is taken from the 10th chapter of John. The relationship between shepherd and sheep, between Christ and the church, is at the heart of John 10:1–10. This relationship leads to abundant life.

One of the key things that this reading from Acts tells us about the early Christians is that they shared their food “with glad and generous hearts” (v. 46, NRSV). Given the persecution of the time and the fact that there was incredible uncertainty about the future, this seems a very courageous and wonderful thing to do. How readily can you live out your Christian faith with a glad and generous heart? What would help make that easier?
Reflection and Focus • May 7, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life
Think about your experience of Christian community – either your church(es) or in other settings.

■ What are the highlights of this community?
■ How readily are things done with glad and generous hearts?
■ How is sharing lived out in this community?

Scripture
Act 2:42–47 illustrates a resurrection community, where everything is shared with those in need.

■ What would it be like to live like that early Christian community portrayed in this passage? What kind of world would be possible?
■ How might you make this a reality in your own community?
■ Where do you see the qualities and positive relationships of this early church community locally or globally?
■ What qualities and positive relationships do you see in the early church?

The picture of the early church living as if there were no tomorrow can be enticing.

■ To what extent are there connections with contemporary living?
■ What are the practical implications of having things in common? How practical was it then and might it be now?
■ Is there a point where generosity is met by responsibility?

Psalm 23 offers a picture of a God who cares for all of our needs: “The Lord is my shepherd.” Chances are that many, if not most, can identify the passage at hand by simply hearing or reading those five words. Consider your own familiarity with those words.

■ What are the memories and associations they evoke?


■ What would be a new model of shepherding?
■ How might one understand it in an urban context? a suburban context?
■ What is the difference between being a shepherd and being a sheep? Where are you most comfortable?

1 Peter 2:19–25 This letter was written in a time of persecution and hardship for Christians.

■ The writer makes a virtue of patient endurance in the face of unjust suffering. How does this hold today in our homes? churches? schools? wider society?
■ What should be our response to abuse?
■ Under what circumstances should Christ’s patient suffering be an example to follow?

Connecting scripture and life
Community seems to be important in all this week’s passages. The immediate reality of resurrection was to build community in a new, balanced way. Isolation was not a way of gospel living.

■ In what ways can the radical picture of the Acts community be a starting point or inspiration in your own community?

It has been said that one’s authentic self can be found in those places where we are able to be most generous.

■ What single change in your living, individually and as a church, might help nurture others as they grow in faith?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

The text from Acts for this week paints an ideal picture of the early Christian church. One can embrace it with great enthusiasm, or one can dismiss it outright as being fanciful but impractical. Alternatively, one can explore ways in which this model can be lived out today. How might we adapt the early church practices to apply in our modern world? How can we “shepherd” one another? How might these examples help us do that?
Glad and Generous Hearts

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: two for the prayer of confession, two for the prayers of the people.
- You might use one of the paraphrases of Psalm 23 that is on p. 67.
- Choose an option for hearing Acts 2:42–47. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “The Early Church” on p. 144. For the dramatic reading, arrange for two readers and choose statements from your own congregation’s documents to intersperse with the verses.
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 145–146.

Call to worship

ONE: God, our Shepherd, invites us to this place.
ALL: God invites us to rest in grassy meadows, and leads us beside restful waters.
ONE: God has set a table for us in the presence of our enemies.
ALL: God has given us so much, it is as if our cup overflows!
ONE: Come, let us gather in the house of our God.

Opening prayer

We gather as followers of Jesus, who embodied love and showed us how to be the very presence of God. May our faith deepen beyond personal piety and mere tradition to become the story we tell with every breath of our lives. Amen.

Prayer of confession

We read of the early disciples gathering and doing things with glad and generous hearts. Yet that is not always the case with us. I invite you to hear these passages of scripture, and the reflections on them that challenge us on how we live.

ONE: The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to shared meals, and to prayers.
TWO: And yet when we disagree with others’ teachings we put them down; we think they are wrong; we do not want to join them in a meal, or pray with them. (Pause.)
ONE: A sense of awe came over everyone.
TWO: And yet we are too often skeptical, reluctant to see God’s presence in our everyday lives. (Pause.)
ONE: The believers were united and shared things. They would sell property and possessions and distribute them to those who were in need.
TWO: But how can we tell who is really in need? So many people want to rip us off. They might say they are in need, but I’m not so sure. (Pause.)
ONE: They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.
TWO: But sometimes I’m tired and I don’t want to live in a way that models God’s goodness. I only want to focus on me. (Pause.)
ONE: Forgive us, God, when we are more concerned with ourselves than with our wider community. Amen.
Worship Outline • May 7, 2017

Words of affirmation

**One:** Hear these words from scripture: “Though you were like straying sheep, you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your lives.” Friends, know that in the presence of our Shepherd and Saviour Jesus the Christ, our sins are forgiven.

**All:** Thanks be to God! Amen.

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**Opening the word**

**Psalm 23**

This psalm was also included in the lectionary readings for March 26 this year. You might choose to use one of the paraphrases that are on p. 67.

**Moving into the focus scripture**

Invite people to think of a brief sentence or phrase that describes your congregation, such as “The church where everyone belongs” or “We’ve been here for 150 years, but we’re not stuck there.” Ask them to take a moment and share these with a person or two sitting near them.

**Acts 2:42–47**

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

**Bible story** Have a storyteller present the story “The Early Church” on page 144.

**Dramatic reading** Consider reading this passage interspersed with readings from your own congregation’s documents. This will vary depending on documents you have, but it might be something like:

- alternating the verses of Acts 2:42–47 with lines from your church’s mission statement
- preceding the scripture reading with a statement of beliefs from your congregation’s founding documents, or a statement that is integral to your denomination
- following the scripture reading with a statement of faith that is unique to your denomination or congregation
- find some key statements in your congregation’s constitution and bylaws (or similar documents) and read these between portions of the scripture reading

The idea here is to form a linguistic bridge between the description of the early Christian church and the way in which church is lived out in your particular setting.

**After the focus scripture**

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

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**Respond**

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

**Sing** or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and downloading at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

**Prayers of the people**

**One:** God our Shepherd, we give you thanks for the world you have created, for your presence in our lives, and for the care that you give to all beings.

**Two:** Jesus said, “I came so you might have life –

**All:** life to the fullest measure!

**One:** You lead us beside grassy meadows and restful waters. You keep us alive!

**Two:** Jesus said, “I came so you might have life –

**All:** life to the fullest measure!

**One:** When we are faced with huge challenges, remind us that we are not alone. (Specific prayers of intercession for those in need of God’s presence could be offered here.)

**Two:** Jesus said, “I came so you might have life –

**All:** life to the fullest measure!

**One:** When we find ourselves at odd with others, break down the barriers between us, and help us to be friends, working together for your realm.

**Two:** Jesus said, “I came so you might have life –

**All:** life to the fullest measure!

**One:** You have promised always to pursue us, to seek us out, so that you might always love us and care for us. Thank you, God, for the many ways you have chosen to be with us.

**Two:** Jesus said, “I came so you might have life –

**All:** life to the fullest measure! Amen.
Prayer of dedication
We bring what we have, O God. We know there are many around us who are in need, and while we cannot do everything, we know that you can take what we offer and use it to make a difference. So take these gifts, brought with glad and generous hearts, and use them for your work. Amen.

Go out in peace to follow Jesus, our Shepherd.
Receive the shepherd’s care, and care for others.
Model the grace of God in our world that others will know they want to be a part of what we have as God’s people. Amen.

Special Day Commentary

**May 10 – Vesak (Buddhism)**
This day marks the three-fold commemoration of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. Vesak is celebrated each year on the day of the full moon of the sixth month in the Theravada tradition. Buddhists universally observe the day with great veneration. Believers set aside this day by performing acts of merit such as giving alms to the poor, making offerings to the temples, reciting sutras, meditating, listening to preaching, and observing all the precepts of Buddhism. Killing of any kind is avoided and Buddhist followers are encouraged to eat vegetarian food for the day.
The Shepherd as Protector and Host

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”
– Psalm 23:5

In some biblical passages, the difficulty of interpretation is obscurity. With others, the difficulty comes in familiarity. With the possible exception of John 3:16, few biblical texts are more familiar in terms of frequency of hearing than Psalm 23. And having heard it all, we may presume to “know” it all. But do we?

Consider this one simple line that opens the fifth verse about God preparing a table for the psalmist in the presence of enemies. Just what exactly does this mean? Two viewpoints dominate the interpretive suggestions: the shepherding God as protector and as host.

As suggested by Philip Keller (A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23) and others, “tables” were flat, well-pastured areas in the hills of Judea used for grazing. The task of the shepherds, however, was not merely to lead the flock from one “table” or pasture to another. Rather, in preparation for leading the flock there, the shepherd would have the responsibility of protecting the sheep from noxious plants that they might otherwise eat and snakes. To deal with the threat posed by serpents, according to these sources, the shepherd would pour thick oil around the holes of the snakes that would make it far more difficult for them to emerge. Secondly, and in keeping with the second half of verse five, the shepherd would anoint the heads of the sheep with aromatic oils (perhaps the same as the first) whose smell was a further deterrent.

The more traditional view of verse five involves shepherding as hospitality. Those who would seek to make sharp distinctions between the images of shepherd and host overlook the natural link between those images. As a host saw to the needs and particularly feeding of one’s guests, so, too, did the shepherd have the responsibility of feeding the flock. In fact, the same Hebrew word raah can mean both “shepherd” and “feed.” The image of the psalm thus underscores the providential nature of God’s care whereby we are fed in God’s shepherding care.

Even these two interpretations of God as “protector” and God as “host” need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Years ago, I heard a Presbyterian missionary and scholar from the Middle East. He related an episode from his ministry in Egypt. He had been summoned to appear before a hostile government board in southern Egypt. This was at a time when the Islamic fundamentalist movement was asserting itself, particularly in the region to which he had been ordered to go. When he arrived in the town where the hearing was to be, he was met at the train station by a local Egyptian pastor. The pastor, who was well-known and respected in the community, insisted on taking the missionary out to lunch in a very public place. The pastor’s act was not only hospitable in sharing food, but in making the clear statement that he stood by this individual. In the missionary’s mind, this act of hospitality saved his freedom and perhaps his life. When he spoke to that audience of which I was part, he specifically referenced Psalm 23:5 in the telling. That Egyptian pastor had prepared a table before him in the presence of his enemies.

John Indermark is a minister in the United Church of Christ. John writes devotional books and Christian Education curricula, and is a regular contributor to Seasons of the Spirit.
The Early Church

Based on Acts 2:42-47

There are lots of churches around today. There are many types of churches: some are big and some are small. Some use different languages. Some churches have done things the same way for many, many years while others are always looking for new ways to do things.

Some church buildings are big and full of people; some are big with only a few people. Some are small. And some churches don’t even have buildings – they are groups of people that might meet in someone’s home, or in a school, or outdoors under a tree, when they want to worship God.

In other words, there is lots and lots of variety to the way we are the church today. But it wasn’t always like that.

You see, in the earliest days of the Christian church – in the first weeks and months and years after the first Easter – there were not many people involved in the church, and they tended to do things pretty much the same way.

Many of them still gathered to worship God on Saturdays in the local synagogue because that is what they had always done. But they also gathered on Sundays, because that was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

They listened to stories that the apostles told – the women and men who might have travelled with Jesus, or who had known someone who travelled with Jesus.

Often, when they heard stories of things Jesus taught and did, people were amazed. It was incredible to think that God was involved in our world, and cared about everybody – the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the important and the not-so-important.

The early Christians shared things, too. Whenever they had a meal they made sure none went hungry. And they would sell things they had so they could share the money with people who needed it.

Perhaps most importantly, they did all these things with joy, because they believed deep down that this is how Jesus wanted them to live. It seems they were onto something, too, because a lot of people saw what the early Christians were doing, and said to themselves, “I want to be part of that.”

And that’s how the church grew and grew and grew.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “The Early Church,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “The Early Church.”
2. The paper and crayons or pencils to draw how you imagine the early church to be.
3. How might you show people caring for each other, or sharing things with others?
Stations • May 7, 2017

Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Community project
Materials article from your local paper, national church newspaper, or page from a website that focuses on a local or national group that builds community; paper and pens/pencils, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of hospitality
Directions
1. Read the article about a local or national group that builds community. How could you support this group or use some of their ideas?
2. Discuss with the other people at this station how you could organize a practical expression of community.
3. Note suggestions for the names of the people who could be involved and set a time frame to approach them.
4. Pass on recommendations to leaders for their next scheduled meeting.

Community chalk board
Materials large board suitable for taking chalk drawing; chalks; damp cloth or board wiper, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of building community
Directions
1. Write in large letters across the board, the name of your church or faith community, or group that has a special focus or mission.
2. Talk with each other about the actions, activities, and happenings that make this community a welcoming and growing place.
3. Write these features round the name.
4. Younger children may draw what they like about the church or group that helps them to feel at home and welcomed.
5. Display the board in a visible place on your church property over the next few weeks.
6. Place a container of chalk near the board and encourage people to add to it.

Drawing the perfect church
Materials large sheet(s) of paper, coloured markers or pencil crayons or other writing/drawing implements, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of re-imagining church
Directions
Too often we think of “church” as the building where we worship. But maybe a church building can be something more…
1. In a small group (or on your own if you prefer), draw a picture of an ideal church. But there is one rule: it cannot look like other churches you have seen!
2. The “ideal” church you draw does not have to follow any other rules. It might have no roof, so you can enjoy trees and open sky when you worship (who cares about rain!); it might have a medical clinic, and/or a coffee shop. Maybe it will be a bus so it can go and be where people need it.
3. Let your imagination(s) run wild! Be sure to share your drawing(s) with others.
Cooperative game

Materials  space to accommodate game and any noise it might generate; a copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of working together like the early church

Directions
In the early church, people did things together. This wasn’t always easy, and people did not always know how things would turn out.
1. Play the cooperative game “Human Knots.”
2. Stand in a circle, facing each other (this works best with at least 5 people).
3. Each person reaches their right hand into the circle and grabs the right hand of someone else.
4. Each person then reaches their left hand into the circle and grabs the left hand of a different person.
5. Make sure you are not holding the hand of a person beside you.
6. You are now tangled in knots, and the goal is to undo the knot – without letting go of the hands.
7. This will involve working cooperatively, doing things such as crawling under two hands, or stepping over hands, or turning around, and so on. If necessary, let go hands for a brief moment (but join back with the people with whom you were connected) to avoid twisting in ways that could hurt someone!
8. Discuss how it felt trying to work together to solve the problem. Did you end up with one circle or two, and which direction did you end up facing? Who took leadership? Was everyone listened to? Did anyone feel frustrated? Why? How did you feel at the end?

Fish mobile

Materials  hangers or paper plates; string; small squares of foil; construction paper, or tissue paper; glue; fish shapes cut from construction paper; copies of scripture verse: “They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone” (Acts 2:47 Common English Bible); copy of the directions displayed where all can see.

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of supporting one another in community

Directions
The early Christians used the symbol of a fish as a secret sign. When Christians travelled to a different community, if they saw the fish symbol they would know that there were other Christians in that place.
1. Choose three or four fish shapes.
2. Glue scripture verse on one fish and decorate the others with mosaic pieces.
3. Attach to hanger or paper plate with string. (Extra hands are especially helpful for assembling mobiles.)
The first followers of Jesus were known by their loving actions and signs.

Make some binoculars and search for signs of Jesus love.

**You will need** two cardboard tubes, masking tape, paper heart shapes or stickers, hole punch, yarn

**Instructions**

Tape the two cardboard tubes together with masking tape.

Punch two holes in the top and make a loop with yarn.

Where might you see signs of Jesus’ love? During the week, search for signs of Jesus’ love. You might leave a tiny heart shape at each place wherever you see loving actions.

**Alleluia, Alleluia,**  
*(tune: “Frère Jacques”)*

God is love. God is love.  
Wave our hands with joy.  
Wave our hands with joy.  
God is love. God is love.

The people in the very first Christian churches loved Jesus very much. They always tried to love others just as Jesus did. If people were hot and tired, they would give them a drink of water.

They went to the temple to worship God. They loved to sing songs about God’s love.

After they prayed at the synagogue they would meet in each other’s homes, like this one, and share a meal together. They remembered how Jesus shared meals with his friends, too.
This child could be you or someone else. Draw a home around this child, thinking about who will help to care for her or him, and what the child needs to be able to grow well.
Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Easter 5
St. Matthias
Mother’s Day

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 7:55–60
Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16
1 Peter 2:2–10
John 14:1–14

May 2017

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Easter 5
St. Matthias
Mother’s Day

Kenya, Tanzania
Stand Firm

This week’s scriptures set up a strange tension. On the one hand, rock is used in a positive way: God is referred to as a rock and a fortress in Psalm 31:3. In 1 Peter 2:1–10 we are told Jesus is a living stone, and that we ourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. And yet, in the reading from Acts we read the story of Stephen the deacon being stoned to death because he stands firm in faith and witness to Jesus. Like fire which we will celebrate in a few weeks at Pentecost, rocks are both good and bad.

Focus scripture: Acts 7:55–60

When we last read about the early Christian community, they enjoyed the “goodwill of all” (Acts 2:47). This regard was short-lived. In Acts 4 we learn that Jewish leaders came to Peter and John, “annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 4:2). The leaders ordered Peter and John to cease their witness. They did not, and the number of Jews believing that Jesus was God’s Messiah continued to grow. Again, in Acts 5:17–42, there is an account of the growing tension between these two groups within the Jewish community. As the Body of Christ grew, the disciples appointed elders – individuals to care for the physical needs of the members. One such individual was Stephen.

In Acts 6:8–12 we learn that Stephen “did great wonders and signs” and spoke with “wisdom and the Spirit.” The temple leaders charged Stephen with blasphemy – showing contempt or a lack of respect for God. This charge was punishable by death (see Leviticus 24:13–16). Stephen stands trial and defends his witness in a fiery sermon, recorded in the first part of Acts 7. As we enter the focus scripture, Stephen has stopped speaking and the stage is set for the sentence for the charge of blasphemy.

In Acts 7:55–56, we learn that as Stephen faced his executioners, he “gazed into heaven” and “saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” This is the Easter message embodied: Christ reigns in glory. Those who heard this covered their ears to block out what were, to them, words of blasphemy.

Note the parallel between Stephen’s dying words in verses 59–60 and Jesus’ dying words. Stephen entrusts his spirit to the resurrected Christ. Like Jesus, Stephen prays that his executioners’ sin not be held against them. (See Luke 23:34, 46.)

One wonders what effect these words of forgiveness may have had upon those who took up the stones to kill and upon the young man who held their coats, Saul (verse 58). We shall meet Saul again in Acts 9, first in avid persecution, then in awestruck conversion, and eventually in faithful witness.

The story of Stephen is part of the enduring witness of the early followers of Jesus. The story seems to end in Acts 8:1 with the scattering of the Jerusalem church. But very soon, those who are scattered begin to preach and the gospel message disperses.

God’s love and protection endures, as the psalmist in Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16 proclaims. Strong verbs in this song of praise witness to God’s presence and protection: deliver, rescue, save.

In 1 Peter 2:2–10, the report of the authorities’ rejection of Christ parallels Stephen’s situation. Yet, God’s gracious purposes endure. The rejected ones are the very ones drawn into the circle of God’s own.

In the part of Jesus’ farewell discourse reported in John 14:1–14, Jesus witnesses to the richness of God’s love, speaking of his death as the opportunity to prepare a place for his followers in God’s eternal realm: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

In the days of the early church, when people believed the return of Jesus was imminent, dying for one’s faith was seen as brave and admirable. Two thousand years later our attitudes have changed somewhat. Yet we still look positively at someone who is proclaiming the gospel. How are those who risk for the sake of the gospel like living stones? How do they help us be built into a spiritual temple?
Reflecting on the Word

Connecting with life

Look at the image/poster Stones, as you also hold a stone in your hand.

Feel the stone’s weight. Observe the shape, texture, and colour. Consider how it is used for good. How it might be used for harm. Allow a metaphor to emerge as you hold the stone.

What in your life does this stone represent? What is its weight? Is it primarily used for good or harm?

Scripture

Acts 7:55–60 According to tradition, Stephen was one of the seven chosen to distribute food to widows and care for the basic needs of others in the community.

- Why might Stephen have been considered a threat within the Roman government of the time?
- How do performing works of compassion create conflict within your time and place?
- How do you experience a filling of the Holy Spirit (vs. 55) that enables you to continue faithful works of love?

We meet Saul/Paul in this passage, but it is not in a good light.

- When, where and in what ways might we, individually and as a church, stand by and not intervene in the stone throwing of others?

John 14:1–14 Jesus establishes his place with God and invites us to join him there.

- How do you find your place with God?
- How do you, or how might you, nurture this sacred place in your day-to-day living?

Verse 12 claims that we can perform even greater works than Jesus.

- Where or in what ways do you see the works of Jesus being limited by the church’s own self-doubt or cynicism?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

The story of the death of Stephen is a difficult one. We may not want to focus on the aspect of his death, but on the circumstances surrounding it. The opposition simply did not want to hear what he had to say – they shrieked, and covered their ears, and in a moment of madness stoned him to death. How often do we want to shut people up and shut them out? Stephen dies using similar words to those of Jesus on Good Friday, asking for forgiveness for those killing him. How realistic is this? Saul/Paul appears in this story holding the coats of Stephen’s opponents, so they are better prepared to kill him. Yet we know that, shortly after this, Saul/Paul is transformed and becomes a key leader in the early church. What do we think of people who make such changes? Is it easy to accept them, or not?

All these questions arise from this story, reminding us that there are many avenues down which we might venture. Look at what is going on in your community and the world at this time; this may help you choose a focus from this rich, albeit brief, story.
Stand Firm

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

☐ Recruit volunteers needed for worship: three for the gospel reading, two with a basket of stones for the “Stones – a reflection on Acts 7:55–60” on page 155.
☐ Choose an option for hearing Acts 7:55–60. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Brave Witness” on p. 156. For the dramatic reading, arrange for two readers/actors.
☐ Bring items for setting the worship space.
☐ You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
☐ Prepare a slide show/Powerpoint® of images of rocks. You might include the image Stones, which is in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION. Other ideas might be: a stone path, a rock garden, stones/boulders in the ocean with crashing waves, rocks that are interruptions of space (such as blocking a roadway), or rocks that one might be tempted to climb. The idea is to offer, throughout the worship time, several differing images of stones/rocks, reminding us of the many ways we encounter them in our daily living.
☐ Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and downloading at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
☐ Set stations as described on pp. 157–158.

Music Suggestions

Jesus, Live in Us  
Daniel Charles Damon; p. 15

The Anointing  
James Maher; Seasons Songbook, vol. 9

Companions on the Journey  
Carey Landry; Seasons Songbook, vol. 8

Children of the Spirit  
Monica O’Brien, Gina Ogilvie; Seasons Songbook, vol. 7

Sing Alleluia!  
Monica Brown; Seasons Songbook, vol. 3

Like a Rock  
Keri Wehlander and Linnea Good; Seasons Songbook, vol. 1

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God  
Martin Luther

Gather

Call to worship

ONE: Come to this place, knowing that God is here.
ALL: We come to worship in a spirit of hope.
ONE: Come to this place, a safe place, where God will keep us safe.
ALL: We come to worship in a spirit of peace.
ONE: Come to this place to be renewed in faith, knowing the risks for us when we proclaim the gospel.
ALL: We come to worship in a spirit of faith.
ONE: Come, let us worship God.

Prayer of confession

It would be especially appropriate to project the image Stones from the Spirit Music Volumes can be found at www.seasonsonline.ca. Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

ONE: We cast stones, sometimes.
ALL: We hurt others with stones – literal and figurative – that we hurl without thinking.
ONE: When someone says something that bothers us, we cover our ears, and shut them out.
ALL: We block those with whom we disagree, challenging them, cutting them down, disregarding them.
ONE: We want others to conform to our standards, not caring if they are good and faith-centred standards or not.
ALL: We challenge and push aside those who seem different from us.
ONE: We cast stones, loving God, and we are sorry. Please forgive us.
ALL: Amen.
Words of affirmation

ONE: Jesus said, “Do not be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.” Friends, know that you can trust in Jesus always, for he offers mercy and forgiveness to us over and over. Know that you are forgiven, and loved by God.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

John 14:1–14

Both this week and next, the lectionary provides portions of Jesus’ farewell address from John as the gospel reading. Someone could portray Jesus for both weeks and present the gospel readings, from memory if possible. It will be especially effective to have the person portraying Jesus wear simple, one colour clothing instead of a biblical costume. The setting in John is Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. As such, have the person depicting Jesus begin the scripture presentation from the Communion table. Arrange to have two people from within the congregation stand and ask the questions from Thomas and Philip in verses 14:5 and 14:8 respectively.

Acts 7:55–60

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Brave Wit- ness” on page 156.

Dramatic reading Present Acts 7:55–60 and Psalm 31:1-5, 15–16 as a brief drama, using the psalm as a form of Stephen’s prayer. This text is based on the Common English Bible.

NARRATOR: Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God’s majesty and Jesus standing at God’s right side.

STEPHEN: (pointing up) Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One standing at God’s right side!

NARRATOR: At this, the religious leaders shrieked and covered their ears. Together, they charged at Stephen, threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed.

“Lord Jesus, accept my life!”

(Stephen falls to his knees.)

STEPHEN: (crying out) Lord, don’t hold this sin against them!

NARRATOR: (brief pause) And then he died.

Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Common English Bible. Copyright © 2011 by the Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.CommonEnglishBible.com)

Stones – a reflection on Acts 7:55–60

Have two people present the reflection that is on page 155.

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

Prayers of the people

God, we come before you in a spirit of prayer, knowing that our world is hurting. We know you have great compassion for all your people, and that we are dear to you. We know you have created a safe place, a refuge, for those who need it. Guide them to it, we pray.
There is a place for those who mourn and for those who hurt, a place of comfort and a place of healing: for those we have lost to illness, and those we have never known. In silence we pray for them. 

Hear us.

There is a place for those who hunger and thirst, a place of banquets and grace: for those farmers trapped in unfair trade, those families dispossessed. In silence we pray for them. 

Hear us.

There is a place for those imprisoned for belief and justice, a place of freedom and full lives: for those mothers of the disappeared, those fathers exiled.

In silence we pray for them. 

Hear us.

Friends, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God’s own possession.

You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of the shadows into his amazing light. 

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Go and share it with others! Amen.

**Special Day Commentary**

**May 14 – St. Matthias**

Not one of the original 12 apostles, Matthias was chosen by the other disciples after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus and later killed himself. Acts 1:15–16 records how the disciples chose Matthias by casting lots.
Stones - a reflection on Acts 7:55-60

Roddy Hamilton

The reading below is read twice. Two readers will speak, with a basket of stones (fist-sized) between them. The first time, Reader One will gently take a stone from the basket and toss it aside after reading each line. Reader Two will take a stone from the bucket and build a simple cairn. The second time through, Reader One’s lines are omitted. However, after Reader Two reads, Reader One will gather a stone that was gently tossed away and add it to Reader Two’s structure.

ONE: A stone
TWO: A stone
ONE: To hurt
TWO: To shelter
ONE: To throw
TWO: To gather
ONE: To wound
TWO: To sculpt
ONE: A weapon
TWO: A blessing
ONE: A stone
TWO: A stone
ONE: To control
TWO: To protect
ONE: To divide
TWO: To gather
ONE: A barrier
TWO: A bridge
ONE: A weapon
TWO: A foundation
ONE: A stone
TWO: A stone
ONE: To build a dividing wall
TWO: To lay a roadway
ONE: To shape an obstruction
TWO: To smooth a connection
ONE: A weapon
TWO: A faith
ONE: A stone
TWO: A stone
Brave Witness

Based on Acts 7:55–60

Hold a palm-sized rock in your hand.

The church started with a few people, Jesus’ followers, spreading the good news.

Then more people heard about Jesus and became followers too.

In just a short time, there were many more people who wanted to find out about Jesus and live the way he taught. They all came together and were one group, one body.

The leaders soon realized that they needed more people to help tell the story, to say the prayers, and to care for all the people in the group who needed help. The disciples decided that a special group of leaders called deacons was needed to care for all the people. They chose persons who were full of faith and the Holy Spirit. One of them was Stephen.

The new deacon Stephen cared for and served the people well. He made sure every person got enough food. Stephen did his work because he loved God and he believed that Jesus was sent by God. However, this strong belief got Stephen into trouble.

Stephen did more than good works. He told others about Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the one sent by God. The religious leaders argued with Stephen about this, and would not listen. They did not believe what Stephen believed about Jesus and they wanted to stop Stephen from talking about Jesus. Some of them plotted against Stephen. Soon Stephen was arrested and taken before the religious judges. (Set the stone on a table or the floor with a thud.)

These leaders and judges were angry! People told lies about Stephen. When he said they were wrong, the leaders and judges got even angrier. But Stephen didn’t stop speaking. “You are against God’s Holy Spirit,” he shouted. Now the religious leaders would take no more. They dragged Stephen away.

They took Stephen outside the city. Even though the crowd began to throw stones at Stephen, Stephen was filled with God’s love.

When Stephen fell to the ground, he yelled, “God, do not hold this against them.” Then Stephen, the faithful deacon and follower of Jesus Christ, died.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Brave Witness,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Brave Witness.”
2. Use the paper and crayons or pencils to draw or write about your response to what happened to Stephen.
3. What questions do you have about this story?
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Opening our ears

Materials: quiet space, pens, crayons, markers, paper or journal, cushions, watch with a second hand, bell, person to introduce the times of silence, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of listening

Directions

1. Take a piece of paper, a pen, marker, or a crayon. Sit in silence for two minutes, perhaps marked by someone ringing a bell.
2. Make a note on a piece of paper of the sounds you can hear in the silence. Were there any surprises?
3. Whose voices do you go out of your way to listen to? (examples: friend, partner, singer)
4. Think of a time when you did not feel heard. Draw or write about how you felt.
5. Think of a time when you did not listen to the cry of another person.
6. Is there a time when you did not listen to that small voice of conscience or intuition?
7. Spend another two minutes in silence.
8. Do you hear God saying anything to you in that silence? Draw or write about it.

Putting down our stones

Materials: paper, pens, and pencils, votive candles (in glass jars) matches, space for people to move away as needed, copies of resource sheet “Putting Down Our Stones” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION), for younger children: empty cardboard tubes about the length of a toilet roll, scissors, and markers, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of self-reflection/honesty

Directions

The crowd around Stephen was enraged, and became violent. We all experience anger. At times that anger can feel overwhelming and we may feel like hitting out at someone with our words or actions.

1. Follow the suggestions on the resource sheet for putting down our stones and finding more helpful ways to deal with anger.
2. Move to a quiet space as needed.

Younger children might make a cardboard ball.

Each child will need a cardboard tube (the length of a toilet roll).

1. Use markers to decorate the tube the colour you see your anger to be, or write on it different words associated with how you feel when you are very angry.
2. Cut the cardboard tube with scissors, so that you end up with about 6 or 7 rings.
3. Overlap and cross over the rings to form a ball.
4. Think about something that makes you angry. If the ball represents your anger, what might you do with the ball? It could be to unravel the ball, to throw it away, to take it with you to talk to someone.
Stations • May 14, 2017

**Stepping stones**

*Materials* grey or tan construction paper (cut in half), scissors pens, pencils, a copy of the *directions* displayed where all can see

*Direction*

Suitable for all ages working together

Stones destroyed Stephen, yet in 1 Peter 2:2–10 one of the other readings for this week, the writer tells that we are like living stones being built into a church. Just as Stephen showed God’s love in the way he lived (and died), we are called to give witness to God’s love. Turn the stones that destroyed Stephen into stones of good works.

1. Take two or three pieces of paper. Cut them into stone shapes.
2. Think about things you can do to help other people.
3. Write or draw each idea on one paper stone.
4. With others at this station, create a stone path of good deeds.
5. See how far your path will take you.
6. Be ready to go out into the world giving witness to God’s way of love.

**Cornerstones**

*Materials* Bibles (age-appropriate translations), paper, markers or pencil crayons, copy of the *directions* displayed where all can see

*Note* If the children are going to go and look at the church’s cornerstone make sure this can be done safely, and without disturbing others.

*Direction*

Suitable for ages 9–adult working together

Traditionally, a cornerstone is considered one of the most important parts of a building, and it symbolizes where the building begins.

1. As a group, find your church building’s cornerstone, making sure this can be done safely and without disturbing others.

   3. Together consider the “living stones” that are building your church. Then talk together about the core values of your congregation. What four words would you put at each corner of the building that would describe your congregation?

2. Have someone share this information about Ladner United Church.

   When Ladner United Church in British Columbia, Canada decided to redevelop their property it was based upon a “faith, mission process.” The redevelopment was not due to amalgamation or a “save the building” focus. The architect and builder requested that Ladner United Church define their core values and mission statement. The original building, over 100 years old, no longer had a cornerstone. Therefore, the congregation decided to incorporate their core values into the building by placing a plaque in each of the corners of the new building. The plaques contain a single word that hopefully describes and embodies the congregation’s mission in Ladner. It was a sense of spiritual renewal and energy. It was a way of stating what the congregation wished their mission to be within the community. A statement that describes the mission of Ladner United Church is “A Heart for God...in the heart of the Village.” The words on each of the corner plaques are “service,” “passion,” “spirit,” and “sustenance.” The writer of 1 Peter also said that we are like “living stones.”

3. Design four cornerstones on construction paper.
Children's Activity Leaflet • May 14, 2017

**Hands Are for Clapping**

*(March around and clap on the numbers.)*

Our hands are for clapping, 1-2-3, don't you see!
Our hands are for sharing, 1-2-3, don't you see!
To God we are thankful, you and me, 1-2-3!

Our hands are for clapping, 1-2-3, don't you see!
Our hands are for loving, 1-2-3, don't you see!
To God we are thankful, you and me, 1-2-3!

Our hands are for clapping, 1-2-3, don't you see!
Our hands are for praying, 1-2-3, don't you see!
To God we are thankful, you and me, 1-2-3!

Our hands are for clapping, 1-2-3, don't you see!
Our hands are for helping, 1-2-3, don't you see!
To God we are thankful, you and me, 1-2-3!

---

**Stephen, a Faithful Helper**

**Based on Acts 7:55–60**

The people in the first Christian churches loved Jesus very much. They always tried to love others just as Jesus did.

More and more people wanted to join the churches. They wanted to sing together, pray together, and share everything together. Soon there were so many people that it was hard to give everyone their fair share. The church needed helpers. Stephen was one of the helpers. He showed God’s love by helping people who were sad or hungry or sick.

What are some things Stephen might have taken with him to help people?

- If someone was hungry, what might Stephen do?
- If someone was cold, what might Stephen do?
- If someone had no money, what might Stephen do?
- If someone had a cut, what might Stephen do?
- If someone didn't know about God’s love, what might Stephen do?
Stephen showed God’s love by helping people who were sad, or hungry, or sick. Stephen told people about Jesus and how Jesus showed God’s love, too. But some people became angry with Stephen, some didn’t like him teaching about Jesus. But Stephen kept on loving.

- What happens to your body when you feel angry?
- Using crayons, draw a shape to represent your anger on the outline where you think it belongs. It could simply be a blob, or it could be a shape like a lightning fork, or an animal.
- What happens if you express what you are angry about?
- What happens if you don’t?
Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour:
white or gold

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 17:22–31
Psalm 66:8–20
1 Peter 3:13–22
John 14:15–21

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Ecumenical

National Reconciliation Week begins (Australia)
Ramadan begins (Islam)

May 2017

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Called Alongside

When called before a court of law, one is generally advised to have an advocate. This person's job, above all else, is to plead your case—no matter what that case may be. Even persons who commit publicly the most heinous of crimes still deserve to have someone plea on their behalf. And it is within this context that Jesus tells us he is sending us a advocate, a paraclete, one who is quite literally sent to advocate for us before God. What an amazing gift!

Focus scripture: John 14:15–21

Today's passage continues Jesus' farewell speech to the disciples. It is the first of four teachings in the gospel of John about God's Spirit. Here, the Spirit is described as “advocate,” from the Greek parakletos. “Paraclete” has a range of meanings that communicate who the Spirit is by what the Spirit does. Among other things, paraclete can mean to encourage, help, or comfort. The use of “advocate” here comes from the way the word is used in other settings to convey the equivalent of a defence attorney. The Spirit comes as a gift from God, just as John earlier portrayed Jesus as God's gift (3:16).

The emphasis in this passage is not so much belief in Jesus as it is love for Jesus. The importance of the Paraclete as “advocate” is one who supports and helps us as we seek to love. Such love is revealed in this passage through action. All five occurrences of love in this passage are verbs. The same is true of the remaining five uses of love in the rest of this chapter. Here, the exercise of love is connected with keeping Jesus' commandments. Jesus had announced a new commandment in John 13:34: “love one another.” Disciples keep Jesus' commands in acts of love in and for the community.

Whenever we feel alone, O God, or whenever we feel cut off from you, or feel we have done things that would cause you to despise us, we can remember that Jesus promised us an advocate, a comforter, one who comes to our side and speaks for us. Help us to be aware of, and to honour, this gracious gift. Amen.

Power in Christian community is given a fresh understanding by Spirit's gift and love's command. Power is not the ability to coerce. Power comes in Spirit's gift and our openness to that gift. Our love does not earn God's love. Instead, our love is the way we keep faith with Jesus' expression of God's love. Jesus' revealing of power comes in the revealing of love.

The language of family is applied here to a variety of relationships. The imagery of God as “Father” continues. A new expression identifies the community as not being left “orphaned.” “Orphan” makes several connections. John declares that Jesus gave us “power to become children of God” (1:12). Jesus addresses his followers as “little children” (13:33). The language makes an interesting connection with Paul's word that we are “God's offspring” (Acts 17:29).

This longing for intimate relationship with God, and God seeking such relationship with us, flows through the other readings. Acts 17:22–31 asserts a universal human longing for God. Psalm 66:8–20 names the writer’s approach to God in worship and God’s openness to that seeking. 1 Peter 3:13–22 reassures us that we do not need to be afraid, whatever the journey of faith entails. Whatever we go through we are not abandoned, we are not alone: the perfect indwelling love of God casts out fear.

In the foyer of the senate chamber in Canada’s capital in Ottawa, the ceiling has a number of stained glass panels listing the names of speakers of the senate. However, when this was being built one of the workers had the foresight to realize that there would come many others afterwards who were as yet unknown, so one of the panels says “Quelqu’un” – French for “someone.” In this way, all future generations would be included. How do you feel yourself included in God's plans for humanity? When you feel excluded from those plans, how might God's Spirit reconnect you?
Reflection and Focus • May 21, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life
Read “Life from Death.”
■ Where do you see hope in this story?
■ When have you felt excluded from what was going on around you?
■ What – if anything – helped you reconnect?

Scripture
John 14:15–21 Everything Jesus says is bracketed by the command to love.
■ In your own experience, does the church do the same?
■ How can politics in a real world be shaped by the commandment to love?
■ How can this happen in your own life?

Jesus offers a paraclete – sometimes translated as advocate, comforter, or counsellor. It is one who is called to be beside us, and speak up for us. With this promised comforter and counsellor at our sides, we can be bold to live as witnesses to God’s love.

■ What has been your experience of the Spirit’s work in your life and the life of your church?
■ In what ways are you a witness to God’s love?
■ When have you been the comfort and advocate for others?
■ When have you experienced this?
■ How and in what situations might we be this?
■ Where do you see comfort, advocacy, a coming alongside in the story of Laloche?

The experience of loss and abandonment can lead to a state of disconnectedness. A sense of emptiness haunts many of us, unsettling us, creating a vacuum that we often try to fill with food, alcohol, drugs, or possessions. It has been said that addictions are a search for community.

■ How might we make the link between the indwelling of God and this emptiness without sounding glib or simplistic?

Acts 17:22–31 contains a powerful statement of faith: “In God we live and move and have our being.”
■ How do you see this statement come to life within your community?
■ How is the practice of love taught or embodied in Acts 17:22–31?
■ How is it embodied in 1 Peter 3:13–22?

Connecting scripture and life
With the promised comforter and counsellor at our sides, we follow Jesus’ commands to love – witnessing to the great love and faithfulness of God in Christ.
■ In what ways are you, individually and as a church, a witness to God’s abiding presence in your community?
■ Specifically, where and in what ways are you being called to this witness?

In her book An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor questions the various reasons people give for the decline of mainline churches such as music in worship, inept clergy, or too much investment in institutional survival. In Taylor’s experience, we should look more closely at the intellectual- ization of the church. She believes people want, “not more about God. More God.” From the youngest to the oldest, we experience “more God” through Spirit-filled community where love is given free expression.

■ How might the church help people recognize Spirit’s enduring presence?
■ In what ways will you, as church, give to encourage a fulfillment of love’s expectations?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
People crave belonging. Social scientists frequently point out that a key aspect of us, as mammals, is a desperate need to feel connected with others; and they consequently point out the many problems that can transpire when we do not feel like we belong. In light of that, this week’s gospel and reading from Acts both address different aspects of belonging and feeling connected. Seek ways you can foster this sense in your congregation, and through your congregation to the community at large.
Called Alongside

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: two for the call to worship
- Choose an option for hearing John 14:15–21. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Friend” on p. 168. For the dramatic reading, arrange for someone to present the reading as Jesus. For the reflection, arrange for two readers to present “A What?” (in the Extra Resources Folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION).
- For the introduction of Acts and John, obtain a copy of the book In God’s Name by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Jewish Lights Publishing).
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 169–170.

Music Suggestions

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<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus, Live in Us</td>
<td>Daniel Charles Damon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Companions on the Journey</td>
<td>Carey Landry</td>
<td>Seasons Songbook, vol. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lo, I Am with You</td>
<td>Iona Community</td>
<td>Seasons Songbook, vol. 6</td>
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<td>Just as the Tide Creeps over Silver Sand</td>
<td>Leith Fisher</td>
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<td>When Our Saviour Yesu Went Away</td>
<td>Tom Colvin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loving Spirit</td>
<td>Shirley Erena Murray</td>
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Gather

Call to worship

ONE: God listens to us!

TWO: God hears the sound of our prayers!

ALL: Praise God!

ONE: God does not reject our prayers.

TWO: God does not withhold faithful love from us.

ALL: Praise God!

ONE and TWO: Come, let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Holy One, we come before you in awe, for you have promised never to leave us. Ever. It is an awesome thing! Even when we feel most lost and alone, still you are with us; your spirit is there, as comforter, advocate, friend. Help us to know, and celebrate, your presence with us always. Amen.

Prayer of confession

(Divide into two groups)

Forgiving One, unseen yet known, we hear the world speak in power and in greed and we hear you speak in love and grace. May our lives be lived in the echo of your voice.

When we are persuaded by the want that leads to hurt, the hankering that leads to greed, the yearning that leads to selfishness,

Group 1: forgive us for following the wrong way;
Group 2: may we turn again and follow you.

When we are persuaded by the spin that becomes truth, the belief that becomes dogma, the fear that becomes intolerance,

Group 2: forgive us for following the wrong way;
Group 1: may we turn again and follow you.

Forgiving One, seeing and forgiving, knowing and loving, we turn from following the wrong way and face you with our confession. Hear us. Forgive us. Amen.
Worship Outline • May 21, 2017

Words of affirmation

ONE: No one has seen God. Yet Jesus has shown us God.
    Jesus is the assurance of God’s forgiveness.

Engage

So know, friends, that through faith in Jesus the Christ all our sins are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening the word

Acts 17:22–31 and John 14:15–21

In Acts, Paul addresses the “unknown god” and proclaims that this god is the Creator of all. Jesus promises to send the Spirit to be with us always. The book In God’s Name by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso offers a variety of ways of naming and experiencing God, and would make a wonderful introduction to today’s scripture readings.

Moving into the focus scripture

Invite people to think about the Holy Spirit. What are ways you have experienced the Spirit in your life? Are there particular words or images that convey God’s Spirit to you? If you were choosing a couple words to describe God’s Spirit, what might they be?

John 14:15–21

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story “Friend” on page 168.

Dramatic reading Both last week and this the lectionary provides portions of Jesus’ farewell address from John as the gospel reading. If someone portraying Jesus presented the gospel last week, invite them to do so again. It will be especially effective to have the person portraying Jesus wear simple, one colour clothing instead of a biblical costume. The setting in John is Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. As such, have the person depicting Jesus begin the scripture presentation from the Communion table.

Reflection: A what? Two people are talking to each other in a pew after the service having a mundane conversation. The idea is to help people understand the key words in John 14:15–21. They could be quite flippant with each other and certainly not intense. (Seescript in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.)

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Sing or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

Prayers of the people

ONE: Divine Creator,
    Jesus promised the disciples – and through them, us – that your Spirit of Truth would be with us always.
    We come before you in prayer to lift up our concerns for all
    who need assurance of your presence in their lives.
    We think of our world, too often a place of violence and war,
    of bloodshed and anger.

TWO: We call upon your Spirit to come into our world,
ALL: and we name that Spirit, “Peace.”

ONE: There is so much injustice and inequality in our world, to the point where we can find ourselves overwhelmed and unsure of where to turn.
TWO: We call upon your Spirit to come into our world,
ALL: and we name that Spirit, “Justice.”

ONE: We think of those whose lives are filled with the daily struggle to find enough food to eat. We think of those who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, and all those who face demons such as pain, addiction, loneliness.
TWO: We call upon your Spirit to come into our world,
ALL: and we name that Spirit, “Hope.”

ONE: We pray for those who are grieving, who are experiencing loss in all manner of ways, and those whose lives are fraught with anxiety.
TWO: We call upon your Spirit to come into our world,
ALL: and we name that Spirit, “Comforter.”
One: We pray for ourselves, and for all your people who hear the call to discipleship, but may be unsure of how to live that out, or too timid to step forward. Yet we know you are always with us.

Two: We call upon your Spirit to come into our world,

All: and we name that Spirit, “Friend.” Amen.

**Prayer of dedication**

God, whose children we are, receive these gifts we offer. May they help to bring others ever closer to you, and to experience and appreciate your presence in their lives. Amen.

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**Special Days Commentary**

**May 25 – Ascension Day**

The feast of the Ascension is observed the 40th day after Easter, always falling on Thursday.

The story of Jesus ascending to heaven is mentioned briefly in Luke 24:50–51 and more completely in Acts 1:6–11. Some scholars believe that the earliest commemorations of the Ascension were tied to the celebration of Easter or Pentecost. In many Protestant churches today, the Ascension is not a major celebration, though some churches do hold special Ascension Day services. In parts of Europe, Ascension Day is a legal holiday and businesses are closed.

**May 27 – National Reconciliation Week begins (Australia)**

The last week in May is observed as National Reconciliation Week (also known as Week of Prayer for Reconciliation) in Australia. Begun in 1996 as an initiative of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the mission of National Reconciliation Week has been to “focus public attention on the relationship between Australia’s first peoples – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – and other citizens.”

Since the year 2000, the observance has been under the auspices of Reconciliation Australia, an independent non-profit body that provides a national focus for the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. The week-long observance promotes the efforts of the country to acknowledge the past history of unfair treatment of people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and to work toward reconciliation. According to Reconciliation Australia, the vision is for “a united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.” People of faith are called to help shape this vision and bring it to reality.

**May 27 – Ramadan begins (Islam)**

Muslims believe that during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, the Holy Qur’an was sent down from heaven. It was revealed to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel as “a guidance for mortals, a declaration of direction, and a means to salvation.”

The month of Ramadan is a time of worship and contemplation during which Muslims concentrate on their faith and spend less time on the concerns of everyday life. Daylight hours are spent in fasting, prayer, and study of the Qur’an.

At the end of the day, the fast is broken, but it is resumed the next morning. Ramadan ends with the holiday of Id-al-Fitr (the Feast of the Fast Breaking), three days of celebration with gifts, meals, and prayers.
Life from Death

Donald Schmidt

Melva cried when she unwrapped the picture and looked at it.

“I was overwhelmed,” she said. “It’s beautiful.”

The picture was the work of her niece, Sarah, who had painted a turtle, surrounded by the words “Help us heal. Lead us home.”

The turtle was the family’s aumakua, or guardian spirit in Hawai‘i, where Sarah had lived. The painting made its way north to Laloche, Saskatchewan, where Melva lived in a community recently ripped open by tragedy. Healing will take a long time, and will be painful. But there is a strong feeling that, despite the agony, it will come.

The small Dene (one of Canada’s first nations) community of Laloche is small – only 2,600 people – and most of them are related to one another. To say that it is tight-knit is to state the obvious. Yet it is also plagued with extreme unemployment (26%), and a strong sense of depression amongst a people who for generations were told they were stupid, worthless, and beyond hope. It sinks in after a while, and the results are devastating. The suicide rate in Laloche is 20 times higher than the rest of Saskatchewan.

Melva’s son Cory knows this too well. He had tried to kill himself so many times he lost count, although it was more than a dozen. Cory’s life was saved when his sister Corinne begged him not to shoot himself several years ago, when he had a gun and was prepared to pull the trigger. Corinne was pregnant, and she used a strong weapon to prevent Cory from taking his life: “Be an uncle,” she said and the message stuck.

Recently Cory has started a suicide prevention group, which meets every two weeks at the school gym. People come and talk about suicides that have happened, about loved ones they miss, or they talk about what prevented them from taking their own lives.

“It’s a place of healing,” someone said.

On January 22, 2016, a 17-year-old boy shot and killed two brothers, Drayden and Dayne Fontaine, and then went to the school where he killed a teacher and a teacher’s aide. Seven other people were shot, but survived. They were quickly stabilized at the local clinic and then flown to Saskatoon, some five hours away, where they could be treated at a hospital.

Soon everyone in Canada knew about it, and Laloche became – for a while at least – the focus of national attention. The Premier of Saskatchewan and the Prime Minister of Canada would soon make visits to the tiny northern community, simply to join the people in their grief and healing.

About 250 people came to the meeting of the suicide prevention group when it next met – not that this shooting involved a suicide (the 17-year-old, who cannot be named under Canadian law, was charged with murder and attempted murder on his 18th birthday a couple days after the shooting). They shared their grief, and talked about the anger that leads to too many unnecessary deaths in their community. The fact that most of the people there were related both to the shooter and one or more of the victims indicated both the nature of the community, and the fact that most people were not as angry as they might have been elsewhere. They tended to understand this tragedy as the result of something bigger than just a “loose nut.”

One of the people at the meeting voiced a question that many had: “If he had turned around and just killed himself, how would your reactions to the situation be right now?” Everyone understands the anger turned inward that happens from bullying. Everyone understands the sense of despair and hopelessness that comes to too many people in that town. And everyone knows someone who has died from suicide. Somehow, this shooting felt a little like it fell in that category, too. “When people are angry they explode,” someone said.

Since then, the focus has drifted away from Laloche to other events, other stories, other communities. Cory continues to lead the suicide prevention group. And the community tries to heal.

Sarah painted her guardian spirit as a way of saying – to her cousin Cory and his community – that somehow in the midst of pain there is hope. There has to be.
Friends,” Jesus said, “I will not always be with you.”

“We know,” the disciples grumbled. They never liked to think about the fact that Jesus was not always going to be with them. They loved being with him: his stories told them so much about God; the ways he touched other people’s lives and made them well was so comforting; and the things Jesus taught made so much sense. How on earth would they get by without him?

“I will not always be with you,” Jesus said again, “and yet, I will.”

That confused them all the more! Whatever did Jesus mean, “I won’t be with you – but I will.” But then they noticed Jesus had a twinkle in his eye. Whenever they saw that, they knew he was going to teach them something new.

“I will be gone soon,” Jesus said. “But I will always be with you. Because God’s Spirit is always with you. God’s Spirit has been here right from the very beginning. Remember, in the creation story, how God’s Spirit hovered over the waters? God is never, ever far away – God is right here.

“So when I am gone and you’re not sure about things, stop for a moment. Pause in the midst of whatever you are doing, and think about me. Think about God. Talk to one another. Remember what I have taught you, and sure enough, you will realize that God is with you, and God will help you find answers to your questions.”

The disciples relaxed a little, but Jesus could tell they were still a little uncertain.

“You won’t see me,” Jesus said. “But when you look inside your heart, you’ll see I’ve never left.”

Somehow, even though they couldn’t quite put it into words, they understood what Jesus meant.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Friend,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story.

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Friend.”
2. Take a moment to sit quietly and imagine ways you can feel God near you.
3. Use the paper and crayons or pencils to draw or write about some ways God’s Spirit is always here.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Planting seeds

Materials flower pots or paper cups, potting soil, spoons for transferring the soil, disposable gloves, seeds, water, spoons; stickers and other decorative items (optional), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages

The practice of patience and trust

Directions

Jesus told the disciples that they would not see him anymore, yet he would still be with us. When we plant seeds we can no longer see them, but we trust they are there; and when a plant breaks through the ground we are reminded of the seed we planted.

1. Use spoons to transfer the potting soil into the cups to about two-thirds full (wear disposable gloves when handling potting soil).
2. Place a seed or two inside the soil, poking it a little way (about a centimetre/half an inch) into the soil. Cover it with more soil.
3. Make sure the soil is moist – if it is not, add a bit of water.
4. Take the plant home and put it in a sunny window. Make sure to water it each day or two.
5. When the plant begins to grow, if the weather is warm you could plant it outside in the garden. Otherwise, just leave it in the cup.
6. Option: If you have time, you can decorate your cup/flower pot.

Wind catcher

Materials clean milk carton, self-adhesive stickers, old magazines, or liquid tempera paint mixed with a few drops of liquid detergent (so the paint will adhere to the waxy carton) and brushes; string, glue sticks, scissors, paint shirts, and a towel and water for cleanup, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for ages 4–12

The practice of wonder

Directions

Jesus promised that God’s Spirit would always be with us. Like the wind, we cannot see it, but we know it is there. A wind catcher can remind us of how the wind is never far away; even though we cannot see it, we can see what it does.

1. Take a prepared milk carton and fold the doors of the carton open.
2. Choose, cut out, and glue pictures from the magazines to the inside of each door, or put stickers there. Alternatively, paint the outside of the carton with a “soapy paint” mixture.
3. Punch a hole in the top of the carton and tie a piece of string through it.
4. Hang the finished wind catcher outside and watch it twirl.
Pipe cleaner people

**Materials** different-coloured pipe cleaners, scraps of fabric, wool, hair ties, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Suitable for all ages**

---

The practice of healing

**Directions**

When children and adults are abandoned or left, it can feel as though part of us has been taken away. We can feel exposed, vulnerable, and alone. Jesus reminds us that through the Holy Spirit he is always with us.

1. As you make a figure out of pipe cleaners, you might like to think of a time you felt very alone: Bend a wire in half. Hold the top firmly and with the other hand twist the ends three times round to make the body. Turn up the ends to make feet. Twist a pipe cleaner once round the body near the head to make the arms. Turn up the ends to make the hands.

2. Dress the doll using pieces of fabric, securing them with a hair tie. As you do, imagine the “clothes” represent the healing presence of Jesus with you in whatever you have gone through or are going through.

---

Journal entry

**Materials** pens, paper or personal journals, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

**Suitable for ages 15–adult**

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The practice of prayerful reflection

**Directions**

Jesus assures his followers that he will not leave us orphaned. We can, though, walk away from or cut ourselves off from God and, in a sense, “orphan” ourselves from God.

1. Think about times in your life when you have separated yourself from God. You might like to reflect on the following questions:
   - What led to your decision? Or was it simply that you drifted away?
   - How did being distanced from God feel?
   - What brought you back?
   - What keeps you connected to God now? What keeps you from God now?

2. Write about or draw about these times.

3. What would you say to someone about this process?
Jesus’ Comforting Words

Based on John 14:15–21

The people in the first Christian churches loved Jesus very much. They always tried to love and help other people, like offering a cup of cool water to people who were hot and thirsty.

More and more people joined the churches to sing and pray together, and to share everything together. They knew Jesus prayed to God, too. And they knew that God listened when they prayed.

Dear God,
your love is all around us. Help us to grow in love for you and for others.
Amen.

The people in the first Christian churches loved Jesus very much. They always tried to love and help other people and spread God’s love. The fish shape was an important symbol for the early Christian church. Think about ways church people today help spread God’s love. Write or draw one or two of these ways on the fish shape.
Make a copy of this page.  
Cut around the solid lines and fold along the broken lines.  
Open out and decorate the the panels.

Deep down and all around,  
know that God is always there.
Planning

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

Shavuot (Judaism)

Easter 7

Liturgical colour: white or gold

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 1:6–14
Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35
1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11
John 17:1–11

May 2017

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Seasons of the Spirit™ SeasonsFUSION Lent • Easter 2017
The United Church of Canada has, since 1944, had the words “that they may all be one” on their crest. These words appear in John 17:11 and 17:21. In 1980, they added the words in French, recognizing that they are a church in a bilingual nation. In 2012, expanding their recognition of the First Nations context for the church, they added the Mohawk expression: Akwesasnà:nínawen (a kwéh níhón dawáy niwáh), meaning “All my relations.” Similar to John 17:11 and 21, this phrase expresses an awareness that we are all connected. Perhaps this was what Jesus intended in his prayer as he was leaving this earth – a plea that we would recognize how we are all related.

Focus scripture: John 17:1–11
Jesus’ farewell discourse in John 14–17 prepares the disciples for Jesus’ departure. It closes with a prayer, the first half of which forms this week’s focus scripture. This is sometimes called Jesus’ “high priestly prayer.” Like the high priest who prayed on behalf of Israel, Jesus prays for others on the eve of his death on the Passover. In John’s gospel, Jesus dies when the Passover lamb was slain in the temple. The other gospels place the death a day later.

Jesus offers this prayer immediately before entering the Garden of Gethsemane. Unlike the other gospel accounts where Jesus’ prayer in the garden struggles with his impending death, John’s gospel describes Jesus as affirming the hour that has come as one of glorification. Jesus prays in the hearing of the disciples, for while the prayer is addressed to God, its concern is for the disciples.

The immediate focus of this prayer is the disciples of that time and those who will follow. The wider focus encompasses the world. Taken out of context, concern for the world in this prayer might appear to be cast in negative expressions (see especially verses 14–16). John 3:16–17 provides the balance. Jesus’ coming has been generated by God’s love for the world. The purpose of that love is the world’s saving. Jesus prays for those called to embody that love in his absence. If God’s love is to be seen in this world, it will be through their (our) witness.

“Glory” and “community” are key themes in Jesus’ prayer. “Glory” in John has to do with the revealing of God. The cross and the Resurrection together form the “hour” when God is revealed through Jesus. “Community” is understood in several ways. Jesus prays for the immediate community of disciples who follow him. Jesus prays for the later community of those who will believe through the witness of these first disciples. Jesus prays that these communities will in turn know the intimacy of relationship that Jesus enjoys with God. Community’s hope is relational. Community’s hope is also missional. “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21b).

Jesus’ prayer intends to empower those who follow. Likewise, empowerment for witness is a backdrop in the other readings. Acts 1:6–14 awaits the witness made possible by the coming of God’s Spirit. The mention of Samaria and the ends of the earth hints this witness will go far beyond traditional borders and limits. Psalm 68:1–10 witnesses with praise and awe to a God concerned for those who are vulnerable. 1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11 sees suffering as the context of the church’s witness. That context is said to be shared with “brothers and sisters in all the world.”

As many churches seek to grow in their understanding of Christian unity, and beyond that of the interconnectedness of all creation, we remember Jesus’ simple plea, that we all be one. Simple, but not always easy. How interconnected do you feel to other Christians beyond your congregation/denomination? How interconnected do you feel with those of other faiths? How interconnected do you feel with all of creation?
Reflection and Focus • May 28, 2017

Reflecting on the Word

Adapt and use for youth and adult studies, sermon seeds, lay worship teams.

Connecting with life
Look at the image Stones as you reflect on the following:
A Caucasian man speaks of the first time he was invited into a Cree sweat lodge:
“When we entered the sweat lodge Stanley, our guide, told us we needed to respect the hot stones in the centre. ‘Those are our grandmothers and grandfathers,’ he said. Just that statement brought me to a new understanding of my connectedness with all of creation.’

- How connected do you feel with the world around you?
- What would it mean to see stones as your ancestors, as the ones who carry your story?

Scripture
John 17:1–11 contains the prayer of Jesus as remembered by the early followers.
- If Jesus were to pray for your community, what things might be included?
- For what courageous acts of ministry among you might Jesus pray?

Jesus defines his ministry as having “revealed your [God’s] name” to the disciples.
- How do you understand this?

In verse 11 Jesus prays that we might be one, and later in verse 21 will pray that we may all be one.
- How is unity with other Christians lived out in your church?
- How is unity with people of other faiths lived out in your church – and in your community or nation?
- How is unity with all creation lived out in your church, and in your community or nation?

Acts 1:6–14 Jesus says that even now he does not know when God’s realm will be established.

Materials
poster Stones (also in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION)

- What resources do you call on to help you through uncertain times?
- How do you understand the importance, for some people, of knowing specific dates and times when God will intervene in human history? How does that square with this passage?

Notice, in verses 13–14, who is present at the first gathering of the church after Jesus’ departure: eleven named (male) disciples, along with some women (including Jesus’ mother, Mary) and his brothers.

- What do you make of this group?
- How significant is it that women are included?
- For those of us who tend to think of Mary only in the Christmas story, what do you make of her role here? What kind of role do you imagine Mary had in the early church?

The Ascension story seems less about the process of ascension and more about the community it leaves behind.

- How do you see yourself as part of that community today?

Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35

- How do you understand God’s relationship with creation in this psalm?

Connecting scripture and life
“All my relations.” Perhaps this was what Jesus intended in his prayer that “that they may all be one” as he was leaving this earth – a plea that we would recognize how we are all related.

- We live in a world of increasing diversity. Where do you see this causing problems?
- Where do you see this presenting opportunities?
- How you, individually and as a church, embrace the opportunities and challenge the problems?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

We may be familiar with Jesus’ prayer that all may be one – either from John 17:11 or 17:21. Often we simply take this to mean all churches, or all Christians, or perhaps at the outside all people. But we could apply the prayer to all of creation. How connected do we feel to the things around us? As seasons change, often we feel changes within ourselves – is this not a reminder that we are a very real part of the creation, not somehow separate from it?

This week, the prayer of Jesus can be a springboard to explore our connectedness with one another – people we know and like, and those we may not know, or may not like. And, we can explore our connectedness with other aspects of creation: flowers, rivers, rocks, sky. How are we part of them, and they a part of us? How can we enhance our connectedness – our sense that we are all relations?
All My Relations

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: several people for the call to worship, two for the opening prayer, two readers for the reading from Acts, two for the prayers of the people.
- Choose an option for hearing John 17:1–11. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Working Together” on p. 180. For the scripture in today’s context, arrange to “customize” the reading creating a paraphrase which brings the passage “home” in your context.
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- You might choose to print the art image Stones on your bulletin covers (in the Images to Project and Print folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION). You might also include one of the art engagement ideas described in “Connecting with the Art” (p. 4).
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 181–182.

Call to worship

Begin by having one or two worship leaders walk quietly into the centre of the chancel area, looking up at the roof/sky. They are soon joined by another, and then another, until a reasonable size of group (depending on your space) is standing there, all of them looking up. Some of the people could come from their seats within the congregation. When the group are all there, two more people enter, not looking up at the sky. They speak:

**ONE:** Why are you standing here, looking toward heaven?
   This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go to heaven! (People lower their heads and look around.)

**TWO:** Come, let us worship God. (The group depart/disperse.)

Opening prayer

**ONE:** As we worship together,
   O God, may we live together.

**TWO:** As we live together,
   O God, may we witness together.

**ONE:** As we witness together,
   O God, may we journey together.

**TWO:** As we journey together,
   O God, may we meet together.

**ONE:** As we meet together,
   O God, may we worship together.

**BOTH:** And may our worship be in you,
   O God, as you are in us. Amen.

Prayer of confession

We live in fear, O God. Fear that we, as peoples of this earth, are disconnected from one another, and from you.

We are deeply aware that people of different nations and different faith communities live as though we are to be enemies. We recognize that, while we are an inherent part of your creation, we often see ourselves as distant from it, not caring what happens to the world around us. And we are afraid of the consequences if we dare to make a difference, if we dare to speak out for others, if we dare to challenge the forces of evil around us.

Forgive us, loving Creator. Help us to find our place – your place – in our world. We pray with all our relations, Amen.
Worship Outline • May 28, 2017

Words of affirmation

**One:** Before leaving this earth, Jesus asked God to watch over us, and prayed that we might be united. It is God’s desire – expressed throughout scripture – always to keep us close, and to love us despite our faults. Know that, as you seek to follow God, you are forgiven and transformed people.

**All:** Thanks be to God! Amen.

---

Opening the word

**Acts 1:6–14**

The following information is provided to be read during verses 13 and 14, as a way of illustrating who was there at that first gathering of the church after Jesus’ departure, according to the author of Acts. One person might read the scripture, pausing as various names are mentioned so that a second reader might add this material.

**Reader:** Peter, John, James, and Andrew – the first disciples Jesus called, according to most accounts. These men left the lives they were used to, fishing on the Sea of Galilee, that they might follow Jesus and fish for people.

Philip was, according to the gospel of John, one of the first disciples also. He went and got his friend Nathanael and brought him to Jesus. He also, after the Resurrection, shared the good news with others, including someone from Ethiopia who did not realize he could be considered a part of God’s people. And Thomas, known as “the Doubter,” reminds us that it’s okay to have doubts as part of our faith.

Matthew, a tax collector; Simon, a political revolutionary, Bartholomew, James, Judas – all disciples that Jesus called to be followers.

**Some women** – we do not have their names here, but we know that brave women such as Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Joanna, Martha and Mary of Bethany, and many other women followed Jesus. They often funded his ministry, and they were the ones who stayed by Jesus’ cross when the male disciples left. Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Christ, according to John, and was commissioned by Jesus as an apostle to tell others that he was risen.

The one woman who was named here is **Mary, the mother of Jesus**. Often we think of her only as the one who gave birth to Jesus, and yet here she is, at the first meeting of the church after Jesus’ ascension, present and participating in the life of this new faith community that Jesus has begun.

Jesus’ brothers are there, too, reminding us that he had family – parents and siblings – and that they, too, were a part of the early church.

Imagine this group of people. And know that you are there, in the midst of them. Jesus prayed that we might all be one.

---

Moving into the focus scripture

We read today a portion of Jesus’ prayer for the disciples as he prepared for his departure. As you hear this passage, imagine Jesus speaking about you, or about us – this worshipping community. As Jesus asks God to watch over his followers, hear him asking God to watch over us. Hear Jesus’ concern and compassion for people then, and now.

**John 17:1–11**

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

**Bible story** Have a storyteller present the story “Working Together” on page 180.

**Scripture in today’s context** You could adapt this text to encompass the name of your worshipping community, and/or others in your community. For example, verse six might become something like “I have revealed your name to the people of First Community Church. They were yours and you gave them to me, and you have kept your word.” Similarly, verse nine might become “I’m praying for the people of this community – young and old, men and women, boys and girls, all faiths, all races.” Such a paraphrase can be as literal or as figurative as you want to make it. It can then be read following the scripture, bringing the message “home.”

---

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

---

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

**Sing** or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).

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Prayers of the people

**One:** Creator of all things, Lover of all things: We come before you in awe of the great Creation you have made, and place us within. We thank you that we are a part of it – that we are connected, through spirit and breath, with everything, animate and inanimate. Loving God, help us to be aware of our interconnectedness with all
things; remind us that they are all our relations.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: Guardian of all things, Lover of all things: We come before you in thanksgiving for Jesus, who brought you to us in new and transforming ways. We thank you for the loving care the risen Christ gives us even today; the arms outstretched on the cross reach far and wide to embrace all creation.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: God of all things, Lover of all things: Jesus told us, “This is eternal life: to know God.” Yet too often we take this to mean that others must be just like us. We know there are others who know you in ways different from us; help us to learn from them, and them from us, how we can all celebrate, worship, and serve God – even with different languages, customs, beliefs, and practices.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: Ruler of all things, Lover of all things: We come before you aware that you have given great power and authority to many of us. Even the smallest things we do have enormous effect on others and our world. Help us to use this authority wisely. And be with all those who have power and authority over others. Help them to make compassion and justice their creed. Remind them that we are all related – all of us.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: God of all things, Lover of all things: We become pregnant, as recorded in Luke 1:39–56.

This day recalls the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth's house, following the angel's announcement that Mary would become pregnant, as recorded in Luke 1:39–56.

June 1 – Shavuot (Judaism)

Experiencing Shavuot in the context of the Jewish tradition is much like examining the inside of a tree trunk – exposing the many rings of development and change. Many Jewish holidays develop like those rings of the tree – instead these holidays reveal layers of meaning and ritual that have developed over the centuries.

The word Shavuot means weeks and it occurs seven weeks (on the 50th day – also why it is sometimes referred to as Pentecost) after the observance of Passover. This period between the two is called the omer – meaning counting. The origins of Shavuot are biblical, recalling when the Israelites offered to God the first fruits of the harvest. It used to be

Worship Outline • May 28, 2017

Prayer of dedication

For all the gifts we have been given, we give thanks: The gift of your love, the gift of Jesus, the gift of life everlasting. We acknowledge our mission to serve and so we bring what we can that others may know your love, too. We pray with all our relations. Amen.

Bless

Special Days Commentary

May 31 – Feast of the Visit of Mary to Elizabeth

This day recalls the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth’s house, following the angel’s announcement that Mary would become pregnant, as recorded in Luke 1:39–56.

June 1 – Shavuot (Judaism)

Experiencing Shavuot in the context of the Jewish tradition is much like examining the inside of a tree trunk – exposing the many rings of development and change. Many Jewish holidays develop like those rings of the tree – instead these holidays reveal layers of meaning and ritual that have developed over the centuries.

The word Shavuot means weeks and it occurs seven

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: Caregiver of all things, Lover of all things: We recognize that we are called to follow Jesus, and, like him, to reveal your name to our hurting world. We live in a world that struggles and cries out for justice, and we ask for your Spirit to strengthen and empower us to bring that about. We live in a world that yearns for a sense of purpose, for an awareness that we are all part of something greater than ourselves – your world, with all its beauty and its quirks and its foibles.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will.

One: Spirit of all things, Lover of all things: May we be one – your peoples, and all your creation. Help us to celebrate the beauty you have created, for when we do that we are far more inclined to share it, to nurture it, to care for it, that it may be present for many generations to come.

Two: Fulfill your glory through us

All: as we seek to do your will. Amen.

Jesus said: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Let us go, then, to be Christ’s witnesses in our city/town, and beyond its borders, and into those places that are different from us, and to all the ends of Earth.

And let us do that in the awareness and the power that we are all connected with all Creation through the love of the one who created it all. Amen.

Rabbi Adam Morris serves as an advisor to the Seasons of the Spirit editorial team. He lives in Denver, Colorado, USA.

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Seasons of the Spirit™ SeasonsFUSION Lent • Easter 2017
A World of Faith

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 seeks our unity with God and one another in Christ. Given that we live in a global village whose members are often at war with each other, it’s fair to ask whether we need to stretch our understanding of this prayer for unity to include people of other faiths. The following is excerpted from the foreword to *A World of Faith: Introducing Spiritual Traditions to Teens*, by Carolyn Pogue. Copyright Carolyn Pogue. Published by Wood Lake Publishing. Used by permission.

Our faiths command us not to sit idly by amid mounting hostility and mistrust, but to make a substantial contribution to peace-building in a polarized world. We must avoid the polarities of truth that have come to drive the international agenda. We can promote a middle way that is not only ethically right, but strategically prudent. *One way to begin is by learning about one another’s spiritual traditions.*

Our role as people of faith is to be an ever-present reminder to political leaders that it is an ethic of human solidarity that has ensured humanity’s survival and well-being from time immemorial. That ethic is based on shared values such as respect, responsibility, and selflessness.

Reconciliation stands little chance when narrow-minded extremists are bloodletting and sowing division in the name of our respective faiths.

Our essential religious values are utterly incompatible with the cycles of retribution making headlines today. Shared values lead to shared security. The vast majority of people belong to religious communities. We can help to address extremism by exploring common values and by refusing to let political divides be elevated to religious status.

The world’s major religions share the essential belief that compassion is the key to spiritual awareness, and that compassion does not mean just detached sympathy for others but active engagement with them. Belief means action, and we must act.

All our ancient faiths and philosophies remain profoundly relevant in this troubled time. Our faiths remind us that it is vital to recognize the humanity of the other in order to affirm our own humanity. In that sense, interfaith dialogue must be linked practically to and meaningfully with political dialogue. It must be a parallel process rather than a pleasant afterthought. This is how we can restore the peaceful role of our faiths when it is needed most...

What might be a prayer for unity in a “world of faith”? Perhaps you can work together to create such a prayer to be used in worship.
Bible Story • May 28, 2017

Working Together

Based on John 17:1–11

(“Saba” is the Aramaic word for grandfather and “Ima” is Aramaic for mother. Aramaic is the language Jesus spoke.)

B artholomew sat under a fig tree and thought about the time he had spent with Jesus. It was such a short time but there were so many memories. Soon he heard his grandchildren coming towards him, arguing about something.

“Saba, Saba, Rachael won’t hold the basket,” shouted Matthew.

“I want to climb the tree,” protested Rachael.

“Calm down, calm down. What’s the problem?” asked Bartholomew.

“Ima asked us to pick some figs for lunch,” said Daniel “but Rachael and Matthew keep arguing about who’s going to climb the tree and who’s going to hold the basket.”

“Well,” mused Bartholomew, “why don’t I tell you a Jesus story; that might help you sort things out.”

“Yes please, Saba,” they all chorused and they settled themselves on the ground next to Bartholomew to listen. They loved his stories about Jesus.

“Not long before Jesus was killed, he prayed for all his followers. Jesus said that he had done the work that God had given him to do. He had shown people what God was like. Now his followers were to carry on the work. Jesus asked God to guard us and asked that we would become ‘one heart and mind.’” Bartholomew paused. He could see the children were having trouble understanding. He wasn’t surprised. It had taken the disciples a long time to understand everything Jesus had said.

“It’s like this. Jesus wanted us to keep doing his work; to tell people about God and to help them. But we couldn’t do that very well if we were always arguing. Jesus wanted us to love one another and work together.”

“But picking figs for lunch isn’t doing Jesus’ work,” grumbled Matthew.

“Doing Jesus’ work means living like Jesus. What do you think Jesus would do if he were asked to pick some figs to share with others?” asked Bartholomew.

The children looked at each other.

After a moment, Rachael said, “I guess I can hold the basket.”

“I have a better idea,” said Bartholomew. “I’m the tallest so why don’t I hold the basket up and the three of you can climb the tree and pick the figs.”

So the three children happily climbed up the fig tree and carefully put the figs into the basket, which Bartholomew held up. The job was soon done. Then Bartholomew and the children went home for lunch.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story

Materials recording of today’s story “Working Together,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling

Directions

1. Listen to the story “Working Together.”
2. Use the art materials provided to respond to the story. What colours might you use to show how the children felt?
3. Draw yourself working with a group to accomplish something.
Stations • May 28, 2017

Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Making a poster

Materials: poster board, stamp pads, markers, cleanser (for thumbs afterwards), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of celebrating our interconnectedness

Directions

All our thumbprints are individual – no two people have thumbprints the same. Use your thumbprints to make a variety of items on a poster of the church, and celebrate that we are all interconnected.

1. Write the words, “All my relations” across the top of the poster paper.
2. Press your thumb onto the inked stamp pad and then onto the poster. Do this several times.
3. Use the markers to turn the thumbprint into aspects of creation. For example, add legs, ears, perhaps some kind of tail to make animals. Add petals, stems, and leaves to make a plant. Several overlapping thumbprints can make a tree trunk, or an acorn. Use your imagination!
4. Display your poster somewhere in the church where people will see it.
5. Use some cleanser to clean your thumbs afterwards.

Church posters

Materials: copies of resource sheet “We Are One” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web versions of SeasonsFUSION), stamp pads, markers, cleanser (for thumbs afterwards), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Note: This is similar to “Making a poster” above, but this activity involves each participant making a poster to take home as reminders that we are all connected.

Suitable for all ages

The practice of celebrating being church

Directions

Use your thumbprints to fill each other’s papers, and celebrate that we are one.

1. Press your thumb onto the inked stamp pad and then onto your paper.
2. Press your thumbprint on each person’s paper, and invite them to press their thumbprint on yours.
3. Using the markers, add facial features, arms, legs, and so on. Dress your thumbprint up if you’d like.
4. Each person can take their poster home and use it as a reminder that we are all the same – and we are all different, too. And yet we are all connected.
5. Use some cleanser to clean your thumbs afterwards.
Writing a letter or prayer
Materials lined pieces of paper suitable for letter writing, a selection of pens, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for ages 9–adult

The practice of building community
Directions
In today’s reading from John, Jesus was praying for his disciples – those who were to take up his work.
1. Spend some time thinking of your hopes and dreams for your descendants or for the people who may succeed you.
2. Write a prayer for/or letter to them, expressing these hopes and fears.
3. You may wish to share your prayer/letter with others at the station.

Prayer collages
Materials construction paper, current newspapers and newsmagazines, scissors, glue sticks, markers, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages

The practice of intercessory prayer
Directions
As followers of Jesus, we are called to be a community of prayer, and to pray for others. If God’s love is to be seen in the world, it will be through our witness and our compassion.
1. Review the newspapers and newsmagazines, looking for stories of concern or difficult situations.
2. Cut out a variety of pictures and headlines from these stories and glue them onto the middle of a sheet of construction paper, forming a collage.
3. Using different shades of markers draw large speech bubble shapes from each of these stories.
4. Print a short prayer for the people or situations included in the collage, writing the prayers within each speech bubble.
5. Share the prayer collages with each other, and pray as a group by reading aloud one prayer from each collage.
6. If desired, make a display of the prayer collages in the church hall.
Younger children Help children cut out pictures from newspapers and newsmagazines of a variety of people in different settings and situations. Glue these onto sheets of construction paper. Ask them to imagine what each person might need (hug, food, warm house) and help them write simple sentence prayers beside each figure.

Art
Materials paper, paints, brushes, clean-up supplies, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for all ages

The practice of creativity
Directions
In today’s reading from John, Jesus asked to be glorified with the glory he had with God before the world was created.
1. Think about what comes to mind when you think about glory.
2. Draw or paint a picture that shows the glory of Jesus. Think about which colours to choose to express “glory.”

Bible research
Materials Bible dictionary and/or computers with Internet access, Bibles, paper and pencils, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

Suitable for ages 9–adult working together

The practice of digging deeper
Directions
1. Look up Acts 1:13–14 (one of the other readings for this week). Notice the wide variety of people at this first gathering of the early church after Jesus left.
2. Working together, and using the Internet, and/or Bible dictionaries, look up the various characters and and learn what you can about them.
3. You will notice that some people (such as Peter, James, Mary) have much written about them, but we know very little about some of the others (such as James, son of Alphaeus, or Bartholomew).
4. Notice, too, that it mentions “some women” without giving their names. Some of the women who followed Jesus were called Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Martha of Bethany, Joanna, and Susanna. Research and discover what you can about them.
Prayer was important part of Jesus’ life, and the disciples’ lives together. Today’s story told of Jesus praying for his friends. For whom might you pray? What would you like to pray for that person? Let your prayers open slowly.

**You will need** plain white bond paper cut into a square, crayons, a large pan of water

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**Directions**

1. Fold in the four corners (see illustration).
2. Open up the four flaps and draw a picture of your prayer in the small square that has been made by the fold lines. Or, you might write your prayer.
3. Fold the paper flaps back over the picture or printed message to hide the drawing or words.
4. Place the folded square gently on the surface of a pan of water.
5. Watch as folded square begins to open.
6. When it is completely opened, say “Thank you, God.” Amen.

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**A Prayer from Jesus**

Based on John 17:1–11

Jesus looked around at all his friends. Jesus knew that soon he would not be with them because he was going to be with God. Let’s imagine that we are there with Jesus. Let’s imagine that Jesus is smiling at us and saying our names.

Jesus loved his friends so much! He knew his friends were anxious about what would happen to them when he was gone. So Jesus said a special prayer for his friends.

Loving God, please take good care of my friends. Keep them safe in the morning, at noontime, and at night. Help my friends to know how to live in your way, and how to share your love with others. Amen.

Jesus’ friends listened as Jesus prayed to God. Then they knew that God would always be with them, even when Jesus wasn’t with them anymore.
Here is a picture of a fruit tree. What fruit do you like the most? Draw some ripe fruit on the tree and then yourself working with some friends or family to pick the fruit. What would you enjoy doing the best? How else do you help other people?
Planning

Things to keep in mind this week…

Planning ahead…

Liturgical colour: white or gold

Ecumenical Prayer Calendar

Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Acts 2:1–21
or Numbers 11:24–30
Psalm 104:24–34, 35b
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13
John 20:19–23
or John 7:37–39

June 2017

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Seasons of the Spirit™ SeasonsFUSION Lent • Easter 2017
Pentecost

Each of this week’s texts offers a glimpse of the workings of the Spirit, rather like different facets on a well-cut jewel, each reflecting something new—the same, and different, all at once. In the central Pentecost story in Acts 2 we find a curious piece that sometimes gets overlooked: Luke (the author) speaks of how the spirit was like flames of fire, and like the howling of a wind. Perhaps the bottom line here is that, try as we might, we cannot fully comprehend the mysterious workings of God’s Spirit, and thus any attempt to define that will fall short.

Focus scripture: Acts 2:1–21

We continue with the story of the disciples after Jesus’ ascension. In Acts 1:4, Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise” of God. During this time, other Jews are gathered in Jerusalem to commemorate the Hebrew observance of Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost. Initially this was a celebration of harvest (Exodus 23:14–17). Later, the festival focused more on Jewish religious history. After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, the feast was transformed into an observance of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Pentecost literally means “fiftieth” (Deuteronomy 16:9–10).

God’s law and covenant were the foundation of the community of Israel, described in the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer of Acts describes God’s giving of the Spirit on this day of Pentecost following Jesus’ resurrection as the foundation of a new community living in covenant with God—the Body of Christ.

In Acts 2:1–21, the writer struggles to offer a verbal description of this day’s events. The writer speaks of Pentecost’s phenomena as “like the rush of a violent wind” and “divided tongues, as of fire.” Surely, the words fall short of the stunning reality.

Acts lists an intriguing variety of peoples that make up the crowd on that day. Gathered from a multitude of nations to celebrate Pentecost, they marvel as they hear the gospel proclaimed in their native languages. Explanations of how this might have occurred pale in comparison to what those words convey. Some wonder what the testimony means. Others wonder if the disciples are drunk.

In Hebrew, the word for “hear” also means “obey.” The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost unleashes the Spirit’s power in the disciples, power that strengthens faithful living and witness. The conclusion to this story of Pentecost has remained open down through the centuries since that day.

God’s pouring out of the Spirit in ways that do not follow human convention is also evident in Numbers 11:24–30. Joshua complains against the prophesying of two “unauthorized” people. Joshua’s complaint is not unlike that of later disciples who report someone who is “not with us” casting out demons in Jesus’ name (Luke 9:49–50). Moses, as does Jesus, turns aside the murmuring. God’s Spirit is given to whom God chooses.

The writer of Psalm 104:24–34, 35b sings of God’s Spirit breathing life upon all creatures, not human beings alone. God’s Spirit renews the face of the ground.

The nature of God’s Spirit is the focus of the additional texts. According to 1 Corinthians 12:3b–13, the Spirit comes with gifts for the Body of Christ. With these gifts come responsibilities to employ them for the common good.

John’s gospel tells of the giving of Spirit in John 20:19–23, when Jesus breathes upon the disciples. In Greek as in Hebrew, “spirit,” “breath,” and “wind” are expressed by the same word. In John 7:37–39, Jesus links the promised gift of Spirit with “living water.” In the arid Near East, water served as a powerful image for life. God’s Spirit flows over all.

The diverse gifts of God’s Spirit make each person and each part of creation distinctive. From this diversity, the Spirit weaves communities and creation in a common life enriched by God’s presence. What do you sense about the abundance and exuberance of God’s Spirit? What signs of God’s Spirit are emerging or exploding in your own life and in your faith community?
Reflected on the Word

Connecting with life
The ship or boat has been an image of the church from the earliest times. Part of the symbolism is the simple reality that sailing a boat is risky, and involves a group effort to move forward. Similarly, while we are afloat and may at times feel adrift, still we can offer solace to those who are swimming, we can symbolically take food and supplies to those who need them, we can offer hope to the drowning, be a symbol for refugees, and travel the seas proclaiming the message of God’s love for all people.

As you gaze upon the image Fish Boat with Net reflect on:
- What might be the fog that envelops your life?
- How might you navigate through it?
- How can you be a beacon for others who are seeking smoother sailing?

Scripture
Acts 2:1–21 Imagine yourself one of the early followers of Jesus, uncertain of what the future might be. Now, read this passage.
- There are several points at which hope comes through. Which are the strong points for you?
- Why do you think you find hope in those passages?
This reading begins: “They were all gathered in one place.” Imagine the whole church, across our diversity and divisions, together in one place.
- What does that look like?
- What is your hope? What is the challenge?
It is significant that the outpouring of the Spirit seems to be on the entire community rather than just the close-knit group of disciples.
- Do you see the Spirit as a gift to the whole community, or just the church?

John 20:19–23 This is another story of the arrival of God’s Spirit; rather than standing in opposition to Acts, it complements it. Again, imagine you are one of the disciples in the locked room.
- What feelings do you have before Jesus arrives?
- What feelings do you have after Jesus arrives?
- What is your experience of the Holy Spirit? How does it guide your life/ the life of your church?

Though the reading from John and the reading from Acts tell of a similar event, the two passages are different in many ways.
- What difference do you see between the giving of the Spirit in John and the one in Acts?

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13 Differences in gifts are recognized, yet each gift is activity by the same Spirit, and regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic background, we are all part of the same body.
- What evidence do you see of your congregation doing God’s work together, despite physical and theological differences?

Connecting scripture and life
Consider the different images of the Spirit in today’s readings: fire, wind, water, sound, body, community, and a number of others. Clearly verbal descriptions fall short of representing the reality.
- What are the signs of God’s spirit growing more in your own life and in the life of the church?
- How might we make real to the world this life-giving Spirit?

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving
For the Christian church, Pentecost used to be the archetypal holiday in the Christian year – for many it eclipsed even Easter, for it was seen as the completion of God’s work. Even the Resurrection took on its true meaning in the context of God’s Spirit arriving among the early disciples.

Over time, the significance of Pentecost has faded somewhat. Yet it still a powerful celebration. Keep it as a celebration in your church! Decorate with red and orange and yellow, and encourage people to get into that spirit. What can you do to exude a sense of unbridled joy in this day? How can the celebration encompass all the various ministries of your church’s life? How might people go from this day aware that God’s Spirit is indeed alive and present in our midst, and goes with us wherever we may go?
Pentecost

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- Recruit volunteers needed for worship: four for the call to worship and prayers of the people, two for the prayer of confession, several for the dramatic mime of John 20.
- Choose an option for hearing Acts 2:1–21. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Miracle at the Marketplace” on p. 192. For the drama, arrange for three actors to present “What Does This Mean?” (p. 191).
- Bring items for setting the worship space.
- Bring song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” (p. 15; recording of this song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
- Set stations as described on pp. 193–194.

Call to worship
A group of four people will lead this call to worship. It would be best if three of them were not seen – just voices (loud enough for everyone to hear) coming out of nowhere, as it were. However, if this is not possible, have all stand at the front.

**ONE:** Spirit.
**TWO:** Wind.
**THREE:** Breath (slight pause).
**FOUR:** God.
**ONE:** Spirit.
**TWO:** Wind.
**THREE:** Breath (slight pause).
**FOUR:** Love.
**ONE:** Spirit.
**TWO:** Wind.
**THREE:** Breath (slight pause).
**FOUR:** Forgiveness.
**ONE:** Spirit.

**TWO:** Wind.
**THREE:** Breath (slight pause).
**FOUR:** Hope.
**ONE:** Spirit.
**TWO:** Wind.
**THREE:** Breath (slight pause).
**ALL FOUR:** Come, let us worship God in spirit and truth.

Opening prayer
If possible, begin and close this prayer with the congregation singing “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come” (page 190) or other simple invocation of the Spirit. Sing it through once or twice at the beginning, and then once or twice at the end.

**ALL:** (sing) “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come.”
**ONE:** Come and be present with us now, Holy Spirit.
The world waits and we wait
for the wonder of the gifts which you bring.
**ALL:** (sing) “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come.”
Worship Outline • June 4, 2017

Prayer of confession

**One:** Moses appointed 70 elders and God blessed them with the Spirit, and they became prophets.

**Two:** Two others, Eldad and Medad, were not part of that group, yet they, too, received God’s spirit.

**One:** Joshua ran to Moses and told him to stop them. But Moses replied, “if only all God’s people were prophets!”

**Two:** Sometimes we, like Joshua, are reluctant to accept that others have received God’s Spirit, and are called by God. Yet they are.

**One:** Take a moment now, and think of a time when you were concerned about someone doing something or proclaiming something, apparently without “authority.” Name them, silently, and ask God to bless them.

(Pause.)

**Two:** Think now of a time when you were not taken seriously, or were shouted down, or silenced. Pray for God’s blessing and wisdom to be upon those who prevented you from speaking. (Pause.)

**One:** If you were angry with them, invite God to forgive you. (Pause.)

**Two:** Lastly, invite God to offer a spirit of insight and acceptance – to you and others – that we might listen to their voices and not be afraid. (Pause.)

**One:** Amen.

Words of assurance

One translation of John 20:22–23 is worded this way: “Receive the Holy Spirit,” Jesus said. “If you forgive someone’s sins, they’re gone for good. If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?”

God rejoices when we are able to forgive others who hurt us. And God rejoices always to forgive us, and to lead us on a new way. Receive the Holy Spirit, and know that you are forgiven.

Opening the word

Numbers 11:24–30 and 1 Corinthians 12:3b–13 can be read in simple dialogue to each other. Two readers come forward, one to read Numbers, and then the second to read 1 Corinthians, as if answering or expanding on the words of Moses at the end of the Numbers reading.

John 20:19–23

A simple, silent drama can enhance this scripture. Begin with a group of disciples – any number, multiple ages, men and women – huddled on the floor in a rather frightened, anxious group. At verse 20, Jesus simply walks into their midst, and they are amazed. He dramatically opens his hands and/or runs them up and down his sides.

During verse 21, Jesus turns to look at each disciple with a calm and gentle smile.

At verse 22, Jesus blows dramatically on the group. They are overjoyed. As the scripture ends, the group might simply depart, or they could go into the congregation, symbolically blowing the same kind of spirit on the congregation.

Moving into the focus scripture

All readings for this week remind us that the Spirit of God is with us in many exciting ways, surprising us and challenging us, comforting us and confronting us. The story from Acts, while central to this day’s celebration, is but one story of God’s Spirit coming to be among us. Yet it is significant, for it comes upon a church that is unsure of what the future might hold for them. In this moment, they find new hope, new purpose, and a sense of assurance that God will never abandon them.

Acts 2:1–21

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

**Bible story** Have a storyteller present the story “Miracle at the Marketplace” on page 192.

**Drama** arrange for three actors to present “What Does This Mean?” (on p. 191).

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

**Sing** or listen to a song such as “Jesus, Live in Us” as people gather together again (p. 15; recording of the song is available for purchase and download at Seasons MP3 Downloads, www.seasonsonline.ca).
Prayers of the people
If possible, the same voices from the call to worship will provide leadership for this prayer, also.

ONE: Spirit.

TWO: Wind.

THREE: Breath (slight pause).

FOUR: God beyond our description and understanding, you have come to be with us in many amazing, wonderful, sometimes incomprehensible ways. You challenge us, comfort us, provoke us, yes sometimes even anger and confuse us – yet you always love us, forgive us, and call us to be your people. We thank you, and we come before you in prayer.

ONE: Spirit.

TWO: Wind.

THREE: Breath (slight pause).

FOUR: Your love is a gift for all people. We pray for those who do not know they are loved by you, or who have forgotten, or whose hearts have grown weary and tired – even hardened – from living too long unsure they are loved at all. Infuse them with a new awareness of your spirit. Guide us to share the good news in ways that invite those at the margins of our world to find their lives renewed and made whole.

ONE: Spirit.

TWO: Wind.

THREE: Breath (slight pause).

FOUR: Offer forgiveness for those who are lost and alone. Offer wisdom to those who are in leadership over others, in communities, churches, and nations. Offer a spirit of renewal for a tired world.

ONE: Spirit.

TWO: Wind.

THREE: Breath (slight pause).

FOUR: We pray to you, O God, in a sense of wonder and hope, knowing that your compassion for all your creation is deep, never-ending, and always unfolding.

ONE: Spirit.

TWO: Wind.

THREE: Breath (slight pause).


Prayer of dedication
We bring a wide variety of gifts to the table, O God, gifts that we have received by your grace. Take all we offer – our money, our time, our talents, our dreams, our hands, our hearts – and use them to make your Spirit’s presence felt in all the world. Amen.

Bless

Receive the Spirit of God – that amazing gift that is present in our midst and at the same time just beyond description, just outside our full comprehension.

Let that Spirit renew your life, and take that Spirit into a world that hungers and thirsts for a new awareness of God’s presence.

Know that the rivers of living water that flow from deep within the Christ flow to refresh our thirsty world. Amen.

Come, O Holy Spirit, Come / Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo

This song is in the public domain; you may copy and use it as you wish. Lyrics are available as text files in the Text Files folder on the Lent, Easter CD, and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION. Recording of this song is on the Seasons Music CD, vol. 5.
What Does This Mean?

Dramatic presentation of Acts 2:1–11

**Onlooker:** It's a disgrace. I thought this was a religious group. Have you ever seen such behaviour? They must be drunk at this hour. What a way to carry on. Someone should tell the authorities.

**Disciple One:** You can't have heard what Peter said. They're not drunk, how could they be? It's not even nine o'clock in the morning. It's the result of God's Spirit.

**Onlooker:** Look I'm a religious man, but I really don't think you can bring God into this. Does this look godly to you?

**Disciple One:** Yes it does! This is what the prophet Joel spoke about, “In the last days –

**Onlooker:** (Interrupting)… I know perfectly well what Joel said, thank you. But this can't be what he was talking about. Joel was a respectable man of God. This isn't respectable.

**Disciple Two:** Why? I see joy and celebration. I hear God's name being praised.

**Onlooker:** I see hysterics, emotions gone wild, and people completely out of control. Where is the decency and order? Where is the decorum? This is…

**Disciple One:** (Interrupting)… the message of God's love being preached to everyone.

**Onlooker:** But how can that be? (Looks around as if confused.) If God's love is being preached to all. If God's Spirit is being poured out on Jew and Gentile (hesitates) what does this mean? (Pause. Disciple One looks as if about to respond and Onlooker puts up his hand and speaks angrily.) No don't tell me! You can't be right. (Walks away.)
Miracle at the Marketplace
Based on Acts 2:1–21

Miriam liked going to the marketplace with her mother. There was always so much to see. There were lots of stalls selling all kinds of things, and today there would be lots of people from different countries who had come to Jerusalem for the celebration. It was fifty days after Passover and everyone would be feasting to celebrate the harvest. Miriam and her mother were going to buy special food for the feast. Miriam was very excited.

Just as they got to the market, Miriam heard a rushing noise. All of a sudden, a strong wind sprang up and almost blew Miriam over. Luckily, she was holding on to her mother’s hand. As they walked further into the market, Miriam noticed that it was even noisier than usual. She could hear lots of people all talking at once but she couldn’t understand what any of them were saying. Miriam held her mother’s hand tightly – she was a bit scared by all the noise and confusion. When the crowd parted slightly, Miriam saw where the noise was coming from. There was a group of people on the roof of a nearby house. They were all standing, holding their hands up, and talking at the tops of their voices.

A man standing next to Miriam’s mother said, “I live in Crete and have come to Jerusalem for the festival. I didn’t expect anyone to speak my language here, but one of those men is speaking Cretan. He is praising God in my language.”

“I can hear another one speaking Arabic and one speaking Egyptian. What’s happening?” asked another man.

“Perhaps they have drunk too much wine,” suggested Miriam’s mother.

Just then, the people on the house fell silent and one of them came forward and spoke to the watching crowd. He explained that they weren’t drunk. Something amazing had happened to them. A prophecy had been fulfilled and they now felt God’s presence with them in a new and exciting way.

When the man finished speaking, Miriam and her mother continued with their shopping, but Miriam couldn’t stop thinking about what the man had said. She thought it would be good to feel that God was always with you. Maybe she could listen to the man again and find out more?

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFusion.

Bible story
Materials recording of today’s story “Miracle at the Marketplace,” player, paper or drawing pads, crayons, pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling
Directions
1. Listen to the story “Miracle at the Marketplace.”
2. Use the art materials provided to respond to the story.
3. Draw what you think Miriam might have seen to make her think that God’s Spirit was with Peter and his friends in a new way.
Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

For your convenience, instructions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION.

The article “Connecting with the Art” on page 4 provides some background to the two posters for Lent, Easter and some art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might choose to add an Art Engagement station each week and choose one of the art engagement ideas.

Other languages

Materials hymnals with one or more hymns in different languages, someone to lead, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of recognizing our diversity

Directions
At Pentecost, people heard the good news about God’s love in different languages. Often our hymnals have hymns in other languages to remind us that God’s love is for all people. Hymns and songs in other languages remind us of the rich diversity of people who make up the people of God.
1. Look for hymns in your hymnal that are either translated into languages other than English (such as perhaps “Jesus Loves Me” or “Amazing Grace) or hymns that were originally written in another language (such as “Wa, wa, wa Emimimo/ Come, O Holy Spirit, Come” or “Stille Nacht/Silent Night.”)
2. Together learn a new hymn in another language, or sing a verse or two of a familiar one in another language.

Younger children
Find a hymn ahead of time, and/or bring copies of a simple hymn in another language, such as “Jesus Loves Me” or “Silent Night.”

Wind chimes

Materials coat hangers, string or cord, pieces of old cutlery (often available very cheaply at op shops/thrift stores), copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of making a reminder of the Spirit

Directions
Acts 2:2 says that the Holy Spirit was like a great wind. We cannot see the wind but we can see what it does all around us, and that is what it is like with the Holy Spirit. Wind chimes can remind us that the wind – and God’s Spirit – are with us always.
1. Using pieces of string, tie one end to a piece of cutlery and the other end to the coat hanger.
2. Add another piece of cutlery, varying the length of string, but making sure the cutlery will clang together in some way. Continue doing this until you feel you have enough.
3. You can bend the cutlery, and/or the coat hanger, to help the pieces “clang” differently.
4. Hang the wind chimes outdoors at your home, and when you hear them think of God’s Spirit being with us, and offer a prayer of thanks!
Paper boats

Materials copies of resource sheet “Making a Paper Boat” (in the Extra Resources folder on the Lent, Easter CD and in the web version of SeasonsFUSION); pieces of letter-size paper, preferably red, orange, and/or yellow; note that construction paper is not the best for this, although it can work in a pinch; large bowl or other container such as a baby bath for floating the boats; copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of making a symbol of the church

Directions
Today, we celebrate the birthday of the church. People have often seen a boat or ship as a symbol of a church. In fact, the part of a church where people sit is often called the “nave” which comes from the Latin word for boat.

1. Follow the directions on the resource sheet to fold a boat, helping one another as needed.
2. As you fold, talk together about how the church might be like a boat.

Prayer flags

Materials triangular pennants of fabric in different colours, markers, length of cord or thin rope, stapler, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of prayer

Directions
1. Write the names of people or situations in need of prayer on the coloured pennants/prayer flags with pens provided.
2. Staple short edge of pennant over cord or rope.
3. After the service, suspend line of prayer flags in a place where the wind catches them.
4. Continue to pray for the people and situations named.

Cake decorating

Materials sponge or other popular cake, butter or fondant icing and natural red, orange, or yellow food colouring, cake candles, palette knife or spatulas, hand sanitizer, plastic gloves, or accessible hand-washing facilities to meet hygiene requirements, clean working space that complies with health and safety guidelines, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

The practice of hospitality

Directions
Decorate a cake to celebrate the birth of the church.

1. Make sure hands are clean.
2. Use the icing and equipment provided to decorate a Pentecost cake.
3. Share the cake after the service, lighting the candles if appropriate and singing “Happy Birthday” to the church.
The Coming of God’s Spirit

Based on Acts 2:1–21

Jesus’ friends were gathered together in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. They were waiting and praying. They were praying and waiting. And they were talking quietly to each other.

“I miss Jesus. I feel afraid without him,” whispered one.

“I miss him, too. I don’t know how to do God’s work or show God’s love, like Jesus did,” whispered another.

“Jesus taught us so many things but I don’t think I can do those things by myself, whispered another.

And then Peter said, “Remember what Jesus told us about God’s Spirit coming to help us? I wonder when we will know?”

Suddenly everyone stopped whispering. They felt something happening, from the top of their heads to the tip of their toes.

Whooo. Whooo. Whooo. It was like the wind blowing.

Whooo. Whooo. Whooo. It was coming through the room!

Whooo. Whooo. Whooo. It was all around them.

Everyone started talking at once.


Whooo. Whooo. Whooo. “Yes, yes. We can feel God’s love!” shouted the other friends.

Whooo. Whooo. Whooo. “We are not alone. We can feel God’s Spirit! God is with us!” shouted Peter again.

Everyone became very excited. They rushed out into the streets of Jerusalem.

“Listen, listen,” Peter called out to the people on the streets. “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. God is with us.” And then Peter told the people all about Jesus.

Many people believed the good news about God’s love. Many people became followers of Jesus. It was an exciting wonderful time!

Silent Wind Chimes

On the Day of Pentecost, God’s Spirit came like a wind blowing. Hang these wind chimes in an area where they can blow in the wind and remind you of God’s Spirit.

You will need red, yellow, and orange construction paper, red yarn, crayons or markers, stickers, clear tape, coat hanger

Directions
1. Cut construction paper into various sizes of squares.
2. Decorate four or five squares of paper with markers and stickers.
3. Roll each square into a tube and tape closed at both ends.
4. Tape a length of yarn to the inside of one end of each tube and tie the other end of the yarn to the coat hanger, spreading the tubes across the width of the hanger.
5. Hang the “chimes” near a doorway or outside where it is protected from the rain.
On Pentecost, God’s Spirit blew and the church grew.

Decorate the pictures that tell ways God’s Spirit helps us to show God’s love.

On Pentecost, God’s Spirit blew and the church grew.

Where people were sad and alone, God’s Spirit blew and the church grew.

Where people were ready to grow and tell of God’s love, God’s Spirit blew and the church grew.

Where people were ready to give and share, God’s Spirit blew and the church grew.