

WEEKLY SERVICES



ASH WEDNESDAY TO THE LAST SUNDAY OF EASTER

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

Dates: Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which falls 40 days prior to Easter. Sundays are not included in the count of these days, as each Sunday is a “little Easter,” meant to celebrate resurrection.

Feast Days* and Special Days

***Ash Wednesday** – the beginning of the Lent–Easter cycle. The wearing of ashes, made from the burning of the previous year’s palms from Palm Sunday, is considered a sign of repentance, sorrow, and mourning, an appropriate way to begin Lent.

***Palm Sunday** – the start of Holy Week, the last week of Lent. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem.

***The Triduum** – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, the last three days of Holy Week.

Meaning of Name: The name Lent comes through Middle English *lente* and Old English *lencten* or *lengten*, referring to the season of spring and the lengthening of days. It is also related to the French word *lente*, which means “to move slowly.”

Liturgical Colour: Purple is a cool colour on the colour wheel, reflecting divinity, wisdom, dignity, mystery, and creativity. Dark purple is a penitential colour, evoking sadness and deep reflection. In the first century CE, purple dye was very hard to come by, so only the wealthy could afford purple garments.

EASTER

Dates: Easter is currently a moveable feast, celebrated in Western Christianity on the first Sunday after the first astronomical full moon on or after the vernal (spring) equinox (fixed as March 21 for ecclesial purposes). Thus Easter falls between March 22 and April 25 on the Gregorian calendar. Easter Day within Eastern Christianity is calculated in the same manner but following the Julian calendar, using the actual vernal equinox

date at the meridian of Jerusalem, and with the added condition that Easter must fall after Passover. There are talks underway exploring the possibility of fixing the date of Easter to the second or third Sunday of April. This would allow all Christians to celebrate on the same day.

Feast Days* and Special Days

April Fool’s Day – April 1.

Holy Humour Sunday – the Sunday after Easter Sunday.

Earth Day – April 22.

***Ascension Day** – 40th day after Easter.

Camping Sunday – the last Sunday of April.

Meaning of Name: The name Easter comes from the Old English *Eostre*, rooted in the Proto-Germanic *austron*, meaning “dawn,” and the Proto-Indo-European *aus*, meaning “to shine.” The word *east* has the same roots. Bede, a seventh-/eighth-century English monk, made a connection between the name Easter and an early Germanic goddess of the dawn or spring, possibly named *Eostre*, whose feasts were celebrated in the month of April, though there is current debate about who this goddess might actually be. Within Greek and Latin traditions, the celebration is referred to as Pascha, a name rooted in the Aramaic word for Passover.

Liturgical Colours: Consider using a rainbow of colours for Easter to celebrate the expansive and extravagant love of God. Gold, a traditional Easter colour, could be added with its meanings of glory, illumination, love, compassion, courage, and wisdom. Why not set aside the traditional white used for Easter? Within Western cultures, white has denoted goodness, innocence, and purity, and reflects a specific racial and cultural bias. In other cultures, white has associations and meanings that may or may not fit well with Easter celebrations.

March 5 – Ash Wednesday

Worship materials for Ash Wednesday were contributed by the Three Harbours P.C., Wallace, N.S., writing team: Heather Blaikie, Bev Ripley-Hall, Connie McNamara, Joanne Nolet, and Stuart Semple. Adapted from the Lent-Easter 2016 issue.

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17

The day of God is coming.

or Isaiah 58:1–12

A fast that pleases God.

Psalms 51:1–17

Create in me a new heart, O God.

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

Be reconciled to God.

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Concerning almsgiving and fasting.

Creation Connection

As we follow Jesus into the desert this Lent, consider how the landscape is a character in the story. How does the landscape shape the story? How does our landscape shape us?

Spark

Place a cross made of dry sticks (driftwood might be best) in a container of ashes to signify the connection and cohesiveness of the time from Ash Wednesday through Lent to Holy Week.

With Children

Remove the cross from the ashes (see Spark, above) and pass it around. After each child has held it, ask them to consider their hands. What do they notice? When we make a choice to hold the cross in a particular way, we might get ashes on our hands. We might be okay with the ashes or not. Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to thank God for choices, forgiveness, and new beginnings.



Sermon Starter

Ash Wednesday has traditionally been seen as a day of sackcloth and ashes, of shame, guilt, and confession, so take a different path and see the potential for Ash Wednesday to be a day of new beginnings, a day for choices, a day to think about how we touch the cross—helpful over harmful from 2 Corinthians, and private generosity over public bragging from Matthew. For what are we looking as we make choices and choose to follow Jesus, even through the despair?

Hymns

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 or Isaiah 58:1–12

VU 109 “Now quit your care”

VU 653 “Come, let us to the God of love”

VU 684 “Make me a channel of your peace”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

Psalms 51

VU 508 “Just as I am”

VU 665 “Pass me not, O gentle Saviour”

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

MV 64 “Because you came”

MV 74 “When painful mem’ries”

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

VU 286 “If you will trust in God to guide you”

VU 611 “Out of the depths, O God”

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

General/Seasonal

VU 105 “Dust and ashes touch our face”

VU 107 “Sunday’s palms are Wednesday’s ashes”

Sung Responses for Lent

VU 348 “O love, how deep” verse 7

VU 948 “O God, hear my prayer”

MV 69 “Kyrie eleison”

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

March 9 – Lent 1

Worship materials for Lent were contributed by Christine Jerrett, Shiloh-Inwood P.C., Inwood, Ont.

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

“My father was a wandering Aramean.”

Psalm 91:1–2, 9–16 (VU pp. 807–809)

I will raise you up on eagle’s wings.

Romans 10:8b–13

Declare with your mouth; believe with your heart.

Luke 4:1–13

Jesus tested in the desert.

Creation Connection

The passage from Deuteronomy names the people of God as those who have received the land as a gift from a gracious, creative God, entrusted to care for it with gratitude and to celebrate the abundant generosity of God.

Spark

The week before, invite members of the congregation to bring jars of locally made or Canadian honey to contribute to a food bank. Jars may be collected during the Children’s Time. Try Deuteronomy 26:1–11 as a readers’ theatre (search *re-worship readers theatre Deuteronomy 26:1–11*).

With Children

The Season of Lent lasts 40 days, a reminder of the 40 years the people of Israel spent in the wilderness learning to live in God’s way of freedom and justice. God gave the people the Torah to guide them, a gift that they considered more precious than gold and “sweeter also than honey and drippings from the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10). Rabbis would place drops of honey on the Torah scroll. They would also drop a little honey on the tongues of toddlers, inviting them to “taste and see” that living in God’s way is sweet (adapted from “Sustaining the Weary with a Word” by Ed Searcy, in *Journal for Preachers*, Lent 2003, p. 6).

Sermon Starter

The passage from Deuteronomy is an early Jewish creed. Jewish people recite the story over and over: “We were treated harshly. We had no hope and no future. We cried out to God and God received our cries. God brought us out of oppression and brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Notice that the phrase “the Lord our God” dominates the passage. As we retell this story that is central to the biblical story, we remember that “the Lord our God” still dominates over the harms we suffer. This God still receives the cries of those who suffer. This God is active in our world to bring us to a place of blessing.

Jewish people tell the story from one generation to the next, repeating it until it becomes part of each person’s identity. In our telling, we too are shaped by this story of a faithful, powerfully creative God. We tell it so that we are made into a people who are capable of resisting the dehumanizing forces of our day. We tell it so that each generation can meet life with courage and hope and creativity.

Hymns

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

VU 518 “As those of old their first-fruits brought”

VU 544 “In gratitude and humble trust” *for offering*

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 650 “O God of Bethel”

Psalm 91

VU 220 “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

VU 221 “Sing praise to God, who has shaped”

Romans 10:8b–13

VU 410 “This day God gives me”

VU 477 “I come with joy”

Luke 4:1–13

VU 115 “Jesus, tempted in the desert”

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

March 16 – Lent 2

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18

God seals the covenant with Abram and Sarai.

Psalm 27 (VU pp. 753–755)

God is my light and my salvation.

Philippians 3:17–4:1

My dear friends, my joy, my crown, hold firm in God.

Luke 13:31–35

Jesus cries over Jerusalem as a hen over her chicks.

Creation Connection

In “How to Be Caught by the Holy Spirit,” Stanley Hauerwas tells us that nature is a character in God’s story, a story about God caring for the world (see ABC Religion and Ethics, November 14, 2013; www.abc.net.au). As followers of Jesus, we are to be witnesses to that caring as well.

Spark

Read Psalm 27 responsively. Present the drama “Don’t You Get it,” available at www.seedstuff.blogspot.com (on the left menu, choose 2022, then February, Lent 2 C, then scroll down to the drama). Alternatively, invite each person to write or draw their “If only…” or “Yes, but…” and then ask them to come forward to place it in a basket. From the basket, give each a magnet that reads “Don’t be afraid. I am your shield and your great reward.” (Magnets can be attached to coloured index cards.) Invite people to put the magnet where they will notice it regularly throughout the week and ask them to report back the next week about the difference it made to be reminded of God’s promise on a regular basis.

With Children

Ask the children, “What kinds of things make you afraid?” In the Psalm, God declares, “Don’t be afraid. I am your shield.” God promises to be with us whatever happens. This knowledge helps us confront our fears and gives us courage to keep going. Sing MV 90 “Don’t be afraid.” Name something that makes people afraid. Then, sing the song again a few times. Or ask someone in your congregation to share a time when they were afraid and how they learned to trust that God was with them. It helps us to be courageous when we

are part of a community that has found courage by leaning in to God’s promises.

Sermon Starter

So often these days, conversations about a congregation’s future circle round to the lack of children. We are as childless as Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Years earlier, God had promised them that they would have children. None had shown up. God spoke into the emptiness of their childlessness: “Don’t be afraid. Your reward will be very great.”

Abraham didn’t pretend to believe. “What use are your promises as long as I am childless?” God just repeated the promise: “Your descendants will be as many as the stars in the sky.” Finally, Abraham chose to trust the promise rather than the evidence. God declared that Abraham’s trust and courage was the bedrock of the relationship between them.

Even so, it would be many years before God’s promise was kept. Living in hope and faith does not mean that everything will go our way. Yet, even when the future looks impossible, God is still actively at work in God’s creation, moving us toward God’s salvation. We live in alert expectation that God will do what God has promised. Faith is letting God do it in God’s way and in God’s time.

A good reference is Walter Brueggemann’s *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (SPCK Publishing, 1978).

Hymns

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18

VU 634 “To Abraham and Sarah”

VU 639 “One more step along the world I go”

VU 703 “In the bulb there is a flower”

Psalm 27

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid”

Philippians 3:17–4:1

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

Luke 13:31–35

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 329 “O Jesus Christ, may grateful hymns be rising”

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great [Redeemer]”

VU 675 “Will your anchor hold”

March 23 – Lent 3

Isaiah 55:1–9

Come, buy wine and milk without money!

Psalm 63:1–8 (VU p. 781)

I long for you, O God.

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

God will not let you be tested beyond your strength.

Luke 13:1–9

The parable of the barren fig tree.

Creation Connection

When we are anxious about the danger our planet is in, it is enormously difficult for us to trust that God cares for God's creation. Do we give up when results come more slowly than we would like? What might we learn from the parable of the barren fig tree?

Spark

Invite the congregation into a time of silence to give their attention to God. Then, play a musical rendition of Psalm 63, such as the jazz version found at <https://worship.calvin.edu> (search *jazz psalm 63*; track 3). Then, allow another time of silence after the psalm. Invite people to write, draw, or share with each other what emerged for them during the time of prayer.

With Children

Place a pot, soil, seeds, and water in front of the children and say, "I would like to grow a flower. What do I need to do that?" Invite the children to help you add soil to the pot and plant the seed. Wait a few seconds. Ask, "Where's the flower? What else do we need to do?" Add some water. Wait a few seconds. Ask, "Why isn't there a flower yet?" Put the pot near light for a few seconds. Still no flower.

Talk about God wanting us to grow more like Jesus so we can share more of God's love in the world. God provides all we need but we aren't always good or kind or loving, like Jesus. Still, God doesn't give up on us. God is patient and keeps helping us grow in love and faith.

Offer the children a sign with the letters: PBPGINFWMY. Explain that the letters stand for "Please Be Patient, God Is Not Finished With Me Yet" (an interpretation of Philippians 1:6). Invite

them to put the sign in a place where they will notice it regularly. Invite them to imagine other people wearing that sign as well.

Sermon Starter

Jesus often said, "Pay attention. Listen!" He told parables, stories designed to get people to consider the world in new ways. In today's gospel, Jesus acknowledges, "Evil forces are at work in the world. Nobody gets by unscathed. Still, God is at work, patiently, persistently transforming this world toward God's good purposes. This is long, slow, hard work. You can miss it easily. Repent. Think differently about what is going on. Turn toward the work God is doing in God's way."

What would it mean to live with complete trust in God, no longer tangled up with fear and worry? What would it mean to have courage rooted in our faith?

We get into trouble when we want to tackle what's wrong in the world but are impatient with God's way of doing that. Jesus' Way includes welcoming those who are different from us, building relationships with our enemies, forgiving those who have harmed us, and sheltering in God's faithful care. Following Jesus' Way, we discover that God's patient, redeeming work is more decisive than the tragedies and dangers.

Hymns

Isaiah 55:1–9

VU 222 "Come, let us sing"

VU 356 "Seek ye first the kingdom"

VU 460 "All who hunger"

Psalm 63

VU p. 766 "As the deer pants for the water"

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

VU 288 "Great is thy faithfulness"

VU p. 806 "O God, our help in ages past"

Luke 13:1–9

VU 274 "Your hand, O God, has guided"

VU 560 "O Master, let me walk with thee"

VU 567 "Will you come and follow me"

VU 613 "We cannot measure how you heal"

MV 6 "Holy Spirit, come into our lives"

March 30 – Lent 4

Joshua 5:9–12

God takes away the shame of Egypt from the people.

Psalm 32 (VU p. 759)

Blessed are those who are forgiven.

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Anyone in Christ is a new creation.

Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32

The prodigal son; the prodigal father.

Creation Connection

Creation is a gift from a gracious and generous God; however, we live in a culture that is actively forming us to use creation to serve our greed and selfishness. Worship services can enable us to resist those forces by renewing our covenant with God and our promise to steward the gifts God gives with generosity and grace.

Spark

In Joshua 5, the people move from depending on manna to depending on local produce. Invite people to bring locally produced food items. After the reading from Joshua, ask them to bring these to the communion table. Offer a prayer/litany of thanks to God for the gifts God gives to sustain us.

With Children

Distribute strips of bright cloth and felt pens to the people in the congregation. Invite them to think of places in their community and in the world where God is “making a new creation” and where the church is involved in ministries of reconciliation. Ask them to write those places on the strips of cloth.

Set up a pot or large vase with several dried branches. Wonder with the children about the ways in which God is at work in the world, offering new beginnings and welcoming us back into community when we mess up. Invite the children to collect the strips of cloth and tie them onto the twigs in the vase as a visual celebration of the ways in which God is making us into the new creation.

Sermon Starter

“There once was a man with two sons...” This isn’t just a story about a person who led a wild life, had a conversion experience, and found his way home. This is a story about a family navigating its way through the messiness, hurts, and betrayals that happen whenever human beings live in relationship with each other. It is about the community that is being shaped by the reign of God that Jesus declares is “at hand.”

Throughout the parable, the father keeps pulling the two sons back into community with each other. The father refuses to let either son stay lost or dead in their separation from each other. That is the work God is doing when God places us in community with other disciples of Jesus, some of whom we may have a hard time getting along with. Together, by the grace and forgiveness we receive in Jesus Christ, we are healed, forgiven, and reconciled.

Our life together thus becomes a gift to a culture where people’s capacity to be in relationship with other people has greatly diminished. We get to be “ambassadors” for Christ, inviting people to enter into God’s work of making things right between them.

Hymns

Joshua 5:9–12

- VU 227 “For the fruit of all creation”
- VU 299 “Teach me, God, to wonder”
- MV 198 “When we gather at the table”

Psalm 32

- VU 112 “O God, how we have wandered”
- #### 2 Corinthians 5:16–21
- VU 477 “I come with joy”
 - MV 181 “Lord, your hands have formed”

Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32

- VU 360 “A woman and a coin”
- VU 402 “We are one”
- VU 691 “Though ancient walls”
- MV 187 “We give our thanks”

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April 6 – Lent 5

Isaiah 43:16–21

Look, I am doing something new.

Psalm 126 (VU p. 850)

Those who sow in tears reap with joy.

Philippians 3:4b–14

I count everything as loss but knowing Christ.

John 12:1–8

Mary anoints Jesus with costly ointment.

Creation Connection

“Pay attention, I am doing something new,” God proclaims while providing water in the desert, a challenge to what seems inevitable. We get to participate in and witness resurrection’s victory over death’s power. Check out “The Earth, the Road, and the Tomb: The Mortality of the Earth and Care for Creation” by Robert C. Saler at www.thecresset.org.

Spark

Decorate the sanctuary or communion table with a variety of large pitchers or with streamers in a variety of shades of blue and brown to symbolize God making “rivers in the desert.”

With Children

Gather the children around the baptismal font. Have a pitcher filled with water. Tell the children that when we are baptized, we become part of a community that tells many stories about God using water to care for creation and the people in it. Ask them to name some Bible stories that mention water. Invite them to pour some of the water into the font for each story. Talk about Isaiah 43 and how the Hebrew people spent a lot of time in the desert and experienced God providing water in surprising ways. The Hebrew people would remember that story whenever they were going through a hard time. Those stories reminded them to be attentive to the ways God was caring for them, as well.

You could also tell stories of the ways the United Church witnesses to God’s good care by being involved in projects that provide water for people.

Sermon Starter

Paul is sitting in a Roman jail, having suffered great losses. Still, Paul writes to the Philippians that he firmly believes that knowing Jesus and understanding the power of his resurrection while sharing in his suffering is essential.

We live in a time full of losses. One way of life is disappearing; a new way is being created. Much of the time, it can seem that the power of death is the most powerful of all. Jesus’ resurrection signals to us that God’s power for life is more powerful still. How do you navigate through such a time? Paul offers this: “You search for Christ Jesus in your suffering, in the losses. You enter every situation hunting for the power of his resurrection.” You might ask Jesus, “What gift do you have for me in this situation?” God is present even in our suffering and losses, turning them into experiences where we journey deeper into the mystery of God’s great love. You trust with everything you have that yielding your life to God opens your life to that holy work.

Hymns

Isaiah 43:16–21

VU 424 “May the God of hope go with us”

VU 460 “All who hunger”

VU 703 “In the bulb there is a flower”

MV 17 “God in the darkness”

Psalm 126

VU p. 859 “By the Babylonian rivers”

Philippians 3:4b–14

VU 339 “When morning gilds the skies”

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

VU 574 “Come, let us sing of a wonderful love”

John 12:1–8

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

Worship Leaders

We ask that you include this statement when using material from **Gathering**.

Written by _____ .
Gathering, Lent/Easter 2025,
 page _____. Used with permission.

April 13 – Palm/Passion Sunday

Worship materials for Holy Week and Easter Sunday were contributed by the Three Harbours P.C., Wallace, N.S., writing team: Heather Blaikie, Bev Ripley-Hall, Connie McNamara, Joanne Nolet, and Stuart Semple. Adapted from the Lent-Easter 2016 issue.

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:1–2,19–29 (VU p. 837 Parts One, Three, and Four)

The stone that the builders rejected.

Luke 19:28–40

Jesus enters Jerusalem to cheering crowds.

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4–9a

They struck my back and plucked my beard.

Psalm 31:9–16 (VU p. 758 Parts Two and Three)

My body and soul are wasting away.

Philippians 2:5–11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ.

Luke 22:14–23:56

Judas betrays Jesus; arrest, trial, crucifixion.

or **Luke 23:1–49**

Jesus is arrested, tried, and crucified.

Creation Connection

Who are we hoping will address the climate crisis? For whom are we waiting?

Spark

“For whom are you looking?” Jesus asks this question twice. He asks the question when the police, soldiers, chief priests, and Pharisees come to the garden after the Passover meal, and then again when Mary is crying at the empty tomb. The question remains pertinent today as we each name Jesus in different ways depending on our situation, and as more and more people are seeking someone or something they are not sure how to name.

Today is a parade day. Play parade music as a prelude, such as Handel’s “March from Scipio.” Such music provides opportunities to use drums and other percussion instruments.

The palms of welcome and the cross of death are intertwined today, so place both some newly made palm crosses and some older ones from previous years throughout the sanctuary.

Note: The writing team highlights the importance of processing the events of Holy Week as a progressive story and advises encouraging people, where possible, to attend Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday services, and discourages the use of the Liturgy of the Passion on Palm Sunday.

With Children

Have you ever been in a parade or attended a parade? What if the end wasn’t as you had anticipated? For example, what if there was no Santa at the end of the Santa Claus parade? When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the crowds had gathered because they knew that something amazing was happening, but who were they expecting? They thought Jesus (of whom so many stories had been shared) should be a mighty warrior riding a brave horse, but what they got was a lowly servant of the people riding on a donkey—not who they expected, but certainly who they needed. Today’s parade eventually ends with the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday, which is a very sad time indeed. Yet Jesus gives us the strength to discover hope even from the cross.

Sermon Starter

Continue the “With Children” theme by examining more deeply who the crowd of bystanders expected that day in Jerusalem and how Jesus did and did not live up to their expectations. Who are we expecting when we gather today? How does Jesus both meet and not meet our expectations? How do others in our church and community meet and not meet our expectations? What can we learn from these reflections? Consider the Philippians passage in relation to our expectations of Jesus.

Hymns

Psalm 118

VU 198 “Come, O Spirit, dwell among us”

VU 409 “Morning has broken”

Luke 19:28–40

VU 124 “He came riding on a donkey”

VU 126 “Ride on, ride on, the time is right”

VU 357 “Tell me the stories of Jesus”

MV 8 “And on this path”

MV 128 “When they heard that Jesus was coming”

Isaiah 50:4–9a

VU 119 “When we are tempted to deny your Son”

VU 618 “God, when I stand”

Psalm 31

MV 76 “If I have been the source of pain”

MV 80 “Beyond the beauty and the awe”

Philippians 2:5–11

VU 147 “What wondrous love is this”

VU 339 “When morning gilds the skies”

Luke 22:14–23:56 or Luke 23:1–49

VU 132 “Bitter was the night”

VU 138 “Ah, holy Jesus”

April 17 – Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

Instructions for celebrating Passover.

Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)

How can I repay your goodness, God?

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

First account of the Last Supper.

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

A new commandment to love one another.

Creation Connection

How do we share in the sacrament of communion with all of Creation?

Spark

Place a small table set for supper, complete with chairs, near the entrance to symbolize that we are waiting for Jesus—the one whom we await. Offer people a bite of bread (gluten-free) and a small drink of wine (grape juice) as they enter the sanctuary to symbolize the transformation that takes place on Maundy Thursday as Jesus turns ordinary food into the blessed symbols of communion at the Last Supper.

With Children

Talk about firsts. Do you remember your first day at school? Do you remember the first time you went swimming? Do you remember the first time you ate chocolate? How do you remember people? Is there anything special you do to remember someone? Jesus and his disciples had celebrated the Passover meal each year of their lives, so the

Maundy Thursday gathering was not new to them, but when Jesus blessed the bread and the wine and asked his friends to share these elements, he did something new by asking them to let this sharing be the way they remembered him. Do you remember the first time you shared in communion?

Sermon Starter

1 Corinthians 11:23 reads, “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.” What is it we receive when we come to the table and what do we do with what we have received? Who are we remembering, and why is the remembrance significant in communion? Who is Jesus for us on this night as he provides bread and wine? Is he nourisher, servant, comforter, friend, saviour, or someone else?

Hymns

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

VU 18 “There’s a voice in the wilderness”

MV 46 “Bless the Lord”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

Psalm 116

VU 650 “O God of Bethel”

VU p. 903 “Lord God, You Now Have Set Your Servant Free”

MV 195 “Long ago and far away”

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

VU 456 “Now to your table spread”

VU 459 “Here, O my Lord, I see you face to face”

VU 461 “Bread of the world”

VU 470 “For the bread which you have broken”

MV 80 “Beyond the beauty and the awe”

MV 194 “Bread of life, feed my soul”

MV 198 “When we gather at the table”

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

VU 130 “An upper room did our Lord prepare”

VU 458 “Christ, let us come with you”

VU 594 “O Christian, love”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

General/Seasonal

VU 148 “Jesus, remember me”

April 18 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

He was despised; a man of sorrows.

Psalm 22 (VU p. 743)

My God, why have you forsaken me?

Hebrews 10:16–25

Provoke one another with love and good deeds.

or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

Jesus the High Priest learned obedience.

John 18:1–19:42

Jesus is arrested, tried, and crucified.

Creation Connection

Consider the theme of betrayal of Creation as related to the betrayal, arrest, and death of Jesus.

Spark

Two suggestions: (1) Place a cross at the front of the sanctuary with nails partially hammered into the wood. Hang a crown of thorns from the cross. (2) Pass out candles as people come into the sanctuary. Assist everyone to light the candles before the reading of the Passion and instruct them to blow out their candle when they hear, “He said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). The light of the world has gone out. Battery-operated candles are an option, but not as poignant.

With Children

On Good Friday, we share the story of Jesus dying on the cross and his body being moved to a tomb, but we know that on Easter Sunday, Jesus is raised from the dead, and the tomb is empty. Today, when someone dies, we have a funeral and then a burial, but there is no visible resurrection for us. There is, however, something that we do that symbolizes the spiritual resurrection. Do you know what that is? Sometimes we plant seeds: they are buried in the ground, and then within days, they poke through the soil and come to life before our eyes. Provide a container of soil and let the children bury the seeds. Promise to water the seeds. We’ll check them on Sunday. What else do we do at times of funerals to symbolize our hope?

Sermon Starter

Jesus asked, “For whom are you looking?” as he was approached by the authorities in the garden. They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” He replied, “I am he.” Yet, is that how Jesus would have chosen to best describe himself in that moment? Jesus was far more than where he came from. He was strong, he was faithful, he was humble, he was a leader, he was “whom we are looking for.” Whom are we longing for on Good Friday? Do we find here what we long for?

Hymns

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

VU 143 “My song is love unknown”

VU 145 “O sacred head”

VU 159 “The strife is o’er”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

Psalm 22

VU 119 “When we are tempted to deny your Son”

VU 154 “Why has God forsaken me”

Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 671 “I need thee every hour”

MV 17 “God in the darkness”

John 18:1–19:42

VU 135 “Beneath the cross of Jesus”

VU 142 “Jesus, keep me near the cross”

VU 149 “When I survey the wondrous cross”

VU 151 “Lift high the cross”

VU 211 “Crown him with many crowns”

VU 348 “O love, how deep”

MV 58 “We sing of your glory”

General/Seasonal

VU 141 “They crucified my Lord”

VU 144 “Were you there”

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS AND IDEAS

Contributions to **Gathering** can be submitted through **GatheringWorship.ca** or emailed to gather@united-church.ca.

April 20 – Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34–43

Peter preaches at the house of Cornelius.

or Isaiah 65:17–25

A new heaven and earth; the wolf and the lamb together.

Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 (VU p. 837 Parts One, Two, and Three)

God is my strength and my song.

1 Corinthians 15:19–26

We die in Adam and are made alive in Christ.

John 20:1–18

Mary and Simon Peter find the empty tomb.

or Luke 24:1–12

The women report that the tomb is empty.

Creation Connection

As we ponder ways to address climate change, do we feel as if we are at the entrance to an empty cave, expecting to find only death, not resurrection?

Spark

In advance, ask people to provide photos or stories that offer their understandings of resurrection and the joy of Easter. Share these during worship or post them on the walls for people to explore after worship. Or, if you celebrate communion on Easter Sunday, have children/youth join the servers and give the people a plastic Easter egg with a symbol of celebration and resurrection inside.

Note: In 2025, the Western churches and the Eastern (Orthodox) churches celebrate Easter on the same Sunday, with the Gregorian and Julian calendars aligning on the date of Easter. In addition, 2025 marks the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

With Children

Remind the children of what you shared on Good Friday about seeds. Examine the container in which they planted seeds; hopefully some seedlings will be poking through, but planting some a few days before Good Friday might be helpful! Offer each child a package of seeds to take home and plant so that, as they watch the plants grow, they can be reminded of the hope, promise, and resurrection of Jesus.

Sermon Starter

Today, Jesus again asks, “For whom are you looking?” This time it is as Mary weeps at the empty tomb. The answer to that question on Good Friday was “Jesus of Nazareth.” The answer from Mary was “My Lord.” For whom and for what are we longing when we come to the empty tomb and the Easter sanctuary? Is it hope, promise, courage, light, new beginning, Saviour, Friend, Lord, Creator? We need to also wonder: Whom is Jesus looking for, longing for? Us!

Hymns

Acts 10:34–43 or Isaiah 65:17–25

VU 448 “We know that Christ is raised”

MV 115 “Behold, behold, I make all things new”

Psalm 118

VU 175 “This is the day that God has made”

VU 409 “Morning has broken”

1 Corinthians 15:19–26

VU 165 “Come, you faithful, raise the strain”

VU 215 “Hope of the world”

John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12

VU 396 “Jesus, stand among us”

VU 426 “Saviour, again to your dear name”

MV 121 “Hey now! Singing hallelujah!”

Responses

MV 85 “Take, O take me as I am”

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

MV 115 “Behold, behold, I make all things new”

Hallelujahs

VU 717, VU 958, MV 32, MV 50, MV 52, MV 54

Music Notes

The Easter season is a time of high celebration extending over the 50 days leading up to Pentecost. While a prayer of confession is not usual during the season, “Song of Hannah” (VU p. 878) can be sung as an act of praise after the opening prayer through all seven Sundays of Easter. One of its four verses could be sung in sequence each week, and then the first three verses could be repeated until the seventh Sunday of Easter. Other possibilities include “We sing of your glory” (MV 58) and “Glory to God in the highest” (MV 124).

Welcoming the Gospel also heightens the celebratory nature of the season. Before the reading of the gospel, “Hallelujah” (VU 717) is well suited, as are “Alleluia” (MV 54), “Alleluia, praise to God” (MV 59), and “Behold, behold” (MV 115).

April 27 – Second Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Second Sunday of Easter through the Fourth Sunday of Easter were contributed by Sarah Provan and Ryan Slifka, St. George's U.C., Courteney, B.C.

Acts 5:27–32

Peter speaks before the Sanhedrin.

Psalm 118:14–29 (VU p. 837 Parts Two, Three, and Four)

God is my strength and my song.

or **Psalm 150** (VU pp. 874–875)

Praise God with the sound of trumpet!

Revelation 1:4–8

John greets the seven churches of Asia.

John 20:19–31

Thomas doubts until he sees Jesus for himself.

Creation Connection

The fact that Thomas can *physically touch* Jesus and his wounds affirms God's love for creation and for our bodies.

Spark

A favourite depiction of John 20:19–31 is *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* by Caravaggio, circa 1600. Thomas gets his finger right in there, which will give the congregation a sense of the visceral nature of the story.

With Children

Begin with a game of “I spy” or “What do you feel in the brown paper bag?” as appropriate for your group. After playing the game, point out that in order for the game to be fun, you have to let others know what you experienced or witnessed. Being a witness is just telling the story of what you have experienced. Share briefly today's scripture story where Peter and the disciples knew that they needed to be witnesses for God's power for the people, even if the people didn't want to listen. How have you witnessed God at work? How are we witnesses for God's power?

Sermon Starter

Evangelism is one of those uncomfortable words for United Church people, conjuring up images of coercion and threats of hell. However, in the Acts passage, Peter preaches the Good News, referring to himself and the apostles as “witnesses to these things.” Witnesses describe what they have experienced. Rather than simply telling people *about* Jesus, a better approach is to “witness” by beginning where the risen Christ has been active in our own lives and our congregations. Don't know where to begin? Jesus has Thomas touch the wounds in his hands and his sides. One way to share the Good News is to begin by sharing our scars, places where we've found healing by the power of God.

Hymns

Acts 5:27–32

VU 512 “Lord, you give the great commission”

MV 38 “Glory to God (Nzamuranza)”

Psalm 118

VU 169 “Good Christians all, rejoice and sing”

MV 122 “This is the day”

Revelation 1:4–8

VU 25 “Lo, he comes with clouds descending”

VU 61 “Of the Father's love begotten”

John 20:19–31

VU 158 “Christ is alive”

VU 168 “The risen Christ”

VU 176 “Who is there on this Easter morning”

VU 185 “You tell me that the Lord is risen”

VU 396 “Jesus, stand among us”

Célébrants et célébrantes de culte, veuillez prendre note de ce qui suit.

Lorsque vous utilisez des textes de *Gathering*, nous vous demandons d'inclure la mention suivante :

Texte de _____ .
Gathering, Carême/Pâques 2025,
 page _____. Droit d'utilisation accordé.

May 4 – Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:1–6, (7–20)

Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

Psalm 30 (VU p. 757)

God turned my mourning into dancing.

Revelation 5:11–14

Worthy is the Lamb.

John 21:1–19

Jesus appears to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

Creation Connection

The incredible haul of fish in John 21 is a sign of creation's abundance and God's providential care for human beings in their physical needs. How do we honour and cherish that abundance?

Spark

One way to visually connect the haul of fish in John 21 to the life of faith would be to have a long piece of bright royal-blue fabric flowing from the baptismal font like water with many fish (even 153) of different varieties. This would signify that Jesus "catches" all of us human beings in all of our diversity to make us his disciples.

With Children

Begin by gathering three items that all involve the number three (for example, a triangle, a toy triceratops, and a tricycle). Ask the children if they can figure out what all three items have in common. In today's scripture, the number three is important. The night that Jesus died, his friend Peter pretended he didn't know who Jesus was three times! In today's story, Jesus asks three times if Peter loves him, and then tells Peter to "feed his sheep." This shows that Jesus forgives Peter for pretending not to know him and he still trusts Peter and wants him to do good things. Jesus loves and trusts us to do good, too, even when we make bad choices, like Peter.



Sermon Starter

Both the Acts and John readings show us the depth of God's grace for those who fall way short. Peter denied Jesus, and Paul persecuted the church. Yet, rather than seeking revenge or repayment, Jesus recruits these rather imperfect offenders as leaders in his movement. One of the favourite sayings we've had on our church sign is "Church is full of hypocrites: and there's always room for one more." A sermon on either of these texts can focus on how the church is not made up of perfect people, or even the best people, but forgiven ones like Peter and Paul.

Hymns

Acts 9:1–6, (7–20)

VU 266 "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound"

VU 413 "O splendour of God's glory bright"

MV 164 "Christe, lux mundi"

MV 167 "Hush! Hush!"

Psalm 30

VU 612 "There is a balm in Gilead"

Revelation 5:11–14

VU 508 "Just as I am"

"This is amazing grace" by Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, and Phil Wickham (hymnary.org)

John 21:1–19

VU 567 "Will you come and follow me"

MV 113 "Jesus saw them fishing"



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May 11 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36–43

Peter raises Tabitha (Dorcas) to life.

Psalm 23 (VU pp. 747–749)

God is my shepherd.

Revelation 7:9–17

The saints of God will never hunger or thirst again.

John 10:22–30

My sheep listen to my voice.

Creation Connection

Both Psalm 23 and Revelation 7:9–17 interweave images of salvation with a flourishing creation, suggesting the two are inseparable.

Spark

The image of the “valley of the shadow of death” from the often-memorized King James Version of Psalm 23 is a striking one. Use a slide deck or an art show depicting where the shadow of death hangs over us now, such as in environmental degradation, war zones, or even a cancer ward, knowing that the Good Shepherd is travelling through these places with us.

With Children

Today’s scripture is an important one in our faith. Psalm 23 has beautiful imagery and is easy for a child to understand. Consider reading a paraphrase of the psalm, such as *Found* by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Jago (Zonderkidz, 2017), with permission from the copyright holder. Or you might read Psalm 23 from *The Message* and invite kids to use their senses to imagine a shepherd with their sheep. Ask them to share what they imagined. To finish, share about how Jesus is the shepherd and we are the sheep. Jesus takes care of us, shows us where to go, and stays with us even in hard times.



Sermon Starter

One of my favourite verses in all of scripture is Psalm 23:6: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (King James Version). It is the whole of the Christian message in one line: God’s unrelenting, never-ceasing pursuit of God’s children to finally bring them home for good and forever. A fruitful sermon could contrast our ideas of searching for God or finding God with the Bible’s emphasis on God’s searching for and finding us in Jesus Christ, no matter the cost. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Intervarsity Press, 1980), Eugene Peterson emphasizes the relentless nature of God’s love, which pursues us and stays at our side (p. 4).

Hymns

Acts 9:36–43

- VU 326 “O for a thousand tongues to sing”
- VU 358 “When Jesus the healer”
- MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

Psalm 23

- MV 126 “Are you a shepherd?”
- SFGP* 75 “My shepherd is the living Lord”

Revelation 7:9–17

- VU 210 “You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd”
- VU 460 “All who hunger”
- MV 4 “All who are thirsty”

John 10:22–30

- VU 478 “You satisfy the hungry heart”
- VU 574 “Come, let us sing of a wonderful love”

* *Songs for a Gospel People*

May 18 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Fifth Sunday of Easter through to the Seventh Sunday of Easter were contributed by Beth Johnson, Bridging Waters P.C., Nipawin, Sask.

Acts 11:1–18

Peter’s vision of unclean animals.

Psalm 148 (VU pp. 870–871)

Let the whole creation praise God.

Revelation 21:1–6

I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

John 13:31–35

A new commandment: love one another.

Creation Connection

In the psalms, Creation has human qualities. It is in the nature of Creation to praise the Creator, but we humans often get in the way. We are fast moulding a world based only on the principle of Creation’s usefulness for humans. How do we promote practices that once again let Creation praise God and allow nature to have its own agency and identity?

Spark

Your congregation may have different comfort levels with different foods. You might show a YouTube video of a street vendor preparing a meal in a market somewhere else in the world. Perhaps someone could talk briefly about the first time they tried a food they did not grow up eating.

With Children

Tell a story about waiting for something super exciting, for example, “Every Sunday afternoon, I visit a young teen. Each time I arrive, the teen immediately tells me, ‘Did you know I am going to Florida in...?’ Each week, the countdown changes. She can’t contain her excitement.”

Sometimes there are things that we just have to tell others about, such as God’s action in nature—the song of the first robin, the vibration of a hummingbird, the soft fuzziness of a pussy willow, the gorgeous dance of the northern lights, the first crocuses of spring, or the smell after a rain (*adapt for your region and climate zone*).

When we encounter these things, we just have to tell someone. Think of these as ways that nature

praises God. We, too, can praise God and offer thanks for these things.

Sermon Starter

This might be a good time to reflect on how the United Church has changed over our lifetimes in terms of including people. Peter and the first Christians, who were Jewish, had a hard time with welcoming non-Jewish people, namely those who had not been circumcised. Some of the first Christians felt that any new converts from other religions had to become Jewish first. Peter’s dream challenged this. Eventually, this issue drifted into the mists of time.

Some people in the United Church remember the discussion around sexuality and eligibility for ministry of the late 1980s. Recently, the United Church made a conscious decision to become intercultural. As the cultural composition of Canada changes, so should our church. Our church is no longer primarily of Western European heritage. *More Voices* introduced many hymns from diverse cultures. The gifts of ministers and members from around the globe bring needed change, challenge, and blessing. Today’s scriptures remind us that God continues to propel us on the journey toward diversity and inclusion. Sing a new hymn in another language. The stretch will be worth it.

Hymns

Acts 11:1–18

VU 226 “For the beauty of the earth”

VU 229 “God of the sparrow”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

MV 2 “Uyai mose”

MV 7 “Rassemble-nous”

MV 62 “There is room for all”

MV 141 “We are all one people”

Psalm 148

MV 30 “It’s a song of praise to the Maker”

MV 37 “Each blade of grass”

Revelation 21:1–6

VU 367 “Come down, O love divine”

MV 115 “Behold, behold, I make all things new”

John 13:31–35

MV 26 “Your love is amazing”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

MV 94 “Love knocks and waits”

MV 209 “Go, make a difference”

May 25 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9–15

Paul worships with Lydia and the women by the river.

Psalm 67 (VU p. 786)

Let the light of God's face shine upon us.

Revelation 21:10, 22–22:5

John's vision of the city of God.

John 14:23–29

The Holy Spirit will come to teach.

or John 5:1–9

A sick man cured at the pool of Bethesda.

Creation Connection

The psalms frequently proclaim that all we have to do in order to sense God's power is to be attentive to the wonder of the earth. This is particularly evident when the spring comes and growth seems to happen right before us, or when the harvest provides for the needs of humans as well as other creatures. Pay attention or you might miss it.

Spark

Display travel brochures. Invite someone to share an experience of travelling in a new place. What did they discover that was unexpected? Who did they meet that enriched their travels?

With Children

Talk about surprises. Some are welcomed. Some are not. Perhaps you had to go on a field trip or a family outing and did not want to. Yet when you went, maybe you discovered a new hobby or met a new friend. God's Spirit can nudge us toward something we hadn't thought we could enjoy. That happened all the time to the first disciples of Jesus. Being open to possibility and joy is really important in life. If we make up our minds that we are not going to enjoy something, we may miss something great.



Sermon Starter

The meeting between Paul and the women who prayed by the river was more than happenstance: it was arranged by the Holy Spirit. Have you ever felt a nudge to go somewhere or do something and then discovered an opportunity to share the gospel?

Continuing the “With Children” theme, a great deal of the growth in the early Christian community happened when the disciples were able to overcome their assumptions about strangers and unknown circumstances.

The experiences many congregations have with sponsoring refugees are ones of growth, not only for those who must learn a new language and new ways of living, but also for those welcoming the newcomers. Everyone we encounter might be someone from whom we can learn about faith and life. Showing love is to show openness to the holy in the other. Then wait for the Spirit to guide and direct the journey into new relationship.

Hymns

Acts 16:9–15

- MV 21 “Open our hearts”
- MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”
- MV 163 “River running in you and me”
- MV 165 “There is a time”
- MV 169 “When hands reach out beyond divides”
- MV 176 “Three things I promise”
- “Down to the river to pray” American folk song

Psalm 67

- VU 226 “For the beauty of the earth”
- VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”
- MV 48 “I can feel you near me God”

Revelation 21:10, 22–22:5

- VU 713 “I see a new heaven”
- VU 714 “Come, we that love”

John 14:23–29

- MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”
- MV 183 “I’m gonna shout, shout”

May 29 – Ascension Day

Acts 1:1–11

The ascension of Jesus.

Psalm 47 (VU p. 771)

Clap your hands, all you people!

or **Psalm 93** (VU pp. 812–813)

God rules in majesty and strength.

Ephesians 1:15–23

I never cease giving thanks for your faith.

Luke 24:44–53

Another version of the ascension story.

Creation Connection

While the psalms seem to guarantee the stability and permanence of this created world, people have forgotten their responsibility to care for it. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have abused Creation. A belief that we are powerless to change has allowed collective destruction. Scaling back our (mis)use of the earth's resources is the key to restoring the promise.

Spark

Invite someone to share a story of a teacher, mentor, or coach who had a positive influence in their life. Perhaps it was only long after graduation or the end of the mentor relationship that we understood their teachings and wisdom anew and perhaps more urgently.

With Children

A man named Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, but they are really all part of one story. Some of you may read books in a series that tell a story that goes from book one to book two, and so on. We, too, are part of a story that goes from book to book to book. Maybe it's as if we are in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2025. If Luke were still here, what do you think he would write down about how we follow Jesus? Jesus promised the Spirit to help people remember God's love and to guide people in how to live. The Spirit is with us even today. What are the ways that we notice God's Spirit at work through us? What stories would we tell about how we live our faith? Elicit responses about various aspects of congregational ministry.

Sermon Starter

When deciding what readings to use on the Sunday before Pentecost, we should consider the ascension ones. The United Church gives us that freedom. This is one of those days we may feel we can safely ignore because it does not occur on a Sunday. Yet, like missing the funeral of a close friend, if we don't read them, we may discover that we have missed a vital part of the story or "missed the memo" as they say. The question is how these parting words affect our ministry now that the mantle has been passed to us. How do we pick up where Jesus left off?

We should not waste our time hoping for Jesus to come back. We are called to proclaim the Good News as long as we live. Once we have marked the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we will all be commissioned to put what we have learned to use. There are great differences between the time of Jesus and 2025. Technology and science have given us knowledge that even the human Jesus could not have imagined, but we know we still have the problems of mistrust, injustice, and violence. In this "in-between time" before Pentecost, allow the parting words of Jesus to challenge our discipleship.

Hymns

Acts 1:1–11 and Luke 24:44–53

VU 122 "All glory, laud and honour"

VU 211 "Crown him with many crowns"

VU 335 "At the name of Jesus"

VU 337 "Blessed assurance"

VU 342 "You servants of God"

VU p. 806 "O God, our help in ages past"

MV 142 "Oh a song must rise"

MV 171 "Christ has no body now but yours"

Psalm 47

VU p. 812 "God, you rule with royal bearing"

Psalm 93

VU 438 "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended"

MV 142 "Oh a song must rise"

Ephesians 1:15–23

VU 703 "In the bulb there is a flower"

VU 706 "Give thanks for life"

June 1 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16–34

Paul and Silas are freed from prison.

Psalm 97 (VU p. 817)

God reigns; let the earth be glad.

Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21

I am coming soon.

John 17:20–26

Jesus prays that they all may be one.

Creation Connection

Think of a place you visited that was pristine; for example, a clear ocean with no human-created sounds. Think of the awe of holding a newborn baby. Think of spending time with a long-time friend or partner and the love that cannot be expressed with words. Sometimes we just need to join the earth in being glad (Psalm 97).

Spark

Consider the ways people are exploited in the world. Bring awareness to people who are harmed by those who capitalize on their work or vulnerability: human trafficking, factories and employers that exploit workers, and more. What action might your congregation take?

With Children

Talk with children about it taking a lot of different people to make one community. Everyone has different abilities and different ways of being, but we are still one people: God’s people. It’s all about how we live together, learn from one another, and share love. We are blessed by what each person offers. What do you offer, or want to offer, to this community of God’s people?

Sermon Starter

In Acts 16, we encounter a story of how a healing was most unwelcome by those exploiting the situation of another person. The healing landed Paul and Silas in jail because the owners of the enslaved girl lost their income.

We don’t know the story of the girl. Perhaps extreme poverty left her parents with little choice but to sell her to the first-century equivalent of the circus, but such exploitation is not God’s will. The Spirit frees each of us to be as fully human as we can be.



Explore the need to change our language. “People experiencing homelessness,” or “people who were enslaved” may at first sound awkward, but it is much more than political correctness. It puts someone’s personhood first and foremost and reminds us that we are all more than the situations and challenges in which we find ourselves. We should ask ourselves why we even need to name another person’s challenges. Why not notice first that we are all beloved children of God?

If we are who we are, transformed by the power of the Spirit working in our lives, that may just lead others to want to be a part of the Spirit-filled community of Jesus, the Christ. That is evangelism without coercion. Thanks be to God for the grace to be carriers of the gospel in our very living.

(See also these Living Language columns on GatheringWorship.ca: “Please Stand” and “Next Steps on Inclusion.”)

Hymns

Acts 16:16–34

- VU 595 “We are pilgrims”
- MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”
- MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”
- MV 142 “Oh a song must rise”
- MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”
- MV 169 “When hands reach out”

Psalm 97

- VU 307 “Touch the earth lightly”
- MV 30 “It’s a song of praise to the Maker”
- MV 59 “Aleluya Y’in Oluwa”
- MV 135 “Called by earth and sky”

Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21

- VU 61 “Of the Father’s love begotten”

John 17:20–26

- VU 578 “As a fire is meant for burning”
- VU 602 “Blest be the tie that binds”
- VU 691 “Though ancient walls”
- MV 2 “Come all you people”