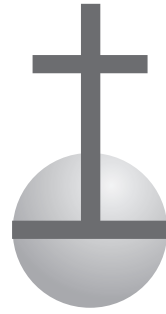


WEEKLY SERVICES



PENTECOST SUNDAY TO LABOUR DAY



PENTECOST

Dates

Pentecost is celebrated on a Sunday 50 days after Easter (counting Easter Sunday), or seven weeks (seven times seven) not counting Easter Sunday.

Meaning of Name

Pentecost comes from the Greek word *pentēkostē* meaning “50th” (day). Pentecost is a reference to the Jewish festival Shavuot or the Festival of Weeks, which is held on the 50th day after the second day of Passover. This festival celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. In Acts 2, it is said that the disciples had gathered on the day of Pentecost, or the day of the festival of Shavuot. That’s when the wind and fire and Spirit came!

Liturgical Colour: Red

Red is a primary colour and a warm colour. It symbolizes fire, spirit, energy, passion, strength, power, intensity, courage, and determination. It draws to mind the flames dancing over the disciples and friends of Jesus gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

ORDINARY TIME

(A.K.A. SEASON OF PENTECOST)

Dates

Trinity Sunday through to Reign of Christ Sunday—the longest season of the church year.

Feast Days* and Special Days

***Trinity Sunday** – the Sunday after Pentecost.

Season of Creation – the Sundays after Labour Day to Thanksgiving.

World Communion Sunday – the first Sunday of October.

Thanksgiving Sunday – the Sunday before the second Monday of October.

***Reformation Day** – October 31: the day in 1517 when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses.

***All Saints’ Day** – November 1: for Protestants, a general commemoration of those who have died. In the Celtic tradition, November 1 is Samhain, marking the end of harvest and beginning of winter.

Remembrance Sunday – Sunday before **Remembrance Day** (November 11), honouring those in the armed forces who fought and died for their countries in times of war.

***Reign of Christ** – the last Sunday before Advent.

Meaning of Name

“Ordinary” comes from the Latin *ordo*, meaning “order.” Ordinary Time is the commonplace, the regular, the everyday time. In between feasts and grand celebrations is the regular time of our lives, the time when faith lives and grows and sustains.

Liturgical Colours

Green is a cool colour, evoking nature, growth, vitality, freshness, harmony, endurance, and fertility. It is associated with healing and rest. It is the depth and stability of blue combined with the warmth and joy of yellow.

June 8 – Pentecost Sunday

Worship materials for June 8 to June 29 were contributed by Colin Cross, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Penticton, B.C.; Fern Gibbard, Penticton, B.C.; and Laura Turnbull, Penticton, B.C.



Acts 2:1–21

The Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost.

or Genesis 11:1–9

Language confused at the tower of Babel.

Psalms 104:24–34, 35b (VU p. 827 Part Two)

God and Wisdom create the earth and creatures.

Romans 8:14–17

A spirit of adoption, not slavery.

John 14:8–17, (25–27)

God will send you the Spirit of Truth.

Creation Connection

If we are to be co-creators with God, we must dream and have a vision of creation as robust and renewed.

Spark

The Acts 2 passage can be dramatized by having two or more people voice, sign, dance, or enact each section. Use sparklers for tongues of flames, hang paper doves from strategic places, and set fans to softly blow (make sure the noise of the fans is not intrusive).

With Children

Have a variety of pinwheels (perhaps in red, yellow, blue, and orange), as well as battery-operated tea lights and flashlights. Invite the young and not so young to select an item and be part of a Pentecost parade or dance. You might all move around the sanctuary to a hymn, such as VU 646 “We are marching (Siyahamba)” or MV 156 “Dance with the Spirit.”

Sermon Starter

The gospel speaks of the “Spirit of Truth.” There is wonderful truth as we gather in community. Together we experience the power and delight of the risen Christ. Yet, many of us are frightened by current events and the current state of the church. Some may find community a scary place. We are tempted to take shortcuts and look for easy answers. We are tempted to try to keep things exactly the same. We fear the power of true community. However, for reconciliation, truth must be spoken, and then dreams and visions become power and hope. The recovery of Indigenous languages is an example of the importance of the process of reconciliation in community.

Hymns

VU 367	“Come down, O love divine”
VU 368	“Holy Spirit, truth divine”
VU 375	“Spirit, Spirit of gentleness”
VU 376	“Spirit of the living God” <i>use as a sung response</i>
VU 388	“Spirit dancing”
MV 24	“Breath of God, Breath of peace”
MV 49	“When we seek language”
MV 135	“Called by earth and sky”
MV 142	“Oh a song must rise”
MV 150	“Spirit God, be our breath”
MV 156	“Dance with the Spirit”
MV 161	“I have called you by your name”



June 15 – Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31

Wisdom’s part in creation.

Psalms 8 (VU pp. 730–732)

How glorious is God’s name.

Romans 5:1–5

Suffering-endurance-character-hope does not disappoint.

John 16:12–15

The Spirit of truth.

Creation Connection

The reading from Proverbs and the psalm remind us that Wisdom and creation are linked. This partnership is an example of how we should and must always coexist. Creation is infused by the ongoing breath of God (*ruah* in Hebrew).

Spark

The powerful retelling of Psalm 8 in *Psalms for Praying, An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan C. Merrill (Bloomsbury, 2006) is a wonderful resource for offering an inclusive, love-infused understanding of the psalms.

With Children

Prior to the worship service, purchase Band-Aids and small packets of facial tissues for the children that will be attending. Ask the young people what to do if someone is injured or ill or sad. After receiving answers, distribute the Band-Aids and facial tissues to the youngsters. Then invite them to find someone in the congregation (or beyond the congregation) with whom they would like to share them. While the youngsters are showing compassion in the congregation, sing VU 381 “Spirit of Life.” Follow up immediately with the Prayers of the People and, if appropriate, include prayers for specific people who are hurting, grieving, lonely, or facing surgery. Share why it is so important that we, as individuals and as a congregation, pray for others.



Sermon Starter

Our scripture texts invite us to move from a place of welcome and belonging within the Trinity to an examination of our suffering, which builds character and opens us to the possibility of transformation. Some of the suffering that we deal with today includes problems with sleep, loneliness, financial challenges, workaholicism (and other addictions), and the overwhelm of caring for loved ones. What are the challenges for people in your congregation and in your context? Despite these challenges, compassion—meaning “to suffer with”—is offered through being in community, inviting the Spirit to be our companion, and embracing a prayer life. Are we able to consider our own brokenness as we turn toward the empty cross and all that it means?

Hymns

VU 215	“Hope of the world”
VU 287	“Wellspring of wisdom”
VU 316	“Praise our Maker”
VU 321	“Maker, in whom we live”
VU 369	“O Holy Spirit, enter in”
VU 379	“O Holy Spirit, root of life”
VU 416	“Forth in your name, O Christ”
MV 6	“Holy Spirit, come into our lives”
MV 12	“Come touch our hearts”
MV 79	“Spirit, open my heart”
MV 83	“Let my spirit always sing”
MV 97	“Listen, God is calling”
MV 144	“Like a healing stream”

Worship Leaders

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

Written by _____ .
Gathering, Pentecost 1 2025,
 page _____. Used with permission.

June 22 – Second after Pentecost

Proper 7

1 Kings 19:1–4, (5–7), 8–15a

Elijah experiences God in the sound of silence.

Psalm 42–43 (VU pp. 766–769)

As a deer longs for the water.

Galatians 3:23–29

No longer Jew or Greek, male or female; all one in Christ.

Luke 8:26–39

Jesus heals a man filled with demons.

Creation Connection

The lead stories in the news today are inevitably about ice storms, earthquakes, tornados, floods, and heat waves. 1 Kings 19 describes all these natural disasters. Do we lose the voice and presence of God because we have become numbed by all the events occurring in creation?

Spark

“I experienced a call from God”: these words are a common theme in scripture and in faith life. The person sleeps on it. Then, upon waking, they find that there is a clarity and a realization that they are nourished by God. The call may be to support the healing of the planet by petitioning the government. It may be to participate in food drives. It may be to a new form of ministry for those living with mental health issues. What is your call in 2025? Try using Psalm 42 and 43 (VU p. 768) as a Call to Worship.

With Children

As people of faith, we are involved in mysterious, sacred work. Sometimes it is hard to notice where God is at work, but then, almost as if by magic, we discover that God has been doing something. Tell the story of Elijah, who runs away because he thinks God isn’t doing what God should be doing, but then discovers the power of God on a mountainside.

Have some fun with the mystery of discovering God’s call and purpose for us using invisible ink. Ahead of time, make the ink by adding one tablespoon of baking soda to half a cup of water and mix thoroughly. Using a small paintbrush or cotton swab, write or draw a message on a piece

of paper. Allow to dry for at least 15 minutes before you intend to reveal the hidden message. (In addition to preparing a message in advance, you can repeat this part of the process with the children.)

Prepare the reagent by mixing a half a cup of rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer and one teaspoon turmeric.

When you are ready to reveal the message, place the paper on a couple of layers of newsprint. (Turmeric leaves a lovely bright-yellow stain on everything it touches, so be careful.) Using a paintbrush, paint the message sheet liberally with the reagent. Your message will be revealed in bright red ink.

Sometimes when God calls us to do something, it is just as mysterious. Sometimes we have to wait and pray and explore the call with other people of faith to come to understand God’s purpose, to have it revealed to us.

Sermon Starter

What has God done for you? For Elijah, God drove him to the desert. For Paul, God asked him to leave his school, despite being a star pupil of Judaism, and instead offer a most radical statement to his listeners, one that at times ostracized him and eventually landed him in prison. Jesus was sent to the demonized man who had been driven away into solitude. God drives us, not necessarily to safe spaces, but to solitude where we can encounter God. Perhaps we need to think about our churches as “health” institutions where people can find solitude and radical transformation.

Hymns

VU 117	“Jesus Christ is waiting”
VU 120	“O Jesus, I have promised”
VU 374	“Come and find the quiet centre”
VU 507	“Today we all are called to be disciples”
VU 562	“Jesus calls us”
VU 570	“Jesus’ hands were kind hands”
MV 8	“And on this path”
MV 45	“You are holy”
MV 84	“In you there is a refuge”
MV 118	“Me alone”
MV 141	“We are all one people”
MV 178	“Who is my mother”
MV 212	“Sent out in Jesus’ name”

June 29 – Third after Pentecost

Proper 8

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14

Elisha sees Elijah ascend to heaven.

Psalm 77:1–2, 11–20 (VU p. 791)

I cry to God in my distress.

Galatians 5:1, 13–25

Called to freedom; the fruit of the Spirit.

Luke 9:51–62

Foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Creation Connection

Don't be a bystander. All scripture passages nudge us past the temptation to keep a distance from the action. If our planet is to survive and thrive, we must be active participants in acting on its behalf.

Spark

Show determination! Just as Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem, so we are all called to live out the way of faithfulness with determination. Both Elijah and Elisha acted with determination. Paul's call to freedom with Christ reminds us that we are to be loving and act in a determined fashion. Who in your congregation or community might share a story of determination, either their own or that of a friend or family member?

With Children

Perhaps a musician in your congregation can help you develop a rhythmic poem using Psalm 77 as the base. One can almost imagine David having insomnia: thinking about creation and counting stars and experiencing the beauty of sunrise and sunset, with the changing temperatures and all the colours present. All of that can be incorporated into a poem or folk song. You might also explore what we do with our worries in the middle of the night. That seems to be the time when they are strongest, just as expressed in Psalm 77. David made the worries into a prayer poem to God. What can we do with our worries and fears?

Sermon Starter

In 2 Kings, when Elisha tells Elijah “I will not leave you,” it is reminiscent of Ruth's words to Naomi (Ruth 1:16). Both Elijah and Elisha are God-infused, spiritual people. Elisha parted the water by faith, picking up the mantle of Elijah. He overcame any doubts he may have had. This is a challenge for us to do more than remain quiet at the sidelines. Think of examples of how we have become blasé.

Psalm 77 reminds us that sometimes a lightning storm is more awesome than a fireworks display!

You've got to love Paul in Galatians 5. He tries to cover all bases. His call to freedom is an opportunity not for self-indulgence, but rather to reflect on our impact for the greater good. “Your actions are speaking so loud I can't hear your words,” someone once offered. Our behaviours count. We are challenged to work at not being hypocritical or phony about our faith. We must live what we declare we believe. What are the faith principles we live out?

The opening paragraph of Luke 9 clearly shows Jesus' determination to get to Jerusalem. He knew where he was heading, and nothing was going to stop him. Even though James and John were prepared to respond with retribution, that was not Jesus' way. He kept focused on his goal. The second paragraph in Luke appears to be a series of Jesus' sayings and seems to lack a common theme.

Hymns

VU 271	“There's a wideness in God's mercy”
VU 421	“Lead on, O cloud of Presence”
VU 595	“We are pilgrims”
VU 642	“Be thou my vision”
VU 686	“God of grace and God of glory”
MV 65	“When we are tested”
MV 79	“Spirit, open my heart”
MV 92	“Like a rock”
MV 172	“God says”

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS AND IDEAS

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

July 6 – Fourth after Pentecost

Proper 9

Worship materials for July 6 to August 3 were contributed by Whitney L.P. Brun and Ruth McDonald, Little Current and Sheguiandah U.C., Little Current, Ont.

2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman comes to Elisha for healing from leprosy.

Psalm 30 (VU p. 757)

God turns my mourning into dancing.

Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16

You reap what you sow; sow in the Spirit.

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The mission of the 70 who carried nothing.

Creation Connection

“Sowing” (relying upon) fossil fuels does a poor job of giving us a future. What could we sow instead?

Spark

Place baskets at the entryway and invite people to “leave behind” something they think they really need, such as their agenda or phone, so that they may “carry nothing” and trust God during the service. Make sure these items are kept safe during the service, to be returned at the end. Alternatively, invite people to write or draw something on a piece of paper that they need to “leave behind” so that they “carry nothing” into the sanctuary that will get in the way of their worship experience.

With Children

Choose a song with good dance moves. Linnea Good has several in our hymnals—or invent your own. Explore the idea of Jesus as the “incarnation” of God—God in a human body. Human bodies are good! Worshipping with our bodies is good. Dance is one way we can talk with God. What would be a happy dance? a sad dance? a hopeful dance? a thankful dance? Some of us dance with our whole bodies, some with our hands or our feet, some with our eyes or mouths, and some within our minds. Try them all.

Sermon Starter

In Elisha’s time, many people had a skin disease called leprosy. But Elisha miraculously cures only one: Naaman. Naaman isn’t Jewish. He is haughty. He doesn’t trust God or the prophet Elisha. But finally, he bathes in the river as directed and miraculously is cured of his leprosy. However, those with leprosy in Elisha’s own community continue to have leprosy. If we live out Jesus’ way of sharing with all people, we might share with people we consider haughty and undeserving. A sermon on trusting God, leaving judgment to God, and having our minds on God’s dream may be in order.

Hymns

VU 120	“O Jesus, I have promised”
VU 288	“Great is thy faithfulness”
VU 509	“I, the Lord of sea and sky”
VU 512	“Lord, you give the great commission”
VU 575	“I’m gonna live so God can use me”
VU 595	“We are pilgrims”
MV 165	“There is a time”
MV 174	“Soil of God, you and I”
MV 176	“Three things I promise”
MV 216	“Wherever you may go”



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, Pentecôte 1 2025, page _____.
Droit d’utilisation accordé.

July 13 – Fifth after Pentecost

Proper 10

Amos 7:7–17

God holds a plumb line in the midst of God’s people.

Psalm 82 (VU p. 799)

God judges in the midst of the divine council.

Colossians 1:1–14

The word of God is bearing fruit in you.

Luke 10:25–37

The parable of the Good Samaritan.



Creation Connection

Imagine worms, buzzards, or germs as Good Samaritans on our planet.

Spark

Pass out different fruits and ask people to contemplate what kind of fruit they bear for God. You might also include a few rotten fruits for laughs and reflection.

With Children

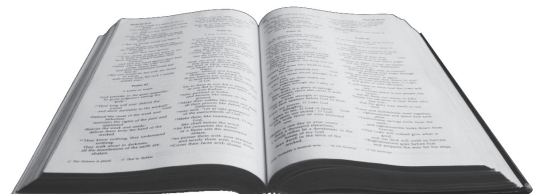
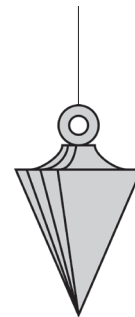
With the children, use popsicle sticks, small old boxes, and rocks to build homes. Race to build the tallest in two minutes! Most will lean or fall over. Share a real plumb line or the photo of one. Explain how God is our plumb line and how we measure things: if they are good or bad, if they are leaning, or if they will fall. Jesus is our cornerstone, the block that we build our lives on. Without Jesus or God, our lives can fall over really quickly! Explore the ways we can build our lives on Jesus as a solid foundation.

Sermon Starter

In her book *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (HarperOne, 2014), Amy-Jill Levine reflects on the idea that it isn’t “who” our neighbour is, but “what” a neighbour is (p. 113). She concludes by imagining herself in this parable today as an Israeli Jewish woman. First, a medic from the IDF fails to help her. Then a member of the Presbyterian mission network ignores her. Finally, a Palestinian Muslim who is sympathetic to Hamas helps her. How difficult is this framing of Jesus’ parable to accept, especially in light of current happenings between Israel and Hamas? There are entrenched battlelines in every ministry setting—in your setting, for example—people you are certain desire the end of your congregation. How do we humanize the enemy? Jesus is telling us our worst enemies are still made in the image of God, are still loved by God, and are still human and not wholly evil.

Hymns

VU 326	“O for a thousand tongues to sing”
VU 472	“O Jesus, joy of loving hearts”
VU 562	“Jesus calls us”
VU 581	“When we are living”
VU 582	“There’s a spirit in the air”
VU 592	“Come, now, you blessed”
VU 594	“O Christian, love”
VU 681	“Where cross the crowded ways of life”
MV 81	“Love us into fullness”
MV 154	“Deep in our hearts”



July 20 – Sixth after Pentecost

Proper 11

Amos 8:1–12

God will turn feasts to mourning and songs to lamentation.

Psalm 52 (VU p. 777)

Why do you boast of evil?

Colossians 1:15–28

Paul, the servant of the gospel.

Luke 10:38–42

Jesus visits Mary and Martha.

Creation Connection

How might we be boasting of evil today? For example, might driving inefficient, excessively large vehicles be boasting or might it be a necessity for some?

Spark

Gather advertisements and items that pressure and promote consumerism (or another perceived evil). Cover the altar with these. During the reading of Psalm 52, recover the sacred space from the “evil” by removing the items.

With Children

Share the true story of Greta Thunberg’s school strike for the climate. Read the book *Our House Is on Fire: Greta Thunberg’s Call to Save the Planet* by Jeanette Winter (Beach Lane Books, 2019), with permission. Being a servant of Jesus means caring for and providing for others—including polar bears, microbes, humans, oceans, and air—all our relations. Building on the spark above, invite children to help recover the sacred space.

Sermon Starter

To inspire your message, listen to or read the transcript of Episode 1 of *Broadview* magazine’s podcast *And Also Some Women*, a discussion about Mary Magdalene with Dr. Diana Butler Bass, Dr. Elizabeth Schrader Polczer, and Nikole Mitchell. You may also wish to share it with the congregation.

What does it mean for us if Mary and Martha were one and the same woman? Consider how figures of “Mary the Tower” and “Peter the Rock” may express a more gender inclusive

ministry and church. Recall ordinations in your community, or in the United Church, that broke sex, gender, sexuality, age, race, or language barriers.

Hymns

VU 219	“When all your mercies, O my God”
VU 286	“If you will trust in God to guide you”
VU 364	“Forgive our sins as we forgive”
VU 472	“O Jesus, joy of loving hearts”
VU 506	“Take my life and let it be”
VU 555	“Our Parent, by whose name”
VU 605	“Jesus, teacher, brave and bold”
VU 642	“Be thou my vision”
MV 41	“O beautiful Gaia”
MV 106	“I am the dream”

“Lift every voice and sing” by James Weldon Johnson/J. Rosamond Johnson (hymnary.org)



Gathering Wants You to Share...

- your worship ideas—everything from full worship services and plans to one or two sentences that could spark ideas in others
- prayers and worship materials you have written
- orders of service that have worked well for you
- your special-occasion ideas and materials for seasons of the church year, for summer services, and for intergenerational services
- original hymns, choral and anthem recommendations, and any other ideas for the music component of worship

Please submit your material for possible inclusion through GatheringWorship.ca or by email to gather@united-church.ca.

July 27 – Seventh after Pentecost

Proper 12

Hosea 1:2–10

Hosea’s marriage is a metaphor for Israel’s relationship with God.

Psalm 85 (VU p. 802)

God restores fortunes and pardons sin.

Colossians 2:6–15, (16–19)

Buried in baptism, raised in faith.

Luke 11:1–13

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray.

Creation Connection

Ask and you will receive. Knock and the door will be opened. The door is not locked on a three-degree warming of the earth! Knock on the doors of polluting companies and governments and tell them love of neighbour is love of the earth.

Spark

Place or project images of Jesus praying so that the images are in conversation with one another. Or invite people to imagine and describe places where Jesus prayed. Many images are available for fair use in the Art in the Christian Tradition (ACT) database of Vanderbilt University Divinity Library. One-time use rights can also be purchased from living artists, such as David Hayward (NakedPastor.com) or Kelly Latimore (kellylatimoreicons.com). What does each image suggest about prayer?

With Children

Ask the children, “How do animals pray? What

about trees? Oceans?” Encourage young people to act this out and then translate what they were praying. Point out that human prayers, the prayers of creation, and the prayers of creatures are similar: “Thank you, God. Help us, God. We praise you, God.”

Sermon Starter

We frequently recite the Lord’s Prayer. Examine how it differs in various versions and translations, such as *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*, the *First Nations Version*, or *Voices United* pp. 921–927. The prayer also differs between denominations. Break it apart and consider closely what each sentence expresses and doesn’t express. Compare to the versions found in scripture (Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4). Consider this as a summary of Jesus’ teachings. What would Jesus teach your faith communities to pray today? Try rewriting the Lord’s Prayer for your specific context and concerns.

Hymns

VU 234	“Let us with a gladsome mind”
VU 236	“Now thank we all our God”
VU 344	“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds”
VU 560	“O Master, let me walk with thee”
VU 626	“I heard the voice of Jesus”
VU 650	“O God of Bethel”
VU 664	“What a friend we have in Jesus”
MV 89	“Love is the touch”
MV 200	“You are my body”

“Nothing is lost on the Breath of God” by Colin Gibson

Any setting of the Lord’s Prayer, such as Shauna Sperry’s found on pp. 60–61 of this issue.

How to find Prayers and Seasonal Resources from the print magazine on GatheringWorship.ca:

1. Select the Search feature (the magnifying glass icon in the upper right corner).
2. For prayers, type in the first line of the prayer. For items with a title, type in the title.
3. Add the author’s name.
4. Click Search.



The item you searched for will be near the top of the search results list. You can then

1. Copy and paste the text into your own document.
2. Bookmark it as a favourite (the little ribbon icon across from the title).
3. Add it to a service you have created (the large plus sign across from the title).



Other related materials will also appear in your search results, and you can filter them, e.g., by theme or category, by choosing from the options on the right. Have fun exploring **GatheringWorship.ca!**

August 3 – Eighth after Pentecost

Proper 13

Hosea 11:1–11

God cares for Israel like a mother for a child.

Psalm 107:1–9, 43 (VU p. 831 Part One)

God satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry.

Colossians 3:1–11

Set your mind on things that are above.

Luke 12:13–21

The rich fool who builds bigger and bigger barns.

Creation Connection

If God is like a mother, then God could be imagined and experienced as Mother Earth, too.

Spark

Play the Theology of Leftovers game from the book *Holy Currencies: Six Blessings for Sustainable Missional Ministries* by Eric H.F. Law (Chalice Press, 2013). You'll need a stack of notecards or slips of paper. Find the game in Chapter Two, pp. 14–17.

With Children

With permission, read the book *Mother God* by Teresa Kim Pecinovsky (Beaming Books, 2022). Or delve into Julian of Norwich's words on the motherhood of God: "As truly as God is our Father, so just as truly is he our Mother." What other images can we use to imagine and understand God?

Sermon Starter

Think of the people in your congregation as you work with the parable in Luke. For some of us, no matter how much money we have, we never seem to have enough. Imagine the following advice from an investor: "Rental property one pays for your vacations. Rental property two pays for your mortgage. Rental property three pays for your groceries. Rental property four pays for your vehicles, and so on. Have a cashflow to pay for your liabilities. It's a cheat code for a stress-free life."

Jesus would point out that this actually reads, "A struggling single mother pays for your vacations. A person on a fixed income pays for your mortgage. An overwhelmed college

student pays for your groceries. A public-school teacher pays for your vehicles. Have the working poor pay for your greed and laziness. It's a guide to a privileged life." When you have more than fits in your barn, don't buy a second one. "Investing" for profit while others lack necessities like food, water, health care, or housing might be the modern-day equivalent of building more barns. Jesus challenges us: Just share, already!

But what is the message of this parable if some people in your congregation can invest in property and others are the ones reliant on that rental property? What is the message if no one in your congregation has any income to invest and all are struggling to make ends meet? How does the promise that God will provide for the hungry and thirsty and the image of God as Mother intersect with this parable and with the reality for your people?

Hymns

VU 216	"Sing praises to God, who reigns above"
VU 280	"Mother and God"
VU 288	"Great is thy faithfulness"
VU 342	"You servants of God"
VU 507	"Today we all are called to be disciples"
VU 606	"In Christ there is no east or west"
VU 658	"O Love that wilt not let me go"
VU 663	"My faith looks up to thee"
MV 120	"My soul cries out (Canticle of the Turning)"
MV 145	"Draw the circle wide"



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August 10 – Ninth after Pentecost

Proper 14

Worship materials for August 10 to August 31 were contributed by Joe Hopkins, Streetsville U.C., Mississauga, Ont.

Isaiah 1:1, 10–20

Come, let's argue it out, declares God to Israel.

Psalm 50:1–8, 22–23 (VU p. 775)

God the Almighty has spoken.

Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

Luke 12:32–40

Be ready; be dressed for action.

Creation Connection

Even as we strive to develop powerful worship services, God prefers humble hearts and righteous action (as God offers through the prophet Isaiah). How can we make sure that our praises on Sunday morning translate to living in harmony with God's natural creation?

Spark

Dress up a doll or mannequin in hiking clothes and set out other hiking items, such as poles, a flashlight, and a backpack. Decorate the altar and other visible areas with items that might help a diversity of people be prepared for action.

With Children

Prepare a backpack with items for an overnight trip (toothbrush and toothpaste, phone charger, pyjamas, etc.). Tell the children that you are getting ready for an overnight trip, and then ask them for suggestions of what you should bring to prepare. As the children respond, repeat their answers for all. Be sure to show some pyjamas! Maybe some of their responses match what you packed already. If not, mention those things. Then explain that you are little nervous about this overnight trip and ask the children what you could do to be less nervous. Connect this conversation with Jesus' teachings about being ready and "dressed for action." Pyjamas probably weren't what Jesus meant by being "dressed for action"; Jesus was really talking about spiritual preparation more than packing an overnight

bag. End with a prayer that emphasizes spiritual preparation for whatever one might encounter in life, even on overnight trips.

Sermon Starter

Both readings from the Hebrew Bible this week emphasize right relations over pious worship, and the gospel lesson is encouragement to be "dressed for action." At this point in the summer, many regular worshippers (and a fair number of ministers) take a break from the worship routines (whatever that means in these post-pandemic days). While it is tempting to celebrate those faithful few who occupy the pews during summer, these readings give us an opportunity to encourage the faithful to engage their faith beyond Sunday mornings and outside of church sanctuaries. This could be an opportunity to homiletically explore what it might be like to seek justice even when on vacation. If you are bold enough, challenge worshippers to consider worshipping one Sunday with another denomination or visiting a different faith group, just to expand their spiritual horizons. Lean into the irregularity of this part of summer so that regular worshippers—and perhaps the whole community of faith—can refresh their own spirituality.

Hymns

Isaiah 1:1, 10–20

VU 686 "God of grace and God of glory"

VU 701 "What does the Lord require of you"

MV 120 "My soul cries out (Canticle of the Turning)"

Psalm 50

VU 314 "Come now, almighty King"

Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

VU 580 "Faith of our fathers"

MV 139 "True faith needs no defence"

Luke 12:32–40

VU 714 "Come, we that love"

MV 18 "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary"

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

August 17 – Tenth after Pentecost

Proper 15

Isaiah 5:1–7

The unfruitful vineyard will be purged.

Psalm 80:1–2, 8–19 (VU pp. 794–795 Part Two)

Care, O God, for the vine you brought from Egypt.

Hebrews 11:29–12:2

The great cloud of witnesses who lived by faith.

Luke 12:49–56

Jesus comes to bring fire and division within households.

Creation Connection

The prophet Isaiah and the psalmist assume that their audiences are familiar with caring for the plants of the earth. Just think of how much richer our understanding of the Bible would be if we were all so familiar with tending such vegetation! Invite those who are familiar to share their learnings and wisdom.

Spark

Decorate your worship space with vines (either brought inside from nature or artificial ones). Perhaps even use a variety of vines (grape, pumpkin, or ivy). Also, spread some garden tools around the worship space: hand-held pruners, loppers, hoes, watering cans, etc. Encourage worshippers to bring produce from their gardens or photos of their gardens. If you want to play up the metaphor of God’s people as a vine, you could encourage worshippers to bring photos of themselves or their families to hang from the vine using clothespins. Or they could add their names with pieces of paper.

With Children

Use the vines and vegetables as an object lesson with the children. Encourage them to imagine what kind of fruit or vegetable they would be—and be sure to share what kind of fruit or vegetable you connect with most! While this will evoke some giggling, explain that the Bible often compares people to plants. The Bible writers also share a lot about needing to care for the plants, including by pruning them. You could even cut off some leaves or flowers with a pruner to emphasize this point. While this may seem violent

or hurtful, even Jesus taught his followers that sometimes there are parts of our spiritual selves that need to be cut off or relationships that need to end so that we can grow as healthy and fruitful as God intends for us to be. End with a prayer that emphasizes wisdom in knowing what parts of our spiritual lives to tend.

Sermon Starter

Tending vines is a very common image in the Bible. In addition to Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80, the metaphor of the vine is used in several of Jesus’ teachings (John 15 especially comes to mind). Even if people in your area don’t tend vines very much, draw on the wisdom of experienced gardeners or farmers in your congregation or community to use some real-world illustrations of caring for plants. While a gardener or farmer might get lucky one year and experience a lot of fruitfulness from their plants without putting in extra effort, sustainable agriculture, year after year after year, takes *a lot* of work. No wonder the prophets, psalmists, and Jesus used so much agricultural imagery to describe the spiritual lives of individuals and whole nations! Most saints had to “prune” quite a lot in their lives to experience the great spiritual fruitfulness that landed them in the “hall of faithful ancestors” (Hebrews 11). Jesus also warns his followers to expect violence (social pruning?) as they follow his Way. You might want to focus on a current challenge in your community of faith as a “wild vine” that needs to be pruned. Or you might ask worshippers to write down for themselves what part of their spiritual lives needs pruning in order for them to experience greater spiritual fruitfulness.

Hymns

Isaiah 5:1–7

VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”

MV 70 “Kyrie eleison” (Reindorf)

Psalm 80

VU 300 “God, whose farm is all creation”

Hebrews 11:29–12:2

VU 449 “Crashing waters at creation”

VU 691 “Though ancient walls”

VU p. 888 “Earth and all stars”

Luke 12:49–56

VU 416 “Forth in your name, O Christ”

MV 156 “Dance with the Spirit”

August 24 – Eleventh after Pentecost

Proper 16

Jeremiah 1:4–10

The call of Jeremiah: “But I’m only a boy!”

Psalms 71:1–6 (VU p. 789 Part One)

A mighty fortress, a sheltering rock is God.

Hebrews 12:18–29

Our God is a consuming fire with an unshakeable kingdom.

Luke 13:10–17

Jesus heals the bent-over woman on the Sabbath.

Creation Connection

Holy scripture often uses natural phenomena like rock and fire to describe God. How can we encourage worshippers to recognize God’s characteristics and presence in nature?

Spark

Opportunities to fulfill God’s will often come in unexpected, disruptive ways. Include some “planned disruption” in the worship service for this Sunday. Perhaps work with some children (and their families) so that they might erupt in a noisy game of tag or another game in the worship space. Or intentionally have a phone ring and start a staged conversation—maybe even on speakerphone!—about a serious prayer concern. Or leave a music stand near an entrance so that worshippers have to move around it (but don’t let well-meaning folks remove it). Plan one or two disruptive things to emphasize God’s creativity in calling us to compassion and justice by disrupting our ways of life.

With Children

Explore how God shares special messages with God’s people. But before you do that, engage the children about how various *human* leaders share messages. For example, when the principal of a school has an announcement, do they ask a random student to share it? Or at a hockey game or soccer match, is it a young child who usually speaks to the audience? Or if the leaders of Parliament have something to tell Canadians, do they ask a little kid to engage with the news reporters? Allow your child worshippers to answer after each question. Assuming that they

answer no to each, continue by summarizing the story of God calling Jeremiah to be a prophet. Teach the kids that God calls people to share God’s messages at all ages—even as young as they are. End with a prayer that emphasizes openness to God’s calling and to God’s messengers of all ages.

Sermon Starter

A cliché of Christianity is that “God works in mysterious ways,” but the stories from the lectionary for this Sunday are especially about God working in *surprising* ways. Jeremiah is surprised by God’s call to become a prophet because he was “still a boy.” Jesus surprised (and upset) a leader of a faith community by disrupting a worship service with a healing. Our churches have lots of rules and traditions that are beautiful and honour God, yet sometimes these rules and traditions might prevent faithful people from recognizing God’s divine action among us. This theme begs for one or two personal stories about being surprised by God. You could share a story from your own life, or you could invite a congregant to share a story about divine surprises. Encourage worshippers to remember divine surprises in their lives and then challenge them to consider what rules or traditions might prevent them, individually and as a community, from recognizing God’s divine action.

Hymns

Jeremiah 1:4–10

VU 504 “How clear is our vocation, Lord”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

Psalms 71

VU 262 “A mighty fortress is our God”

Hebrews 12:18–29

VU 268 “Bring many names”

MV 92 “Like a rock”

Luke 13:10–17

VU 570 “Jesus’ hands were kind hands”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

MV 186 “Because Jesus felt”

August 31 – Twelfth after Pentecost

Proper 17

Jeremiah 2:4–13

The people have forsaken living water and have dug their own cisterns.

Psalms 81:1, 10–16 (VU pp. 796–797 Part Two)

God will feed you wheat and honey.

Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

A list of instructions on living mutual love.

Luke 14:1, 7–14

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Creation Connection

Too often we humans understand the world through an anthropocentric lens, and we miss both God's perspective and the perspective of our non-human relations. Even on a weekend that honours human labourers, let's consider how our work honours God and nature in addition to human workers.

Spark

Labour Day Sunday invites engagement with labour unions and other worker-justice organizations. Engage with congregants who might be part of labour unions to discover whether they might share their stories. Create an exhibit that honours worker struggles in your area. Many unions and worker-justice groups have T-shirts, buttons, and posters that you could display.

With Children

Place a fancy chair at the front of the worship space. Ask the child worshippers if they would like to sit there. If multiple children do, allow them to take turns. Then ask them what they like about the chair. If none of the kids want to sit on the fancy chair in front of everyone, then sit on the chair yourself and speak and act in a very snobby manner, "talking down" to everyone! Then share the story of Jesus in Luke 14, summarizing Jesus' teachings about choosing more humble seats instead of the fanciest one. Connect the story to Labour Day Sunday by emphasizing that Jesus wants everyone—from custodians to CEOs—to work for the best of everyone else, rather than lording fame, wealth, or power over everyone

else. Finish with a prayer that emphasizes humility and working for the common good.

Sermon Starter

While Labour Day can be a celebration of work in general, it is especially a celebration of *organized* labour. Organized labour simply means workers striving together for a common purpose, which is similar to organized religion (believers striving together for a common purpose). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God accuses God's people of abandoning their common purpose (life ordered by the Creator and Sustainer of the world) for a poor substitute (life ordered by foreign, false deities). Likewise, Jesus accuses his fellow dinner party guests of seeking to increase their own honour at the expense of others. Even as we read these accounts two thousand years later, we ought to feel uncomfortable. You might explore ways in which contemporary leaders, especially self-identifying Christian leaders, have built up their own fame, wealth, and power at the expense of vulnerable people. And before anyone starts to feel self-righteous, explore the temptations of greed and sloth among progressive people. Then lead the congregation to consider groups that are doing inspirational work in seeking justice for people in vulnerable situations, including certain labour unions and worker-justice organizations. In the 1940s, The United Church of Canada was active in supporting collective bargaining as a justice issue. Invite worshippers to think of how they could support these organizations and build up the common good.

Hymns

Jeremiah 2:4–13

VU 609 "In all our grief and fear"

MV 76 "If I have been the source of pain"

Psalms 81

MV 199 "When at this table"

Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

VU 600 "When I needed a neighbour"

VU 681 "Where cross the crowded ways of life"

MV 209 "Go, make a difference"

Luke 14:1, 7–14

VU 372 "Though I may speak"

VU 512 "Lord, you give the great commission"

MV 145 "Draw the circle wide"