Called to Be the Church: Congregational Giving Program, 2020  
Loving Our Neighbours

28 Days to Thanksgiving: Offering Our Gratitude

[Introduction 2](#_Toc75970163)

[Sunday 1 Worship Service 4](#_Toc75970164)

[We Offer Gratitude through Music 4](#_Toc75970165)

[Sunday 1 Sermon 8](#_Toc75970166)

[Spiritual Aerobics 8](#_Toc75970167)

[Sunday 1 Children’s Program 10](#_Toc75970168)

[Praying Three Times 10](#_Toc75970169)

[Sunday 2 Worship Service 12](#_Toc75970170)

[We Offer Gratitude through Silence 12](#_Toc75970171)

[Sunday 2 Sermon 17](#_Toc75970172)

[Wordless Thanks 17](#_Toc75970173)

[Sunday 2 Children’s Program 19](#_Toc75970174)

[Oil, Anointing, and Offering 19](#_Toc75970175)

[Sunday 3 Worship Service 21](#_Toc75970176)

[We Offer Gratitude through Food 21](#_Toc75970177)

[Sunday 3 Sermon 25](#_Toc75970178)

[Enough 25](#_Toc75970179)

[Sunday 3 Children’s Program 27](#_Toc75970180)

[Manna, Food, and the Power of Sharing 27](#_Toc75970181)

[Sunday 4 Worship Service 29](#_Toc75970182)

[We Offer Gratitude through Creation 29](#_Toc75970183)

[Sunday 4 Sermon 34](#_Toc75970184)

[The Dying Elephant in the Temple 34](#_Toc75970185)

[Sunday 4 Children’s Program 37](#_Toc75970186)

[Weeping God, Angry Jesus, and Suffering Creation 37](#_Toc75970187)

[Sunday 5 Worship Service 39](#_Toc75970188)

[Thanksgiving Sunday 39](#_Toc75970189)

[Sunday 5 Sermon 47](#_Toc75970190)

[The Great Dinner Party 47](#_Toc75970191)

[Sunday 5 Children’s Program 50](#_Toc75970192)

[Offering Thanksgiving to God with Whole Heart and Whole Mind 50](#_Toc75970193)

# Introduction

One of the ways we live religiously as Christians is to mark time and make meanings out of specific time periods. For example, in Canada, we kick off the new school year after Labour Day, observing this time as a period of fresh starts, renewal, and thankfulness.

Written to coincide with the opening weeks of the school year, with fall, and with harvest time, the overall theme for the worship services in this program is “Offering Gratitude.” The worship and children’s program resources for the five Sundays provide multiple ways to express thanksgiving, reflect on the change of seasons from summer into fall, and attend to new beginnings, culminating with Thanksgiving Sunday. The key to gratitude lies in our ability to deepen our appreciation about what is special in our ordinary lives. Paying close attention to our ordinary experiences, we may touch the Divine glory that shines through and manifests in human and creation’s beauty and in our brokenness.

Each week, we are invited to think about and share our experience of gratitude, focusing on a particular component—music, silence, food, and creation. We are invited to examine how our experience around these components is limited by our lack of awareness, our lack of generosity, and our lack of openness to difference. For example, we are invited to stretch out our ways of worship (by learning new songs, using our bodies, and trying silence). Ultimately, we are invited to imagine offering gratitude in ways that are supple, abundant, and overflowing rather than through actions confined by a sense of scarcity, fear, and duty.

On Sunday 1, we use multiple ways of making **music**—singing with voices, bodily movements, and by making sounds with musical instruments and our human body. Children’s program participants will explore the power of music and sound-making through biblical stories (Exodus 15:20–21 Miriam).

In contrast, on Sunday 2, we explore the power of **silence** and non-verbal ways of offering gratitude. Here we will incorporate meditative rituals (such as anointing with oil) as we reflect on the passages of the woman anointing Jesus as an example of offering gratitude (John 12: 1–8).

Sunday 3 worship invites us to meditate on the importance of **food**—an offering rooted in Jewish faith and central to Jesus’ ministry (Mark 6:30–44). Sunday 3 coincides with harvest celebrations in the East Asian lunar calendar; the service will share how people in other parts of the world celebrate the mid-autumn festival, the harvest moon, with food. Children’s program participants will learn about the power of eating together and sharing meals with the saints of every time and place.

Last, but not least, Sunday 4 deals with the exploitation of the **creation** as the opposite way of offering gratitude. This service addresses the problem of our commodification and consumption of the natural world because of a culture of greed (Genesis 1, Isaiah 24). We explore how living with respect in creation is the way to give thanks to God, the creator of all. The service and children’s program will tap into Indigenous peoples’ wisdom and spirituality. Sunday 4 encourages us to dedicate ourselves to ecological justice.

On Sunday 5, Thanksgiving Sunday will be dedicated to integrating elements of the previous four worship services in a culmination offering of gratitude. The worship recognizes the abundance of the harvest, the gifts of creation, and the contribution of our human labour inspired by God’s guidance and grace.

The worship liturgies were prepared by the Rev. Dr. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, recently appointed Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College, Toronto, with sermons by the Rev. Dr. Kathleen James-Cavan, minister at St. Andrew’s United Church, Imperial, Saskatchewan, and Associate Professor of English at the University of Saskatchewan. The children’s program was developed by the Rev. David Kim-Cragg, ecumenical chaplain at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

# Sunday 1 Worship Service

## We Offer Gratitude through Music

*NOTE: This service aims to offer gratitude to God by making different sounds* (*gong, musical instruments, human voices, clapping, and clanging*)*. Feel free to bring objects that make noises to offer thanks to God in recognition of the abundant gifts of God. Also, most prayers will be sung, and the hymns chosen reflect diversity in tunes, cultures, and languages. This service is intended to be an intergenerational service. Involve children in worship. While there will be a sermon, it is to be short and animated. Children’s program activity is provided, but it could be incorporated as a Children’s Time activity.*

### Prelude

### Welcome

God be with you.  
**And also with you.**We greet one another in the name of the triune God:  
Source of Love, Love Incarnated, Wisdom of Love.

### Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment, Christ’s light shines. Alleluia!**

### Call to Worship with the Sounding Gong

Hear the sound!  
**God is calling.** (*gong*)  
 We are gathered.  
**God is present.** (*gong*)  
Thanks be to God.  
**Hallelujah! Amen.** (*gong*)

### Sung Opening Prayer

“Come Now, O God of Peace” (*Voices United* 34) (in English and Korean)

### Opening Hymn

“Make a Joyful Noise” (VU p. 820) (*use all instruments and objects*)

### Prayer of Confession

God Weeps” (*More Voices* 78) (*creating a quiet mood in contrast to the song before*)

(*Silence while the music for MV 78 is playing*)

### Sung Assurance of Pardon

“I Come with Joy” (VU 477) vs. 1

### Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“Give to Us Laughter” (VU 624) (*last verse sung with “Ha ha ha” and clapping*)

### Children’s Time: Praying Three Times

A very long time ago, in the 4th century, there lived a theologian (named Augustine) who said, “Those who sing pray twice.” What does that mean? (*Pause, engage with the responses from children.*)

I think it means that when we sing, we pray to God better, at least twice better and maybe more. Our voices are gifts of God and from God. God is pleased to hear our voices in song.

Why is God happy to hear our voices? (*Pause, engage with the responses from children.*)

God is happy because we are happy. God senses that we are happy when we sing. God can feel our heart beating because singing expresses the joy of our heart. Because God is in relationship with us, God cares for how we are doing.

Today, we want to talk about one more thing concerning singing. If singing with our voices is praying twice, I wonder what happens when we sing and use the instruments that make sounds *and* use our bodies to make sounds. Do you think when we do all of these things, we are praying three times?

I think not only are our voices gifts, but also our bodies are gifts, just as instruments that make sound and music are gifts. When we sing, move, and use our bodies, as well as instruments, we pray better and more. God is pleased. We offer our thanks to God in an even better way.

Do you know the name of the first person in the Bible who sang with an instrument and danced? (*Pause, engage with the responses from children.*)

It was Miriam. She was the sister of Moses and Aaron. Let us learn more about her in the sermon (and/or children’s program).

Some of us sing well and use our bodies very naturally. For others, singing and moving are more difficult. But all of us are called to earnestly raise our voices and praise God with our bodies and instruments. Offering gratitude to God is not a competition or a test. It is a beautiful way to worship God and to worship one another.

So let us sing, make harmony, use our bodies, and make noises!

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_1_Children’s)*. Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service*.)

### Invitation Hymn to Offering

“We Give Our Thanks” (MV 187) (*in Tswana and English, pointing to hands, eyes, feet, and hearts as indicated by each verse*)

### Offering

### Sung Prayer of Illumination

“Over My Head” (MV 88) (vs. 1) (*raise hand, swinging body*)

### Scripture

Exodus 15:20–21; Psalm 100; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

### Sermon

Spiritual Aerobics (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_1_Sermon)*.*)

### Response Hymn

“Oh, a Song Must Rise” (MV 142) (*use all instruments*)

### Prayers of the People (finger prayer)

*Note: As each part is prayed, a finger is raised or uncurled or pointed. At the end, the whole hand is open. It is possible that not everyone may have or be able to use their fingers in this way. You might use this prayer using other symbols to demonstrate parts of making a whole, e.g., individual orange segments or a jigsaw puzzle.*

Dear God, we give you our thanks and praise for all the gifts we have received from you over the week.

As we begin our new (school) year, help each of us study and work hard as you intend us to do (*raise first finger/thumb*).

We now pray to reach out to those people and places in need of prayer.

We pray for the leaders, in churches and of nations, as they strive for peace and justice (*raise second finger*).

#### Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 1)

We pray for the strongest people and nations that are wealthy and powerful as they learn to share their wealth and power, and as we long for a world filled with freedom and equity (*raise third finger*).

#### Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 2)

We pray for the most vulnerable, the sick, the sorrowful, the lonely, and the oppressed, as they feel your healing power and your comforting presence (*raise fourth finger*).

#### Sung Refrain MV 154 “Deep in Our Hearts” (vs. 3)

We pray for the smallest people and nations—and creation—who suffer, as they proudly and courageously make their voices heard (*raise fifth finger/thumb*).

#### Sung Refrain MV 154 “Deep in Our Hearts” (vs. 4)

### Commissioning

“Sent Forth by God’s Blessing” (VU 481)

### Benediction Song

“Go Now in Peace” (VU 964) (*round, acapella*)

### Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Find people, young and senior, newcomers and seasoned members who play musical instruments. Reach out to them and invite them to offer their musical gifts in worship and beyond.
* Reach out to people who enjoy non-European cultures; they may be encouraged to share and teach other music styles.
* Plan a special service of offering music (for fundraising or a stewardship campaign, and so on).
* Plan to include some of these activities in celebrating the Thanksgiving Sunday service.
* Think about offering opportunities for generosity, using music as a teaser. For example, you might announce a special donation invitation for a sound system, or new mics or speakers, or to buy new musical instruments for worship, or to remove old carpets to improve the acoustics of the sanctuary.

# 

# Sunday 1 Sermon

## Spiritual Aerobics

*Consider displaying several tambourines in your worship space*.

You may or may not have grown up with giving thanks for food before meals, using a scripted prayer. Perhaps you continue this spiritual practice. When I was a child, my siblings and I dutifully folded our hands before each meal (except before breakfast on busy school days) and said, “Thank you for the world so sweet/Thank you for the food we eat/Thank you for the birds that sing/Thank you God for everything” no matter the state of the world that day or the look of the food on our plates. Sometimes, I did not want to thank anyone, least of all God, who was supposed to be on my side, for the detested soup in my bowl or the kid on the playground who bullied me. In speaking the words anyway, did I learn hypocrisy instead of gratitude? What does it mean to “rejoice always” or to make a “joyful noise” (Psalm 100: 1) to God and, in doing so, is there a chance that gratitude for blessings might inure us to the injustice that loads abundance on some plates and empties others? In other words, how do we authentically make a joyful noise of gratitude in the full knowledge of our human failings?

For an example, let’s look at Miriam who for the second time (possibly) witnesses Moses’ salvation from water. (She may have watched when, as an infant, Moses was taken up from the river by Pharaoh’s daughter.) Now, Miriam sings, dances, and plays a tambourine in gratitude after she, Aaron, and Moses, along with all the Israelites, have emerged untouched by the Red Sea while it closed over Pharaoh and the Egyptian Army. As the enemy drowns, Moses and the Israelites sing their gratitude to God, source of strength and salvation, but Miriam goes further. When she and the women pick up tambourines and dance, they embody the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor in a language that amplifies the words of Moses’ song. The language of the body—movement punctuated by drumbeat and the clash of cymbals—visibly and physically enacts the freedom they have gained because God has triumphed. In this act and because in her whole body she understands whom to thank, Miriam is called “prophet.”

A prophet has the special status of truth-teller or one who urges the people to obey God. Moses, of course, is the most significant prophet in the Hebrew Bible, but Miriam’s action here, her “joyful noise,” brings to the people a reinforcement of their indebtedness to God. She frames Moses’s song by making a refrain of his first line, “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” In her dance and celebration, she reiterates the wisdom of Psalm 100: “Know that…God…made us” (v. 3) and not we ourselves; know that we are God’s people, and this is God’s saving act.

Therefore, says Paul in the first letter to the Thessalonians, “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5: 18). Note, Paul does not limit those circumstances to the good things of life, such as liberation from oppression, full bellies, or a good harvest. If we are to give thanks “in all circumstances,” if that is what constitutes true rejoicing and rest in Christ, then we cannot insulate ourselves from our flaws and disappointments even when we dance and sing for joy as did Miriam with the women. But how is this possible?

Am I to be grateful when things are *not* going my way? You want me to take up my tambourine when my plate is empty, when life has handed me the pits instead of the cherries? Am I to turn in gratitude to God when I know that my unearned privilege has been handed to me because others have less or none? To give thanks for good and bad is like patting my head and rubbing my stomach at the same time. (*You might invite the congregation to try this*.) Can it be done without confusing or blending the two?

It may be worth remembering that the command to “rejoice always” does not limit believers to a mood of meaningless happiness. Miriam’s joy is not like that of, say, Grey Cup winners who crow “We’re number one!” Her rejoicing is in God. Loosely translated, she could be saying something like “God is number one.” I believe that God wants us to rejoice in all that God gives, not because God needs our praise or wants us to be endlessly “happy clappy,” but precisely because in the act of giving thanks and rejoicing in God, we come together into relationship with God. We begin to know, with Miriam, that God triumphs gloriously, not we ourselves, and that though generations pass, God’s love endures forever.

As we explore the theme of gratitude over the next four Sundays, we will be challenged to bring our whole selves, body and mind, to thanksgiving. Dancing and playing tambourines, Miriam and the other Israelite women lead us in a kind of spiritual aerobics, a full body experience of gratitude. As we move into the week ahead, let’s emulate Miriam and the Israelite women by mentally beating the tambourine and dancing each time we remember to thank God for God’s faithfulness.

# Sunday 1 Children’s Program

## Praying Three Times

### Preparation

Teachers (at least one teacher) and volunteers (who play music or sing well) rehearse ahead of time with a few musical instruments: a tambourine (to represent Miriam), a guitar (instead of a lyre for David), a trumpet (to represent Jubilee), and a flute or pipe (for Jesus). Finding four children who could confidently play together in front of a congregation might be challenging, so adapt according to your congregation. Four passages from the Bible (Exodus 15:20–21; 1 Samuel 16:14–17; 21–23; Leviticus 25:8–10; and Matthew 9:23–26) are printed on separate pieces of paper and placed in a box. Both instruments and box are placed on a table. A simple and joyful hymn that celebrates giving thanks is also prepared, using these instruments. Ideally select music that children already know. This music may be played on Thanksgiving Sunday as an offertory.

### Opening

Welcome the children to the children’s program and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us pray…

God, thanks for gathering us today.  
Help us learn about offering thanks to you, O God.  
**We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

### Introduction to Activity

How do we offer thanks to God? (*Pause and engage with the children.*) (*One possible response is that*) We pray to God to say thanks. That is one way to offer our gratitude to God. A long time ago, our ancestors in faith encouraged us to give thanks to God by singing. They said something like this, “If we sing to God well, we pray twice, so long as it is from love.” Do you agree with them? Today, let us learn to sing and give thanks to God at least twice. In fact, if we sing to God with our bodies as well as with musical instruments, how many times would that be? Do you think God will be even more pleased?

### Engaging Activity

Teachers, volunteers, and children gather around the table with the instruments and box. Ask the children whether they play any instruments. Talk about the way each instrument might express something different about the way we feel. Ask how we feel when we hear different instruments played at the same time. Each child (assuming that the group has at least four children) is invited to open the box in turn and take out one of the pieces of paper with a Bible passage. Each time a child reads the Bible passage aloud and identifies (perhaps with help) the instrument referenced in the Bible passage. Then a teacher provides a short lesson about the passage, explaining what and why Miriam and David did what they did, why the trumpet was played on the day of Jubilee, and why Jesus told the story he did.

Share the simple and joyful hymn that was prepared ahead of time. Encourage any who can play one of the instruments to accompany the hymn. After the hymn, invite the children to reflect on what it is like to sing and play music together. Expressions of fun and joy can be shared as a concrete way of offering God thanksgiving.

### Closing

Offer a prayer that incorporates the reflections from the children’s sharing.

# Sunday 2 Worship Service

## We Offer Gratitude through Silence

*Note: This service aims to offer gratitude to God by honouring silence and non-verbal participation in worship. It seeks to name brokenness and suffering. If possible, find a person who can demonstrate and/or learn sign language. The service introduces attentive breathing as prayer and incorporates bodily actions of gesture and clapping as prayer and praise. Also, it includes anointing ritual as offering gratitude of healing. Similar to communion, people are invited to come forward to assigned stations and be anointed. In pairs, people put oil on each other’s wrists and offer blessings* (*words/hugs*)*.*

### Prelude

### Welcome (*using sign language*)

God be with you,  
**and also with you.**Whether you are hurt or sad,  
**You are welcome here.**

### Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment, Christ’s light shines! Alleluia!**

### Call to Worship (*with deep breathing*)

God is in our breath (*breathe*).  
**We receive God’s presence as we breathe in.**God is outside our breath (*breathe*).  
**We experience God’s presence as we breathe out.**God is in-between our breaths (*breathe*).  
**God is present everywhere in all living, breathing things.**Thanks be to God.  
**Amen**.

### Opening Hymn

“Spirit God, Be Our Breath” (*More Voices* 150)

### Opening Prayer

In joy and in trouble,   
help us, gracious God,   
to trust your love,  
to serve your purpose,  
and to praise your name. Amen. (*Celebrate God’s Presence,* page 25)[[1]](#footnote-1)

### Prayer of Confession

Are any among you sick?  
The Letter to James teaches us to pray over the sick, anointing them with oil.  
However, we failed to ask the question.  
We failed to pray over them and forgot to use oil.  
Help us remember that the prayer of faith will save the sick.  
Help us confess, those of us who committed sins to one another,  
and pray for one another so that we may be healed. (James 5:14–16)

### Assurance of Pardon

“Like a Rock” (MV 92) (*sing with actions found in the hymn book*)

### Silent Passing of the Peace

(*People are invited to bow their heads to each other while holding their palms together near their heart as a gesture of respect, instead of shaking hands without words. This is an opportunity for the whole congregation to participate in experiential learning of sharing peace in silence with a non-verbal gesture*.)

### Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“Ev’ry Day Is a Day of Thanksgiving” (MV 185) (*clapping*)

### Children’s Time

(*Prepare essential oils, which include but are not limited to cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, and galbanum.*)

Last week, we learned about Miriam, the first woman prophet in the Bible, who gave thanks to God, sang with a tambourine, and danced to celebrate the joy of Exodus. Her people, who were delivered from slavery, went on a journey. This was not easy. It was long. It was uncertain. Do you know how long they were in the wilderness? The Bible says it was 40 years. Some died in the wilderness. Some people were born in the wilderness.

Next week, we will learn about what they ate in the wilderness.

Today, I would like to talk about oil. One of the first things the people of Israel did in the wilderness was to build a place to worship God. Thanks to God, they had become free, and it was important that they give thanks to God regularly. This place of worship was not like the church we have. It was not a building. They were on a journey. They had to move. So the worship place they built was a tent, a moveable and portable thing. You can imagine a camping tent. While it was not fancy, the tent was built with care and thankful hearts. They offered many things in the tent. One of the things they offered to God was oil.

May I put this oil on your wrist? How do you feel? (*Engage with the responses, e.g., Does it feel good, soft, smooth?*) Oil is especially helpful when someone is not well or sad because touching people who are sick and sad with oil gives them comfort and healing. That is why our ancestors in faith offered oil when they visited the sick and when they worshipped about healing.

Do you know that Jesus also received oil? He did. Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, bathed Jesus’ feet with oil before he was going to suffer and die. We will talk about this more in the sermon and during the children’s program.

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_2_Children’s)*. Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service*.)

### Invitation Hymn to Offering

“When Hands Reach Out and Fingers Trace” (MV 136)

### Offering

### Scripture

Exodus 35:10–15; John 12:1–8; James 5:14–16

### Sung Prayer of Illumination

“Be Still and Know” (MV 77)

### Sermon and Hymn

Wordless Thanks (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_2_Sermon)*.*)

“Said Judas to Mary” (VU 129)

### Ritual Response

(*People may be invited to come forward to a station where a person holds a small dish of olive oil. Each person uses the oil to anoint the person behind them, offering blessings to each other.*)

### Response Hymn after Ritual of Anointing

“Put Peace into Each Other’s Hands” (MV 173)

### Prayers of the People

We praise you, O God.  
From you spring forth the wonders of life:  
water, oil, darkness, salt, companionship, light.  
We are blessed.  
**Blessed be God.**We praise you, Christ Jesus,  
that you choose to share the burdens of our humanity;  
 that you offer healing to us,  
reaching out to us in your great love.  
We are blessed.  
**Blessed be God.**We praise you, Holy Spirit,  
for you breathe life into us afresh in the caress of your power,  
and anoint us with oil,  
that we may be free of all dis-ease of spirit, mind, heart or body.  
We are blessed.  
**Blessed be God.  
Gracious God, you bless us in your healing love;  
Living Christ, you deliver us from oppression;  
Holy Spirit, you restore us to wholeness.  
We give you thanks and praise. Amen.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

### Commissioning

As we go out into the world,  
Let us follow Jesus who taught us to remember Mary who anointed him.  
**Let us go forth remembering who we are and whose we are.**Do not be afraid,  
**God will never forget us and forsake us.**

“I Am the Dream” (MV 106) (*accompaniment of drum would be encouraged*)

### Benediction with the Sound of Gong

God has called us with the sound.  
**Let us echo God’s calling.** (*gong*)  
God has blessed us with oil.  
**Let us touch others.** (*gong*)  
God is with us.  
**We are not alone. Thanks be to God.**  
**Amen.** (*gong*)

### Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Share experiences of receiving blessings when you were sick, lonely, and/or scared. This is a chance to express our experience of gratitude despite unexpected pain and unjust suffering.
* Share experiences of giving blessings to those who are sick, lonely, and/or scared in your midst. This is an opportunity to affirm the gifts of care and healing to serve others.
* Plan a meditative, silent retreat that includes creative art sessions.
* Plan an educational event, which could also be a fundraising event, learning about the power of symbols, gestures, and ritual.
* Think about fundraising opportunities using oil as a teaser. For example, issue special donation invitations for healing services, or for buying new or replacing old symbols or objects to improve the tactile experience of worship.
* Visit other churches and other religious communities that honour silence.
* Use oil and practise non-verbal rituals.

# Sunday 2 Sermon

## Wordless Thanks

*Invite three or four volunteers to rehearse the anointing of Jesus from John 12:1–8 in mime and/or dance. Consider adding a fancy box or jar to the worship space to represent nard.*

As my mother lay dying in a hospital, 30 km. from her home, a neighbour whom we had never met, wordlessly offered a pot of soup at our parents’ door in rural Ontario. She left a name but no address, so it was only through considerable sleuthing that my sisters later tracked her down to return her pot with gratitude. That simple gesture, a large pot of soup, released the family from some of the burden of daily living during the hours of vigil at the hospital. At each of the hearty meals it provided, we gave thanks for our new friend’s generosity in our silent but grateful eating.

“Preach the gospel; when necessary use words.” It turns out St. Francis of Assisi never said this.[[[3]](#footnote-3)](#_bookmark2) Rather, this saying derives from his prayer that his preaching might be by example in obedience to God’s Holy Rule. Actions speak for themselves, but sometimes, as in the case of Mary’s anointing of Jesus, they are subject to the misinterpretation of words.

Let’s imagine what it means to preach without words. Some of you may have expertise in American Sign Language; for example, here is how you say “Thank you.” (*Here, you might* [*make the sign for “Thank you”*](https://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-signs/t/thankyou.htm) *which is like blowing a kiss without puckering up.*) But these signs are also words, just unvoiced. Can you think of a time in your life when a gesture went beyond words? When an action spoke louder than any words could say? Or, when you offered someone nothing more than the “bread” of your presence, or an anointing through your undivided attention?

In silence, I invite you to think back to one of those times and then I will show you a story.

(*After at least one minute of silence, invite the three or four volunteers who have rehearsed the anointing of Jesus from John 12 to perform it in mime and/or dance, but resist the urge to narrate. Attention should be on the action, not on how it is represented by the words of either Judas or Jesus*.)

While Martha serves and Lazarus, Jesus, and Judas Iscariot sit at table, Mary’s wordless action dominates the scene, punctuated by the pungent fragrance that fills the house. Even if you want to avert your eyes from the intimacy in the way she uses her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet, your nose will not let you forget. You are drawn to the lingering evidence in the overpowering perfume that fills the house. While her action cannot be ignored, she offers no explanation or justification. It is a bold and daring act made more significant by silence. Silence speaks when words are not enough.

But we protest! We are people of the book. So, into the gap between motive and act, hearers and readers yearn to insert what Mary leaves out. What happens when we try?

Jesus has recently raised her brother Lazarus from the dead; perhaps this extraordinary anointing should be understood as an offering of gratitude in response. This explanation is speculative at best. There is no evidence to suggest that Mary rates her brother’s life as equal to one year of a labourer’s pay. For Judas, because the extravagance does not add up in his daily balancing of credit and debit; it is literally unaccountable. He criticizes what he cannot understand: surely this huge outlay of money could have been used for greater benefit! He’s right, of course, in the earthly economy of give and take, profit and loss. This expenditure is in God’s account book, however, which remains silent and demands our silence in return. For whatever the motive, Jesus receives the extravagant gift as an outpouring of Mary’s deep love, just as he will soon wipe all of his disciples’ feet in love, even though he knows one “has lifted his heel” against him (John 13:18). If we try, we might still smell the love that overwhelmed those gathered at Mary, Martha, and Lazarus’s table.

For many of us in the church, the account books have been saying that our churches cost too much to maintain. Every region of the United Church knows the grief of the shutting and sale of much-loved buildings, whether urban or rural, large or small. So, it may be with some bemusement that we hear about God’s specifications through Moses for the construction of the tabernacle, a structure to protect the second covenant with God. In gratitude for God’s mercy following the incident of the golden calf, they contribute their precious goods and skills to make not a graven image, but a moveable home for their moveable feast in worship. No expense is spared, no sensory experience left out: lit by lamps and perfumed with incense, the tent and ark with its poles, clasps, and pillars, the curtain at the entrance, and the table with the bread of Presence make sacred space for experiencing God’s love. If you think about it, not much has changed except we expect our tabernacles to have foundations.

I invite you to experience the space in which you worship today, constructed with no less attention to detail than that lavished on God’s design for the tabernacle. Can you feel the care that has gone into making your chair comfortable—the wood smooth or the cushion soft? Can you see the beauty in the colours that drape the sanctuary? Can you hear the rich music in the instruments? Do you discern the delicious scent of bread on the Sunday you celebrate Holy Communion? Does your mouth water for the taste of coffee or tea around which you will gather with friends after worship? All of this has been prepared with love, the same love that filled the house with fragrance at Bethany, the same love that is stirred into the soup of condolence or baked into the cupcakes of celebration.

The good news is that in our life together we are blessed both to receive and preach the gospel of grateful love through the actions that embody our faith. In the week ahead, I challenge you to offer either a gesture or a prayer of thanks for a neighbour whether near or far.

# Sunday 2 Children’s Program

## Oil, Anointing, and Offering

### Preparation

Teachers (at least one teacher) and a volunteer (who is good at drama) prepare a few essential oils that include cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, and galbanum. Use one of these in an oil burner. Light or turn on the oil burner before the children’s program begins to create an aroma. The oils and burner are placed on the table. Create a dramatic reading based on the passage from the Gospel of John about Mary anointing Jesus (John 12:1–8). The dramatic reading will have a narrator plus Mary, Judah, and Jesus. Prepare copies of the script that will be shared with the children.

### Opening

Welcome the children to the children’s program and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us give thanks to God before we begin our learning today…  
God, thanks for gathering us today.  
Help us learn about offering thanks through oil.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### Introduction to Activity

Ask the children: Do you smell something? Where is that scent coming from? Teachers then guide the children to the table where the oils and oil burner are located (the oil is no longer burning). Take some time to let children explore the smell of each oil without pouring or touching.

### Engaging Activity

Teachers tell the story of the Magi, who brought gifts to the baby Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Explain to the children that these are precious substances that were regularly traded in ancient times. Tell them that two essential oils on the table have the scents of frankincense and myrrh. Teachers can share that such gifts were also found in the story of Exodus when the people of Israel built the worship space and offered thanks to God using anointing oil and fragrant incense (Exodus 35:28).

Move then to sharing the dramatic reading of the story of Mary anointing Jesus. Distribute the scripts and assign/share roles among those children who wish to participate. Before reading it aloud, the teacher(s) might share the background story of how Jesus brought Mary’s brother, Lazarus, back to life and the fact that Mary’s family was well known to Jesus.

After the reading, invite the children to talk about the feelings they felt as they shared this dramatic reading. The intention of this sharing is to help children appreciate the power of offering that includes costly sacrifice. How will the scent of the oil make Mary feel as she is thanking Jesus? How will it make Jesus and the others feel? Further reflections could be explored about the feeling of the oil itself and how that helps to experience God.

### Closing

Children are invited back to the table where the oils are. Thinking of Mary and Jesus in the story, teachers dab oil on the wrist of each child with the following words of blessing:

Let us remember Mary, who taught us the power of offering.

*or*

We give thanks to Jesus, who showed his self-giving love for us.

# Sunday 3 Worship Service

## We Offer Gratitude through Food

### Prelude

### Welcome

God be with you,  
**and also with you.**Let us greet one another in the name of the triune God:  
**Source of Life, Gift of Love, Teacher of Wisdom.**

### Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment, especially the moment of sharing food, Christ’s light shines. Alleluia!**

### Opening Hymn

“All Who Hunger” (*Voices United* 60)

### Opening Prayer

Taste and see that God is good.  
God of abundance,  
**we give you thanks for your goodness.**Every day you feed us with nutritious food in body and soul.  
**Help us share food as we share good news of your abundant love.  
Amen.**

### Prayer of Confession

God of food,  
Day by day, we are blessed with your generosity.  
Thanks to your generosity, we have not gone hungry.  
Thanks to your care, we have been comforted and nurtured.  
Yet, we have not shared your generosity with others.  
Due to our selfishness, we have abandoned those who are in need.  
Due to our greed, we only accumulated wealth without sharing it.  
Accept our sins and forgive us.  
We are grateful for this opportunity to confess our wrongdoings.

### Words of Assurance

Jesus taught us not to worry about what to eat and what to wear.  
**Merciful God,  
you are endlessly patient with us and never give up on us.  
We give you thanks for bestowing pardon so that we can live as a forgiven people.**

### Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“If Our God Had Simply Saved Us” (VU 131) (vs. 1, 2, 3, 10)

### Children’s Time: The Gift of Manna

Last week, we learned how the people of Israel, travelling in the wilderness, built a tent to worship in and used oil to honour God. And I promised you that today we would learn what those people ate. Do you know what they ate? The clue is in the song we just sang. Yes, they ate manna. It means “bread from heaven” in Hebrew, the language of the people of Exodus. We do not know exactly what manna looks or tastes like. But I think it was a kind of bread, a daily food that we all need to eat to fill our empty stomachs. Remember, bread is mentioned in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us today our daily bread.”

Because the people of Israel were in the wilderness and could not stay in one place for a long time, they could not farm, right? That is why God provided manna, bread from heaven. While this food was free, there was one condition. What would that be? (*Pause and engage with the children’s responses.*)

Because they were travelling and did not have homes, the people could not take more bread than they needed. There was no way to be greedy and selfish as there was no way they could save the bread. Yet some of those people actually tried to do just that. And guess what happened with that bread! It became rotten. What is the message of this?

God gives food freely; but it must be freely shared. As long as we are sharing it, everyone who needs food can get it. There is enough for everyone. In Hebrew this means *Dayeinu*. What God gives is sufficient. It is enough. Isn’t it awesome? Jesus tells a similar story in the Gospel of Mark. We will learn more about this in a sermon or in the children’s program.

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_3_Children’s)*. Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service*.)

### Invitation Hymn to Offering

“If Our God Had Simply Saved Us” (VU 131) (vs. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

### Offering

### Scripture

Exodus 16:13–21; Mark 6:37–44; Acts 2:44–47

### Sung Prayer of Illumination

“My Soul Is Thirsting for You” (VU p. 781)

### Sermon

Enough (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_3_Sermon)*.*)

### Response Hymn

“For the Crowd of Thousands” (VU 355)

### Prayers of the People

(*Note: Arrange tea light candles or electric tea lights (at least 12 to 20, depending on the size of the congregation) in a basket or other container at the front of the sanctuary or in the chancel area, ideally wherever the Christ candle is located. During the prayer, people are invited to come forward and light a candle as they pray. Real candles can be lit from the Christ candle.*)

God, you placed me in the world to be its salt.  
 I have been afraid of committing myself,  
afraid of being stained by the world.  
I did not want to hear what “they” might have to say.  
And my salt dissolved as if in water.  
**Forgive me, Jesus.  
We pray for all who are afraid, facing oppression and injustice locally and globally.**

#### Sung Refrain “Your Will Be Done” (MV 151)

God, you placed me in the world to be its light.  
 I was afraid of the shadows, afraid of poverty.  
I did not want to know other people’s struggles.  
And my light slowly faded away.  
**Forgive me, Jesus.**

#### Sung Refrain “Your Will Be Done” (MV 151)

God, you placed me in the world to live in community.  
Thus you have taught me to love, to share in life,  
to struggle for bread and justice,   
your truth incarnate in my life.  
**So be it, Jesus.[[4]](#footnote-4)**

**We pray for all who work for justice, freedom, and abundant life.**

#### Sung Refrain “Your Will Be Done” (MV 151)

### Commissioning Song

“As We Gather at Your Table” (VU 457)

### Sung Benediction

“God Bless to Us Our Bread” (Spanish and English) (MV 193)

### Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Research poverty issues that affect your community (concerning children, youth at risk, the elderly, single parents, people with disabilities).
* Learn about food waste at home, at school, at hospital, and work places, locally and globally.
* Learn about food sovereignty, growing food locally, and consuming local food.
* These learning events could be fundraising events, e.g., selling food, locally produced and prepared.
* Think about fundraising opportunities using food as a teaser, e.g., donation invitations for kitchen improvements, replacing or fixing cooking related materials.
* Invite someone new or lonely to a meal at your home.
* Practise meal sharing (more than communion), which can be a regular part of the church life, one of the most powerful ways to offer gratitude.

# Sunday 3 Sermon

## Enough

(*Today’s symbol in the worship space could be an item or items of food, such as squash, corn, and beans, symbolizing abundance for your congregation.*)

Close to today, the autumnal equinox ushers in a new season and a time of harvest festivals when people give thanks for abundant crops. Fun fact: in Middle English, before the 1300s, the word “harvest” *was* the word for this season, “Autumn” being a later word borrowed from French. In many Asian cultures, people also gather at this time to celebrate family unity and honour ancestors with special food.

Can you think of a celebration that doesn’t have food? Even funerals have funeral bread. Perhaps one of the first harvest celebrations, of a sort, is described in the story from Exodus when the hungry Israelites, as though returned to the Garden of Eden, discover a food with a miraculous property just waiting for them to collect.

For those of you who like math, here’s a question: If every member of the camp gathered a portion of manna per person for their tent, how much *manna* did the Hebrews gather all together? (*Allow time for responses. Or, you might want to develop this as a Jeopardy question, e.g.: “For $800, estimate the amount of manna the Hebrews gathered in the wilderness.”*)

The answer? “Enough.”

This really is the miracle of the *manna*: not that food suddenly appeared on the ground, but that there was enough for everyone. Those who gathered little found they had enough; those who gathered more than they needed had nothing over. They all had what they needed to support life.

“Enough” is a word you cannot take in if you lack food security. It takes huge trust in God—and Moses on the part of the Israelites—to abide by the rule to gather just what is needed. Strangely, in our modern economy of plenty and constant growth, it is a word we North Americans scarcely recognize. The lesson doesn’t seem to last for the Israelites either, but for this moment the Israelites demonstrate that they trust that God will sustain them enough to satisfy their needs and permit them to observe Sabbath with nothing extra to burden them on the journey. After escaping Egypt with their lives and despite disobedience, here is another rich opportunity to discover abundance in God’s loving and forgiving care. How they must have celebrated over this miraculous food!

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20), says Jesus, and very often so is the coffee or teapot and a snack. In our search for connection to one another and God, what could be better than sharing a meal? Everyone needs sustenance, no matter the form of delivery. The act of sharing food has the power to bring together vastly diverse people as all our senses, whether taste, smell, hearing, sight, or touch, are opened to one another at the table where the spirit in me greets the spirit in you.

As part of my seminary training, I volunteered every Saturday for nine months at “Friendship Inn,” a drop-in centre in downtown Saskatoon where people are served a free meal twice a day. The food, or money to purchase it, is donated by local businesses, charitable organizations, and individuals. Everyone who comes through the door is welcome to partake of the nourishing soups, sandwiches, fresh or canned fruit and vegetables, cookies, and other treats. On rare occasions there is pizza.

Although it sounds like a soup kitchen, the Inn’s primary purpose is not feeding. It is gathering community. Week after week, youth, middle-aged, and elderly alike come together, talking about their lives and helping one another solve such problems as finding an apartment or filling out government forms. Young men newly released from prison find a mentor in one of the employees who works with a support group for anyone wanting to make a positive change in their lives. Over a hot meal, people with few material resources to spare create community through giving and receiving expertise, friendship, wisdom, and encouragement. “Friendship Inn,” and other places like it across the country, demonstrate that there *is* enough to go around and that more than mere nutrition is gained by sharing food.

When the disciples return from their first mission trip, all they want, as Miriam Spies pointed out in her sermon at General Council 43, is a break. But when they try to send the hungry people away to forage on their own, Jesus insists, “You give them something to eat.” They should have learned something on their travels about creating community and discovering abundance. When the disciples begin by looking at what they do have, rather than what they lack, they discover there is more than enough, for 12 baskets full of broken pieces of bread and fish are returned. Where with our fractured hearts and minds we perceive only scarcity, there is always more than enough. When we answer the call to be church together, we discover that, surprise, we are not alone and we have more than enough to offer.

Your spiritual homework this week is to practise eating and drinking in God’s name, opening your awareness to the abundance of God’s love in the food you enjoy and share with others. Imagine, what would our world be like if everyone had enough?

# Sunday 3 Children’s Program

## Manna, Food, and the Power of Sharing

### Preparation

Teachers and a volunteer (who is good at storytelling) prepare rice crackers and bowls (one bowl per child). A bread machine is prepared and turned on ahead of time to create the smell of baking bread as the children enter the children’s room. The idea is to evoke the sense of food.

### Opening

Welcome the children and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us give thanks to God before we begin our learning today.  
God of food, thank you for feeding us each day with daily food.  
Help us learn about offering through sharing food and sharing stories.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

### Introduction to Activity

Ask the children: Do you smell something? Do you feel hungry? (*Pause and engage with the children’s responses.*)

### Engaging Activity

Today, the children will explore the story of the five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:30–44).

Everyone sits on a chair in a circle. First a teacher or volunteer reads the story. Since it is a well-known story, some of the children may have heard it already and have formed pictures inside their heads.

Next, the children are invited to tell the story by themselves. They tell the story in a kind of relay format with each child composing a sentence for the story and the next piggy-backing their sentence onto the one before. As each child has a turn, the story unfolds. Teachers should not be too worried about accuracy. Allow the children to use their imaginations and the freedom to remember the story as they wish. For example, one can begin with the sentence “One day, Jesus and his disciples went to a boat.” “They got in the boat and the boat felt a bit wobbly.” “They paddled; it was hard work.” “When they arrived at the other side, people were waiting for them.” “They told Jesus to teach them.” “So he did.” “Jesus taught many things for many hours.” “They all became tired and hungry.” “Jesus told disciples to feed them.” “Disciples knew that they only had two fishes and five loaves.” “Yet, as they shared the food, it never ran out; there was a lot left over.” “The miracle happened.”

It is hard to predict what the end of the children’s story might be. The story may take unexpected twists and turns. It may even end differently from the story in the Bible. This is okay—there is no wrong ending. Teachers must learn to trust the Spirit. The teacher might try to direct the story with questions, but should not control it. The teacher might also want to explore the story by asking questions about things that are not in the Bible story such as, “What was the weather like when they got in the boat?” or “What were people doing on the shore while the waited for Jesus?” When the storytelling is done, teachers can ask, “What was different in our story compared with the one that was read?” “Did you learn anything new?” “Was it fun to tell the story in this way?”

Teachers can go further by reflecting: “This storytelling is an example of the power of sharing. By sharing the story together, instead of one person controlling the story with all of the knowledge, the story becomes fuller and more enriching. Sharing a story is like sharing food. Everyone has something to eat, and we all eat well and feel full by sharing.”

### Rice Cracker Sharing Game

* There are four children.
* Three children are given four rice crackers in a bowl, but one child is given only two crackers.
* The first three children give one cracker to the one who received only two. The one who had the least now has the most (five crackers, the rest have three crackers).
* Perhaps, that is what happened in the story in Mark. People were so grateful that they all offered to each other. At the end, they were left with abundant food and an abundant feeling of gratitude.

### Closing

End with the Lord’s Prayer, inviting children to raise their voices when reciting the line, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

# Sunday 4 Worship Service

## We Offer Gratitude through Creation

### Prelude

### Welcome

God be with you,  
**and also with you.**We greet each other in the name of the triune God:  
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment through nature, Christ’s light shines. Alleluia!**

### Acknowledging the Land

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

### Opening Prayer

(*Praying in four directions, following the tradition of some Indigenous people(s).*)

As we embody the acknowledgement of Indigenous people(s) and their stewardship of the land on which we stand, let us pray, honouring the tradition of many First Nations by praying facing the four directions.

(*facing east*)

From the east, the direction of the rising sun, we receive peace and light and wisdom and knowledge.  
**We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(*facing south*)

From the south come warmth, guidance, and the beginning and the end of life.  
**We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(*facing west*)

From the west comes the rain, purifying waters, to sustain all living things.  
**We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(*facing north*)

From the north come the cold and mighty wind, the white snows, giving us strength and endurance.  
**We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(*facing upward*)

From the heavens we receive darkness and light, the air of your breath, and messages from your winged creatures.  
**We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(*facing downward*)

From the earth we come and to the earth we will return.  
**We are grateful for your creation, Mother Earth, O God.**

### Opening Hymn

“Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (*Voices United* 308)

### Prayer of Confession

God of all creation,  
you love us into being,  
yet we often flee our rightful place in your creation.  
We confess that we exploit the gifts you place around us,  
and dominate the richness of the natural order.  
Forgive our greedy grasping.  
We confess our part in the devastation of our planet home,  
mirrored in the violence of cities  
and the brokenness of hearts.  
Forgive and restore us, O God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

### Words of Assurance

Nurturing God, remind us of other ways to live  
and of a place called home,  
**where creation reflects your goodness**and each thing lives in balance with all others.  
Come and find us, set us right again,  
**and take us home.[[6]](#footnote-6)**

### Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“Mother Earth, Our Mother Birthing” (*More Voices* 39)

### Children’s Time

Can you name a prophet in the Bible? What does a prophet do? (*Pause and engage with the children.*) One of the roles of prophets is to warn people of their wrongdoings. The other role is to speak to the people on behalf of God. The prophet Amos did both. He is telling the people of Israel that God hates our offering because the offering came as a result of exploitation (Amos 5). It is like offering God the gifts that we stole from someone else. The prophet Amos is letting us know that God is angry because our offering is not compatible with God’s justice and mercy. God is sad because God created us equally in God’s image, but we created hierarchy so that only a very few people get wealth and power.

God is particularly concerned that our fellow creatures are suffering because of human greed and consumption. Instead of looking after the creation, we have abused it. We will learn more about this in the sermon and in the children’s program as we meditate on the story of creation in Genesis. Jesus, in his time, was also angry for the same reason as Amos was angry. Jesus was angry because people were selling and buying things, making them vulnerable to the few who could take advantage of them (Matthew 21:12–16). Jesus is especially angry that this is happening at the Temple, the place of prayer and worship.

How would you feel if you came to church and found people making money by selling the stuff that you donated to give to others? In the children’s program we will learn about plastic waste that is killing our birds and fish and destroying the oceans. We will learn how our human greed and the cycle of producing, buying, and selling is closely connected with ecological degradation and crisis.

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_4_Children’s)*. Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service.*)

### Invitation Hymn to Offering

“We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” (MV 143)

### Offering

### Scripture

Genesis 1:26–28; Amos 5:21–24; Matthew 21:12–16

### Sung Prayer of Illumination

“Hey Ney Yana” (MV 217)

### Sermon

The Dying Elephant in the Temple (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_4_Sermon)*.*)

### Response Hymn

“I See a New Heaven” (VU 713)

### Prayers of the People

In God’s vision, every part of creation is good;  
every part of creation is of value in and of itself;  
humanity is a precious part of the intricate, beautiful web of life.

**In Jesus’ day, wild animals were rounded up from Israel   
and taken for sport killing in Rome’s arenas.  
The hills of Israel were deforested  
 for palaces in distant lands.  
Men, women, and children died of lead poisoning  
from water pipes, eating utensils, and cooking pots.**

In our world today, plants and animals are disappearing forever.  
Our air and water are polluted.  
We exploit and deplete natural resources easily.  
Poorer nations hold richer nations responsible  
for environmental problems,  
and assert that our environmental concerns  
are a smokescreen to guarantee our wealth.

**As individuals and as the global community,  
and with God’s help,  
let us work to end the accusations and fears,  
exploitation and destruction,  
and thus restore life and joy  
 to all God’s creation.[[7]](#footnote-7)**

### The Prayer of Jesus

(alternative version by Jim Cotter, VU p. 916)

### Commissioning Song

“Called by Earth and Sky” (MV 135)

### Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Learn about environmental justice actions that are happening at churches, faith communities, schools, and work places, both locally and globally.
* Invite Indigenous leaders and learn about their ideas around stewardship of the land; plan concrete ways of working with Indigenous people(s) for ecological justice toward reconciliation.
* Engage the ways that your church can participate in ecological justice (e.g., audit the energy consumption).
* Think about fundraising opportunities using environmental issues as a teaser. For example, special donation invitation for churches’ ecological sustainability and improvements, replacing old bulbs with LCD bulbs, or installing new water efficient toilets, or new windows and doors for improved insulation.
* Examine biblical and theological human-centred views of creation.
* Develop concrete actions to practise the “three Rs” (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) at homes, churches, schools, and work places including ten ways to go plastic-free (see *The United Church* *Observer* magazine, April 2018).

# 

# Sunday 4 Sermon

## The Dying Elephant in the Temple

(*Consider adding a dirty glass of water and/or a pile of crumpled and dirty paper money to the worship space*.)

For centuries, Christians have had a “hate-on” for the dove sellers and money changers in the Temple as if they are the cause and not the symptom of spiritual illness. Let us remember, however, that they are doing nothing wrong: their business supports legitimate Temple worship. The Temple is not unclean, despite what our Bibles tell us about Jesus cleansing it. Although silenced in the gospel, the merchants would likely protest Jesus’ destruction of their stalls with something like, “But we’ve always done it this way.” They would be right.

But prophets don’t preach the status quo. Followed by the scriptural authorities of Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11), Jesus’ actions are theatrical and prophetic. He might also have cited Amos: “I hate; I despise your festivals!” (Amos 5:21) In accordance with a prophet’s behaviour, Jesus first acts to alarm the elite and those who serve them, and then contextualizes how the actions should be understood.

When Jesus accuses the Temple authorities of making the “house of prayer” into a den of robbers, he does nothing more than state the obvious that no one else wants to admit.

This, too, is the work of a prophet. In contrast to modern Euro-centric economics in which wealth and goods are seen as constantly increasing and no growth is a bad thing, in ancient Palestine they were understood to be finite. Stasis was the rule. Anyone’s increase in wealth could only happen at the expense of others’ loss.[[[8]](#footnote-8)](#_bookmark7) Hence, the Temple, a place where growing wealth is stored, is a den for robbers. In the economy of limited good where anyone’s gain, legitimate or otherwise, is understood to happen only by another’s loss, Jesus rightly accuses the Temple authorities of robbery because the Temple has wealth. What looks like an insult is merely an observation of the elephant in the Temple.

Having got the ethics straight about the purpose of Temple worship—community health—Jesus proceeds to heal it, to make it whole by admitting “the blind and the lame,” those who are excluded from drawing near. Again, his action is buttressed by prophetic speech, first by a chorus of children quoting Psalm 118:25, and then by his insulting rebuttal to the rhetorical question of the chief priests and scribes: “Have you never read?” Did he coach those children? His playing up to the self-aggrandizement in “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies/you have prepared praise for yourself” is a kind of “Just watch me!” moment. “You bet,” he says to the chief priests and scribes, “I am bad. Real bad!” His words and actions amount to nothing more revolutionary, however, than pointing out what everyone already knows: when human systems function for their own sake and not for community wellness, they oppress.

There are prophets among us today also pointing out the obvious. They can be found in those pointing to emaciated polar bears searching for food in a melting Arctic, to the heat and smoke of forest fires that rage every summer in Australia, California, Europe, and across every forested region of Canada (as I write this in Saskatchewan, my eyes smart from the smoke from British Columbia), and in the words of Indigenous elders who repeatedly point to the changes in the animals and land. The acclaimed 2010 film *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* by Nunavut filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk and environmental scientist Ian Mauro documents how everything is changing, including the position of the sun. (*Share a* [*video clip*](https://vimeo.com/36725990)*.*)

In the Judeo-Christian creation story, God creates humankind in God’s image, like a painter or a poet who makes a representation. It is a good image, a good likeness. It is so good, in fact, that God puts limits on how we are to behave in God’s creation; we are to have dominion. The word “dominion” in the NRSV is a Latinate translation of the Hebrew “*radah*” and has been the subject of considerable, ongoing theological discussion. What does “dominion over” mean? If we consider that humankind is made in the image of God, then humankind’s role in relation to creation is also in the image of God, which suggests in the Hebrew Bible formulation, a kingly responsibility for creation. In the creation story, God also creates the waters, land, animals, fish, birds, and every living thing. Human “dominion” then, in the image of God’s relationship to God’s creation, does not authorize the untrammeled use of creation, but urges a relationship with creation as co-creator, as God is Creator. The rainbow reminds us that, after the flood, God promised never again to destroy creation. As sea levels rise, we must ask whether humankind has volunteered to go back on God’s word!

As other animals become extinct, primarily through habitat degradation, human animals look on in literal disbelief. How could our use of resources have anything to do with the environmental changes around us? Is it true, after all, that the environment is a limited good? Is it also true that whatever we take for our gain results in loss somewhere else?

Have we tragically forgotten our relationship to creation? Have we lost the habit of gratitude?

Let us heed the words of Amos who calls for radical repentance, a radical turning again. Through Amos, God refuses the worship of things as a return on God’s investment in us— “burnt offerings and grain offerings” (Amos 5:22). Instead, God yearns that justice and righteousness should be our worship and flow, not like a wadi that dries up between rainy seasons, but like a river, an “everflowing stream” (Amos 5:24) of waters.

Thanks to Jesus we have seen the dying elephant in the Temple, and it is us. I won’t repeat what you already know—that individual reductions in resource use can make a big difference. In addition, we need a Jesus moment—an overturning of the tables, an overthrowing of the very structures and legitimized habits, symbolized by the dove sellers and money changers, upon which our metaphoric Temple worship is based. How might we join our voices with those many prophets, including Jesus, to make a change for God’s creation? How might we live out the dominion God grants us by caring for God’s body, our beloved earth? Let justice and righteous flow, like an everflowing stream!

# Sunday 4 Children’s Program

## Weeping God, Angry Jesus, and Suffering Creation

### Preparation

Teachers (at least one teacher) and a volunteer (ideally an expert in ecology) record a dramatic reading of the story of Jesus overthrowing the money changers’ tables in the Temple (Matthew 21:12–17). As they make the recording, they might include the sound of a table turning upside down, the sound of people urgently selling and buying, the sound of money changing. It will help to create the atmosphere of buying and selling in the precincts of the Temple in those times. It will also help create the mood for understanding Jesus’ anger. The atmosphere of urgency, of greed, of anger will be echoed by reflections on the ecological crisis. Also, make copies of the list of 10 ways to go plastic-free (based on *The United Church Observer* magazine, April 2018) that will be handed to each child at the end.

### Opening

Welcome the children to the children’s program and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us give thanks to God before we begin our learning today…  
Creator God,  
Thank you for creating this beautiful world.  
 Help us care for mother Earth.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

### Introduction to Activity

Ask the children “How might God be feeling as God sees creation suffer?” (*Pause and engage with the children’s responses.*) Explain how you will be talking about God being angry and sad because of our greed and carelessness with creation.

### Engaging Activity

Play the recording of the dramatic reading of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers and then ask the following questions:

* What did you hear? (*Pause and engage with the children’s responses.*)
* Why did Jesus drive out all those who were selling and buying at the Temple?
* Why did he turn the tables upside down?

Jesus was angry because rich and powerful people were taking advantage of poor and powerless people. Jesus is still angry today because some people who are already wealthy continue tempting us to buy more stuff than we need so that they can become even more wealthy. We are doing this not only to our fellow humans, but also to fellow creatures.

The poor and the powerless are not only humans, but also creation. Do you see how we are taking advantage of animals and nature for our profit? In what ways do we exploit nature and animals? (*Pause and engage with the children’s responses.* Share the video [*Plastic Ocean*](https://youtu.be/ju_2NuK5O-E).)

Plastic overuse is one of the most obvious examples of how we are hurting creation by our consumer culture. Everything, almost everything, we buy, has plastic. This plastic is filling our garbage sites and spilling over into the environment, killing animals, polluting oceans, and ultimately killing us.

### Closing

Hand out the copies of the list of 10 ways of living plastic-free. Encourage the children to practise reducing, reusing, and recycling. The hand-out also advises us about changing the ways we shop and consume. Encourage the children to take the hand-out home and to share it with friends at school. Ask them: “Do you think it will be easy to live by this list?

What will be the hardest thing to do? How is God helping us to do the hard things?”

The children might bring back the list next Sunday and together you might talk about these things and dedicate the list to God at the Thanksgiving Sunday service.

# Sunday 5 Worship Service

## Thanksgiving Sunday

*Note: This service aims to offer gratitude as a culmination of the last four weeks’ learning. As an example of this culmination, people are invited to present symbolic concrete offerings of gratitude; there will be a procession as assigned people bring and put these symbols on the communion table. These things could be the things that were used in previous services and/or things that congregations worked on as worship follow-up. What is suggested in the prayer of thanksgiving is only an example. This service is intended to be intergenerational.*

*Involve congregation members of all ages in worship. While there will be a sermon, it is to be short and animated. Sunday school activity is provided, but it can be incorporated into a children’s time activity.*

### Procession Hymn

“Psalm 100” (*Voices United* p. 822)

### Welcome

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it. (Psalm 24:1).

### Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment, especially at the time of harvest, Christ’s light shines. Alleluia!**

### Opening Prayer (unison)

“ʼTis the Gift to Be Simple” (VU 353)

### Opening Hymn

“Grateful” (*More Voices* 182)

(*While singing, those assigned for the prayer will come forward and stand in front of the mic.*)

### Prayer of Confession and Assurance

(*Six people, including children, will take turns leading the parts.*)

How many people have done something wrong?  
Part of growing up  
is being able to take responsibility for our lives and our actions.  
One helpful way to do that is to name before God  
our pain and our faults,  
our sins, as we call them in church.  
That’s what we do in our prayer of confession.  
This is an action prayer—stand if you can.  
Let us pray with hope, sure and true,  
that God sees our sinfulness  
and does not turn away from us.

**Leader 1** (*touching the sides of their mouth with both hands*)  
 Let us offer up the sins of our mouths.  
Gracious God,  
we offer up to you the words we’ve said in anger  
or when feeling spiteful or hurt,  
lies we’ve told that we thought didn’t matter  
or that we could “get away with.”

**Leader 2** (*two hands on head*)  
Let us offer up the sins of our minds.  
Holy God,  
we offer up to you thoughts we’ve had that “cut down” others  
or show a lack of respect for ourselves.

**Leader 3** (*hands over heart*)  
Let us offer up to God the sins of our hearts.  
Merciful God,  
we offer up to you the times our hearts were bitter  
and we refused to forgive,  
or when we were sad and refused to be comforted,  
or when we were hardened to others and didn’t share love.

**Leader 4** (*hands open, upwards, chest height*)  
 Let us offer up the sins of our hands.  
Loving God,  
we offer up to you the times we used our hands  
to do things that brought harm to others,  
to the earth or to ourselves,  
the times we were not kind.

**Leader 5** (*lifting open hands overhead*)  
Let us take the sins of our mouths and our minds,  
our hearts and our hands, and release them to the heart of God.

**Leader 6** (*one hand spiralling downward*)   
God will transform us,  
pure and clean as the dove of the Holy Spirit,  
for we are loved.  
This is the Good News of the Gospel.

**Thanks be to God.**

(*Celebrate God’s Presence*, pp. 34–35, reproduced with permission of *Gathering* magazine)

### Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“For the Fruit of All Creation” (VU 227)

### Children’s Time

Do you notice anything different in worship today? (*Pause and show the gifts offered on the communion table and take the children to the front where the communion table is situated.*) Why are these items here today? These are gifts that our church family brought to celebrate Thanksgiving Sunday. Some are yummy, delicious foods. Some are photos pointing to the serious situation of our earth, the harm caused to the living creation. Some are pictures of people in the city (town) who are hungry and homeless. Some are signs of protest from courageous people who seek justice. Some show beautiful works of art.

As you see, offering gratitude to God is more than giving material things. It includes our own action, our support of helping hands, and our commitment to working together with others to make a better world. That is why Thanksgiving does not happen just today. We have to be faithful to offering gratitude to God and to one another every day. You see, things you see here cannot be accomplished alone. No one super person can achieve this independently. Offering gratitude is collective and communal work. It is the work of the people. And that is also the meaning of worship. So let us continue to worship, offering gratitude as we pray together.

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_5_Children’s)*. Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service*.)

### Prayers of Thanksgiving

(*Add/change the items listed in parentheses according to choices your community has made to bring to the table in prayer.*)

For the beauty and wonder of creation (*grain or water in a jar*),  
**we thank you God.**

For our daily food, for our homes, families, and friends (*casserole dish*),  
**we thank you God.**

For minds to think and hearts to love (*study materials on ecological crises and/or cards for the sick*),  
**we thank you God.**

For health, strength, and skill to work (*oil, crafts, or drawings done by children*) and for leisure to rest and play (*musical instruments or creative art from a silent retreat*),  
**we thank you God.**

For those who are brave and courageous (*photos of Indigenous people protesting*), patient in suffering and faithful in adversity (*photos of people suffering from poverty or images of environmental disasters*),  
**we thank you God.**

For all who pursue peace, justice, and truth (*prayer shawls or LED bulbs, fair trade coffee*),  
**we thank you God.**

For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women,  
revealing the image of Christ (*posters of an event where different groups are working together*),  
**we thank you God.**

Today, we give thanks especially for…  
and for all the saints whose lives have reflected the light of Christ (*tea light candles*),  
**we thank you God. Amen.[[9]](#footnote-9)**

### Scripture

Isaiah 55; Luke 14:15–24

### Sermon

The Great Dinner Party (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_5_Sermon)*.*)

### Response Hymn to the Reflection

“I Danced in the Morning” (VU 352)

### Invitation Hymn to Offering

“What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering

### Sharing Peace

“Ubi Caritas” (Latin and English) (MV 170)

### The Service of Thanksgiving

May God be with us.  
**God is here among us.**Let us open our hearts to God.  
**We open them to God and to one another.**Let us give thanks to God.  
**It is right to give thanks and praise.**

**Child:** Why do we give thanks and praise at this table?  
**Presider:** We give thanks because God is always with us.

We thank you, God, Creator of us all;  
from the beginning you made the world and all its creatures.  
You made people to live for you and for one another.  
We praise you, O God.  
**We praise you, O God**.

You created Adam and Eve and gave them a garden;  
you showed Noah a rainbow;  
you gave Moses strength to free your people  
and taught Miriam to sing;  
you gave courage to Esther  
 and loyalty to Ruth;  
you gave David a harp to sing your praise,  
and helped him defeat the giant.  
We praise you, O God.  
**We praise you, O God**.

Yet, even they turned away from you  
and forgot about you, as we do, too.  
But you did not forget.  
You sent Jesus to the world  
to show how much you love us  
and to bring us back to you again.  
We praise you, O God.  
**We praise you, O God**.

He came as one of us,  
first an infant, then a child,  
later a youth, then an adult.  
He rejoiced with those who rejoiced,  
and wept with those who wept.  
To the despairing, he spoke a word of hope.  
To the sick, he gave healing.  
To the hurting, he was a friend.

Still, people turned away from you.  
They betrayed Jesus and nailed him to a cross.  
But he was lifted from the grave and restored to life,   
that he might be with us and we with him,  
alive for evermore!  
Therefore, with all the saints of every time and place,  
we join the angels in their praise by singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” (MV 206).

**Holy, holy, holy,  
God of power of might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the One who comes in God’s name.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Child:** Why do we eat bread at this table?  
**Presider:** We gather at this table to remember that  
on the night before he died, Jesus ate with his friends.   
He took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it,  
he broke it and gave it to them, saying:  
**“Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.  
Each time you do this, remember me.”**

**Child:** Why do you drink from the cup at this table?  
**Presider:** That same night, Jesus also took a cup, and after giving thanks,   
passed it to his friends, saying:  
“Drink. This cup, poured out for you, is the promise of God.  
Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

**Child:** What do we remember at this table?  
**Presider:** We remember Jesus’ death and celebrate his resurrection;   
we await with hope his coming again  
to bring peace and justice to the earth;  
and we proclaim the mystery of our faith by singing “Christ Has Died…” (MV 207).

**Christ had died.   
Christ is risen.  
Christ will come again.**

Send, O God, your Holy Spirit upon us and what we do here,   
that we and these gifts, touched by your Spirit,  
may be signs of life and love to one another,   
and to the world.  
Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,   
all glory is yours, God most holy,  
now and forever.  
**Amen** (MV 208)

### The Prayer of Jesus

### Breaking the Bread and Filling the Cup

Come, for all things are now ready.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### Communion Hymns

“Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (VU 468)  
“Let Us Break Bread Together” (VU 480)  
“God Bless to Us Our Bread” (MV 193)

### Post-Communion Prayer

**Take wheat—  
Scatter it on hills and valleys of the world. Let it grow and harden.  
Gather it together:  
Let each grain yield itself to millstones To make flour;  
And let the flour bear the cruel heat of ovens To make bread  
For the world.**

**Take human beings—  
Scatter them on streets and skyscrapers of the city,   
Let them grow and learn.  
Gather them together:  
Let each one yield to Christ’s commands  
To make a Church.  
And let the Church bear the cruel heat of human pain  
To become bread  
For the world.**

Clifford Elliott (1973) in *Sharing Our Song: Song, Story & Prayer* (Saskatoon: St. Andrew’s College)[[10]](#footnote-10)

### Benedictions and Sending Forth

May God continue to bless us as we respond to your call, share your abundance, and follow you.  
You called everyone who thirsts to come to the waters, multiplied loaves and fishes, and invited all of us to the banquet.  
We will go out in joy and be led back in peace.  
As we go out, help us remember that Christ has no body but ours.

### Commissioning Song

“Christ Has No Body Now but Yours” (MV 171)

### Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Evaluate the last five weeks of services in terms of worship experience.
* Assess the last five weeks of services in terms of identifying next steps for stewardship.
* Evaluate and determine what areas are required to continue and what areas need change in terms of worship and other parts of the church life.
* Name new areas and new learnings that could happen in light of offering gratitude.
* Keep doing it as we cannot keep from singing!

# Sunday 5 Sermon

## The Great Dinner Party

(*Dramatis personae: Jesus; Host; Slave; three wealthy people; the congregation arranged into two parts*)

**Minister:** (*playing the role of dinner guest who begins the tale*) Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!

**Jesus:** Funny you should mention that. Let me share with you a story about a great dinner. Once upon a time, there was a rich man who decided to give a dinner and invited many….

**Host:** Come here slave! Go and tell everyone that dinner is ready.

**Slave:** (*to Rich person 1*) Come to my master’s house for everything is prepared.

**Rich person 1:** I am sorry. I cannot come today as I have just bought some land. I must go and see it.

**Jesus:** (*aside*) He bought land without seeing it first? That doesn’t sound right.

**Slave:** (*to Rich person 2*) Come to my master’s house for everything is prepared.

**Rich person 2:** I just bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to try them out; please give my regrets to your master.

**Jesus:** (*aside*) He bought five yoke of oxen without trying them out first? That makes no sense!

**Slave:** (*to Rich person 3*) Come to my master’s house for everything is prepared.

**Rich person 3:** I just got married, so I cannot come to dinner. I don’t want to go to anymore parties.

**Jesus:** (*aside*) He just doesn’t want to invite the host back to his house.

**Slave:** (*to Host*) Everyone is busy and cannot come to the dinner.

**Host:** (*in anger*) Now I want you to go out right away into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in everyone who is poor, crippled, blind, or lame.

**Slave:** (*aside to congregation*) He’s lost it! (*to Host*) Whatever you say! (*Slave runs around the church inviting half the congregation. He may be accompanied by children from the children’s program delivering invitations to Holy Communion.*[[11]](#footnote-11)) Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.

**Host:** Go out into the roads and lanes outside the city and compel even those people to come in so my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.

**Slave:** As you wish. (*Slave and children deliver the remaining invitations to the other half of the congregation.*)

**Jesus:** What does it take to eat bread in God’s kin-dom?

**Minister:** Let’s try to answer Jesus’ question…

In the time of Jesus, your place in society depended upon your honour, not your income or your style of dress or how many toys you had. Honour was public reputation and determined how you were treated in social life, such as where you sat at a banquet and whom you invited to your house. If you had money but lacked honour, you were called “poor.” The reverse was true: if you had no money but enjoyed a good reputation, you would be a person of honour. Dishonour was based on any physical, mental, or social anomaly, such as having a disability or being a widow without a son. Being “poor” meant that you did not have a place at the table. Being “poor” made people vulnerable, “religiously, economically, politically, and domestically.”[[[12]](#footnote-12)](#_bookmark11) In this social hierarchy some fortunate people were on top and some below; movement from “poor” to “honourable” was rare. As we have seen in other stories, Jesus criticized these arrangements for they perpetuated injustice. By contrast, in the kin-dom of God, justice and righteousness flow like a river and Jesus’ ministry and ours is all about bringing that kin-dom into being.

When the dinner guest says, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God,” Jesus responds with a story that helps us better understand the qualities of that kingdom and the meaning of the word “anyone.” Notice that the first two people make nonsensical excuses and the third likely does not want to have to return the favour and invite the host to a later dinner.

The host is angered by their rejection; they insult his honour by refusing relationship. The story could have stopped there, but instead, expectations are reversed when the honourable and wealthy host opens his home to the poor, to those who cannot reciprocate. He invites not only “the poor, crippled, blind, and lame,” but also those living outside the walls of the city—prostitutes, beggars, and thieves. He fills his house and breaks bread with those who will bring him dishonour. Jesus uses this story to show the dinner guest that “anyone” willing to accept the invitation can eat bread in the kin-dom of God, not just those of the elite who seem to have the price of admission.

The open invitation of the great dinner is for “everyone who thirsts” (Isaiah: 55:1) to “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1) for in fact what returns to the host, or the Lord of hosts, multiplies like the miracle of the bread and fish. As we hear in Isaiah 55:11–13:

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;   
t shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
For you shall go out in joy  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

As we gather today in gratitude remembering all we are and have from God—food, friends, family—we also gather grounded in who and whose we are: children of God, carers for creation, sharers in the abundance that is enough for all, and God’s beloved to act in the world so that God’s kin-dom may come on earth. Thanks be to God for the blessing of this day. Come, let’s have a banquet!

# 

# Sunday 5 Children’s Program

## Offering Thanksgiving to God with Whole Heart and Whole Mind

### Preparation

Teachers (at least one teacher) and a volunteer (who has helped in previous weeks) collect the things that were used in the previous classes. For example, a song sheet and musical instruments, essential oils, rice crackers, and the 10 ways to go plastic-free list. These are placed on the table.

### Opening

Every day is a special Sunday. But today is extra special. Why? Because it is Thanksgiving Sunday. Let us give special thanks to God:

Creator God,  
Thank you for being such a great God who is always generous to us.  
Help us to be always thankful and rejoice in your love.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

### Introduction to Activity

Today is a review day. We are not going to learn something new. Thanksgiving Sunday is a day we thank God by offering our harvest. Reviewing what we have been doing is a great way to offer our gratitude to God. We can show the fruit of our learning and offer up the harvest of our practices and actions as a way of thanksgiving.

Children are invited to the table where all of the items from the previous sessions are displayed. Some children may have been present for each of the last four weeks, while others may have attended the children’s program just one or two times. A few may never have been there. Let the children identify what they recognize. For example, the children who were part of the offering thanksgiving to God through music may share what he or she learned that day. Take time with this sharing so that the children who were absent will still get a chance to learn. Sing the song again. Smell some of the scented oils again. See if you can recap the story of Jesus and the loaves and fishes that was told by all of the children together. Talk about ways we can care for creation. Sing, smell, see, and speak—all of these acts are concrete and sensory ways that we give thanks to God.

### Closing

As you say farewell and thank the children for being part of this special program, invite them to take their learnings with them and to reflect further about what they can learn about offering thanks to God.

Offering thanks to God is never-ending. Just as God never stops loving us, we cannot stop giving thanks to God. This thanksgiving offering must be a part of our daily life, contributing to making our world a better place. For example, we learned about the power of sharing food. A need for sharing recognizes that there is poverty. We can learn more about poverty. We learned about oil as a symbol of comfort and healing. We can discover who needs healing and learn what things or rituals we can use to help us practise care and healing for ourselves and others. We learned about the sin of our consumer culture, especially plastic waste. What other ecological issues do we need to learn about?

1. From Liturgies of the World © The Joint Liturgical Group, Great Britain. Used with permission of SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services by The United Church of Canada,* United Church Publishing House, 2000, p. 653. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jamie Arpin-Ricci, “Preach the Gospel at All Times?” *Huffington Post,* Aug. 31, 2012, [huffpost.com/entry/preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-st-francis\_b\_1627781](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-st-francis_b_1627781). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adapted from Prayers for the People. Ten Days for Global Justice, which continues in KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, [kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org/). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. © Janet Crawley, *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services by The United Church of Canada,* United Church Publishing House, 2000, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Used with the permission of Betty Lynn Schwab; all thanks to God! [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Rich, Poor, and Limited Good,” *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003), p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Adapted from *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* © 1985 by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. Used with permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. From *Sharing Our Song: Song, Story and Prayer* by Clifford Elliott (Saskatoon: St. Andrew’s College), 1973. Used with permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. At the invitation to Holy Communion near the end of the service, you may wish to invite anyone preferring not to receive to indicate they wish a blessing. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Rich, Poor, and Limited Good.” *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003), p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)