

***Gathering,* Lent/Easter 2022**

Ash Wednesday to the Last Sunday of Easter

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Excerpted from

*Gathering: Resources for Worship Planners*

Published four times a year, *Gathering* is a worship planning magazine for ministers and lay leaders, music directors, and United Church of Canada worship committees. Subscribe or browse single issues at [UCRDstore.ca](https://www.ucrdstore.ca/magazines/gathering).

## **Ash Wednesday to the Last Sunday of Easter**

## **Lent and Holy Week**

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

**Feast Days\* and Special Days**

\*Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the Lent– Easter cycle. It is marked by the ceremonial distribution of ashes as a symbol of entering into the penitential Season of Lent. The wearing of ashes, made from the burning of the previous year’s palms from Palm Sunday, is considered a sign of repentance, sorrow, and mourning, an appropriate way to begin Lent.

Women’s World Day of Prayer – first Friday in March.

International Women’s Day – March 8.

\*The Triduum – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday.

**Meaning of Name**

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

**Liturgical Colour: Purple**

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

## **Easter**

**Dates:** Easter is currently a moveable feast, celebrated in Western Christianity on the first Sunday after the first astronomical full moon on or after the vernal (spring) equinox (fixed as March 21 for ecclesial purposes). Thus Easter falls between March 22 and April 25 on the Gregorian calendar. Easter Day within Eastern Christianity is calculated in the same manner but following the Julian calendar, using the actual vernal equinox date at the meridian of Jerusalem, and with the added condition that Easter must fall after Passover. There are talks underway exploring the possibility of fixing the date of Easter to the second or third Sunday of April. This would allow all Christians to celebrate on the same day.

**Feast Days\* and Special Days**

April Fool’s Day – April 1.

Holy Humour Sunday – the Sunday after Easter Sunday.

Earth Day – April 22.

\*Ascension Day – 40th day after Easter.

Camping Sunday – last Sunday of April.

**Meaning of Name**

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

**Liturgical Colours**

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

## March 2 – Ash Wednesday

Worship material for Ash Wednesday was contributed by Leigh Sinclair, Leduc-Beaumont P.C., Leduc, Alta.

**Joel 2:1–2, 12–17**

The Day of God is coming.

or **Isaiah 58:1–12**

A fast that pleases God.

**Psalm 51:1–17**

Create in me a new heart, O God.

2 Corinthians 5:20*b*—6:10

Be reconciled to God.

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Concerning almsgiving and fasting.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah 58:1–12: What fasts from consuming might please God today and be a blessing to the earth?

### Spark

Traditionally, the worship presider applies the ashes to each participant’s hands or forehead with words such as “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” With so little touch over the last couple of years, how powerful would it be to have participants apply as well as receive a mark of the cross or perhaps a heart? (Attend to whatever safety protocols will make everyone comfortable.)

You might invite a certain age or stage (e.g., elders or children, newest participants or the longest) to participate in offering the ashes. Or ask a small group, such as members of a Lenten study, membership class, or an Affirming or anti-racism committee, to preside with you. Or invite everyone to join in, pairing people up—either those who don’t know each other or long-time pew mates—to share the imposition of ashes.

### With Children

Prepare the ashes ahead of time from last year’s palms. Then, before or during the service, ask youth and children to help create the mixture of ashes and oil. Before starting, discuss how the oil, while colourless, provides the stickiness or unity. Then show the rich, dark colours of the ashes. Are they soft or soothing? Ask them to mix the oil and ashes. Together, what do they become? What is the colour and texture of the mixture? How does it smell? Why do we do this and what might it mean this year? Note: Hand-washing before and after is essential.

### Sermon Starter

Upon what, and whom, shall we rely? Upon whose rewards and praise? What things and relationships do we need to deny or relinquish in order to seek solely God’s rewards? Paul’s letter to the Corinthians asks us to work, worship, and relate to all in love and gentleness even when we are blamed, distrusted, or ignored by the world. We can do this because we rely on God and not earthly praise. What might the rewards we receive in this lifetime mean to us if we remember God’s love as eternal and sufficient as we follow Jesus? How best can we remember that we are all “recognized by God; terrifically alive” (2 Corinthians 6:9 The Message)?

### Hymns

General/Seasonal

VU 105 “Dust and ashes touch our face”

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

VU 401 “Worship the Lord”

VU 621 “Heal me, hands of Jesus” as a spoken prayer or sung to the tune TRENTHAM (VU 382) using Christ instead of Jesus.

VU 641 “Lord Jesus, you shall be my song”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

## March 6 – Lent 1

*Worship materials for Lent were contributed by Éric Hébert-Daly, Responsable des ministères en français, L’Église Unie du Canada.*

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

My father was a wandering Aramean.

Psalm 91:1–2, 9–16 (VU pp. 807–809)

I will raise you up on eagle’s wings.

Romans 10:8b–13

Declare with your mouth; believe with your heart.

Luke 4:1–13

Jesus tested in the desert.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 91: We are inspired by the soaring of an eagle or other birds, but what are we doing to ensure their habitats? In Luke 4:1–13, Jesus spends time in a dry desert to understand what God is calling him to do. Is there a wasteland, a land stripped bare, nearby, where you (as a congregation) might spend some time contemplating God’s call?

### Spark

Invite the congregation to consider the idea of being held in the palm of the divine hand. Ask folks to focus on the palm of their own hand and consider how God’s creation holds us in the palm of divine hands.

### With Children

*Tithing* is a big word. Talk about what it means to give a portion of what we have. (With older children, you could explain that it means one-tenth.) Sometimes we tithe or give an offering because we are thankful for having something important, like a friend, food, a ball to bounce, air to breathe, or a place to live. We give because it helps us say thanks. If possible, share this short video about an attitude of gratitude: *What Is Gratitude?* (by The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement; voiced by Stephanie Bierman; available online).

### Sermon Starter

Many of our churches now start worship with a land acknowledgement. Our urban reality has replaced God’s creation with human structures that separate us from nature. Land

acknowledgement is an important sign of reconciliation, but also a moment to remember the gift of creation that we share.

The passage in Deuteronomy is reminiscent of the way some Indigenous people express thanks by returning some of the fruits of the land back to the land. The Łutselk'e Dene, for example, drop a pinch of tobacco into the lake before a journey, a ritual that is a prayer to the Creator and recognizes the spiritual nature that is woven into every aspect of life. What are the practices for giving thanks within your community?

In the three temptations in the gospel, the devil attempts to separate Jesus from humanity and from the natural world by asking him to take the rock and turn it into something it is not and to seek colonial power in kingdoms, and by offering to thrust him atop the temple far away from creation.

What can we do to reconnect with creation, and do so with gratitude? There is a name for what ails us: nature-deficit disorder. How can we care for things we are disconnected from? How can we learn from people who cared for and treasured this land for millennia before Settlers came? Let us consider the wilderness and other places of God’s creation that we often take for granted.

### Hymns

*Deuteronomy 26:1–11*

VU 226 “For the beauty of the earth”

VU 293 “We praise you, Creator”

VU 542 “We give you but your own”

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

NVU\* 249/MV 104 “C’est vrai: Dieu est bon”

*Psalm 91:1–2, 9–16*

VU269 “The care the eagle gives her young”

“He’s got the whole world in his hands” (African American spiritual; alternate words: “The whole world is in God’s hands”

*Romans 10:8b–13*

VU 326 “O for a thousand tongues to sing”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

*Luke 4:1–13*

VU 113 “To the desert Jesus came”

VU 375 “Spirit, Spirit of gentleness” / NVU\* 47 “Souffle, vent doux du Saint–Esprit”

MV 118 “Me alone”

MV 143 “We cannot own the sunlit sky”

\**Nos voix unies*March 13 – Lent 2

Genesis 15:1–7, 17–18

God seals the covenant with Abram and Sarai.

Psalm 27 (VU pp. 753-755)

God is my light and my salvation.

Philippians 3:17–4:1

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

Luke 13:31–35

Jesus cries over Jerusalem as a hen over her chicks.

### Creation Connection

Luke 13:31–35: Where might Jesus weep today over destruction in the world?

### Spark

As a centrepiece for today’s worship, set a single lit candle among a group of unlit candles. Place the lit candle at the edge of the group or even at a bit of a distance, to represent the voice of the prophet.

### With Children

Ask the children about times when they have cried. What’s happening when they cry? Is there a reason? Offer a time that you’ve cried and why. Usually, it is because things didn’t go as planned.

Jesus cried too when things weren’t going the way he wanted them to. It happens to all of us. Tears help us release our frustration and our sadness. Once we’ve done that, we can think of new ways of doing something or we notice that things turned out okay in the end. Maybe we even discover something we didn’t know before. When we’re upset about something, we can cry and we can pray, asking God to help us learn or notice something new, even when it’s hard.

### Sermon Starter

The role of a prophet isn’t to sugar-coat things. It is interesting to consider that it’s the Pharisees in the gospel who warn Jesus that Herod is intent on killing him. These are the very people Jesus debates and challenges throughout his ministry. Obviously, there are some who accept Jesus as a valuable voice, even while others are far less enthusiastic about his ministry. Either way, their instinct is to smooth things over, compromise, and try to get along. Jesus doesn’t go for that—there are things to do.

The city that “kills prophets” is one that prefers things to remain exactly as they are. We have a human tendency to be unwilling to engage in dialogue and evolve through it. We each carry our own xenophobia because we like the comfort of things being as we have always known them— surrounded by people who share our culture, language, and customs. We “kill” or shut down and exclude those who offer new visions and approaches.

In the letter to the Philippians, we hear that it is in God that our humiliation as prophets can be transformed. Being an “enemy of the cross of Christ” is to wish to remain attached to our worldly comfort at the cost of a more just and fair world for all. Will we be attached to the world or will we follow Christ?

### Hymns

*Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18*

VU 399 “God, whose love is reigning o’er us”

VU 634 “To Abraham and Sarah”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

*Psalm 27*

VU 79 “Arise, your light is come”

*Philippians 3:17—4:1*

VU 368 “Holy Spirit, truth divine”

*Luke 13:31–35*

VU 269 “The care the eagle gives her young”

VU 636 “Give to the winds your fears”

VU 681 “Where cross the crowded ways of life”

MV 98 “Like a river of tears” March 20 – Lent 3

Isaiah 55:1–9

Come, buy wine and milk without money!

Psalm 63:1–8 (VU p. 781)

I long for you, O God.

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

God will not let you be tested beyond your strength.

Luke 13:1–9

The parable of the barren fig tree.

### Creation Connection

Luke 13:1–9: We tend to like simple solutions, even for the big issues of the environment. Where might we need to dig a little deeper and add more resources?

### Spark

This is a good time of year to find bags of fertilizer and compost. Place a few of them at the front of the sanctuary. Maybe they can be used in your church’s gardens in the spring.

### With Children

Take a plant’s seed (e.g., the seed from an apple) and show it to the children. Ask them what the seed needs in order to grow (soil, water, sunshine). What happens if the seed doesn’t get these things?

Ask the children what we need in order to grow. (Expect answers like food, water, a home). What about loving adults (e.g., parents, grandparents, teachers, aunts and uncles)? Remember that not everyone lives with their parents or feels safe with them. Loving adults guide us and help us grow well. God also is helping and encouraging us all the time, just like God helps an apple tree grow good apples. You might share a version of the parable of the fig tree, including how Jesus wanted the tree to have another chance. For the children, omit the part about chopping it down if it doesn’t bear good fruit. Pray a prayer of thanks to God, who gives us the things that help us grow (body, mind, and soul).

### Sermon Starter

This parable sometimes makes us uncomfortable. It feeds into the sense that God will judge us harshly and that there is no room for forgiveness after the first chance. But of course, this parable is much more than that and must be put in the context of the other parables and sayings of Jesus.

Think of where our strength comes from, biologically: muscles are built from a process of tearing and repairing. New tissue takes place of the old by consuming the protein that our body has absorbed. The same is true in the garden. When you first plant a small strawberry bush, you should remove the fruit before it starts to take shape in the first year or two, so that the plant can put its energy into spreading roots underground. It will then produce many more strawberries in subsequent years.

The purpose of the fig tree is not to have beautiful leaves. A fig tree that answers the call deep within its DNA and has the right conditions for growth produces many figs! Our parable is a call for us to concentrate on our purpose, to trim the things that burn our energy unnecessarily (the way dying branches do), and to produce the fruit that God calls us to produce in our co-creation of the heavenly realm on earth.

Lent is an extraordinary moment to assess our strength, grow from the times we have experienced being torn, draw around us the fertilizer and compost we need, and ensure that the source of our energy is directed to the right places where we can grow new spiritual tissue to build us up.

### Hymns

*Isaiah 55:1–9*

VU 612 “There is a balm in Gilead”

MV 82 “Bathe me in your light”

*Psalm 63:1–8*

VU 31 “O Lord, how shall I meet you”

VU 282 “This Ancient Love”

*1 Corinthians 10:1–13*

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

VU 658 “O love that wilt not let me go”

VU 675 “Will your anchor hold”

*Luke 13:1–9*

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 21 “Open our hearts”

SGP\* 105 “Vine and fig tree”

*\*Songs for a Gospel People*

## March 27 – Lent 4

Joshua 5:9–12

God takes away the shame of Egypt from the people.

Psalm 32 (VU p. 759)

Blessed are those who are forgiven.

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Anyone in Christ is a new creation.

Luke 15:1–3, 11*b*–32

The prodigal son; the prodigal father.

### Creation Connection

2 Corinthians 5:16–21: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.” Might these words sustain us as we tackle the overwhelming issues of climate change? New creation is possible, in us and for the earth.

### Spark

A boomerang on the communion table may be suitable for the parable. No matter how far we go, God calls us home.

### With Children

Have a conversation about fairness with the young people in your community. What does fairness mean to them? Does it mean that everyone gets exactly the same thing? Does it mean that everyone has to be treated the same way? Maybe some of you have struggled with homework or with a certain skill or assignment. It is good to get extra help if you need it. Why? Because not everyone has the same needs. Sometimes what is supposed to be fair (everyone being treated the same) isn’t always the best way. Share a version of the story of the father and the two sons from Luke 15.

### Sermon Starter

Squandered fortunes through dissolute living: that’s the example that Jesus gives us in the parable of the reckless young man who takes his inheritance and spends it until he is destitute and unable to find reasonable work.

We often judge those who do not save, plan, or live within their means. We think of it as weakness, and if people like that become unable to feed themselves, some will claim that they are unworthy of support, that they “had it coming” when they hit hard times.

Jesus tells us this parable to remind us that this is not how God’s kingdom works. We are not judged for what we’ve done or failed to do. We are loved, cared for, and met in our place of need without being identified as “deserving” or not. If you’re hungry, you’re deserving of food, no questions asked. If you’re without shelter, you deserve to be safely and properly housed.

The older brother in today’s parable is echoing what so many of us say when we encounter someone in need, someone who struggles with addiction or who is too “lazy” or who has committed a crime. Are they deserving of our support? Jesus’ answer is a resounding yes. Can we take yes for an answer?

### Hymns

*Joshua 5:9–12*

VU 260 “God who gives to life its goodness”

VU 274 “Your hand, O God, has guided”

VU 460 “All who hunger”

*Psalm 32*

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 685 “We turn to you”

*2 Corinthians 5:16–21*

VU 376 “Spirit of the living God”

MV 153 “Body, mind and spirit”

*Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32*

VU 271 “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy”

VU 348 “O love, how deep”

VU 584 “Through the heart of every city”

VU 600 “When I needed a neighbour”

MV 94 “Love knocks and waits”

“Two sons (How could I be so misguided?)” by Gordon Wray (p. 56 of this issue)

## April 3 – Lent 5

Isaiah 43:16–21

Look, I am doing something new.

Psalm 126 (VU p. 850)

Those who sow in tears reap with joy.

Philippians 3:4b–14

I count everything as loss but knowing Christ.

John 12:1–8

Mary anoints Jesus with costly ointment.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah 43:16–21: We look, notice, and perceive the increasing effects of climate change. We are frustrated by the slow movement of governments to address the underlying contributors to the situation. Yet, can we also look, notice, and perceive where God is at work?

### Spark

Get a roll of nickels or dimes minted this year (usually available from a bank). Tape a coin to each bulletin or distribute them so that everyone has a shiny new coin to reflect upon. You can encourage people to consider what they will do with their new wealth! Today it might not seem like much, but a hundred years ago, a nickel could buy a ticket to a “nickelodeon” movie, a simple breakfast at a diner, a pack of gum, or a bottle of pop.

### With Children

Create a treasure chest with a bunch of coins (chocolate coins if that’s a safe choice). Ask the young people to imagine that this chest has enough money in it to buy a big house with a big backyard or the biggest playground possible! (Or choose an option appropriate to your context. Be aware that there may be people who are homeless or who are forced to move around a great deal due to their circumstances.) Then ask an adult (or volunteer yourself) to move next to the chest and ask which is most valuable: the chest or the person beside it. We might be tempted to choose the chest for many good reasons. Sometimes the world makes us think that things are more valuable than people, but in God’s eyes, we are loved beyond all the money and riches in the world. God always sees people as more important than any “stuff.” But God also wants every person to have a loving home and good food. (If you’ve used chocolate coins, share them, providing alternatives for those with food allergies.)

### Sermon Starter

What things do we place value on? In Isaiah, we are told to forget what has happened before because God is doing something new. We need to be able to perceive it. In Philippians, the things that Paul valued are now worthless to him, now that he “sees” or understands the world as a Christ follower. Mary places her value on Jesus rather than on the ointment she showers on his feet.

The value of the past is the fertilizer it creates to make new things grow. The new that emerges may not look anything like what we knew previously, even if the past helped nurture and feed the new thing. We place so much value on the tradition and history of material things and ritual practices in our congregations that we might get distracted from the arc of the future—or more importantly, all that is divinely valued.

The letter to the Philippians warns of the distinction between the “righteousness of our own” and the “righteousness from God based on faith.” It is easy for us to rely on what we think is right in our minds, particularly when that meets our selfish needs. But how often do we stop and ask ourselves, “Is this a divinely righteous way or merely a human one?” Are we getting caught up in the values that have been designated valuable by human beings or by divine spirit?

### Hymns

*Isaiah 43:16–21*

VU 601 “The church of Christ in every age”

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

MV 125 “When a grain of wheat”

*Psalm 126*

VU 166 “Joy comes with the dawn”

*Philippians 3:4b–14*

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

MV 106 “I am the dream”

NVU\* 124 “Si tu dénoues les liens de servitude”

*John 12:1–8*

VU 129 “Said Judas to Mary”

VU 667 “Jesus, priceless treasure”

SGP 130 “Give me oil in my lamp”

*\*Nos voix unies*

## April 10 – Palm/Passion Sunday

Worship materials for Holy Week and Easter Sunday were contributed by Leigh Sinclair, Leduc-Beaumont P.C., Leduc, Alta.

## Liturgy of the Palms

Luke 19:28–40

Jesus enters Jerusalem to cheering crowds.

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

The stone which the builders rejected.

## Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4–9*a*

They struck my back and plucked my beard.

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

My body and soul are wasting away.

Philippians 2:5–11

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

Luke 22:14—23:56

Judas betrays Jesus; arrest, trial, crucifixion.

or **Luke 23:1–49**

Jesus is arrested, tried, and crucified.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 31:9–16: This psalm gives us words of lament and longing that can model for us an offering of lament over the effects of climate change, drought, poverty, racism, and more, as well as our longing for what still may be because of God’s grace.

### Spark

A liminal Sunday of both celebration and foreshadowing. Think of hinges, folds, and weavings that allow all colours, emotions, and stories to come together, though from one perspective alone they may not match or make sense. God will allow meaning to blossom, in time, in God’s time. Find things to fold and unfold like palm leaves and banners. Give everyone a small hinge to hold on to through this week, or a stone to remind them they can be silent and God will still sing to them. A reading suggestion on liminality: *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* by Susan Beaumont (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

### With Children

Children understand the pain of transitions. Have a conversation about what they like or dislike when they have to go from home activities to school or from playtime to bedtime. What helps them get through those transitions? Advance warning? Time to adjust? Compassion and listening ears? Ask them to share with the other worshippers their wisdom. How can we support one another through this Sunday’s experience of transitioning from the happiest of tales (parades and song) to the more sorrow-filled ones of last suppers and goodbyes?

### Sermon Starter

We may not have had an in-person, out-of-our-cars parade in so long! And so, on this day, we will wave our palms, our ribbons, or our tissues, if that is all we have. We will sing along with these stones: sorrow and worry will never overcome the hope of this one, this Christ, this redeemer of all creation. Yes, even if we are masked or out of breath, the stones themselves will lead the song: Hosanna! Hallelujah! We now follow Jesus into this week of betrayals, sorrow, pain, and death. What have we learned in Lent? What habits have been strengthened and when have we allowed ourselves to be weak? What aspect of faith has grown? What has been let go of to lighten the loads we carry? Are we ready to be of the same mind as Christ?

### Hymns

*Liturgy of the Palms*

VU 123 “Hosanna, loud hosanna”

VU 124 “He came riding on a donkey”

VU 128 “Sanna, sannanina”

MV 8 “And on this path”

MV 128 “When they heard that Jesus was coming”

*Liturgy of the Passion*

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 212 “Eternal Christ, you rule”

VU 328 “Jesu, joy of our desiring”

MV 114 “Behold the face of Christ”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

MV 189 “Jesus, we are here / Jesu tawa pano”

## April 14 – Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

Instructions for celebrating Passover.

Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)

How can I repay you, O God?

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

First account of the Last Supper.

John 13:1–17, 31*b*–35

A new commandment to love one another.

### Creation Connection

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us” represents a Passover tradition. If God had only done this one thing, it would have been enough, but then God did more. Why not play with this idea in terms of creation? If God had only created the prairies, and not also added mountains, it would have been enough…

### Spark

Psalm 116:13: “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.” Celebrate all the names we can imagine for Jesus and use them as a menu for your meal (worship) service. Turn each aspect of your worship service into an engagement with safe touch and other senses, wherever possible. Have participants smell, taste, or see the salvation of our God in the elements of our faith: water, oil, bread, and wine or juice.

### With Children

To toast someone is to speak or sign their name and then have a sip of a drink to honour them and wish them blessings. Learn the preferred names of the children present and toast each one. You might use empty glasses and pretend they are filled (Be careful. Let’s not spill!) or pour a bit of water into each. Then teach some of the names for Jesus and toast Jesus now or throughout your worship:

“We come as friends to know Jesus as a friend.”

“Come to be healed and to know Jesus as a healer.”

“Come to receive from Jesus, whom we name Word and Wisdom.”

“Come to be cleansed by Jesus, Compassionate One.”

“Come to serve one another, following the servant Jesus.”

“Come to be nourished by Jesus, the Bread of Life and Cup of Salvation.”

“Go forth anointed with oil by Jesus, the Lover, who waited in the garden: prayerful, vulnerable, and still ready.”

### Sermon Starter

God knows your name, your true name of identity and meaning. Let us toast one another and share in a meal—large, if possible, or small, if needed. A rice cracker will do! Imagine that the person beside you (or you yourself) has NEVER experienced communion or any remembering of Jesus’ Last Supper. How can we make this a “first time” experience for one another?

### Hymns

VU 121 “Tree of Life and awesome mystery”

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

VU 134 “Shadows gather, deep and cold”

VU 340 “Jesus, friend of little children”

VU 344 “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds”

VU 357 “Tell me the stories of Jesus”

VU 474 “The Son of God proclaim”

VU 607 “O Jesus, think on me”

“Break the bread, share the cup” by Nancy R. Chegus\*

“The bread we eat” by Walter Farquharson & Ron Klusmeier\*

\*found in *All God’s Children Sing* (Woodlake Books, 1992)

## April 15 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

He was despised; a man of sorrows.

Psalm 22 (VU pp. 743)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Hebrews 10:16–25

Provoke one another with love and good deeds.

or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

Jesus the High Priest learned obedience.

John 18:1—19:42

Jesus is arrested, tried, and crucified.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 22: Has God forsaken us and creation? Or have we forsaken God and creation? How might we embrace the invitation in Hebrews 10 to provoke one another to care for creation?

### Spark

Use many stones—large, if possible—in your sanctuary today. Jesus says that when we lose our voices or they are ignored or discounted, the stones will praise God for us. In the face of the cross, we are called to watch, but we need not find words. What sounds do we hear in creation that sound like cries of frustration, oppression, and pain? Using the Gospel of John, what words does Jesus turn to and how can we allow him to speak to and for us in our grief?

### With Children

How do you take care of friends when they are hurt? When grief, hurt, or sadness silence us or others, how can we still show our feelings and experiences? How can we show others that we keep watch and are ready to serve, to comfort, and to hold them in their grief or hurt, without even using words?

Or you might explore the phrase about the stones shouting, even if people are silent. How do the children imagine that? How might we know what stones, trees, or birds are saying to us?

Sermon Starter

The Hebrews reading today calls us to meet together. It may be time to reflect on how different it has been to be in person more this year. (Hopefully you have been able to do so.) It helps us to stay at the cross when we are able to join together: supporting one another, holding memories of each other’s loved ones, sharing grief held together. Peter denies Jesus as he finds himself alone with strangers. When are we tempted to ignore the cross or the pain of others? When is it hard to call out for help, for others or for ourselves? The small group that stays to witness the crucifixion can do so because they have one another for support. Use as much silence as you can and discover how silence in community is different from silence when we are alone.

### Hymns

VU 136 “O come and mourn with me awhile”

VU 137 “The Love that clothes itself in light”

VU 148 “Jesus, remember me”

VU 154 “Why has God forsaken me”

VU 278 “In the quiet curve of evening”

MV 64 “Because you came”

MV 73 “O God, why are you silent?”

MV 135 “Called by earth and sky”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

**The Gospel of John** has been used through the centuries to stir up antisemitism, especially with its declaration about “the Jews” in relation to Jesus’ death. While hostile references may reflect the historical context of the gospel, they are contrary to the actual gospel message of loving neighbours and enemies. Remember, Jesus and all of the disciples were Jewish. In our current context, these hostile references are unnecessarily divisive. When reading from the Gospel of John, you might choose to say “Judeans” instead of “Jews,” an acceptable translation of the original Greek word. You might also use “the religious authorities.” For other suggested wording options for the Gospel of John readings, see Celebrate God’s Presence, p.177.

## April 17 – Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34–43

Peter preaches at the house of Cornelius.

or Isaiah 25:6–9

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

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

God is my strength and my song.

1 Corinthians 15:19–26

We die in Adam and are made alive in Christ.

John 20:1–18

Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter find the empty tomb.

or Luke 24:1–12

The women report that the tomb is empty.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah 65:17–25: A new heaven and earth, the wolf and lamb together, and an empty tomb. Today proclaims possibility and resurrection not only for human beings, but for all of creation.

### Spark

What are some new names for Jesus today? We have celebrated some this week: Friend, Healer, Compassion, Word, Servant. Today we have at least two new names. What do these names mean: Redeemer and Risen One? Explore these and sing about them too. Maybe raise another toast!

### With Children

Parties have been different over the last two years. What aspects of parties did children miss the most? Bubbles? Games? Blowing out candles? Find some ways to have a party on this wonderful resurrection day. Invite the children to create a party for Jesus at home or at church.

### Sermon Starter

Judge of the Living and the Dead is another name for Jesus. What a wondrous judge...the one who loves, heals, and redeems us. Our God knows our true names and intentions and still wants us to grow and transform to better ourselves through loving others and ourselves. Jesus helps us find words in our pain and suffering. What words can we now find to describe the feelings of celebration, awe, fear, hope, and faith that this wonderful resurrection news elicits?

### Hymns

*Isaiah 65:17–25*

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

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

*1 Corinthians 15:19–26*

VU 572 “Send me, Lord”

*John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12*

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

VU 176 “Who is there on this Easter morning”

VU 180 “Christ is risen, yes, indeed”

VU 448 “We know that Christ is raised”

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

MV 121 “Hey now! Singing hallelujah!”

## April 24 – Second Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Second to Fourth Sundays of Easter were contributed by Karen Boivin, Ottawa, Ont.

Acts 5:27–32

Peter speaks before the Sanhedrin.

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

God is my strength and my song.

or **Psalm 150** (VU pp. 874–875)

Praise God with the sound of trumpet!

Revelation 1:4-8

John greets the seven churches of Asia.

John 20:19–31

Jesus says, “Peace be with you” to Thomas and the disciples.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 150 ends with the beautiful declaration, “Let everything that breathes praise God.” How might our praise of God be connected with the praise of the trees, the flowers, the fields, the rivers, the birds, the insects, and the animals?

### Spark

Provide time in the service for people to draw to mind the times when they felt most at peace. How can they return to that place, person, situation, or memory at times when life is turbulent or uncertain?

Invite congregation members to participate in a Call to Worship based on Psalm 150, with trumpet, harp, violin, pipe, and cymbal players being given an opportunity to contribute some notes, and dancers some steps, between the phrases.

### With Children

In John’s gospel, we hear once again the assurance, “Do not be afraid.” Jesus calms the disciples with his repeated blessing, “Peace be with you.” Discuss with the children the things that make them afraid and how they might use faith to help them find peace. Show them how deep breathing when frightened can become a prayer that brings them peace. Instruct them to focus on the breath, with a slow inhale as they repeat the words “Peace be with me,” and hold the breath for a few seconds before repeating the phrase slowly on the exhale, then holding the breath out for a few seconds. Invite them to imagine Jesus saying the words with and to them. Remind them to tell God when they are afraid and find an adult to tell as well.

### Sermon Starter

Share the Revelation reading with an actor playing John as he writes the words of his letter. In some way, all the readings state that the blessing of peace of mind that Jesus offered the disciples is available to all. The opening blessing in Revelation of “grace and peace” is given to “all the people of the earth.” Acts suggests that the disciples also are sharing Jesus’ message with “all the people of the earth.” The readings also point to how that peace can be found. The psalms remind us of the peace found in joyfully sharing our gifts with others in a celebration of life. Music groups, such as a church choir, provide a peaceful, joyful retreat for many people. Peace can also be found in knowing we are forgiven and in forgiving others. Our faith is a source of peace however it comes to us; whether we need a direct experience like Thomas or we are able to trust in the witness of others.

### Hymns

*Acts 5:27–32*

VU 378 “Spirit of God, descend upon my heart”

VU 575 “I’m gonna live so God can use me”

VU 579 “The church is wherever God’s people”

*Psalm 118:14–29*

VU 253 “Sing your joy”

VU 477 “I come with joy”

MV 40 “Never ending joy”

*Psalm 150*

VU 241 “Oh, sing to our God”

VU 245 “Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet”

VU p. 884 “You shall go out with joy”

MV 183 “I’m gonna shout, shout”

*Revelation 1:4–8*

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

MV 91 “Cradle me in your arms”

MV 106 “I am the dream”

*John 20:19–31*

VU 374 “Come and find the quiet centre”

VU 664 “What a friend we have in Jesus”

VU 964 “Go now in peace”

MV 95 “How deep the peace”

MV 168 “May peace be with you”

MV 215 “Peace be with you”

## May 1 – Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:1-6, (7-20)

Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus.

Psalm 30 (VU p. 757)

God turned my mourning into dancing.

Revelation 5:11-14

Worthy is the Lamb.

John 21:1-19

Jesus appears to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

### Creation Connection

Acts 9:1–6: Saul’s conversion happened out on the open road. Invite one or two people to share their stories of what “converted” or brought them to a passion for caring for creation.

### Spark

Have you ever been given a job, an accolade, or a benefit you did not feel worthy to receive? What was the outcome? Did it lead to a turnaround of any kind or any significant learnings? Congregation members can be asked to share a story of a time when they dared to try something they felt unqualified to do but that led to a positive change in their life or the lives of others.

### With Children

Share Paul’s conversion story using toy figures. Paul considered himself a very religious man but he severely persecuted Jesus’ followers. After his conversion experience, he and many followers of Jesus still believed his past history made him unworthy to be a fellow follower. However, through God’s forgiving love, he became one of the greatest Christian missionaries. It is not fair, then, for us to judge what we or others are capable of doing for the good of the world. God’s loving power is with us.

### Sermon Starter

Invite someone to dramatize the reading of the Revelation passage to introduce the theme of worthiness. Revelation states that, because Christ is worthy, people of “every tribe and nation” are also worthy members of God’s family, able to share in God’s love, wisdom, strength, and power. The holy within each person, like the divinity of Jesus, means that we are always worthy to receive grace. Yet even the disciples were fearful to claim that grace. John 21 recounts that they recognized Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias but were afraid to ask him who he was (verse 12). Perhaps they were embarrassed to be found fishing rather than preaching since they had previously experienced Jesus in resurrected form. An exploration of the many ways we mistakenly believe ourselves unworthy, and the grace received when we claim our worthiness, can offer much hope that our “mourning can be turned into dancing.”

### Hymns

*Acts 9:1–6, (7–20)*

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

VU 658 “O Love that wilt not let me go”

MV 212 “Sent out in Jesus’ name”

*Psalm 30*

VU 117 “Jesus Christ is waiting”

VU 352 “I danced in the morning”

VU 388 “Spirit dancing”

MV 156 “Dance with the Spirit”

*Revelation 5:11–14*

VU 147 “What wondrous love is this”

VU 334 “All hail the power of Jesus’ name”

VU 339 “When morning gilds the skies”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

*John 21:1–19*

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

VU 575 “I’m gonna live so God can use me”

MV 113 “Jesus saw them fishing”

MV 209 “Go, make a diff’rence”

## May 8 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36-43

Peter raises Tabitha (Dorcas) to life.

Psalm 23 (VU pp. 747–749)

God is my shepherd.

Revelation 7:9-17

The saints of God will never hunger or thirst again.

John 10:22-30

My sheep listen to my voice.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 23 is a beloved psalm of comfort, yet it is also a profound statement of the blessings and challenges within creation, travelling from green pastures then on to shadowy valleys of death. How does this psalm challenge us in our relation with creation?

### Spark

What is your favourite type of body of water (e.g., ocean, lake, brook)? How does it make you feel to be near it? Individuals might share stories of their favourite watery places. Once again an actor portraying John can read the Revelation 7 passage, as a Call to Worship. The congregation can respond with the words of verses 12 and 15–17.

### With Children

Talk with the children about springs (as in bodies of water) using pictures. In her book *Sacred Spaces: Stations on a Celtic Way* (Paraclete Press, 2001), Margaret Silf points to what differentiates springs from other bodies of water: their bubbling up unexpectedly with pure water that draws other life toward them. Discuss how faith can be like a spring that both refreshes us and helps us to refresh others when it is shared. Read the first three verses of Psalm 23 and invite the children to repeat them after you.

### Sermon Starter

Jesus the shepherd leads the flock by still water in the psalm and to the springs of living water in Revelation. The gospel tells us that the flock recognizes the shepherd’s voice and follows him wherever he calls them to go. The faithful are shepherded by Jesus’ life and teachings and by the continued inspiration of the Spirit of Christ to endless supplies of living water. The peace, joy, hope, healing, unity, and purpose found in a life of faith can metaphorically be connected to various forms of water. Tabitha was a faithful member of the flock of Jesus. The water of eternal life that restored her included the healing she received from Peter as well as the gratitude others who gathered to mourn her passing had shown for her life and gifts. What are the springs of living water experienced within your congregation?

### Hymns

*Acts 9:36–43*

VU 449 “Crashing waters at creation”

VU 563 “Jesus, you have come to the lakeshore”

VU 577 “I’ve got peace”

MV 98 “Like a river of tears”

MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

*Psalm 23*

VU 657 “He leadeth me”

VU 670 “Precious Lord, take my hand”

*Revelation 7:9–17*

VU 222 “Come, let us sing”

VU 287 “Wellspring of wisdom”

VU 334 “All hail the power of Jesus’ name”

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

VU 710 “Shall we gather at the river”

MV 87 “Water flowing from the mountains”

*John 10:22–30*

VU 380 “She comes sailing on the wind”

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

VU 635 “All the way my Saviour leads me”

MV 3 “River”

MV 163 “River running in you and me”

## May 15 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Fifth to Seventh Sundays after Easter were contributed by Eric Stephanson, the Anglican parish of St. Christopher & St. Aidan, Lake Cowichan, B.C.

Acts 11:1-8

Peter’s vision of unclean animals.

Psalm 148 (VU p. 870-871)

Let the whole creation praise God.

Revelation 21:1-6

I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

John 13:31–35

A new commandment: love one another.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 148: Fire, hail, snow, frost, and stormy wind praising God might be hard for some to imagine, but how often do we as humans get in the way of (and are sometimes devastated by) nature doing what nature naturally does? Revelation 21:1–6 provides a hopeful vision of God settling in (literally pitching a tent or tabernacle) to work with us to create a new heaven and a new earth.

### Spark

Imagine going into the antique wardrobe of C.S. Lewis’s Narnia books and finding yourself in a different world. Imagine the sharp change portrayed between decades in the *Back to the Future* movies. What perspectives might these and other similar images in literature and popular media bring to the ideas of a “new heaven and new earth”?

### With Children

Do you ever have dreams that make you laugh? Once I had a crazy dream that made me sit up in bed laughing but then I couldn’t remember what it was! Do you remember your dreams? Sometimes people have dreams about things that happened to them, but everything is different in a dream, isn’t it? I’ve also had some dreams that seemed wonderful, where the whole world was made new and everything was delightful.

If God wanted to show you something in a dream, what might it be? In one of the Bible stories today, God showed a man called Peter something that changed him. In the dream, God said that a stranger was going to visit Peter and that he should go with that man to meet the man’s friends. God wanted Peter to encourage them and to welcome them.

Do you ever wonder how God speaks or gives messages to people today? I sometimes wonder if God is speaking and giving messages to us all the time, but we don’t notice. What do you think?

### Sermon Starter

All four scriptures today reflect the great dividing line of history between life as we think we know it and life as it will be when God’s vision culminates, with the kingdom of God coming “on earth as in heaven,” as Jesus taught us to pray. We live every day on the fulcrum between the past and the future, between what has already been and what has not yet happened but could. The vision of God’s future coming to transform us and the whole world is like a bright thread woven through the biblical tapestry. Peter is shown a new vision of community bridging separated nations due to the change from Jesus’ death and resurrection. The cosmos has been radically shifted because of Jesus. In his kaleidoscopic vision, John sees a “new heaven and new earth,” with God’s presence literally coming to earth. Far from promising to whisk his followers away from this world, Jesus tells them that we must love one another as he has loved us, where we are. In our mission as a church, we live simultaneously in two realms, committed to love others here and now, but attuned to the future breaking in among us now. How can we keep in step with the Spirit in this transition zone that Jesus has begun?

### Hymns

*Acts 11:1–18*

VU 699 “Live into hope”

VU 703 “In the bulb there is a flower”

*Psalm 148*

VU 371 “Open my eyes, that I may see”

VU p. 884 “You shall go out with joy”

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

*Revelation 21:1–6*

VU 710 “Shall we gather at the river”

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

MV 120 “My soul cries out”

*John 13:31–35*

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 367 “Come down, O love divine”

VU 688 “O day of God, draw nigh”

## May 22 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9-15

Paul, Lydia, and the women by the river.

Psalm 67 (VU p. 786)

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

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John’s vision of the city of God.

John 14:23-29

The Holy Spirit will come to teach.

### Creation Connection

Revelation 22:2: “The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” Consider gifts of creation that provide for healing of body, mind, and spirit.

### Spark

The New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop N.T. Wright says we should think of heaven as “the control room” for earth, or a backstage where things are organized in a lively way to support what is happening “on stage.” Someone else once said that the concept of heaven used in Bible stories implies a reality just inches above our heads, not light years away from us. What if the kingdom of God really is interwoven with our everyday reality? What stories might people in your congregation share about their mystical experiences of heaven here among us?

### With Children

What do you think of when you hear the word *kingdom* (or *kin-dom*)? When I was young, my mom helped me learn the prayer that Jesus taught his followers to say.\* I liked the idea that we were asking God to send God’s kingdom to earth! But you know what I thought? I thought the kingdom would be like a huge stone castle floating in the air, gently coming down to earth! And I thought there would be lots of flags and a moat around the castle, with drawbridges that would come down to let us go in to join a party! I thought there would be great food, lots of fresh bread, music, and singing, and everyone would be happy. I still like some things about that picture. But I wonder what Jesus was thinking about God’s kingdom? When Jesus asked us to pray for God’s kingdom to come, he was imagining a place where everyone was loved, fed, forgiven, and lived in safety. What else would be in Jesus’ kingdom?

*\*Adapt to your own story.*

### Sermon Starter

It is a startling exercise to read chapters 13 to 17 of John, the extended talk Jesus had with his friends at the Last Supper: the platform for the next stage of his mission and ours. As a précis of his sense of calling, the challenges to come, and his pivotal role as “the way and the truth and the life,” it is a bracing read. Imagine using it as your “position paper for ministry” in your congregation. The Christian enterprise in North America is become increasingly marginal. As one older man in my first pastoral charge explained, he never accompanied his wife to worship because “it’s just so predictable!” Another person, inspired by G.K. Chesterton, declared, “It’s not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, it’s just so rarely that it’s been really tried.” Considering Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John, spoken to his friends the night before he met his death, our version of “Christian life” might seem pretty tame compared with the One we follow, or the lives lived by his earliest followers. How do we step forward into the love that risks putting Jesus’ words in practice every day? How do we experience the guidance of “the Advocate” who Jesus said would “teach us all things”?

### Hymns

*Acts 16:9–15*

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

*Psalm 67*

VU 23 “Joy shall come”

MV 20 “God of still waiting”

*Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5*

VU 705 “For all the saints”

VU 709 “O holy city, seen of John”

VU p. 884 “You shall go out with joy”

MV 120 “My soul cries out”

MV 142 “Oh a song must rise”

*John 14:23–29*

VU 371 “Open my eyes, that I may see”

VU 375 “Spirit, Spirit of gentleness”

MV 49 “When we seek language”

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

## May 26 – Ascension Day (Thursday)

Acts 1:1–11

The ascension of Jesus.

Psalm 47 (VU p. 771)

Clap your hands, all you people!

or **Psalm 93** (VU pp. 812–813)

God rules in majesty and strength.

Ephesians 1:15–23

I never cease giving thanks for your faith.

Luke 24:44–53

Another version of the ascension story.

### Creation Connection

Acts 1:1–11: Jesus ascends into the heavens. It is upon the heavens, or the air around the earth, that humans have made changes to the climate. How might understanding the heavens or the sky as a holy place affect our actions on the earth below?

### Spark

Be attentive to the fact that some people in the congregation may have experienced the disappearance of a friend or family member, never seen or heard from again, either through choice, tragedy, or death. How do we read this story when we know of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, for example? Red Dress Day was marked on May 5.

### With Children

There was once a small boy who went to church with his parents, but then one day, he said to them, “Why is it that we’re always talking about Jesus at church, but we never see him?” It’s true, isn’t it? Some of the stories about Jesus are so wonderful we wish we could experience them too! We would all like to know Jesus in person, just like the disciples did! But what if he is near to us...just not in person like you and me? Do you sometimes feel near to someone who is not beside you? Sometimes we might think of someone and then they phone! There can be invisible connections between us when we love one another. Our connection with Jesus is like that. You might share *The Invisible String* by Patricia Karst (Little, Brown, 2018).

### Sermon Starter

For decades, Ascension Day passed under the radar. It is the unsung blockbuster that should be rediscovered and celebrated as the turning point in the transition from Jesus’ ministry with the 12 to ministry with and through all who turn to him. To understand the ascension of Jesus in the grand sweep of the whole biblical story is to identify the blossoming of what began in prophetic visions about “the kingdom of God” years earlier, illustrated when Jesus called the fisherfolk and told them, “Now you will fish for people.” With the ascension, the authority of Jesus as the One who brings the reign of God now becomes operative among all in the Body of Christ, in you and me. Yet in the history of the church, we don’t engage much with what this means for us. In the same way that we are surrounded every moment by radio waves filled with content that can only be accessed when we “tune in,” could we be *that close* to the power that results in transformation if only we were more patient or perceptive in connecting to the One who activates it? What if we were to experiment with discovering how to be “in sync” with the risen Christ?

### Hymns

*Acts 1:1–11*

VU 179 “Hallelujah, hallelujah, give thanks”

VU 183 “We meet you, O Christ”

VU 187 “The spring has come”

VU 330 “Jesus shall reign”

*Psalm 47*

MV 2 “Come all you people”

*Ephesians 1:15–23*

VU 512 “Lord, you give the great commission”

MV 88 “Over my head”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

*Luke 24:44–53*

MV 27 “Creator God you gave us life”

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

MV 152 “You who watch the highest heavens”

## May 29 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16–34

Paul and Silas are freed from prison.

Psalm 97 (VU p. 817)

God reigns; let the earth be glad.

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

I am coming soon.

John 17:20-26

Jesus prays that they all may be one.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 97: Let the earth rejoice in God’s presence. What do we mean when we declare that we notice God’s presence in creation? How does that affect our interaction with creation?

### Spark

A phrase we often hear in news investigations into the motives and actions of individuals and groups is “Follow the money.” In a similar way when reading the gospels, Acts, and Epistles, you could say, “Follow the miraculous signs.” These miraculous signs caused the Christian faith to explode across the Mediterranean. Post or project “miraculous signs” to follow. Or create an investigative drama based on that idea.

### With Children

Some stories in the Bible are exciting and strange! Let me tell you one. Two friends of Jesus named Paul and Silas were telling people about him and praying for people. Some people were upset and had Paul and Silas put in jail. The two were locked in and had chains on their ankles so they couldn’t run away. In the evening, Paul and Silas began singing songs to God and praying. In the middle of the night, there was an earthquake that broke open the prison locks! The jailer thought all the prisoners would escape and was afraid he would be in trouble for letting them get away, but before the jailer could do anything, Paul and Silas yelled from inside the prison saying that none of the prisoners had escaped. The jailer was so surprised by this that he asked Paul and Silas to tell him about the God they were praying to. Then the jailer decided he wanted to be a follower of Jesus too and not be a jailer anymore. The Bible is a whole library of stories and poems.

### Sermon Starter

Historically, Christian theology is the distillation of lived experience among those who were with Jesus and those who were drawn to follow through what they saw, heard, or felt from those first Christians. One of its characteristics is the focus on the intersection between faith and practice. If spirituality in our society today is the broad umbrella category for “how we make sense of our life experience,” Christian spirituality goes one step further and shows us the practical response of people like us. The stories of scripture provide a lens through which we share in the experiences of others as they engaged with the Way of Jesus and were changed by the Holy Spirit. Paul and Silas, for example, developed an ability to follow God in the midst of the events that came unexpectedly into their lives. They looked for God’s initiative in events day-to-day and then responded to those events out of their previous experiences of God’s guidance. The vision of John during times of persecution and trouble conveys his sense of Jesus’ ongoing engagement with the world. All of us who seek to follow Jesus are engaged in “experimental” faith, watching for what God will do next and responding based on our best understandings from scripture and personal experience.

### Hymns

*Acts 16:16–34*

VU 413 “O splendour of God’s glory bright”

VU 569 “You call us out”

VU 575 “I’m gonna live so God can use me”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

*Psalm 97*

MV 26 “Your love is amazing”

MV 182 “Grateful”

*Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21*

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 565 “Love, who made me in your likeness”

MV 23 “Come, O Holy Spirit”

*John 17:20–26*

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

VU 586 “We shall go out with hope of resurrection”

VU 603 “In loving partnership we come”

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”