

WEEKLY SERVICES



ASH WEDNESDAY TO THE LAST SUNDAY OF EASTER

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

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

Feast Days* and Special Days

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

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

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

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

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

EASTER

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

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

Feast Days* and Special Days

April Fool’s Day – April 1.

Holy Humour Sunday – the Sunday after Easter Sunday.

Earth Day – April 22.

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

Camping Sunday – the last Sunday of April.

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

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

February 18 – Ash Wednesday

Worship materials for Ash Wednesday were contributed by Karen Boivin, Melville U.C., Fergus, Ont.

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17

The day of the Lord is near.

or **Isaiah 58:1–12**

A fast that is acceptable to God.

Psalms 51:1–17 (VU pp. 776–777)

Create in me a new heart.

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

We are ambassadors for Christ.

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Give alms and fast in secret.

Creation Connection

Ask congregants of all ages what part of creation they are especially concerned about (e.g., oceans, songbirds, air quality) and encourage them to choose a way of addressing that concern during Lent.

Spark

Joel presents two possibilities for the future of the world, and the seeds of both are evident today. Create a slide show of those opposing possibilities; for instance, deforestation/ reforestation, or conflict/community. Write a Prayer of Confession that moves back and forth between confession and assurance in concert with the slides.

Refer to VU 105 “Dust and ashes touch our face,” VU 106 “An Ash Wednesday prayer,” and VU 107 “Sunday’s palms are Wednesday’s ashes” for hymns and a prayer for today.



With Children

Invite someone who has acted as an ambassador of some kind to explain to the children what that role entails. Based on that, ask the children what they think the apostle Paul might have meant by declaring that we should be ambassadors for Christ. Invite them to practise their Christian ambassador skills during Lent. Ask them to report back on their experiences.

Sermon Starter

Joel moves from painting his apocalyptic picture of a coming “Day of the Lord” to assuring us that, along with our compassionate God, we can change that trajectory for the better. The psalmist reminds us that an important part of this work is purifying our hearts. What does it really mean to purify our hearts? We need a clear understanding of our faith and a willingness to put it into action by being the ambassadors described in 2 Corinthians. Lent is an opportunity to focus privately on this work throughout the week, along with the communal time of support and encouragement with the congregation on Sundays. Matthew addresses many aspects of that private purification of our hearts.

Hymns

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 or Isaiah 58:1–12

VU 412 “This is the day”

VU 649 “Walk with me”

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

MV 179 “Sisters let us walk together”

TLUS 57 “We wait for God”

TLUS 88 “Why are things so broken?”

Psalms 51

VU 209 “Fire of God, undying flame”

VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”

VU 508 “Just as I am”

TLUS 110 “Give me a clean heart”

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

VU 112 “O God, how we have wandered”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 684 “Make me a channel of your peace”

TLUS 23 “For everyone born”

TLUS 130 “Who will speak a word of warning”

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

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

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

February 22 – Lent 1

Worship materials for Lent were contributed by Leigh Sinclair, St. David's U.C., Leduc, Alta.

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Psalms 32 (VU p. 759)

Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven.

Romans 5:12–19

Through one came death; through one came life.

Matthew 4:1–11

The temptation of Jesus.

Creation Connection

How will we repent and change our ways as stewards of creation in the face of the temptation to forget that God put limits on our consumption by making creation renewable only when cared for correctly?

Spark

As a Lenten practice, invite the worshippers to take a wander in their neighbourhood sometime every week. A focus for that wander will be offered each week. The psalm uses the metaphor of finding protection in the midst of rushing waters to describe how prayer works in our lives. Next time it rains, take a wander around your neighbourhood. While you might use an umbrella or rain jacket, try putting down the umbrella or pulling back your hood and letting the rain fall upon your head. How does that help you imagine God's love for you?

With Children

Gather together a thermos, a travel mug, a clay mug, a glass cup, and a teacup. Explore their different levels of fragility. What makes each fragile or not fragile? Consider that people, aspects of creation, and ideas all have times when they are more fragile and need more protection. When we plant new seeds in a garden, they need more care to get started. When we are sad, we feel more fragile and need someone who cares. Pray for God to be present with all who feel fragile today.

Sermon Starter

Lenten practices can set this season apart from our normal routine. Reflecting on Jesus' decisions in the desert, how can we choose a practice without punishing or underestimating ourselves? For example, if you will be making a change in consumption, remember that Jesus fasted and feasted depending on his community and context. If you want to change how you use scripture in daily life, invite new perspectives and approaches into the explorations. How can we faithfully follow Jesus in a way that challenges us to grow and does not lead to guilt?

Reading ideas:

Shannon T. L. Kearns, *In the Margins: A Transgender Man's Journey with Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2022).

M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Orbis Books, 2018).

Hymns

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7

VU 112 "O God, how we have wandered"

Psalms 32

VU 364 "Forgive our sins as we forgive"

Romans 5:12–19

MV 162 "Christ, within us hidden"

Matthew 4:1–11

VU 113 "To the desert Jesus came"

MV 65 "When we are tested" (if tune is unfamiliar, use tune VU 642 "Be thou my vision")

General/Seasonal

VU 105 "Dust and ashes touch our face"

VU 109 "Now quit your care"

MV 28 "God of the Bible"

Worship Leaders

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

Written by _____.

Gathering, Lent/Easter 2026, page _____.

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March 1 – Lent 2

Genesis 12:1–4a

God calls Abram to be a blessing.

Psalm 121 (VU p. 842)

I lift my eyes to the hills.

Romans 4:1–5, 13–17

The promise of God rests on grace.

John 3:1–17

Nicodemus learns that “God so loved the world.”

Creation Connection

How will we repent and change our ways as stewards of creation when caring for refugees who need safe harbour from the climate crisis runs up against the temptation to worship the false idol of “ownership of land”?

Spark

The psalm describes God as a shade that protects us from heat as a metaphor for how God’s presence changes our experiences of life. On a sunny day, take a wander around your neighbourhood with the goal of finding a noticeable piece of shade and feel the difference between sun and shade. Celebrate the wonder of both and of God having created all the ways that darkness and light offer gifts to our lives.

You might reflect on the “calls” to faithful living in A New Creed (The United Church of Canada, 1968).

With Children

Nicodemus came to visit Jesus at night because he was very curious, but he wasn’t sure what his friends would think of it. What are some signs we use at church to invite others to “come in, day or night, you are welcome”? Do you have posters about events? Rainbows of welcome for LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit folx*? Ramps and automated doors? What do the children think is missing to ensure a warm welcome for all?

** folx is an alternate spelling for folks, used as far back as 1833. It is now used to indicate explicit inclusion of marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people.*

Sermon Starter

Lenten practices can set this season apart from our normal routine. For some, this has been a time to address bad habits or start a new good habit. However, focusing in on our habits, especially those we are not proud of, can blur our understanding about why God loves us and why Jesus came. God loves us absolutely and unconditionally. Jesus arrived to remind us of and to fulfill God’s promised love. This morning, proclaim the good news—that we are considered part of the righteous and beloved of God—because God has already chosen us. Before Abraham and Sarah even knew how God wanted them to behave or what God wanted them to do, they were beloved of God! Before Jesus lived, died, or was raised from the dead, all people, all creation, were beloved of God! No matter how we are at living out the calls to faithful living in A New Creed, we are beloved!

Hymns

Genesis 12:1–4a

- VU 634 “To Abraham and Sarah”
- MV 148 “Hope of Abraham and Sarah”
- MV 161 “I have called you by your name”
- TLUS 147 “There’s no need to ask me twice”

Psalm 121

- MV 96 “And when you call for me”
- TLUS 42 “Lord, I will lift mine eyes”

Romans 4:1–5, 13–17

- VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”
- VU 356 “Seek ye first the kingdom”
- TLUS 78 “Trust these words”

John 3:1–17

- MV 115 “Behold, behold, I make all things new”
- MV 172 “God says”
- TLUS 105 “May you be held”

General/Seasonal

- MV 125 “When a grain of wheat”
- TLUS 31 “Queerly beloved”

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS AND IDEAS

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

March 8 – Lent 3

Exodus 17:1–7

Water from the rock.

Psalms 95 (VU pp. 814–815)

Let us shout to the rock of our salvation.

Romans 5:1–11

Hope in God does not disappoint us.

John 4:5–42

Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Creation Connection

How will we repent and change our ways as stewards of creation in the face of the temptation to stockpile resources for our individual needs, forgetting that God’s plan is that we will have enough only when all is shared?

Spark

The psalm uses the metaphor of a rock to describe God’s faithfulness and constancy. Take a wander around your neighbourhood with the goal of finding an interesting rock, stone, or brick. Examine it using various senses, then leave it where it is to remind you of God’s faithfulness next time you wander.

WE NEED YOUR SUBMISSIONS.

Gathering began as a document stapled together from worship materials sent by (snail) mail to the Worship Desk at the national office. Worship leaders across the United Church wanted to share what had worked well in their congregations. They wanted to be inspired by the ideas of their colleagues. And Gathering was born!

We know you love using the prayers and worship ideas from Gathering. But Gathering only works if you submit your own prayers and worship ideas. You don’t have to edit it before sending it. It just needs to be your own original work. Send it along. We’ll edit it and find a way to share it with other worship leaders.

So please! Share your experiences and worship materials. Your contributions create the richness of the Gathering Worship Resource. Submit through GatheringWorship.ca or by emailing to gather@united-church.ca.

With Children

What change does water bring to the way you feel? Gather some rocks, paper, a bar of soap, and other items, as well as a large bowl filled with water and a towel to dry hands. Examine each item with various senses, then place it into the water. Delight and wonder at how the water changes each item. Pray thanks to God for water’s power to change, sustain, and nourish us inside and out.

Sermon Starter

Lenten practices can set this season apart from our normal routine. Invite your community to engage with the reading from John in a way that is new to you. Invite congregational participation through *Lectio Divina* or the Swedish Method. Seek out art and images at lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu to expand on the scripture (Under the Resources tab, select Art). Or share some animated storytelling from bibleproject.com (choose Videos). Model sharing both the challenges and insights you found while approaching the John reading with one of these models.

Hymns

Exodus 17:1–7

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

TLUS 11 “The river is a healer”

Psalms 95

VU 246 “Shout for God”

MV 92 “Like a rock”

TLUS 64 “There’s a wild hope in the wind”

Romans 5:1–11

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

John 4:5–42

VU 561 “Take up your cross”

MV 117 “By the well, a thirsty woman”

TLUS 147 “There’s no need to ask me twice”

General/Seasonal

VU 117 “Jesus Christ is waiting”

VU 539 “God of all good”

VU 635 “All the way my Saviour leads me”

TLUS 134 “Little by little”

March 15 – Lent 4

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Samuel chooses one of Jesse's sons as king.

Psalms 23 (VU pp. 747–749)

God is my shepherd.

Ephesians 5:8–14

Live as children of the light.

John 9:1–41

Jesus heals the man born blind.

Creation Connection

How will we repent and change our ways as stewards of creation in the face of the temptation to limit our understanding of wholeness and health to those whom we experience as “just like us”? How do we expand our understanding to include all of God's creatures and all of creation?

Spark

The psalm uses the metaphor of “beside still waters” for how God brings us times of peace, tranquility, or hope. Take a wander around your neighbourhood and discover various places you can go to experience God's love for you. Be attentive to where God is calling you to think outside your box.



With Children

What can change the way you experience something? Hand out some spoons of different sizes, shapes, lengths, colours, etc. Invite the children to explore them with various senses. What do they discover? (You may want to put a grain of salt or sugar on some to invite tasting.) Pray thanksgiving to God for the diversity of senses that help us experience God's world, and for the way we can learn from the sense experiences of others, allowing the wonder of God's diversity to be clearer to us all.

Sermon Starter

Today's reading from John brings up healing with metaphors of light and seeing through eyes. These metaphors bring up challenges and gifts simultaneously. The story tells of Jesus' power, the way he demanded free health care and inclusion for all in the community of faith and preached that sin is not the cause of disability. However, great harm can come if disabilities are understood as diminishing a person or needing to be “healed.” We must not allow John's community dynamics from decades after Jesus' death to influence how we perceive Jewish people today or people who live with disabilities, which were, at that time, considered to be caused by sin.

Reading ideas:

Amy-Jill Levine, *Signs and Wonders: A Beginner's Guide to the Miracles of Jesus* (Abingdon Press, 2022).

Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Brazos Press, 2022).

Hymns

1 Samuel 16:1–13

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

TLUS 12 “Give me a name”

Psalms 23

VU p. 747 “The Lord's my Shepherd”

VU p. 748 “God is my shepherd”

MV 77 “Be still and know”

TLUS 142 “As a parent holds a child”

Ephesians 5:8–14

MV 18 “Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary”

MV 27 “Creator God you gave us life”

TLUS 6 “God lights a lamp”

John 9:1–41

VU 371 “Open my eyes that I may see”

TLUS 8 “Way Maker”

General/Seasonal

VU 111 “As the sun with longer journey”

VU 116 “Giver of the perfect gift”

MV 126 “Are you a shepherd?”

March 22 – Lent 5

Ezekiel 37:1–14

The valley of dry bones.

Psalms 130 (VU pp. 852–853)

Out of the depths I cry to God.

Romans 8:6–11

The Spirit is life, not death.

John 11:1–45

The raising of Lazarus.

Creation Connection

How will we repent and change our ways as stewards of creation in the face of the temptation to shut our hearts and assume that death is the final word? How will we turn to hope, fostering small and constant actions that show faith in God's renewing of all things?

Spark

The psalm today asks us to imagine having to stay up all night (due to work, insomnia, etc.) and how the relief of sunrise is like the relief we feel when we pray to God. Wander outside and take in a sunrise or sunset. Engage it with a variety of senses. Smell it or see it or feel it on your skin. How does experiencing a sunrise or sunset help you imagine God's love for you?



With Children

Let us experience our scripture story in a new way. Tell the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones in a dramatic way. Invite the children to make the noises of dry bones, using wooden instruments or their hands, and of strong winds when appropriate. You might help the children find the tendons and muscles in a hand or arm, or a foot or lower leg. Then pray a prayer of thanksgiving for God's creations of sinews, tendons, and muscles, and the breath we have within us.

Sermon Starter

Lenten practices can set this season apart from our normal routine. One of the hardest aspects of human life is imagining something beyond our current expectations and experiences. Yet Jesus expresses the wisdom that we must die to live, that Lazarus can return from the grave, and that we must take up our crosses. Find ways to acknowledge how hard it is to imagine what God can do using metaphors such as “acornology,” wherein acorns are asked to die so they can become trees. This story originated with Maurice Nicoll, Jacob Needleman, and Cynthia Bourgeault. (See *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* [Jossey-Bass, 2003].)

Hymns

Ezekiel 37:1–14

VU 614 “In suffering love”

TLUS 10 “God calls you good”

TLUS 97 “When I can't take the first step”

Psalms 130

MV 90 “Don't be afraid”

TLUS 100 “In my wrestling, and in my doubts”

TLUS 102 “Nothing to fear”

Romans 8:6–11

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

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

TLUS 92 “The darkness comes”

John 11:1–45

VU 581 “When we are living”

MV 17 “God in the darkness”

TLUS 91 “In life, in death”

General/Seasonal

VU 105 “Dust and ashes touch our face”

VU 108 “Throughout these Lenten days and nights”

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

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

Texte de _____.

Gathering, Carême/Pâques 2026, page ____.

Droit d'utilisation accordé.

March 29 – Palm/Passion Sunday

Worship material for Holy Week and Easter Sunday were contributed by Karen Boivin, Melville U.C., Fergus, Ont.

Liturgy of the Palms

Matthew 21:1–11

Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Psalms 118:1–2, 19–29 (VU p. 837)

The stone the builders rejected.

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4–9a

The suffering servant struck and insulted.

Psalms 31:9–16 (VU p. 758)

My times are in your hands.

Philippians 2:5–11

Let the same mind be in you as was in Jesus.

Matthew 26:14–27:66 or **Matthew 27:11–54**

The passion of Jesus.

Creation Connection

In the Palm Sunday readings, how Jesus is treated by different individuals and crowds echoes how humanity at times treats the natural world: with celebration, support, concern, disrespect, abandonment, or destruction.

Spark

Present each story in the gospel separately. Demonstrate the part that nature plays within each one, bringing forward to the communion table a related symbol: a toy donkey, a palm branch, bread, a wooden beam, a crown of thorns, etc.

With Children

Involve the children in bringing forward the symbolic items suggested in the Spark. Discuss with them what use the humans in the story made of these elements, and the pros and cons of those decisions. How did the items help welcome Jesus? How might that inform how we use nature today? Note: In the Lukan version of this story, Jesus declares that the stones would shout out a welcome if the people were silent.

Sermon Starter

God communicates with us in many ways. Do we trust that what we receive is from God? Are we willing to act on it? Would we dare take the donkey, as the disciples did? Would we go against that voice in our head like Pilate did?

As Christians, we hope to have a “well-instructed tongue” and “opened” ears like Isaiah (50:4, 5 NIV). We hope to experience and respond to God’s answers like the psalmist (118:21). Jesus is our role model in how we experience and respond to God’s word. The disciples, on the other hand, are often asleep to what is being asked of them, or demonstrate selective listening.

The With Children discussion can be expanded here to consider what God might be communicating and asking us to do in relation to the parts of creation represented on the table.

Hymns

Matthew 21:1–11

VU 123–128 Palm Sunday hymns

MV 121 “Hey now! Singing hallelujah!”

TLUS 38 “Enter into Jerusalem”

TLUS 46 “Hosanna” (Pan-African)

Psalms 118

VU 10 “Prepare the way of the Lord”

MV 96 “And when you call for me”

Isaiah 50:4–9a

VU 272 “Open your ears, O faithful people”

VU 371 “Open my eyes, that I may see”

VU 589 “Lord, speak to me”

MV 64 “Because you came”

Psalms 31

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

MV 92 “Like a rock”

Philippians 2:5–11

VU 663 “My faith looks up to thee”

MV 155 “Unbounded Spirit, breath of God”

TLUS 149 “Yeshuko pachhi”

Matthew 26:14–27:66 or *Matthew 27:11–54*

VU 129–159 Passion hymns

MV 135 “Called by earth and sky”

MV 172 “God says”

TLUS 83 “May your struggles keep you near the cross”

April 2 – Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

Instructions for the first Passover.

Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)

How can I repay you, O God?

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

An account of the Last Supper.

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

Creation Connection

Ask what small sacrifices might be made this Easter weekend in thanksgiving for the joys of the natural world. For instance, could time be spent picking up roadside garbage, brewing coffee rather than using non-recyclable pods, or offering help to a neighbour?

Spark

The intimacy of many Maundy Thursday services—with hand/foot washing or serving each other an agape meal—may be outside many people's comfort zones. However, the Spirit often transforms their discomfort into thanksgiving and joy at being part of their community of faith, a direct experience of today's theme of making sacrifices as a form of thanksgiving. How might you invite people to attend?



With Children

Ask the children about times when they were uncomfortable doing something but, in the end, were glad that they had. Why were they glad? Maybe they made new friends, learned something new, or felt more grown up. Share a story of your own experience. Discuss how God gives us the strength to do difficult things because God knows the goodness that will follow and wants what is best for us.

Sermon Starter

Peter moved from aversion to Jesus' washing of his feet to welcoming this opportunity. Take a quick tour through the history of the Christian church, highlighting times when the faithful were willing to be uncomfortable out of love for God. Note that these experiences grew the Christian community and faith. Include the Reformers and the history of your own congregation. Be honest about missed opportunities along the way, and garner excitement about future possibilities.

Hymns

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

VU 131 "If our God had simply saved us"
(omit last verse)

MV 196 "We will take what you offer"

Psalms 116

VU 342 "You servants of God"

VU 521 "Praise to God, immortal praise"

MV 191 "What can I do?"

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

MV 195 "Long ago and far away"

MV 197 "Bread of life, broken and shared"

MV 201 "I am the bread of life"

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

VU 510 "We have this ministry"

VU 594 "O Christian, love"

MV 187 "We give our hands to you"

TLUS 29 "When Jesus sets the table"

TLUS 89 "Our tears, falling down like rain"

My Reflections

April 3 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

The suffering servant despised and rejected.

Psalm 22 (VU pp. 743–746)

Why have you forsaken me?

Hebrews 10:16–25

Provoke one another to love and good deeds.

or **Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9**

Jesus, the High Priest who knows our weakness.

John 18:1–19:42

The Passion narrative.

Creation Connection

Let us rely on God's creative Spirit to get us past being overwhelmed by the volume of things that need doing in order to protect and restore the natural world. Let us provoke one another to good deeds for creation.

Spark

Write a modern paraphrase of Psalm 22 as a congregational Prayer of Confession for the “great assembly” (verse 25 NIV) gathered this Sunday. Address the local and global concerns of the day. Compose as boldly as the psalmist, asking for what is hoped for while trusting God, based on past provisions.

With Children

Assure parents ahead of time that this will be a child-friendly service where the focus will not be on the more violent imagery in today's readings. Write a child-friendly paraphrase of the Hebrews 10 passage so that each child can practise a line at home to share with the congregation. Explore what it means to “provoke” one another to loving, good deeds. How do we choose loving deeds even when we are sad and scared?

Or hand out blank sticky notes at the beginning of the service and encourage everyone to draw a picture or write a word that represents something they need to let go of or for which they wish to be forgiven. Have the children collect these notes during the service and stick them to a cross. It is good for them to witness that we all make mistakes and can trust in God's love and forgiveness.

Sermon Starter

Today's readings encourage us to consider what we are capable of doing and enduring on the continuum between destructiveness and creativity. In these passages, we encounter individuals hurting one another and their world. We witness how tolerance to that suffering varies between people, as does the willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Jesus' willingness to sacrifice himself in today's gospel can be placed alongside the other times in his ministry when he used the Spirit's creativity to escape hurt and continue his ministry. Building on the Palm/Passion Sunday theme of listening to God, discuss how the creative Spirit is ready to help us avoid hurting others and guide us in determining whether our chosen sacrifice must be endured or creatively transformed.

Hymns

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

VU 143 “My song is love unknown”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

Psalm 22

VU 154 “Why has God forsaken me”

VU 617 “I love you, God, who heard my cry”

MV 73 “O God, why are you silent?”

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

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

MV 26 “Your love is amazing”

John 18:1–19:42

VU 129–154 Good Friday hymns

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

VU 612 “There is a balm in Gilead”

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

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

TLUS 92 “The darkness comes”

TLUS 98 “When pain or sorrow”

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

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

Texte de _____.
Gathering, Carême/Pâques 2026, page _____.
Droit d'utilisation accordé.

April 5 – Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34–43

Peter’s account of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

or Jeremiah 31:1–6

God’s everlasting love.

Psalms 118:1–2, 14–24 (VU p. 837)

God is my strength and my song.

Colossians 3:1–4

Set your mind on things above.

John 20:1–18 or Matthew 28:1–10

Mary and the empty tomb.

Creation Connection

References to earthquakes, snow, and lightning in the Matthew reading demonstrate how our experiences in nature help us to articulate what we feel and witness in all aspects of life.

Spark

Begin the service with a dramatization of the apostle Paul making his speech in Acts to a number of gathered followers. This provides a warm welcome and a wonderful summary of Jesus’ ministry and the Easter story within it for all present.

With Children

Make a memory game of matching pairs using Easter symbols. Draw the symbols and outline them with puffy paint so that they can be felt as well as seen. Turn the cards face down and play the game. Then turn the cards face up and play again. Ask why it was so easy the second time. Explain that this is one of the reasons prayer is powerful. God already knows past, present, and future and is therefore better able to help us. You might conclude with singing MV 90 “Don’t be afraid.”

Sermon Starter

In Matthew, the guards are frozen with fear at the sudden appearance of the angel. The two Marys, on the other hand, receive with joy the message that Jesus has not only risen but gone ahead to Galilee where his followers will meet him.

We are often given assurance that we can turn to and enjoy the company and guidance of the Spirit, who is around and within us at all times.

Here, however, is the extra assurance that Christ is also more than one step ahead of us. It’s not unusual to wish we could know the outcome of a variety of choices before picking one. We are encouraged here to prayerfully seek the guidance of the One who is better informed. Or, as Colossians puts it, to be raised with Christ to a perspective from above, one that knows past, present, and future. We can then follow the guidance we believe we are given with the same confidence as today’s psalmist, and declare that God is our strength and our song.

Hymns

Acts 10:34–43

VU 164 “The day of resurrection”

VU 606 “In Christ there is no east or west”

TLUS 96 “All my life I will seek your face”

Psalms 118

MV 8 “And on this path”

Colossians 3:1–4

VU 155 “Jesus Christ is risen today”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

TLUS 24 “Cross and Circle”

John 20:1–18 or Matthew 28:1–10

VU 161 “Welcome, happy morning”

VU 166 “Joy comes with the dawn”

VU 179 “Hallelujah, hallelujah, give thanks”

MV 121 “Hey now! Singing hallelujah!”

TLUS 48 “Worthy of every song”

My Reflections

April 12 – Second Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Second to Fourth Sunday of Easter were contributed by Scott MacAuley and Judy McKelvey while at Sparling U.C., Winnipeg, Man. First published in the Gathering Lent-Easter 2014 issue.

Acts 2:14a, 22–32

Peter preaches on Pentecost.

Psalm 16 (VU pp. 737–738)

In you, God, I take refuge.

1 Peter 1:3–9

Salvation is the outcome of faithfulness.

John 20:19–31

Jesus appears to the disciples and to Thomas.

Creation Connection

What doubts do you need to overcome in order to witness to hope and resurrection in the midst of the changing climate?

Spark

Place a table in an accessible space in the sanctuary and cover it with tea lights. During the prayers of the faithful, invite those gathered for worship to think about the doubts they experience in their faith journeys. After an appropriate time of silence, encourage people to visit the candle station, light a candle, and offer their doubts to God. This may be done while singing MV 85 “Take, O take me as I am,” with simple or no accompaniment.

With Children

Bring a bag that contains a block of Swiss cheese, a transformer toy, some hard beans, and a cellphone. Share with the children that you are going to take items out of the bag and tell them something about each. They have to tell you whether or not they believe you. For example, tell them that the Swiss cheese is a piece of the moon, the transformer robot is a taxicab, the beans are magic, and with the cellphone they can call God. When the children don't believe you, ask them what would make them believe you. If they do believe you, ask them why they believe you. Tell them the story of Thomas the doubter and what it took for him to believe that Jesus was alive.

Sermon Starter

The Evangelist John has passed on to us this wonderful story of the apostle Thomas's movement from doubt to belief after his encounter with the risen Christ. While we often focus on Thomas's doubt and hold it up as a kind of assurance that our doubts are healthy, normal, and to be expected, it may be of value to dig a little deeper into this familiar story. When Jesus first appears, Thomas is absent from the community of disciples. When Jesus appears again a week later, Thomas is present in the community of disciples. Is it possible that John is trying to tell us that our presence in the community of disciples is necessary to experience the risen Christ? What does it mean to be “absent from” or “present within” the community of disciples? Where is it we can safely declare, like Thomas, “My Lord and my God”?

Hymns

Acts 2:14a, 22–32

VU 155 “Jesus Christ is risen today”

VU 158 “Christ is alive”

VU 253 “Sing your joy”

TLUS 24 “Cross and Circle”

Psalm 16

VU p. 737 “Protect me, God”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

1 Peter 1:3–9

VU 663 “My faith looks up to thee”

MV 220 “Hope shines as the solitary star”

TLUS 103 “Bambelela”

John 20:19–31

VU 170 “O sons and daughters, let us sing”

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

MV 147 “God, help us to treasure”

TLUS 100 “In my wrestling, and in my doubts”

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

April 19 – Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36–41

Three thousand new followers of the Way.

Psalms 116:1–4, 12–19 (VU p. 836)

How can I repay you, God?

1 Peter 1:17–23

Souls purified through obedience.

Luke 24:13–35

Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus.

Creation Connection

What projects, ministries, and events in your community that show care for creation cause your heart to burn within you?

Spark

Invite the worship team to join you for a mid-week wander through the community to take pictures of places where they believe God is at work. Subjects might include a renewed playground, a building project, a wetland area, an outdoor hockey rink, or any other signs of community renewal. Meet together to review the discoveries and to prepare a slide presentation that could be used during the Call to Worship, gospel reading, or sermon. When these pictures are shown, offer verbal descriptions and highlight that they are examples of God journeying with us in community. Emphasize that, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, if we search with hearts of faith, our spirits will be opened to experience the resurrected Jesus at work in our community.

With Children

Using a magnifying glass and a cereal box, show the children the small print on the side of the box and explain that this includes important information about nutrition, calories, and fat content. Explain that it may be difficult to read the information. Show the children what happens when you place the magnifying glass over the small print. Share the story of the road to Emmaus and explain that the disciples did not recognize Jesus. As Jesus shared stories and then broke bread with them, they noticed a warm, loving sensation within them and finally recognized him. Invite the children to consider how Jesus is like a magnifying glass that helps us understand the important things in our lives.

Adapt the story, using images appropriate to the children.

Sermon Starter

In *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission* (CreateSpace, 2013), Tim Dearborn states, "It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world." This quote has become something of a foundational pillar in reclaiming what it means to be engaged in mission. Our God is engaged deeply in the world and invites all humanity to join in the work of renewing creation. We could add to Dearborn's quote that the God of mission also has a synagogue in the world, a mosque in the world, and countless other institutions that are invited into the work of God.

Luke is the only gospel to relate the story of the road to Emmaus. Within this real journey, a spiritual journey also unfolds. The truth is slowly unveiled and the disciples discover what God is already doing in their midst. The choice for the disciples is to continue on their journey and ignore what has been revealed to them, or to turn back to Jerusalem and participate in the work that God has already begun. How many times do we find ourselves absorbed in the works of the church and headed on a journey away from the work that God is already doing in our midst?

Hymns

Acts 2:14a, 36–41

VU 480 "Let us break bread together"

MV 135 "Called by earth and sky"

TLUS 147 "There's no need to ask me twice"

TLUS 149 "Yeshuko pachhi"

Psalms 116

MV 191 "What can I do?"

1 Peter 1:17–23

MV 13 "O let the power fall on me"

Luke 24:13–35

VU 182 "Stay with us through the night"

VU 184 "As we walked home at close of day"

MV 21 "Open our hearts"

MV 199 "When at this table"

TLUS 2 "A strand in the web of life let me be"

TLUS 112 "Pra Jao Song Sum Phad"

April 26 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42–47

The believers share everything in common.

Psalm 23 (VU pp. 747–749)

God is my shepherd.

1 Peter 2:19–25

Christ's example in suffering.

John 10:1–10

Jesus the good shepherd and the gate.

Creation Connection

How do you recognize the voice and presence of Jesus in prayer, in worship, in community life, and in creation?

Spark

“And the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4). Create a central, two-tiered, altar-like area by placing some sturdy boxes on a table and covering it all with enough cloth to “puddle” down the front and onto the floor. At various levels around the table, place pictures, newspaper clippings, articles, names, and images of known leaders (past and present) within the community. These may include some of the church's past and current ministers and lay leaders, community politicians who have made significant contributions, and volunteers of non-profit community organizations. Intersperse these images with symbols of leadership, such as a cane to represent a shepherd's crook, a hiking pole, a gavel, a stole, and a sash. Invite the congregation to reflect on how these leaders have been “shepherds” of the community to make it a safe place and how leadership is exercised in their own families and workplaces.

With Children

Bring along a cane to act as a shepherd's crook and explain to the children that shepherds care for their sheep by protecting them from prey, helping them to get untangled from bushes, and leading them to pastures where they can eat and drink water. Show the children how the cane or “crook” could be of assistance to a shepherd in scaring off wild animals that wanted to hunt the sheep. Also, explain to the children that sometimes shepherds let the sheep from different flocks mix together in large open fields

and that the sheep all know the sound of their own shepherd's voice, so that when the shepherd calls, they will come from wherever they are to meet them. In today's gospel, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. Reflect on why Jesus is like a shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows each of us by name and keeps a caring watch over us.

Sermon Starter

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one that inspires, comforts, and encourages us in our individual faith journeys. Knowing we are named by Jesus and that he calls us to join in caring for others is a timeless truth. It is good for us to reflect on how we experience the voice of the Good Shepherd amid the cacophony of voices in our world, but the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd is also one that calls us out of ourselves to join our individual spiritual journeys with the journey of our faith communities. Leadership is never for the sake of an individual's vision. Rather, a leader calls forth, by name, the energies and gifts of an entire community of people. Are our individual journeys of faith in tune with the rest of the community?

Hymns

Acts 2:42–47

- VU 588 “Many are the lightbeams”
- VU 603 “In loving partnership we come”
- MV 1 “Let us build a house”
- MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”
- MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

Psalm 23

- VU 273 “The King of love”
- VU p. 747 “The Lord's my Shepherd”
- VU p. 748 “God is my shepherd”
- MV 105 “You are my father”
- TLUS 1 “Simply to be”

1 Peter 2:19–25

- VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”
- MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”
- MV 91 “Cradle me in your arms”

John 10:1–10

- VU 478 “You satisfy the hungry heart”
- MV 126 “Are you a shepherd?”
- MV 161 “I have called you by your name”
- TLUS 3 “A whisper from the universe”
- TLUS 142 “As a parent holds a child”

May 3 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Worship materials for the Fifth to Seventh Sunday of Easter were contributed by Geoff Wilfong-Pritchard, Edmonton, Alta.

Acts 7:55–60

Stephen is stoned.

Psalms 31:1–5, 15–16 (VU p. 758 Parts One and Three)

My times are in your hands.

1 Peter 2:2–10

A chosen race, a royal priesthood, living stones.

John 14:1–14

I am the way, the truth, the life.

Creation Connection

We live in a world of human and non-human relationships. As participants in the wisdom of God through our relationship with the Christ, our role is to bring those relationships into balance.

Spark

Play Hagood Hardy's "The Homecoming" as a prelude or close to the beginning of the service. Many versions are available on YouTube. Ask the gathering if anyone can identify the music. Some may remember it as the soundtrack to a very successful tea commercial from the 1970s. Even if people can't identify it by name, ask what feelings the music evokes. Why does it work so well to evoke a feeling of home, or homecoming?

With Children

Ask the children, What should home feel like? How do you want to feel when you are at home? (Remember that not everyone experiences home as loving and safe.) Put the question out to other members of the congregation or have the children go ask people individually. Gather up the answers. Reflect with the gathering on how home is more than a physical structure. It's a set of relationships. At home, we should feel welcome and loved unconditionally. We should know that we can truly be ourselves. We may find our home in unexpected places. For example, some might describe being at home in the mountains. When we are in balance with each other and with creation, we are always at home. In God's love, we are always at home.

Sermon Starter

The words from John's gospel are some of the most comforting in scripture and most often shared at funerals or celebrations of life, especially the words "I go to prepare a place for you." Yet they are followed with what sounds like stern words of admonition: "No one comes to God except through me." It's easy to conclude that if you believe certain things about Jesus, you will get to God. Remember that in John's gospel, Jesus is the embodiment of God's wisdom, which is the creative and sustaining impulse of all creation. While no one comes to God except through wisdom, that wisdom is available to all humans and non-humankind. We just need to reflect upon the relationships that sustain us to know this is true.

Hymns

VU 120	"O Jesus, I have promised"
VU 220	"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
VU 238	"O Lord my God"
VU 248	"When long before time"
VU 256	"O God beyond all praising"
VU 628	"Come, my Way, my Truth"
MV 10	"Come and seek the ways of Wisdom"
MV 27	"Creator God you gave us life"
MV 37	"Each blade of grass"
MV 154	"Deep in our hearts"
TLUS 23	"For everyone born"
TLUS 24	"Cross and Circle"
TLUS 32	"As we are"
TLUS 50	"As the moon"
TLUS 56	"We long to know her"



May 10 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22–31

Paul points the Athenians to “the unknown god.”

Psalms 66:8–20 (VU pp. 784–785 Parts Two and Three)

God preserved us.

1 Peter 3:13–22

Do not repay evil for evil.

John 14:15–21

The Advocate, the Spirit, will be with you.

Creation Connection

What is our legacy individually and collectively?

What do we hope to leave for those who follow us?

Spark

At the beginning of the service, remind people of the phrase “famous last words” and how it is used to describe things turning out the exact opposite of the way we think (or hope) they should. Ask people to reflect on last words that those close to them may have shared with them—spoken, signed, written, or embodied—and how those words may continue to guide them.

With Children

Ask the children about Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Do they know how many he had? (Hint: Refer to Mark 6:3.) Ask them what they think it would be like to be the brother or sister of a really famous person like Jesus. Ask the congregation, too. You might get some surprising answers! It seems that Jesus’ brothers and sisters weren’t too crazy about having him as a brother sometimes. Jesus, though, wants us to reframe our understanding of family. He explains that his family is anyone who is loving and anyone who helps other people know that they are loved.

Sermon Starter

The Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John give us very different perspectives on God’s love and judgment. Paul very much describes the apocalyptic presence, exhorting people to repent and to believe in the unknown god who has set a date for the judgment of the world. The Jesus in John’s gospel suggests that his presence will continue with the disciples, and that they are to be judged not on their belief, but on the quality

of their love for one another and for creation. In John, these are Jesus’ “famous last words.” They give us the opportunity to remember the last words that others have left with us, and how we might wish to be remembered by our last words and deeds.

Hymns

VU 217	“All creatures of our God and King”
VU 226	“For the beauty of the earth”
VU 241	“Oh sing to our God”
VU 272	“Open your ears, O faithful people
MV 12	“Come touch our hearts”
MV 79	“Spirit, open my heart”
MV 97	“Listen, God is calling”
MV 176	“Three things I promise”
TLUS 2	“A strand in the web of life let me be”
TLUS 33	“God in whose memory no one is lost”
TLUS 94	“In the twilight, in the midnight”
TLUS 111	“As the wind song through the trees”

My Reflections

May 14 (Thursday) – Ascension Day

(Or use these scriptures on Sunday, May 17.)

Acts 1:1–11

The promise of the Spirit and Jesus' ascension.

Psalm 47 (VU p. 771)

Clap your hands, all you people.

or **Psalm 93** (VU pp. 812–813)

Majestic is our God.

Ephesians 1:15–23

I do not cease to give thanks for you.

Luke 24:44–53

Jesus' last words to the disciples bring joy.

Creation Connection

The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus represent for the gospel writers the reconciliation of the human and non-human worlds, and the seen and the unseen worlds.

Spark

Superheroes! Create a slide collage or bulletin cover of superheroes throughout the ages. See *Worship Sparks* (p. 26) for a sermon series idea with a superhero theme.

With Children

Ask the children who their favourite superhero is. Ask the congregation for their favourites as well. What are the attributes of a superhero? What identifies them? What do they do? Remind everyone that there are lots of images of Jesus in scripture. One of them is that he is like a superhero. What do you suppose Jesus does so that people remember him in that way? Share the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples as if by "magic." Or share a story of something you feel makes Jesus a superhero (such as being a superhero of compassion or courage).

Sermon Starter

The ascension of Jesus may not be everyone's favourite story because it suggests that we need to believe in a three-tiered universe (heaven, earth, underworld) for it to make sense. Just as the epistle of Peter suggests that Jesus descended into hell and preached to the spirits there before the resurrection, so too Luke suggests that Jesus ascends into heaven. Such images gave Luke and



his hearers no cause for concern. They were well aware that Greek superheroes ascended into heaven to be deified. Think of Hercules the strong and Asclepius the healer. The questions for them would have been, Why Jesus? What was so special about him? How do his superpowers differ from the common cultural understandings of the day?

Hymns

VU 161	"Welcome, happy morning"
VU 163	"Hail, glad festival day"
VU 173	"Thine is the glory"
VU 187	"The spring has come"
VU 192	"Forsaking chariots of fire"
MV 101	"Jesus, you fill our hearts"
MV 103	"Ka mana'o 'I 'O"
MV 150	"Spirit God, be our breath"
TLUS 100	"In my wrestling, and in my doubts"
TLUS 145	"Portanto, assim vivamos"
TLUS 148	"We have been called"

Worship Leaders

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

Written by _____.

Gathering, Lent/Easter 2026, page _____.

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May 17 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:6–14

The ascension of Jesus.

Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35 (VU p. 787)

God makes a home for the poor.

1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:6–11

Cast your cares on God. Be alert.

John 17:1–11

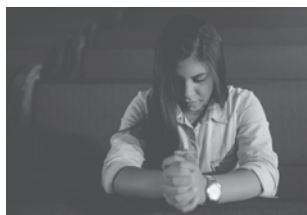
Jesus prays that his disciples “all may be one.”

Creation Connection

Just as God reconciles us to Godself through the Christ, so too does God reconcile us to ourselves and to creation, that we may be one within ourselves and with creation, united in body, mind, and spirit.

Spark

Create a slide presentation or collage of different images of people at prayer.



With Children

Ask the children about their prayer life. When do they pray? What do they pray for? Ask everyone else as well. Then ask, When you pray, who does the talking? Is it possible to listen to God in prayer? How might God be praying for us? Share some prayer practices that help us listen in prayer.

Sermon Starter

We are eavesdroppers on the passage from John, listening in on Jesus as he prays for his disciples. It's easy to take this as a model of prayer life. We pray for others. We do the sharing of concerns and God is the receiver. Then, perhaps, if God deems our prayers worthy, they will be answered. But what if we turn this around? What if the Spirit is praying not for us but through us? How might that understanding reshape our thoughts about what constitutes prayer and how God's prayers are answered in our lives? How might we respond?

Hymns

VU 216	“Sing praise to God, who reigns above”
VU 232	“Joyful, joyful we adore you”
VU 377	“Holy Spirit, hear us”
VU 384	“The lone, wild bird”
VU 385	“Spirit divine, attend our prayers”
VU 437	“The day you gave us, God, is ended”
VU 661	“Come to my heart”
MV 62	“There is room for all”
MV 94	“Love knocks and waits”
MV 145	“Draw the circle wide”
TLUS 54	“I know that ev'ry time I pray”
TLUS 56	“We long to know her”
TLUS 71	“In the presence of your Holy Silence”
TLUS 111	“As the wind song through the trees”

