

WEEKLY SERVICES



PENTECOST SUNDAY TO LABOUR DAY

PENTECOST

Dates

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

Meaning of Name

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

Liturgical Colour: Red

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



ORDINARY TIME (A.K.A. SEASON OF PENTECOST)

Dates

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

Feast Days* and Special Days

*Trinity Sunday – the Sunday after Pentecost.

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

World Communion Sunday – the first Sunday of October.

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

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

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

Remembrance Sunday – Sunday before

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

*Reign of Christ – the last Sunday before Advent.

Meaning of Name

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

Liturgical Colour: Green

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

May 24 – Pentecost Sunday

Worship materials for May 24 to June 14 were contributed by Kelly Sprinkle, Mountain Rise United Church of Christ, Fairport, N.Y.

Acts 2:1–21

The Holy Spirit comes in wind and flame.
or **Numbers 11:24–30**

Moses shares the spirit given to him.

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

God's spirit brings life and renewal.

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13

One spirit, many gifts.

John 20:19–23

Jesus appears behind locked doors.

or **John 7:37–39**

Let the thirsty come and drink!

Creation Connection

Jesus reminds his followers that those who believe in him will be like streams of living water. Metaphorically and literally, water sustains all life. Rivers carve the earth, nourish fields and forests, and connect ecosystems and communities. Without water, there is no growth—only desolation. Consider that many are still thirsty for clean water in this world.

Spark

Each year on Pentecost Sunday, Roman firefighters climb to the top of the Pantheon and drop thousands upon thousands of rose petals through the oculus, symbolizing the coming of the Holy Spirit, an old tradition revived in 1995. Recreate this in your congregation. As a soloist, the choir, or the congregation sings VU 200 “O Holy Spirit, by whose breath,” invite volunteers (including children and youth) to toss rose petals (real or artificial, such as paper) up into the air or from a balcony, symbolizing the flames of the Spirit landing upon the gathered. Artificial petals can be collected following service to use again on another Pentecost.

With Children

Invite the children to imagine how God's Spirit gives life to all Creation—oceans, animals, people, and the earth itself. Using a fan or pinwheel, help them experience how the Spirit moves like wind—unseen but powerful and refreshing. Encourage

the children to pay attention to signs of that Spirit in nature and in themselves.

Sermon Starter

The Holy Spirit is indiscriminate and uncontrollable. It alights where it will. In Numbers, Eldad and Medad, among the 70 elders, were summoned to the meeting tent but didn't go. When God bestowed the Spirit, all 70 received it, even though elders 69 and 70 were missing. The Spirit moved again 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, enabling Galileans to speak in languages of every nation.

In both instances, humanity tried to stop the Spirit's movement. When Eldad and Medad spoke ecstatically in the Spirit, Moses' assistant Joshua implored Moses to stop them. Their prophesying was happening in the community instead of the designated meeting tent. Humanity also suggested that the early followers of Jesus were already drunk before lunch.

The Spirit can't be contained. Who knows where it will move today? We can be certain we'll be surprised if we expect life to stay within the same boundaries. The Spirit breathes freedom and unsettles the complacent.

In *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*, Cole Arthur Riley writes, “Pentecost reminds us that the Spirit of God rejects assimilation under the guise of ‘unity.’ This tale is not just about diversity; it's not mere tokenism; it's language as liberation. It's the sound of excluded voices making something whole again” (Convergent Books, 2024, p. 265).

As we celebrate Pentecost, how can we dream anew and live into a future full of Spirit-filled liberation and abundant possibilities?

Hymns

VU 200	“O Holy Spirit, by whose breath”
VU 205	“Like the murmur of the dove's song”
VU 380	“She comes sailing on the wind”
VU 381	“Spirit of Life”
VU 387	“Loving Spirit”
MV 6	“Holy Spirit, come into our lives”
MV 13	“O let the power fall on me”
MV 79	“Spirit, open my heart”
MV 87	“Water flowing from the mountains”
MV 142	“Oh a song must rise”
TLUS 51	“Anointing, fall on me”
TLUS 64	“There's a wild hope in the wind”

May 31 – Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1–2:4a

The first story of Creation.

Psalm 8 (VU pp. 730–732)

What are human beings that God cares about them?

2 Corinthians 13:11–13

Agree with one another; live in peace; trinity.

Matthew 28:16–20

Go be disciples in all the world!

Creation Connection

In the beginning, God formed a world woven with beauty and interconnected with all living things—and called it good. But that balance is now broken; we are called not to dominate Creation, but to join in its healing with humility, justice, and care.

Spark

Give each person a smooth stone to hold in their hands, symbolizing the mystery of the interconnectedness of the divine Trinity. At a designated time during worship, invite each person to place their stone in a central bowl of water, symbolizing the mystery and closeness of God. As the worshippers come forward, the minister offers a blessing: “The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the friendship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.”

With Children

Contemplate with the children the beauty and wonder of nature and the world. Tell them that in the first story of Creation, God looks at everything and calls it good. Invite them to share what their favourite parts of nature might be—trees, flowers, animals, stars, water. Psalm 8 reminds us that we are responsible for God’s Creation. Ask the children how they might be able to help protect and care for Creation in their everyday lives. Offer additional examples of how children can care for the earth—recycling, planting trees or flowers, turning off electronics to save energy, being kind to animals, and picking up litter.

Sermon Starter

The Trinity is a mystery. The mystery of the Trinity is easier to embrace than Trinitarian language itself. Trinitarian language is difficult. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the “official” words in baptism. The masculinity of Father and Son seems an affront to commitments to reflect the diverse understanding of God found in scripture and the tradition. Ecumenical agreements with other denominations and a shared commitment to common recognition of baptism leave us with a male godhead at baptism. The absence of the three “official” naming words may invalidate one’s baptism in other denominations.

Trinity Sunday doesn’t need to present an argument for or against the “official” language. 2 Corinthians 13:11–13 provides an opportunity to embrace and explore a more expansive vision of the Trinity in a blessing that is relational: the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the friendship of the Holy Spirit. Paul doesn’t define the Trinity but rather blesses the community with the realities of grace, love, and friendship (communion). We are invited to meet a God of relationship, mystery, and community.

Trinity Sunday is a celebration—not of doctrinal correctness—but of holy mystery: a mystery that welcomes us into grace, into love, into friendship; a mystery that is bigger than our words and doctrine, but not beyond our experience.

Hymns

VU 268	“Bring many names”
VU 316	“Praise our Maker”
VU 514	“God the Spirit, guide and guardian”
MV 24	“Breath of God, Breath of peace”
MV 30	“It’s a song of praise to the Maker”
MV 43	“The play of the Godhead”
MV 173	“Put peace into each other’s hands”
TLUS 56	“We long to know her”
TLUS 64	“There’s a wild hope in the wind”
TLUS 104	“Kirisuto no heiwa ga”
TLUS 158	“On this good earth”

June 7 – Second after Pentecost

Proper 5

Genesis 12:1–9

Call of Abraham.

Psalm 33:1–12 (VU p. 760)

Sing a new song to God.

Romans 4:13–25

Faith, not the law.

Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Call of Matthew; girl restored to life; woman healed.

Creation Connection

In a time of ecological crisis, we return to scripture not only for comfort, but for clarity and challenge. The scripture readings invite us to engage with Creation not as a finished product, but as a living, unfolding reality—one that God continues to shape through human courage, divine love, and Creation's healing power.

Spark

Create a drab, grey scene. Around the table, litter old newspapers, discarded items, and other trash. Invite a cellist or another musician to play a song that begins in a sombre tone but brightens throughout. As the musician plays, volunteers come forward to brighten the drab area by adding flowers, colourful cloths, candles, and other such items.

With Children

Invite the children to reflect on the surprising and compassionate ways Jesus interacts with people who are ignored or judged. Tell them how Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector who wasn't very popular, to follow him. Highlight how he didn't choose only those who were thought to be "good" or "perfect"—he chose real people who had their ups and downs. Remind the children how Jesus stops, pays attention, and helps people, even when others overlook or dismiss them. Conclude by asking how they might show compassion, inclusion, and courage—just like Jesus did.

Sermon Starter

The psalmist urges us to "sing for joy, you who love justice. Sing God a new song. God loves justice and fills the earth with love" (adapted from Psalm 33).

At a leader's home, a noisy crowd and flute players are leading a funeral dirge. Without saying they're singing the wrong song, Jesus tells them to move along so he can be with the girl who only "sleeps." They laugh, but he enters, takes her hand, and she rises from her deathly sleep. A song of healing and joy replaces the dirge.

How often do we sing old hymns that don't align with our commitment to a wider vision of God's realm and the inclusion of all humanity? Old hymns comfort, but do we sing without embracing the full expanse of God's love? Though individuals prefer certain hymns and music styles, there's beauty in discovering new songs. Just as we can't limit music to one style, we must embrace the breadth of humanity, expecting that God will reveal more beauty in each one. Labelling certain music and people as bad misses God's welcoming song.

Labelling someone a sinner is pejorative. It separates "us" from those pushed to society's margins and creates a superiority complex. Instead of labelling, Jesus calls, invites, and welcomes. Despite society's segregation of tax collectors, Jesus named Matthew a disciple. On this occasion, Matthew hosted Jesus and more "sinners" at dinner.

We must be careful not to "clean up" sinners and tax collectors to make them acceptable to prejudiced sensibilities. Jesus welcomed them for who they were, humans created in God's image. If God welcomes so-called sinners and their song, we must do the same. And in doing so, we discover that we sinners also have a welcome.

Hymns

VU 245	"Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet"
VU 256	"O God beyond all praising"
VU 359	"He came singing love"
VU 533	"When in our music God is glorified"
VU 716	"My life flows on"
MV 138	"My love colours outside the lines"
MV 145	"Draw the circle wide"
MV 157	"I am a child of God"
MV 169	"When hands reach out beyond divides"
TLUS 22	"Build a longer table"
TLUS 23	"For everyone born"
TLUS 29	"When Jesus sets the table"

"Sing praises old and new" by Sally Ann Morris, text by Brian A. Wren; anthem or hymn version (www.giamusic.com)

June 14 – Third after Pentecost

Proper 6

Genesis 18:1–15; (21:1–7)

Son promised to Abraham and Sarah.

Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)

I called upon God in the face of death.

Romans 5:1–8

Justified by faith.

Matthew 9:35–10:8, (9–23)

Jesus and the disciples preach and heal.

Creation Connection

Beneath a tree, the story of Abraham, Sarah, and the three travellers unfolds. The tree offers shade and a welcoming space for hospitality. Similarly, just as this space fosters the nurturing of relationships, humanity bears the responsibility for protecting and nurturing natural environments for future generations.

Spark

Create a soundscape of distant waves, wind, and soft weeping, echoing the sorrow of a wounded world. Enlist volunteers to move about the worship space with small bowls of water mixed with salt—symbolizing the tears of all who feel harassed and helpless. The volunteers gently sprinkle the water into the air or onto the hands of the congregation. Let the scent of saltwater and the sounds of waves, wind, and weeping move the congregation to notice, grieve, and bring healing to their communities.

With Children

Abraham and Sarah both offered hospitality to the three travellers by providing a space for respite and food. While the travellers were eating the meal that Sarah had prepared, one of them surprised Abraham and Sarah by stating that they would finally have a baby, even though they were an elderly couple. Sarah was so surprised by what the traveller said that she laughed.

Explore the themes of hospitality and surprise. Hospitality means welcoming others with kindness—even if you don't know them well. We can practise hospitality at church and in our homes. When we get to know others like Abraham and Sarah did, they can bring joy to our lives and perhaps even surprise us.

Sermon Starter

On the global stage, we witness genocide, wars, closed borders, violence against immigrants, migrants, and refugees, and self-centred politics. If we are attentive, we experience the cries of ancient and contemporary psalmists: “The cords of death entangle me, the pangs of the grave lay hold on me; I suffer distress and anguish.... O God, I pray, save my life” (adapted from Psalm 116:3–4).

The pericope from Matthew serves both as a reminder and a summons for preachers and laity alike that, just as the early disciples were given authority to expel unclean spirits and heal sickness and diseases, we as Christians have the same authority. Even if we can't cure sickness and disease or exorcize demons, we are still able to diagnose the situations in which humanity suffers and proclaim life and compassion to challenge the tyrants who seek insular communities of sameness. Remember that when Jesus noticed the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless. Who among us and within our community and global village is experiencing harassment and may feel helpless?

Just as our ministry and mission have a global context, the reading from Matthew calls us to proclaim the healing realm of heaven in the very communities in which we live. While the writer of Matthew focuses Jesus' words on a particular community, we should be careful not to preach an insular message, but rather to proclaim a gospel that brings hope and heals the enmity and prejudice that is simmering in our communities.

Hymns

VU 215	“Hope of the world”
VU 333	“Love divine, all loves excelling”
VU 572	“Send me, Lord”
VU 613	“We cannot measure how you heal”
VU 639	“One more step along the world I go”
VU 700	“God of freedom, God of justice”
MV 79	“Spirit, open my heart”
MV 94	“Love knocks and waits”
MV 171	“Christ has no body now but yours”
TLUS 147	“There's no need to ask me twice”
TLUS 148	“We have been called”
TLUS 149	“Yeshuko pachhi”

June 21 – Fourth after Pentecost

Proper 7

Worship materials for June 21 to July 12 were contributed by Anna Constantin, St. Paul's U.C., Edmonton, Alta.

Genesis 21:8–21

Hagar and Ishmael sent away.

Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17 (VU p. 803)

Turn your ear to me, O God.

Romans 6:1b–11

Dead to sin; alive in Christ.

Matthew 10:24–39

Discipleship: Lose your life to find it.

Creation Connection

Hagar's flask runs out. The psalmist thirsts for God as they cry out asking for a sign of God's favour. How does Creation refresh us when we thirst for connection?

Spark

Share images of emptiness, such as a flask without water and a car out of gas. What do we do to fill our spiritual tanks and refresh our spirits? How do we open ourselves to be filled so that we can be refreshed? What are the ways that we include or exclude people from being refreshed at church? Perhaps explore this question using the different senses. How do we include folks that have a diversity of learning, visual, or physical needs? Or those who have allergies to scents?

With Children

Lead a game of Simon Says, but do actions that are different from those the children are being asked to do. For example, say, "Simon says to pat your tummy" and pat your head instead. Invite the children to discuss how this may be confusing and make people feel left out. How do we make our actions match our words? Invite them to act out words like *welcome, belonging, and friend*.

Sermon Starter

What words and actions are common in our church and culture that leave people feeling sent away and thirsting for community? Jesus reminds us that each one of us in our diversity is precious,

for God even counts the hairs on our heads. Perhaps we are being invited in discipleship to lose our life (assumptions, societal practices, approaches, habits) to find connection, to be united in new life together, and to find ways that God is revealed in our diversity. When we pay attention to Jesus' invitation, might we as church have something that people are thirsting for?

Hymns

Genesis 21:8–21

VU 280 "Mother and God"

VU 395 "Come in, come in and sit down"

MV 62 "There is room for all"

MV 138 "My love colours outside the lines"

TLUS 31 "Queerly beloved"

Psalm 86

VU 218 "We praise you, O God"

TLUS 61 "Are you lost?"

Romans 6:1b–11

VU 402 "We are one"

TLUS 65 "When all else is gone"

Matthew 10:24–39

VU 561 "Take up your cross"

MV 178 "Who is my mother"

TLUS 55 "We light this candle"

TLUS 149 "Yeshuko pachhi"

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS AND IDEAS

Contributions to **Gathering** can be submitted through

GatheringWorship.ca or emailed to

gather@united-church.ca.



Worship Leaders

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Written by _____.

Gathering, Pentecost 1 2026, page _____.

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June 28 – Fifth after Pentecost

Proper 8

Genesis 22:1-14

The sacrifice of Isaac.

Psalm 13 (VU p. 734)

How long will you forget me, God?

Romans 6:12-23

The wages of sin is death; eternal life is a free gift.

Matthew 10:40-42

Welcoming and offering a cup of water.

Creation Connection

Even something as small as sharing a cup of cold water invites us into the reward of connection and community. What happens when we live the invitation to offer a cup of water in a way that recognizes the resources of this world as something to be shared with all of Creation?

Spark

What if we followed a droplet of water on its journey as a raindrop falling to the earth? Or as part of glacier melting into a stream that enters a river into the ocean? How does this small drop of water impact our earth's ecosystems and the way we relate to each other? How do we cherish a drop of water?

With Children

Pour a glass of water and ask if anyone is thirsty. Have other glasses of water ready to pass around. Ask when people feel thirsty (e.g., after running around, on a hot day, or when we pay attention to what our bodies need). What can we do when we notice that other people are thirsty? How does it feel to be offered a cup of water when you are thirsty? How does it feel to offer a cup of water to another person, or help in some way? Jesus speaks about these kinds of actions being rewarded. What kind of reward do you think he is imagining?

Sermon Starter

“Those who receive a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Those who receive a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward” (adapted from Matthew 10:41). What does it mean to

receive someone as they are and not what we would hope or like them to be? Is Jesus inviting us to get past our assumptions and be attentive to the prophets, the righteous, and those who are thirsting in our world? What does it mean to lean into our discomfort so we can understand the reward of welcoming the diverse voices in our global community? How do we create space for the voices of everyone, including any who experience being deemed “little” and “less than” in our culture? As we live into the realm of what God considers precious, how do we offer a cup of water to a little one? How do we reward the prophets among us?

Hymns

Genesis 22:1-14

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

TLUS 109 “All this pain”

Psalm 13

VU 618 “God, when I stand”

VU 624 “Give to us laughter”

TLUS 78 “Trust these words”

TLUS 98 “When pain or sorrow”

Romans 6:12-23

VU 672 “Take time to be holy”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

TLUS 102 “Nothing to fear”

Matthew 10:40-42

VU 582 “There’s a spirit in the air”

VU 681 “Where cross the crowded ways of life”

MV 4 “All who are thirsty”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

TLUS 164 “Neighbour, I am your neighbour”

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

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

Texte de _____.

Gathering, Pentecôte 1 2026, page _____.
Droit d'utilisation accordé.

July 5 – Sixth after Pentecost

Proper 9

Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67

Rebekah welcomes Isaac as her husband.

Psalm 45:10–17 (VU p. 769)

A song for the anointed ruler.

or **Song of Solomon 2:8–13**

A love song.

Romans 7:15–25a

I do not do the good I want to do.

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

My yoke is easy; my burden is light.

Creation Connection

In the Genesis passage, Rebekah makes a life-altering decision to marry Isaac. Her life changes forever and she finds herself in places she has never experienced before. What decisions have taken the environment to places we had not anticipated? Where have we travelled that has given us new insight about our relationship with Creation?

Spark

What would a timeline of your place of worship look like? Were there decisions or events that took your community of faith in a new direction? What decisions are currently being made that will impact the future of your faith community? Post a timeline and invite people to add to it.

With Children

Have a large bag filled with books or other heavy objects. Invite one child to try to pick it up and carry it to a set point. They shouldn't be able to achieve this. Invite two children to try the task. Keep adding people (young and older), and join in yourself, until the task is accomplished. Jesus told a story about carrying burdens. A burden is a heavy load, just like we tried to carry. A burden can be something physical, such as a heavy bag of books. Or a burden can be something we are sad or worried about, or afraid of. A burden is easier when we carry it together. Jesus promises to always be there to help us carry our burdens, our heavy loads.

Sermon Starter

Remember the Choose Your Own Adventure books? Each decision led to a change in where the storyline went. How are our decisions affecting our story with our Creator and Creation? Are they taking us to places we would rather not go? Our gospel reading uses the image of a yoke, a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to a plow or cart that they pull. It is placed on the neck or shoulders of the animals to allow them to pull a load together, distributing weight and increasing their combined pulling power.

How do we yoke ourselves to God's dream for us so that we find ourselves in places and stages in life beyond anything we could ask or imagine? What happens when we do what we would rather not and find ourselves pulling in a different direction from God? What would happen if we rested in God's gentle and humble yoke and allowed God to help us pull the load and carry the burden? Where would we find ourselves then?

Hymns

Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67

VU 633 "Bless now, O God, the journey"

MV 216 "Wherever you may go"

TLUS 151 "Holy One, may your presence here"

Psalm 45

VU 210 "You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd"

MV 85 "Take, O take me as I am"

TLUS 44 "Sari srishti ke malik tumhi ho"

Song of Solomon 2:8–13

VU 273 "The King of love"

VU 367 "Come down, O love divine"

TLUS 31 "Queerly beloved"

Romans 7:15–25a

VU 120 "O Jesus, I have promised"

MV 84 "In you there is a refuge"

TLUS 142 "As a parent holds a child"

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

VU 661 "Come to my heart"

TLUS 105 "May you be held"

TLUS 107 "Come and rest in the arms of God"

"Leaning on the everlasting arms" by E.A.

Hoffman (www.hymnary.org)

July 12 – Seventh after Pentecost

Proper 10

Genesis 25:19–34

Esau gives up his birthright for Jacob's stew.

Psalm 119:105–112 (VU p. 841)

Your word is a lamp for my feet.

Romans 8:1–11

To set the mind on the Spirit is life.

Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

The parable of the sower and the seed.

Creation Connection

Creation measures time by the seasons rather than by minutes and hours. As she spirals through the seasons, there is an echo of Ecclesiastes ("there is a time") that invites us into the abundance of each period. Instead of giving up our birthright in order to quench our appetites in the mindset of scarcity, what if we patiently cultivated good soil so that we would be grounded in abundance for all? Where in the world are people being asked to give up more than their share so that they can have the basics of food and water?

Spark

In the 1960s, Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel and his colleagues created the marshmallow test (also known as the cookie test) to study self-control and delayed gratification in children. Inspired by his own daughters, Mischel designed an experiment where children were offered a treat, such as a marshmallow or cookie, and given the option to wait a short period before eating it in order to receive a second, larger reward. Where are we invited to live out this test in Creation?

With Children

Discuss the cost of items and how they have changed over time. Wonder together why some things seem like a good deal and others do not. Is it a good idea to trade certain things because you want something right now? Share the story of Jacob and Esau and explain what a birthright is. Invite conversation about patience and what is needed so that we can make good decisions. The acronym HALT—hungry, angry, lonely, tired—may be useful in remembering that when any of us, at

any age, feel any of those things, it is not a good time to make a decision. Help the children set the intention of halting and making good decisions. Remind the adults that younger brains are still developing and may have trouble holding on to more than one intention at a time. So, we accept good intentions, even when they aren't lived out, and help the children as their brains mature into being able to make good decisions.

Sermon Starter

Is there enough? What happens when we as individuals or as a church begin to hold tight to resources? Sometimes we lose sight of our birthright (like Esau) or only notice the places where seeds do not thrive. Sometimes being hungry, angry, lonely, tired, or afraid affects our choices. What is it that we need to create good soil (where God's abundance can flourish) in our lives and in our churches so that our choices as a congregation will positively impact the seven generations after us, instead of getting caught in the illusion of instant gratification where the soil may be shallow or thorny?

Hymns

Genesis 25:19–34

VU 644 "I was there to hear your burning cry"
 TLUS 103 "Bambelela"

Psalm 119

VU 662 "Lead me, God"
 MV 12 "Come touch our hearts"

Romans 8:1–11

VU 370 "Send your Holy Spirit"
 VU 381 "Spirit of Life"
 MV 156 "Dance with the Spirit"
 TLUS 2 "A strand in the web of life let me be"

Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

VU 361 "Small things count"
 VU 481 "Sent forth by God's blessing"
 VU 503 "When seed falls on good soil"
 MV 174 "Soil of God, you and I"
 TLUS 134 "Little by little"
 TLUS 155 "We gather as Christ's body"

July 19 – Eighth after Pentecost

Proper 11

Worship materials for July 19 were contributed by Nathan Wright, while at Nashwaaksis U.C., Fredericton, N.B. First published in the Gathering Pentecost 1 2020 issue.

Genesis 28:10–19a

Jacob's dream of the ladder.

Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24 (VU p. 861)

God, you have searched me and known me.

Romans 8:12–25

Creation groans with labour pains.

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

The parable of the weeds scattered among good seed.

Creation Connection

Invite people to take time this week to find a spot in nature where they can spend time connecting their senses with a tree, a rock, a river, or such.

Might they feel the pain-filled groans of Creation?

Might they feel the dreams of Creation?

Spark

Consider a dream you've had that felt like a message to you from God. Spend time reflecting on it.

On a screen, project images of different kinds of Jacob's ladders (wooden toy, string, gym equipment, electric arc, artists' interpretations). Or have a table with some of these objects, where people can touch them and try them out.

With Children

As the children gather, bring out a blanket and pillow. Tell them that you're very tired and want to sleep. Pretend to sleep and then wake up and share, "I had the most amazing dream! I dreamed that the church was full of people and then everyone went out into the world to tell about God's love for them." Ask them what they have dreamed about recently. Sometimes we get a message from God in our dreams. Messages from God are always good, but we need to check with someone we trust to make sure the message really is from God. Then, share the story of Jacob's dream. Talk about how God promised to be with Jacob and never leave him. God makes the same promise to us.

Sermon Starter

Jacob's dream encounter with God on his way from Beersheba to Haran is an opportunity to reflect on where we meet God along our own life's journey. One of the most startling aspects of Jacob's encounter is how intimate and personal it is. In the NRSV, it says that God "stood beside him" and then spoke the divine name, telling him, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go." Although Jacob focuses on God being in "this place" when he wakes up from the dream, God's promise was not simply to be in Bethel; it was to have a covenantal relationship that would endure from place to place, generation to generation. As heirs to the promise, we are confident in the knowledge that "we are not alone" and that we journey with the One who will keep us wherever we go. Refer to the pretend dream in the With Children time, where the church is full of people who go out to share God's love with everyone. Sometimes we start limiting our dreams and expectations, but if we dare to trust that God is always with us, then we don't have to live by those limits and can imagine new possibilities.

Hymns

Genesis 28:10–19a

VU 367	"Come down, O love divine"
VU 389	"God is here"
VU 391	"God, reveal your presence"
MV 92	"Like a rock"
TLUS 3	"A whisper from the universe"
TLUS 12	"Give me a name"

Psalm 139

VU 219	"When all your mercies"
MV 2	"Come all you people"
MV 27	"Creator God you gave us life"
MV 131	"You, Creator God, have searched me"
TLUS 56	"We long to know her"

Romans 8:12–25

VU 606	"In Christ there is no east or west"
MV 157	"I am a child of God"
MV 167	"Hush! Hush!"
TLUS 2	"A strand in the web of life let me be"
TLUS 111	"As the wind song through the trees"

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

VU 516	"Come, you thankful people, come"
VU 678	"For the healing of the nations"
VU 708	"My Lord, what a morning"
TLUS 88	"Why are things so broken?"

July 26 – Ninth after Pentecost

Proper 12

Worship materials for July 26 to August 16 were contributed by Dan Benson, while at St. Paul's U.C., Scarborough, Ont. First published in the Gathering Pentecost 1 2020 issue.

Genesis 29:15–28

Jacob marries Leah and Rachel.

Psalm 105:1–11, 45b (VU p. 828 Part One)

Make known what God has done.

or **Psalm 128**

It shall be well with you.

Romans 8:26–39

The Spirit intercedes for us when we cannot pray.

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Five parables: mustard seed, yeast, treasure, pearls, net.

Creation Connection

How might we experience the Spirit praying through and for Creation?

Spark

Consider: Who first taught you to pray? What have you learned about prayer since?

Place a sign at the entrance of the sanctuary that reads (in all the languages used in your congregation), “The kingdom of God is like...” and create a small display of mustard seeds, packages of yeast, something that can be identified as treasure, pearls (fake ones from vintage or used clothing shops), and some fishing nets (from a sporting goods store). You might include small packets of a few mustard seeds for people to take home.

With Children

Christian bookshops used to sell prayer cubes, which are six-sided wooden dice with brief prayer starters on each face. Create your own by buying a large blank dice or making a cube out of heavy paper. Print on each side a prayer starter, such as “Thank you, dear God...,” “I’m worried and afraid about...,” “Please help us...,” “Surprise us...,” “You are awesome, God...,” and “What do you think about, God?” Discuss with the children that prayer often doesn’t come easy for all of us (including ministers!), so sometimes we need a little help—

and that comes from the Spirit. Tell them that today, the Spirit is going to help us with this (show them the dice). Ask one child to toss it and another to retrieve it. Use the prayer starter on the cube to start your prayer with the kids. This activity can be used any time and repeatedly.

Sermon Starter

This chapter of Matthew is filled with parables that begin with “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Rather than trying to explain or expand on each of the parables to figure out exactly what the kingdom or realm of God is like, perhaps focus on the fact that Jesus himself is at such a loss for words to adequately describe the realm of God that he keeps offering additional similes. What does it mean to hold up and to long for something that is so beyond our comprehension that words fail us? Yet, as humans, we would love to have our understanding of both the kingdom and God tied up nicely with a ribbon, without any hint of uncertainty or ambiguity. What images might we use today to describe the realm of God? Create your own kingdom parables.

Hymns

Genesis 29:15–28

- VU 220 “Praise to the Lord”
- VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”
- VU 602 “Blest be the tie that binds”
- MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

Psalms 105 and 128

- VU 383 “Come, O Holy Spirit, come”
- MV 75 “Veni Sancte Spiritus”
- MV 104 “Know that God is good”
- MV 130 “Rise up, rise up”
- TLUS 8 “Way Maker”

Romans 8:26–39

- VU 368 “Holy Spirit, truth divine”
- VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”
- MV 5 “Holy Spirit, you’re like the wind”
- MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”
- TLUS 97 “When I can’t take the first step”
- TLUS 102 “Nothing to fear”

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

- VU 713 “I see a new heaven”
- MV 144 “Like a healing stream”
- MV 146 “The kingdom of God”
- TLUS 22 “Build a longer table”
- TLUS 29 “When Jesus sets the table”

August 2 – Tenth after Pentecost

Proper 13

Genesis 32:22–31

Jacob wrestles with God.

Psalm 17:1–7, 15 (VU p. 739)

Guard me as the apple of your eye.

Romans 9:1–5

I am speaking the truth in Christ.

Matthew 14:13–21

Feeding more than five thousand.

Creation Connection

The pupil of the eye was once called an apple, leading to the expression “The apple of my eye.” To be held as the “apple of the eye” is to be considered precious, valued, and beloved. The English translation of Psalm 17 uses this phrase to invite God’s protection and care. How might we guard Creation as if it were as precious as the “apple of our eye” and protect it under the shadow of our “wings?”

Spark

Consider: What blessing has come to you out of a time of wrestling?

Create a slide presentation or a display using memorabilia of wrestling stars of all genders. In the midst of this, set up an angel, choosing an image that contrasts with the wrestling characters. Strength is often hidden and sometimes deceptive.

With Children

Invite one of the children into an arm-wrestling match. Let them win after a suitable “struggle,” and then bless them. Repeat with one or two more. Now, take a stout rope and organize a little tug-of-war. Try to make it an even contest! Make sure everyone is invited to participate in some way. If it’s a stalemate, quickly call it and then have the children bless each other. If one side wins, again, quickly call it and then have the winners bless the losers, but then turn to the losers and get them to bless the winners, so that it is win-win. A quick blessing might be along these lines: “Even in your struggles, you are loved and blessed by God.” Then tell the story of Jacob wrestling with God and being blessed.

Sermon Starter

Wrestling with God is something many of us do: to get blessed, to be noticed or understood, or to experience God. This is often part of the discernment process for those going into ministry and is perhaps ongoing for those in ministry for their entire careers. If you’re comfortable with such a level of vulnerability in your setting, share with the congregation your own story of wrestling with the angel as part of your coming to faith and ministry. This may be more of a “testimony” than the usual sermon, but it can also be invitational to others in the congregation to come to terms with their own perceptions of their faith journey as flawed, thin, or inadequate. Invite others to share their stories, if that works in your setting; otherwise, share stories of well-known people who have wrestled with their faith (e.g., Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Coren).

Hymns

Genesis 32:22–31

VU 240	“Praise, my soul”
VU 314	“Come now, almighty King”
MV 48	“I can feel you near me God”
MV 96	“And when you call for me”
TLUS 100	“In my wrestling, and in my doubts”

Psalm 17

VU 262	“A mighty fortress is our God”
VU 286	“If you will trust in God”
MV 62	“There is room for all”
MV 157	“I am a child of God”
TLUS 6	“God lights a lamp”
TLUS 105	“May you be held”

Romans 9:1–5

VU 580	“Faith of our fathers”
VU 628	“Come, my Way, my Truth”
MV 18	“Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary”
MV 139	“True faith needs no defence”
TLUS 147	“There’s no need to ask me twice”

Matthew 14:13–21

VU 355	“For the crowd of thousands”
VU 682	“O day of peace”
MV 171	“Christ has no body”
MV 182	“Grateful”
TLUS 60	“There’s enough for all”
TLUS 124	“Tu nous appelles”

August 9 – Eleventh after Pentecost

Proper 14

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Joseph is sold into servitude by his brothers.

Psalm 105: 1–6, 16–22, 45b (VU pp. 828–829 Parts One and Two)

Remembering Joseph.

Romans 10:5–15

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.

Matthew 14:22–33

Jesus walks across stormy waters.

Creation Connection

With climate change, the earth is experiencing more frequent storms and more with greater intensity. What wisdom might the story of Jesus walking across stormy waters provide for us as we navigate the changes in climate?

Spark

Consider: What is your relationship to and understanding of the miracle stories in the gospels?

The Matthew passage would be easy to perform as a short mime. Use a length of blue fabric and have two people make waves with it, then have two others (Jesus and Peter) positioned behind it while it waves. Enact Jesus moving on top of the water, Peter moving and then sinking, and then Jesus lifting him up.

With Children

Bring a life jacket from home or borrow one. Ask the children if any of them can swim (a few hands may go up). Ask if any of them can walk, wheel, roll, or crawl on top of water (a swimming pool, a lake, a pond) without sinking. (No hands should go up, but if some do, let them know there will be a test after church!) It's good to be able to swim, but almost nobody can walk or roll along on top of the water, especially if the water gets really stormy. That's why we need life jackets. (Bring out a life jacket and put it on.) Jesus is like our life jacket; life can get stormy and it can be easy to get lost under the waves, but we can rely on Jesus to help hold us above the storm. (If the life jacket has a whistle on it, blow it three times to send the

kids off to church school, children's worship, or back to their seats.)

Sermon Starter

This story in Matthew is one of those “unbelievable” stories because who could possibly walk on water? And if they can, what does it prove, anyway? For Peter and the other disciples, Jesus’ ability to walk on water was proof positive that he was the Son of God. To what degree is our faith dependent upon such miracle stories and eyewitness accounts, and is such “proof” actually antithetical to our faith? Or is our doubt enough to sink us, even when we want to believe that our faith will keep us above the tumultuous waves of our lives? Share some personal times of doubt, if that feels comfortable, and how you have journeyed through them, who has accompanied you, and what has made the difference. Remember, though, that this is meant to offer encouragement and hope. Or share stories of other people who have journeyed through doubts to faith.

Hymns

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

- VU 691 “Though ancient walls”
- MV 72 “Why stand so far away”
- MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

Psalm 105

- VU 148 “Jesus, remember me”
- VU 658 “O Love that wilt not let me go”
- VU 685 “We turn to you”
- MV 28 “God of the Bible”

Romans 10:5–15

- VU 301 “Before the earth had yet begun”
- VU 313 “God, whose almighty word”
- VU 409 “Morning has broken”
- MV 92 “Like a rock”

Matthew 14:22–33

- VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”
- MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”
- MV 161 “I have called you by your name”
- 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.

August 16 – Twelfth after Pentecost

Proper 15

Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph is reunited with his brothers.

Psalm 133 (VU p. 856)

How pleasant it is when God's people are together.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

God has not rejected the Hebrews.

Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

A Canaanite mother challenges Jesus.

Creation Connection

The Canaanite mother dared to challenge Jesus. Where might we need to challenge our own beliefs and assumptions about faith and life in order to live with respect in Creation?

Spark

Consider: When has someone challenged your beliefs in a way that was uncomfortable for you but that also brought greater wisdom into your life?

How does your community address the need to "speak truth to power" in your context? When the Canaanite mother challenges Jesus, she is taking a big risk on the one hand; on the other, what has she got to lose? What holds us back from challenging those we respect, love, and hold in esteem (or who may themselves hold positions of authority) when they are wrong or could do better?

With Children

Invite the children to dramatize being dogs, using their faces, bodies, and voices. Encourage lots of different actions (digging, rolling over, sitting for a treat) and sounds (yelping, snarling, growling, silent barking, and so on). Does barking and scratching make them dogs? Maybe they need to try harder! Now, we might love our dogs, and we might even pretend to be dogs, but that doesn't make us dogs. But dogs, like all God's creatures, including us, deserve to be treated well, cared for, and respected. Who else deserves to be well cared for in God's world? Everyone and everything. Sometimes, though, some of God's creatures, including people, aren't well cared for. (The children might have some examples.) As followers

of Jesus, we commit ourselves to caring for all God's creatures.

Sermon Starter

This is a unique story because the Canaanite mother not only challenges Jesus but upbraids him soundly for the thinness of his generosity. When Jesus is so often portrayed as meek, mild, and extremely kind, what does it mean for us as his disciples when he is so mean to her and literally calls her less than a dog? And what does it mean for us when an outsider both challenges and teaches Jesus that he can do better? Far from having it all figured out, Jesus learns from this woman, who is not afraid to criticize him and advocate for her daughter. Jesus is someone we can truly relate to, whose faith, theology, and understanding of relationships is evolving and growing constantly. Who might we need to learn from in the church? Who is upbraiding us and challenging our beliefs about ourselves as Christians?

Hymns

Genesis 45:1-15

VU 271 "There's a wideness in God's mercy"

VU 606 "In Christ there is no east or west"

MV 141 "We are all one people"

MV 145 "Draw the circle wide"

TLUS 88 "Why are things so broken?"

TLUS 164 "Neighbour, I am your neighbour"

Psalm 133

VU 380 "She comes sailing on the wind"

VU 395 "Come in, come in and sit down"

MV 14 "Where two or three are gathered"

MV 154 "Deep in our hearts"

TLUS 10 "God calls you good"

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

VU 559 "Come, O Fount of every blessing"

VU 679 "Let there be light"

MV 90 "Don't be afraid"

MV 115 "Behold, behold, I make all things new"

TLUS 163 "One God, many names!"

Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

VU 348 "O love, how deep"

VU 697 "O for a world"

MV 79 "Spirit, open my heart"

MV 137 "Welcome, Jesus"

TLUS 24 "Cross and Circle"

TLUS 31 "Queerly beloved"

August 23 – Thirteenth after Pentecost

Proper 16

Worship materials for August 23 to September 6 were contributed by Daniel MacDonald, then at Trinity U.C., Cannington, Ont.; Rodney Smith-Merkley, then at Buckhorn (NM) P.C., Buckhorn, Ont.; Bob Root, Peterborough, Ont.; and Max Ward, Highland Hills P.C., Minden, Ont. First published in the Gathering Pentecost 1 2020 issue.

Exodus 1:8–2:10

The baby Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.

Psalm 124 (VU p. 848)

If God had not been at our side!

Romans 12:1–8

Present yourselves as a living, holy sacrifice to God.

Matthew 16:13–20

Who do you say that I am? asks Jesus.

Creation Connection

Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Consider Creation asking us that question: "Who do you say that I am?" Do we understand Creation as an endless resource, a gift to be used wisely, a living entity, a nurturing mother, a companion, or...?

Spark

Consider playing the James Bond theme music as people arrive. Or decorate the space with items that explore a secret agent theme.

With Children

Play a game to introduce the story of Pharaoh's daughter:

Simon Says. Afterwards, ask, "What does it mean for us to follow orders? Whose orders should we follow?" Tell the story of how the midwives and Pharaoh's daughter didn't follow Pharaoh's orders but chose instead to save the baby Moses' life. How do we know whose orders to follow?

Telephone Game. Then discuss the idea that when we share (say, sign, or write) a message, others may not understand it in the way we intend. Tell the part of the Exodus story about Pharaoh's daughter adopting Moses. What were people whispering around the palace? Everyone knew it wasn't really her child and that the boy was probably a Hebrew. But Pharaoh's daughter ignored the whispering and

raised Moses as her own. In the gospel story, people are whispering about Jesus. Jesus asks the disciples to tell him what they are saying. Then he asks them the same question: "Who do you say I am?" Who do we believe that Jesus is?

Sermon Starter

Is lying or keeping secrets acceptable—even in the name of God? A lot of people kept secrets in the story from Exodus: Moses' mother, the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, and servants. When is keeping a secret (or hiding the truth) a good idea? When is it not? How do we know? When are secrets destructive? Are they ever life-giving, such as in the story of Moses? Or is this the lesser of two (or more) evils?

Each person in the Exodus story had a particular part to play. What is the part God is inviting you to play in the greater story of humanity? Romans speaks of gifts; Exodus tells the way in which each person in the story used their gifts. Each of us has a part to play, but when we work together, when we all offer our parts in God's work, it makes the story whole. There is always a bigger perspective than the one we can know. Being faithful means discerning what our part is and responding with gratitude.

Hymns

Exodus 1:8–2:10

- VU 651 "Guide me, O thou great [and holy]"
- VU 696 "Homeless people, will you listen"
- MV 90 "Don't be afraid"
- TLUS 2 "A strand in the web of life let me be"
- TLUS 103 "Bambelela"

Psalm 124

- VU 131 "If our God had simply saved us" (omit verse 15)
- TLUS 112 "Pra Jao Song Sum Phad"

Romans 12:1–8

- VU 356 "Seek ye first the kingdom"
- VU 575 "I'm gonna live so God can use me"
- MV 18 "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary"
- TLUS 12 "Give me a name"
- TLUS 51 "Anointing, fall on me"
- TLUS 149 "Yeshuko pachhi"

Matthew 16:13–20

- VU 120 "O Jesus, I have promised"
- MV 85 "Take, O take me as I am"
- TLUS 8 "Way Maker"
- TLUS 45 "Takwaba uwabanga Yesu"

August 30 – Fourteenth after Pentecost

Proper 17

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses encounters the burning bush.

Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c (VU pp. 828-829 Parts One and Three)

Remembering Jacob and Moses.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28

Take up the cross and follow me.

Creation Connection

Moses encounters a bush that burns but is not consumed. What are the wonders of Creation that amaze you and seem beyond explanation?

Spark

Consider: How do you understand yourself as a disciple of Jesus? With what have you been equipped?

Perhaps worship outdoors today and invite people to notice their surroundings. Or, if it is possible, invite people to take off their shoes and leave them outside the worship space. A bush with lights might be set up to look like a burning bush. Perhaps the lights could be turned off as the scripture begins and then turned on at the point where Moses “turns aside.”

With Children

Bring a heavy school backpack, firefighter’s gear, or a pack ready for a backcountry trip. Make a show of how heavy it is to lift. Explore the items in the pack and what they are needed for. Then ask, “What do we need to be Jesus’ disciples?” Take a moment to explore what we do as Jesus’ disciples, so that we can know what “equipment” we need. You might also ask, “What heavy gear is the church being asked to lift right now? What will make life richer, fuller, and better for everyone?” Jesus says, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Perhaps that is Jesus saying to us, “Pick up the equipment you need to do the work I need you to do.”

Sermon Starter

Moses asks the question to the presence in the burning bush, “Who are you? What is your name?” At the same time, Moses must answer the question for himself: “Who am I?” Moses must come to terms with who he is being asked to be and what he is being asked to do by God. These are good questions for us as individuals and for the congregation. Who are we? What is our name? What are we being asked to do, and have we really come to terms with that?

To Moses and to us, God responds: “I will be with you.” In what ways do you feel God’s presence with you? And, not only that, God gives Moses a sign. What signs have you experienced in your congregation or community? Are there signs all around us that we do not notice? How has God equipped us for the work and ministry we are being asked to do?

Hymns

Exodus 3:1-15

VU 509 “I, the Lord of sea and sky”

TLUS 28 “I’m gonna eat at the welcome table”

Psalm 105

“When the saints go marching in” (African American spiritual)

TLUS 49 “You are my strength”

Romans 12:9-21

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

TLUS 127 “We resist”

TLUS 139 “Love over hate”

Matthew 16:21-28

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

VU 561 “Take up your cross”

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

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

MV 85 “Take, O take me as I am”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 176 “Three things I promise”

MV 213 “Take up his song”

TLUS 24 “Cross and Circle”

TLUS 86 “Salwalqulubi”

September 6 – Fifteenth after Pentecost

Proper 18

Exodus 12:1-14

Instructions for the first Passover.

Psalm 149 (VU pp. 872-873)

Sing to God a new song.

Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything but love.

Matthew 18:15-20

Where two or three are gathered in my name.

Creation Connection

Pay attention! How is Creation singing, dancing, and expressing praise to God? Hint: read Psalm 148.

Spark

Consider: What is the difference for you between praying alone or praying with two or three? You might have picnic things on display at the front of the worship space if you are emphasizing the Exodus scripture. Or, for the psalm, have a variety of rhythm band instruments distributed in the seats for people to play during hymns. If you are focusing on Romans, display big hearts or place a big heart in each bulletin with the verse, “Owe no one anything, except to love one another” (Romans 13:8a). For Romans 13:11b (“It is already the moment for you to wake from sleep”) have a gentle alarm clock go off randomly during worship.

With Children

Show the children a board game you like to play or engage in an easy card game with a few players (such as Go Fish). Start a conversation about board games and other games. Which ones do you like? Why? Some people declare, “If you want to start a fight in your family, pull out a board game.” Yet, that isn’t the purpose of games. What should games be about? In fact, maybe a better saying would be, “If you want to stop a fight, pull out a board game.”

How do we resolve differences between people? Jesus had some ways of resolving problems between people. Mostly, he said that people needed to address each other directly and keep love at the centre of everything. It’s not about being “right”; it’s about finding a new way forward

together. Or, with permission from the copyright holder, you might read *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (Chronicle Books, 2000).

Sermon Starter

Exodus describes the institution of the Passover meal. If possible, invite a Jewish colleague to express what this meal means for them. The Passover is a meal that is intended to be shared with others. How do we, in our tradition, create opportunities for sharing and celebrating with others?

Romans invites us to pay attention to the lives we are living: to be loving and kind, to care for others, to wake up and live honourably. In our world today, this advice stands in opposition to much that we experience on television and in the news. What steps or approaches, large or small, are we, individually or as communities, able to take to help embody these words?

The gospel offers a model for relationship-strengthening. Jesus invites people to be in right relationship with one another. No one was “in” or “out”—Jesus understood everyone to be loved by God. We get it “right” when everyone is at the table.

Hymns

Exodus 12:1-14

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us” (omit verse 15)
VU 460 “All who hunger”
TLUS 28 “I’m gonna eat at the welcome table”
“Pharaoh, pharaoh” (Search *pharaoh kids bible songs* and join in the actions.)

Psalm 149

VU 245 “Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet”
MV 30 “It’s a song of praise to the Maker”
TLUS 37 “Rab ki hove”

Romans 13:8-14

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”
MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”
TLUS 133 “El amor de Cristo”

Matthew 18:15-20

VU 401 “Worship the Lord”
VU 402 “We are one”
MV 14 “Where two or three are gathered”
MV 178 “Who is my mother”
TLUS 72 “Oh, let us breathe”
TLUS 155 “We gather as Christ’s body”