

# *Gathering*, Pentecost 2 2020

From Creation Time 1 to Reign of Christ Sunday

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## Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost

**Dates:** Five Sundays in the Season of Pentecost beginning with the Sunday after Labour Day and continuing through Thanksgiving Sunday. Occasionally there are six Sundays in this time frame.

### Meaning of Name

*Creation* comes from the Latin *creare* and *creatio* meaning “to create.”

The root of Creation Time is in the liturgical Ember Days. *Ember* is thought to come from the Old English *ymbren*, possibly an alteration for *ymbryne* “period,” from *ymb* “about” + *ryne* “course.” Another possibility is that the name is derived from the Latin *quatuor tempora*, meaning “four periods or times.” *Ember* may also come from the German *Quatember*, translated as “quarter day,” a day of asking God’s blessing on the new season.

### Liturgical Colour: Orange

Orange is a warm colour, associated with enthusiasm, creativity, fruitfulness, endurance, and strength as well as with sunrise and sunset, fall and harvest, and the changing seasons, nature’s last burst of colour before winter. It is the red of passion tempered by the yellow of wisdom.

## Sunday

**Dates:** Sunday is the traditional day of worship for followers of the Way of Jesus. It is a day to worship, sing, pray, and break bread together. Each Sunday is meant to be a celebration, a “little Easter,” and a break from fasting and abstention, such as during Lent.

### Meaning of Name

The term *Sunday* comes to us from Old English *Sunnandæg*, a translation of the Latin *dies solis*, literally “the day of the sun.” This was the day upon which the disciples discovered the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus. *Sabbath* comes from Old English, through Greek from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, meaning “to rest.” Sabbath is a day of rest or a time period of rest.

### History of the Sabbath

Scripture is clear that Jesus celebrated Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the Sabbath. The change for Christians came about during the reign of Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. Constantine became a Christian and made all the citizens of the Roman Empire Christians as well. Many pagan practices were Christianized or recycled into celebrations of the Christian God. Prior to their forced conversion, the cult of Mithraism or sun–worship was the official religion of the Roman Empire. It had an official worship day on the first day of the week, a day set aside for special homage to the sun. This is where we get our name Sunday. Constantine tried to make it a little easier for his citizens by accepting their special day of worship, Sunday, instead of the Christian Sabbath that had been observed by Jesus and his disciples. Traditionally, the day is to be set aside as a day of rest and worship.

*Note: For background on Ordinary Time, see Pentecost 1 2020 issue, p. 11.*

## September 13 – Fifteenth after Pentecost

##### *Creation Time 1 in the Season of Pentecost*

##### *Proper 19*

*Worship materials for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost to Thanksgiving Sunday were contributed by Beverly Brazier, Whitehorse U.C., Whitehorse, Yuk.*

**Exodus 14:19–31**

God parts the sea for the Hebrews.

**Exodus 15:1*b*–11, 20–21** (VU p. 876)

Miriam and Moses sing the Song of the Sea.

or **Psalm 114**

Tremble, O earth.

**Romans 14:1–12**

Whether we live or whether we die, we are God’s.

**Matthew 18:21–35**

How many times must I forgive?

#### To Ponder

Do you consider yourself to be a free person? Why or why not?

#### Spark

The overarching theme from the texts for the next five weeks is resistance, specifically gifts and graces to resist despair. For these Sundays, the Hebrew texts form a story arc. These are often stories that fewer people know well now. For With Children, focus on the senses of each story: the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. It’s often through our bodies, through our physical senses, that we experience the grace and gifts of God. In exploring the senses, be aware of the primary sense used by various children in the group, e.g., sight not sound, sound not touch.

For every story, ask, “Who don’t we notice in this story? Whose voice isn’t given space?”

#### With Children

Tell the story of the Exodus, the parting of the sea. What did it feel like to be there? Imagine the scene at the water’s edge: What do you notice? What does it smell like? What are the sounds? The story tells about Moses. Who else was there? Can you imagine children in the scene? Animals? What are they feeling? Are they scared? What do you need when you are scared and you don’t know what’s coming next? And what about the Egyptians? Did God really want them to drown? Of course not. God loves everyone. God cried when the Egyptians drowned because of Pharaoh’s choices, just as God cried when the Israelites were treated so badly. This is a story about freedom. God always wants us to be free. God is with us when we help others be free. What examples can you think of in today’s world? How can we “hold out our hand” as Moses did? At home, at school, here at church?

#### Sermon Starter

Focus on the moment when the Israelites are at the water’s edge. The sea has not yet parted. Angry Egyptians are behind them, a perilous sea before them. What is the gift? What is the grace? Moses stretches out his hand. A small action—a moment of resistance. Does he do this with full faith or out of despair? He stretches out his hand. In what ways do we stretch out our hands in situations that seem hopeless? Praise be to God that we are not alone in these moments. Seas do part. Forgiveness is possible. We need not be held captive by what we can’t forgive (or anything else). Seas part. There is a way, a path through. We may be led into the yucky bottom of a river before we ever get beyond it, but seas do part, by God’s grace. The story is a gift that holds up the freedom God created us for.

#### Hymns

*Introit for Creation Time*

MV 130 “Rise up, rise up”

*Exodus 14:19–31*

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

MV 4 “All who are thirsty”

MV 55 “Watch once more”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

*Psalm 114*

VU 216 “Sing praise to God, who reigns above”

*Romans 14:1–12*

VU 581 “When we are living”

*Matthew 18:21–35*

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

MV 76 “If I have been the source of pain”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

MV 160 “There’s a river of life”

## September 20 – Sixteenth after Pentecost

##### *Creation Time 2 in the Season of Pentecost*

##### *Proper 20*

**Exodus 16:2–15**

Bread and quails to feed the people.

**Psalm 105:1–6, 37–45** (VU pp. 828–829 Parts One and Four)

Make known what God has done.

**Philippians 1:21–30**

For me, to live is Christ.

**Matthew 20:1–16**

Daily wages for the labourers; what’s fair?

#### To Ponder

For what old country or former time do you long? Why? Where is God guiding you?

#### Spark

Learn the repeated theme of “Mah Nà Mah Nà” by Piero Umiliani (the version by the Muppets), and have fun teaching it to the congregation during With Children or in the sermon time. Why not dance the song, too?

#### With Children

Imagine the scene. Tell (but don’t read) the story to them. Imagine it. It’s funny; make it funny. They have just been rescued in a miraculous way and what do they do? COMPLAIN. Then the story of the manna: “What IS this?” What do you think it smelled like? Tasted like? What sounds are in this story? Whining? Crunching of the manna, if it was crunchy? You might tell the first part of the story again and have the congregation provide the sounds: whine, crunch, complain! Then move to the part about not being able to keep any for tomorrow and each person having just enough. Wonder with the children what it might look like for us to live that way. Some people have so much; others don’t even get paid fairly. What would our world look like if we saw what’s unfair and said, “What IS this?” And then if we lived “manna” lives; that is, lives that are all about fairness and justice? Have some fun singing “Mah Nà Mah Nà.” Put out the challenge: “Let’s pay attention this week to what’s fair and what’s unfair. Every time we see something unfair, think of that song and sing it out loud or in your head! (It’s kind of hard to get it out of your head once it’s in there.) Let the manna (and the Mah Nà song) remind us that God asks us to make things fair for everyone.”

#### Sermon Starter

Moving from one way of living (in Egypt) to another (in the wilderness) is hard even if the move is for freedom and for the better. There is a pull back to slavery within us. How do we resist? What gifts and what graces help us fight the temptation to go back to the way it used to be? What helps us avoid letting nostalgia paralyze and starve us? There is nourishment all around us, lying on the very earth, but not when we’re looking for the fleshpots of our former lives. Whose purpose does it serve for us to long for the past? This is one of the ways that the principalities and powers work: they sing us a romantic song of how it used to be, and in so doing, prevent us from following the pillar and the cloud by which God leads us to a new place on a new path. The current nostalgia (“Make America Great Again” and the like) is not by chance. It is well thought out, a tool for distraction from following the cloud and pillar. It serves the purposes of the forces that lead to death. This is a text of resistance to that discourse and that agenda. The quails and manna are gracious gifts toward a new order of being.

#### Hymns

*Exodus 16:2–15*

VU 421 “Lead on, O cloud of Presence”

VU 633 “Bless now, O God, the journey”

VU 647 “Travel on, travel on”

VU 650 “O God of Bethel”

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

MV 28 “Fresh as the Morning”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

*Psalm 105*

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

VU 405 “New every morning”

VU 688 “O day of God, draw nigh”

*Philippians 1:21–30*

VU 714 “Come, we that love”

Matthew 20:1–16

VU 227 “For the fruit of all creation”

MV 127 “I saw the rich ones”

## September 27 – Seventeenth after Pentecost

##### *Creation Time 3 in the Season of Pentecost*

##### *Proper 21*

**Exodus 17:1–17**

Water flows from the rock for thirsty people.

**Psalm 78:1–4, 12–16** (VU p. 792 Parts One and Two)

God did marvellous things for our ancestors.

**Philippians 2:1–13**

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

**Matthew 21:23–32**

By what authority does Jesus act and teach?

#### To Ponder

What does water mean for you? When have you experienced too much water? Not enough water?

#### Spark

You might wish to suggest an idea for a water project, such as helping to protect waterways in your own area, supporting clean water for Indigenous communities, or doing a water-use audit in the church.

#### With Children

Again, tell the story. Remember, from last week, how the Israelites began to learn to trust that there would be enough food? Well, they haven’t learned yet. This week they are complaining about water. Tell what happened. Imagine what it was like. How does it feel to be thirsty? Do you know that there are people in our own country and in the world who don’t have good, clean water yet? How can we help God provide water for thirsty people? How can we be good stewards of the water we have available to us? Is there a water project you could begin in your own community or beyond? Consider: Whose voices aren’t given space in this story? What might they share with us if we listened?

#### Sermon Starter

What a contrast: water from a rock, a gracious gift to a wondering, wandering people. Then, a question: Is God with us or not? It’s a great question. What signs have we learned to trust, signs for us that witness to God’s presence? The passage ends with bloodshed, apparently in the name of God. Hold up the painful contrasts. The image of water: universal, life-giving, life-sustaining water might be for us the measuring rod against which to evaluate the discourse about Amalek (and other scriptural narratives.) Is the scripture story life-giving? To everyone? Does it free? Does it cleanse, make new? Does it inspire trust in God? If not, is it really God doing this, or is it people thinking that God is doing it? The “water test”—that what is of God is life-giving, just, merciful, and compassionate—might be a helpful way to propose approaching a story such as this, instead of avoiding it.

#### Hymns

*Exodus 17:1–17*

VU 449 “Crashing waters at creation”

VU 650 “O God of Bethel”

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

MV 4 “All who are thirsty”

MV 55 “Watch once more”

*Psalm 78*

VU 580 “Faith of our fathers”

*Philippians 2:1–13*

VU 147 “What wondrous love is this”

VU 341 “Fairest Lord Jesus (Beautiful Saviour)”

VU 348 “O love, how deep”

MV 47 “Born in human likeness”

*Matthew 21:23–32*

VU 325 “Christ is made the sure foundation”

VU 664 “What a friend we have in Jesus”

## October 4 – World Communion Sunday

##### *Creation Time 4 in the Season of Pentecost*

##### *Proper 22*

**Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20**

The Ten Commandments.

**Psalm 19**

The heavens declare God’s glory.

**Philippians 3:4*b*–14**

Paul’s testimony—his gains were loss.

**Matthew 21:33–46**

The parable of the landowner and the tenants.

#### To Ponder

When in your life has a limit that was placed upon you become a gift?

#### Spark

Do you know someone who works with stone who could provide a stone tablet carved with words or demonstrate chiselling in stone?

#### With Children

Tell the story of the giving of the law, the Ten Commandments. God is giving the people a gift. God says, “You’re my people. I love you. And this is how I need you to live.” The commandments are a precious gift, all about loving and respecting God, and loving and respecting one another. The people of God said that the commandments were sweet, like honey. It’s fun to have the congregation make the sounds of the trumpet and the thunder after each commandment is spoken. (I always get one of the elder women to speak them. Do you have someone who could sign them also?) Wonder together about the experience of the whole event. What did it sound like? What did it smell like (the thick smoke on the mountain)? Would the sounds, sights, and smells have been overwhelming? The story says that everyone felt afraid. I wonder why? Have some pasteurized honey for the children to taste or a stone tablet to touch. The experience was overwhelming, but it brought a great gift. Still today, the Ten Commandments help us know how to live our lives. That’s amazing!

#### Sermon Starter

Focus on the law as gift and grace. It is not meant to be restrictive or limiting, but rather freeing. The law is an embodiment of the freedom they worked so hard to achieve. It provides a common understanding of how to live out God’s will and how to be together as a community. Sometimes we react to the commandments as though we are adolescents, saying, “You’re not the boss of me!” We choose to understand the commandments as an imposition and a burden. The discourse around Sabbath practices is especially so. Increasingly, though, people are realizing that the gift of a Sabbath is life-giving and simply a wise human practice. We need a break from work, from demands, and from technology. These commandments reflect the life and values of a historic community that was learning to create a life over and against a world where other things so quickly became gods. The law is a gift of resistance to the forces that move us away from the respect and love of God and the care and respect for one another.

#### Hymns

*Exodus 20:1–20*

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

VU 690 “From the slave pens of the delta”

VU 699 “Live into hope”

*Psalm 19*

VU 308 “Many and great, O God, are your works”

VU 312 “Praise with joy the world’s Creator”

*Philippians 3:4*b*–14*

VU 149 “When I survey the wondrous cross”

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

*Matthew 21:33–46*

VU 325 “Christ is made the sure foundation”

VU 664 “What a friend we have in Jesus”

*For Communion*

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

MV 155 “Unbounded Spirit, breath of God”

MV 169 “When hands reach out beyond divides”

## October 11 – Thanksgiving Sunday

##### *Creation Time 5 in the Season of Pentecost*

##### *Proper 23*

**Deuteronomy 8:7–18**

God will bring you to a bountiful land.

**Psalm 65** (VU pp. 782–783)

God provides; the valleys shout and sing.

**2 Corinthians 9:6–15**

God loves a cheerful giver.

**Luke 17:11–19**

Ten healed; one returns to offer thanks.

#### To Ponder

When has your voice been silenced? What did you learn from the experience?

#### Spark

Prepare a display of symbols, or a series of pictures, for all the stories from Exodus that have been shared the past weeks (wafers for manna, water and a rock, etc.). Prepare a bowl of honey and some rice crackers (gluten-, dairy-, and nut-free). Have a jug of water with small cups ready for sharing during With Children.

#### With Children

Tell the whole story again, beginning with the escape from Egypt, with the help of the children. Invite them to fill in parts of the story or make sounds that go with the story. If it works for your congregation, the children could invite the adults to come to the front and everyone could gather in a circle and share wafers dipped in honey, or distribute the water in small cups. As you share, you could express to one another, “The gifts of freedom and love!” Or learn a hymn that tells the story, e.g., VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us.”

#### Sermon Starter

Review the texts from the last five weeks. These are texts of resistance. They are about gift and grace. The Deuteronomy text reminds us that we can easily move away from the radical gifts of God when things are good and life is easy. We can forget what God has done for us. There is a warning not to do so. Question the discourse about coming into a new land, one flowing with milk and honey. What does that mean for the people who are already living there? Then and now? In this ancient land and in our own country? Sometimes we assign a meaning to an event that is not what God intends. Do we need to retell this story (as Deuteronomy is a retelling of the Exodus story) with fresh questions and considerations? What is the Spirit of God revealing to us in our own day? Whose voices have been silenced until now in our land?

#### Hymns

*Deuteronomy 8:7–18*

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

VU 310 “God, who touches earth with beauty”

*Psalm 65*

VU 217 “All creatures of our God and King”

VU 231 “I sing the mighty power”

VU p. 783 “To bless the earth”

*2 Corinthians 9:6–15*

VU 477 “I come with joy”

VU 518 “As those of old their first-fruits brought”

*Luke 17:11–19*

VU 358 “When Jesus the healer”

VU 409 “Morning has broken”

*Thanksgiving*

VU 218 “We praise you, O God”

VU 222 “Come, let us sing”

VU 227 “For the fruit of all creation”

VU 232 “Joyful, joyful we adore you”

VU 242 “Let all things now living”

MV 182 “Grateful”

MV 187 “We give our thanks”

## October 18 – Twentieth after Pentecost

##### *Proper 24*

*Worship materials for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost to the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost were contributed by Read Sherman, Aaron Miechkota, and Julia Budd, Trinity-Anjou P.C., Montreal, Que.*

**Exodus 33:12–23**

God speaks to Moses face to face as a friend.

**Psalm 99** (VU p. 819)

God is a ruler who delights in justice.

**1 Thessalonians 1:1–10**

We always give thanks to God for you.

**Matthew 22:15–22**

Give to God the things that are God’s.

#### To Ponder

To whom do you give your trust? What qualities make you trust someone? What makes God trustworthy?

#### Spark

Invite people to write or draw on slips of paper of different colours. On the first colour, ask them to name or draw those with whom they have found trust, and on another colour, any with whom trust may have been broken. Invite them to keep the first slip to remember and cherish that trust, and to let go of the other slip. (Fold it or rip it up, then invite people forward to dispose of them or pass a basket around to receive them.) Consider burning or shredding the slips as an act of giving those names and experiences up to God.

#### With Children

In a good-sized box, cut a hole just large enough to peek inside or put your hand through. Put into the box something that’s easy to guess without seeing it, such as a teddy bear or an apple. First, let each child explore the contents by hand only. (No telling!) Then, invite the use of other senses. After the big reveal, ask the children how we can know God when we can’t experience God directly. Share ways that you experience God. Then tell the story of how Moses wanted to see God face to face, but only got to see God’s back side! Moses decided to trust God anyway. We can decide to do that, too.

#### Sermon Starter

Canadian Thanksgiving has ended. Now, how do we respond to abundance by our “thanks-living”? Or as Matthew’s Jesus puts it, by our giving to God “the things that are God’s”? Consider: What are the “things of God” if not everything—our lives, our wealth, our hearts, our trust? Trust, it turns out, is key. In both Exodus 33 and the psalm, God shows up to lead and guide, but not exactly “face to face.” Moses and the people have to discern God’s intentions less by “seeing” than by “believing.” Spend some time with the Exodus story’s intimacies between God and Moses. Where do you find such intimate sharing today that would gain your trust? In Matthew, Jesus demonstrates that he knows whom to trust and whom not to trust. To live our thanks every day requires trust in God, not in idols or liars. Paul’s thanksgiving to his church at Thessalonica is a case in point: by imitating Christ, if not church leaders (gulp), the church really can start the kind of living that makes a difference.

#### Hymns

*Exodus 33:12–23*

VU 374 “Come and find the quiet centre”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

MV 73 “O God, why are you silent?”

“Be not afraid” by Bob Dufford, S.J.

“Rock of ages, cleft for me” by Augustus Toplady

*Psalm 99*

VU 421 “Lead on, O cloud of Presence”

VU 714 “Come, we that love”

VU p. 878 “My Soul Is Filled with Joy”

*1 Thessalonians 1:1–10*

VU 289 “It only takes a spark”

VU 375 “Spirit, Spirit of gentleness”

VU 411 “O God we call”

VU 578 “As a fire is meant for burning”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

*Matthew 22:15–22*

VU 326 “O for a thousand tongues to sing”

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

VU 509 “Here I Am, Lord”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

*Seasonal*

MV 182 “Grateful”

## October 25 – Twenty-first after Pentecost

##### *Proper 25*

**Deuteronomy 34:1–12**

Moses dies and is buried in Moab.

**Psalm 90:1–6, 13–17** (VU pp. 805–806)

O God, our help in ages past.

**1 Thessalonians 2:1–8**

We care for you like a nurse tenderly cares for her own children.

**Matthew 22:34–46**

Love God; love your neighbour as yourself.

#### To Ponder

When have you been tested in your life or in your faith? What were the circumstances? How did you respond?

#### Spark

A week ahead of time, ask everyone to bring in old tests or graded reports. Add a couple of your own or imaginary ones with not so good grades. Create a display. Blank out names if requested. Make large grade letters (A through F) to sprinkle around the walls of the sanctuary.

#### With Children

Ask the kids, “Who likes tests? Who likes to get good grades?” It isn’t always easy to get a top grade. What are grades and why do teachers give them? What can grades tell us about ourselves or someone else? (“I understand that math” or “I’ve got more learning to do.”) What can’t they tell us? (“I’m a good person” or “I love my family.”) Do you think God gives us grades? Share the story of Jesus being tested by the Pharisees. They asked him to tell them what was the most important commandment of all, the most important thing about how God wants us to live. It was like a test, and the Pharisees would have been happy if Jesus had messed it up and got a bad grade. But Jesus didn’t mess it up. He aced it by answering that the best way to live is to love God and love your neighbour just as much as you love yourself. We call this “The Great Commandment.” It means that if we remember to be loving like Jesus, we can always count on getting an A. (Though, remember, God doesn’t give grades and helps us when we don’t get it right and have to try again.)

#### Sermon Starter

“O God, our help in ages past” (Psalm 99) may be an old warhorse of a hymn, but this might just be the time to hear and sing it again. The world is in rough shape (Iran/Syria/Iraq, Israel/Palestine, US election divisions, Indigenous reconciliation, climate crisis). Right now, we need God, who is ageless and active, to spur us into high gear to save us from ourselves. But it is also a time of testing. Are we willing to work for the good of the future? It’s not all about us, as we learn when Moses dies before entering the Promised Land to which he led the people. When bullies are gaining on the world stage, can we still act gently, with a nurse’s care, for each other, for strangers, and for new immigrants and refugees? Can we resist taking the bait tossed at us in order to avoid escalating conflict that would distract us from remembering who and whose we are? If faith is the intention and we are to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds full stop—then we are tested and proven as we take action to love neighbours (especially our enemies!) as ourselves.

#### Hymns

*Deuteronomy 34:1–12*

VU 433 “Day is done”

VU 436 “Abide with me”

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

MV 140 “As long as we follow”

“We are Going (Woyaya)” by Osibisa

*Psalm 90:1–6, 13–17*

VU p. 806 “O God, our help in ages past”

MV 72 “Why stand so far away”

MV 73 “O God, why are you silent?”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

MV 212 “Sent out in Jesus’ name”

*1 Thessalonians 2:1–8*

VU 593 “Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love”

VU 602 “Blest be the tie that binds”

VU 672 “Take time to be holy”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

MV 28 “Fresh as the Morning”

*Matthew 22:34–46*

VU 242 “Let all things now living”

VU 289 “Pass It On”

MV 110 “First-born of Mary”

MV 139 “True faith needs no defence”

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”

## November 1 – All Saints’ Day (Sunday)

**Revelation 7:9–17**

They will hunger no more and thirst no more.

**Psalm 34:1–10, 22** (VU pp. 761–762)

Taste and see that God is good.

**1 John 3:1–3**

What we will be has not yet been revealed.

**Matthew 5:1–12**

The Beatitudes.

#### To Ponder

Who are the living saints you know? Who are those who’ve left this life? How have they touched or influenced your way of living?

#### Spark

In collaboration with your choir director, ask choir members to be present in the sanctuary as people enter or just before the scripture readings. Instruct them to roam around singing (possibly a made-up tune) or chanting words of praise to God (see Revelation 7:9–17 or Matthew 5:1–12 for inspiration). It might get a little chaotic and noisy, but smile and invite people to enjoy both the surprise and the “dis-ease.”

#### With Children

Kids often gravitate to “either/or” thinking because it’s easier to grasp at an early age and stage of mental development. Explore with them the question of whether saints are somehow different from us regular folks. (Seek to root out the fallacy of perfectionism as something Jesus wants and God demands.) Using a flip chart, draw a line down the middle of a page with “Saints” written on one side and “Regular Folks” on the other side. Ask the kids to name qualities they think saints would have, versus so-called regular folks. (They might associate saints with superheroes!) Share Jesus’ teachings of the Beatitudes—just one or two will do—to contrast how, in faith, God understands saints not as perfect or superheroes but as ordinary folks who take to heart such powerful teachings for living. Erase or scribble out the line between the saints and ordinary folks on the chart.

#### Sermon Starter

All Saints’ Day offers a great opportunity to celebrate the saints, past, present, and (we pray!) future, of your communities. Think of your own congregations but also explore more widely, into the town, city, and region, and to other faiths or community groups. Where do you see new saints—engaged, inclusive, giving, sacrificing—arising? How is God involved in such everyday saintliness, either explicitly (consider the language of Revelation 7, Psalm 34, and 1 John 3) or implicitly (the Beatitudes in Matthew 5)? Despite the sense in 1 John that God’s children (saints!) need to be pure or purified, do you know any saints who could actually meet that requirement? Psalm 34 speaks of saints needing “the fear of God” to do good; this phrase can be misunderstood and needs unpacking. Think “wonder and awe” of God. Revelation’s apocalyptic imagery both comforts people and challenges them to imagine their own ideas of what is redeeming (in this life and the next). Despite the ordeals they go through, yet will God (the Lamb) shepherd and guide them, granting all God’s saints peace.

#### Hymns

*Revelation 7:9–17*

VU 210 “You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd”

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

VU p. 894 “Holy God, We Praise Your Name”

MV 126 “Are you a shepherd?”

*Psalm 34:1–10, 22*

VU 234 “Let us with a gladsome mind”

VU 460 “All who hunger”

MV 26 “Your love is amazing”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

MV 104 “Know that God is good”

*1 John 3:1–3*

VU 657 “He leadeth me”

VU 672 “Take time to be holy”

MV 35 “Holy One, O Holy One”

“And He shall purify” from Handel’s *Messiah*

*Matthew 5:1–12*

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

VU p. 896 “Blest are they”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

*Seasonal*

VU 705 “For all the saints”

“I sing a song of the saints of God” by Lesbia Scott

“When the saints go marching in” African American spiritual

## November 1 – Twenty-second after Pentecost

##### *Proper 26 (alternative to All Saints’ Day)*

**Joshua 3:7–17**

Joshua leads the people across the Jordan River.

**Psalm 107:1–7, 33–37** (VU pp. 831–832 Parts One and Four)

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

**1 Thessalonians 2:9–13**

Lead a life worthy of God.

**Matthew 23:1–12**

The greatest one will be the servant.

#### To Ponder

Has living your Christian faith ever put you in danger? Was it something specific you did, or was it the way you choose or feel called to live?

#### Spark

Play or project “Michael, row your boat ashore” (African American spiritual) as people enter the sanctuary, until everyone is singing.

#### With Children

Riffing off Matthew 23, dramatize the story. Play the Pharisee. Be haughty and hypocritical, and maybe introduce the meaning of those words as you go. Then, play the tax collector: humble, self-effacing, compassionate. Afterwards, ask the kids who the more faithful one was and why they think that. Tell them that Jesus uses contrast here to make a point: it’s not as simple as “Pharisees are bad guys” and “tax-collectors are good guys.” We are all like the two sides of a coin: one way at one time and different at another. God loves us anyway but encourages us to be more humble than hypocritical.

#### Sermon Starter

After Halloween, consider a sermon title like “Trick or Truth.” Matthew’s Jesus speaks powerful (and dangerous!) truth, likely with Pharisees listening in. Unlike in the Matthew 22 story, there’s no trick question here. Are we ever called to be as brave? Joshua’s story is about trusting that his word is true when he says that God’s presence is still with him (as Moses’ successor) and with the people. Who is most at risk of drowning should this sign fail? It’s the priests, of course, standing in harm’s way with the ark. Where do we see clergy or Christians standing in harm’s way today to “tell the truth”? (And yet, in light of the ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict, how do we handle the inconvenient truth of God’s help “driving out” all other inhabitants?) In 1 Thessalonians 2, the readers are exhorted to *love* the truth. In this era of “fake news,” we need to discern truth from fiction. Psalm 107 points to the signs of a humble, yet powerful truth that embodies care for the last and least.

#### Hymns

*Joshua 3:7–17*

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 657 “He leadeth me”

MV 3 “River”

MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

“Lead me, guide me” by Doris M. Akers

*Psalm 107:1–7, 33–37*

VU 220 “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

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

VU 702 “When a poor one”

“All good gifts” by Stephen Schwartz and Matthias Claudius (from *Godspell*)

*1 Thessalonians 2:9–13*

VU 217 “All creatures of our God and King”

VU 236 “Now thank we all our God”

VU 315 “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 213 “Take up his song” (*Add “truth” as another verse*.)

*Matthew 23:1–12*

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 589 “Lord, speak to me”

VU 595 “We are pilgrims”

VU 701 “What does the Lord require of you”

MV 64 “Because you came”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

## November 8 – Twenty-third after Pentecost

##### *Proper 27*

*Worship materials for the Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost to Reign of Christ Sunday were contributed by Lynn McCaw, Laura Tobin, Kimberly Heath, and Keith Hartshorn-Walton from Wall Street U.C., Brockville, Ont.*

**Joshua 24:1–3*a*, 14–25**

Joshua challenges the people to choose God.

**Psalm 78:1–7** (VU p. 792 Part One)

We will teach the next generation.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**

God will raise the dead.

**Matthew 25:1–13**

Parable of the 10 bridesmaids and the lamps.

#### To Ponder

Where have you “sighted,” heard, felt, or experienced God this week?

#### Spark

In advance, invite the congregation members to bring in photos of people from their lives, in the present or the past, who have influenced their faith or shared their faith story with them. If this is Remembrance Sunday for you, they might bring photos of those who have served. Display the pictures around the sanctuary and offer thanks.

#### With Children

Psalm 78:4 reads: “We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” At times, we use a practice called God Sightings during the Children’s Time, especially when there may not be many or any children. God Sightings is an open-mic format where we invite members of the congregation (and the children gathered at the front) to tell us a brief story about where they have noticed God at work this past week. Sometimes we do this weekly for a season, and people make a habit of noticing God at work in the midst of their daily lives and remembering the story to share on Sunday. The stories are wide-ranging, from acts of kindness to feeling God’s peace in a difficult time. We need to tell our faith stories to one another and to the next generation.

#### Sermon Starter

Whether you are observing a Remembrance Sunday or not, you can use the theme of remembering and make a commitment to tell the remembered stories—remembered in the Bible and through generations—of God’s presence. There is a sense of endurance, and of having a faith that lasts, in Joshua’s challenge to the people to choose whom they will serve. This sense is also found in the Psalm 78 reminder to tell the story to the next generation and in the bridesmaids who keep enough oil in their lamps. If we are going to endure as a church to the next generation, if we are going to be beacons of peace and make a difference, we need to learn how to tell our stories and share our faith, lest we forget, lest the lamp and light of the church goes out.

#### Hymns

*Joshua 24:1–3*a*, 14–25*

VU 625 “I feel the winds of God”

VU p. 806 “O God, our help in ages past”

“A new hallelujah” by Michael W. Smith, Paul Baloche, and Debbie Smith

*Psalm 78:1–7*

VU 359 “He came singing love”

VU 599 “Living Christ, bring us love”

“Tell me the old, old story” by Kate Hankey

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

VU 238 “How Great Thou Art”

“Awake my soul” by Chris Tomlin, Daniel Carson, Jesse Reeves, and Jason Ingram

*Matthew 25:1–13*

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

SFGP\* 130 “Give me oil in my lamp”

*Remembrance Sunday*

VU 678 “For the healing of the nations”

VU 684 “Make me a channel of your peace”

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

*\*Songs for a Gospel People*

## November 15 – Twenty-fourth after Pentecost

##### *Proper 28*

**Judges 4:1–7**

The judge Deborah speaks God’s word to the general Barak.

**Psalm 123** (VU p. 847)

We lift our eyes to you, O God.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**

The day of God will come as a thief in the night.

**Matthew 25:14–30**

The parable of the talents.

#### To Ponder

What is your favourite talent or skill to share? What talent or skill has it taken longer for you to share?

#### Spark

Focusing on the parable of the talents, project or display photos of members participating and helping out on different occasions inside and outside of the church. As people arrive, give them a piece of paper with a picture of a toolbox on it. Later, they can write or draw what tools, skills, and talents they have to share with others. This could lead to a volunteer sign-up to help with various ministries or perhaps a “time and talent” auction fundraiser.

#### With Children

Bring a toolbox with various tools. Discuss what the tools are used for and how they are helpful to build things. Then share how God has given us tools and talents to help serve others. Discuss how, though the children are young and may not think they can do much, even the smallest act of kindness can mean so much to someone.

#### Sermon Starter

Use it or lose it! We are called to use our talents and gifts and to not be afraid. From the cradle to the grave, life brings with it limitations. However, we are cautioned against focusing so strongly on the limitations that we end up doing nothing. The familiar Serenity Prayer by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr—“God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference”—reminds us that, no matter our limitations, there are things we can do and give that will make a difference. What do you (or your church) focus on more, the limitations or the possibilities? When we focus inward, we will be tempted to bury any small gift we have, deeming it not enough. But when we focus on God, the giver of the gift, we will understand the possibilities through the context of faith.

#### Hymns

*Judges 4:1–7*

VU 394 “Moved by the Gospel, let us move”

VU 509 “Here I Am, Lord”

*Psalm 123*

“Draw me close to you” by Kelly Carpenter

*1 Thessalonians 5:1–11*

VU 703 “In the bulb there is a flower”

“Build your kingdom here” by Rend Collective

*Matthew 25:14–30*

VU 635 “All the way my Saviour leads me”

VU 701 “What does the Lord require of you”

MV 209 “Go, make a diff’rence”

## November 22 – Reign of Christ Sunday

**Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24**

God searches for the sheep; God judges between the fat and the lean.

**Psalm 100** (VU pp. 820–824)

Make a joyful noise all the earth!

**Ephesians 1:15–23**

May God give you a spirit of wisdom, revelation, and hope.

**Matthew 25:31–46**

When you helped the least of these, you helped me.

#### To Ponder

What prophetic voice, from the Bible or beyond, inspires and challenges you the most?

#### Spark

Include one or more of the provocative sheep/shepherd cartoons from the NakedPastor.com in your bulletin or project them on a screen. (An internet search for *naked pastor Jesus sheep* will yield a whole series of these. Please honour the information under Cartoon Licensing.) Invite congregants to discuss the cartoons in pairs or groups of three. Cartoonists are often the modern-day prophets. Psalm 100 could easily become the Call to Worship. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians (Ephesians 1:17–19) could be adapted and used as a benediction.

#### With Children

Place a small crate or bag containing things a pet needs to live a good life: food, water, a bed, a toy, a spray bottle of water for training cats to stay off the table, a leash, etc. Engage the children in a conversation about pets they have at home. What does it take to keep a pet well looked after? Then switch gears to talk about shepherds and how they look after sheep. In the Bible, God is sometimes referred to as the True Shepherd. If God is the shepherd, who are the sheep? You and me. Right, so what do we need from God? We need to know that God is here and that God is always with us wherever we wander, to keep us safe and guide us as we listen to God’s voice.

#### Sermon Starter

In this week’s readings, three of the scriptures draw our attention to the idea of the shepherd and the sheep. David, the shepherd boy, was a larger-than-life superhero, killing a bear, a lion, and a giant with nothing but a slingshot. He was also the ideal shepherd. However, not all sheep were as well looked after as David’s. Ezekiel casts judgment on those who have ravaged instead of tended the sheep. Richard Rohr has pointed out that it is unique to Hebrew Scriptures that they did not edit the very critical judgments of the prophets against their own leaders and kings—their bad sheep and shepherds—from the canon. (Internet search *Richard Rohr self-critical thinking*.) How does self-critical thinking, in a constructive and prophetic way, continue to be important to our role as Christians in society today? If we are to hold up the tending qualities of the True Shepherd, caring for those who are in need, providing for and protecting them, we also need to be aware of where in our church and in our world we have fallen short.

#### Hymns

*Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24*

VU 235 “O worship the King”

“Sinking deep” by Joel Davies and Aodhan King (Hillsong Young and Free)

*Psalm 100*

MV 185 “Ev’ry day is a day of thanksgiving”

“10,000 reasons (Bless the Lord)” by Jonas Myrin and Matt Redman

*Ephesians 1:15–23*

MV 4 “All who are thirsty”

*Matthew 25:31–46*

VU 600 “When I needed a neighbour”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

*Reign of Christ*

VU 211 “Crown him with many crowns”

VU 273 “The King of love”

“The Servant King” by Graham Kendrick