

*Gathering,* Lent/Easter 2024

Ash Wednesday to the Last Sunday of Easter

[Lent and Holy Week 2](#_Toc151049017)

[Easter 2](#_Toc151049018)

[February 14 – Ash Wednesday 4](#_Toc151049019)

[February 18 – Lent 1 6](#_Toc151049020)

[February 25 – Lent 2 8](#_Toc151049021)

[March 3 – Lent 3 10](#_Toc151049022)

[March 10 – Lent 4 12](#_Toc151049023)

[March 17 – Lent 5 14](#_Toc151049024)

[March 24 – Palm/Passion Sunday 16](#_Toc151049025)

[March 28 – Maundy Thursday 18](#_Toc151049026)

[March 29 – Good Friday 20](#_Toc151049027)

[March 31 – Easter Sunday 23](#_Toc151049028)

[April 7 – Second Sunday of Easter 25](#_Toc151049029)

[April 14 – Third Sunday of Easter 27](#_Toc151049030)

[April 21 – Fourth Sunday of Easter 29](#_Toc151049031)

[April 28 – Fifth Sunday of Easter 31](#_Toc151049032)

[May 5 – Sixth Sunday of Easter 33](#_Toc151049033)

[May 9 – Ascension Day (Thursday) 35](#_Toc151049034)

[May 12 – Seventh Sunday of Easter 37](#_Toc151049035)

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## Lent and Holy Week

### Dates

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

### Feast Days\* and Special Days

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

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

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

### Meaning of Name

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

### Liturgical Colour

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

## Easter

### Dates

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

### Feast Days\* and Special Days

**April Fool’s Day** – April 1.

**Holy Humour Sunday** – the Sunday after Easter Sunday.

**Earth Day** – April 22.

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

**Camping Sunday** – last Sunday of April.

### Meaning of Name

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

### Liturgical Colours

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

## February 14 – Ash Wednesday

*Worship materials for Ash Wednesday contributed by Barbara Cairns, West River U.C., Cornwall, P.E.I.*

**Joel 2:1–2, 12–17**

Return to God with all your heart.

or **Isaiah 58:1–12**

The worship that God desires.

**Psalm 51:1–17 (VU pp. 776–777)**

Put a new heart in me, O God.

**2 Corinthians 5:20*b*—6:10**

Be reconciled to God.

**Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21**

Practise your faith in secret.

### Creation Connection

How might we be reconciled to God through our actions in care of creation?

### Spark

Consider the following for use in the Ash Wednesday service. As sung responses: VU 411 “O God we call” and VU 948 “O God, hear my prayer,” as well as the Lenten prayer found at VU 110.

### With Children

Prepare Ash Wednesday sachets ahead of time by wrapping bits of dried lavender into pieces of burlap and tying them up with purple ribbon. During worship, explain that burlap symbolizes the rough and difficult parts of our lives, purple symbolizes the loving presence of God, and the dried lavender inside the bag symbolizes calming and forgiveness. (Take a sniff!) Give one to each child and adult to take home as a reminder of God’s loving and healing presence when we are dealing with difficult and rough times.

### Sermon Starter

The Ash Wednesday scriptures focus on turning toward God’s healing. Words such as *repentance, forgiveness, turn around, reconciliation, return, prepare,* and *good news* are used. The ashes used today remind us to turn around and remember the good news of God’s love. We are invited to move forward on a journey toward God’s healing. We are invited to enter into the place of wilderness and uncertainty that often comes when we seek healing. In worship today, we can set a healing intention, naming our desire for God’s healing in our own lives, our corporate lives, and in the world. In this way, we accept God’s invitation to wholeness and begin the journey. It is a 40-day journey that will take us to places we may not choose to go. Knowing that God’s love is with us, we dare to embrace the journey, answer God’s call to seek out new paths, and strive to create space to reflect, pray, and return to God’s heart during this Lenten season.

### Hymns

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 or Isaiah 58:1–12

VU 701 “What does the Lord require of you”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

“Return to God” by Marty Haugen

Psalm 51

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10

VU 595 “The Servant Song”

MV 179 “Sisters let us walk together”

SGP\* 13 “Morning glory, starlit sky”

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

VU 105 “Dust and ashes touch our face”

VU 107 “Sunday’s palms are Wednesday’s ashes”

VU 581 “When we are living”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

\**Songs for a Gospel People*

## February 18 – Lent 1

*Worship materials for Lent contributed by Teresa Burnett-Cole, Glebe-St. James U.C., Ottawa, Ont.*

**Genesis 9:8–17**

The covenant between God and Noah.

**Psalm 25:1–10 (VU p. 752)**

Lead me in your truth, O God.

**1 Peter 3:18–22**

Baptism now saves you.

**Mark 1:9–15**

The baptism, temptation, and mission of Jesus.

### Creation Connection

Humans have often tried to tame the wilderness, yet in scripture, it is in the wilderness that people encounter God. How might we learn to understand wilderness as a blessing, not as something to be tamed?

### Spark

Start to build a visual and tactile reminder of the Lenten journey we are undertaking. This could be on a table in the sanctuary or on the stairs leading to the chancel. Cover the table or stairs with a piece of purple fabric. For this Sunday, to symbolize the waters of baptism and the wilderness, place a bowl of water and some rocks. Invite people to come and touch the symbols before or after worship.

### With Children

Have ready a ring, Skittles, a plate, and warm water. The ring is a reminder of an important promise. Sometimes we give a ring as a way of pledging to keep a promise. God always keeps their promise. Tell the story of Noah’s ark. After the flood, God made a promise to Noah to never again destroy the earth with a flood. God gave a ring in the sky to show that God would keep their promise.Next time you notice a rainbow, remember God keeps their promise. Create a rainbow by placing Skittles of all colours around the edge of a plate. Pour warm water into the centre of the plate. As the water spreads to the edge of the plate, a rainbow will appear. For a fun video demonstration, search *Skittles rainbow science activity*.

### Sermon Starter

On the first Sunday in Lent, the scripture texts thrust us into the wilderness. First, we encounter the story of God’s promise to Noah after the flood, after the devastation of the earth that turned the whole known world into a wilderness. In the gospel, we engage the story of the baptism of Jesus, who is then driven out into the wilderness.

The flood was a disaster, but it also prefigured baptism, as it is through the death of the old that we rise anew in Christ. As humans, as a culture, as a faith, we come from a truly wild place. We have suffered, and we have caused suffering. Yet through baptism, we are redeemed and called to offer Christ’s love to others. As we enter into the Season of Lent, we experience the wilderness around us, but perhaps it is time for a new relationship with God’s beloved wild.

### Hymns

Genesis 9:8–17

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 356 “Seek ye first the kingdom”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 165 “There is a time”

Psalm 25

VU 217 “All creatures of our God and King”

VU 449 “Crashing waters at creation”

1 Peter 3:18–22

VU 299 “Teach me, God, to wonder”

Mark 1:9–15

VU 99 “Christ, when for us you were baptized”

VU 509 “I, the Lord of sea and sky”

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

General/Seasonal

VU 108 “Throughout these Lenten days and nights” *Consider singing one verse a week as a Lenten introit.*

## February 25 – Lent 2

**Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16**

The covenant between Abram, Sarai, and God.

**Psalm 22:23–31 (VU p. 746 Part Three and Four)**

You have not hidden your face, O God.

**Romans 4:13–25**

God’s promise rests on grace and faith.

**Mark 8:31–38**

Those who lose their life for the gospel will save it.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 22 reminds us that it is God who has dominion over the earth, a challenge to the words of Genesis 1:28. The ends of the earth, and all the people, are told to remember this.

### Spark

Continue to build your Lenten visual display by adding a simple wooden cross.

### With Children

Have ready a deck of cards and a book of magic tricks. Choose a helper to pick a card and return it to the middle of the deck without telling what card it was. Snap your fingers and say that the card they chose will magically appear on the top of the deck. Of course, it doesn’t happen. Explain that there were other steps in the trick, but it was too hard. Pretty foolish, eh? Yet sometimes, isn’t it what we expect from God? When life is hard, we want God to intervene with the snap of a finger. We want an easy way out. In today’s story in the Gospel of Mark, that’s what the disciple Peter wanted. He was determined to protect Jesus by demanding an easier way than Jesus having to suffer a terrible death. He wanted Jesus to use his power, at the snap of a finger, to set up his kingdom. But Jesus got mad at Peter and let him know that that’s not how things work. Being a follower of Jesus isn’t easy and means taking up our crosses. It means doing the difficult thing that shares God’s love and justice. You might go on to explore what some of those difficult things might be.

### Sermon Starter

Just imagine: You’ve been travelling with your teacher for three years. You’ve been present and have watched as the crowds come to him for healing and hope. You are excited by the momentum that is building. You imagine all the wonderful possibilities for the coming years, working with Jesus and learning from him. Then Jesus begins to talk about his future suffering and death. Of course, Peter protests. Wouldn’t you?

Peter wants Jesus to be the Messiah who conquers Rome. Jesus, remembering the temptations experienced in the wilderness, says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan. You are focused on earthly things, not on divine things.” Then Jesus tells his disciples, “Take up your cross and follow me.” What is the cross we carry today? The Old Testament and the epistle speak of faith and promises fulfilled because of Abraham’s trust in God. Jesus’ trust in God leads him to the cross. Are we prepared to confront our own crosses?

### Hymns

Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16

VU 288 “Great is thy faithfulness”

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

VU 634 “To Abraham and Sarah”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

Psalm 22

VU 143 “My song is love unknown”

VU 307 “Touch the earth lightly”

Romans 4:13–25

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

MV 99 “Stand, O stand firm”

Mark 8:31–38

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 561 “Take up your cross”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

VU 581 “When we are living”

MV 212 “Sent out in Jesus’ name”

## March 3 – Lent 3

**Exodus 20:1–17**

The Ten Commandments.

**Psalm 19 (VU pp. 740–741)**

The heavens declare the glory of God.

**1 Corinthians 1:18–25**

God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.

**John 2:13–22**

Jesus clears the temple.

### Creation Connection

How might the Ten Commandments be interpreted in terms of the human relationship with creation?

### Spark

Add to the Lenten display a piece of braided rope for a whip and a small bag of coins.

### With Children

Have ready a broom, a mop, and window cleaner. Ask the children what these things are used for. To clean the house! How do you know when it’s time to clean the house? There was a time when Jesus cleaned the house, too. When he went to the temple, he couldn’t believe what he discovered. People were selling cattle, sheep, and doves to be used as sacrifices in the temple ceremonies. They were even doing their banking right there in the temple courtyard. It was more like a flea market than a place to worship God. Jesus was so angry, he made a whip from rope and drove the animal sellers out of the temple. He said, “Get out of here! How could you turn my father’s house into a market!” Jesus did some serious housecleaning that day! The Season of Lent is a time for us to think about how our hearts might need a little housecleaning. Share some examples of how a housecleaning of our hearts might work.

### Sermon Starter

Jesus was angry when he saw the temple made into a marketplace. He was angry because God forbade idolatry in the Ten Commandments. The people were making worship all about money. Jesus knew his actions in the temple could bring him into conflict with the temple priests and leaders, but he did it anyway. Sometimes we place certain things as more important than our relationship with God. We set up idols, which creates stumbling blocks for ourselves and others. We need Jesus’ courage to rid ourselves of such idols. What might those idols be for us as individuals and as a congregation? As we approach Holy Week, we need Christ’s strength and integrity to set aside our idols and to call out those who oppress others. We need Christ’s passion to inspire us to resist the culture of the age. During Lent, let us know that God’s power goes with us.

### Hymns

*Exodus 20:1–17*

VU 642 “Be thou my vision”

VU 701 “What does the Lord require of you”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

MV 151 “Your will be done”

*Psalm 19*

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

*1 Corinthians 1:18–25*

VU 657 “He leadeth me”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

MV 188 “I thank you, thank you, Jesus”

*John 2:13–22*

VU 117 “Jesus Christ is waiting”

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”

MV 209 “Go, make a diff’rence”

## March 10 – Lent 4

**Numbers 21:4–9**

A bronze serpent heals the people.

**Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22 (VU p. 831 Part One and Two)**

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

**Ephesians 2:1–10**

We are not saved by our own doing, but by grace.

**John 3:14–21**

For God so loved the world.

### Creation Connection

A serpent is used as a symbol of healing. What are the many ways that nature provides healing and resources for healing?

### Spark

Building on the symbols of our Lenten journey, add a rubber snake to the display. You could wrap the snake around a cross to emphasize healing rather than the snake’s venomous bite. Make sure to explain this symbol at some point during worship.

### With Children

Have ready a tray with several small metal objects and a magnet. Allow the children to experiment with the magnet. The magnet has great power to draw things to it. It reminds us of something Jesus taught about himself. He taught that he would draw people to himself. The drawing power of this magnet is very powerful, but it is nothing compared to Jesus’ drawing power. When we understand Jesus through his great love, we’re drawn to him. Despite all the things in the world that draw us away, Jesus never stops loving us and reaching out to draw us closer to him.

### Sermon Starter

John 3:16 is likely the most famous of all scripture passages. Yet it is juxtaposed in the lectionary this week with the story of Moses lifting up a snake on a cross in the wilderness. In this story from Numbers, we encounter the cranky Hebrew people. The longer they wander, the more complaints they have, and the crankier they get. They don’t like the food, they’re thirsty, they’re tired, they want to go back to Egypt, they’re sick of camping. Finally, they reach the boiling point and complain to Moses that they’ve had enough. God retaliates by sending venomous snakes into the encampment. While this seems a little harsh on God’s part, what parent hasn’t been pushed to the limit? Yet the arc of the scripture story is one of a relentless and undeterred God who does whatever is necessary to maintain a relationship with humanity. Even in this situation and after an extreme reaction, God receives the people’s prayers and provides a cure for snake bites. Fear of the unknown, fear of the other, fear of failure, fear of death—these cause spiritual and emotional paralysis. During this Lenten journey, let us reflect on how we are afflicted by fear’s venom and remember that it is only by moving headlong into death’s shadow that we can know Christ’s resurrected love.

### Hymns

Numbers 21:4–9

VU 112 “O God, how we have wandered”

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

MV 65 “When we are tested”

Psalm 107

MV 62 “There is room for all”

Ephesians 2:1–10

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

VU 356 “Seek ye first the kingdom”

John 3:14–21

VU 504 “How clear is our vocation, Lord”

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

MV 20 “God of still waiting”

MV 93 “What calls me from the death”

MV 114 “Behold the face of Christ”

## March 17 – Lent 5

**Jeremiah 31:31–34**

“I will write my law on their hearts.”

**Psalm 51:1–12 (VU pp. 776–777)**

Put a new heart in me, O God.

**or Psalm 119:9–16 (VU pp. 838–839)**

Finding joy in God’s commandments.

**Hebrews 5:5–10**

Christ did not glorify himself; rather he suffered.

**John 12:20–33**

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth.

### Creation Connection

Jesus used many images from nature in his teachings: grains of wheat, birds, lilies, fig trees, and more. How might we learn from Jesus to understand our close relationship with nature?

### Spark

Add a large heart made of paper, or a heart- shaped balloon or pillow, to the collection of Lenten symbols.

### With Children

Have ready a stethoscope (a real one or a toy). Doctors use stethoscopes to listen to what is happening in our bodies. A person could seem healthy on the outside yet have something wrong on the inside. One of the things doctors check is our hearts. If there is something wrong with our heart, we might need medicine, an operation, or sometimes even a new heart. Today’s story is about a man named David. He was a shepherd boy whom God made into a king. David also took down the giant Goliath with a slingshot and five smooth stones. David loved God with all his heart, but he didn’t always do what God wanted. David sometimes had heart trouble, not with his physical heart, but with his heartfelt intention to love and serve God. So David prayed for God to fix it. Sometimes we have heart trouble, too. We might leave things in our hearts like bitterness, anger, jealousy, pride, or greed. We need to pray, like David, for God to fix our heart troubles.

### Sermon Starter

What does God expect from us this year? The world is finally recovering from the chaos of the pandemic. There has been a time of adjustment as we’ve started to gather again. Current political and environmental news has been harrowing. There seems to be a growing fear of anything and anyone different. We are being confronted with the ways this world continues to oppress. We are searching for signs of love and caring around us. Perhaps, like the Greeks in John’s gospel, we just want to experience Jesus in person.

The Old Testament reading reminds us that God forgives us for not paying attention to the Source of Life, to those who are suffering, and to those who are marginalized. In the gospel, Jesus experiences God’s voice. Like the crowd, we may confuse the source of the voice. As we come to the end of Lent, let us decide to be intentional about keeping attentive to God’s voice in our lives. Let us, like the Greeks, wish to experience Jesus in all that passes our way.

### Hymns

Jeremiah 31:31–34

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou Great and Holy”\*

VU 686 “God of grace and God of glory”

MV 106 “I am the dream”

MV 176 “Three things I promise”

Psalm 51

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

MV 213 “Take up his song”

Psalm 119

VU 166 “Joy comes with the dawn”

MV 40 “Never ending joy”

Hebrews 5:5–10

VU 282 “Long before the night”

MV 93 “What calls me from the death”

John 12:20–33

VU 364 “Forgive our sins as we forgive”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

VU 581 “When we are living”

VU 584 “Through the heart of every city”

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

MV 125 “When a grain of wheat”

\*Did you know that The United Church of Canada has made a commitment to not use “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” as part of its pledge to antisemitism? For more information, see The United Church of Canada’s [*Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/interfaith-relations/countering-antisemitism) (2003), pp. 20, 57. See also “Worship Sparks,” *Gathering ACE 2023-24*, p. 26.

## March 24 – Palm/Passion Sunday

*Worship materials for Palm/Passion Sunday through to Easter Sunday contributed by Barbara Cairns, West River U.C., Cornwall, P.E.I.*

### Liturgy of the Palms

**Mark 11:1–11 or John 12:12–16**

Jesus’ joyful entry into Jerusalem.

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

The stone that the builders rejected.

### Liturgy of the Passion

**Isaiah 50:4–9*a***

The servant says, “I gave my back to those who struck me.”

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

My times are in your hands, O God.

**Philippians 2:5–11**

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

**Mark 14:1—15:47**

The narrative of Jesus’ final hours.

### Creation Connection

Palms are traditionally used for this service, and we often order them in from the Holy Land. What is the environmental impact of doing so? What alternatives may have a lower environmental impact?

### Spark

Have a large container of sand and enough small stones for everyone. During the service, invite people to place a stone (or two) in the sand as they ponder what it is that they have to celebrate or welcome in their lives and what it is that they might need to give up in order for healing to be possible.

### With Children

Explore the idea of how it feels to be on a team and how it feels when the team wins. How do we celebrate? Do we shout and cheer, wave our banners, throw our caps in the air, or do a happy dance? What about when something really good happens in your life? You passed your test, your tooth came out, you learned to skate or ride a bike. Let the children share with you how it feels to be excited and happy and how they show it. Share the story of when Jesus came into town riding on a donkey and how excited the people were to welcome him and cheer for him. This is why we celebrate on Palm Sunday. We welcome Jesus once again. Explain to the children the ways we usually welcome Jesus on this day. Encourage them to think of more ways we could welcome Jesus. It is a time to celebrate Jesus and give thanks.

Offer this prayer: Hosanna! We cheer your name, Jesus! Loving God, we turn to you when we need guidance. Help us to follow Jesus when we are not sure what is the best way to go. Hosanna! We praise you, Jesus, today and always. Amen.

### Sermon Starter

Palm Sunday can be a challenge as there are many ways to enter the story. We can choose to focus primarily on the celebration of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem with all the excitement it brings. Or we may choose to split the service into the Palm and the Passion, hoping to capture some of the crowd’s betrayal and the change in mood. This ensures that we don’t go from the excitement of the Jesus parade to the joy of Easter while skipping over the hard parts of the story that are experienced in the Good Friday service.

Perhaps focus on the healing and joy of the procession. We can also point to the alternative way that Jesus lived out his call through a ministry of choice, of freedom, and of healing. Folks are invited to enter this time of worship with an open heart to follow Jesus, to lay down their burdens, and celebrate.

### Hymns

Mark 11:1–11

VU 124 “He came riding on a donkey”

VU 126 “Ride on, ride on, the time is right”

MV 128 “When they heard that Jesus was coming”

“Blessed is the King who comes” by S.T. Kimbrough Jr. (One License)

Psalm 118

“Celtic alleluia” by Fintan O’Carroll and Christopher Walker (hymnary.org)

MV 8 “And on this path”

Isaiah 50:4–9a

VU 143 “My song is love unknown”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

Psalm 31:9–16

VU p. 780 “My soul finds rest in God alone”

Mark 14:1—15:47

VU 127 “Ride on! Ride on in majesty!”

VU 132 “Bitter was the night”

VU 135 “Beneath the cross of Jesus”

## March 28 – Maundy Thursday

**Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14**

Instructions for the first Passover.

**Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)**

How can I repay you, O God?

**1 Corinthians 11:23–26**

An account of the Last Supper.

**John 13:1–17, 31*b*–35**

Jesus washes the disciples’ feet.

### Creation Connection

“How can I repay you, O God?” asks the writer of Psalm 116. It is a question we need to ask of creation.

### Spark

Perhaps an intercultural feast can be set up that includes foods from other cultures that are symbolic and significant in your community of faith and the surrounding community. A communal meal shared among Christians is sometimes called an Agape Meal (or Love Feast). The intention is to share a meal, share God’s love, and be in community. It can be a potluck or a simple meal prepared for all to share.

### With Children

Visit buildfaith.org and search *Maundy Thursday agape meal activity*. Scroll down and select *activity cards* to access a PDF of questions to engage children during the meal. Print out the questions on cardstock and cut them into squares, or glue them onto recipe cards, providing one set of cards for each child. Invite the children to complete the cards during the shared meal or during worship. Crayons or felt pens will be needed. Some of the questions may need to be adapted to your setting.

### Sermon Starter

Maundy Thursday is a time in our Holy Week to stop, pause, and give thanks. It helps us to remember, celebrate, and focus on Jesus, his purpose, his call, and his love for all. It is a holy night. A sermon may not be needed. The message is found in the actions of hand- or foot-washing, anointing with healing oil, sharing a meal, and communion. Through engaging in this service, we come closer to experiencing God’s abundance, God’s grace, and God’s love.

### Hymns

Exodus 12:1–14

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us” *select verses*

VU 460 “All who hunger”

VU 466 “Eat this bread”

Psalm 116

MV 103 “Ka mana’o ’I ’O”

MV 221 “I am walking a path of peace”

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

VU 462 “Before I take the body of my Lord”

VU 469 “We gather here”

VU 471 “Eat this bread and never hunger”

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

VU 130 “An upper room did our Lord prepare”

VU 133 “Go, now, to Gethsemane”

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

MV 199 “When at this table”

## March 29 – Good Friday

**Isaiah 52:13—53:12**

The servant is despised, suffering, acquainted with infirmity.

**Psalm 22 (VU pp. 743–746)**

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

**Hebrews 10:16–25**

Let us approach God with a true heart.

or **Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9**

Jesus the High Priest.

**John 18:1—19:42**

The betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion of Jesus.

### Creation Connection

How have we forsaken and betrayed creation? Yet for those who have experienced an environmental event that caused a human disaster, the feeling may be that creation has forsaken and betrayed them.

### Spark

We as Christians need to be aware of internal racism and our biases that can harm. On Good Friday, in order to move away from an interpretation of the events surrounding Jesus’ death that tends toward antisemitism, we need to pay special attention.

**Recommended articles:**

“Who Killed Jesus? Combatting Anti-Semitism on Good Friday” by the Rev. Eleanor Harrison Bregman, (HuffPost.com, March 24, 2016) includes an excerpt from the Rev. Mary Luti that focuses on Jesus’ message and actions of radical love—which were a threat to the Roman Empire. Bregman suggests reprinting the short excerpt in your bulletin or newsletter, with credit to Luti.

“Who Killed Jesus? An Examination of the Evidence” by the Rev. James Martin, S.J. (HuffPost.com, April 22, 2011) explores the role of Judas Iscariot and touches on antisemitism as well.

“Three Teaching Points for Holy Week” by Sarah Bentley Allred and Eric Grubb (buildfaith.org, April 19, 2019) explores the services of Holy Week and also touches on the antisemitism of Good Friday.

### With Children

In spite of the violent nature of the Good Friday story, it is important to communicate it in age-appropriate language and with ideas that do not convey the violence of the cross. Note: This telling of the story involves lighting the Christ candle.

Explore the feelings of Good Friday. We have lots of different feelings: happy, sad, angry, scared, and more. Jesus died on this day. That makes us feel very sad and maybe scared. We might feel we are all alone. But we aren’t! God is with us even in our saddest feelings.

Some of you may have been to a funeral. A funeral is a time when we gather to share in our sadness at the death of our loved one. Today, we gather here at church to sit with one another and to remember Jesus, to remember his goodness and his love. So, on this day, we light this candle as a way to remember Jesus. (*Light the Christ candle together.*) We light this candle every Sunday and give thanks for Jesus’ presence with us. At the end of the service, we will snuff the candle out to show that he died. But then on Easter Sunday, we’ll light a brand-new Christ candle to celebrate his resurrection and to remember that Jesus is always with us.

Helpful resource: *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, and Resurrection: Simple Ways to Create Meaning for the Seaso*n by Traci Smith (Chalice Press, 2022).

### Sermon Starter

Now, more than ever, we live in a world that is polarized. We may find our relationships are strained. There is an increase in injustice, violence, despair, poverty, and climate disruption, to name a few. How can we as people of faith find hope in the midst of so much alienation, despair, and fear? Yet, Jesus too lived in a time filled with injustice, violence, despair, and poverty. His answer was to live radical love and a deep trust in the living, loving God.

Perhaps in naming our own issues, we can begin to find a way forward toward God’s love for all creation. When we stop at this point on our faith journey to say no to living in ways that harm ourselves, others, and the earth, we begin to move away from behaviour that is selfish and toward receiving God’s grace and forgiveness for all.

As a symbolic way of repenting, invite people to write down issues they wish to bring before God and come forward to place the cards on a large wooden cross or on the altar.

### Hymns

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

VU 141 “They crucified my Lord”

VU 145 “O sacred head”

Psalm 22

VU 118 “Wonder and stare”

VU 154 “Why has God forsaken me”

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid”

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

VU 143 “My song is love unknown

VU 147 “What wondrous love is this”

John 18:1—19:42

VU 135 “Beneath the cross of Jesus”

VU 136 “O come and mourn with me awhile”

VU 137 “The Love that clothes itself in light”

## March 31 – Easter Sunday

**Acts 10:34–43**

Peter preaches, “God shows no partiality.”

or **Isaiah 25:6–9**

God provides a rich feast.

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

God is my strength and my song.

**1 Corinthians 15:1–11**

An account of Jesus’ resurrection appearances.

**John 20:1–18 or Mark 16:1–8**

The resurrected Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah declares that God will provide a rich feast on a mountain. In your context, where might God’s rich feast best be held?

### Spark

Why not invite the adults to join in the painting activity described below for the children? Alternatives could be to create a weaving or a mosaic from pieces of coloured paper or tiles. You might also play off the idea of the rich feast God will provide and create your artwork based on that theme.

### With Children

Share the wonder of Jesus’ resurrection and how it showed us that God loves us so very much. Then invite the children to participate in painting an Easter picture. Everyone could work on one large canvas or each person could have their own small canvas. Offer a variety of paint colours that are happy and bright. Coloured pieces of craft glass (or plastic) could be added on, then glitter glue to make it sparkle. These pictures remind us that God’s love is like a wonderful tapestry with many layers that, when combined, make a beautiful picture. We are part of that tapestry of God’s love, no matter how we feel, who we are, or what we look like. God loves us!

### Sermon Starter

The Easter story comes to us every year: a story of miracles, mystery, hope, joy, and grief. How do we come to terms with the grief we may be personally experiencing in the midst of such a powerful story of love? What do we take from it to help us navigate our own lives, which may be full of fear, frustration, and suffering? Can we experience our own names being expressed through our tears and fears? Can we move away from the tomb and enter into the world ready to respond to this love that already has moved from the tomb into the world? This story of hope and love is one that demands to be shared. How do we open our hearts and our lives to share this miracle of love?

### Hymns

Acts 10:34–43

VU 159 “The strife is o’er”

VU 448 “We know that Christ is raised”

Isaiah 25:6–9

VU 460 “All who hunger”

VU 468 “Let us talents and tongues employ”

Psalm 118

VU p. 876 “Song of the sea” refrain

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

VU 158 “Christ is alive”

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

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

John 20:1–18 or Mark 16:1–8

VU 176 “Who is there on this Easter morning”

VU 178 “Because you live, O Christ”

VU 183 “We meet you, O Christ”

## April 7 – Second Sunday of Easter

*Worship materials for the Second to Fifth Sundays of Easter contributed by Kelly Sprinkle, Mountain Rise United Church of Christ, Fairport, N.Y.*

**Acts 4:32–35**

The believers shared everything in common.

**Psalm 133 (VU p. 856)**

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

**1 John 1:1—2:2**

God is light; journey in the light. **John 20:19–31**

Jesus appears to the disciples, but Thomas is not there.

### Creation Connection

The first Christians shared everything in common. How might such a practice work if we included creation as someone with whom we were committed to sharing?

### Spark

In her book *Malala’s Magic Pencil* (Little, Brown, 2017), Malala Yousafzai wishes for a magic pencil that would bring her drawings to life and make the world a better place. Distribute “magic” pencils to the congregation prior to the Commissioning and then use the following phrases as a charge to them to go out and be the change in the world:

* “Draw a better world, a more peaceful world.”
* “Erase war, poverty, and hunger.”
* “Draw children of all genders, together as equals.”
* “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”

### With Children

Invite the children to describe situations where they have been afraid, and then ask them when they have been brave. After some of the children have responded, tell them briefly about Malala Yousafzai and then read her book *Malala’s Magic Pencil* (Little, Brown and Company, 2017). Malala was brave but it wasn’t easy. I’m sure there were times when she felt like giving up, but she didn’t. Her family supported her, and she knew people around the world were praying for her. That helped her continue to work for the rights of girls.

(You may wish to link this to the story of Thomas, who was brave but also had doubts. See Sermon Starter.)

### Sermon Starter

Thomas is brave. Even though he may have doubts, Thomas is the brave disciple. While all of the other disciples are holed up, Thomas is nowhere to be found. Scripture doesn’t tell us where Thomas is, but it is clear that he isn’t seeking safety behind locked doors. Thomas only speaks in the Gospel of John. He is only mentioned once in each of the synoptic gospels and Acts. Even though there isn’t a lot of information about Thomas, he is often portrayed as a faithless doubter.

Is there more to Thomas? Have we glorified doubting Thomas while failing to notice that Thomas is brave? When Jesus announces to the disciples that they will be returning to Judea because Lazarus is near death, they protest, worried for Jesus’ safety (John 11:8). It is Thomas who bravely announces, “Let us also go that we may die with him” (John 11:16). Thomas is a realist and knows the dangers ahead but is willing to go.

After Mary of Magdala realizes that she is speaking to the risen Christ rather than the gardener, Jesus instructs her to go and tell the others. Mary announces that she has seen Jesus. Perhaps Thomas is there and leaps up and runs out the door because he suddenly has clarity of vision and understands the way.

Earlier in John 14:1–5, when Jesus says, “I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you… And you know the way to the place I am going,” Thomas admits his confusion: “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” But with Mary’s announcement, Thomas may have run into the streets, bravely mustering the strength not to be bound to the death grip of fear. Thomas won’t stay behind locked doors because he knows the way and is ready to brave whatever may come.

### Hymns

VU 173 “Thine is the glory (À toi la gloire)”

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

VU 396 “Jesus, stand among us”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

MV 139 “True faith needs no defence”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

“From the falter of breath” by John L. Bell (hymnary.org)

“Ask the complicated questions” by David Bjorlin (hymnary.org)

“O Spirit, send doubt” by David Bjorlin (GIA Publications)

“Community of Christ” by Shirley Erena Murray (hymnary.org)

## April 14 – Third Sunday of Easter

**Acts 3:12–19**

Peter preaches in Solomon’s Portico.

**Psalm 4 (VU p. 727)**

Answer me when I call, O God.

**1 John 3:1–7**

We are children of God.

**Luke 24:36*b*–48**

Jesus invites the disciples to touch his hands and feet.

### Creation Connection

Sometimes we have to touch to believe. How might your congregation spend time touching and engaging with God’s creation around you? A community garden provides one way.

### Spark

Use “I am a child of God” (MV 157) throughout worship. For example, sing verse 1 as a response during the Call to Worship or prior to the time with children; verse 2 as a call to prayer or as a response following the Prayers of the People; verse 3 during the Prayers of the People or with a slide deck of images of a wounded world of injustice; verse 4 as a call to sharing the peace; and verse 5 as a response to the Commissioning and Blessing.

### With Children

Focus on 1 John 3:2. Every person is loved by God. We all are children of God. Even though we don’t know what the future holds, God is with us throughout our lives. Read the book *When God Made You* by Matthew Paul Turner (Convergent Books, 2017).

In addition to reading Luke 24:36*b*–48, read John 20:24–28, which is the conclusion of the gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter. In the post- resurrection accounts by Luke and John, Jesus invites disciples to touch him. In Luke, Jesus asks the disciples to examine his wounded hands and feet and then invites them to touch and see. In the Gospel of John, Jesus instructs Thomas to touch his wounded hands and side because Thomas had stated that he would not believe until he could do so.

Just as Jesus instructed Thomas and the other disciples to touch his wounds, Jesus still asks contemporary followers to touch the wounds of the world. It is important to examine our motivations to touch those wounds. Are we seeking proof of the wounds or are we touching the pain to be a healing balm? Where are the visible wounds in your neighborhood, community, and global village?

Give witness to how hope is born anew when a group of committed people respond by telling stories about situations where support was given. Give testimony to the healing that occurs when unnoticeable wounds are finally exposed. When the church touches the wounds of the world, we become the body of Christ by offering compassion in expected and unexpected ways.

### Hymns

VU 166 “Joy comes with the dawn”

VU 178 “Because you live, O Christ”

VU 614 “In suffering love”

VU 704 “God give us life”

MV 64 “Because you came”

MV 78 “God weeps”

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid (N’ayez pas peur)”

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”

“See my hands and feet” by Mary Louise Bringle (hymnary.org)

“Inspired by love and anger” by John L. Bell and Graham Maule (hymnary.org)

## April 21 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

**Acts 4:5–12**

Peter testifies before the high priests.

**Psalm 23 (VU pp. 747–749)**

God is my shepherd.

**1 John 3:16–24**

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

**John 10:11–18**

Jesus is the good shepherd.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 23 invokes beautiful pastoral scenes of comfort. How might it also help us reflect upon our relationship with creation?

### Spark

David Hayward’s “It’s Always Pride” is a digital cartoon that shows Jesus embracing a group of sheep of different hues and colours. The image can be purchased and downloaded from NakedPastor.com. Use this cartoon to open a discussion about who Jesus’ sheep are.

### With Children

Read *Gerald the Giraffe and Friends* by Mike Callaghan (Austin Macauley, 2019). After reading the book, discuss the variety of animals and the types of people they represent. Remind the children that everyone is loved by God and no one is ever excluded because of differences.

### Sermon Starter

Psalm 23 brings comfort to many, but on Good Shepherd Sunday, there is a temptation to privatize it by placing emphasis on the individual: my shepherd, restores my soul, leads me, you are with me. Even though the Lord is my shepherd and Jesus is our good shepherd, we must be careful not to make the Divine ours alone.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a shepherd attending to the needs of the sheep to describe the realm of justice on earth. The Pharisees don’t get it (John 9:39—10:7). Jesus explicitly says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). In the realm of justice, the shepherd will go to extreme lengths, even as far as risking their own life to protect the vulnerable. Thank goodness Jesus cares for those sheep. In the realm of justice, there is boundless inclusivity.

Jesus cares for even more sheep, too! Jesus’ compassion and care is not limited to the known sheep. The realm of justice goes farther than one can imagine, and Jesus cares for sheep that some might rather ignore or discredit. Jesus is explicit again: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Who are the people who go unnoticed? Where are the people who are ignored? Are we the ones who feel ignored and unnoticed? To what lengths will we go to advocate for those foolishly labelled as “sinners”? How will the church more genuinely welcome and accept without limitation all of Jesus’ sheep?

If possible, end with the prayer “How great is your love, Lord God” (*Book of Common Worship,* p. 804, no. 27, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

### Hymns

VU 700 “God of freedom, God of justice”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

MV 94 “Love knocks and waits”

MV 126 “Are you a shepherd?”

MV 142 “Oh a song must rise”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

MV 159 “In star and crescent”

MV 169 “When hands reach out beyond divides”

MV 173 “Put peace into each other’s hands”

“Christ is the Shepherd strong” by Brian Wren (Hope Publishing)

“When the church of Jesus” by Fred Pratt Green (Hope Publishing)

## April 28 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

### Sermon Starter

**Acts 8:26–40**

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

**Psalm 22:25–31 (VU p. 746 Part Three and Four)**

Praise God who has heard our call.

**1 John 4:7–21**

Everyone who loves is born of God.

**John 15:1–8**

Jesus is the true vine.

### Creation Connection

Jesus often uses images from nature—vines and fig trees—to make a point. In your context, what might be the equivalent to the vine image? The connections between trees in the forest is an example.

### Spark

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch’s baptism provides an opportunity to offer hospitality and solidarity with gender queer individuals by adding preferred pronouns to name tags. Using pronouns on name tags is just one way to be gender inclusive and show support for those who have been misgendered. Pronoun stickers and buttons can be ordered online or created locally. A great resource for this story is the recorded lecture “Seeing Gender Diversity in Scripture” by Austen Hartke, which can be purchased on The Bible for Normal People website.

### With Children

Gather the children around and dramatically pour water into the baptismal font using these words from the sacrament of baptism ceremony in *Celebrate God’s Presence* (p. 346): “Listen to\* the water. Listen to\* its free-flowing powers; Listen to\* its releasing powers; Listen to\* its welcoming powers.” Invite the children to imagine their own baptism or share a memory of a sibling’s baptism or another baptism they’ve been part of. Briefly discuss the promises that their family and congregation made to nurture them in growth and faith. Conclude with singing VU 454 “May God who creates you.”

\*or *feel*

### Sermon Starter

The Ethiopian eunuch is queer. They are a non- binary stranger. The blurring of gender and sexuality fluidity are not only contemporary phenomena. The very presence of the eunuch in scripture reminds the church and society that queers have been part of the sacred and human story for millennia.

Some argue that a eunuch would not have been welcomed inside Jewish and Christian worship establishments because of genital mutilation and their non-binary female and male traits. This attitude of exclusion is muted when God proclaims unconditional acceptance of foreigners and eunuchs: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name…their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:4–7).

The implications of Phillip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch are far-reaching. Should anyone be excluded from the church? Is anyone beyond God’s love? The answer to both questions is surely no. Thank God for queers who push us all to imagine an ever larger, expansive table of hospitality and acceptance.

### Hymns

VU 187 “The spring has come”

VU 454 “May God who creates you”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

MV 40 “Never ending joy”

MV 117 “By the well, a thirsty woman” especially verses 2 and 3

MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”

“I met a stranger on the road” by David Bjorlin (GIA Publications)

## May 5 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

*Worship materials for the Sixth Sunday of Easter to Seventh Sunday of Easter contributed by Rosemary Godin, First U.C., Trenton, N.S.*

**Acts 10:44–48**

The gift of the Holy Spirit comes as Peter preaches.

**Psalm 98 (VU p. 818)**

Sing to God a new song.

**1 John 5:1–6**

To love God is to obey God’s commandments.

**John 15:9–17**

Love one another as I have loved you.

### Creation Connection

Today is a day to honour the Indigenous wisdom of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. It is a day to acknowledge and grieve the way that colonization has harmed this relationship with lasting effects for Indigenous peoples—indeed, for us all.

### Spark

May 5 is National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People, also known as Red Dress Day. This is an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue of MMIWG and members of the Two-Spirit community. Hang a red dress in your sanctuary and provide information about this tragic subject. Think about ways you, as a congregation, can be part of supporting the families of the missing and murdered in your province and lobbying for changes to end this violence. One theme of this week is “love one another.” How does the way society treats “the other” fit into this theme? For the story of Red Dress Day and worship resources, search *Red Dress Day* on GatheringWorship.ca.

### With Children

Today’s scriptures are filled with opportunity to explore the idea of love that is safe and welcoming. True love, good love, should always make you feel good inside. That’s God’s love. That’s the love we have for each other as followers of Jesus. If you have a red dress in your meeting place, share the story. The red dress reminds us to think about the families who are waiting for their children and siblings to come home. So children are not fearful, explain it this way: “We don’t know where many of them have gone and we miss them.” Give the children paper cut-outs of red dresses that they can take home and put in their window. Ask them how they feel when someone is “missing” from their family or friend circle. We feel so much better when they come home or when we know where they are. Jesus tells us that we should love one another, and so when others are sad, we should do what we can to comfort and care for them.

### Sermon Starter

Today’s passages speak about holy love. We’re still basking in the glow of awe and wonder for the sacrifice Jesus made for each one of us. The Jesus kind of love is agape love. It is a deep love we have for one another; it is sacrificial love that calls on us to let go of our own egos and humble ourselves both to God and to the other. We can “sing to God a new song” by being more aware of spreading God’s love to a wider circle around us and across the world. We may think that small acts of kindness don’t mean much. Yet, they can mean the world to even one person who is the recipient! Share stories of small acts of kindness with which you have been gifted, or solicit stories of kindness in the lives of others and weave them into your message. If you choose to focus on the MMIWG situation, why not have paper cut-outs of red dresses with the name of a missing woman, girl, or a Two-Spirit person to hand out to each person and ask them to pray for their return. Lists of missing women, children, and Two-Spirit people in Canada are available on the internet.

### Hymns

Acts 10:44–48

VU 194 “Filled with the Spirit’s power”

VU 376 “Spirit of the living God”

Psalm 98

VU 158 “Christ is alive”

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

VU p. 820 “Make a joyful noise”

1 John 5:1–6

VU 211 “Crown him with many crowns”

VU 657 “He leadeth me”

VU 661 “Come to my heart”

John 15:9–17

VU 600 “When I needed a neighbour”

VU 602 “Blest be the tie that binds”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

## May 9 – Ascension Day (Thursday)

**Acts 1:1–11**

The ascension of Jesus.

**Psalm 47 (VU p. 771)**

Clap your hands, all you people!

or **Psalm 93 (VU pp. 812–813)**

God rules in majesty and strength.

**Ephesians 1:15–23**

I never cease giving thanks for your faith.

**Luke 24:44–53**

Another version of the ascension story.

### Creation Connection

The disciples are scolded for looking up at the ascending Jesus rather than getting on with sharing the good news. How often are we looking up, hoping for God to descend and fix climate change for us? While we are looking up, how is God already active among us and in the world?

### Spark

Signs of new life are “rising” all around us. If you use a screen in worship, display images and words of those signs before the service. Or place large pictures or posters of new life around the sanctuary.

### With Children

It seems like everything changes in spring. Have a fun conversation with the children about that word: *spring*. Ask them what they have noticed around them that “springs” to life. If you can find a coil spring, bring it to show the children how it works (e.g., a Slinky toy). Let them all have turns with it and suggest that things “spring” to life, sometimes quickly and sometimes more slowly. Remind them that Jesus does not so much “spring to life” as he encourages us to spring to life just by his presence.

### Sermon Starter

Jesus says to his disciples, “You are witnesses of these things.” And even though we were not physically there, Christ speaks to us across the miles and the ages, reminding us that we are still witnesses of the ascension. The promise of new life in Jesus Christ should be as clear to us today as it was to those who were with him on that day. Despite our failings here on earth, God’s world is continually renewing itself. It is our obligation to our faith and to the One who created us to support the natural regeneration of our world and our lives. Death is not an end in God’s universe.

We, on earth, are held here by the pull of gravity. But Christ is no longer held down in the same way. And because he is freed from earthly “pulls,” he is free to enter the hearts of each one of us—all at once. If you think your congregation would understand the concept of the “multiverse,” you might remind them of the 2022 movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Just the name of the movie is enough to get their minds racing with the possibilities of the omnipotence and omnipresence of God and the lengths we will go to in and for great love.

For another perspective on ascension, read “Ascension? Not in Celtic Theology” by Ivan Gregan, Pentecost 2 2021 (On GatheringWorship.ca, search *Exploring Biblical Translation and Its Impact* for a downloadable PDF that includes the article.)

### Hymns

Acts 1:1–11

VU 161 “Welcome, happy morning”

VU 703 “In the bulb there is a flower”

Psalm 47

VU 179 “Hallelujah, hallelujah, give thanks”

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

Psalm 93

VU 213 “Rejoice, the Lord is King”

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

Ephesians 1:15–23

VU 238 “How Great Thou Art”

VU 706 “Give thanks for life”

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

Luke 24:44–53

VU 231 “I sing the mighty power”

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

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”

## May 12 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

**Acts 1:15–17, 21–26**

Matthias is elected as an apostle.

**Psalm 1 (VU p. 724)**

**Blessed are those who delight in God’s law.**

**1 John 5:9–13**

The testimony of God is greater than human testimony.

**John 17:6–19**

“May my joy be made complete in them.”

### Creation Connection

Where is your joy made complete in creation? How might you tend and mend that place?

### Spark

The practice of prayer and sharing testimony are themes of the passages for today. What is a prayer? What is testimony? In preparing for worship today, these are good questions to ask of yourself, the Creator, and other people. When we ask things of our Creator or tell others about the Creator, is there ever a “correct” way to do it? Of course not! We should be “moved by the Spirit” and all will be well and right. How might you encourage people in this approach?

### With Children

After explaining Jesus’ physical absence here on earth (e.g., “Now that Jesus is living with his parent in heaven…”), remind the children we have to be the hands, feet, and heart of Christ here in the world. Before the service, prepare slips of paper with little jobs that need to be done during worship that the young people can do (e.g., deliver a song book to someone in their seat). At Children’s Time, assign the tasks or ask the children to volunteer, or pair them with an adult (e.g., “Would someone read scripture or lead a prayer?” “Would you like to light the Christ candle?”). Provide a variety of tasks that will include everyone. Thank each of them when a task has been completed. Give them a “commissioning” at the end of their time to go out into the world and be Jesus’ love for others in the name of God.

### Sermon Starter

Have you ever explained to your congregation how you experienced your own call to ministry, in whatever form that ministry has taken? Now might be a good time to share your testimony with others, even if you have shared before. Or seek out others in your community of faith who would testify about their reasons for being faithful to God and church. Testimony and prayer are intimate practices that make us vulnerable to others and also open to love. Focus today on the joy and delight that comes with being vulnerable when we follow God’s lead. If exploring the concept of prayer, remind people that we pray for ourselves and we pray for others. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is an example.

### Hymns

*Acts 1:15–17, 21–26*

VU 560 “O Master, let me walk with thee”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

*Psalm 1*

VU 242 “Let all things now living”

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

*1 John 5:9–13*

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

VU 635 “All the way my Saviour leads me”

*John 17:6–19*

VU 218 “We praise you, O God”

VU 672 “Take time to be holy”

*General/Seasonal*

VU 79 “Arise, your light is come”

VU 213 “Rejoice, the Lord is King”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”