

# *Gathering,* Pentecost 1 2020

Pentecost Sunday to Labour Day

[Pentecost Sunday to Labour Day 2](#_Toc34388312)

[Pentecost 2](#_Toc34388313)

[Ordinary Time (a.k.a. Season of Pentecost) 2](#_Toc34388314)

[May 31 – Pentecost Sunday 3](#_Toc34388315)

[June 7 – Trinity Sunday 5](#_Toc34388316)

[June 14 – Second after Pentecost 7](#_Toc34388317)

[June 21 – Third after Pentecost 9](#_Toc34388318)

[June 28 – Fourth after Pentecost 11](#_Toc34388319)

[July 5 – Fifth after Pentecost 13](#_Toc34388320)

[July 12 – Sixth after Pentecost 15](#_Toc34388321)

[July 19 – Seventh after Pentecost 17](#_Toc34388322)

[July 26 – Eighth after Pentecost 19](#_Toc34388323)

[August 2 – Ninth after Pentecost 21](#_Toc34388324)

[August 9 – Tenth after Pentecost 23](#_Toc34388325)

[August 16 – Eleventh after Pentecost 25](#_Toc34388326)

[August 23 – Twelfth after Pentecost 27](#_Toc34388327)

[August 30 – Thirteenth after Pentecost 29](#_Toc34388328)

[September 6 – Fourteenth after Pentecost 31](#_Toc34388329)

Excerpted from

Gathering: Resources for Worship Planners

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

## Pentecost Sunday to Labour Day

## Pentecost

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

**Meaning of Name**

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

**Liturgical Colour: Red**

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

## Ordinary Time (a.k.a. Season of Pentecost)

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

**Feast Days\* and Special Days**

\*Trinity Sunday – the Sunday after Pentecost.

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

World Communion Sunday – the first Sunday of October.

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

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

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

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

\*Reign of Christ – the last Sunday before Advent.

**Meaning of Name**

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

**Liturgical Colour: Green**

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

## May 31 – Pentecost Sunday

Worship materials for Pentecost Sunday to the Third Sunday after Pentecost were contributed by Gill LeFevre, Walton Memorial U.C., Oakville, Ont.

**Acts 2:1–21**

The Holy Spirit comes in wind and flame.

or **Numbers 11:24–30**

Moses shares the spirit given to him.

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

God’s spirit brings life and renewal.

**1 Corinthians 12:3*b*–13**

One spirit; many gifts.

**John 20:19–23**

Jesus appears behind locked doors.

or **John 7:37–39**

Let the thirsty come and drink!

### To Ponder

Dan Sullivan said, “All progress starts with telling the truth.” The biblical understanding of prophesying means speaking God’s truth, or speaking truth to power. About what circumstances in your church, community, or the broader world do you feel inspired to speak God’s truth?

### Spark

To illustrate the concept of shared and differing spiritual gifts, identify six to eight gifts and write them on adhesive name labels. When people arrive, ask them to pick and wear the gift label they feel best describes them. Examples could include Connector, Organizer, Supporter, Healer, Greeter, Teacher, Artist, Speaker. Encourage people to share with each other why they connect with that particular gift (see [www.fearlessdialogues.com](http://www.fearlessdialogues.com) for background information).

### With Children

Talk to the children about their favourite team sports. Ask the children to name the different team positions. Now ask the children to imagine what the sport would be like if everyone shared the same position. For example: How many runs would a baseball team score if everyone on the opposing team had to play pitcher? How would the pitches be stopped if there wasn’t a catcher? How would you catch out a batter without fielders? Compare the different team positions to the different gifts in a church community. Perhaps ask the children to identify the gifts or “positions” they see in their church (for example, teaching, welcoming, singing, playing music). Discuss why it’s important to have a variety of gifts and why no single gift is more important than any other.

### Sermon Starter

The reading from John 20 describes Jesus breathing over the disciples to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. One way to think of this is as a breath of life, similar to Genesis 2:7 where God breathed life into the first human. With this breath, Jesus initiated the new lives the disciples were to lead, where they would be witnesses to God’s love in the person of Jesus Christ. If we follow the story of the early Christians throughout the Book of Acts, we see how much they needed the Holy Spirit—God’s strength and support—as, time and again, it is only through the Spirit that the apostles make progress in sharing the Good News of Jesus.

In parallel, explore the way in which the Holy Spirit is present for us today. The passages from John 20 and Acts 2 remind us that everyone receives the Holy Spirit and is called into action, not just a special few. We are furthermore reminded that the Holy Spirit enables us to bring about God’s purpose, serving God beyond our own vision or abilities. We are called, ultimately, to live outside ourselves.

### Hymns

Acts 2:1–21

VU 207 “Spirit of God, unleashed on earth”

VU 373 “As comes the breath of spring”

VU 375 “Spirit, Spirit of gentleness”

VU 385 “Spirit divine, attend our prayers”

Psalm 104

VU 217 “All creatures of our God and King”

VU 235 “O worship the King”

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13

VU 467 “One bread, one body”

VU 537 “Your work, O God, needs many hands”

VU 539 “God of all good”

John 20:19–23

VU 369 “O Holy Spirit, enter in”

VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”

## June 7 – Trinity Sunday

**Genesis 1:1—2:4a**

The first story of creation.

**Psalm 8** (VU pp. 730–732)

God, your glorious name.

**2 Corinthians 13:11–13**

Agree with one another; live in peace; Trinity.

**Matthew 28:16–20**

Go make disciples!

### To Ponder

God created the world, and then rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. In our 24/7 culture, it’s difficult to carve out Sabbath time, to have a day, or even a few hours, for rest and rejuvenation. It takes a determined show of resistance to push away from all the noise, bustle, and overwhelming—not to mention digital—distractions. How can you find one or two hours this week to switch off and be present with your soul? What might your Sabbath-keeping act of rebellion look like?

### Spark

Have a basket of seed packets for people to choose from as they arrive, along with “seeds of love” or “seeds of kindness” cards with suggestions written on them (e.g., “Invite a neighbour over for coffee,” “Call a friend you’ve not spoken to in a while,” “Buy school supplies for a teacher,” or “Contribute to a local food bank”). Encourage the congregation to think about what they could plant and grow—both literally and spiritually. (For affordable ways to get seeds, consider the dollar store, seeds collected from the garden, and library seed banks, or break up larger packets into smaller quantities.)

### With Children

Read a child-friendly version of the Genesis passage (or, if time is short, focus on Genesis 1:28–30). Discuss different examples of the wonders of creation, and talk about how God looked after all the creatures on earth and made sure they had something to eat. Explain that while God put humankind in charge of the earth, the point was that God wanted us to look after creation and care for it, not use up the resources for our own benefit. Ask the children to suggest different ways we look after the world and ways in which we are damaging the planet. Perhaps suggest to the children that they decide to take one new action in the coming week to help care for God’s creation.

### Sermon Starter

In Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith (Riverhead Books, 2006), Anne Lamott provides this encouragement for preachers grappling with Trinitarian theology: “I didn’t need to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity; I just needed to turn my life over to whoever came up with redwood trees.” So, rather than getting stuck with abstract and potentially dry doctrine, explore the practical relationship we have with our Trinitarian God, built on forgiveness, love, and support. The readings from Matthew and 2 Corinthians are taken from the very end of each book, essentially the authors’ last words. In both cases, they examine the practical relationship God seeks to have with humankind, and they give early Christians and contemporary readers alike encouragement, guidance, and words to live by.

Explore what it might look like to turn our lives over to the one who “came up with redwood trees.” How faithfully are we obeying everything Jesus commanded? How mindfully do we remember that Jesus is with us always? To what extent do we try to live in peace and order? Most importantly, how can we draw on each author’s last words as sustenance for our faith? How do we celebrate and demonstrate a faith that encapsulates “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit”?

### Hymns

Genesis 1:1—2:4a & Psalm 8

VU 242 “Let all things now living”

VU 256 “O God beyond all praising”

VU 291 “All things bright and beautiful”

VU 296 “This God’s wondrous world”

VU p. 872 “Give praise to our God”

2 Corinthians 13:11–13

VU 325 “Christ is made the sure foundation”

VU 481 “Sent forth by God’s blessing”

VU p. 862 “You are before me, God”

Matthew 28:16–20

VU 420 “Go to the world”

VU 512 “Lord, you give the great commission”

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

## June 14 – Second after Pentecost

##### Proper 6

**Genesis 18:1–15, (21:1–7)**

Son promised to Abraham and Sarah.

**Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 (VU p. 836)**

I called upon God in the face of death.

**Romans 5:1–8**

Justified by faith.

**Matthew 9:35—10:8, (9–23)**

Jesus and the disciples preach and heal.

### To Ponder

Hope is faith in action. Hope affirms that we believe not just in the existence of God but that God directly and personally cares for us. When things go well, this is a breeze, but things don’t always go well, and hope becomes more challenging. Where in your life do you need to reaffirm your belief that God cares for and loves you? Where do you need to lean into a divine silence and abide with God?

### Spark

With input from congregants, create a display that expresses different aspects of their relationship with God (e.g., statements of praise or appeals for help, reflections on when they felt noticed or when they felt a divine silence). Use sticky notes or cards to display the comments and allow others to contribute more as they arrive. Discuss the importance of recognizing the variety in our relationship with God—the good times and the bad—and emphasize the importance of maintaining our relationship throughout. Perhaps suggest that congregants keep a prayer journal of praise and appeals. Reflecting on this over time can provide insights on how God is at work in our lives, even in times of silence.

### With Children

Earlier in Matthew 9 (14, 16) we are shown that even for the disciples, doing God’s work does not mean they will get a universally positive reception. Discuss different ways God’s work is done today: in the church (not just by ministers but also by youth leaders, choir members, greeters), in the world (by teachers, peacekeepers, environmental workers), and in ourselves (by being welcoming, forgiving, or loving). Explore the challenges we all may face as we try to do God’s work. Remind the children that although we may face difficulties and may not be rewarded or praised, it’s important to continue following God’s teaching and seeking to do God’s work in our lives. Explain that God wants us to keep praying about the difficulties we face, and that God listens to us and cares for us.

### Sermon Starter

The readings from Genesis and Romans both share a key theme of grace and the extent to which it is unmerited by humankind. Romans talks abstractly about how unlikely it is that someone would die for an “ungodly” person, while Sarah demonstrates her all-too-human ability to make mistakes and doubt God’s commitment. Both these readings provide a helpful reminder that grace is a gift from God and is not something we earn or deserve through our behaviour—quite the opposite. How might our faith be shaped by remembering how God keeps God’s promises regardless of our behaviour or faithfulness?

This theme could also be extended to explore how God’s promises are fulfilled according to God’s timing and not ours. For Sarah and Abraham, this meant an unlikely and belated child, while in Romans, Paul implies through his chain of linked character traits that Christians need strength to endure suffering for the sake of sharing and living the gospel. Where do we need to draw on these reminders to sustain us in our own lives?

### Hymns

Genesis 18:1–15

VU 665 “Pass me not, O gentle Saviour”

Romans 5:1–8

VU 238 “O Lord my God”

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

Matthew 9:35—10:8, (9–23)

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

Themes of promises, grace, and thanksgiving

VU 234 “Let us with a gladsome mind”

VU 264 “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”

VU 472 “O Jesus, joy of loving hearts”

VU 508 “Just as I am”

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

## June 21 – Third after Pentecost

##### Proper 7

**Genesis 21:8–21**

Hagar and Ishmael sent away.

**Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17 (VU p. 803)**

Turn your ear to me, O God.

**Romans 6:1*b*–11**

Dead to sin; alive in Christ.

**Matthew 10:24–39**

Discipleship: lose your life to find it.

### To Ponder

Where in our discipleship are we held back by fear? Where could we help ourselves to move forward by naming our fear and bringing it to God in prayer?

### Spark

Display or project “before and after” pictures of home transformations; rooms and gardens would work well. When a change such as this takes place, often we wonder how we lived in the old way. Reflect on how transformations exemplify God’s grace. Once we have experienced God’s love, and although we are abundantly forgiven, slipping back into the old way of living is no longer desirable (though there may be things we miss from the old).

### With Children

The readings this week each contribute to the theme of Jesus coming to the world to change our lives. A common feature of his ministry (seen particularly in the last section of the Matthew reading) is the way in which Jesus subverted the norms of society and status. Discuss with the children some of the social norms or “rules” in their lives (for example, sporty kids are picked first for teams; children in older grades sit at the back of the school bus; the most popular child is elected class president or room monitor). Imagine what it might feel like if those rules were overturned. How exciting would it be for the Grade 2s to sit at the back of the bus? How uplifting would it feel for a non-sporty person to be picked first? Ask the children to think about ways in which they can overturn social norms that leave other people feeling left out.

### Sermon Starter

Abraham and Sarah’s story, both throughout Genesis and encapsulated in the reading today, is one tumultuous soap opera. Today’s “episode” highlights several themes relating to our relationship with God. First of all, God’s perspective is always bigger than all our dramas. Secondly, God notices us at our weakest and least likeable, and loves us regardless. Thirdly, God listens to our cries for help.

“Genesis: The Soap Opera” is in desperate need of God’s healing grace, and furthermore in need of Paul’s encouraging reminder that although we will always be forgiven, we are called into a transformed way of living— the “newness of life”—now that we know God’s love. Following in Jesus’ footsteps, however, is easier said than done, and when we seek help for this, we can always turn to Psalm 86 and bring our fears and requests to God in supplication and gratitude.

### Hymns

Genesis 21:8–21

“God of the women” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette ([carolynshymns.com](http://carolynshymns.com/): note the ways to support Carolyn’s hymn-writing on her home page)

Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17

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

VU 671 “I need thee every hour”

Romans 6:1b–11

VU 179 “Hallelujah, hallelujah, give thanks”

VU 442 “Wash, O God, our sons and daughters”

VU 461 “Bread of the world”

Matthew 10:24–39

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

## June 28 – Fourth after Pentecost

##### Proper 8

Worship materials for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost to the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost were contributed by Nathan Wright, Nashwaaksis U.C., Fredericton, N.B.

**Genesis 22:1–14**

The sacrifice of Isaac.

**Psalm 13 (VU p. 734)**

How long will you forget me, God?

**Romans 6:12–23**

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

**Matthew 10:40–42**

Welcoming and offering a cup of water.

### To Ponder

Think of a time when you have felt excluded. Have you ever felt excluded in a group calling itself Christian? What makes the difference between inclusion and exclusion?

### Spark

Place a number of “Welcome” signs throughout the worship space, including at the entrance and on the communion table, the pulpit, a pew, and the baptismal font.

### With Children

Before the worship service, place some grapes and other gluten- and nut-free snacks into a child’s lunch box. Ask the children if they remember what it’s like to be the new person in a group. What did it feel like? What are some ways that they could help someone else feel included? Suggest that sharing something is one way to make them feel welcome. Open the lunch box and invite them to take one thing and share it with another person. Talk about how Jesus invites us to welcome others and help them feel included.

### Sermon Starter

Many congregations describe themselves as “welcoming” and “friendly.” In the Matthew reading, Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” What does it mean for us to truly welcome people and, by extension, Jesus and the one who sent him, today? Rather than staying in the pulpit (if that is your usual practice), take the sermon on the road today by preaching a portion at each of the “Welcome” signs you placed around the worship space earlier. At the communion table, consider who we welcome or exclude (either intentionally or unintentionally) from our tables and other places of fellowship. At the pulpit, consider who we welcome to share their faith stories and take on leadership roles in the congregation. At the pew, consider who is missing. What might make them feel unwelcome? How can we address this? How can your congregation live out the welcome offered by Christ in every aspect of its life? At the baptismal font, talk about our shared ministry, empowered by the Spirit, to welcome others into the community of faith as Christ has welcomed us.

### Hymns

Genesis 22:1–14

VU 652 “Be still, my soul”

MV 65 “When we are tested”

Psalm 13

VU 611 “Out of the depths, O God”

MV 72 “Why stand so far away”

Romans 6:12–23

VU 266 “Amazing grace”

MV 176 “Three things I promise”

MV 212 “Sent out in Jesus’ name”

Matthew 10:40–42

VU 389 “God is here”

VU 395 “Come in, come in and sit down”

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

MV 62 “There is room for all”

## July 5 – Fifth after Pentecost

##### Proper 9

**Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67**

Rebekah is found as a wife for Isaac.

**Psalm 45:10–17 (VU p. 769)**

A song for the anointed ruler.

or **Song of Solomon 2:8–13**

A love song.

**Romans 7:15–25*a***

I do not do the good I want to do.

**Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30**

My yoke is easy; my burden is light.

### To Ponder

What is your story of connecting your physical/sexual self with your spiritual self?

### Spark

Display images of yoked oxen and other work animals, along with pictures of people from around the world carrying heavy loads, including heavy equipment operators, crane operators, and more. Also include portrayals of heavy emotional loads.

### With Children

Show the children some of the images described under Spark. Ask them to point out the yoke. (Most will probably not know the term, so offer them assistance if they are unable to locate it.) Ask them what they think the yoke does. Describe how it helps the animals to share the burden of a heavy load and work together, making it easier for them. Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon us and learn from him. Why do you think he said that? What kind of heavy loads can we share so that the burden (or load) is lighter for all of us? Consider physical, emotional, and mental loads.

### Sermon Starter

The Song of Solomon only makes two appearances in the Revised Common Lectionary (once as an alternate reading for the psalm in Year A and once as an optional Hebrew scripture reading in Year B), and both times, it is the verses assigned for this Sunday. No other selection from the book is part of the regular cycle of readings, which means that it is likely unfamiliar to most people in the pews. The book—an extended love song—is full of erotic imagery, and the author is not ashamed to express it openly and freely. Of course, the usual reaction of people who experience this reading in church on a Sunday morning is to blush and ask, “What is this doing in the Bible?” This could be a good week to read the whole book (or much more than what is included in the lectionary) and explore the relationship between the body and spirituality. If our understanding of Jesus is incarnational—God becoming flesh—our theology, then, should remain “incarnate”; that is to say, it should remain embodied, fleshly, earthy. Explore how understanding and relating to our human bodily needs and desires are part of our spiritual growth.

### Hymns

Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67

MV 216 “Wherever you may go”

Song of Solomon 2:8–13

VU 490 “Our God, Creation’s loving source”

MV 35 “Holy One, O Holy One”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

MV 103 “Ka mana’o ’I ’O”

Romans 7:15–25a

VU 292 “Creating God, we give you thanks”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

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

MV 182 “Grateful”

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

VU 286 “If you will trust in God to guide you”

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

MV 98 “Like a river of tears”

## July 12 – Sixth after Pentecost

##### Proper 10

**Genesis 25:19–34**

Esau gives up his birthright for Jacob’s stew.

**Psalm 119:105–112** (VU p. 841)

Your word is a lamp for my feet.

**Romans 8:1–11**

To set the mind on the Spirit is life.

**Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23**

The parable of the sower and the seed.

### To Ponder

Who or what has nurtured your faith, providing good soil for you to grow in?

### Spark

On a table or plant stand at the front of the church, place a large flowerpot filled with potting soil and surrounded by a few seed packets.

### With Children

Gather around the large flowerpot filled with potting soil. Invite the children to examine it closely and ask them what it is. Show them the seed packets and talk about what has the potential to grow from these seeds. Ask, “If this pot were filled with rocks and did not have much soil, would the plants grow well?” “How about if we put some seeds on the sidewalk and the birds came along? Would they grow well there?” Talk about how good soil is needed for the seeds to grow. Discuss how we are like the seeds sown in good soil that God hopes will grow up to bear much fruit. What is “good soil” for human beings? How do we “bear fruit” for God?

### Sermon Starter

In the Romans reading, Paul says, “those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” and that “to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” What does this mean for us today? How do we live according to the Spirit, and how does this set us apart from society at large? Play with the idea of what this may look like in your own local context. What are some of the ways that your community of faith can focus on things of the Spirit? How might this change the way you approach decision-making around the ministries you support? What could be different if instead of looking at the limitations you have (that is, living “according to the flesh”), you set your mind on the myriad possibilities offered by the abundant life of God?

### Hymns

Genesis 25:19–34

VU 644 “I was there to hear your borning cry”

MV 74 “When painful mem’ries”

Psalm 119:105–112

VU 313 “God, whose almighty word”

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 108 “I know your Word”

Romans 8:1–11

VU 369 “O Holy Spirit, enter in”

VU 371 “Open my eyes, that I may see”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

MV 150 “Spirit God, be our breath”

MV 153 “Body, mind and spirit”

Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

VU 481 “Sent forth by God’s blessing”

VU 503 “When seed falls on good soil”

MV 41 “O beautiful Gaia”

MV 174 “Soil of God, you and I”

## July 19 – Seventh after Pentecost

##### Proper 11

**Genesis 28:10–19*a***

Jacob’s dream of the ladder.

**Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24** (VU p. 861)

God, you have searched me and known me.

**Romans 8:12–25**

Creation groans with labour pains.

**Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**

The parable of the weeds scattered among good seed.

### To Ponder

Consider a dream you’ve had that felt like a message to you from God.

### Spark

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

### With Children

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

### Sermon Starter

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

### Hymns

Genesis 28:10–19a

VU 367 “Come down, O love divine”

VU 389 “God is here”

VU 391 “God, reveal your presence”

VU 392 “How sacred is this place”

MV 92 “Like a rock”

Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24

VU 219 “When all your mercies”

VU 308 “Many and great, O God”

MV 2 “Come all you people”

MV 27 “Creator God you gave us life”

MV 131 “You, Creator God, have searched me”

Romans 8:12–25

VU 444 “Child of blessing, child of promise”

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

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

VU 516 “Come, you thankful people, come”

VU 520 “We plough the fields”

VU 678 “For the healing of the nations”

VU 708 “My Lord, what a morning”

## July 26 – Eighth after Pentecost

##### Proper 12

Worship materials for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost to the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost were contributed by Dan Benson, St. Paul’s U.C., Scarborough, Ont.

**Genesis 29:15–28**

Jacob marries Leah and Rachel.

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

Make known what God has done.

**or Psalm 128**

It shall be well with you.

**Romans 8:26–39**

The Spirit intercedes for us when we cannot pray.

**Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52**

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

### To Ponder

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

### Spark

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

### With Children

Many Christian bookshops sell prayer cubes, which are six-sided wooden dice with brief prayer starters on each face. Either choose a version that suits you and your congregation or create your own by buying a large blank dice or making a cube out of heavy paper. Discuss with the children that prayer often doesn’t come easy for all of us (including ministers!), so sometimes we need a little help—and that comes from the Spirit. Tell them that today, the Spirit is going to help us with this (show them the dice). Ask one child to toss it and another to retrieve it. Use the prayer starter on the cube to start your prayer with the kids. This activity can be used any time and repeatedly.

### Sermon Starter

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

### Hymns

Genesis 29:15–28

VU 220 “Praise to the Lord”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 602 “Blest be the tie that binds”

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

Psalms 105 & 128

VU 383 “Come, O Holy Spirit, come”

MV 75 “Veni Sancte Spiritus”

MV 104 “Know that God is good”

MV 130 “Rise up, rise up”

Romans 8:26–39

VU 368 “Holy Spirit, truth divine”

VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”

MV 5 “Holy Spirit, you’re like the wind”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

VU p. 896 “Blest are they”

MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

MV 146 “The kingdom of God”

## August 2 – Ninth after Pentecost

##### Proper 13

**Genesis 32:22–31**

Jacob wrestles with God.

**Psalm 17:1–7, 15 (VU p. 739)**

Guard me as the apple of your eye.

**Romans 9:1–5**

I am speaking the truth in Christ.

**Matthew 14:13–21**

Feeding more than five thousand.

### To Ponder

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

### Spark

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

### With Children

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

### Sermon Starter

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

### Hymns

Genesis 32:22–31

VU 240 “Praise, my soul”

VU 314 “Come now, almighty King”

MV 48 “I can feel you near me God”

MV 96 “And when you call for me”

Psalm 17:1–7, 15

VU 262 “A mighty fortress is our God”

VU 286 “If you will trust in God”

MV 62 “There is room for all”

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

Romans 9:1–5

VU 580 “Faith of our fathers”

VU 628 “Come, my Way, my Truth”

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

MV 139 “True faith needs no defence”

Matthew 14:13–21

VU 355 “For the crowd of thousands”

VU 682 “O day of peace”

MV 171 “Christ has no body”

MV 182 “Grateful”

## August 9 – Tenth after Pentecost

##### Proper 14

**Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28**

Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.

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

Remembering Joseph.

**Romans 10:5–15**

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

**Matthew 14:22–33**

Jesus walks across stormy waters.

### To Ponder

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

### Spark

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

### With Children

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

\*Note: Consider words that include children who use wheelchairs or other modes of movement.

### Sermon Starter

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

### Hymns

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

VU 690 “From the slave pens of the delta”

VU 691 “Though ancient walls”

MV 72 “Why stand so far away”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

Psalm 105:1–6, 16–22, 45b

VU 148 “Jesus, remember me”

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

VU 685 “We turn to you”

MV 28 “God of the Bible”

Romans 10:5–15

VU 301 “Before the earth had yet begun”

VU 313 “God, whose almighty word”

VU 409 “Morning has broken”

MV 92 “Like a rock”

Matthew 14:22–33

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

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

MV 84 “In you there is a refuge”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

## August 16 – Eleventh after Pentecost

##### Proper 15

**Genesis 45:1–15**

Joseph is reunited with his brothers.

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

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

**Romans 11:1–2*a*, 29–32**

God has not rejected the Hebrews.

**Matthew 15:(10–20), 21–28**

A Canaanite mother challenges Jesus.

### To Ponder

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

### Spark

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

### With Children

Invite the kids to make barking sounds like dogs. Encourage lots of different sounds (yelping, snarling, growling, silent barking, and so on). Does barking make them dogs? Maybe they need to try harder (make more noise!). Now, we might love our dogs, and we might even make dog sounds, but that doesn’t make us dogs. But dogs, like all God’s creatures, including us, deserve to be treated well, cared for, and respected. Who else deserves to be well cared for in God’s world? Everyone and everything. Sometimes, though, some of God’s creatures and people aren’t well cared for. (The children might have some examples.) As followers of Jesus, we commit ourselves to caring for all God’s creatures and people.

### Sermon Starter

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

### Hymns

Genesis 45:1–15

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

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

MV 141 “We are all one people”

MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”

Psalm 133

VU 380 “She comes sailing on the wind”

VU 395 “Come in, come in and sit down”

MV 14 “Where two or three are gathered”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

VU 679 “Let there be light”

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid”

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

Matthew 15:(10–20), 21–28

VU 348 “O love, how deep”

VU 697 “O for a world”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

MV 137 “Welcome, Jesus”

## August 23 – Twelfth after Pentecost

##### Proper 16

Worship materials for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost to the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost were contributed by Daniel MacDonald, then at Trinity U.C., Cannington, Ont.; Rodney Smith-Merkley, Buckhorn (NM) P.C., Buckhorn, Ont.; Bob Root, Peterborough, Ont.; and Max Ward, Highland Hills P.C., Minden, Ont.

**Exodus 1:8—2:10**

The baby Moses is adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter.

**Psalm 124 (VU p. 848)**

If God had not been at our side!

**Romans 12:1–8**

Present yourselves as a living, holy sacrifice to God.

**Matthew 16:13–20**

Who do you say that I am? asks Jesus.

### To Ponder

Have you ever had to lie or keep silent in order to protect someone? Was it the right decision?

### Spark

Consider playing a video of Johnny Rivers singing “Secret Agent Man” or the James Bond theme music as people arrive. Or decorate the space with items that explore a secret agent theme.

### With Children

Play one or two of the following games with the children or congregation to introduce the story of Pharaoh’s daughter:

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

**Telephone Game.** Then discuss the idea that what we say is not always what others hear. Tell the part of the Exodus story about Pharaoh’s daughter adopting Moses. What were people whispering around the palace? Everyone knew it wasn’t really her child and that the boy was probably a Hebrew. But Pharaoh’s daughter ignored the whispering and raised Moses as her own. In the gospel story, people are whispering about Jesus. What are they saying about him? Jesus asks the disciples to tell him. Then he asks them to answer the same question: “Who do you say I am?” Who do we say that Jesus is?

### Sermon Starter

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

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

### Hymns

Exodus 1:8—2:10

VU 651 “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”

VU 696 “Homeless people, will you listen”

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid”

Psalm 124

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

Romans 12:1–8

VU 356 “Seek ye first the kingdom”

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

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

Matthew 16:13–20

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

MV 85 “Take, O take me as I am”

“It is no secret what God can do” by Stuart Hamblen

## August 30 – Thirteenth after Pentecost

##### Proper 17

**Exodus 3:1–15**

Moses encounters the burning bush.

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

Remembering Jacob and Moses.

**Romans 12:9–21**

Let love be genuine; overcome evil with good.

**Matthew 16:21–28**

Take up the cross and follow me.

### To Ponder

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

### Spark

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

### With Children

Bring a heavy backpack (school starts soon!) or firefighter’s gear. Make a show of how heavy it is to lift. Explore what one needs to do different jobs. “To be a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (occupation), you need \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (equipment).” Then ask, “What do we need to be Jesus’ disciples?” Take a moment to explore what we do as Jesus’ disciples, so that we can know what “equipment” we need. You might also ask, “What heavy gear is the church being asked to lift right now? What will make life richer and fuller for everyone?” Jesus says, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Perhaps that is Jesus saying to us, “Pick up the equipment you need to do the work I need you to do.”

### Sermon Starter

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

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

### Hymns

Exodus 3:1–15

VU 509 “I, the Lord of sea and sky”

Psalm 105

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

Romans 12:9–21

VU p. 896 “Blest are they”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

Matthew 16:21–28

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

VU 561 “Take up your cross”

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

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

MV 85 “Take, O take me as I am”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 176 “Three things I promise”

MV 213 “Take up his song”

## September 6 – Fourteenth after Pentecost

##### Proper 18

**Exodus 12:1–14**

Instructions for the first Passover.

**Psalm 149** (VU pp. 872–873)

Sing to God a new song.

**Romans 13:8–14**

Owe no one anything but love.

**Matthew 18:15–20**

Where two or three are gathered in my name.

### To Ponder

What is the difference for you between praying alone or praying with two or three?

### Spark

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

### With Children

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

How do we resolve differences between people? Jesus had some ways of resolving problems between people. Mostly, he said that people needed to address each other directly and keep love at the centre of everything. It’s not about being “right”; it’s about finding a new way forward together. Or you might read *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (Chronicle Books, 2000).

### Sermon Starter

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

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

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

### Hymns

Exodus 12:1–14

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

VU 460 “All who hunger”

“Pharaoh, Pharaoh” (Internet search *pharaoh pharaoh kids bible songs with lyrics* and choose a version with actions.)

Psalm 149

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

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

Romans 13:8–14

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

Matthew 18:15–20

VU 401 “Worship the Lord”

VU 402 “We are one”

MV 14 “Where two or three are gathered”

MV 178 “Who is my mother”