Scripture-based Focus Moments

These scripture-based focus moments may be used in many settings:
- in a worship setting to provide an all-ages and child-centered worship experience
- in a family or small group setting
- in a study group or retreat to provide a unique and tangible interpretation of a particular scripture

Focus moments are ordered by the books of the Bible. Some focus moments include an activity page, song, or bulletin insert to be used with the activity. Those are placed at the back of this resource and referred to by a thumbnail image of the page in the focus moment description.

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| Matthew 3:1–12 | A | Second Sunday of Advent |
| Matthew 3:13–17 | A | First Sunday after the Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord (Ordinary Time) |
| Matthew 4:1–11 | A | First Sunday in Lent |
| Matthew 4:12–23 | A | Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time) |
| Matthew 5:1–12 | A | Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time) |
| Matthew 5:13–20 | A | Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time) |
| Matthew 5:21–37 | A | Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time, Proper 1) |
| Matthew 5:38–48 | A | Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time, Proper 2) |
| Matthew 10:24–39 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 7) |
| Matthew 10:40–42 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 8) |
| Matthew 11:2–11 | A | Third Sunday of Advent |
| Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 9) |
| Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 10) |
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| Matthew 14:13–21 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 13) |
| Matthew 14:22–33 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 14) |
| Matthew 15:10–28 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 15) |
| Matthew 16:13–20 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 16) |
| Matthew 17:1–9 | A | Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Transfiguration Sunday |
| Matthew 18:15–20 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 18) |
| Matthew 18:21–35 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 19) |
| Matthew 21:1–11 | A | Palm Sunday |
| Matthew 26:14—27:66 | A | Passion Sunday |
| Matthew 21:33–46 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 22) |
| Matthew 22:1–14 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 23) |
| Matthew 22:15–22 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 24) |
| Matthew 22:34–46 | A | Ordinary Time (Proper 25) |</p>
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Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Sacredness of Creation

Together with participants, tell how a story of how wonderful and mysterious is the world that God created! Read the statements, then motion for participants to call out their own ideas.

In the beginning, there was God who created the world.

God created life and light. God created the heavens and the Earth. In the heavens God created...

(Invite participants to call out names of what God created in the heavens, such as planets, stars, clouds, lightning, rain.)

On the Earth, God created...

(Participants can name specific animals and plants, land formations, processes like gravity, and so forth.)

God created the seas and the waters. In them, God created living creatures like...

(Participants fill in their ideas of plants and animals.)

God created people: men, women, and children—of all races, tribes and cultures. God created...

(Participants fill in.)

God created friendships and community.

(At this point, continue without waiting for participants to interject ideas; however, accept their ideas as they offer them.)

God created how we express ourselves: language and stories, words and meanings, tears, smiles, hugs, paintings, dance!

God created sounds: shouting, singing, giggles, whispers, the sounds of crickets rubbing their legs together, wolves howling at the moon, whales singing in the sea.

God created everything we can see and everything we can’t see. Everything we understand and everything we don’t. God created mystery for us to discover.

God created ideas, dreams, and generosity. God created faith, hope, love, and peace. And God called it good!

(Invite participants into joyful sounds and movements in celebration of all God created.)

Close the story with a prayer of thankfulness for the sacredness of creation.


Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18/15:1–16, 20–21 IV

A Covenant People

God has made a covenant to be with us in all we do. A covenant is a promise, but more than a promise. In our covenant with God, we promise to listen to God and to do what God calls us to do. The story in Genesis 15 (Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18) tells of a promise, a covenant, between Abram (later called Abraham) and God. God promised a gift of land for all Abram’s generations. In Psalm 27:14, we are told to “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

• What is a promise you have made? With whom did you make it?
• Did you do what you promised?
• What is the promise God makes to you? Do you believe in God’s promise? Why do you believe it?
Write on a slip of paper a promise that you will make to God. Then write the promise you think God makes to you (for example, I will be with you always, in all you do). Roll the paper up and tie it with a string, like a small scroll. Keep your promise with you, in your pocket or in your room, and read it often. This is what it is to be God’s “covenant people”!

**Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16/17:1–8, 21–22 IV**

**Be a Covenant People**

God has made a covenant to be with us, to be our God, and we are to be God’s people. A covenant is a promise, but more than a promise. God loves us so much that when we accept God’s love for us, we then show that love to others.

Ask participants to think about a promise they have made. Did they do what they promised?

Give each participant a slip of paper (distribute paper and pencils now, or include sheets of paper in the worship bulletins). Ask them to write a promise they will make to God. Then write the promise they think God makes to you (for example, I will be with you always, in all you do). Roll the paper up like a small scroll. Keep your promise with you, in your pocket or in your room, and read it often. This is what it means to be God’s covenant people.

**Exodus 3:1–15**

**Here I Am**

Do you think God knows your name? One day, Moses saw a burning bush. God called to him, “Moses! Moses!” and Moses answered, “Here I am.” Much later, Jesus walked down a street in Jericho and looked up into a tree. He said, “Zacchaeus, I’m coming to your house today,” and Zacchaeus came down. One night a boy Samuel was sleeping when he heard someone call his name, several times. He answered, “Here I am.”

Turn to the person sitting next to you, and say their name (if you don’t know it, find out!) Pause to listen to everyone calling one another’s names. Say: Today, listen for God’s call and be prepared to answer, “Here I Am.”

**Numbers 21:4–9**

**Confess our Impatience**

**Drama: “Are We There Yet?”**

A story for one narrator and a chorus of three or more people (mixed ages). The narrator stands to one side, with chorus members in a bunch on the other side, facing the congregation. Only three chorus members have individual speaking parts (CH 1, CH 2, and CH 3—or one person can read all three), but others can participate as part of the group.

The chorus members begin walking in place at a moderate pace, as if traveling on a path. From time to time, they may notice something along the road, but mostly they are just walking and walking.

Narrator: Once upon a time, long ago, the people of Israel were traveling. Now, they weren’t on vacation or anything, but still, it was a pretty momentous journey for them. Not long before, they had all been slaves in Egypt, until Moses came along and—with the help of God, of course—persuaded Pharaoh to let his people go, and led them out of slavery! And then they had to get out of Egypt, which meant a road trip. Now, you’d think being freed from slavery would make the Israelites happy, and for a while it did. They were free and together—Moses was leading them, God gave them manna to eat, and they were going home. But in those days, a road trip didn’t involve nice comfy cars, or buses, or even bicycles. It was just you, your sandals, and your own two feet. And so, it’s not surprising that after a while, the people of Israel began to grow impatient with the long journey.

Chorus: *(beginning to walk slower)* Are we there yet?

Narrator: *(speaking to the chorus)* No, you still have to go around the land of Edom.

CH 1: But we’re tired!

CH 2: And it’s dusty!

CH 3: And my feet hurt!
Narrator: The people began to complain, and to speak against God and Moses.

*By now, chorus members are dragging their feet and barely moving.*

CH 1: Moses, do you even know where we’re going?

CH 2: Why did you bring us out of Egypt? We’re just going to die here in this wilderness.

CH 3: There’s nothing to eat here, and nothing to drink!

Chorus: And we hate this horrible manna!

Narrator: The people complained and complained...

Chorus: Are we there yet?

Narrator: and grew more and more impatient...

Chorus: Are we there yet?

Narrator: and continued to speak against God and Moses...

Chorus: Are we there yet?

Narrator: It took some soul-searching, but finally the people remembered that, compared to slavery, a little road dust and manna weren’t so bad after all. They realized that after all God had done for them, they could maybe show a little more gratitude. So they went to Moses to apologize.

*The chorus looks ashamed and sorry.*

CH 1: Um, Moses? We’re really sorry.

CH 2: We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you.

CH 3: We really do trust you and God to lead us where we need to go.

Chorus: Are we there yet?

Chorus: *(apologetically)* Sorry, God!

CH 2: Thanks again for the manna and the freedom!

CH 3: We’ll just keep walking now...

Narrator: And the moral of the story is: Be patient, don’t take God for granted...and always eat your manna!

Chorus: The End.

**Deuteronomy 26:1–11**

**Give Your First Fruits**

Are you and your family farmers? Or do you grow your own fruit and vegetables in your garden? Imagine that you are a farmer and that you grow vegetables and fruit on your land. When the crops are full-grown and at their most delicious stage, you will harvest (pick) your apples, pears, beans, peppers, or corn.

Now imagine your bushel baskets full of the delicious colorful fruits and vegetables. As you picked them, you chose the best for someone you truly care about and put them in a special basket. These are your “firstfruits”—the very best of the harvest.

In Deuteronomy 26:1–11 we can read about giving our firstfruits to God. The Hebrew people gave their best (firstfruits) to the synagogue (church) in thankfulness to God for bringing them to the Promised Land, and because God was the true owner of their land.

- What are the best things you receive?
- Can you share the best of those with God in thankfulness?

The next time you receive anything, think about giving the best of what you receive—your firstfruits—to God.

Who Shall Reign?

Review this hymn text with the congregation: “The Peace of the Earth (La paz de la tierra)” CCS 647. How does this text make you feel about peace? What images do you see in the text? Where did this song originate? Teach the vocal parts and review the pronunciation of the English and Spanish. Have children or youth demonstrate motions that interpret the words. Sing the song together with the motions. Sing it in both languages.

1 Samuel 15:34—16:13

See with God's Eyes

Ask the congregation to look around the room, seeing one another, while a child reads the poem.

Put on God’s eyes and what do you see?
I see Jesus looking at me.
God’s eyes don’t see the clothes that you wear
God sees the burden that you bear.
I don’t mind if your hair is a mess
You’re the one God calls me to bless
Your job is not important to me
I see the person you want to be.
I don’t care if you drive an old car
I want to know the person you are.
Sit in the chair, sit in the pew
I see God’s love shining in you.
—Lu Mountenay

1 Samuel 17:32–49

Come in the Name of the Lord

Before the service make four flags on sticks or dowels.

The letters of the flag semaphore can be used to create a symbol. One enduring example is the peace symbol, adopted by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958. Gerald Holtom designed the logo for use in a protest march on the Atomic Weapons Establishment in England. On April 4, 1958, the march left Trafalgar Square in London for rural Berkshire, carrying “Ban the Bomb” placards made by children and making the first use of the flag semaphore symbol below.

Nuclear Disarmament: The N is made by holding arms downward at 45-degree angles. The D is made by holding one arm straight up and one straight down. Using the flags prepared, have one person (N) stand in front of another person (D) to see the letters combined for the familiar peace symbol. Let several combinations of people try it.

Dramatic Reading

...And I saw, lying on the path behind me—benign and without power, the same sticks and stones that once hurt my feelings—once made me doubt myself...and they were beautiful in their restored innocence. They were reborn to the purpose for which they were created—structures to shape the earth—scaffolding for the peaceable kingdom. They had atoned for the corruption of their use as weapons of spiritual destruction.

The “sticks,” once sharp and threatening to me, are now mere “kum-ba-yah” kindling and bones for weaving nests. The “stones,” once formidable and heavy, are now rolled away from my self-imposed tomb, exposing for me the warm light of forgiveness, which is mine to give.

Yes...they may break my bones, but they can never lessen my resolve or flatten my faith again. I see them for what they are...inventions of my imagination. I may trip on them along my journey, but I will leave them behind as litter on the labyrinth. I will not drag the burden with me, colliding with others and corrupting my outward path.

If I sense stones hurled at me again, I will duck... “Oh, was that an insult, a criticism, a slight? ...I must have misunderstood! Forgive me.”—Lu Mountenay
1 Kings 17:8–24

Respond in Faith

Read the story “The Prophet Elijah” from the Lectionary Story Bible, Year C by Ralph Milton, pages 157–158.

- A widow was very angry with Elijah. Why do you think she was angry?
- Elijah was frustrated too. Why do you think Elijah was frustrated?

When we are really hurting, we sometimes say mean things. Because she was so sad about her son’s death, the widow lashed out at Elijah and at God. Elijah was upset too and told God so. God’s love was always there for the widow and Elijah. Even when we don’t understand events that can hurt us and others, we can feel God’s love for us and respond. Don’t stop going to God, even when you are sad or angry. God will always understand and God’s love never leaves us.

1 Kings 19:1–15a

Where Do We Encounter God?

This story of Elijah is dramatic. It is a great story to read aloud in a group. Give the background that Elijah was a prophet that Queen Jezebel disliked so much she told King Ahab to kill him. Elijah ran for his life into the desert. After 40 days and 40 nights Elijah reached Mount Horeb, the place the ancient Hebrews called the “mountain of God.” Read this story from a Bible or from the Lectionary Story Bible, Year C by Ralph Milton, page 163. If using a Bible, read Elijah’s complaints and fears, and God’s comforting phrases. Describe each power display on the mountain loudly, and then whisper, “But the Lord was not in the ____” and let participants finish the sentence. Discuss the story afterward:

- When have you ever been afraid and wanted to run away?
- Did you pray during that time?
- Who brought comfort to you?
- How do you hear God’s voice, and where?

1 Kings 21:1–21a

Make Responsible Choices

The story of Ahab is like a melodrama with a sinister villain! Produce it as a simple play, with children and youth playing the parts of Ahab, Jezebel, Naboth, Elijah, a leader, and two false witnesses. Read the story from scripture while actors pantomime the parts. Encourage cheers and boos from the congregation. Afterward, offer a prayer based on the story, suggesting that sometimes we break the rules to get what we want. Ask forgiveness, thanking God for the opportunities we have to make responsible choices.

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14

Called to Mission

Have a child-size “mantle” (a cloak or cape) available. Ask participants what you are holding. Children may not know the term mantle but will know that a cape is something superheroes wear. Say that in today’s scripture story, the prophet Elijah passed on his responsibilities to his son, Elisha. Share the scripture story and explain that Elisha was then challenged to do what his father had done: care for others, give counsel and direction, and share messages of God. Jesus Christ wants us to be ready to do the same as he did: to care for others and tell people about God. Are you ready to do this? Are you ready to wear the “mantle” as a disciple of Christ? Give each participant a large sheet of newsprint and washable markers or cotton fabric and fabric markers. (If newsprint is the most practical, tell participants we will “pretend it is a cape, or mantle.” Invite them to write and draw on either the newsprint or cloth how they will engage in Christ’s mission. You might want to place these on display somewhere in the building for the congregation to see.
Humble Yourself

This story of Namaan’s cure from leprosy and the slave girl who believed in God shows the need for humility, but also of loving-kindness. Often seemingly small deeds are more life-changing than the larger-than-life heroic ones. Tell the story from scripture. Spread some wet oatmeal or grits on the hand of a volunteer (who will represent Naaman), and ask him or her to express how it feels as it dries. Itchy? Tight? Uncomfortable? Now which of the listeners would be willing to tell this commander of the army about their faith in God? Who would say, “You should go to my prophet (my minister) and she or he will help you?”

After participants answer, tell “Naaman” that his healing involves washing himself in the muddy Jordan River seven times. Ask: Why should a commander of the army have to do this? Naaman didn’t think so, but he did after much protesting. Why did he? What happened as a result? What do we learn about God in this story? What do we learn about ourselves and what we can do?

Psalm 1

By Streams of Living Water

Invite participants to imagine themselves as young trees and stand with plenty of space around them to do the motions you describe. Read:

Stand and spread out as a full tree. Your roots reach deep in the ground to give you strength. They run to a nearby stream for life-giving water. Your branches and leaves stretch to the sun. Your trunk grows strong, and your branches grow new twigs, flowers, fruit, and leaves. Gently sway back and forth in the spring breeze and feel how firmly you’re rooted in the earth. You absorb energy from sun and light, and water through your reaching roots.

—Joseph Cornell, Sharing the Joy of Nature, adapted

Life is good, and you bring shade, food, beauty, and nurture to all who see and depend on you, because you gain strength from the Son, and because you are connected to the Living Water. Ask participants to sit back down. You may wish to sing “The Trees of the Field,” CCS 645.

Psalm 8

God Cares

Psalm 8 is a psalm that all ages can easily understand and enjoy. Read it aloud together. Participants may choose any phrase and express it in a paraphrase, through art media, or through a song. If you know the song “How Majestic Is Your Name,” written by Michael W. Smith, sing it with everyone. If you don’t know it, listen to a children’s a cappella choir sing it at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5–KsfViezU&feature=related.

Psalm 19

Revive My Soul

Ask if anybody plays sports, or likes to run and play outside. Ask if they have ever played so hard they got sweaty and thirsty…and really tired. Have everyone imagine they feel that way right now. Show them a selection of different beverages, including a few varieties or flavors of sports drinks, juices, or water. Discuss whether the drinks would be refreshing and make them feel better if they were hot and thirsty. Ask them to name which beverage they would find most refreshing (hopefully there will be some variety in the choices). Ask them to explain their choices. Discuss the fact that all the beverages could relieve thirst and refresh the drinker, but the drink each person chose was based on personal preferences for flavor, color, brand, etc.

Sometimes our souls get tired and “thirsty,” just like our bodies do. When that happens we might feel sad, upset, or angry. God provides many ways for us to revive our souls and feel better (brainstorm a few of these) and while all of them may be helpful, people have personal preferences for how they revive their souls just as they have personal preferences for drinks they find most refreshing. Some people feel better if they spend quiet time alone and pray or meditate, while others prefer to talk with a friend; some people feel better if they spend time outside, while others like to be in their rooms or go to church. Ask participants to volunteer their preferences, and affirm the validity of each response.
Psalm 62:5–12
God Our Refuge

Refuge-building Toy Box
Place a toy box in a visible and accessible place. Open the box and take out building blocks or similar toys people can arrange or assemble in imaginative and creative ways. Have the leader discuss what a refuge is. Ask a few people to build a refuge with the blocks. Take liberty to organize people to work together in a few small multigenerational groups. If it isn’t a distraction, have them work on their building while continuing with the service. Take time to acknowledge their creations or display the creations at the front of the room or sanctuary.

Psalm 63:1–8
Thirst for God

Read Psalm 63:1–8 which describes a thirst for God—that we want God in our lives—much like a thirsty person in a desert craves something to drink.

- Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? What was it like?
- What was the first thing you drank to quench your thirst?
- How did it taste compared to times when you drank it when you weren’t so thirsty?

Show how to make origami paper cups, using 8 in/200 mm square paper. Foil paper will make the cups more water resistant.

When everyone has a cup, pour water from a pitcher into each one. Invite everyone to taste the cool refreshing water. How is drinking this water like having God in our lives? Paul describes it well in his letter to the Romans. “We know how dearly God loves” (Romans 5:1–11, adapted). Just like the water we just drank!

- How can you be sure that you will never get thirsty for God?
- Where can you go? What can you do?

Psalm 91:1–6, 14–16
God is with Us

Read Psalm 91:1–6, a beautiful poem expressing that God is with us. Invite all participants to repeat the verses after you read them. Choose one participant to be “It.” Half of the remaining participants use their bodies to make a shelter to protect It. The other half will wad up sheets of scrap paper and try to hit It with the paper wads. After two minutes of play, stop the action. Ask:

- It, how did you feel in the shelter?
- Protectors, how easy or difficult was your job protecting It? How did your shelter compare with God’s shelter that Psalm 91 tells us about?

Now read Psalm 91:14–16, personalizing the scripture passage by using the pronoun you. Close in prayer, giving thanks for God’s overwhelming love and comfort.

Psalm 96
Glorify God

Read aloud Psalm 96. It is beautiful and conveys the awe-inspiring nature of God, the Creator. Listeners can repeat each short phrase in unison, echoing your tone, emphasis, and volume. Have participants do a silent chorus as the psalm is read. In a silent chorus, the “choir” stands facing the congregation and mimics the actions of a leader who is facing them. The leader can use whatever hand, arm, or body motions fit the phrases or sections being read. Or the choir can be given motions to do when they hear certain key words like Lord, Praise, and Earth. The fewer key words to remember, the easier it will be. Alternative: sing the hymn “Earth and All Stars,” HS 49, a beautiful echo of Psalm 96. You may want to create new phrases for the hymn as well.
Psalm 111
Love God

In Psalm 18, David is a WARRIOR, so he thinks of God as protection.

A SOCCER player might think of God as the goal to aim for.
A GARDENER might think of God as the creator of the most perfect flower.
An ARTIST might think of God as an inspiring work of art.
A WRITER might say, “O Lord, you are the Pulitzer Prize.”
An ARCHITECT might say, “O Lord, you are the most beautiful cathedral.”
How do you think of God? Complete the phrase, “O Lord, for me you are the ______.”

Psalm 122
Pray for Peace

Today begins the season of Advent (Advent means “coming”). Advent is a time of preparing ourselves to receive the gift of Jesus Christ. The Advent wreath is symbolic of that preparation time. Traditionally, the circle of evergreen reminds us of God’s never-ending love. The candles represent the coming of the light of Christ into the world. A candle focuses us each week on peace, hope, love, or joy as we prepare for Christmas. There are four weekly candles; one is pink, three are purple or blue. The center white candle, called the Christ candle, is lighted on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the first purple or blue Advent candle. Today’s scripture passage is the psalmist’s prayer for peace for Jerusalem after the chaos and pain of war. The psalmist prays, “Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers” and “…Peace be within you” (Psalm 122:7–8 NRSV). This prayer can apply to our lives, too. During this season of preparation and expectation, move with peace, create peaceful spaces around you, and hold others in your prayer for peace.

Psalm 145:1–5, 17–21
Bless God’s Name Forever

Psalm 145 is an acrostic. Each verse begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Write a psalm of praise using an acrostic format. It may help to write the letters of the alphabet vertically on a large sheet of paper and display it on the wall. If writing the psalm as a group or with young children, the alphabet letters could praise God for everything starting with that letter. The psalm can even rhyme.

God we praise you for …

A lligators, arithmetic, an albatross at sea
B allerinas, butterflies, balloons, queen bees
C aterpillars, Canada, chrysanthemums, cheese

Isaiah 6:1–8
Here I Am; Send Me!

As people gather, hand out small stones that are imperfect and dirty. Prepare a large bowl of water and towels available near the bowl.

Look at the stone you were given as you came today. What do you see? (imperfections, dirt) When Isaiah entered the temple in the scripture story, almost immediately he remembered all the times he had turned away from God. He felt dirty—just like your stones. Even though he felt undeserving, he was forgiven; his sin was taken away. While the music is playing take your stone to the bowl in the back of the sanctuary and leave it in the water. Then return to your seats. As you go, consider times you have turned away from God and ask God for forgiveness.

Musician plays CCS 216 as the congregants move. When everyone has returned to their seats, invite the congregation to sing the song together.
Isaiah 49:1–7

Called to Serve

God’s love is not for a small, limited group of people. Isaiah’s message is that we are to proclaim God’s word to the entire world. In Community of Christ, we believe All Are Called (just as Isaiah was called) and we believe in the Worth of All Persons—that God’s love, grace, and salvation are for all.

Ask participants to think of people who are different from them whom they would like to get to know better, or someone they would like to know or befriend. Give each person a small stack of self-adhesive notes and a pencil. Ask them to write each person’s name (if they know it) on a sticky note. Tell them to post these at home, around a mirror or on the refrigerator, a place where they will see them daily. Encourage them to find a way to care for at least one of those people in some way. We are called to share God’s love with the world. If we start with just the people we know, won’t the world be a better place—a world of love?

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Rejoice in the Lord

Advent 3: “What Is on God’s Christmas List?”


Cast: Narrator, Gabriel, Joseph and Mary

Preparation: At the worship center: a large gift-wrapped box (wrap the lid separately)

The actors Gabriel and Mary are on the rostrum. While the narrator reads the text below, Joseph enters. Gabriel, Mary, and Joseph pantomime the reading together.

Narrator: Mary knew she was going to be the mother of a very special baby and that baby would need a dad here on Earth to teach him all kinds of things. Well, God had a vision for that, too. God knew Joseph would make a good husband and dad, so God sent an angel to fill Joseph in on the details. In a dream, the angel told Joseph: “You should marry Mary. My vision is that you will all be a family and you will raise this baby together.” When Joseph woke up, he did what God had said and took Mary as his wife. What a wonderful gift! Joseph accepted a great responsibility when he agreed to be Jesus’ earthly father and Mary's husband. Gabriel, Mary, and Joseph freeze while the narrator engages the people in a brief discussion about this part of the Christmas story and then reads the final paragraph.

Narrator: So, what do you think is on God’s Christmas list? What would God want for Christmas? It’s in that big box, but we can’t look yet! I’m sure it’s really great, but we have to wait...

Isaiah 65:17–25

Rejoice in God’s New Creation

Isaiah’s vision of the peaceable kingdom came after many years of difficult times for the Hebrew people. Isaiah reveals God’s vision for creation: shalom—a vision of peace and hope, which is reflected in the Community of Christ seal.

Think about difficult times you have experienced. What vision gives you hope for a brighter tomorrow—a picture of God’s vision for you? On paper using markers or crayons, draw words or images that express the hopeful future you desire, the future you are promised through God’s vision for creation. What is your personal promise of hope and peace?

Jeremiah 18:1–11

Formed by God

Invite a potter to work a piece of clay as a person narrates:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.
Then the word of the Lord came to me: “Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?” says the Lord. “Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand....”

—Jeremiah 1:1–6 NRSV, adapted

Discuss how God showed the prophet Jeremiah that our nations, our world, and we can be shaped to express God's vision of shalom just like clay can be shaped:

- We start with a lump of clay and put it in the center of our workspace. When we are centered with God, we can be molded and shaped.
- To make a bowl or vase, we open up the clay in the middle. Are we open to God’s love and direction?
- Next, the clay is shaped and lifted to its full height. We let God form us as we grow.
- Last, we are made into our final form and purpose. We become all that we can be when we allow ourselves to be shaped by God.

Give all participants a piece of clay to form, shape, and share with others.

Jeremiah 31:7–14

Gladness for Sorrow

Read “You Will Be Happy Again,” a story of Jeremiah in the *Lectionary Story Bible, Year C*, page 207. Explain that the people in the story didn’t like being captured by the Babylonians, but Jeremiah told them to stop feeling sad. Instead, he told them to build houses, plant gardens, get married, and have children. In other words: to keep living their lives. Jeremiah said God would bring people from all around. “They shall come and sing aloud on...Zion, and...their life shall become like a watered garden...the young women shall...dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow” (vv. 12–13 NRSV).

Show children a bouquet of flowers. Flowers are given to bring joy and show we love others. Imagine the people did what Jeremiah said and planted gardens? Perhaps they even planted flowers in their gardens. Give each child a flower and ask: Do you know someone who is unhappy? Think quietly about that person. Will you give them a flower to turn their sadness into joy or gladness? What else can you do to turn someone's sadness into joy or gladness?

Jeremiah 31:31–34

We Are Forgiven

**Preparation:** Cut out paper hearts and distribute to people as they arrive.

Ask: Have you ever had to forgive someone or asked for forgiveness from another? Do you think it is harder to forgive or to ask for forgiveness? On your paper heart, write something for which you’d like forgiveness, or write something another person did to you, that you need to forgive.

Now write a prayer asking God for forgiveness or to help you forgive. This week, with this reminder of God’s generous grace and love, put your heart of forgiveness into practice.

Jeremiah 33:14–16

A Promise Kept

Long ago, God promised to send One (Jesus Christ) who will fulfill God's promises and “...execute justice and righteousness in the land.” When God makes a promise, it gives us hope. The Advent season is a time of hope.

- What do you look forward to with excitement and anticipation?
- What are some things you have hoped for and received?

Hide wrapped treats (or snacks or treats inside plastic eggs or small boxes) around the room, one for each person. Tell them to find the treats when you give the signal. Read Jeremiah 33:14–16. Talk more about the great promise God made that Jesus Christ would come. Notice how hopeful (and restless!) they become. Finally, give the signal for them to find the treats. Gather them back together and invite them to open their gifts. Discuss:
• When you heard the treats were hidden around the room, did you hope to find one?
• Was it difficult to wait until it was time to go look?
• Why would you want one?

Explain that you made a promise and kept it. God made a promise to send Jesus Christ and kept it. God’s promise gives us great hope and anticipation. Jesus Christ is truly a gift of hope.

**Zephaniah 3:17**

**God Is With You**

Most of the time, we can take care of ourselves. But sometimes, we need help from someone else.

• What do you need help with at times?
• Who do you ask for help?
• How do you contact them? (What are the different methods of contacting another?)

Prepare beforehand paper hearts with “I am with you” written on one side. Give one to each person. Invite everyone to print his or her name on the blank side of the heart. Hold up your own paper heart. Explain that when you need God, God is right there. When you call, God is right there, with you. When you look for God, you don’t even have to move. God is right there—with you—all around you—never away from you. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Have everyone write “God” on the side where “I am with you” is written. The heart helps you remember that God loves you and is with you. Everyone can prepare extra hearts to give to others.

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**New Testament**

**Matthew 1:18–25/2:1–8 IV**

**Jesus Is Born**

Light the Advent candles. This scripture story is of Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, who struggled with many questions and concerns. Yet Joseph was assured God was in this event.

Children are often the bearers of joy. In their presence, their expressions and discoveries, we are filled with joy. Share J-shaped candy canes as an expression of that joy, and light the white Christ candle, in the center of the Advent wreath.

**Matthew 2:1–12/3:1–12 IV**

**Follow the Star**

In a group gathering, walk around holding up a paper star. The star can be decorated with glitter or bright paint, and attached to a long pole, or it can be a star balloon on a string, filled with helium. Invite everyone to come and follow as the star passes them. Stop at a place where everyone can sit down.

Sometimes, something catches our attention and we want to learn more about it or see where it will lead us. When the star passed by, we got up and followed it. Read Matthew 2:1–12. When Jesus was born there was something in the sky that caught the attention of those who were looking for it. Magi, or Wise Men, had studied for a long time, and when they saw the new star, they traveled a long way to learn more about it. We should always be ready to follow where God leads us. Give everyone a star sticker to remind them to follow Christ.
Matthew 2:13–23/3:13–23 IV

Listen to the Voice

The gospel of Matthew tells the story of Joseph who listened to the voice that directed him to move his family to safety.

Listening is a tricky thing. It's a process of being open and receptive. In most cases, it involves using our ears, because hearing is caused by a series of vibrations in the ear that are interpreted in the brain. Do we hear God audibly or in other ways? Can we listen to God without using our ears?

Hold your palms open in your lap, close your eyes, and meditate on God. Think about the joy, hope, love, and peace highlighted during this Advent season. Be still, open, and receptive. When you listen, what do you hear—the sound of people in this room, a clock ticking? But if you listen without using your ears, you notice thoughts or feelings as they come to you. What are they? Vibrations can occur in our minds and in our hearts, too. Vibrations don’t need to occur in our ears for us to receive God’s message for us. Continue this practice when you can draw apart from the busyness of your life. Take time to be open; take time to listen.

Matthew 3:1–12/3:27–39 IV

Prepare the Way

Light the Advent candles. Today’s scripture story is of John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for the Lord, Jesus Christ. John brought a message of hope: Jesus is coming!

Children are well aware that Christmas is coming. What does it mean for them that Jesus is coming—perhaps Jesus is coming to others through you. How do you express the hope of Jesus to others? What do we as family and friends hope for our lives, hope for the lives of others? Write your hopes on small cards and spread them around the Advent wreath.

Matthew 3:13–17/3:41–46 IV

Fulfill All Righteousness

When Jesus was baptized, the loving, eternal community of God was evident. Gather children to hear the story of Jesus’ baptism from Matthew 3:13–17 as they act it out. They can take the parts of Jesus and John, the crowd, the dove, and the voice of God. Encourage them to use their senses to imagine what the sand, water, and breeze would feel like; what would they hear and see? Play sound effects of a lake or river. John can pull a blue fabric (resembling water) over Jesus as he is baptized.

After the story, ask:

- Where do you see community in this story? (In the presence of God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and in the community that gathered for the baptism—Jesus and John.)
- What community was (or will be) with you when you are baptized? (family, friends, church community, and the community of God-Jesus Christ-Holy Spirit)

Print the coloring page of Jesus being baptized for children, on page 54 at the end of this resource.

Matthew 4:1–11/4:1–10 IV

Led by the Spirit

Matthew 4:1–11 tells of Jesus’ being led by the Spirit into the wilderness following his amazing baptismal experience. It was a time for Jesus to open his life to God. When he did, he experienced some of the same things that tempt us.

Read “Jesus Gets Ready,” the story of this experience in the Lectionary Story Bible, Year A, pp. 78–79. After reading, invite participants to take a stone from a collection of stones. Ask:

- Do you remember what this temptation was?
- What did Jesus say?
When Jesus resisted all those temptations, he felt strong inside. As the story says, “Jesus knew God had been with him there in the desert. God had helped Jesus choose the right way. Now Jesus was ready to show people how to grow in God’s way” (p. 79). Participants may take a rock to remind them God is stronger than any temptation. As they take the stones, ask: What tempts you? When you are tempted, what will you say?

Matthew 4:12–23/4:11–22 IV

Follow Christ

This scripture story tells of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. Play a game of Follow Me. Explain that after you say “Follow me,” you’ll make up an action for others to follow. Participants should repeat your action, and then will have an opportunity to make up their own follow-me actions.

Say, “Follow me,” and pretend to flip the pages of an imaginary book; walk in place; pray; or exercise. Have fun and create some silly movements. Now invite each person to take a turn as the leader.

When everyone has led the group, give statements that describe what Jesus would like his disciples to follow him and do. Create actions to go with them. Encourage others to copy your actions.

Jesus said, “Follow me to help feed others.” (Make motions of spoon-feeding someone from a bowl.)

Jesus said, “Follow me to invite those who are not invited.” (Reach out to shake someone’s hand.)

Jesus said, “Follow me to be kind to others.” (Wave and say “hi” to each one.)

Jesus said, “Follow me to learn faith.” (Demonstrate Jesus walking confidently.)

Invite participants to take turns sharing their ideas on how to follow Jesus.

Matthew 5:1–12/5:1–14 IV

Blessings of Community

Matthew 5:1–12 includes the eight blessings we call the beatitudes. Each beatitude promises a blessing. Through these words, Jesus made clear what the good news of God’s reign was about.

Prepare 16 large cards. On a card, write one beatitude and on another card, write the blessing for that beatitude or you may write the blessing on the back of the beatitude card. Invite eight participants to help you display the cards.

Read aloud, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The person with the “Poor in Spirit” card comes forward and holds the card up. Continue reading, “For theirs is ___. Ask the congregation to complete the sentence. If they are correct, the participant holds up the blessing card: “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Continue this way through all eight blessings. You may display the blessing cards afterward.

Matthew 5:13–20/5:15–22 IV

Let Your Light Shine

Candlemas is a Christian festival of lights to mark 40 days after Jesus’ birth. In some faith traditions, Candlemas is the day to bless all the church candles to be used the coming year. Candles remind us that Jesus Christ is the light, just as Jesus used light in today’s scripture passage to describe how we can share God’s shalom through our lives.

Give each person a battery- or solar-powered votive candle in a paper cup candleholder (or use a real candle, with caution). People can decorate candleholders with markers, sequins, glitter, or found items. Put the candles in a darkened area and light them. Invite all to pray for the blessings they have received and the blessings they wish for others.
Matthew 5:21–37/5:23–39 IV

Be Reconciled

Invite a few persons to experiment with following Christ. Give each one a shoebox lid with a sheet of white paper taped to the inside. Drip little drops of paint into the lids (not enough for the paint to run) and put one marble at one end of each lid. Challenge participants to try to roll their marbles in straight paths from one end of the lid to the other, by moving the lids only. The marbles will create swerving “trails” of paint. Then carefully take the marbles out and put them aside.

Sau that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave instructions on how we can form as disciples. As much as we try to follow Jesus Christ, sometimes it is as difficult as making this marble roll in a straight line. But Christ doesn't expect us to be perfect; he expects us to try. Look at what a beautiful painting we create when we try! Invite all participants to hold up their shoebox marble paintings.

Matthew 5:38–48/5:40–50 IV

Love beyond Boundaries

In Matthew 5:38–48, Jesus taught about a unique way to love: love beyond boundaries, generosity beyond reason, a call from Christ to share God’s love with everyone. Learn a fun song called “G*E*N*E*R*O*S*I*T*Y,” music and lyrics by Janné Grover. Teach this song to others! Print the songsheet on page 55 of this resource.

Generosity from God to us, from us to the world
We can change the world if we really care
By the way we love and grow and share generosity!

Matthew 10:24–39

Take Up Your Cross

Sometimes we doubt when we are required to take up our cross and follow Christ. But God’s love for us is beyond our understanding, as expressed in this scripture of Matthew. Jesus gives an example of how much God loves us.

Create a simple pattern to make dozens of paper sparrows or print page 56 at the end of this resource. Hide these around the room (ask youth to help). Then invite participants to find as many sparrows as they can. Count the sparrows as they bring them and ask a participant to read Matthew 10:29–31. What does Jesus say about how much God loves the sparrows?

Jesus also says that even the hairs on our head are counted. Who has the most hairs to count is an interesting question. Guinness Word Records® says people with these hair shades tend to have this many hairs on their head:

- Blonde: 140,000 hairs
- Brown: 110,000 hairs
- Black: 105,000 hairs
- Red: 90,000 hairs

Source: www.guinnessworldrecords.com

This is just for fun—not to interpret how much God loves us by the hairs on our head! Let’s sing praise for the great love God has for us! Close with singing the hymn, “God of the Sparrow,” CCS 138.

Matthew 10:40–42

Extend Welcome

This scripture passage from the Sermon on the Mount tells us about hospitality, the kind that is freely given, without thought of repayment. Christ modeled caritas, the type of love and compassion that is not sacrificial, but mutually enriching, wherein when we give to others, we also receive and learn from them.

Sing, “Leftover People in Leftover Places,” CCS 275. On a large sheet of poster paper or card stock, create a “welcome mat.” Write the word WELCOME in large letters and then invite participants to call out the “leftover” people whom
we need to welcome into our homes, and our lives, i.e. those who are sad, sick, impoverished. At times, we all experience these situations. Do we accept the invitation from others when we are also feeling “leftover”? Write these words on the welcome mat and display it for all to see. Challenge participants to consider whom they would welcome with their own welcome mat. Who will they extend welcome to today?

Matthew 11:2–11

Tell What You Hear and See

Light the first two purple or blue candles and the third Advent candle of the Advent season, the pink candle. In today’s scripture story, John the Baptist asked, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus said, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them” (Matthew 12:3–5 NRSV). Jesus Christ brought a message and a mission of love.

Children are well aware that Christmas is about love. Despite difficulties and danger, a story of love surrounds the Christ infant: loving parents, adoring shepherds and wise men, praising angels. What does it mean that Jesus Christ represents love, the most powerful, unconditional love that can be expressed? Remind children that even during difficult times, we learn from this story that our lives can be surrounded with love. Use heart-shaped cards to write your goal of loving others, and spread them around the Advent wreath.

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

Come and Find Rest

“Come and find rest” is Jesus’ invitation for his disciples to put down their burdens and find rest in him. Jesus sought times of solace, quiet, withdrawal, and prayer and knew their value for his disciples as well.

This phrase reflects personal spiritual practices: prayer, meditation, mindfulness, and more. One practice that many use for deeper thought is to walk a labyrinth. A labyrinth has been used for centuries as a way of mindfulness, meditation, and transformation. Many are built into the architecture of churches around the world. The process of “going in” and “going out” is one that captures the mind so that focus is given to reflection and renewal.

Give a copy of the Finger Labyrinth (on page 57 of this resource) to each participant (copies may be placed in the worship bulletins). Invite everyone to “walk” the labyrinth by tracing the route with their finger. As they do, they should breathe in and out slowly, release their worries, and listen. Say: When you get to the end, pause and give thanks for the One who invites you to “come and find rest.”

Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

Hear and Understand

The message of the parable of the sower is that when seeds are planted in good soil, they grow well. It is the same with us. When we are like the good soil, we listen to Jesus’ words and we obey them. It is then that we can “grow” in faith and do many wonderful things in Christ’s name.

We never know where the seeds of kindness and Christ’s wisdom might grow, if we will just plant them. When Jesus talked about the seeds along a path, in rocks, or in thorns, it meant that a person was not willing to listen to or receive them. But there are “hard” places where we can spread our seeds of kindness: perhaps to a bully after school, or to a person taking the last parking place at the grocery store. We never know who might be open to our kindness. Invite participants to think of someone or a situation where they could “sow seeds of kindness.” You may wish to give participants a small envelope or bag filled with “seeds to sow,” healthy snacks to share with another.
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

We Are Children of God

In Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares, he equated these images with those who did and didn’t listen to his words of love and service. But could the wheat and tares represent the conflict that exists in each of us—the conflicting priorities we choose between? Can you imagine the wheat being our best choices that grow from following Christ, and the tares being our poor choices? Can we be a good Peace Club member on the one hand, and yet on the other, be cruel to the new child in our classroom? How do we “weed out” those “tare-ible” choices we sometimes make?

Give each participant an card and invite them to draw a “wheat” image on one side of the card, and also one of their best qualities based on what Christ teaches. Ask them to turn the card over and draw a weed or “tare.” Now invite them to write a quality they would like to “weed out” of their life. Share a prayer that we will be aware of opportunities around to share the good news of Jesus Christ in all our decisions and actions.

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Bring Forth the Kingdom

The text in Matthew 13 is all about developing disciples to serve (a Community of Christ mission initiative). Jesus’ disciples are learning what it means to be in relationship with God and with others in new ways. Jesus shared through simple parables how accessible the kingdom is if we have faith, value it beyond all else, and understand that all of God’s creation is included.

Invite participants to gather around a table and explain that Jesus used simple things to teach big ideas.

- Mustard seed: Let participants taste the potency of mustard—a powerful taste from something so small! Explain that the tiny mustard seed grows into the tallest plant in the garden.
- Yeast: Discuss what yeast is used for. Show an unleavened piece of bread (such as a tortilla) and a fluffy slice of bread. Show that yeast helps things rise and grow. Just like the mustard seed, a little thing can make a big difference.
- Pearl: A pearl begins as something very small—a grain of sand. Inside an oyster, it can grow until it becomes a pearl. This takes time, and the most perfect pearl is very rare and valuable. Just like the kingdom of heaven!
- You: Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like—people who love God, trust others, who forgive, and follow Jesus. Jesus also encouraged adults to be more like children. Show participants a mirror and look for the “childlike faith” in their own and one another’s faces.

You may give each participant a small bag with a mustard seed, pinch of yeast, plastic pearl or pinch of sand, and small mirror to remind them that the kingdom of God is a simple thing, all around them, and accessible through their faith.

Matthew 14:13–21/14:12–18 IV

Be Generous

Grace and Generosity is an Enduring Principle of Community of Christ. God first was generous, loving us with an overwhelming grace, and our response is to be generous in return.

Show the poster “Grace and Generosity” provided in the We Share Poster Set or project it from the We Share DVD, both available from Herald House. Ask someone to read the words (even in Spanish and French, if they can). Ask what images of generosity and grace are seen in the drawing. What images would you add to this drawing? Close with singing “For the Fruit of All Creation,” CCS 132.

We Share by Monica Bradford, illustrated by Sue Cornelison
Matthew 14:22–33/14:19–28 IV

Have Faith!

Create a wavy, crooked line on the floor using masking or painter’s tape, or sidewalk chalk. Invite participants to try to walk on the line with one foot placed in front of the other. After they have tried, briefly tell the story of Peter wanting to walk to Jesus on the water, but when he stepped out of the boat, his fear overcame him. Jesus gave him a helping hand.

Invite the participants to try walking the line again, only this time pair them so that one person is holding the hand of the walker to keep them balanced on the line (or perhaps a person on each side, holding their hands). Gather participants again to discuss: when you had a helper, were you able to walk on the line? Jesus told Peter about faith, and we should have faith in Jesus, too. When we are afraid, or trying something new or difficult, know that Jesus is with you, holding your hand, encouraging your faith.

Matthew 15:10–28/15:9–27 IV

Hear Us, Lord

Invite participants to share stories of their pets, especially if they have dogs. Ask: do your dogs ever come to your dinner table? Do they watch for the crumbs that fall from the table and eat them up? Imagine a mother who believed so much in Jesus that she was willing to take just the blessing “crumbs” from Jesus to heal her daughter. Tell the story from Matthew 15:10–28 in your own words. Then teach this simple Taizé song reflecting on the desire that was on the heart of this mother, “O Lord, Hear My Prayer,” CCS 192.

Matthew 16:13–20/16:14–21 IV

Declare the Messiah

Remember the old television game, “What’s My Line”? A guest would answer questions from a panel that tried to guess his/her occupation. Invite five participants to help, and give each participant a card. On one card, write “John the Baptist,” on another write “Elijah,” another “Jeremiah,” another “a prophet.” On the last card write “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

Explain that someone from the Bible is “behind the curtain” and they are to guess whom. When the person behind the curtain asks, “What’s my line,” (or “Who do you say I am?”), the participants are to read their card. The first participant in line reads, “John the Baptist.” This process repeats for each person. When you ask the last person, he/she answers, “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” The person behind the curtain can emerge and say “Blessed are you, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but our Creator in heaven. Go and tell the world!”

Matthew 17:1–9/17:1–8 IV

Do Not Be Afraid!

In the story of Matthew 17:1–9, Jesus travels up a mountain where he is transfigured. The Gospel writer tells us his face shone brightly and his whole appearance changed. That’s what we mean by “transfigured.” God affirmed, as in Jesus’ baptism, “This is my Son” (v. 5). Jesus is transformed to be who God created him to be. The disciples with Jesus—Peter, James, and John—were terrified and fell to the ground, hiding their eyes. But Jesus assured them, “…do not be afraid” (v. 7)

Imagine you are with Jesus and the disciples on top of the great mountain. You’ve been with Jesus many times before, but suddenly you see Jesus shining brighter than the sun, glowing from within, unlike anything you’ve ever seen. You see a dazzling cloud above and you hear a voice say, “This is my Son.” Would you love to have such an experience?

Give children a coloring page “Jesus and the Children.” (on page 58 of this resource) As they color it, ask them to remember Jesus loves and comforts them just as he comforted his disciples.

Sometimes adults, like the disciples, are afraid to have close experiences with the Divine, to be transformed into someone new. We’d rather hang onto what we know and what is comfortable—fearful of letting go. With the assurance of Jesus’ love and touch, we need not be afraid.
Matthew 18:15–20

God Is Among Us

Tell a simple tale of forgiveness. You may illustrate this story by drawing the farms and bridge on a flipchart, building a toy bridge, or using another visual aid.

Once upon a time, a farmer who was growing old divided his farm in half for his two sons. He said, “I know that you will always work together and be good friends.”

When the farmer died, the brothers were the best of friends and shared everything. Then little things began to push them apart, and soon, the brothers weren’t talking with each other at all.

About that time, a carpenter came to town looking for work. One brother said, “Please build a tall fence at the edge of my land. My brother and I don’t get along and I don’t want to see him again.” The brother went to town on some errands, and the carpenter went to work. Later, when the brother returned, he walked to the edge of his land and was shocked to see that the carpenter hadn’t built a fence. He had built a bridge to the brother’s land. The brother was standing at the end of the bridge.

“Oh thank you, dear brother,” the estranged brother said. “After all the terrible things I have done and said to you, you have built a bridge of forgiveness between us.” The two brothers hugged and became the best of friends again. The carpenter? He had many more bridges to build.

Challenge participants: Today, think about to whom, with the Carpenter’s help, you can build a bridge. Where does forgiveness need to occur in your life? Who could you become “best friends” with, again?

Matthew 18:21–35/18:21–34 IV

Have Mercy

In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus said that because God forgives us, we should forgive others, not just seven times, but seventy times seven. In Greek seventy and seven were perfect numbers that meant to forgive “without counting.” Even if we multiplied seventy times seven, it would be a huge number.

Invite participants to gather around a table. Pour about 490 (or 500) toothpicks onto the table. Begin counting, and then show frustration and give up. Ask if anyone can guess how many toothpicks are there. If someone guesses 490 (70 x 7), say that Jesus meant we should forgive “without counting.” Now form the toothpicks into a heart shape. Jesus promised us that our Creator also forgives each of us when we forgive our brother or sister “from our heart.”


Hosanna!

Palm/Passion Sunday begins the journey through Holy Week. As we read this story, we can explore some challenges faced by Jesus and his disciples on the days leading up to his death.

Invite all to read the stories of Holy Week in their books of scripture or children’s story bibles. Traveling through the stories involves us in the emotion of these events.

To help participants keep their places as they read, make palm bookmarks from real palm leaves or green paper. For ideas and instructions, see Seasons of the Spirit™ All Ages Lent/Easter 2014 or www.squidoo.com/FoldingPalms.

Matthew 21:33–46/21:35–49 IV

Produce Fruits of the Kingdom

“Produce Fruits of the Kingdom” reflects Galatians 5:22–23, which names the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, qualities that today’s parable of the wicked tenants did not display.

Before the service, cut outlines of favorite fruit, indigenous to your area, from colorful construction paper. On one set, write one of the spiritual “fruits” from Galatians 5 on each cut-out. Display these around the room to be easily seen by all. Cut out enough paper fruit cut-outs so each participant can choose their favorite fruit.
Invite participants to write their favorite “fruit of the Spirit” on their paper fruit, and what they can do to express that Spiritual “fruit” this day or this week. Affirm that, as disciples of Christ, we are to help bring about the fruits of justice and peace.

Matthew 22:1–14

Invite All to Christ

Perform a skit of the parable of the wedding feast, inviting participants to be the “servants.” The servants will do and say whatever the king tells them, so encourage participants to listen carefully. Take on a different voice or demeanor when reading the king’s words.

Jesus: The kingdom of heaven is like a king who celebrated his child’s wedding. The king told his servants, “Go, invite everyone to my child’s wedding feast.”

Servants: Make inviting motions to congregation to come.

Jesus: But the people didn’t come. So the king said, “Invite everyone. Tell them there’s room for all.”

Servants: “There’s room for all!”

Jesus: But again, the people didn’t come. So the king said, “Tell them there’s food for all.”

Servants: “There’s food for all!”

Jesus: The people still didn’t come. So the king told his servants, “Go to the homeless and the sick. Bring them to my feast. Tell them everyone is welcome!”

Servants: “Everyone is welcome.”

Jesus: The people who were homeless, sick, and hungry were surprised to be invited. They felt love and joy. And the king was right: there was room and food for all. Amen.

Matthew 22:15–22

Consider What Is God’s

The lectionary scripture from Matthew is “put God first” (“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.“—Matthew 22:21.) On this Children’s Sabbath, we think of a similar phrase, used especially when we make policy decisions: “Is it good for the children?” In other words, how will our decision impact children? This is putting children first.

Christ came as a child, welcomed children, urged adults to become like children, and insisted we care for “the least of these.” Let’s read together a simple poem about Christ.

Print the attached “Put Children First” (at the end of this resource) and place in bulletins. Invite children to read the phrases or invite all participants to read in unison.


Commanded to Love

Divide the congregation into two groups (perhaps separated by a center aisle). Make two large posters and invite volunteers to hold them before their respective group.

On poster 1 is: “Love God with all your heart, mind and soul.”

On poster 2 is: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Ask both groups to stand, facing each other. Then ask them to share their message with the other group, first Group 1, then Group 2. Tell them to start quietly at first, as a whisper; then, get louder each round. Continue until each gives the other the message in a rousing retort. Ask volunteers to put down the signs and ask Group 1: “What was Group 2’s message to you?” Ask Group 2, “What was Group 1’s message to you?” Invite all to join you in a confirming “Amen” as they sit down.

Put Children First

Children’s Sabbath 2014

We praise you, O God, for sending your beloved child Jesus born as a baby nurtured by his family, protected by strangers, who grew as a child who was taught in his temple, surrounded by his community, guided by his parents, who became an adult who loved and blessed the children, who cared for those who were sick, poor, and left out, who taught that God loves us like a parent, and who called us his friends. This one who was born a baby needing us died our Savior whom we all need, triumphant even over death, freeing us to live as your beloved children.

Matthew 23:1–12/23:1–9 IV

Make Me a Servant

This scripture passage reminds us of the importance of being humble. All we do should point to God, not ourselves, to be a servant as Christ modeled.

Find a blank space in your bulletins (or distribute blank paper cards of half-sheets of paper and pencils). Write the word “humble” vertically down your page. Starting with each letter, write something you do now or can do to serve Christ in your daily life.

After a moment, comment how difficult it is to find some words, especially for some letters like “U.” Ask participants to complete at least two of the letters, rather than all six. Encourage them: if we do even two things that point to God, we are responding to Christ’s challenge to ‘be a servant.’

You may carry this further by displaying the word ‘humble’ on a large poster board or flipchart. Invite ideas for each letter from the congregation, and write their ideas next to the word ‘humble.’ In this way, they share ideas to ‘be a servant’ as Christ calls us to be.

Matthew 25:1–13/25:1–12 IV

Be Ready

We are called to be ready for Jesus. To get ready, we must do the things Christ showed us. What are those things? Invite participants to give examples after each statement.

- Jesus loved God. How do you show love for God?
- Jesus loved others. How do you show love for others?
- Jesus taught others what he knew. Have you taught someone something? What?
- Jesus took time to rest and pray. Where do you rest? Where do you like to pray?

A wise person once said, “Life is so daily.” Serving Jesus is, too. We get ready for Jesus by doing acts throughout each day to draw closer to God, and to help others.


Make Responsible Choices

Read the parable of the talents asking children to pantomime it as it is read. Preface the story by explaining that a talent is an Aramaic word for a large amount of money, equal to about three year’s wages. Use paper grocery bags stuffed with newspaper to look like big money bags to represent the talents.

After telling the story, assure children that the harsh master in the story is not like God. God loves all of us with a great love. But God also wants us to “grow” our talents, to not be afraid to risk. Ask participants to imagine that these bags are what we refer to as talents (skills, gifts, abilities). Do we grow and share our talents the way the first two servants did, or do we hide our talents like the third?

Ask worshipers of all ages to draw or write lists of their talents, and other resources on a page in their bulletin (distribute index cards or half-sheets of paper). After a few moments, offer a prayer of thankfulness for all our gifts, and for the opportunities to share these gifts with God.


When Did We See You?

Jesus counsels his followers to respond in love to others the way they respond to him in person. Share one of these two children’s storybooks, which illustrate this idea:

*Charlie’s Walk* by Francine Inslee, illustrated by Matt Mills. This book is about a young girl who makes friends on her way to church who teach her about giving. Discuss after:

- Have you ever made friends with someone who is alone?
How did Jesus help us understand how to meet and care for others?
What did Olivia learn about giving from Charlie?

Nobiah's Well: A Modern African Folktale by Donna Guthrie, illustrated by Robert Roth. This wonderful story tells how a young boy's love for his fellow creatures also becomes a blessing for his family. Discuss after:
• Have you ever helped someone who is alone?
• What do you think Nobiah’s family learned about his generosity?

Mark 1:1–8/1:1–6 IV
Prepare the Way
Advent 2: “What Is on God’s Christmas List?”

Cast: Narrator, Gabriel, and Mary

Preparation: At a worship center: a large gift-wrapped box (wrap the lid separately)

Gabriel is on the rostrum. While the narrator reads the text below, Mary enters. She and Gabriel pantomime the reading together.

Narrator: This story began when I was sent to tell Mary she had been selected to be the mother of a special baby. I said, “Mary, you’ve been chosen to give birth to God’s Son.” She was really surprised and wondered what was going on. “Me? I’m so young! I’ve never been a mother before!” But I reassured her she shouldn’t be afraid—that everything would be OK. I told her she was to name the baby boy, “Jesus.” Mary replied, “I will do as God pleases for I am God’s servant. God can use me in this special way. This will be my gift to God.”

Gabriel and Mary freeze while the narrator discusses this portion of the Christmas story. Then Gabriel and Mary resume their pantomime while the narrator reads the final paragraph.

Narrator: So, what do you think is on God’s Christmas list? What would God want for Christmas? It’s in that big box, but we can’t look yet! I’m sure it’s really great, but we have to wait…

Mark 1:4–10/1:39–9 IV
Of Water and Spirit

Prepare a short drama to act out the story of Jesus’ baptism. Actors may take the parts of Jesus and John, the crowd, the dove, and the “voice of God.” After acting out the story encourage listeners to use their senses to imagine what the sand, water, and breeze might have felt like.

• What would you hear, smell, and see in this story?
• Where do you see community in this story?
• What community is there when someone is baptized or confirmed in our congregation?

Mark 1:9–15/1:7–13 IV
God is Near

Display a bowl of water and discuss whether water is powerful. Demonstrate how water can act on various things to change them—such as drop a hard (dry) sponge in the water and it becomes soft; pour water into a dish of sand and it makes a well, use water to wash a dirty item and it becomes clean, dip a paintbrush in water and dry watercolors become colorful paints. Finally, show a picture of the Grand Canyon or other natural feature created by erosion and discuss how, over time, water can cause huge changes in the world.

Read Mark 1:9–11/1:7–9 IV which tells about Jesus being baptized. Discuss how when people are baptized, the water doesn’t physically change them the way water changes a sponge or the Grand Canyon, but it changes the person inside because being baptized means making a commitment to follow Jesus. If we truly try to be like Jesus, the way we act and decisions we make change in a way other people can see. Briefly discuss ways following Jesus in our daily lives might create a visible change in us (for example, we are kinder, happier, or more helpful).
Mark 1:29–39/1:26–35 IV

Come and Be Healed

Youth Ministries Day

Think about times when you were sick or hurt and tell what made you feel better. Read “Jesus Helps Eunice Feel Well” by Ralph Milton in Lectionary Story Bible, Year B (Wood Lake Publishing, 2009, ISBN 9781551455648), 61–62.

When Eunice felt better, she wanted to help others. How can we help others feel better when they are sick or sad?

Mark 5:21–43/5:18–35 IV

Act in Faith

At a worship setting, display rustic or primitive-looking cloth to represent the garment of Jesus, and dirty-looking or torn cloth to represent the clothes of the unclean woman.

Direct people's attention to the cloth in the worship setting. You may want to have some gather close to the cloth. Ask them to reflect on what it might feel like to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Then ask if they want to touch the dirty or torn cloth. Liken it to the unclean woman—no one wants to be near her or touch her. Have people imagine what it might have felt like for her to crawl and stretch to reach Jesus. Would you be afraid? But what if you thought he could heal you? Would you act in faith?

Mark 6:1–13/6:1–14 IV

Called to Mission

Read the children's book We Share (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915224). Use the CD-ROM with the book's artwork to project the images on a screen for all to see. Focus on the three languages featured in the book. Where are those languages spoken? Find the places on a globe. Perhaps have several of the statements read in a language other than your own.

Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23/7:1–9, 14–15, 20–21 IV

Purify Your Heart

Fruits, nuts, herbs, seeds, spices, vegetables, and other ingredients are often added to bread to make it more interesting or flavorful.

Break open a loaf of bread that visually demonstrates this. Place the bread in the worship setting.

The bread of Life, Christ, wants us to see beauty in our differences. We are called to be salt for the kingdom of God and to share the flavor of life in the kingdom of God.

Mark 7:24–37/7:22–36 IV

Draw the Circle Wide

Preparation: Provide a large sheet of newsprint paper taped to a wall so it is visible and accessible to the entire group. Provide markers in many colors for participants to use.

Share the text of “Draw the Circle Wide” CCS 273, using a variety of readers.

State that: We confess that we draw our circle too small.

Have a youth draw a small (10 in/25 cm) circle on the paper. Have an older person draw a larger circle (20 in/50.8 cm) on the paper.

While singing “For Everyone Born” (CCS 285), invite people to come up and draw more circles on the paper in a variety of colors. If possible, project images of circular graphic patterns on the screen during this song.
Mark 8:27–38/8:28–41 IV

Take Up Your Cross and Follow

Engage the group in a short game of Follow the Leader using these and similar commands:
Raise your hands up over your head. Stand on one foot. Touch the ground. Turn around.

Ask How did you do? What does it mean to follow the leader? To be a good follower what do you have to do? (We have to watch the leader closely to know what to do.) How can we watch what Jesus did so we can become good followers? (Listen to stories from the Bible.)

Share Jesus’ comments found in Mark 8:34–35. Ask: What does this mean? How can we take up our crosses and follow Jesus Christ?

Mark 9:2–9/9:1–7 IV

Listen to the Beloved

Drama: “Jesus Transfigured” The drama scenes can be intermingled with other parts of a worship service.

Cast: Peter and Mark

Scene 1: Our Journey Begins

Peter: Mark, I want to tell you about an experience I had before Jesus was crucified.
Mark: Sure, Peter, what is it?
Peter: It was something wonderful, and yet something so hard to understand.

Scene 2: Climbing the Mountain

Peter: Jesus took us to the top of a mountain. It was a long climb. We were tired when we got there.
Mark: Just you and Jesus?
Peter: No, James and his brother John were there, too. They know what happened.

Scene 3: Jesus Transfigured

Peter: I’ll never forget that time. All of a sudden, Jesus changed. His face shone. It was like looking into the sun. And his clothes turned white. Really white. Then there were two people with Jesus.
Mark: Who?
Peter: Elijah and Moses.
Mark: How did you know?
Peter: I don’t know how we knew. But we knew. And Jesus was talking to them.
Mark: So what did you do?
Peter: I didn’t know what to do. I said to Jesus, “Shouldn’t we build three houses here? I could build one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” It sounds silly, now that I think about it. But I was so afraid. I didn’t know what to say!
Mark: What did Jesus say?
Peter: He didn’t say anything. A bright cloud came and covered him. Then we heard a voice. James and John heard it, too. You can ask them.
Mark: Was it God?
Peter: It must have been. The voice said, “This is my Son. I love him. Listen to him.”
Mark: That’s all?
Peter: That’s all!
Mark: What did you do?
Peter: We were so scared. We fell flat on our faces. But then Jesus said very gently, “Don’t be afraid. Get up.”

Scene 4: We Are Transformed

Mark: (shaking his head) I don’t understand. Every time I think I understand, I hear and learn something new. Then I have to think about it all over again, and it changes me.

Peter: Yeah! I know what you mean.


Mark 9:30–37/9:27–35 IV

Like a Child

Today’s scripture reading tells of Jesus’ disciples competing with one another over who might be the greatest. In a car race, how do we know which driver and car are the greatest? What about in a spelling bee, how do we know who is the greatest at spelling? When there are many kites flying on a windy day, how do we know which one is the greatest? (Allow for discussion.)

Display a model or project a picture of a church upside down.

When Jesus hears his disciples disagreeing over which of them is the greatest, he says to be first, they will need to become servants! And even more surprising, he placed a child among them and said that welcoming a child is the same as welcoming Jesus! What Jesus has to say about becoming servants for others and welcoming a child is sometimes called the “upside-down kingdom,” sort of like the model (or picture) of this church. How do Jesus’ words represent an upside-down kingdom? (Allow for discussion.) What about our lives? Do we understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in the upside-down kingdom?

Mark 9:38–50/9:36–50 IV

Honestly Examine Our Lives

Wear a trench coat and have a large magnifying glass to hold up. Introduce yourself and say that today you are an inspector and you are here to examine things. What does the word examine mean? (to inspect or look closely in detail)

Look at the back of your hand through the magnifying glass.

This tool helps me see. It is called a magnifying glass. It makes things look larger when I look through it. It helps me see things I might not otherwise notice. For example, I can see the tiny hairs on the back of my hand.

To really examine something takes time. If we hurry through the examination, we might miss something important. A magnifying glass helps us see the little things. Pass the magnifying glass around.

But the magnifying glass doesn’t help much when I want to look at invisible things…like thoughts. In today’s scripture, Jesus tells his disciples to look closely at their lives and get rid of the things that are not good…things that cause them “to stumble.” Jesus was trying to help them be better disciples.

I imagine they wished they had a magnifying glass like mine to help them see better—to help them examine their lives—and then try to live like Jesus taught. It takes time to examine our lives—to think about how we are living. Don’t get in a hurry! Take time to look closely at your life and decide to make changes so you can be more like Jesus.

Mark 10:2–16/10:2–14 IV

Receive the Kingdom of God as a Child


OR listen to God’s Dream being read at www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMXUL1YoJHk.

Take time to talk about how Archbishop Tutu understands God’s vision for creation. Ask: What are ways we can help fulfill this vision in our congregation, schools, and community?
Mark 10:17–31/10:15–30 IV
All Things Are Possible with God

Mark 10:35–45
Make Me a Servant
Watch “Children of the World” video (sponsored by CROP Hunger Walks) www.youtube.com/watch?v=izBiZlKM5ro.
OR Ask someone who has experienced other cultures to relate his or her impressions of children’s lives in that culture.
Discuss: How can we be servant ministers for all God’s children?

Mark 10:46–52/10:46–54 IV
Jesus, Have Mercy
Ahead of time, organize stations around the room where mercy bracelets can be assembled. During the activity, listen to music. Suggestions include: “Lord, Have Mercy” CCS 197; “Nimwebo Ba Yahweh” CCS 613; and “Kyrie Eleison” CCS 184 played instrumentally or on Community of Christ Sings Audio Recordings.
Assemble Mercy Bracelets: To make a mercy bracelet provide each participant with three different colored beads and a cord on which to string them. Explain that each of the beads has the following meaning:

First Bead: represents a past struggle when you have been aware of God’s mercy.
Second Bead: represents a current struggle in which you need to find Christ’s mercy.
Third Bead: represents someone with whom you have not been merciful.

The beads are strung on the cord during the song as a time of meditation. Ask people to assist one another in tying the mercy bracelets around their wrists. Project the following paragraph on the screen or print it in the bulletin to facilitate the meditation:
You have been healed by faith. In your current struggles, do not forget to get up and follow Jesus Christ. Wear this bracelet as a reminder that God’s mercy is always with you. Commit to responding to God’s mercy by being merciful with others.
(Activity designed by Joelle Wight)

Mark 12:28–34/12:33–40 IV
Commanded to Love
Memorizing scripture may not be a regular practice. Today may be a good time to give everyone an opportunity to put to memory the two great commandments.
These commandments are easily connected to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. We don’t always live these commandments perfectly, but Communion provides us an opportunity to take stock of where we are and where we want to be. This can be a fresh start. It is important to note we all have opportunity for a new start anytime we seek God’s forgiveness and recognize God’s presence.
Materials: Common items, such as a doll or teddy bear, belt, board game, blanket, apple, comb, bottle of water, etc.
Ask: Have you ever had to put things in order to show what is most important? I have some items here. Which do you think is most important?
There might be some diversity in what is most important. If so, make point #1. If they all agree, or you ask one person to put things in order, make point #2 (below).

#1 You have various ideas about the order of what is most important. That is partly why Jesus was asked the question, “Which commandment is the first of all?” (move on to “Jesus answered...”)
#2 This is what [person’s name] believes is most important. Do you all agree this would be most important to you? Mmmm, so you don’t all agree.

Well, that is what was happening in the scripture that was just read. Some people were disagreeing about what was the most important. They asked, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

Jesus answered the question by reminding the disciples of the commandment God gave to the people of Israel (Mark 12:30). That commandment is:

> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...
> Put both your hands over your heart, have the congregation do the same actions as you read the scripture passage.
>
> ...and with all your soul...
> Move your hands outward to shoulder height and then wrap your arms around your body in a hug.
>
> ...and with all your mind...
> Move your hands to rest on your head.
>
> ...and with all your strength...
> Pose your arms to show your muscles.

Let’s repeat the whole commandment now that we have learned the actions. Repeat series above.

Jesus also went on to say there is a second commandment. Let’s see if anyone knows what it is. ("Love your neighbor as yourself" Mark 12:31) Let’s all say that one again. These are two important commandments that help us remember to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves.

Today is Communion. We remember God loves us so much that God sent Jesus to show us how to live. Jesus reminded us about the two most important commandments. We don’t always make the best choices. Communion reminds us of the two commandments and that we are loved by God. When we know we haven’t made good choices, we can repent and God forgives us. Let’s offer prayer.

We bow our heads and confess those ways and times when you, O Lord, have not been our first priority. We bow our heads in deep and humble gratitude that in this very moment, your forgiving grace can fill us and draw us closer to your Holy Presence. Amen.

Mark 12:38–44/12:45–50 IV

Imitate God’s Generosity

Drama: “Who Gives the Most?” by Erica Nye

**Cast:** Narrator, Christian 1, Christian 2, Christian 3, Servant

A very large bucket or bin sits center stage. It is marked in large letters: OFFERING. Consider asking children or youth to play the parts of Christians 1–3 and the Servant. Narrator’s lines can be read, but are best if delivered directly.

**Narrator:** Something is happening at church this morning! Let’s watch what’s going on up here. See there—can you see the big bucket? It says “offering.” It looks like some Christians are about to donate some money.

Christian 1 enters. He or she is dressed in nice “Sunday clothes” and carries a big bag full of money. The bag is labeled with a large dollar (or other currency) sign. It could be filled with play money or coins visible at the top. He or she totes the money bag to the offering bucket and puts it in. Then he or she pulls one dollar out of a pocket and tosses it in. He or she bends over to the congregation and takes a bow. Then he or she goes to stand quietly at the corner of the rostrum—in sight, but out of the way.

**Narrator:** Did you see that! A whole bag full of money to share with the church! Do you bring that much money to church? Oh look, here comes someone else.

Christian 2 enters. He or she is dressed in very nice clothes with fur or a fancy hat to indicate wealth. He or she is carrying three big bags marked with dollar (or other currency) signs and a servant follows lugging a couple more. The person makes a show of grandly putting each bag in the bucket and silently ordering the servant to put in the rest. He or she pulls money out of various pockets from all over his or her clothes and deposits it in the offering as well. Christian 2 turns to the congregation and takes several elaborate bows, egging on the congregation for applause. Then he or she goes to stand quietly at the corner of the rostrum next to Christian 1.
Narrator: Whoa! Did you see that? Now that was a lot of money! I’m not sure I’ve ever seen that much money! That person couldn’t even carry it all. But wait…here comes one more Christian to share an offering. Let’s watch.

Christian 3 (preferably a woman) enters slowly. She is barefoot and dressed in old jeans and a T-shirt. She approaches the offering bucket and pauses. Then she fishes into her pocket and pulls out two low-value coins. Christian 3 holds them up high to look at them in the light for a moment. She drops the coins into the bucket. Try to arrange the bucket so the congregation can hear the two “clinks” of the coins in the bucket. She is quiet, but not sad, and does not take a bow. Then she goes to stand quietly at the corner of the rostrum with the other Christians.

Narrator: Hmm. Just two coins. It seemed like those two coins were all she had! I have a question for you. Who gave the most? Did the first, second, or third Christian give the most to the offering?

Take responses. If you like, have the three Christians step forward one-by-one, asking the congregation to clap for the one who they think gave the most.

In the Gospel of Mark it is written that Jesus watched people giving their offering just like we did. Afterward, he gathered his disciples and told them who gave the most. Would you believe he said the last Christian gave the most! Christian #3 steps forward. In fact, Jesus told his disciples she gave more than everyone else put together! How can that be? What do you think he meant? That’s what we are going to explore today in our service. Listen, and you’ll hear about what it really means to give to your true capacity.

Mark 13:1–8/13:1–10, 27, 33 IV

Remain Faithful

Drama: “Church Is the Faith Community” by Erica Nye

The narrator can read the lines, but it is best to deliver them directly. Modify the questions and focus points to fit your congregation. Allow opportunities for children to respond.

Welcome to church today! We are in church, right? Well, how do you know for sure? Take responses, if you like.

Just look around! Look at all the pews. And the pulpit up front. And the hymnals. This is definitely church! What else do you see that tells us we are in church?

Take more responses. Perhaps point out the organ or piano, a cross or pictures hanging on the wall, the steeple on the roof, stained-glass windows, the presider or preacher up front, etc.

Now I have something for you to imagine. Close your eyes. Imagine all of the hymnals have disappeared! Poof—they’re gone! Pause for people to imagine.

You can open your eyes. I wonder…if all the hymnals are gone, are we still at church? What if the pews were gone? Are we still at church? What about the pulpit up front? The cross? The organ? The stained-glass windows? The preacher? Still church?

What if everything including the walls and roof and steeple were gone? Are we still at church? What is left when all these things are gone? Take responses.

The people! And Jesus! Even if everything else is taken away, it is the people and the love of Jesus (we call that “community”) that make up the church. Everything else is just stuff to help us along the way.

In the Gospel of Mark we are told Jesus was walking with his disciples near the huge temple. The disciples looked at the spectacular temple and said, “Wow! Now that is a strong, impressive building! The church must be great!” Did Jesus agree? He told the disciples, “It does appear strong and important, but even this big building will fall down one day.” Then he reminded his disciples not to get distracted by what appears powerful today or by worrying about the future.

What really matters at church? The love and message of Jesus Christ is what matters most. That’s what makes us the church! That’s what helps keep us faithful to God. Let’s stick to putting Jesus and people first. Let’s not get too attached to the place and the stuff around us.

We are going to sing a song next. It’s called “There’s a Church within Us.” Remember Jesus said church isn’t about things. When we sing the song it’s not really saying there is a building inside of us. Let’s turn to CCS 278 and read the words before we sing it to see if we can understand what the song says really matters at church. Consider reading the entire text aloud before singing it. The music could play quietly behind the reading to introduce the tune.

Watch for the Lord

Advent 1: “What Is on God’s Christmas List?”

During Advent, focus moments will tell the story of Jesus’ birth. Each week, the narrator should quickly recap the previous week, and make sure people understand the Bible story as it develops. As we expectantly await the birth of Jesus, consider the question, “What is on God’s Christmas list?” People dressed as the Bible characters can read or act out the following scene. The idea is to build expectation during Advent by telling the Christmas story, and encourage all to recognize Christmas is not just about receiving, but also giving. This is the first of the four dramas.

Cast: Narrator and Gabriel

Preparation: At the worship center: a large gift-wrapped box with lid wrapped separately.

The Gabriel character is on the rostrum while the narrator reads the text below. Although Gabriel doesn’t speak, he should pantomime actions to fit the words.

Narrator: In the beginning, God had a vision. This vision would take years and years and years to happen. Over the next four weeks, we will hear the story and get to know Gabriel. Gabriel pantomimes while the narrator reads.

Narrator: I am Gabriel, an angel who was part of the Christmas story. In fact, my role came very early in the story—but more about that next week. Let’s just say today that my message launched a tradition of gift-giving many people still follow during Christmas celebrations.

Gabriel freezes in place while the narrator engages the people in a brief discussion about this portion of the Christmas story. Then Gabriel again pantomimes while the narrator reads the final paragraph.

Narrator: So, what do you think is on God’s Christmas list? What would God want for Christmas? It’s in that big box, but we can’t look yet! I’m sure it’s really great, but we have to wait...


Walk the Via Dolorosa (Way of Grief)

Monologue: “The Follower”

Character: A follower of Jesus in New Testament times

You’ve heard the story, of course...so many times that you may know it by heart. It’s been told over and over again, for 2,000 years—the story of Jesus, and the miracles he did, and the lessons he taught—everything that happened during that last, amazing, awful week. How Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey with people shouting “hosanna” and waving palms; how Jesus broke bread and drank wine with the disciples on Thursday; how Jesus was betrayed and was crucified on Friday. And you all probably know what happened on that next Sunday. It’s a great story.

But what about the rest of us? Jesus wasn’t alone that week, you know; we were there, too. Just ordinary people, going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with our teacher and friend. Sure, we knew Jesus was special. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and taught us the most amazing things about love and forgiveness and God. And we loved him. And we followed him.

And we didn’t know what was going to happen.

We knew something was strange, something was different, when we got near Jerusalem and Jesus sent a few of his followers into the city to bring him back a donkey to ride. He never rode; he always walked with us, among us, as one of us. But not that day. That day he rode, and the people came to meet him.

I don’t know how they knew he was coming, and I don’t know how they knew who he was. Jerusalem is a big city anyway, and with crowds gathering for Passover there were people everywhere! But somehow they knew, and they came. And they laid down palm branches and clothes, and made a path for Jesus. And Jesus rode over the path on the donkey,
and he didn’t stop. He didn’t stop to teach us, or heal the sick and afflicted along the path, or bless the children who ran before him with the palm branches. The people shouted “hosanna”—“save us”—and he didn’t stop. He just kept riding, into Jerusalem, going...toward something. Going...away from us.

He was with us that week, though, at least in body. He spoke to us, taught us, shared meals with us...but something was different. He no longer spoke of love and forgiveness. He spoke of remembrance and blood. He spoke of denial and betrayal. Then the soldiers came. We thought it was a mistake, at first. What could the government possibly care about a poor, traveling preacher from the country? Those of us who followed him were just a small, ragged bunch of peasants—fishermen, farmers, laborers—we weren’t a threat to anyone, and neither was he. But it didn’t matter. They took him, they tried him, and then they killed him.

At first, we couldn’t believe it. It didn’t seem real. Then as it started to sink in, all the things Jesus had been saying that week began to make sense. And we realized he must have known. When he stood before the tribunal, when the soldiers came to take him, when he broke that last loaf of bread—he had known. Even when he rode into Jerusalem on that donkey—he had known. He must have. But still he came.

I didn’t want to be angry, but I was. We had followed Jesus, freely and joyfully, over weeks and months, and countless miles. We followed him, and where did he lead us? To his own execution! He wouldn’t let us save him, or help him, or even say goodbye—but he would let us watch him suffer, and watch him die. He led us there, so we could watch.

When Jesus went into Jerusalem, he knew what was going to happen, and he made his choice. But if I had known, would I have followed him there? Looking back on it now, now that I know the real ending of the story, I can understand why we were there. We had to see it, so we could tell it and write it. The story had to be told; I know that. But Jesus wasn’t just a story to me—he was my teacher and my friend, and I had to stand there, helpless and afraid, and watch him die. If I had known that’s where the path would lead, would I have followed that donkey? Would I have waved a palm branch and shouted “hosanna”? If I had known the road into Jerusalem would continue up the hill to Golgotha, to the cross—would I have chosen to walk that path with Jesus? Would I have followed?

Would you?

**Mark 16:1–8/16:1–7 IV**

**Resurrected!**

**Dramatic Reading of Mark 16:1–5**

**Cast:** Reader, two women, and two angels

While the scripture passage is read, two women dressed in robes, interpret the narrative through actions and facial expressions. They walk toward the tomb-like setting carrying jars or ceramic containers that contain spices with strong aromas. When they get to the tomb they mime that the stone has been rolled away. They see two figures dressed as angels in long white garments. The women express fear as they hear the words of the angels read. The women look into the tomb and then hurry away, amazed but still frightened by what they have just experienced.

**Luke 1:26–38**

His Name is Jesus

Advent 4: “What Is on God’s Christmas List?”


**Cast:** Narrator, Joseph and Mary, and baby Jesus, and a child

**Preparation:** At the worship center: a large gift-wrapped box which contains a large mirror, and smaller little mirrors, one for each person. On the inside of the box lid is written, “What God wants is YOU!”

Actors take their places on the rostrum and pantomime their parts while the narrator reads the text below. At the appropriate time, have Mary reach into the manger, lift out baby Jesus, and cradle him. If desired, add an innkeeper, shepherds, angel, and wise men to pantomime their portion of the story.

**Narrator:** When it was almost time for Jesus to be born, the government ordered everyone to return to the town of
For Joseph, that was Bethlehem. So Mary and Joseph packed some supplies and started on their journey.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, they found there was no place to stay. They asked everyone they saw, but there just weren’t any rooms available. Mary was really tired; it had been a long, dusty trip. Finally, one innkeeper had an idea. He offered them some space in the stable behind his inn. So they settled in with the cows and sheep, maybe even a stray dog. Later, in the quiet of the night, Mary gave birth to baby Jesus, the very first Christmas gift.

It wasn’t too long after that when some shepherds saw a marvelous sight. While they were watching their sheep, the sky lit up and an angel declared to them, “Do not be afraid because I am bringing you good news. To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Go—you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” They did what the angel said. They found the stable, and when they looked inside, what do you think they saw? A manger! A baby! They were in the right place! They had found Jesus! (Luke 2:10–12 NRSV, adapted)

These shepherds joined in the first celebration of Christmas. Later there were wise men, who came to see what all the excitement was about and offered this very special baby gifts from their treasure chests.

So, you see, my story is about gifts—gifts Mary and Joseph offered to God, gifts wise men gave to Jesus, but more importantly, the gift of God’s Son that was given to us.

All actors freeze and the narrator engages the people in a brief discussion about this part of the Christmas story. Discussion should end with the question “What is on God’s Christmas list?” The narrator reads the final paragraphs below to provide the answer. All actors pantomime the conclusion of the Advent focus moment series while the narrator reads.

Narrator: What is on God’s Christmas list? It’s in the big box, where we have kept it hidden throughout Advent. Peek in the box and see what it is...

Actors open the large box, discover a large mirror and message, and hold them up for all to see.

Narrator: You! You are on God’s Christmas list!

Child: Me? I don’t understand. I cannot be wrapped up with ribbon and a bow!

Narrator: No, you cannot, but when you live as a faithful disciple you are fulfilling God’s vision for you. That’s the best gift ever; you are what God wants for Christmas.

Actors hand out small mirrors to everyone.


Rejoice for Joy


• Who was it who “leaped for joy”? (verse 44)
• Did Mary feel joy too? How do you know?

A camp song about joy expresses the kind of joy Mary (and baby Jesus) may have felt. As you sing “I’ve Got the Joy (Down in My Heart),” reflect your joy in your face and action.

Add new verses and phrases about joy.

What makes you feel this kind of joy?

Luke 2:22–40

Guided by the Spirit

Drama: “Celebrate the Gift”

During Advent, we heard the story of Jesus’ birth. As we made our Christmas lists and waited for the birth of Jesus, we wondered, “What is on God’s Christmas list?”

Complete the story with the scripture from Luke 2:22–40. Inside a large wrapped box place index...
cards and pencils, enough for each person who attends today. The cast can distribute these toward the end of this focus moment.

People dressed as the Bible characters can act out the following scene while it is narrated. The idea is to continue the telling of the Christmas story, and encourage all to recognize Christmas is not just about receiving, but also giving.

**Cast:** Narrator, Simeon and Anna, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus

Actors take their places on the rostrum and pantomime their parts while the narrator reads the text below. At the appropriate time, Mary and Joseph bring baby Jesus to be blessed. Simeon and Anna each come up to hold and celebrate the baby as the narrator reads about them.

**Narrator:** Jesus was born, and after many days, when the visitors had gone, the daily life of this family began. But Mary and Joseph had to pack again for another journey. This time it was to the temple in Jerusalem, where Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to “fulfill the requirements of Jewish law,” to present Jesus as the firstborn male into the service of God, and to follow other Jewish requirements.

Two elderly people in the temple had awaited the birth of this child just as we looked forward to the coming of Jesus at Christmas. Their names were Simeon and Anna. The Holy Spirit guided Simeon to the temple that day and assured him he would live to see the One who God sent. Simeon praised God for allowing him to witness this special child. Anna was an elderly widow who lived at the temple, fasting and praying daily. Like Simeon, she too was looking forward to this promise, and recognized this very special baby. She also praised God with a prophetic declaration of who Jesus was.

So, you see, this story tells us many were waiting for the gift of God’s Son. I know you waited for Jesus to come, too. What else were you looking forward to?

Actors open the large gift box, and give the index cards and pencils within to all participants.

Think about what tangible or spiritual gift you received for Christmas and write it on your card. (Allow some time).

Now remember that last week, we said that YOU were God’s greatest gift. When you live as a faithful disciple, when you share your gifts or grow your talents, you are a special gift! You are what God wants for Christmas and for every day of the year! Celebrating the gift of Jesus didn’t end on December 25. It continues throughout the year as we share ourselves—God’s special gifts—with others.

**Luke 3:1–6/3:1–11 IV**

**Jesus Lights Our Way**

Centuries ago, during the time of Jesus and before, people used oil lamps to provide light (show a picture or a clay model of an oil lamp). A wick was laid inside, and the lamp was filled with oil. People would light the wick and carry the lamp in the palm of their hands or by the handle. Lamps, candles, and lights all help us see. Without light, we may stumble or lose our way.

- First, invite others to follow you around the room, using a variety of movements. Do it with lights off.
- Second, do the same task while holding a battery-powered tea light candle that is turned on. Your movements should now be easy for all to see.

Read Luke 3:4–6. God sent Jesus Christ to be the light of the world—to teach us about God and how to share God’s love with others. Give everyone a tea light candle and suggest that when people ask about it, tell them about Jesus, God’s light of the world.


**Descend Holy Spirit**

In Bible times people were not sure where God was; they thought God was “up there” somewhere. We often talk about things connected to God as “coming down” or “descending.” The angels came down to sing at Jesus’ birth. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus when he was baptized.


Now we understand that God and the Holy Spirit are all around and with us. Blow soap bubbles and watch how they

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Scripture-based Focus Moments

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float through the air. The bubbles will “descend” too. Try to catch one or interact with it in some way. Wonder:

- How can the bubbles remind us of the Holy Spirit?
- How is the Holy Spirit different from these bubbles?

No matter in what form or how we understand the Holy Spirit, we know God sends the Spirit to us. It comes every time—whether it comes down or goes up, even if we cannot touch, feel, or hold it.

**Luke 4:14–21/4:13–21 IV**

**Christ’s Mission Is Our Mission**

**Preparation:** Print the verses of Luke 4:18–19 on cards, one for each person. On a sheet of letter paper, write “Good morning. I love you and have a mission for you. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to deliver a copy of my mission as found in your Bible to every member of this congregation. Thank you for helping me. Love, Jesus.” Put it in an envelope inside your Bible.

In a group gathering, open the envelope and read the letter. Then read Luke 4:18–19 aloud and give each person one of the cards you prepared beforehand. When Jesus first began his ministry, he read this scripture to announce his mission. He cared about people who were sick, hurting, in trouble, or needed help. Jesus did everything he could to make the things he said happen. Jesus’ ministry was this mission which he started for us to keep it going. Christ’s mission is our mission. Read Luke 4:18–19 often so you can follow Jesus in mission.

**Luke 4:21–30**

**Challenged by the Truth**

We hear statements and receive information every day. Some of it is true and some is not. We have to decide whether to believe it. Do you think the following statements are true?

- Don’t cross your eyes—they’ll get stuck that way!
- Break a mirror and you’ll have seven years of bad luck.
- If you make an ugly face, it will stay that way.
- Touching a toad will give you warts.

Can you think of another one?

We doubt that these statements are true, but we know who does tell the truth: Jesus Christ. Read Luke 4:21–30. In this scripture story, Jesus had just shared his mission as God’s son to bring good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners, bring sight to the blind, and release the oppressed. Then he said “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” meaning that it was true, and that Christ was the son of God sent to bring God’s shalom. The listeners in the synagogue were angry. They didn’t like what they heard. But Jesus Christ is who he said he was. And he came with a mission to care for others.

- Do you believe Jesus came to bring God’s vision for all creation—shalom?
- Do you believe Jesus’ mission was to care for others? Why do you believe that?
• When you are in trouble, I am here.  
• Share your love with other people.  
• I will be with you.  
• Take care of your brother or sister.  
• You are a really nice and loving person.  
• You have said many prayers to me.

What do you think Jesus would say to you? Today, find time to be with Jesus and listen for what he might say to you.

Who Is Your Neighbor?
Community of Christ believes that God’s vision for creation is shalom: a fullness or completeness of peace. The story of the Good Samaritan shows one way we can share God’s shalom with others. Tell the story from scripture, starting at verse 30 to engage immediately in Jesus’ story. Participants may act out the story as it is read and show the actions that the Levite, the priest, and the Samaritan had toward the man on the road. (Explaining the background roles of the priest and Levite or how a Samaritan was viewed during this time are not needed to understand the compassion shown. The importance is to show that some people refused to help the traveler because of their differences, and one person helped in a significant way.) After the story, ask:

• What happened to the man who traveled on the road?
• Which traveler showed God’s shalom? What did he do?
• When have you ever shared a feeling of peace, love, or comfort with another person? Tell about it if you wish.

What Matters Most?
Have a table display and items to set the table: napkins, silverware, dishes, glasses, and candles. Divide the group of participants in half. One group helps set up the table for a meal; the other group gathers in a circle and reads aloud the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38–42. When both groups have finished their tasks, gather them. Ask:

• In this story, what was Martha doing? (cleaning and preparing the meal)
• What was Mary doing? (listening and learning from Jesus)
• Why was Martha unhappy with Mary?

(Jesus said that Mary had made a better choice: to sit and learn from him. It is important that we learn how Jesus would have us help others, as Martha was doing.)

• Tell about the ways you help others. (like Martha)
• Tell about the ways you listen and learn about Jesus. (like Mary)

Come Apart and Pray
Play charades showing all the places one might pray. First, brainstorm ideas of where participants pray: in bed at night, at a meal, in church, before taking a trip, in your private sacred place, with friends, at camp, with your parents, or other. Participants may want to write an idea or two on index cards. Then, as in charades, have each one act out (without words) their favorite places to pray, while others guess where it is. Afterward, discuss:

• Do you say different prayers in different places?
• What do you pray when you are alone? With others?
• What are some places to pray that you haven’t tried yet?
• Name some places where people pray? (Jews at the Western wall in Jerusalem, many legislative bodies at the beginning of a session, parents in their car.)

Invite all to discover a new place to pray in the coming week.
Lost and Found
Play a game of “hoarding” snacks (wrapped treats). Spread many wrapped treats where children can collect them. Give each child a paper bag or cup, and when you whistle, they are to “gather” as much as they can in their containers in a few seconds’ time. (Don’t give them time to take it all.) After a short time, stop them and ask: how did it feel to gather as many snacks as you could? Fun? Now invite children to read today’s scripture story from the Lectionary Story Bible, Year C, by Ralph Milton, page 181.

Afterward, ask children how it would feel to have gathered all these snacks and then to leave it all behind? This is what Jesus meant in the parable of the rich man who wanted to build big barns to collect all his crops. How can we do that? Now have children take their bags or cups of snacks and pour everything into a large container. Have them now divide it up equally into cups or bags to share with others in the larger group. We are rich when we know God loves us.

Shattering the Status Quo
Gather participants around a collection of building blocks, dominoes, or other items they can use to build something. On finishing their creation, cue someone to knock the creation down. What shocking behavior! Listen to the builders’ complaints as you invite all to help you pick up the pieces.

Say: God’s vision for creation is shalom. Shalom is a peace that includes justice (fairness, people having what they need). Where have you felt or seen shalom? (wait for responses) How do people act who are living God’s shalom? How are we supposed to help bring about shalom? If we ever wonder how to act, we only need to look to Jesus Christ, and follow his example.

In Luke 12:49–56, Jesus says that following him may cause division between us and others. This is scary for us, no matter what age we are. But disciples must be ready to stand up for God’s ways, no matter what others think and say. How could we stand up to someone who is being a bully at school; to someone who is cheating on a test; or to someone who is selfish and unkind? Jesus said that following him is not always easy. But we know that God will be with us as we help create shalom wherever we are.

Be Compassionate
Play a game of tag. Everyone starts out bent over. Give the person who is “IT” a bottle of bubble-blowing soap and a bubble blower. IT runs to a bent-over person and blows bubbles on him or her. This allows that person to stand up straight and they become the new IT. IT takes the bubble blower and runs to blow bubbles on another bent-over person. This continues until everyone is standing straight. (Note: if done in a small space, have participants do this in slow motion rather than running.) Gather everyone and ask:

- How does it feel to be bent over?
- How does it feel when someone helps you to stand straight?
- How did it feel to be IT and help someone feel better?

There are many ways to help someone feel better or stand taller, things we can all do. That is what compassionate means. Jesus was compassionate, sharing in love with others. We can do that too. Find someone this week that you can help feel better.
Luke 14:1, 7–14

Inviting All

Invite participants to play a game of Musical Chairs. Set chairs in a circle, two fewer chairs than there are players and two chairs that are smaller than the others. Players circulate around the outside the circle of chairs as music is played. The leader stops the music at random. When the music stops, players will race to sit in a chair. Two players will not have chairs, and two will be in small chairs. Play the game a few times; then discuss: How did it feel to be on the small chairs? How did it feel not to have a seat at all? How might that compare with how it feels when we leave people completely out or give them only a small space in our lives?

In today’s parable (Luke 14:1, 7–14), Jesus says we ought to invite people who usually are not invited, or have nothing to give in return. Think about who these people might be in your schools, neighborhood, club, or work. Give everyone a card and pencil to write the name of one or more people who fit this description. Challenge everyone to turn the cards into invitations just as Jesus taught—to invite those people to their homes, to an event, or to their next party.

Luke 15:1–10

Rejoice! The Lost is Found!

Invite everyone to write their names on dried lima beans or other large beans with ultrafine-point markers. Collect the beans in a paper bag already half-full of beans. Shake the bag; spread the beans on a table. Have participants hunt for the “lost” beans (the ones without any names on them). They will also enjoy finding their own beans.

In the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, Jesus talked about people who have become lost to God. Lost may mean that things of God are not part of our lives, or that we choose to do something that leads us from God. What might people feel who seem to be lost (sad, lonely, angry, hurt)? How can we help them feel God’s love?

Have participants write on blank lima beans the names of people they know who might feel lost in some way. Offer a prayer or invite prayers that all will welcome the lost to be with us, to be found! Encourage each person to “find” the person they identified by befriending them, inviting them to an event, contacting them, or showing care for them in some way.


Lost and Found

Invite a group into a circle and begin a conversation about lost and found.

• Have you ever been lost? Or lost something? How does it feel?
• How did you feel when you found something you lost?
• How did you feel, if you were lost, when you were found?

Jesus once told a parable of being lost and found. The prodigal son is a parable Jesus told of God’s joy when we are “found” after we were “lost”—when we return to God’s love. Read Luke 15:11–32 from a children’s bible storybook or from a Bible.

• What did the son receive when he returned to his father? Draw the following items in words or pictures on a flip chart: feast, fattened calf, ring, sandals, best robe, father’s hug, and father’s love.
• What was the most important gift the son received? Circle the word or picture of father’s love on the flip chart.

Affirm that each of us is loved with the greatest of all loves, the love of God. Offer a prayer of thankfulness for God’s grace and generosity—God’s love and forgiveness.

Serve God

Serving God is what Community of Christ strives to do in its personal and corporate presence in the world. Read aloud the book We Share, showing the pages, or projecting the pages onto a screen using the DVD. We Share can be purchased from Herald House.

Luke 17:5–10

Increase Our Faith

Jesus Christ taught that the kingdom of heaven is made of small things that can grow large and strong. In today’s lectionary reading, Jesus tells his disciples their faith can increase from the size of a mustard seed to become the greatest in the garden.

Gather participants to taste mustard on a cracker or bread. Show a tiny mustard seed. If possible, show a photo of a full-grown mustard plant. Ask participants:

• Can you believe such a strong taste comes from something so small?
• Is your faith sometimes as small as the mustard seed?
• Can it grow to be great, like the mustard plant?
• How can you help your faith grow?

Give each participant a mustard seed to remind them to have faith, and that great things can come from small beginnings.

Luke 17:11–19

Get Up and Go

In today’s lectionary story, 10 lepers who call out to Jesus for healing are blessed. Jesus told them to “Get up and go” (v. 19) to the priest, and along the way, all 10 are healed. But only one returns to praise God. This story provides insight into how often (or how rarely) we recognize blessings and take time to give thanks.

Dramatize the story with 11 people of all ages. Encourage the 10 “lepers” to express their feelings through their movements. They were outcast and in pain, so they may bend over, cover their sores in shame, or avoid others. Once they are healed, they can express how they feel—would they run, jump, dance, or sing? Only one leper returns to thank Jesus. What is this person showing by his or her action?

Invite everyone to tell a nearby person how they have experienced God’s grace, and what they acknowledge in their lives as God’s generous blessing to them. Ask how class members express joy in response to blessings they have received.

Luke 18:1–8

Justice for All

Share the story of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8) from the Lectionary Story Bible, Year C, by Ralph Milton, pp. 212–213. The unjust judge finally gave in to a woman’s pleas for justice because she never gave up. Jesus says this is how we should pray—repeatedly, many times a day.

Are you concerned about justice? God hears the prayers of those who are poor, those who have been marginalized, and those who are oppressed. If we are in tune with the Holy Spirit, inquiring and listening throughout the day, our faith will grow and our relationship to God will strengthen. Compassionate God will respond to our concerns for justice. Today, Children’s Sabbath focuses on the needs of children. Lift prayers to God for justice for all children.

Luke 18:9–14

Worth of All Persons

Worth of All Persons is an Enduring Principle of Community of Christ. Worth of All Persons means: “We value and love all people, just as God does” (We Share picture book, pp. 20–21).
Show the illustration from *We Share*, pp. 20–21, or project this image from the *We Share* CD (sold with the book). Ask participants to first identify the differences between the children, and then say what the children have in common. Discuss:

- Are the children more alike than different?
- What is good about being different?
- What is good about being similar to one another?

In today’s lectionary reading, Jesus told a parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to teach his disciples that no one is better than another. Think about a time when you thought you were better than someone else. How do you feel about that now? What practices can you do to serve Jesus humbly and honor the worth of all persons?

**Luke 19:1–10**

**Grace and Generosity**

Today’s scripture story is about Zacchaeus, the tax collector who responded to God’s grace (shown to him by Christ), by giving half of his possessions to those who were poor, and returning four-times the money he may have fraudulently taken from others in the course of his tax-collecting duties. We could say Zacchaeus turned his heart to God.

Try an experiment: cut out a large paper heart (at least eight inches square) and lay it on the floor (or draw a large heart with sidewalk chalk). Write “God’s Heart” on it. Cut out smaller hearts from paper, the size of business or index cards. Hold your heart card vertically (the heart facing you) about waist-high. Drop the card. The card will spin and land away from the heart on the ground—it will not drop straight down. Now try “turning” your heart to God. Hold your heart card horizontally, waist-high, facing “God’s Heart” toward the ground. Drop the card, and watch it drop straight down onto the large heart. To respond to God’s love and grace, we need to turn our hearts to God! Ask:

- When have you felt God’s grace and love (as Zacchaeus did)?
- How can you respond (turn your heart) to God?


**Blessed Is the One Who Comes**

Read the story of the event we celebrate as Palm Sunday, when Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem on a donkey as people shouted praises (Luke 19:28–40). Notice that verse 36 says that people spread their cloaks on the road in front of Jesus to walk across. They offered up something precious of their own to prepare Jesus’ way.

Use paper grocery sacks or a roll of newsprint to make shawls (or make vests from felt or other fabric). Turn the sacks upside down and cut out a neck opening and armholes from the bottom and bottom corners of the bag to make a “vest” for each person. Cut an opening up the middle. Then each person can decorate a bag as a cloak to wear and lay on the path for Jesus. The decorations can include what is unique about the wearer; what he or she has to share or “lay down” for Jesus; or joyful images of love.

When cloaks are done, they can be worn in worship or during a Palm Sunday parade and placed on the path for Jesus.


**God’s Chosen One**

Today’s scripture story is about Jesus’s last moments on the cross. The Roman soldiers made fun of him; they called him “king” and challenged him to save himself. Jesus Christ was the king, the chosen one, but as God’s son, he did not put himself first. Read the story “God’s Chosen One” from the *Lectionary Story Bible, Year C* by Ralph Milton, pp. 110–111.

- What did the criminal hanging next to Jesus say to the Roman soldiers?
- What did he say to Jesus?
- What did Jesus say in response?

Even though Jesus was likely in great pain, he was kind and gentle—truly God’s Chosen One.

Christ Is Risen

To make today’s story of finding the empty tomb more real, remove some furniture from the room. When people enter the room to find no table or chairs, invite them to sit on the floor to discuss where the furniture went. (Be prepared with a couple of chairs for those who cannot easily sit on the floor.) Was the furniture stolen, was it a prank, who did it? Tell the story from Luke 24:1–12 of the women who found Jesus’ tomb empty. Discuss how surprised they were, just like finding this room empty. What many consider the most important story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ showed the power and love of God; power even over death.


Break Bread Together

In Luke’s story of Jesus breaking bread and offering a prayer, (Luke 24:13–35), the disciples recognized him as Christ, showing that simple acts of invitation and hospitality can open our eyes, and in that moment we can see and experience the love of Jesus.

Set a table with loaves of bread and “wine.” Give participants large sheets of paper and colorful markers. Invite them to sketch a quick drawing or write the identifier of a person who tends to be overlooked, left out, or uninvited—someone in their neighborhood, school, workplace, or other location. (This can also be done with magazine pictures they can choose from or hidden around the room for them to find). When finished, ask the participants to describe their person, then tape their paper to one of the chairs around the table.

Ask participants to reflect on the persons they have “invited to the table.” Ask them to imagine: in that moment together, in our simple acts of invitation and hospitality, will our guests experience the love of Jesus? Will we?

Challenge participants to consider inviting that person to their home to break bread together. Sing together a hymn of welcome and love, “On the Journey to Emmaus,” CCS 272.


Hope Is Fulfilled

Preparation: Gather small objects in baskets (enough for everyone) to pass around the congregation during the focus moment. Items can be stones, shells, flowers, nuts, or other items from nature.

Jesus appeared to the disciples after death, letting them touch his hands and feet so they would know he was real and had overcome death.

Instruct participants: As the basket passes to you, choose a small object that draws your mind to the realness of Jesus. When you take it home, place it somewhere you pass by every day. Every time you go by it, slow down and notice it. Take just a moment to think about this real object that reminds you Jesus is real, just as this object is real. There is new life through Jesus, and hope is fulfilled.

John 1:43–51

Can Anything Good Come Out of [fill in the blank]?

Show a world globe to the congregation. Ask people to tell you what they see and then get them to tell the names of the countries they see. Ask them to name some countries they cannot see now. Propose a rhetorical question of how we can be sure of a place outside our worldview. Next, pick some people to each name one place he or she would never want to visit. Once you get a few responses, ask everyone to consider how they can be sure there is nothing good about those places. Brainstorm as a group and list possible good qualities that could exist in one (or a few) of the places named.
John 2:1–11
Believe in Christ

Preparation: Place clear tape in a cross shape near the top of an inflated balloon. Practice this activity beforehand.

Read John 2:1–11, the story of Jesus turning water into wine. In verse 11, it says that in this action, Jesus “revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” Discuss:

- What does it mean to put your faith in someone?
- Why are some people easier to believe or have faith in than others?

Show the balloon (keeping the tape out of sight). Convince them that you can put a pin in it and it won’t pop. Ask:

- Do you believe that I can do that? Why or why not? If I always tell the truth, will you believe me?

Stick the point of the pin into the balloon in the center of the clear tape. Push it in and let go. The balloon will not pop.

Sometimes it is hard to believe something because we have never seen it before. But if Jesus did it or said it, you can believe it! That is why the disciples—and we—can put our faith in, and believe in Jesus Christ.

John 3:1–17
Believe in the One

In the scripture story, Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a leader among the Jews, asks Jesus many questions. Among the answers is a verse (John 3:16) that has been memorized by many Christians. Invite everyone to learn this scripture through the choral reading below. Learners will repeat with you a phrase from the verse, or will clap in rhythm. You may have a partner lead the response.

For God (clap, clap)
So loved the world (make a round shape with your arms, repeat “the world”)
God gave (put hands out, palms up, repeat “God gave”)
God’s only Son (cross hands over chest, repeat “God’s only Son”)
So that everyone (spread arms out to include everyone, clap, clap)
Who believes in the One (point index finger up, say, “Oh, yes; the One”)
  God sent (put hands out, repeat “God sent”)
Won’t perish (shake finger in “no” pattern, repeat “won’t perish”)
But will have (clap, clap)
Eternal Life (shout “Eternal Life!”)

—Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit ™ Multiage/Ages 5–12 Lent/Easter 2014, p. 18.

John 4:5–42/4:7–44 IV
Share Your Story

Prepare: Put one tablespoon of baking soda in a clear glass jar. Have one-third cup of vinegar to add to it. Provide circle-shaped notepaper (“bubbles”) and pencils for all participants.

The scripture story in John 4:5–42 is about a woman at a well who met Jesus. After talking with him, she “bubbled over” with joy. She ran into town and told everyone she met!

Imagine this is how she felt before she met Jesus (show baking soda in the glass jar). Now imagine this is how she felt after she met Jesus (pour vinegar in the glass and watch it bubble up).

Have you ever felt like this—bubbling over with a feeling of love and excitement? Think about that time. How do you feel when you think about how much God loves you? With whom can you share your bubbling excitement? Give participants “bubbles” (one per person) and pencils to write the names of people with whom they can share their love of God.
John 6:1–21
Our Gifts Are Multiplied
For a visual aid, have a barbecue grill with charcoal placed where all can see it. Lead a discussion of seasonal cookouts—what are favorite barbecue foods? Charcoal provides the heat needed for cooking, but it won’t cook food when it is cold.
Ask: What do you need to start the charcoal? A match! Point out there can be no fire, no burning, no cooking, and no delicious meal without a match to start the fire. Strike a match for visual effect (use caution—do not light the charcoal).
Tell the story of Jesus feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children. The disciples were not sure how they could ever feed so many people. It took one little boy to get the meal started with his five loaves of bread and two fish. He was like the match that set the process in motion. His generosity got the whole meal started.
Good things often start with the action of one person. Can you think of an activity or community service that has been ignited by a single child or adult? (For example, actions by Martin Luther King Jr., Mattie Stepanek, Mahatma Gandhi, Craig Kielburger, Henry Dunant and Gustave Moynier, and the creators of Alex’s Lemonade Stand.) Be sure to include people from your congregation and community who have made a difference. Ask: Can we be like the match and get a fire going in our world? How?

John 9:1–41
Open Your Eyes
Provide a large world map or globe. Today’s scripture story is of Jesus healing a blind man. Jesus healed and helped many people, giving us a pattern of how we should open our eyes to see what others need.
Give each participant a bandage and a pen to write a prayer of healing by completing the sentence “Jesus, help me to see….” For example:

- who is sad today
- who I can love in our neighborhood
- who needs my friendship

Have participants take turns reading their prayers and sticking them to the map. Just as Jesus healed the blind man, Jesus can help all of us open our eyes to the needs of others.

John 10:11–18
Hear Christ’s Voice
Tell the story of a good shepherd and his or her sheep, paraphrasing how Jesus described himself as a good shepherd in John 10:11–18. If possible, use a lamb puppet or stuffed toy lamb. Show how loving Jesus is to it, giving it food, water, comforting it when it is frightened. This short script may be used:

“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me. My sheep hear me, and they know my voice. I am not like a hired hand, who runs away when the wolf comes to snatch and scatter the sheep. I will lay down my life for my sheep, to protect them. I have other sheep too, not of this fold, and I will bring them also, so we will be one flock with one shepherd. For this reason God loves me, because I love my sheep and will give my life for them.”

Paper and crayons may be distributed to all who may wish to create drawings of the Good Shepherd and his sheep during the service.

John 11:1–45
Raised to New Life
The story of Lazarus reminds us that God is ever creating, renewing, bringing us to new life. Spring also reminds us of the renewing power of God’s creation. Invite participants to imagine themselves as a young tree, and to stand with plenty of space around them. Share:
Stretch out as a full tree. Your roots deep in the ground give you strength. Your branches and leaves reach to the sun. It was fall when your leaves turned from green to red, tan or orange, and then flew away in the blustery winds. It was winter when the storms come and snow covered your branches, yet your strong trunk kept you from breaking.

Your roots store the nutrients to form next year’s stem, leaves, and seeds. So now, when the spring comes, your roots move again, reaching deep into the earth. You trunk grows strong, and your branches stretch to the sun, growing new twigs, flowers, fruit, and leaves. Gently sway back and forth in the summer breeze and feel how firmly you’re rooted in the earth. You absorb energy from sun and light, and water through your stretching roots.—Adapted from Joseph Cornell’s Sharing the Joy of Nature

Life is good, and you bring shade, food, beauty, and nurture to all who see and depend on you. You are raised to new life!

You may wish to play “Tree Song” by Ken Medema or “Seed Wisdom” by Dave Heinz, available on iTunes, or sing “The Trees of the Field,” CCS 645.

**John 12:1–8**

*Accept the Gift*

During Jesus’ time, travelers’ feet became dusty when they walked along the roads. So, when they were guests in someone’s home, their feet were often washed for them—a way the hosts showed hospitality and care.

* What do you do for your guests?
* How does it make them feel to be cared for?
* How does it make you feel to care for them?

Read John 12:1–8. Mary offered Jesus this generous gift because of all that Jesus had done for her family. Mary had great love for Jesus and generously gave out of her true capacity. Jesus accepted this gift of generous love. Do we love Jesus, and others, in this same generous way? Explore this story one of two ways:

1. Wash one another’s feet or hands using a small amount of perfumed liquid soap and a bowl of water for rinsing. Use a soft cloth cut into strips to wipe one another’s feet (to simulate hair).
2. Make perfume to take and share as a gift for others. Mix fresh perfume this way:
   a. Pour baby oil into a small jar or bottle until it is one quarter full.
   b. Add a squeeze of lemon, lime, or strawberry juice; cinnamon oil; vanilla; or crushed flowers.
   c. Fill the rest of the bottle or jar with baby oil.
   d. Tightly seal the jar or bottle with the lid and shake to mix.

Ask: With whom will you share your generous gift? Note: Be aware of any in the group who might have fragrance sensitivities. Provide an option for them such as unscented lotion or soap.

**John 14:15–21**

*Come, Holy Spirit, Come*

In John 14:15–21 the writer answers the question, “How do we stay in faithful, loving connection with Jesus?” One of Jesus’ promises to the community of believers is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Ask: how have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter?

One way we may have felt it is as a comforter—just like the warm, comfy blankets we have at home. Gather as many participants as want to, to join with you wrapped in a large comforter. Giggling and crowding may occur as you draw close together. Ask: how does this feel? Warm? Cozy? Safe? Fun? Have you ever had this feeling in church, at a camp, with your friends or family? Affirm that Jesus remains in loving relationship with his believers who are unified in their love for God and one another.
John 15:1–8

Ubuntu (We Are One)

Have you heard the word Ubuntu? (wait for responses and encourage participants to say the word with you). Ubuntu is a South African word. Perhaps we can best understand it with a familiar story:

According to legend, an anthropologist proposed a game to children in an African tribe. He put a basket of fruit near a tree and told the kids the first one to reach the fruit would win them all. When he told them to run, they all took one another's hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying the fruits. When asked why they ran like that, as one could have taken all the fruit for oneself, they said, “Ubuntu, how can one of us be happy if all the others are sad?”

What is Ubuntu then? It is a philosophy of South African tribes that can be summed us as “I am because we are” or “a person is a person through other people.” We might define it as today’s theme: “We Are One.”

John 15:9–17

Love One Another

Have a basket full of an assortment of fruit. You could have children pantomime trees by standing tall with arms spread, vines by intertwining their arms, and bushes by squatting down in a rounded shape. As you speak, hold up fruit that would grow on each type of plant.

Jesus sends his disciples to go and bear fruit. But how can we do that? Are we apple or peach, cherry or mango trees? Do we have vines to grow grapes or kiwi or watermelon? Are we a bush to grow blueberries or raspberries or blackberries? No, but we have other fruit. Our fruits are the gifts of caring, loving, listening, hoping, helping, and much more. Jesus wants us to love one another by sharing our gifts, our fruit. (Give each child a piece of fruit or a fruit snack.) Take these fruits to share with someone. Then during the week reach out and share caring, loving, and helping—your best fruits.

John 17:1–11

Make Us One

Jesus’ prayer closes with “protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 17:11) His prayer reminds us of the connectedness we all share as disciples.

We can imagine being in a grove of aspen trees. In fact, we can imagine that each of us is an aspen tree in a grove of aspens. Aspen trees only grow in community; they cannot grow alone. Though they appear to be separate trees, they are connected by their root system. In fact an entire grove of aspen trees, though they appear many, is really one organism, one body. Their deep roots give them the strength to weather difficult times and to reach the full potential that the Creator intended. Connected this way, aspen groves endure for many thousands of years.

Ask participants to stand and simulate a grove of aspens by connecting to another person with their feet touching, or by touching fingertips together.

We can share the love of Jesus Christ in our lives, knowing that our strength comes from our God who abides in community that connects us in a supporting life-giving way.

—Adapted from Together in Faith: A Season of Hope, USA Conference Worship Reflections

John 18:33–37

Listen to the Truth

Drama: “Listen to the Truth” by Erica Nye

Today is the end of the Christian year because next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, when we begin our wait for Jesus to be born. Each Sunday during the year we have had scripture readings that tell about Jesus’ life. From December through Easter we retell stories about how Jesus grew up and lived his ministry. Palm Sunday and Easter tell the story
of Jesus going to Jerusalem and the story of his death and resurrection. Since then we have heard what is recorded in the scriptures about what the disciples did after Jesus left and their retelling of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Now today, just before we start a new year, we read about Jesus’ experience in Jerusalem with the Roman governor, Pilate. Let’s see what the scripture says. Read John 18:33–37.

Did you understand what the story was about? (Children probably won’t understand this very well.) It can be confusing. That is probably how Pilate felt—confused. Yet there was something about Jesus he knew was true. Have you ever had the feeling when you weren’t sure you understood something, but in your heart you knew it was right or true?

Jesus was bringing truth to the world. What do you think Jesus wanted the world to know was true? Some answers might be: God loves everyone, there is hope no matter how difficult things can be, and God forgives us when we make mistakes.

In Jesus’ time, only important people and people with lots of money thought they were worth anything. Women, children, sick, old, or poor people weren’t respected or treated kindly. So Jesus teaching God loves everyone was a “truth” that was new and changed everything people thought about the way the world operated. Jesus’ truth is something the scriptures and the Holy Spirit help us understand.

For children: While you listen to the speaker, complete the word search, and remember the things we talked about today. (Word Search on page 60 at the end of this resource).

John 20:1–18
See, Believe, and Share

Mary Magdalene, a follower of Christ, showed extraordinary love, courage, and witness when she found the tomb of her Lord empty (John 20:1–18). She learned Jesus was not dead or taken away, but had transformed into the Risen Christ. Mary saw, believed, and shared this transformation with the disciples.

What does transformation mean: a change to something so new it is barely recognized from what it used to be. Imagine a caterpillar with its big eyes and strange body. It moves slowly and sluggishly. Yet, a caterpillar turns into a new creature, a butterfly, light and fast, fluttering on the wind. It now has wide colorful wings, and is no longer restricted to crawling along a twig or the ground. (If you have a caterpillar/butterfly puppet, or a photo, show the transformation from one to the other.)

Mary Magdalene saw Jesus in his last few days and hours; she saw and believed Jesus when he appeared to her after death. And she shared the story and message of Jesus with others.

As Spring, and Earth Day approaches this week, when flowers and trees become new, think about what Mary Magdalene experienced: she saw, she believed, and she shared. Who will you share the story of Jesus with?

John 20:19–31
Peace Be with You

“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” (John 20:19). This experience of Christ appearing to his disciples after the resurrection was one of pure joy. Jesus left a message with all who followed him—a message of less contention, fear, fighting, and doubt; a message of more peace, love, joy, and hope.

Make a large poster, listing what Christ’s message is: less what, and more what? (See sample.) Ask participants to call out what they would like less and more of. They may wish to create these in parallel (less war, more peace, etc.) Use colorful markers and bold writing. Celebrate the message of your poster by singing “Peace Salaam Shalom” CCS 310 or “Peace of Jesus” CCS 318.
Acts 2:1–21
Filled with the Spirit

Pentecost shows the power of the Holy Spirit to build community and be of “one heart and one soul.” God wants to be one, together with each other in community, just as God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are one—the Trinity.

What is the Trinity “like”? Invite all to think of a word or idea—a thought. Ask them to hold their hands in front of their mouths, and speak the word aloud. Explain that the “thought” is like God, where the idea begins. The “spoken word” is Jesus Christ, who was described as The Word (John 1). The breath they feel on their hands is like the Holy Spirit, the breath that carries the spoken word out, that puts the idea into practice. The Hebrew word for breath is the same word for spirit: ruach.

Invite them to think of another word or idea—something God would share with us—such as “shalom” or “I love you.” They may say their words aloud as they feel the breath that carries their words. God speaks, God’s Word acts, and God’s Spirit moves over creation. Affirm that God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit are all part of the same one God we believe in; they are different ways we understand God.


Acts 2:1–21
Ruach (Wind of God)

As the story is read, set a scene to recall Pentecost by turning on fans and handing out flame-colored (orange, yellow, red) crepe paper or ribbons to wave during the story. Consider playing bells, drums, and other percussion instruments during the next hymn.

All the disciples and other friends of Jesus gathered in a big room to hear the stories of Jesus. They enjoyed one another’s company and ate together. They discussed what Jesus had told them while he was with them. And they prayed together. While they were gathered a strange and wonderful event occurred.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, came the sound of a rushing, mighty wind. It was as if a violent whirlwind was in the room with them!

And that isn’t all…

They saw flames above their heads!

And that still isn’t all…

They all experienced a powerful Spirit and they all began to speak in languages they’d never spoken before!

The noise from the wind and from all the people speaking at the same time was so loud people outside on the street were beginning to wonder what in the world was happening in that room!

People came from all around to find out what all the commotion was about. They were amazed and thought it was marvelous they were hearing people speaking in their own languages, because they knew the people in the room were all from Galilee and probably wouldn’t know any other language except their own.

Some people were thrilled to be hearing about the wonderful works of God. Other people didn’t understand what was going on and thought the people inside were crazy!

Peter stood up and started to preach to all the people standing outside. He explained that what they were seeing and hearing was the power of the Holy Spirit.

On that day, thousands of people decided to follow Jesus. They all continued to gather for meals, fellowship, and prayer, and became a loving community energized by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:42–47
Embody Sacred Community

Acts 2:42–47 focuses on the key attributes of Christian community, modeled after the Trinity (God-Jesus Christ-Holy Spirit). Just as the Trinity is a loving community, we can create loving communities. Invite participants to make a model
that expresses their relationship with God and with one another. On a workspace, provide a 3 in/8 cm x 9 in/23 cm card and crayons or markers for each person. Give the following instructions while demonstrating:

1. Fold the paper into three equal sections. Crease the folds well. On one side of the card, write “God” in the first section, “Jesus Christ” in the next, and “Holy Spirit” in the third.

2. Flip the paper over and write your name in each of the three blank sections.

3. Tape the outside edges of the paper together to form a triangle with God-Jesus Christ-Holy Spirit on the inside and your name on the outside. Tape your triangle at the ends.

When everyone is done, put their triangles together to create a “community.” Use tape or paper clips to hold all the triangles together. Celebrate the creation of your sacred community.


Acts 5:27–32

We Are Witnesses

Stage something to happen in the room and then ask people what they saw and heard (for instance, a person could blow kisses or give paper hearts to everyone; two youth could invite a person to dance out of the room with them; or one person could speak to another in another language. The more unusual or unbelievable the behavior for your setting, the better.) Say, “I need witnesses to tell me what happened here today.” Ask what everyone saw and heard.

The disciples witnessed the life of Jesus Christ and told others. They proclaimed the good news so everyone would know what had happened. There might have been a time when you told people something. Did they believe you? Did they try to talk you out of it?

We are witnesses of the good news of Jesus Christ. What are some of the good things that happen in church, camp, or other places, for which you can be a witness? (Something that you can tell about.) Tell about a time you told someone about God’s love by sharing something that happened in your life or telling a story about Jesus.

Acts 7:55–60

Glorify God

Soon after Jesus was resurrected, his followers and friends gathered in homes to talk about his teachings, pray, eat meals together, and help others. As more and more people gathered, the church leaders knew they needed people to serve, teach, and help. So they set some followers as a special group of ministers called deacons. Stephen was one of those early deacons.

Stephen cared for people who were sick. He took food to those who were hungry. He gave clothes to those who needed them. He visited people who were lonely. He did all these things because he loved Jesus Christ and wished to glorify God.

What are the ways that you help others? Give each participant paper and marker or crayon to trace his/her hand. Inside the hand drawing, they can write a way to others and glorify God. Invite each one to read their idea, and then display all on a wall or poster. Sing a song to glorify God such as: “God Within, God Around,” CCS 20 or another hymn of service or praise.

Acts 9:1–20

Be God’s Instrument

Have you ever heard of Paul, a disciple in the first century church? At first, he was Saul, a Jewish man who was a Roman citizen. He persecuted people who followed Jesus Christ. But God changed him—and his name changed from Saul to Paul—and said he was “an instrument I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and…the people of Israel”—Acts 9:15, adapted.
• If you could be an instrument, what would you be: a tuba with a deep sound? A strumming guitar? A flute? Drums that pound out a rhythm?
• But can you be an instrument by yourself? Can a tuba “blow its own horn”? Can a guitar strum its own strings?

Each instrument needs a musician. Saul/Paul became an instrument for God.

Provide percussion instruments. Invite participants to keep rhythm with a pianist so they can play “beautiful music” together. (Suggested hymns: “Instruments of Your Peace” CCS 364, or “Make Me a Servant,” CCS 597).

Acts 9:36–43

Alive in the Lord

Tell the story of the raising of Tabitha (or, in Greek, Dorcas) from Acts 9:36–43. This story is about a community of disciples of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus was gone, the apostles did the same deeds Jesus did—they became healers and preachers, helpers and teachers. Every person in this story acted in the name of Jesus!

• How did Tabitha act like Jesus?
• How did Peter act like Jesus
• How do YOU act like Jesus?

Participants can tell how they follow Jesus or may use a charades format to show how they act like Jesus.

Acts 11:1–18

Make No Distinction

Peter accepted Cornelius as his friend. They belonged to different religious communities, had different cultural practices, and they even ate different foods! Some people don’t want to be friends with someone who is different from them; some people actually bully or tease those who are different. What situations like this have you seen in the news, in your school, or in your community?

Community of Christ believes in the Worth of All Persons. We believe that God’s grace and generosity is given to each person. Let’s discover what we may have in common with one another, even with our differences.

Play “Circle Up,” a game about how we’re the same. Point out two large areas in your meeting space. You will give a descriptor, such as “Circle Up if you’re wearing blue socks.” Everyone with blue socks will move to one circle. Everyone not wearing blue socks will move to the other circle. Descriptors can be anything:

• Everyone wearing glasses (or a hat, or blue jeans), circle up!
• Everyone wearing a watch (or with white socks), circle up!
• Everyone who likes math (or languages, or science, or loves to read), circle up!
• Everyone who has horses (or cats, or dogs, or chickens), circle up!

Call out other ways to regroup participants based on interests, skills, clubs, and other activities in which they are involved. Summarize the story of Peter and Cornelius as an example of the love God intends for us to share. We are all called to treat everyone with love.

Acts 16:9–15

Proclaim the Good News

Tell this story of Paul and Lydia from Acts 16:9–15 (adapted):

Paul traveled to a town called Philippi and on the Sabbath day, he went outside to a place of prayer. He sat down to speak to the women. A woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening. God opened her heart to listen eagerly to what Paul said. She and her household were baptized, and she invited them to stay at her home.

Ask: Can you imagine that sitting and telling someone about Jesus Christ would cause that person’s heart to open and he or she would be baptized?
Think of someone you know and like to talk with. Print that person's name on a paper card. Now think of an experience that has happened at church, at camp, in your home—something that proves to you that God loves you, that Jesus Christ is your friend. The experience you tell about can be wonderful or it might be simple. Do you want to share that story with us now? The next time you are with the person whose name is on your card, share your “Jesus–story” with them, and see what happens!

**Acts 16:16–34**

**Believe in God**

Read or paraphrase the story of Paul and Silas in prison from Acts 16:16–34. Gather participants into a sitting circle and ask them to imagine being in jail together. Pass around a long roll of crepe paper for each person to loop around their wrists before passing to the next person. Say that while Peter and Silas were in jail, they prayed and sang hymns while the other prisoners listened to them. Paul’s and Silas’s prayers and songs helped other prisoners believe in Jesus Christ.

As a group, sing “Jesus Loves Me.” Say that while Paul and Silas were singing, an earthquake suddenly shook open the doors of the jail and made their chains fall away! Now, break through your chains because you are free! Offer your praises to God! What was the first thing Paul and Silas did once out of prison? They went home with the jailer and baptized the jailer and his family!

**Ephesians 1:3–14**

**Set Your Hope on Christ**

Ask participants: What makes you most hopeful, most joyful? I will start my list, and feel free to add to it by shouting out your answers. I feel hopeful when I see toddlers take their first steps, when a new recipe turns out delicious, when I listen to kids talk about what they care about, when a new plant blooms. *(Add your own experiences of hope.)* When do you feel hope? *(Allow time for participants to call out their ideas.)*

Hope comes from the grace and generosity of God, from knowing we are adopted as God’s own, and that love and peace can thrive in the world when we bring hope and joy, love and peace to others. This day, go out to share and live out your hope in Christ.

**Ephesians 2:11–22**

**Proclaim Peace**


As “In the Quiet of This Day” CCS 161 is quietly played in the background, ask everyone to turn to the hymn and read the words. At the end of the reflection time sing stanza 5 (Alleluia) together.

**Ephesians 4:1–16**

**One in Christ**

Before the invention of erasers in the late 1700s, people often used a rolled-up piece of bread to erase graphite. Demonstrate with bread and a chalkboard. Today, artists still use bread to lighten charcoal or pastel marks in their works. Let us consider this aspect of the bread of life as we kneel before the table of the Lord and receive that which can heal our brokenness and cleanse us.

**Ephesians 4:25—5:2**

**Live in Love**

Read the storybook *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth, (Dragonfly Books, 2002, ISBN 9780440412106). This story is about a girl who made a difference in her neighborhood after her search to find something beautiful helps her realize she can make those changes herself. Challenge the congregation to think of one thing they are willing to do to live in love as Christ did and make “something beautiful.”
**Ephesians 5:15–20**

**Sing to the Lord**

Display various types of bread. Ask people to identify the different types of bread on display. When making bread, varying ingredients and differing quantities of ingredients create different types of bread. Give examples (like wheat flour or white flour, cinnamon or pumpkin). The loaves are different textures, sizes, colors, and shapes, resulting in an endless variety of bread from around the world.

Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, uses differences to create a song of the diverse creation. Our voices are loud, soft, brassy, gentle, melodious, raucous, strong, clear, shrill, warm, flat, bright, and deep. Regardless of our differences, we can all sing to the Lord.

**Ephesians 6:10–20**

**Prepare!**

Have two loaves of bread—one white, one dark, to use as examples.

Historically, a person’s social class was often reflected by the color of bread he or she ate. Darker bread designated a lower class. White flour was more expensive to produce and thus, was eaten by those of high status. Today, we find the opposite; darker breads are more expensive and esteemed for their taste and nutritional value. The Living Bread, Christ, provides welcome, nourishment, and strength to all no matter their economic or social status and he challenges us to do the same.

**Philippians 1:21–30/1:22–30 IV**

**Live the Gospel**

Today is Heritage Day in Community of Christ, when we reflect on those in our past who lived the gospel so that it has become our way of life, too. Ask: is there someone who modeled God's love to you?

Set up a small “tree” (can be made of branches arranged in a vase) and comment that this is our “family tree.” Give participants small paper circles about 2 in/5 cm in diameter, with a string or yarn sewn through one end to hang on the tree (see sample), and pencils. Ask them to draw a portrait of someone who makes them feel welcome in Community of Christ, or has been an inspiration in living the gospel. Then ask each to bring their small portrait to tie onto a branch. Depending on time, you may have participants give the name of the person, or tell why their person is so special to them. Offer a prayer of thankfulness for those who have carried the gospel forward into each of our lives.

**Philippians 2:1–13**

**Be of One Mind and Heart**

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we read, “Be of the same mind, having the same love as Christ, of one mind with each other.” What is the mind of Jesus like?

Jesus and God are one and Jesus rightfully should have been treated like a ruler, but he was willing to be our servant to share God’s love. The rest of the scripture tells us how to be like Jesus: “Do nothing from selfishness or boastfulness, but be humble; think of others as better than yourself. Look out for the good of others.”—Philippians 2:1–5 adapted.

Ask participants to tell you the words from the scripture that we are to “be like” and write these on a flipchart or poster board. Words might include: share God's love, don't be selfish, don't boast, be humble, think of others, take care of others, etc. Keep this list present as a visual reminder to worshipers to “Be of One Mind and Heart.”

**Colossians 3:12–17**

**Let Christ Be in You**

Preparation: Ask two or three people to run into the circle when you give the cue. They may remain outside the room until you cue them in.

Gather the group and ask “Have you heard it said, 'Let Christ be in you'?"
• What does it mean to let Christ be in us?
• How do we act if Christ is in us?

Form a circle of the participants, and ask them to join hands. Begin singing a favorite song. Then, give a cue for the volunteers to rush in and try to join the circle (but not in a hurtful way). Watch what those in the circle do. Stop the song and discuss:

• Should we include everyone who wants to join us?
• How did you feel when the new people tried to join us?

Ask someone to read aloud Colossians 3:12–17 and then ask what the phrases mean. Jesus taught us that when we do something nice for someone else, we are doing it for him. Affirm that today we let Jesus be in our circle.

Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

Live in Faith

This letter to the Hebrews talks about Abraham who looked forward to a city designed and built by God. This is what we imagine when we talk about signal communities. This letter gives credit to God, who is the architect and builder of all things good. These are cities not of bricks and stone only, but of people who share their gifts with others.

Invite as many people to join in as possible. Have plain wooden or cardboard “blocks” available, one for each participant. With markers, participants are to decorate sides with what they have to share: have each write his or her name on one side, special skills on other sides (caring for animals, playing soccer); camp or event they attend and can invite others to on the top and bottom. When they are finished designing the blocks, talk to each one about what he or she has to share, holding up that person’s block. Invite all to build a “city” with the blocks. You may need to add extra blocks to have enough to create a city.
GENEROUSITY

Janné Grover

Matthew 5:38–48/5:40–50 IV
Matthew 10:24–39

Illustration by Jack Martin
Finger Labyrinth

“Walk” the labyrinth by tracing the path from the outside to the inside and back out with your finger. As you do, release worries, breathe in and out slowly, and relax.

When you get to the end, pause and give thanks for the One who invites you to “come and find rest.”

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Matthew 17:1–9/17:1–8 IV
We praise you, O God, for sending your beloved child Jesus born as a baby nurtured by his family, protected by strangers, who grew as a child who was taught in his temple, surrounded by his community, guided by his parents, who became an adult who loved and blessed the children, who cared for those who were sick, poor, and left out, who taught that God loves us like a parent, and who called us his friends. This one who was born a baby needing us died our Savior whom we all need, triumphant even over death, freeing us to live as your beloved children.

Matthew 22:15–22

### Word Search for John 18:33–37

**Word Bank**

- JESUS
- JOHN
- JOY
- LISTEN
- LOVE
- PILATE
- PILATE
- SHALOM
- TRUTH
- UNEXPECTED
- WORTHWHILE
- EVERYONE
- FORGIVEN
- GOD
- GOODNESS
- HOPE
- FORGIVEN
- GOD
- GOODNESS
- HOPE

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**Listen to the Truth**

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