

Sacrifice

In this week's readings, we witness people called by God to perform marvellous acts – giving birth in old age and curing the sick. Accepting these callings requires a willingness to sacrifice one's own comfort to serve God and others. The texts invite us to explore sacrifice in our own lives as we seek to live out God's call.

Focus scripture: Matthew 9:35–10:8, (9–23)

Matthew 9:35–10:8 (9–23) describes the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. There are many in need of Jesus' healing ministry. Jesus acknowledges that he cannot do this work alone and calls disciples to join him. However, the authority to cast out unclean spirits and cure disease requires that the disciples sacrifice their former lives and any hopes of wealth or prestige.

Jesus instructs them to begin their ministry in the Jewish community. While this may seem like an unfair exclusion of the Gentiles, it demonstrates the need to limit ministry at times so that it can be most effective, particularly when resources are few. It may also seek to address the internal turmoil of the predominately Jewish Matthean audience. The community needs to heal from the traumas experienced in the violent destruction of the temple, which was its primary sacred space and means of connecting to God. The passage points to the importance of ministering to and strengthening community. But this requires sacrifice and compassion on the part of those facilitating healing. The responses of the traumatized community are diverse, ranging from hostility and suspicion to gratitude and hospitality. Jesus is aware of this and instructs the disciples to mindfully discern their ministry.

Genesis 18:1–15 tells the prediction of Isaac's birth. Abraham and Sarah were focused on providing hospitality to mysterious visitors, an important custom in this time. Little did they know that it was

they who would be receiving a great gift that day. When they least expect it, God promises the miraculous birth of a child despite their old age. In accepting this promise, Sarah and Abraham had to sacrifice control of their life and trust in God. Despite their initial disbelief and laughter, they ultimately rejoice when Isaac is born.

In **Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19**, we hear the thankful voice of those who have cried out and have been heard by God. It serves as a reminder that God stands with and supports those who are persecuted. Even though they might meet death, God does not abandon them.

In great compassion, God creates and sustains hope. In **Romans 5:1–8**, Paul asserts how suffering need not end in despair, because of God's love that continues to pour into our hearts.

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Sharing the Good News brings joy and suffering. Paul shows us that this suffering ultimately leads to hope rather than despair. Likewise, Jesus demonstrates that making the sacrifice to share in his ministry does not require that we accept all suffering and hostility. Instead, we are called to discern where our ministry is most needed. God calls us, individually and as a church, to the urgent work of carrying God's love and care into the world, and we can trust in God to sustain us on the way. To what urgent work are you and your church being called today?



Focus scripture
Matthew 9:35–
10:8, (9–23)

Additional scriptures
Genesis 18:1–15
Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19
Romans 5:1–8

 *Seasons of the Spirit*
is based on semi-
continuous readings of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

**Healing God,
help us to open
ourselves to
your call to aid
others. Teach us
how to sacrifice
our own comfort
and expectations
to better serve
the needs of our
hurting world.
Grant us vision,
strength, and
joy for this work.
Amen.**

Lection Connection
links current events
with this week's
scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and
click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most of the children in your group probably have chores assigned them at school or at home. These chores are important in family and school life. When the tasks are not done, children suffer the consequence. It is also important that children realize that they have a task to do that supports the ministry of your congregation. Their contribution to a food collection or greeting visitors is significant. This participation helps them grow spiritually and also gives them the assurance that what they are learning in church school is important for the adults around them too.

In earlier sessions, the outreach zone focused on environmental care as a responsibility for the people of God. In the previous session, the children began an exploration of their call by Jesus and how they can live the life of faithful discipleship. The outreach zone in Respond offers an opportunity for the children to participate in the church's ministry for each session. You may find that a particular project is of such interest to the group that they want to continue it longer. Follow the lead of the children.

Pray that the children in your group will hear Jesus' invitation to them as they encounter this story from Matthew's gospel.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 9:35—10:8 (9–23), and [biblical background material](#) (p. 11).
- ☐ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volumes 6 and 9), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 6 and 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "Come, Holy Spirit" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ☐ Bring a box of wooden matches.

Engage

- ☐ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Jesus Calls Helpers](#)."

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ☐ **Art zone:** poster board, heavy paper, chalk, and fabric
- ☐ **Music zone:** song "Jesu Tawa Pano/Jesus, We Are Here" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #14 on the *Seasons Music CD*) and, optional, rhythm instruments
- ☐ **Discovery zone:** resource sheet "[Giving Pockets](#)," wooden craft sticks, business-sized envelopes, and self-adhesive magnet strip
- ☐ **Outreach zone:** information about partners in mission affiliated with your congregation or denomination
- ☐ **Quiet zone:** directions

Bless

- ☐ Bring, if possible, the song "As Long As We Follow/Na Nzela Na Lola" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)
- ☐ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Letter to Families](#)" (p. 107) for newcomers.



Sacrifice

Scripture

Matthew 9:35—
10:8 (9–23)

FOCUS To hear, with the disciples, that we are sent to show God's love in the world

Gather

Welcome the young people and any newcomers or guests; share stories and experiences from the past week.

Gather in the worship space and point out the green cloth. Green is the colour of new growth and this is a time when we learn about how to grow as followers of Jesus. Invite a volunteer to light the candle as you say:

This candle reminds us
of God's presence with us.
In this space, we hear stories
about God and God's people. (*Place Bible
beside candle.*)

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Come, Holy Spirit" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray (*Invite children to repeat each line after you.*)
Loving God,
thank you for this place
where we can learn and share.

May we be open to the work
of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Making connections

Hold up a wooden match. Invite volunteers who think they can break the match into two pieces to try. When everyone who wishes has tried, bundle ten to 12 matches together. Ask for volunteers to try to break the bundle of matches into two pieces. Again give each child who wishes a chance to try. Ask:

- Which was easier to do: break one match or the bundle of matches?
- Which is stronger, one match or the bundle of matches?

One observation from this activity is that several matches together are stronger than a single match. The same is true when there is a job to be done. Several people working together can often do the job better and faster. Suggest that they listen for how that works in the story today.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Ask a child to bring the Bible opened to Matthew from the worship table. Explain that the story today comes from the ninth chapter in Matthew. This book includes lots of stories about Jesus and about his teachings. Jesus knew how carefully and lovingly God made the world and he taught his friends, the disciples, about God's love.

The Bible story

Jesus was constantly sought out by people who wanted to be healed and people who wanted to hear what Jesus taught. Day after day, Jesus could hardly find time to be alone to pray. Tell the story, based on **Matthew 9:35—10:8**, from today's resource sheet "[Jesus Calls Helpers](#)." Following the story, ask:

- What took up so much of Jesus' time?
- Who were the people that Jesus asked to help?
- What did Jesus tell them to do?

Exploring the story further

(*To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.*)

Poetry group This group will explore the directions to the disciples through poetry. The poetic form of the instructions is:

Go to the villages and to the towns.
Tell the good news and make the rounds.
Heal the sick; comfort tall and small.
Speak of God's love, love enough for us all.

Have the children say the first line in unison after you. Have them sit on the floor and say it together; then say it together with their eyes closed. Have them say the second line in unison after you. Have them stand in a circle and say it together; then say it together with their hands on top of their heads. Now have them say the first two lines. Continue adding the third line and the fourth line. Each time repeat the line at least twice in some creative way. By the end of the activity, they will be able to say this four line poem.

Directions for disciples group This group will explore the meaning of the directions through drawing. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "[Directions for Disciples](#)," pencils or crayons, and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "[Directions for Disciples](#)."
- 2 The sentences under the boxes are another way of saying the directions Jesus gave the disciples.
- 3 Read what it says under each box. In the box, draw a picture of what the disciples might do to follow that direction.
- 4 When you finish, talk with another person about these directions for the disciples of Jesus and what you have drawn.

Reporting Invite the poetry group to say the poem and the directions for disciples group to show their illustrations.

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Textile art** This art project is an opportunity to talk about many followers of Jesus today. Beforehand, prepare a large sheet of white poster board and print "Followers of Jesus" across the top. Provide fabric and heavy paper "adult" and "child" people patterns (from the [Virtual Resources Booklet](#) on the *Seasons* website). The children can trace around the patterns with chalk and cut the fabric to create figures which can then be mounted on a sheet of poster board. Perhaps they will include themselves and people they know.
- ❑ **Music zone: Jesus' call** Sing this song as a response to Jesus' call for disciples. Play the song "*Jesu Tawa Pano/Jesus, We Are Here*" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #14 on the *Seasons Music* CD). Sing the song together in English and the other languages in the songbook. Provide rhythm instruments for the children to keep time to the music as they sing.
- ❑ **Discovery zone: Sent today** People continue to accept Jesus' invitation to tell the good news. Provide information about a partner in mission that your congregation or denomination supports. Such people have answered the call from Jesus, too. Some denominations have letters from partners in mission on their websites. If the Internet is not available in your learning area, you can print out some information for the group. Perhaps the children in this zone can prepare a message to send to the person, by mail or e-mail.
- ❑ **Outreach zone: Giving pockets** Jesus calls us to give freely to others because we know the loving care of God. This magnetic pocket reminder will encourage such giving daily. Follow the directions for making the pockets on the resource sheet "[Giving Pockets](#)." Before the children write on the craft sticks, talk together about appropriate activities that show God's love to others. List their ideas on newsprint.

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Acrostic poems** Encourage the children to think about the many possibilities they have to show God's love each day. Provide writing paper, pens or pencils, and these directions:



- 1 We have many ways to show God's love to others every day.
- 2 Here is an example of an acrostic poem for someone named Carl:

Carry a bag of groceries for an older person.
 Answer a question politely.
 Remember to pray for people who are sad.
 Listen to my parents.

- 3 Take a sheet of paper and a pencil.
- 4 Write your name – first name, last name, or nickname – down the left side of the paper.
- 5 Complete your poem with things you can do to show God's love.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Invite children to repeat each line after you:

Dear God, thank you for
 all the ways you care for us.
 Help us not to be afraid
 as we live in your way. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: "(Name), share the good news of God's love."

Distribute copies of the "[Letter to Families](#)" (p. 107) to newcomers.

Reflect

What sense did you gain of how confident the children are in God's abundant, inclusive love? In what ways might you continue to reflect a similar caring for the children, individually and as a group?



Jesus Calls Helpers

(based on Matthew 9:35—10:8)

Look
directly
at a child
as you name
each disciple,
moving from
child to
child.

Jesus left his home in Capernaum and went to cities and villages. He taught in the synagogues and healed people who were sick. But so many people came to Jesus. So many people needed help. Jesus looked at the crowds each day. "So many people need to hear about God's love. I need help to do this."

Jesus called his disciples – Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew the tax collector, another James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas, and said, "I will give you the authority to heal people as I do."

Then Jesus gave them these instructions:

"Don't go to some far-off place,
but stay near here and tell the people about the
good news of God's love.

Heal people who are sick.

Care for people who are left out.

Tell them that God's peace is already here.

You have received a lot, so give just as much to
others."

Now the disciples were ready to be helpers of Jesus. I wonder if they were excited. What do you think?



Directions for Disciples

Don't go to some far-off place, but stay near here and tell the people, "Hear the good news."

Heal people who are sick.

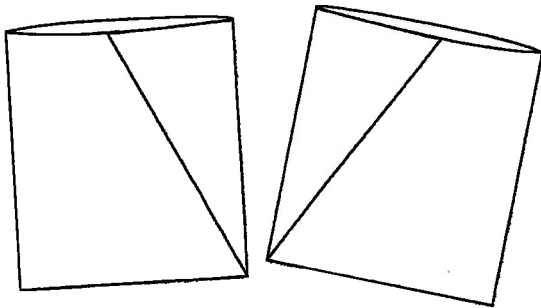
Care for those who are left out.

Tell them that God's peace is already here.

You have received a lot, so give just as much to others.



Giving POCKETS



Jesus invites us to give freely to others the loving care that we have been given. However, we all need a reminder from time to time.

Materials needed

wooden craft sticks, business-sized envelopes, self-adhesive magnet strips, crayons or markers, self-adhesive stickers, glue, glitter, and other decorations.

Instructions

Taken an envelope, seal it, and cut it in half to make two pockets. Take several wooden craft sticks. On each stick, write or draw something that you could do that would show loving care for another (phone a grandparent, read to a younger sibling, pray for a sick friend, bring food to a food bank...). Stick a length of self-adhesive magnet strip to the back of the envelope.

Hang your Giving Pocket on the fridge at home. Draw out a stick every week to remind you of a specific way to show God's love, then DO IT!



Letter to Families

Welcome to the *Season after Pentecost*, the longest season of the church year, which begins on June 7, the week after Pentecost, and will end on the Sunday before Advent. Traditionally this season is considered to be a time of learning and growth in the life of the church as we explore what it means to follow God faithfully day by day.

This season begins with a story about the creation of the world from the first two chapters of Genesis. The following three weeks the children will explore some of Jesus' teachings from the gospel of Matthew.

The rest of the season focuses on some foundational stories of our faith. From the book of Genesis the children will hear the stories of Isaac and Rebekah (chapter 24), of their sons Jacob and Esau (chapter 25 and 28), of Jacob and his wives Leah and Rachel (chapter 29), and of Jacob's son Joseph and his brothers (chapters 32 and 37). The season ends with two stories about Moses from chapters 1 and 3 of the book of Exodus.

We encourage you and your child to follow these stories at home as they unfold week by week, perhaps reading from a book of children's Bible stories (see some suggestions below). Sometimes the lectionary (a series of weekly scripture readings) will skip over several chapters of the story from one Sunday to the next, so it can be helpful for you to read those missing parts together.

One question that can be asked this season is, "What does it mean to live in God's way?" By sharing your experiences you can help your child learn what it means to follow God in her or his everyday life. Take time to discuss how you choose to follow God's ways at home, in the community, or at work. Talk about the experiences that encourage you. Also talk about the times you have found it difficult to live in God's ways, and where you find strength and hope to live faithfully. Share with them the places and times where you see signs of God's presence. Talk about those who have shown you what it means to live faithfully. Discussing these topics helps children know that your faith is important to you.

During this season we will pray weekly for your child. We hope that you and your child will also pray for us and for our group. May this Season after Pentecost be one of growth and discovery for you and your child.

Blessings,

Suggested children's Bibles for using at home: For young children, *Family Story Bible* or *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year A*. For older children, *Read, Wonder, Listen: Stories from the Bible for Young Readers*. Both are available from the publisher of *Seasons of the Spirit* at www.woodlakebooks.com. Also available is the book *A Creation Story* by Carolyn Pogue to help children explore the stories of creation in the book of Genesis. Other books from Wood Lake Publishing which can help children explore life and faith issues: *Is That Story True* and *Jesse's Surprise Gift* by Laura Alary and *The Alligator in Naomi's Pillow* by David Giuliano.

