

Solidarity

This week's readings ask us to consider what it means to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized. Solidarity may mean providing means of survival and support as God did for Hagar in the wilderness. But as Jesus shows, solidarity may also require us to enter uncomfortable, disruptive spaces in our pursuit of justice.

Focus scripture: Matthew 10:24–39

Jesus invites his followers into a space of discomfort and division. Jesus highlights that to follow him involves sacrifice and a willingness to disrupt the status quo – secrets will be brought into the open, family conflicts will arise, lives will be lost. This disruptive space mirrors the trials occurring within Matthew's primarily Jewish audience. The community was struggling with leadership, tradition, and ritual practice issues following the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Those who were following Jesus presented further complications as they disrupted communal unity through their new beliefs and practices.

Jesus reassures his followers that God values and cares for all people. Just as God cares for all creation. While this reassurance might bring comfort, Jesus concludes with the reminder that his message does not bring peace, but the sword. To bring about the reign of God requires radical changes in society; changes that challenge power structures. Followers are called to enact this change and to face the consequences that emerge from it.

Genesis 21:8–21 shifts the narrative focus from Abraham and Sarah to Hagar and Ishmael. With the text repeatedly reminding the reader that Hagar is Egyptian, Sarah labels the slave woman and her son a foreign threat to Abraham's lineage. Abraham casts Hagar and Ishmael cast out into lethal desert conditions at Sarah's request and, according to the storyteller, with God's approval. However, Hagar and Ishmael are not forgotten. Facing death, both cry out. God hears them. God stands in solidarity with and provides for those cast out into the wilderness by society. As womanist theologian Delores Williams

explains, this solidarity does not always fully liberate those who are oppressed, but it secures their survival. This offers hope that those who are oppressed and labelled as outsiders by society today have the power to find their voice, a voice that calls God and all of God's people to listen and to act.

In **Psalm 86: 1–10, 16–17**, we hear the cry to God from one who suffers affliction. It is a cry, like Hagar's, calling for strength, comfort, and God's favour. This call recognizes the power of God and understands that God uses this power to stand with those whom society scorns or deems shameful.

Romans 6:1b–11 invites believers to recognize the cost of discipleship. Through baptism, believers are united with Christ. To be one with Christ involves more than a metaphorical rising in new life. It requires that Christ followers live differently than they had previously. It requires that one live one's life like Christ – standing in solidarity with the marginalized, bringing healing, and sharing meals with those society has rejected. This new way of living is countercultural, challenging the conventions of Greco-Roman society that valued social hierarchy and status.

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God models for us how to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering. Solidarity requires that we not only listen for those suffering injustices but that we act. As followers of Christ, we enter uncomfortable spaces that disrupt our relationships to power and disrupt relationships, even with those closest to us. In doing so, we make God's love and justice more fully present in the world.



Focus scripture
Matthew 10:24–39

Additional scriptures
Genesis 21:8–21
Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17
Romans 6:1b–11

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

Gracious God, you are with us in times of great joy and in our wilderness moments. Help us to stand fearlessly in solidarity with those who are marginalized, just as you have been present with us. Grant us the courage to seek justice in your name. 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

Children in this age group know what it is like to experience fear. It may be the first day in a new school, the fear of a bully, concern about disasters seen on the television news, or fear of the unknown. Older children in the group may have also had experiences of facing situations with courage. They may have had the courage to try something new, to live with a health challenge, or to speak out to defend themselves or another.

The essence of this week's reading from the gospel of Matthew is that we are all

precious in God's sight. The session helps affirm that the children will never be outside God's presence and reinforces the message of God's abundant love, available to each and all of us. There may be some children in your group who are feeling insecure about themselves. The safer they feel, the more confident they will be about sharing their questions, concerns, and joys.

Pray that the children in the group will find assurance in Jesus' words and learn to trust that God is with them at all times.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 10:24–39, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 19).
- ❑ Set worship space with green cloth; bring candle and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 6), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 6), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Be Still and Know" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Do Not Be Afraid](#)."
- ❑ **Sparrow poster group:** poster board, paper bird shape for each child (see resource sheet "[Patterns](#)," p. 108)
- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of section "[Matthew's gospel](#)" (bottom of p. 23) and Bible with dictionary

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Music zone:** recording of song "Be Still and Know" (#7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6)
- ❑ **Art zone:** painter's caps (available at paint supply stores), fabric markers, fabric paints
- ❑ **Game zone:** square of fabric and yarn or small soft bird toy
- ❑ **Cooperative zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Word Find](#)"
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Shaped Poems](#)"

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "As We Go Now" (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6, #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).
- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Letter for Families](#)" (p. 107).



Solidarity

Scripture
Matthew
10:24–39

FOCUS To be assured by Jesus' words to the disciples

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce any newcomers. Share stories and experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

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.*)

In this space, we know God's Spirit is with us.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Be Still and Know" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

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.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Begin by telling about something you were afraid of when you were a child (such as the sound of thunder, or shadows on a bedroom wall). Then invite children to talk about some fears they had when they were younger.

■ What made you feel better?

Explain that this week we hear some words that Jesus told the disciples, which helped them not to feel afraid.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Recall that last week we heard a story from Genesis, the first book in the Bible. This week we hear a story from Matthew, the first book in the section called the New Testament. Matthew's gospel was written to help people remember Jesus' teaching and to continue his work of showing God's love in the world.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Do Not Be Afraid](#)" to present the story based on **Matthew 10:24–31**, inviting children to participate as indicated.

Wondering questions Use some or all of the following questions to wonder together:

- **What did Jesus want his followers to know about God?**
- **How did Jesus help people understand how much God loved them?**

Exploring the story further

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

Sparrow poster group (for younger children) This group will have the opportunity to reflect on an image of God's love. In advance, prepare a sheet of poster board with the words "God Loves Sparrows and God Loves Me" across the top. Distribute bird shapes; have children print their names on the shapes. Attach the birds to the poster board. and use reusable adhesive to attach these inside the figure's arms. Ask children to name other things that God loves that could be part of this poster.

Bible research group (for older children) This group will have the opportunity to learn more about the

gospel of Matthew. Distribute copies of the section "Matthew's gospel" (bottom of p. 23) and work together to read the information and answer the questions. Have them prepare a short report for the rest of the group.

Reporting Invite the poster group to share some of their ideas about what God loves, and invite the research group to present their report about Matthew's community.

The Bible story and us

Sometimes following in Jesus' way is not easy. Sometimes we need courage to live in God's way. Ask:

- **When might it be hard to follow Jesus' way when we are with friends? At school?**
- **What helps you to not be afraid when you want to be kind or courageous?**

Respond

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

- **Music zone: Chant** (for older children) Sometimes a prayer or chant can help us face our fears and know that God is with us. Invite the group to listen to a recording of the song, "Be Still and Know" (#7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6), hearing it over and over until they have learned this simple chant. Then sing or say it together, beginning quietly and getting stronger and stronger. Encourage the children to say this chant silently to themselves as a prayer whenever they need courage to face a fear or challenge.



- **Art zone: Love caps** Jesus told people that whatever happened they could know that God loved them very much. Distribute painter's caps and invite children to print on these, "God loves me sooooo much!" Then have them use the fabric markers and paints to decorate their caps, adding images of birds as reminders of Jesus' teaching in this week's focus passage.

- **Game zone: Find the sparrow** (for younger children) The idea of God knowing the fate of every single



sparrow is a big idea. Invite children to explore this idea by playing a game. Tie a knot in the middle of a piece of fabric to form a "sparrow" or use a small stuffed toy. Choose one child to be "It." This child leaves the room briefly while another child hides the sparrow. "It" is called back and has to find the lost sparrow. Others can help by calling "hot" if nearby or "cold" if far away. Continue until all children have had a chance to find the sparrow.

- **Cooperative zone: Word puzzle** (for younger children) God's big love makes even small ones feel cared for. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Word Find." Assist the children or invite them to work cooperatively to find the words and complete the puzzle. (Answer: *God pays attention to you, down to the last detail – even numbering the hairs on your head.*)
- **Quiet zone: Prayers** (for older children) Jesus encouraged the disciples to have courage, and God gives us courage to face things in our own world. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Shaped Poems" and help children follow the instructions to write a diamante poem/prayer.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song “As We Go Now” (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

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), you are precious in God’s sight.”

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?

Matthew’s gospel

1. This gospel was probably written between 80 and 100 CE (which means “Common Era,” the years after Jesus was born).
 - **Would those who read it have been alive when Jesus was teaching? Why or why not?**
2. This gospel was written for Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the special leader that they had been waiting for. Read verse 1 of the first chapter of Matthew.
 - **What other words are used to describe Jesus?**
3. Matthew’s community included Gentiles as well as Jews. Find a definition of “Gentile” in a Bible dictionary.





DO NOT BE AFRAID

(based on Matthew 10:24-31)

The repetition of the phrase "Do not be afraid" helps reinforce the central message of the story.

Pause slightly before each "Do not be afraid" statement and invite children to participate by saying it with you.

Jesus spent a lot of time outdoors. Sometimes he went up a mountain to be away from people and spend time with God. Many times Jesus stood by the sea to teach people about God. Some days Jesus walked from town to town with the disciples and, along the way, they saw all the wonderful things that God had created.

Often Jesus spoke directly to the disciples, teaching them about God's love and how to live in God's way. One day as they walked along, he said:

"Do not be afraid. Your life will be no harder than those who teach you.

You may be turned away just as they are.

You will live in the same way as those who went before you.

If I am called names, you will be called names.

Do not be afraid. Do not let others keep you silent.

Now you can tell everyone what I tell you.

You can even shout it from the highest places.

Do not be afraid. Only look to God.

Look at how God cares for the birds of the air.

Surely you know that you are worth much more than any two of these birds.

God cares for you so much that God knows the number of hairs on your head.

Do not be afraid. Say proudly that you are my follower and friend."

The disciples nodded. **Do not be afraid!**



Word Find

Complete the word search and arrange the words to fill in the blanks and complete this version of Jesus' message. Search diagonally, backwards, forwards, up, and down to find and circle the words.

you down attention head detail
hairs your numbering God

n	a	d	o	w	n	z	u
o	t	m	s	a	u	b	t
i	o	d	e	r	m	l	m
t	l	a	c	u	b	s	l
n	n	e	i	e	e	r	i
e	r	h	a	i	r	s	a
t	r	u	r	u	i	o	t
t	s	m	o	c	n	u	e
a	o	y	t	y	G	o	d

___ pays _____ to _____,
 to the last _____ – even _____
 the _____ on _____!

Matthew 10:29–30 (*The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000.
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Shaped Poems

Think of the things in your life that cause you fear, worry, or pain.

Write down some words that come to you when you think of these things.

Now, write a prayer to describe what it means to trust in God during fearful or painful times. You could write this prayer as a *diamante* (diamond-shaped) poem.

A diamante moves from one word to its opposite, using the following format:

- Line one** - a noun
- Line two** - 3 adjectives
- Line three** - 5 verbs (ending in "ing")
- Line four** - 3 adverbs
- Line five** - a noun that is opposite to the first noun.

For example, a diamante poem that moves from fear to trust is:

Fear
Dark, fierce, huge
Bursting, burning, clenching, dissolving, finishing
Slowly, steadily, finally
Trust

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.

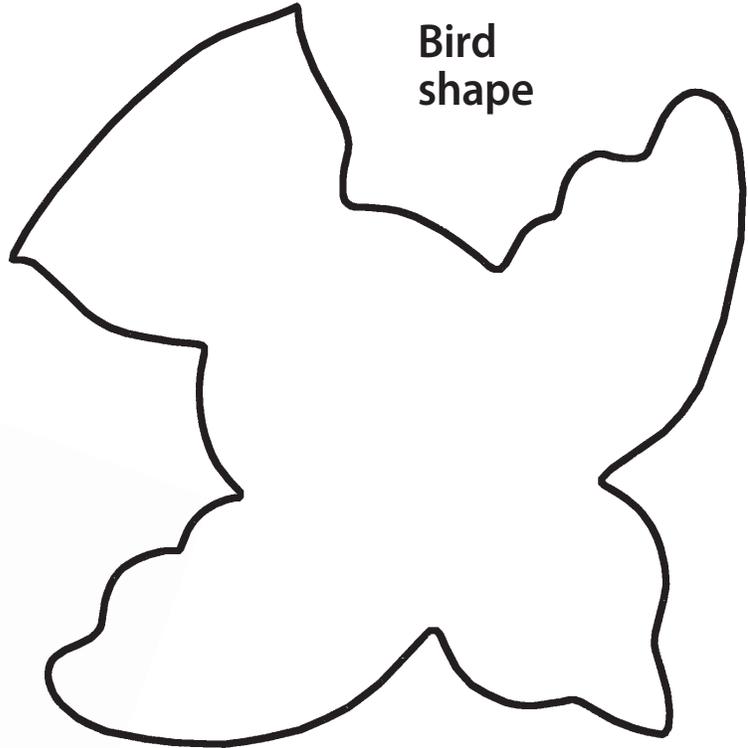


Patterns

Hand shape



Bird shape



Child shape



Flower shape

