

Rejecting Fear ~ Embracing Joy

This week's readings remind us that while living in faithfulness to the liberating movement of God's spirit is a source of deep joy, it also requires courage and. Fear is a barrier to faithfulness that can be overcome by trusting the one whose love never ends.



Focus scripture
Matthew 25:14–30
Additional scriptures
Judges 4:1–7
Psalm 123
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Focus scripture: Matthew 25:14–30

Matthew 25:14–30 comes as both encouragement and warning to all those who sign up for the realm-of-God movement. It invites us to live as though the realm of God's justice and liberation is happening now, and we can share in the joy of being part of this movement. The future is present.

The gospel of Matthew is written to people who have reason to be afraid. They have signed on to a realm-of-God movement whose leader was executed on the cross by Rome. Those crosses were still present as a means of intimidation and control. Those deemed a threat were hung out as a warning to anyone who challenged the power of Rome. Playing it safe was a logical and practical choice for lives governed by fear.

The story that Matthew recounts takes an exploitive economic system designed to enrich the few and impoverish the many and turns it on its head. Servants are entrusted with a large sum of money. Each talent is the equivalent of 15 years of earning for a day labourer. There is no micro-managing. Each person is provided the freedom and responsibility of using the talents they have received. The opportunity and the risk are the same for each, regardless of how many talents they receive.

The one who let's fear govern his life buries the talent. When the master arrives, he faces the anguish and tears of a life shrivelled up by caution and playing it safe. In sharp contrast, the two who reject letting fear govern their lives invest what they have received, doubling the talents entrusted to them. They, in turn, are given greater responsibility and are invited to share in the joy.

If this were a story about how to function in an unjust economic system, it would be a story about how those who have, get more, while those who have the least are left to suffer. This, after all, is how unjust economic systems work. Christians to whom Matthew's gospel is written

know this reality all too well. However, this is a story about challenging that system by taking those same principles used by architects of greed and selfishness and applying them to advancing the realm-of-God vision of liberation and justice. No one will tell you precisely what you are to do with your talent other than put them to use. Risk is involved. Success is never guaranteed. Playing it safe is an option. Matthew, however, is unequivocal in rejecting this cautious, play-it-safe approach, warning that it leads to sadness and despair. Those who take the risk of loving faithfully, challenging unjust economic systems, and advancing the promise of liberation and justice experience the real-time joy of the realm-of-God movement, breaking into our world.


Judges 4:1–7 creates tension with the promise of liberation and justice for all people. However, it makes clear that we are free to decide what we will do with our lives.

Psalm 123 reminds us that faithfulness never means everything goes our way. On the contrary, faithfulness to love and justice can increase our awareness of injustice and suffering, which is why the writer relies on God.

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Paul and the early church are aware of the thin line between the present and the in-breaking of God's future. Paul's encouragement is clear; be strong, be ready to participate in the realm of God's justice and liberation. No one needs to go it alone; as a community of faith encourage and build each other up.

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God's love and justice is both a promise for the future in all its fullness and a lived reality for all who are prepared to encounter the opportunities of love as they come our way. Life may not always turn out as we hope and expect, but our texts today are clear, we are all called to take the risk that love requires, embracing the joy found in trusting the one to whom "we lift our eyes."

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

Holy One, you call us as witnesses to your world-transforming love and liberation. Yet we are often cautious, denying ourselves the joy of your presence. Grant us the courage to utilize our talents and gifts. Amen.

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

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Young children who are part of loving, supportive families sense that they are important. When they are acknowledged as members of the church community and affirmed for their smiles, openness, joy in learning, and energy, they will grow in confidence as contributors to life “in God’s way.” As they grow in faith, they become familiar with Jesus. Jesus speaks concretely of love and caring for others, and models that love in ways the children can appreciate.

The children are also learning that Jesus’ friends, members of the community to which they belong, do important, caring things – and

teach others to do important, caring things, too. Among those things is listening carefully to one another’s stories, as the children are encouraged to do during these sessions. The “Moving into the theme” conversation introduces the power of a small gesture, a smile, in a loving context and among members of a community. One of the Respond options offers an opportunity for children to learn more about the work and ministry of the church. Pray that the children are growing to understand that their church community is part of a much bigger family that embodies Jesus’ love and shares it with the world.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Matthew 25:14–30, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 63).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) *Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) *Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring “Gathering song” (on resource sheet [“Additional Songs and Poems,”](#) p. 76) or “Jump for Joy” (pp. 14–15 in *SGF Songbook*, #10 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring blanket, resource sheet [“The Story of Three Workers,”](#) and eight large coins.

Respond

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

- ❑ **Church work:** invite a church staff person or volunteer (such as custodian, church secretary, volunteer who cares for the gardens), suggesting they bring some items they work with.
- ❑ **Activity sheet:** copies of resource sheet [“The Gift of Me!”](#)
- ❑ **Display:** poster board, hand shape for each child (trace around your hand on construction paper)

Bless

- ❑ Bring “Blessing song” (on resource sheet [“Additional Songs and Poems,”](#) p. 76) or song “We Are the Church” (p. 26 in *SGF Songbook*, #19 in *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca.
user name: spirit
password: child



November 15, 2020

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Scripture

Matthew
25:14–30

FOCUS To see, illustrated in Jesus' parable, that everything we say and do is important to God

Gather

Welcome each child, saying "Hello, *(child's name)*, we're happy you're here."

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space. Say,

The colour green reminds us
to grow in God's way *(point to the green cloth)*.
The Bible is a book of stories about God
and of people who loved God *(point to Bible)*.
The light of the candle reminds us
of God's love *(light the candle)*.

Sing "Gathering song" (p. 76) or "Jump for Joy" (pp. 14–15 in *SGF Songbook*, #10 on *SGF Music CD*).

Pray Loving God,
thank you for this place.
Thank you for stories
that tell us about your love. Amen.

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

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi, everybody. This is a happy day for me! I love to see all your smiley faces.

Leader: We like to see you too, Priscilla! What do you most like about coming to church?

Priscilla: I really like it when people smile at me, and I always smile right back.

Leader: It is hard to stop a smile, isn't it? Let's pass a smile around the circle. *(Smile at a child and invite them to pass it on.)* A smile is like a gift – it tells someone, "I think you're important!" Today we hear a story that Jesus told about some workers and their important work. *(Say goodbye to Priscilla.)*

- ☐ **Game** Invite children to sit in a circle. Smile at the child on your left and ask them to pass a smile around the circle, first in one direction and then back again in the other direction. Mention that a smile is a little gift that says something big: you are important! Explain that today we hear a story that Jesus told about some workers and their important work.

Engage

Before the story

Spread the blanket on the floor, gather in a circle, and invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to the gospel of Matthew. Explain that this part of the Bible has stories about Jesus and stories that Jesus told. In this week's story, Jesus talks about what is important to God.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[The Story of Three Workers](#)," based on **Matthew 25:14–30**, and eight coins to tell the story.

After the story

Church bulletin boards Take the children to look at the display boards in the church hall. Point out the activities posted, information about outreach needs, and upcoming projects and events. Emphasize all the people involved and the gifts they bring to your church community. Explain that many important things happen in the church and the things that we all do can make a difference.

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ☐ **Church work** All three workers in the story had an opportunity to make a difference. Introduce your visitor and invite him or her to talk about what they do to help at church. Encourage children to ask questions and examine any items brought by the visitor.



- ☐ **Activity sheet** The landowner helped the workers to see that they were all important and could make a difference. Even a small gesture makes a difference. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[The Gift of Me!](#)" and encourage children to draw their own smiling faces and add smiling faces on the other faces. Talk



together about what other gifts that the children have, as well as their smiles.

- ☐ **Display** Each worker in the story made decisions and worked individually, but in the church we often work together for our community. Give each child a hand shape and talk about ways we can use our hands to bring smiles to others. Write these ideas on the children's hand shapes, and then have them decorate these. Create a display of the hands by gluing them onto the poster board. Add a title such as "Our Helping Hands Bring Smiles." Display the poster in the church hall, if desired.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and light the candle.

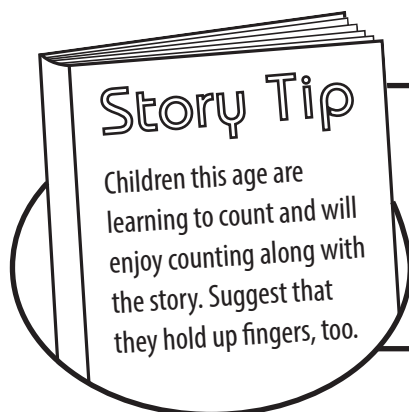
Pray Thank you, God,
for the ways we can share your love,
through our smiles, and our helping hands.
Amen.

Blessing Lead the group in the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 76) or the song, "We Are the Church" (p. 26 in *SGF Songbook*, #19 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), you are important to God and to me."

Reflect

What kinds of things does your church do to help children feel important – especially at worship? How do you encourage the children to respect and affirm one another each week?



The Story of Three Workers

(based on Matthew 25:14–30)

(Have eight coins nearby, and place them in three piles in the middle of the group as you mention each worker.)

One day Jesus told this story...

Once there was a landowner who was going on a trip. Before leaving, the landowner asked the workers to take care of things. The landowner trusted the workers to do their best.

To the first worker, the landowner gave five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

To the second worker, the landowner gave two coins. 1, 2.

To the third worker, the landowner gave 1 coin. 1.

5, 2, 1! *(Hold up five fingers, then two, and one.)*

"Take good care of this money," the landowner told them. Then the landowner went away.

While the landowner was away, the first worker bought some seeds with the five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The worker planted the seeds and later sold the vegetables that grew from those seeds. Now the worker had 10 coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

The second worker bought a cow with the two coins. 1, 2. Every morning the worker

would milk the cow and sell the milk to the neighbours. Now the worker had four coins. 1, 2, 3, 4.

The third worker looked at the coin and was afraid that the one coin would be lost. 1. So, the worker hid the coin. One coin stayed one coin. 1.

Much later the landowner returned home. The landowner was very interested to know what the workers had done with the coins.

To the first worker the landowner said, "I gave you five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Now I see that I have ten coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Your work is important and you did well! Be happy with me."

To the second worker the landowner said, "I gave you two coins. 1, 2. Now I have four coins. 1, 2, 3, 4. Your work is important and you did well! Be happy with me."

To the third worker the landowner said, "I gave you one coin and you hid it. I still have only one coin. 1. Your work is important but you made a different choice."

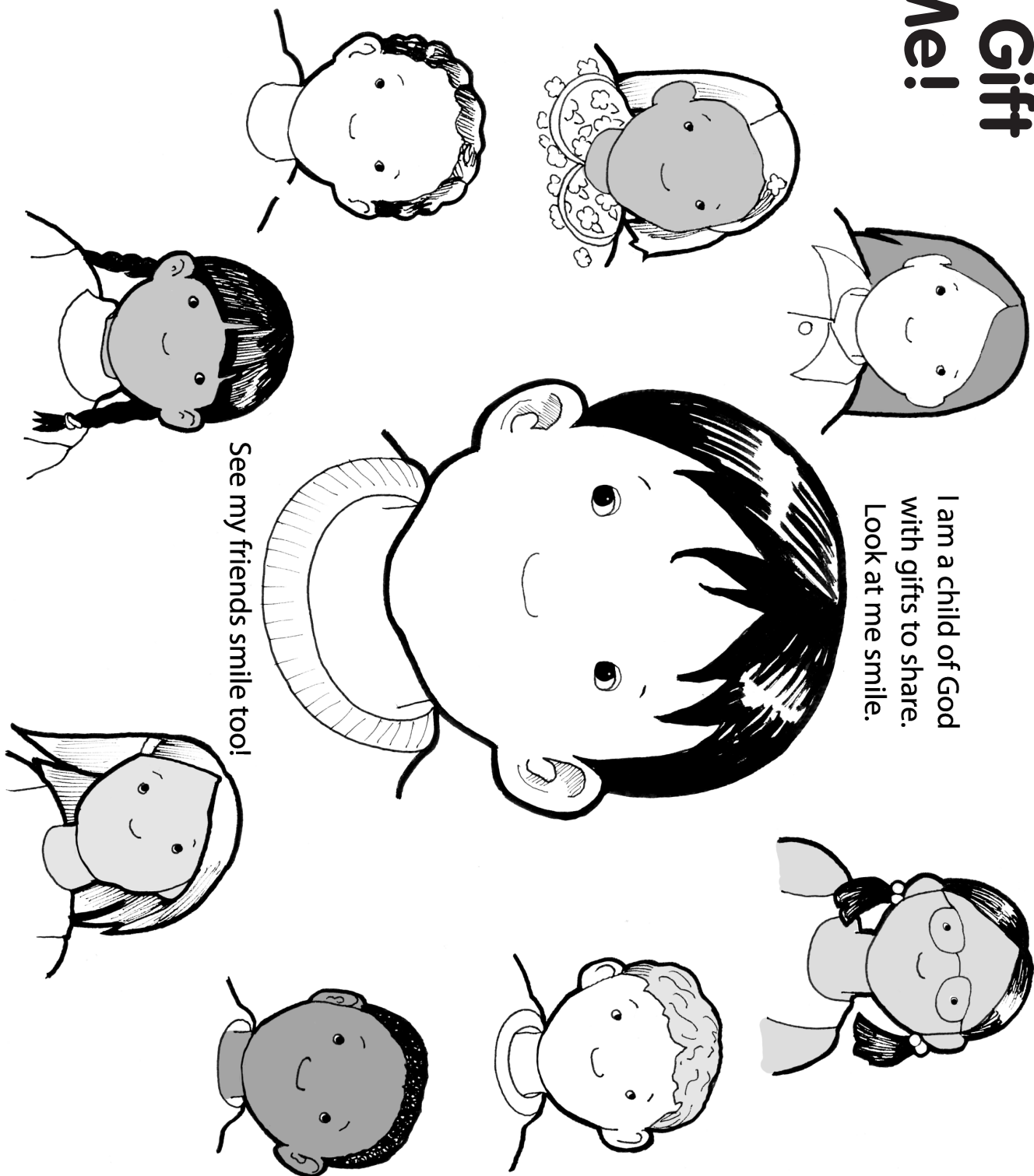
10, 4, 1! *(Hold up ten fingers, then four, and one.)*
Everyone's work is important!



The Gift of Me!

I am a child of God
with gifts to share.
Look at me smile.

See my friends smile too!



Additional Songs and Poems

Welcome song

(tune: "London Bridges")

Welcome, welcome, we are here!
Clap your hands! Shout a cheer!
We'll sing and pray and learn today,
to live and grow in God's good way.

Parting poem

Where do we see God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)
God's love is there, shining through,
in me (*point to self*) and in you (*point to others*).

Where do we find God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)
God's love can be found,
the whole wide world around (*spread arms wide*).

God Is with Us

(tune: "B-I-N-G-O")

God's with me and (*point to self*).
God's with you and (*point to another*).
God is with us always (*make a circle with arms*).
Yes, yes, when we love (*clap for each word*),
Yes, yes, when we care (*clap for each word*),
Yes, yes, when we help (*clap for each word*),
God's with us every day (*place hands over heart*).

Gathering song

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Thank you for this lovely day (*arms held wide*).
Thank you for the ways to pray (*hand together*).
Thank you for the friends we see (*wave to each other*).
Thank you for your love for me (*hug self*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
We thank you every day (*hands over heart*).

Blessing song

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

Now let's go out to share God's love,
share God's love, share God's love.
Every day, in every way,
let's share God's love with all.
(Repeat if desired, substituting the last line with phrases, such as "Let's be a friend to all" or "Let's show our care for all" or "Let's try and help someone.")

Shout It Out

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Share, share, share God's love,
share God's love today.
Shout it out and tell your friends,
God's love is here to stay!

Ten Young Bridesmaids

(Start by holding up 10 fingers. Put one finger down as each bridesmaid runs out of oil.)

- 10 young bridesmaids with lamps burning fine.
One ran out of oil and then there were 9.
- 9 young bridesmaids said, "The bridegroom is late."
One ran out of oil and then there were 8.
- 8 young bridesmaids said, "Now it's past eleven."
One ran out of oil and then there were 7.
- 7 young bridesmaids, with brightly burning wicks.
One ran out of oil and then there were 6.
- 6 young women asked, "When will he arrive?"
One ran out of oil and then there were 5.
- 5 young bridesmaids, standing in the room.
"Finally he's coming! Here comes the groom."
- 5 young bridesmaids with lamps burning bright,
went to the wedding and shared their light.

Just like the bridesmaids, we make choices, too.
We can let our lights shine depending on what we do.

