

Planning



Sunday, April 30 – Saturday, May 6 • 2023

Sensing Awe

Overshadowed by persecution and death, the early Christian church encourages us to find ways to nurture our sense of wonder as we care for each other.

This week...

Ecumenical prayer calendar

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

As listed in *Pilgrim Prayer: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*, edited by Ester Pudjo Widiastih and Karen L. Bloomquist. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2018). <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle> offers valuable aids for intercessory prayers, and prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others.

Special days (commentary on p. 140)

May 3 – St. Philip and St. James

May 6 – St. John the Evangelist

April 30, 2023

Easter 4

**Revised Common Lectionary
(Year A)**

Acts 2:42–47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19–25

John 10:1–10

the focus in age-level materials

Liturgical colour white or gold

Personal reflection

The Early church shows ways to daily live and remember the power of Jesus' ministry and his resurrection.

Find yourself a little extra space for awe this week. Enjoy beauty. Look at art. Walk in creation. Find some way to feel God's presence before something big and wonderful.

Notes

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The planning page is provided in text format for copying, adapting, and adding to your bulletin or online worship resources or website or social media (see Text folder, Worship Outline).

Online Resources

Lection Connection

Essays and discussion prompts linking current events with this week's scriptures. Use for sermon preparation, Bible studies, and small groups or share on social media at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/10/>.

Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home

An easy-to-share, weekly online resource supports the spiritual lives and faith formation of individuals and families at home. It is provided in the [Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home](#) folder.





Acts 2:42–47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19–25

John 10:1–10

the focus in age-level materials

God, in whom we find shepherding love, may we feel, hear, and see this love in our lives. May words and actions joyfully testify to the abundance of your faithful love for us and for all. Amen.

Sensing Awe

The joy-filled celebration of resurrection on Easter is quickly overshadowed, for most, by ordinary day-by-day life. Or worse, it can feel like the joy of Easter is quickly replaced by the horror of Good Friday in times of war and dis-ease. This year, we might learn to shepherd each other into a sense of awe and wonder in our day-to-day existence.

In **Acts 2:42–47**, we glimpse the early church before internal conflicts, persecution, and inter-faith tensions present the fledgling community with the challenges that will define and refine it.

“They” in 2:42 refers to those who responded in faith to Peter’s Pentecost address, being baptized and joining the early Christian community. “They” were eagerly awaiting Christ’s return in glory with the passion of recent converts embracing a new way of life. The focus on Peter’s preaching, and this week’s reading from the letter bearing his name, remind us that Peter was the first leader of the early church before the conversion and subsequent influence of Paul.

A sense of awe and reverence characterized the mood of the moment (2:43). Often, we associate these feelings with our response to the mystery and otherness of a God far beyond us; here, however, these come about through the immediacy of “wonders and signs”; tangible, practical changes to daily life that made a difference.

The church’s unity is emphasized. However, the description of having all things in common is acknowledged as past rather than an ongoing practice. Still, these early Jesus followers enjoyed the “goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:47). “Goodwill” is a translation of a Greek word that also means “grace.” Perhaps such feelings of goodwill made it easier for the Body of Christ in that place to make God’s grace known to their neighbours. Their words of

praise and deeds of mercy testify to the abundance and wholeness found in their shared devotion.

As the abundance of growth in the Acts community follows the earlier terror and tragedy of the crucifixion of Jesus, **Psalm 23** follows the lament and anguish found in Psalm 22. In these familiar words, we see a bold proclamation of how God – our shepherd – provides an overflowing abundance of what is needed for life: sustenance, water, safety, and direction. God’s people can move with trust and faith into such abundant life.

1 Peter 2:19–25 was written during a time of suffering and persecution as part of a “household code” that instructs its readers how to live. Typically, they addressed the head of the household, but here the enslaved people are addressed directly to uphold vicarious suffering. It should come with a trigger warning. Enduring unjust suffering and abuse is not a virtue, and human rights groups work hard to end both within homes, the church, and wider society. There is a clash between hurt borne unjustly and the nurture that should be within our communities.

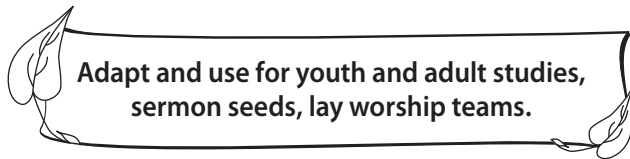
Like the psalm, **John 10:1–10** centres on the Middle Eastern shepherd, often a subsistence farmer whose livelihood depends upon the diligent care of their animals, just as the survival of the animals depends on the shepherd’s watchful eye and guiding voice.

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These texts testify to God’s diverse, abundant provision and guidance. The “overflowing cup” in the presence of enemies and the sharing of time – our lives and possessions – run counter to our cultural norms. What helps us know our shepherd’s voice and follow in those ways of abundant living?



Reflecting on the Word



Connecting with life

Think about your experience of Christian community – either in your church(es) or in other settings.

- **What is abundant in your life together?**
- **How readily are things done with glad and generous hearts?**
- **For what is your community longing?**

Scripture

Acts 2:42–47 illustrates a resurrection community that shares everything with those in need.

- **What would it be like to live like that early Christian community portrayed in this passage? What kind of world would be possible?**
- **How might you make this a reality in your own community?**
- **Where do you see this early church community's qualities and positive relationships locally or globally?**
- **What qualities and positive relationships do you see in the early church?**

The picture of the early church living as if there were no tomorrow can be enticing.

- **To what extent are there connections with contemporary living?**
- **What are the practical implications of having things in common? How practical was it then, and might it be now?**
- **Is there a point where generosity is met by responsibility?**

Psalm 23 speaks of the shepherd's provision – rest, food, water, guidance, and presence. The writer also offers an image of dwelling with God and a table set in the presence of enemies.

- **How can we feel safe if enemies are present?**
- **What other imagery of care, protection, comfort, and safety might work as a metaphor, particularly in an urban setting?**

1 Peter 2:19–25 was written in a time of persecution and hardship for Christians.

- **The writer makes a virtue of patient endurance in the face of unjust suffering. How does this hold today in our homes? churches? schools? wider society?**
- **What should be our response to abuse?**
- **Under what circumstances should Christ's patient suffering be an example to follow?**

John 10:1–10

- **What qualities of leadership emerge from these verses?**
- **Who would you consider to be "thieves and bandits"?**
- **Think of some challenging situations being faced in your family group, your place of work, church, or the wider community. How might good leadership skills make a positive difference in these situations?**

Connecting scripture and life

Following the One who promises life in abundance sounds wonderful... and hard. We who have much in the ways of objects and power may need to surrender much. In response, society poses questions as to why would/should we give up individual possession of belongings, time, and control?

- **Where and in what ways do you experience an abundance of joyful life in sharing resources?**
- **What is truly enough? What about being prepared for "rainy days"?**
- **In what ways are you, individually and as a church, witnessing to God's abundant love?**

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

The text from Acts for this week paints an ideal picture of the early Christian church. We can embrace it with great enthusiasm or dismiss it outright as fanciful but impractical. Alternatively, we can explore how we can live

this model today. How might we adapt the early church practices in our modern world? How can we "shepherd" one another? How might these examples help us do that?



Sensing Awe

Prepare

NOTE: The following suggestions are mere starting points. You are invited to adapt, delete, add according to your local needs and context. If a community is gathered in person, they may speak the **bolded** lines. If worshippers are not physically present, consider having a different individual say the bolded responses. Instructions are *italicized*.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Acts 2:42–47. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present “[The Early Church](#)” on p. 142. Alternatively, for younger children, arrange for a storyteller to present “[The Early Christian Community](#)” in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials. For the dramatic reading, research statements from your congregation’s documents to intersperse with the verses.
- ❑ Bring items for setting the worship space: several candles for the prayers of the people.
- ❑ Bring canvas or tablecloth for painting the confession, paint, paintbrushes, and an easel.
- ❑ You might choose to print [Alleluia](#) on or in your bulletin (in the Images to Project and Images for Printing folders). See “[Connecting with the Art](#)” on p. 8 for background to the art and artist.
- ❑ Bring song such as “All Are Welcome” (*Seasons Songbook, vol. 9, #12 on Seasons Music CD, vol. 9*). Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/.
- ❑ Set [stations](#) as described on pp. 143–144.



Music Suggestions

All Are Welcome

Marty Haugen, *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

Alleluia

Traditional; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

Hold Us in Your Grace

Keri Wehlander; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

I Send You Out

John Angotti; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

Pass It On

Kate Abba, Julia Abrahams; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

Companions on the Journey

Carey Landry; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 8*

Children of the Spirit

Monica O'Brien, Gina Ogilvie; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 7*

When the Spirit of God

Mennonite World Conference; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 4*

Let Us Break Bread Together

African American spiritual

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

Francis Rous

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Peter Scholtes

We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky

Ruth Duck



A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 *Seasons of the Spirit* Music Volumes can be found at www.seasonsonline.ca. Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

Gather

Call to worship

We are different people;
each one of us unique.
We look different, sound different,
think different thoughts,
hold different opinions,
feel different emotions.

God gathers us all together – with all our differences,
quirks, all our gifts and challenges – to break bread,
sing songs,
open our hearts to prayer and share in devotion to the One
who unites and transforms us.

Opening Prayer

Sing a song of welcome, as a prayer of invocation, to the Holy Spirit that your worship might be filled with holy presence and grace. “Come, Holy Spirit” Seasons Songbook, vol. 9, or “Come Holy Spirit, descend on us” by John Bell.

Prayer of confession

On an easel or the worship table, have a large canvas spread like a tablecloth (or just a plain white tablecloth). If using easels, you might need to set up more than one to have enough space for all to participate. Set beside the table paints and paintbrushes.



Worship Outline • April 30, 2023

This time of confession might begin with words like these:

There are times we have not lived our faith fully.

We have made mistakes that we don't even know how to name

and so we come before God with blotches and marks that we would rather no one else see

but we trust them to God, knowing God forgives.

You are invited to come forward, take some paint and blot or stain the cloth on the table/canvas with the sorrows you are carrying today.

Words of affirmation

Carefully hold up the canvas/tablecloth so that the congregation can see it.

Children of God, hear the good news!

God's compassionate love transforms all things and makes beauty that is a wonder to behold.

You are forgiven and loved. God sees the beauty in you.

After the prayer, place the canvas/cloth back on the table/easel. The congregation might respond to this affirmation with words of praise such as "Sing Alleluia!" (Seasons Songbook, vol. 3), or "Alleluia" (Seasons Songbook, vol. 9). Printed music is also available for purchase and download at https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/.

Engage

Opening the word

Psalm 23 If permission can be obtained, have Psalm 23 read from *A New Zealand Book of Prayer*. Online it is found at <https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/> with copyright and permissions information on page iv. The referenced translation is on page 170 in the "Night Prayer" section. Alternatively, you might use an anthem or one of the hymns based on Psalm 23.

Acts 2:42–47

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Arrange for a storyteller to present "[The Early Church](#)" on p. 142. Alternatively, for younger children, tell the story "[The Early Christian Community](#)" (in *Exploring Our Faith* at the end of this week's materials).

Dramatic reading Consider reading this passage inter-

spersed with readings from your own congregation's documents. This will vary depending on the documents you have, but it might be something like:

- alternate the verses of Acts 2:42–47 with lines from your church's mission statement preceding the scripture reading with a statement of beliefs from your congregation's founding documents or a statement that is integral to your denomination
- follow the scripture reading with a statement of faith that is unique to your denomination or congregation
- find some key statements in your congregation's constitution and bylaws (or similar documents) and read these between portions of the scripture reading.

The idea here is to form a linguistic bridge between the description of the early Christian church and the way in which church is lived in your particular setting.

If gathering in person, invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word. For those participating at home, you might encourage them to use materials that have been sent.



Respond

Sing or listen to a song such as “All Are Welcome” as people gather again (*Seasons Songbook, vol. 9, #12 on Seasons Music CD, vol. 9*). Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/.

Prayers of the people

Share your community's prayer petitions this week by sharing each petition, followed by lighting a candle for each petition and singing a simple chant, such as "Lord, Hear Our Prayer" from the

Taizé Community. Petitions might be offered by saying, "O God, we pray for..."

Prayer of dedication or offering prayer

We bring what we have, O God. We know many around us are in need, and while we cannot do everything, we know that you can take what we offer and use it to make a difference. Take these gifts, brought with glad and generous hearts, and use them for the goodwill of all. Amen.

Bless

God, the creator, births and nurtures you.
God, the life-giver, sustains you on life's journey and will never abandon you.

Go from this place with the assurance of God's love.
Model the grace of God in our world so that others will know they want to be a part of what we have as God's people.
Amen.

Special Days Commentary

May 3 – St. Philip and St. James

In the gospel of John, Philip is the third disciple to be called by Jesus. It is recorded that Philip then brought his friend Nathaniel to Jesus. Philip is also named in the story of the feeding of the 5000 (John 6) and in John's account of the Last Supper. Philip's request to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" (14:8), leads to Jesus' farewell discourse.

The James referred to this day is James, the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). Some scholars believe this is also the person referred to by Jerome as "James the Less" and "James the Younger," who, in Mark's gospel, is a witness at the crucifixion. Some believe that James, the author of the epistle, is most likely the brother of Jesus, who is mentioned by name in Matthew 13:55 and elsewhere.

Both Philip and James are celebrated on the same day because the church in Rome, where their relics rest, was dedicated on this day in the year 560 CE.

May 6 – St. John the Evangelist

Some churches commemorate John the apostle and evangelist on this day. (Other churches observe St. John's Day on December 27.) Traditionally, John is thought to have been the youngest of the apostles. Jesus called him as he sat fishing in a boat with his father, Zebedee, and his brother, James. Known in scripture as "the one whom Jesus loved" and the disciple who Jesus entrusted with the care of his mother as he hung on the cross, John was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and was a witness to the empty tomb.



Community Love Project

God, the creator, births and nurtures you.

God, the life-giver, sustains you on life's journey and will never abandon you.

Go from this place with the assurance of God's love.

Model the grace of God in our world so that others will know
they want to be a part of what we have as God's people. Amen.

These were the words that sent us out from worship this week. In these five lines, we are reminded of who God is, how God loves us, our call to share that love with others and our trust that God will support us in where our faith leads.

In the middle of the Season of Easter, the question to our community is: Where is our faith calling us? What big thing could we do in our community to share God's love?

Directions

1. Brainstorm some big things that your church could do.
2. Discern where there is energy to act.
3. Explore how to organize this project as a practical expression of love.
4. Make plans and love big.



The Early Church

Based on Acts 2:42–47

There are lots of churches around today. There are many types of churches: some are big, and some are small. Some use different languages. Some churches have done things the same way for many years, while others are always looking for new ways.

Some church buildings are big and full of people; some are big with only a few people. Some are small. And some churches don't have buildings – they are groups of people that might meet in someone's home, or in a school, or outdoors under a tree when they want to worship God.

In other words, there is lots and lots of variety to the way we are the church today. But it wasn't always like that.

In the earliest days of the Christian church – in the first weeks and months and years after the first Easter – there were not many people involved in the church, and they tended to do things pretty much the same way.

Many of them still gathered to worship God on Saturdays in the local synagogue because that is what they had always done. But they also gathered on Sundays because that was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

They listened to stories that the apostles told – the women and men who might have travelled with Jesus or who had known someone who travelled with Jesus.

Often, when they heard stories of things Jesus taught and did, people were amazed. It was incredible to think that God was involved in our world and cared about everybody – the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the important and the not-so-important.

The early Christians shared things, too. Whenever they had a meal, they made sure none went hungry. And they would sell things they had so they could share the money with people who needed it.

Perhaps most importantly, they did all these things with joy because they believed deep down that this is how Jesus wanted them to live. It seems they were onto something, too, because many people saw what the early Christians were doing and said to themselves, "I want to be part of that."

And that's how the church grew and grew and grew.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder.



Bible story

Materials

- Basic supplies
- Paper or drawing pads
- Recording of today's story "[The Early Church](#)"
- Alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling _____

Directions

1. Listen to the story "The Early Church."
2. Use the paper and crayons or pencils to draw how you imagine the early church.
3. How might you show people caring for each other or sharing things with others?



Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space, or in other places around the church, in your home, or outdoors. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the [directions](#) for all to see onscreen or in person. Adapt stations for use when physically distancing and above all, follow the safe practices of your congregation and local health officials.

For your convenience, directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder.

Health and Safety Practices

Basic supplies pens, pencils, markers, crayons, white glue/glue sticks, scissors, hand sanitizer, wipes placed in a basket or bin, two containers marked “clean” and “used”

Setting the space Utilize large spaces where people can maintain a safe physical distance. Spread out chairs around a large table or use tape to mark off the space around stand alone chairs.

Keep it clean Wipe down and disinfect places used for stations. Provide enough arts and crafts supplies to reduce sharing and mark containers “clean” and “used.” Remind people to use hand sanitizer as they begin and as they end stations.

Psalm 23 sensory play

Materials

- Cotton balls or play sheep
- Cut grass
- Sticks (or small shepherd crooks)
- Play chalices of water
- Small bowls of water
- Dollhouse chairs and tables
- Black felt squares
- Easter basket filler or sand
- Small shovels
- Kitchen tongs
- Plastic tub or basins



Suitable for
all ages

The practice of contemplation

Directions

1. Half fill a plastic tub with Easter basket filler or sand. Scatter other items on top. You might choose to give the objects a good stir so there is some surprise in the discovery. Place shovels and tongs on the table to the side of the box.

Younger children thrive in their fine motor skills with sensory bins. You might choose to place a second tub on a low table just for littles to engage in – but don't limit the adults' fun! Please do note the size of the objects so that nothing is a choking hazard.

2. Explore the contents inside this box using your hands, tongs, and shovels.

3. As you explore, contemplate:

- **What makes you feel safe and loved?**
- **What does love sound like?**
- **How do you know when love is real?**

Awe came upon everyone

Materials

- Art gathered from within your community (paintings, music, sculptures, even dancers). Include *Alleluia*, which is provided in these materials as a poster or in the Images to Project and Images for Printing folders
- Performers or display items needed for artwork to be experienced
- Ample space for the experience
- Comfortable pillows and chairs around the artwork



Suitable for
all ages

The practice of contemplation

Directions

The people in the early church experienced awe. Together, they felt an awareness of how big God's world is and how amazing it is to live in this place. Awe can be felt in our worship together, in the natural world and sometimes in art.

1. Take in the artwork in this small installation.

2. Go and sit before the art that most draws you in.

- **What do you notice in your body?**
- **Where do your thoughts wander in awe?**

Younger children will not need directions for this. They will be drawn in by the art that speaks to them, or not. You might follow their lead and learn from their awe but don't worry if their interests lie elsewhere. Awe cannot be forced.



Braided communal prayers

Materials

- Yarn in colours of white, green, and blue; cords cut to at least 12 cm / 5 in. in length
- Safety pins (optional)
- Offering plate or basket
- Prayer cards with this prayer:

Source of All, may the prayers of our individual hearts be held together as a common offering of love shared by each and distributed generously as there is need. Amen.



Suitable for
all ages

The practice of prayer

Directions

1. Take a yarn of each colour and tie a secure knot at one end, so the lengths of yarn are free to braid. Use a safety pin to attach it to tether it for easier braiding.
2. Slowly braid or twist the strands together.
3. As you move each strand into place, pray silently for yourself with each white thread, others with each green thread, and the Earth with each blue strand.
4. When you reach the end of the yarn, tie a second knot to hold all your prayers. Add your braided prayers to the basket or plate, trusting that God receives all of these things.
5. Take a prayer card with you to remember what you have shared.

Love fish

Materials

- White air-drying clay
- Rolling pins
- Knives (or clay knives)
- Fish outline template at least 12 cm / 5 in. in length (download from *Virtual Resource Booklet* at https://www.seasonsonline.ca/files/virtual_resource_booklet_2013.pdf)



Suitable for
all ages

The practice of creativity

Directions

The Greek word *ichthys*, meaning fish, was used by the early Christian community to remember their faith in “Jesus Christ, Son of God, our Saviour.” Fish appeared in places where Christians wanted to remember their faith.

1. Roll some air-drying clay into a ball. Knead it as well as you can to remove any air bubbles.
2. Shape it into a fish, placing the templates underneath your creation to get the right shape and size. Use the rolling pin as it helps.
3. Using a knife, add details to the tail and the face as desired.
4. When dry, take home and place where you’ll remember to share love with your family and others.

The article “*Connecting with the Art*” on page 8 provides background to this season’s posters and art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might add an Art station and select one of the art engagement ideas.



Story and activities for the very young to use in church or at home.

The Early Christian Community

A story based on Acts 2:42–47

The people in the very first Christian churches loved Jesus very much.

They always tried to love others just as Jesus did. If people were hot and tired, they would give them a drink of water.

They went to the temple to worship God. They loved to sing songs about God's love.

Alleluia, alleluia!

(tune: "Frère Jacques")

Alleluia, alleluia!

God is love. God is love.

Wave our hands with joy.

Wave our hands with joy.

God is love. God is love.

After they prayed at the synagogue, they would meet in each other's homes and share a meal. They remembered how Jesus shared meals with his friends, too.

Loving Hands

The first followers of Jesus were known by their loving actions and signs.

Trace your hand. Think of all of the loving things you can do with your hands to show God's love. Draw or write inside your hand all of those wonderful actions and signs. If you don't have enough room, draw or write outside of your hand and let your love overflow.



This child could be you or someone else. Draw a home around this child, thinking about who will help to care for them and what the child needs to be able to grow well.

