

Planning



Sunday, February 12 – Saturday, February 18 • 2023

From the Heart

With the people of Israel, we look toward the land of promise and hear the clear message that God’s way leads to life, while Jesus’ questions in the Sermon on the Mount encourage us to look deep into our hearts and investigate what is true for us.

This week...

Ecumenical prayer calendar

Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland

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, prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others.

Special day ([commentary](#) on p. 172)

February 15 – Nirvana Day (*Buddhism*)

Personal reflection

Jesus shows how we can live closer to God’s ways and one another. He gives examples of coming to terms with our anger, being principled in our relationships, and being true to our oaths and promises. These heart matters and Spirit matters turn us inward to seek the meaning of who and whose we are.

- **Reach out to a friend or family member with whom you’ve had a disagreement or with whom you are angry right now. Allow love to guide your conversations.**

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.

February 12, 2023

6th Sunday after the Epiphany
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 or Sirach 15:15–20
Psalm 119:1–8

1 Corinthians 3:1–9

Matthew 5:21–37

the focus in age-level materials

Liturgical colour green

Notes

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____





Deuteronomy 30:15–20 or
Sirach 15:15–20
Psalm 119:1–8
1 Corinthians 3:1–9
Matthew 5:21–37
 the focus in age-level materials

Explorer of our hearts, discerner of our souls, we invite you into the depths of our struggles. We open the locked doors. With words of love and boldness of truth, we ask you to knock on the hardest places of our hearts and soften them so we may love you and love our neighbours. Amen.

From the Heart

Seven weeks into the new year and our resolutions might now feel more like routines than resolutions. We can be lulled back into living by habits and behaviours and might stop questioning what is at the heart of the matter.

This week, Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on Mount help us take another look at some commandments to discover what is at the heart of the law. As the people of Israel look toward a land of promise, the author is clear – following in God's way leads to life.

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 makes plain our choice as citizens of a global world, children of an interconnected creation: "I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity." The advice of Deuteronomy 30 is about more than by which to live; it's about right relationships. Faithfulness to God and God's ways are life-giving. Sirach 15:15–20 echoes the themes of faithfulness and our freedom of choice.

Happiness lies in keeping God's commandments, as the psalmist prays in **Psalm 119:1–8** and thus asks for an "upright heart." The Israelites considered the heart the centre of thought and intention. Psalm 119 is written as an acrostic using the Hebrew alphabet in a repetitive form to aid in memorization. Saying this psalm is a way of inscribing the heart with thoughts and intentions to love God and God's commandments.

The Corinthian church seems to have been full of conflict. In **1 Corinthians 3:1–9**, Paul cautions against jealousy and rivalry within the Christian community. Those who are jealous of one another are not living according to God's way. Instead, they act in immature ways. Paul uses the metaphor of the garden to show that God gives life and growth when we work together.

Matthew 5:21–37 Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, contains many regulations and commandments about specific details of everyday life. Jesus' followers sought to discover what it meant to apply these teachings in new situations. Applying a traditional rabbinic method: "You have heard it said...but I say..." Jesus addresses the difficult

topics of daily life and deepens their meaning for an ethical life. As he discusses anger (vv. 21–26), adultery (vv. 27–30), divorce (vv. 31–32), and true speech (vv. 33–37), Jesus tells his audience not just how to act but how to be – be in the image of God.

On first hearing, the rules Jesus sets out seem like stricter replacements for the commandments given in Deuteronomy. At a closer look, they deconstruct actions of murder, retribution, betrayal, abandonment, and lying into symptoms of our hard-heartedness and refusal to be reconciled to each other. In holding up the vision of each person with hearts reconciled to God and one another, Jesus claims personhood for all parties involved. The judged and the judger are not bound in the past but together liable for the justice and reconciliation of the future. Condemnation of adultery – thought as well as deed – challenges our tendency to treat others as objects rather than as subjects. This idea, along with coming down on the accepted practice of men divorcing their wives, furthers Jesus' campaign for the equal personhood of women.

The lesson on oath-taking seeks not merely to rid an antiquated practice but to open our eyes to the insidiousness of self-interest. We are either too concerned with being liked or accepted or so unconcerned with the hearer of our words and the receiver of our pledges and vows that we do not take care in speaking words that are true or in making sure they stay true.

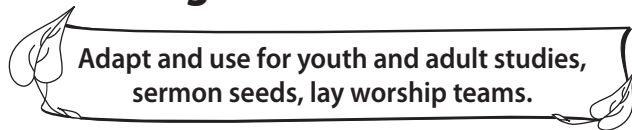
Life is full of opportunities, especially for those living in an industrialized and technological society. Still, options aren't the same as the choices we make that change the course of our lives.

•••••

Jesus shows us a new way of being human, of being peacemakers, of reconciling conflict, of telling the truth. As Christians, how should we handle conflict and rivalries within the Body of Christ? What does it mean to hold fast to God from the heart? What does it mean to live in ways that restore relationships and strengthen community?



Reflecting on the Word



Connecting with life

Reflect on your experiences of living with rules and regulations.

- **When has your experience of following rules or laws been satisfying or positive? When has it been a challenge or frustration?**

Scripture

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 Moses contrasts life and prosperity, death and adversity.

- **Consider what images each of these choices brings up for you.**
- **How does your church define what prosperity looks like in its context?**
- **What does your church consider its adversities?**

Psalms 119:1–8 inspires people to take seriously their hearts, thoughts, and intentions.

- **How do you respond to the encouragement, “Happy are those”?**
- **What does positive reinforcement in a religious context look like?**
- **How do we sometimes instruct with shame when we intend to encourage with praise?**

1 Corinthians 3:1–9 addresses community factions. Paul concentrates on the “common purpose.”

- **Consider a community that is important to you. Are there factions on a particular issue? Can you identify a common purpose?**

Matthew 5:21–37 Jesus uses exaggeration in his teaching: an escalating series of punishments for anger, advice to leave one’s sacrificial animal at Jerusalem temple and return after a 3-day journey to Galilee to restore a relationship; extreme suggestions of cutting off hands and plucking out eyes.

- **If Jesus did not intend these words to be taken literally, what does this vivid language impress upon his hearers?**

Jesus addresses the difficult topics of the daily lives of those who gathered to hear him teach and deepens the meanings they have for an ethical life.

- **What might be equivalent questions today?**

“Being spiritual is not the same thing as being religious. Religion is about what you believe and do. Spirituality is to do with quality; it is the thing of the heart. Religion draws lines. Spirituality reads between them. It tends to avoid definitions, boundaries, and battles. It is inclusive and holistic. It crosses frontiers and makes connections. It is characterized by sensitivity, gentleness, depth, openness, flow, feeling, quietness, wonder, paradox, being, waiting, acceptance, awareness, healing and inner journey” (By Brian Woodcock from *This Is the Day*, edited by Neil Paynter copyright © 2002 Wild Good Publications).

Woodcock’s observation about a life-giving spirituality offers a helpful window into Jesus’ traditional rabbinic method: “You have heard it said...but I say...”

- **How might the statement, “Religion draws lines, Spirituality reads between them,” offer a more expansive way into the challenging nature of Jesus’ teaching?**
- **What is Jesus getting at, even if it be through the lens of the gospel writer?**
- **What has been your experience of learning to live faith from the heart, rather than relying on external religious rules and expectations?**

Connecting scripture and life

- **When do you, individually and as a church, crave the structure and rules of religion? What is going on in the world and your life for that to be so?**
- **When do you, individually and as a church, crave for what Brian Woodcock describes as spirituality: reading between the lines, avoiding definitions, boundaries, and battles?**
- **How can you make space for both spirituality and religion?**

Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

Most adults and many young people and children have experienced the pain of hatred, disloyalty, divorce, or broken community. We would not want to exacerbate those experiences with a sense of shame or guilt. By way of contrast, this real-life context is potentially an inviting basis for living from the heart and all for the sake of the common good. It is a life lived beyond hard and fast rules, yet totally in keeping with a communal spirit. Today’s scriptures invite

us to encounter the world as disciples and to meet it with more integrity in our thoughts and deeds. It might be an opportune time to invite a group to talk for a minute or so about their work for mission or to commission another group ready to serve or to welcome new members. You might also invite people into deeper discernment with their thoughts through engaging with the stations.



From the Heart

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: three for the prayer of confession.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Matthew 5:21–37. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present “[The Things Jesus Taught](#)” on p. 174. Alternatively, for younger children, arrange for a storyteller to present “[God’s Dream – Part 3](#)” in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials. For the reflection on the reading, provide slips of paper. Place a litter bin or bag at the end of each row.
- ❑ Bring items for setting the worship space.
- ❑ You might choose to print [Red Ladder to Safe Harbour](#) on or in your bulletin. See “[Connecting with the Art](#)” on p. 8 for background to the art and artist.
- ❑ Bring song such as “The Anointing” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9, #5 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 9. Printed music and recording also available at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order>).
- ❑ Set [stations](#) as described on pp. 175–176.

 **Music Suggestions**

Be God’s
Danielle Rose; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

The Anointing
James Maher; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

May the God of Hope
Alvin Schutmaat, Ann Mitchell; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 6

Where the Spirit Is
Jonas Jonson, Per Harling; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 2

Let Us Put On the Clothes of Christ
Bret Hesla; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 1

Love Canon
Seasons Songbook, vol. 1

We Give Our Hands to You
Daisy Nshakazongwe, Andrew Donaldson; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 1

Draw the Circle Wide
Gordon Light

 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

Based on Psalm 119:1–2

How sacred are those whose path is honest and just,

who boldly stride out in the spirit of God!

Sacred are they that pay attention to Wisdom,
seeking God’s inner voice with all their heart.

Friends,

be joyful in the kindness of God.

May the Spirit lead us further into the ways of costly love.

Come, let us worship.

Opening prayer

God of our deepest yearnings,
give us devoted hearts that seek
to listen, think, and feel anew.

Open in us

the wisdom of Jesus,

with the courage needed

to travel his life-giving road.

Amen.

Prayer of confession

Have three voices speak from the back of the worship space.

ONE: We want a faith that sets us free.

TWO: We need a way that is new and hopeful.

THREE: We don’t want more laws weighing us down.

ONE, TWO, THREE: We desire a faith that sets us free to live and love.

God of extraordinary and wise ways,

ways that stretch us to the limit of creative possibilities,

we admit how difficult it can be to live our faith without
turning to rule books – new or old.

Have mercy on us for rigid patterns of belief
often inherited and rarely questioned.

Forgive us also for the grief

we cause ourselves and others,



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when we offer moral prescriptions that continue to injure and shame;
impossible expectations that keep new life from taking root and flourishing.

Renew us, O God,
with your gift of compassion given to all.
And may this unconditional compassion
be the wise rule and guide in our lives.

ONE: We want a faith that sets us free.

TWO: We need a way that is new and hopeful.

THREE: We don't want more laws weighing us down.

ONE, TWO, THREE: We desire a faith that sets us free to live and love.

Words of affirmation

Friends, hear a word of grace:

God is our sure hope,
and steady font of healing.

Be free in God

to live, choose, and love with passion and unbridled joy
at home and at play

in your hearts.

Amen.

Engage

Opening the word

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 The book of Deuteronomy is written as if it is the farewell sermon by Moses before the people enter into the promised land. Deuteronomy 30:15–20 offers practical advice to the people. While the going has been rough at times, the community has become insular during the 40 years of wandering, and dependent upon one another. But now, the people are about to enter a new land, encounter people who think and believe differently from them, have different values, offer all sorts of new temptations. So, the preacher asks, how are you going to make it out there? You have to choose, every day, maybe in every encounter, maybe in every situation. And when another day starts, the choice must be made again. Choose life! The people long ago were challenged, just as we are when we leave this somewhat insular community and go out into the neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces where we live our daily lives.

Matthew 5:21–37 *the focus scripture for age-level materials in ENCORE*

Choose from the following.

Bible story Arrange for a storyteller to present “[The Things Jesus Taught](#)” on p. 174. Alternatively, for younger children, tell the story “[God’s Dream – Part 3](#)” (in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials).

Reflection on the reading Distribute slips of paper. After the reading, invite the people to take a moment to reflect on the following:

- **What word did you utter recently you wish you could take back?**
- **Whom did you dehumanize by lusting after them, laughing behind their back, gossiping about them?**
- **What easy lie did you utter this week?**

After a moment of reflection, invite them to use fingertips (not pens/pencils) to write down their responses, fold their papers, and drop them in a litter bin or bag placed at the end of each row, where it will be left behind when they leave – no longer to be a burden.

**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 “The Anointing” as people gather again (*Seasons Songbook, vol. 9, #5 on Seasons Music CD, vol. 9*. Printed music and recording also available at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order>).

Prayers of the people

God of love and life, hear our prayer
for renewed ways of heart and mind.

For we seek a faith
bold in its authenticity,
generous in its practice,
and always deepening in its heart.

God of love and life, hear our prayer
for a renewal of hope and action.



For we seek a faith
that longs for shared futures,
is reconciling in its expression,
and always deepening in its heart.

God of love and life, hear our prayer
a renewing of trust and compassion.
For we seek a faith willing to co-suffer and heal,
tenacious in its desire for justice,
and always deepening in its heart.
Amen.

Prayer of dedication or offering prayer

We dedicate these gifts to you, O God, whose love teaches
us abundance and belonging.
May we use them to face the death and adversity we bring
on ourselves and others.
May we be inspired by the life and prosperity you infuse
in Creation.
Amen.

Bless

Season after the Epiphany circle blessing.
Go now, beloved,
to follow the love of God
to be surprised by God's wonder
to lift your voice for love and compassion.

Feel God's encouragement
to be a blessing as you offer blessings
with your heart and hands and
know that you never, ever go alone.
Amen.

Dare to believe that you are people
on a mission of healing and grace.

Special Day Commentary

February 15 – Nirvana Day (*Buddhism*)

This day commemorates the death of the Buddha, which is also the day he achieved nirvana or total enlightenment. While celebrations vary according to region and culture, Buddhists generally observe the day by meditating or going to Buddhist temples or monasteries. Often special food is prepared, and some people bring gifts to the temple or monastery, such as money, household goods, or clothes. Some Buddhists will read passages from the Parinibbana Sutta, which describes the last days of Buddha, while others may reflect on those who have recently passed away.



Choices and Options

We are called to make choices that allow all to live God's dream.

- Think of a choice you might have to make – an actual situation you are dealing with, or a scenario you might face.
- Think of three or four options you have for the situation or scenario you face.
- Write or doodle your response over the page, in no particular order.

Reflect on each option.

- How might it impact the lives of others?
- How might it impact my own life?
- How might it meet the needs of others?
- How might it meet my needs?
- How might it build community and encourage relationships?
- How might it break the community apart and break relationships?

Doodle your response, so the words and shapes mingle with the words already on the page.



The Things Jesus Taught

Based Matthew 5:21–37

For a long time, your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents have known that it is wrong to kill another person. There is never a good reason to kill someone. It is called murder.

Now I want to tell you something harder. If you are angry and you think that you would like to kill someone, that is just as bad. You are murdering that person in your heart.

Don't say things that hurt somebody else. It is wrong to say something that will make them feel bad. It is also harmful if you think mean things about someone. Even if you don't say it out loud.

Sometimes you bring money to the church. That's good. But if you are angry at someone, put the money back into your pocket. Go and talk to that person. Try to become friends again. When you've done that, then you can bring your money to the church.

Never say what you don't mean. When you tell a friend that you will do something, be sure you do it. Don't say, "I forgot," or "I didn't really mean it."

When you make a promise, keep that promise!

*Lectionary Story Bible: Year A by Ralph Milton.
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A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder.



Bible story

Materials

- Paper or drawing pads
- Recording of today's story "[The Things Jesus Taught](#)"
- Alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

The practice of storytelling _____

Directions

1. Listen to the story "The Things Jesus Taught."
2. Use the art supplies to record your response to the story.



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.

We grow together

Materials

- Basic supplies
- Coloured papers



Suitable for all ages working together

The practice of wisdom

Directions

Wisdom comes as we search our hearts, listening for God’s spirit to stir or speak within. Wisdom comes as we witness and share our stories and our call. We grow together as we get to know one another and are inspired by one another.

1. Using a central circle, write “We Grow Together” in the middle of the poster board, table, or bulletin board.
2. Cut “petal” shapes from coloured pieces of paper.
3. Write on each petal what each brings to the growth of the community. What unique offering does each bring? Offer assistance as needed to anyone unsure what to write; after all, we see the gifts and uniqueness of others sometimes more clearly than they see for themselves. Some suggestions: levity, humour, love, objectivity, peace, calm...
4. Tape each petal around the central circle, adding more and more as they are completed.
5. You can add blank petals sporadically for others to add their words later.
6. Place this in a visible space for all to see and enjoy.

Linked by love

Materials

- Pipe cleaner in a variety of colours
- Needle nose pliers
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



Suitable for all ages

The practice of love

Directions

1. Gather materials in the middle of the table.
2. Using a pipe cleaner, bend it into the shape of a heart. Do so by bending it in half, unfolding it in the opposite direction, joining the open ends together and shaping the “heart.”
3. Take the next heart, join it to the first one, and link them together.
4. As each heart is placed next to another, say, “We grow in God’s love.”
5. Repeat as many times as you desire. Each heart that’s added represents how we are each linked by God’s love, and that love continues to grow the community of faith.
6. These can be displayed around the church, used as a table runner, or other visual capacity.



Tower of words

Materials

- Jenga® game
- Label each brick with a word that is important to building God's community, such as "peace," "justice," "love," "kindness," "laws"
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



Suitable for ages 6–adult
working together

The practice of balancing our words

Directions

1. Jesus reminds us that words are powerful. Words can build us up, and they can tear us down. You will build a strong, steady tower of words in this fun activity. Be careful as you build higher as you might tip the balance, and the tower will topple.
2. Using only one hand, push or move one of the blocks from a lower level of the tower and place it on its top level.
3. Going clockwise, each player takes a turn removing a block from a lower level and placing it on top of the tower.
4. As the tower gets taller, be careful, you don't want to be the one to make the tower fall.
5. After the game, reflect on the following: In the laws recorded in Matthew 5:21–37, we are called to create a world of justice, or forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, love, commitment, and honesty.

■ **How might the building of this tower of words be a metaphor/symbol for your community and our world?**

We are God's building

Materials

- Basic supplies
- Quantity of modelling clay or clay
- Construction paper
- Variety of "building" materials, such as toothpicks, pipe cleaners, spools, corks, rolling pins
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



Suitable for all ages
working together

The practice of building community

Directions

Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount guides us as we grow as communities of mercy, justice, reconciliation, peace, and love. 1 Corinthians 3:1–9, one of the other readings for today, states, "For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building." In this activity, you will *work together* with other church members to *build* a community.

1. Using the clay and building materials provided, build one piece of a community (a house, a store, a forest, a park, a road, a river, a mountain, a windmill, a garden, a church, a soup kitchen, a school – whatever comes to mind).
2. Once you create your piece, place it in relation to pieces others have created.
3. Cut a thin strip of construction paper about the length of your finger. Place a toothpick vertically in the middle of the paper. Glue the toothpick to paper. Fold the paper over so that you have a small flag. On this flag, write a word such as "peace," "love," "faith," "mercy," and then place that flag on the spot in the community where you think that word lives. If there is no place to anchor your flag, use clay to create a base at the end of the toothpick.
4. **Rules** You cannot destroy a structure that someone else has created. You cannot move a structure that someone else has created. You may not take items (clay, toothpicks, and so on) from another person's piece.

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.

God's Dream – Part 3

A story based on Matthew 5:21–37

Jesus and his friends were talking together on the top of a tall hill. It was a special place to share stories. Jesus began to talk with his friends.

“Everyone is special because no one is exactly alike.

“Sometimes, we might not get along because we have different ideas and plans.

“Sometimes there will be days when we get frustrated or angry with each other.

“But when that happens. It is important not to hurt each other. We all carry God’s love in our hearts.

“God’s love can grow inside when we remember to care about each other, even when we’re feeling frustrated or angry.”

Jesus knows us.

Jesus loves us.

Jesus helps us live and grow.

Jesus knows us.

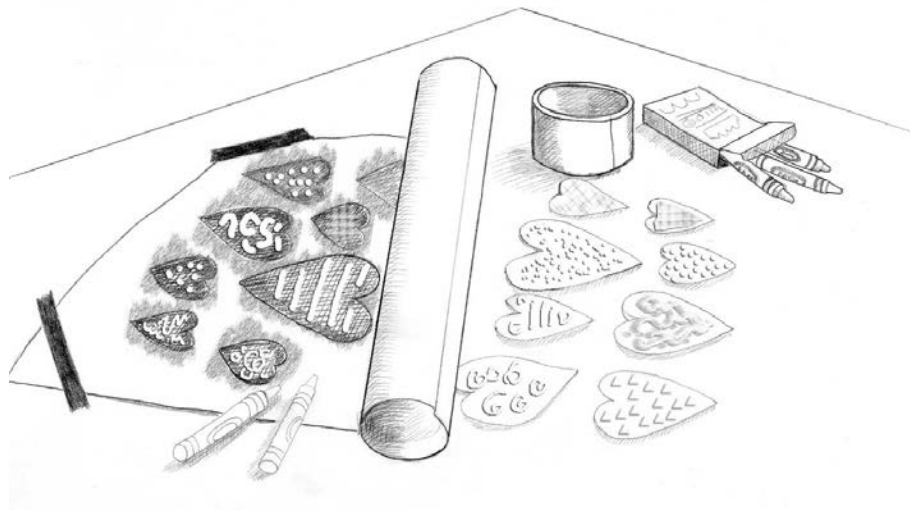
Jesus loves us.

Now, this love we show.

Heart Rubbings

Directions

1. Fix the heart shapes to a table with rolled pieces of tape.
2. Cover the heart shapes with a large sheet of plain paper.
3. Tape the paper in place, making sure that the paper won't rip when doing the rubbings.
4. Rub across the paper with the sides of crayons to make the hearts appear.
5. Each time a heart appears completely, call out a message such as, “love is here.”
6. Continue until all hearts have been revealed.



Puzzle

Find, fill in with markers, and count as many hearts as you can find.

