

A Vision of God's Love

There are times when following Jesus feels particularly hard. Jesus himself knows how his ministry will end, while the writer of 1 Peter reflects on how our faith can push us against the grain of what is culturally expected and acceptable. This week's readings remind us that the indwelling love of God and the Spirits enduring presence is with us; not matter what, we are never alone and never abandoned.

Focus scripture: John 14:15–21

In John 14:15–21, Jesus discusses them openly with his disciples just hours before he will be crucified for preaching radical love and inclusivity. There will be times when it will feel like we are walking through fire and carrying heavy burdens, and that we will be doing so by ourselves. When we worship our God, rather than the human desires and comforts of this world, then we will suffer, with and for the sake of others, which is an inherently lonely experience.

Yet in our loving, we are always accompanied by the Holy Spirit, here called the Advocate (literally, the Paraclete: the one who is called alongside us). As much as our faith may lead us to places where we feel abandoned when our insistence on love and justice puts us at odds with the world – even with those closest to us – we have the assurance that we will be accompanied, that we will be able to see Jesus and be part of him and of God, even now in this life.

Acts 17:22–31 What is it that we worship? In many ways this is the question that Paul asks all of us through his speech in Athens. Do we keep our hearts turned towards that which is of human origin, cast in metal or stone or created of human desire? Or do we keep our hearts turned to that which is always bigger than we are, that which unites all of creation in one origin and one blessing? Do we give our attention, our time, our energy to our own stuff, or to God's?

It's a question that we need to ask from time to time, throughout our lives of faith. As much as we all want to follow Jesus, and to

live our faith, it is entirely human to want to avoid suffering. We want to have the spacious place and the listening God that the writer of **Psalm 66:8–20** describes, but the refining and the burdens sound a lot less palatable. Sometimes we go so far as to suggest that the refining was needed for the ancients, but that we who follow Jesus no longer need it. Today's texts suggest otherwise.

Though neither use the terminology of the psalm, both the writer of **1 Peter 3:13–22** and Jesus acknowledge the continuing need to acknowledge our humanity while still striving for the divine. The acts of love, grace, and compassion to which the gospel calls us can be uncomfortable, to say the least. Loving all of our neighbours can call into question the status quo in which some folks are "in" and some are "out." If we are called to love those who are "out" then we call into question the system that excluded them, and the power that depends on that exclusion. We will suffer, indeed, with those who are suffering, by virtue of our compassion, but also because of the pushback that comes when cultural mores are questioned. Jesus knew both of these forms of suffering intimately, as is evident from the gospel reading.

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What is it that we worship, and what is it that keeps us from the love that Jesus preached? Where do we need to be reminded of the abiding presence of the Spirit, to give us the reassurance that at the end of the refining – of our choosing to love – we will find the spaciousness and comfort of our God?



Focus scripture

John 14:15–21

Additional scriptures

Acts 17:22–31

Psalm 66:8–20

1 Peter 3:13–22

Holy God, pour your light down upon us, that we may see you where we least expect to and follow in your way rather than in the way of the world. 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

Although there is a growing desire for independence for the older children in your group, they are still reliant on the significant adults in their lives. All children in the group have times when they need help, comfort, and encouragement. The word “advocate” will likely be unfamiliar to group members but they will have all experienced times when they needed someone to stand up for them.

This session can help children to connect everyday living and loving with the presence

of God, and the good news that no matter what happens God’s Spirit is always there to comfort, encourage, and advocate. The words Jesus speaks to his disciples in the focus scripture, John 14:15–21, show the strong ties and intimacy between them. Children who have experienced a close friendship will understand Jesus’ concern for his followers after he is gone. Pray that the children and you will come to a better understanding of the constant presence of the Advocate promised by Jesus.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, John 14:15–21, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 91).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white, gold, or yellow cloth, candle, and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring a green plant in a pot.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “Come, Holy Spirit” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ Bring training wheels for a bicycle and/or water wings.

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet “[Waiting](#)” and “Story line” from last week.
- ❑ **Music group:** song “Pass It On” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)
- ❑ **Role play group:** no additional materials needed

Respond

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

- ❑ **Easter zone:** option: song “The Peace of the Earth” (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ **Puzzle zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Jesus’ Promise](#)”
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of the section “Spirit symbol” from resource sheet “[The Advocate](#),” paper, kitchen foil, card stock, thick yarn
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of the section “Cinquain poetry” from resource sheet “[The Advocate](#),” construction paper
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** dove shapes (pattern in *Virtual Resource Booklet* in Library at www.seasonsonline.ca), poster board

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “The Peace of the Earth” (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



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Scripture

John 14:15–21

FOCUS To be encouraged by Jesus' promise that God's Spirit is always with us

Gather

Welcome the children and explain that we are nearing the end of the Season of Easter. Invite them to share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and lead the children in the ritual, inviting them to participate as indicated:

We light this candle to celebrate the light of God's presence in our lives.
(Invite a child to light the candle.)

During the Easter season we celebrate our new life in Christ.
(Invite a child to place the plant on the worship table.)

We are witnesses to God's love and light, as we follow Jesus, the risen Christ.

All: Alleluia!

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

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God,
we know you are here with us.
May your Spirit be with us
as we follow the ways of Jesus. Amen.

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

Connecting with the focus

Show the children the training wheels and/or water wings and have them share what they know about what these items are for. Explain if necessary that these are used to help and support children as they are learning to ride a bicycle or to swim. Invite group members to share experiences of learning something new.

■ **How did it feel the first time you tried?**

■ **Who was there to help you?**

Explain that in this week's story Jesus talks about a special helper who is sent by God to help and support us as we learn to live in God's way.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Story line Look together at the story line begun last week to remember the stories they heard so far during this Season of Easter: "Jesus is alive" (**John 20:1–18**); "Thomas" (**John 20:19–31**); "Emmaus" (**Luke 24:13–35**); "the first Christians" (**Acts 2:42–47**); and "Stephen" (**Acts 7:55–60**).

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of John. Recall that we've been hearing stories of the first community of Jesus' followers who got

together in each other's homes, to share stories and teachings about Jesus. The gospel of John contains many of these stories and teachings.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Waiting](#)" to present the story based on **John 14:15–21**.

Wondering questions Use the following questions to wonder together:

■ **What were some of the things that Jesus promised his followers?**

■ **How do you think this message from Jesus would have helped the disciples?**

Story line Print the focus passage reference and the words “John’s community” on another sticky note and add it to the story line begun earlier.

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.)

Music group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to identify ways in which they witness to God’s love. Play or sing the song “Pass It On” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9) and invite the children to move around the room giving high fives as they pass one another. Stop at the end of each verse and have the children form groups of two or three. Give each group a few minutes to create a pose that shows a loving action. When everyone has struck a pose say, “There is love,” and encourage the children to respond, “There is God.”

Role play group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to explore further what it

means to act in loving ways. Provide copies of the scenarios (see bottom of p. 95) and have children act out a response to each of these situations. Or they might choose to act out situations from their own lives.

Reporting Invite the music group to share some of their action poses and invite the role play group to act out some responses to specific situations.

The Bible story and us

Jesus promised his friends and followers that God would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. This promise of God’s Spirit is important for us today too. God’s Spirit can encourage us when we are worried, comfort us when we are scared, and help us when we don’t know what to do. Share some of the ways you have experienced God’s Spirit in your life.

Each time we share God’s love in our actions, we are helping love to grow in the world. Explore the following question together:

■ **Where do you see signs of God’s love being put into action at your school? At church?**

Respond

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

- **Easter zone: Spoken litany** Jesus’ Spirit is with us everywhere, like the air we breathe, and the Spirit helps us to live in loving ways. Encourage the children to think of things they do during a typical day. Use the phrase, “God’s Spirit is with me when I (*name activity*),” followed by the group response, “Thank you, God.” Encourage children to include both happy and sad times. Conclude this time with a blessing song such as “The Peace of the Earth” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

- **Puzzle zone: Hidden message** *(for younger children)* Jesus’ followers received a wonderful promise from Jesus and we can receive this same promise. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Jesus’ Promise](#)” and help children follow the directions to discover this promise and the hidden word. *(Answer: Spirit)*



- **Craft zone: Symbols** Jesus reminds us that we can count on the help of the Spirit. Distribute copies of section “[Spirit symbol](#)” from the resource sheet “[The Advocate](#)” and invite children to create symbols as reminders of the presence of the advocate or helper promised by Jesus. Talk together about the shapes or figures that would remind them of the helper and advocate.

- **Quiet zone: Poetry** *(for older children)* As followers of Jesus we can count on the constant presence of the Advocate, God’s Spirit. Explain that the word “advocate” is also translated as “helper,” “comforter,” and “counselor” in various Bibles. Distribute copies of the section “[Cinquain poetry](#)” from the resource sheet “[The Advocate](#)” and review the directions. Brainstorm words that relate to helper and advocate and what an advocate does. Encourage children to write poems about God’s Spirit, cut these out, and glue onto diamond-shaped sheets of construction paper.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Dove prayers** (*for older children*) Jesus' promise reassured the disciples and can encourage us too when things look bleak. Invite children to look through newspapers to find headlines and stories of situations around the world that are in need of God's comfort, help, encouragement, or advocacy. Distrib-

ute dove shapes and invite children to glue their stories onto the shapes and print a simple prayer around the edges of the dove shape. Arrange these on a large sheet of poster board with a title chosen by the children and display in the church hall.

Bless

Gather around the worship area, light the candle again, and invite children to spend a few moments in silence looking at the flame.

Sing if possible, the song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Lead the children in the following simple breath prayer. Begin by breathing in and out, slowly and

deeply. Read each line slowly and quietly. Repeat the prayer several times.

As you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be..."

As you breathe out, say silently, "with you."

Then, as you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be..."

As you breathe out, say silently, "with me."

Blessing Offer the following blessing: "God's peace and God's Spirit go with you."

Reflect

In what ways did the children indicate an understanding of God's constant presence with them? How did they reveal a connection between everyday, loving actions and God's presence?

Role play scenarios

- ❑ You live next door to an older couple whose children live far away. The husband dies and the wife is living alone. What might you do to bring her some comfort?
- ❑ You have lived in the same town for your whole life. You know a lot of the children at school. This year a new boy comes to school, who doesn't speak English. What can you do to show friendship to this boy?





Waiting

(including a paraphrase of John 14:15–21, selected verses)

Setting a story in a context that the children will recognize helps to tie the Bible stories together. This is especially helpful for the older children.

Much time had passed since Jesus appeared to the disciples in the locked room in Jerusalem and the two followers on the road to Emmaus. The followers of Jesus longed for Jesus to be with them again.

Benjamin had helped his mother and father prepare for the followers to gather in their home this night. He watched them arrive. Some looked worried and sad. They asked questions of one another.

“What did Jesus promise us?”

“How long will we have to wait?”

“What are we supposed to do while we wait?”

“What did Jesus teach us?”

Jesus’ teachings were not written down, but some followers who had gone with Jesus from place to place told others the stories that Jesus told and about the people that Jesus

healed and helped. Their words stirred up the memories of others in the room. Benjamin listened quietly as the people recalled the special words of Jesus.

“If you love me, keep my commandments.”

“To help you, I will ask God to send you an advocate, someone to stand with you forever. This will be the Spirit of truth. This Spirit will be in you.”

“Through this advocate, I will be with you and in you. You will know this Spirit is in people because they will do what I have taught you. They will know who I am and I will love them.”

The people talked about these words and their meaning. How could these teachings from Jesus help them now?

When all the people left for their homes, Benjamin went to the top of his house. He looked at all the stars in the sky. The world seemed enormous. I have never seen Jesus, thought Benjamin, but I believe what the people who were with Jesus say. Because I believe, I want to do what Jesus taught too. I want to love people, all people, like Jesus loved people. As Benjamin thought about what he might do to show God’s love to people, his eyes closed, and soon he was asleep.



Jesus' Promise

Before he died, Jesus had something very important to say to his friends. To find out what it was, read the story and fill in the blanks using the words listed.

HELPER JESUS THAT PROMISED WITH DISCIPLES

_____ knew that he would have to leave his _____.

Jesus wanted them to know they would not be left alone.

So Jesus _____ that God would send a _____

who would stay _____ them forever.

The same promise has been given
to all of God's creation, and _____ includes you!

Do you know who the helper was? Use the bold letter from each word to fill in the blanks and spell out the answer.

Jesus promised that God would send

the _____ to the whole world.



THE ADVOCATE

Cinquain Poetry

A cinquain (SIN cane) poem is written to form a diamond shape in this way.

One word for the advocate, the subject, and the title of the poem

Two words that describe the advocate

Three words that tell what the advocate does

Two words that describe the advocate

One word, another word for the advocate, the subject of the poem.

Spirit Symbol

What to do

- 1 Plan a design for your symbol of the advocate, comforter, helper, encourager promised by Jesus. You might draw some samples on paper the size of your backing before you use the materials for the final product.
- 2 When you are satisfied with your design, wrap the kitchen foil around the stiff paper or cardboard. Tape it securely to the back.
- 3 Lightly draw your design for the symbol of the advocate on the kitchen foil. Be careful not to press hard or the foil may tear.
- 4 Now glue the yarn along the lines of your symbol design. The easiest method is to trace the lines first with the glue and then place the yarn on it. Another method is to dip the yarn in the glue and place in on the foil. White glue dries clear.
- 5 Carefully wipe off any glue in the spaces between the lines of yarn.
- 6 Give the glue a moment to dry before continuing.
- 7 With markers, fill in the spaces so your design stands out.
- 8 Keep the symbol flat until the glue is thoroughly dry.

