

Living in Abundance

The growing community of Jesus' followers spent an abundance of time together learning, praying, sharing of food and resources – all with sincere gratitude to God. They helped shepherd one another to walk in and make right paths for others who would follow in the Good Shepherd's ways of life, including us! Because three of the four lections this week speak of a shepherd, evoking images of a shepherd leading sheep to green pastures, we may begin to wonder who are the “wolves in sheep's clothing” trying to steal the sheep in our churches, communities, and lives. When delving into these scriptures for other commonalities, we hear the abundance of God-provision and care, including that found in our relationships with God, and with one another.

Focus scripture: Acts 2:42–47

Acts 2:42–47 speaks directly of people, not sheep, as it picks up from last week's reading where Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached to curious Jews from every nation who had gathered in Jerusalem. In response, an abundance of people (about 3,000) were baptized and added to the number Jewish Jesus-followers. There is also an abundance of “wonders and signs” that stir up awe, fear, terror in all. We read of the mutual concern and care of this growing community, as they spend time together in the temple, and in homes praying, breaking bread, and eating with joy and sincerity of heart. This new community share their possessions, so no one is in need. Their words of praise and deeds of mercy testify to the abundance and wholeness of life they experience following in the “right paths” on which they are being led.

Those early days of communal life after Christ's resurrection and ascension echo the psalmist's testimony of abundant God-provision and care found in **Psalm 23**. 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, the first verse of which Jesus cries out from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:33, Matthew 27:46). God's goodness and faithful love follow/pursue Jesus, the early Christ followers, and all God's “sheep,” including us.

Even when we stray, as spoken of in **1 Peter 2: 25**, we are invited into right relationship with God and with one another. These verses from 1 Peter are part of a “household code” that instruct the readers how to live. Typically, they were addressed to the head of the household, but here it is the enslaved people who are addressed directly. In this departure from the norm, 1 Peter reflects tensions of daily life as households are to have their first loyalty to God and not to the norms of culture. It is Jesus, their “shepherd and guardian,” whose way they are to follow.

In **John 10: 1–10**, Jesus uses the metaphor of sheep and shepherd and refers to himself as the gate. Metaphor aside, a shepherd might function as the gate for the entrance of the sheep pen by placing their body and their lives across the opening.



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



Focus scripture

Acts 2:42–47

Additional scriptures

Psalm 23

John 10:1–10

1 Peter 2:19–25

God in whom we find shepherding love, may we hear, follow, and embody this love in all the days and in all the ways of our lives. May words and deeds joyfully testify to the abundance of your faithful love for us and for all. Amen.

Lecture 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

Younger children’s understanding of community is growing to encompass more than their immediate family. They are beginning to understand the value of social interactions and will often choose activities based on who is in that particular group. As their desire for independence becomes increasingly important, older children in this age group are drawn strongly to establish connections with peers. If group members know each other outside of their time together at church they begin to make connections between their experiences at church and at school or in the community.

This week children will begin learning about the early church and their witness in the world. Several of the Respond options give children the chance to engage with others in the faith community and share in ministries of outreach. This is a good time for establishing quality connections with their community of faith and to affirm each child as a valued member of the church family. Pray for the children as they explore how daily actions bring Christian community to life.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Acts 2:42–47, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 75).
- ❑ 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 “As Long as We Follow/Na Nzela Na Lola” (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- ❑ Bring long strip of mural paper; make a copy of resource sheet “[Introducing the Early Church](#)” and cut strips apart.
- ❑ **Good News group:** resource sheet “[Introducing the Early Church](#)”
- ❑ **Game 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:** invite several guests from the congregation to speak about the outreach projects in which they participate, bringing photographs, props, and information.
- ❑ **Community zone:** ingredients and materials to make a simple no-bake snack; make arrangements to use the kitchen and to serve food after the worship service.
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of the resource sheet “[My Church](#)”
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of the resource sheet “[Making Paper Beads](#),” different colours of paper (gift wrap, magazine pictures, or other paper), rulers, knitting needles, string and darning needles
- ❑ **Art zone:** mural paper cut into large circle, church mission magazines, different colours of tempera paint placed in shallow dishes, cleanup supplies

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “Pass It On” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



Living in Abundance

Scripture

Acts 2:42–47

FOCUS To learn about the early church and the actions of the first Christian communities

Gather

Welcome the children and remind them that we are in 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 "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God,
we know you are here with us.
May we grow in love
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

Have the children watch as you perform several simple, yet multi-stepped tasks within the room, such as arranging chairs, putting some objects in a box, or laying supplies out on a table. After each task invite two children to take turns sitting in the "witness chair" and telling as many details about what happened as they can remember. Repeat with a new task until everyone who wishes has had a chance to serve as witness. After each round ask:

- **How were the stories of the two witnesses the same? How were they different?**
- **What would you add to the story that the witnesses did not include?**

Explain that today we will hear how the first followers of Jesus were powerful witnesses to God's love.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Story line In order to help children remember the stories they will hear during this Season of Easter, create a visual story line by drawing a line on a long strip of paper. Write a phrase and gospel reference on sticky notes and ask children to add these in order to the line as you recall the stories from the past three weeks together: "Jesus is alive" (**John 20:1–18**); "Thomas" (**John 20:19–31**); and "Emmaus" (**Luke 24:13–35**).

Then invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Acts. Explain that we will be reading from this book for the next two weeks. This book has stories about many adventures of the first followers of Jesus. It also tells us about the special way that people lived together in communities.

The Bible story

Explain that the Bible passage today is about the followers of Jesus after the time when Jesus first

appeared to his disciples after his death and resurrection. Distribute strips from the resource sheet [“Introducing the Early Church,”](#) based on [Acts 2:42–47](#), and invite the children to take turns reading from their strips. Print the focus passage reference and the phrase “the first Christians” on another sticky note and add it to the story line begun earlier.

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

- **What are some of the things that the first Christians did?**
- **What do you like about the description of this community?**

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.)

Good News group This group will have the opportunity to explore ways in which churches share the good news of the gospel. Review again the information on the resource sheet [“Introducing the Early Church”](#) to see what the first Christians did as they were becoming a new church. Invite children to imagine that they were making a banner showing the activities of the first Christians. What would they include?

- **What symbols could we use if we were making a banner about new life and growth in our church?**

Game group This group will have the opportunity to explore further the concept of community. Invite them to play a game to help them identify the different groups to which they belong. Have them stand up if they are part of a family...scouting group, sports team, musical group, dance group, and so on. Have them notice groups they have in common and talk about what the group does together. What would be the definition of a group or community? What does a church community or church school group do that is different from other groups?

Reporting Invite the Good News group to talk about the symbols they would use to show new and growth, and invite the game group to share their ideas of what makes a church community different from other communities.

The Bible story and us

Invite the group to look again at the strips of information from the resource sheet [“Introducing the Early Church”](#) and call out phrases that describe what these followers of Jesus did (met often, prayed together, read scriptures, told stories of Jesus, shared generously).

- **How are these things the same as what we do in church today? How are they different?**
- **How can we share generously as followers of Jesus today?**

Respond

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

- **Easter zone: Outreach ministries** The early church community witnessed to God’s love through their actions. Invite your guests to talk to the group about the outreach ministries in which they are involved. Have each person sit in the “witness chair” and talk about some of the things they do, using photographs and props to help describe their work. Then invite the children to take turns sitting in the chair and completing this statement: “Jesus’ way of love is shown when *(name an aspect of the outreach ministries that they remember)*.”
- **Community zone: Serving project** When we share with others we show Jesus’ love. Help the children to make a simple snack to serve to the rest of the congregation after worship.
- **Quiet zone: Reflections** *(for older children)* The church today continues to do some of the things that the early church did. Distribute copies of the resource sheet [“My Church”](#) and Bibles. Invite children to read [Acts 2:42–47](#) and then follow the directions for writing or drawing on the resource sheet.
- **Craft zone: Paper necklaces** Like the early church we are a community of people gathered in Christ. Invite children to make necklaces of different coloured beads as reminders that they are part of a community of people following in the way of Jesus. Distribute copies of the resource sheet [“Making Paper Beads”](#) and paper. Help children follow the directions to



make the beads. Have them share their beads with each other so that each child has a bead from each person in the group. Encourage them to keep their strings of beads as reminders of the group.

- **Art zone: Circle collage** (*for younger children*) The first followers of Jesus were known by their loving actions and signs. We too can share loving actions as followers of Jesus today. Draw a large heart shape in the

middle of a circle cut from mural paper. Invite children to fill the heart shape with pictures cut from church mission magazines, showing ways that people in their denomination are sharing God's love. Then have them dip one hand each in tempera paint and make handprints around the heart shape, showing their willingness to lend a hand and share God's love in their everyday lives.

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 "Pass It On" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #7 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 goes with you."

Reflect

As the children talked about their church, what did you discover about their connections to the congregation and what they know about congregational life? How might you help children get more involved in fellowship, worship, and service?



Introducing the Early Church

They lived just after the time of Jesus and some of them were eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus' life.

Many of them had been in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came and filled the believers.

They were full of the joy and excitement of something totally new.

They were expecting Jesus to return and establish God's reign at any moment.

As they believed Jesus would return at any time, material possessions didn't seem very important to many of the believers. In fact the Bible records that some even gave up their jobs.

They met together regularly to talk about Jesus' teaching.

They went to the synagogue to worship God.

They read from the scriptures.

They shared the story of Jesus with everyone who would listen.

They prayed together often.



My Church

In this space, write or draw what you know about the way the believers in Jesus the Christ lived together in the early church.

Think about your church. What would you put in a paragraph or a drawing to describe how we live as followers of Jesus?

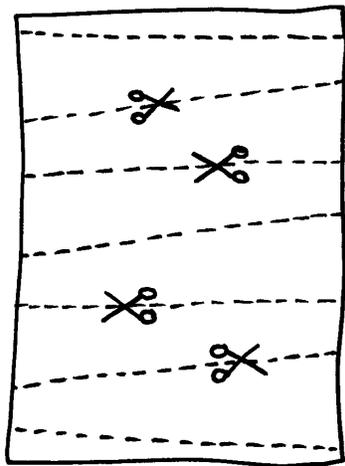


MAKING PAPER BEADS

Materials

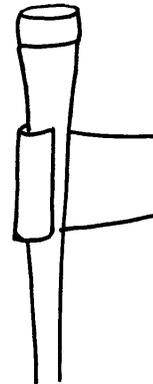
- colourful paper (even magazine pages with pictures work)
- ruler and pencil
- scissors
- knitting needles
- glue
- string and needle

1 Divide the paper into strips like this. The size of the strips will determine the size of the beads.



2 Cut out the strips.

3 Roll each strip on to a knitting needle, starting with the wide end. Wrap it tightly and evenly.



4 Glue the narrow end and hold until the glue is dry.



5 Make the number of beads you want. Then string them.

