

Beloved, Be Loved, Be Love

When we trust God, when we abide in God, the love of God revealed in Jesus bears much fruit in us and in our relationships with God and one another. Meetings become holy encounters when we meet others with a spirit of love, mutuality, and interdependence.

Focus scripture: John 15:1–8

John 15:1–8 begins, “I am the true vine,” one of several statements in John in which Jesus speaks of himself using a metaphor that begins “I am...” Last week’s text included another of these statements: “I am the good shepherd” (10:11a). This text echoes the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6–9, as well as shares imagery with Matthew 3:7–10 and 7:15–20.

Metaphor invites multiple interpretations and layers in meaning. This particular metaphor appeals through its accessibility: the purpose of cutting down and pruning vegetation is as it always has been. Yet we must be mindful when interpreting this metaphor of the role in which we place ourselves. The identity of the vine grower is clear. We are invited to examine, individually and communally, the condition of our vineyard and how we might improve its health. However, we are not invited to call upon the metaphor in ways that perpetrate harm or oppression under the guise of “cutting off an unproductive branch.”

Another significant feature of this text is the recurrence of abiding. This abiding is thick with significance. It is to be secure, to be deeply attached, to be close, to be loyal, to continue in a particular state or action. It conveys mutuality, togetherness over individualism, interdependence. This interdependence with the vine grower promises to be a relationship that will continuously shape, form, and re-form us.

Acts 8:26–40 narrates an encounter that recalls Jesus’s final instructions to his disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The Ethiopian eunuch reads Isaiah 53:7–8

from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. In their interaction, the two figures question each other. One is not exclusively in possession of answers; understanding comes via mutuality. This exchange is holy dialogue. This story follows a pattern similar to that of Luke 24 (from two weeks ago) in which participation in a sacred act follows an understanding of scripture. In Luke 24, that act is the sharing of bread. Here that act is baptism.

While **Psalm 22:25–31** is effusive in praise, Psalm 22 is a psalm of lament. It begins with words made familiar by Jesus from the cross: “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” As is usual with psalms of lament, the speaker expresses both deep despair and vast praise. Verses 3–5 give shape to the hope that permeates verses 25–31. The holy and trustworthy God who delivered the ancestors will deliver those who trust God in the present and the future. The story of the people’s past is the hope of their future.

1 John 4:7–21 is full of love. Of the text’s 15 verses, 12 contain the word love at least once. Asserted repeatedly is that God loves us; therefore, we must love others, even so far as to be the same love – love of God is love of others (vv. 20–21). These verses also focus, like John 15, on abiding, including a beautifully intricate weaving together of love and abide in verse 16, illustrating both textually and conceptually their intimate connectedness.

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God is love, and our love finds its origin in that God, that love. It is the foundation of relationship, with God and with others. This love is a commandment, and it expects us to bear fruit. What fruits have grown and are growing from our love of God?



Focus scripture

John 15:1–8

Additional scriptures

Acts 8:26–40

Psalm 22:25–31

1 John 4:7–21

Divine Vine Grower, we give thanks for your perfect love. Please accept the offering of our good fruit. Form us and re-shape us so that we may bear more fruit and, in so doing, glorify you. 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

Children usually have a natural connection to their families and other people, young and old, whom they see regularly. So the idea that we are connected through friendship and love will seem natural to them. They may find it more difficult to imagine themselves connected to Jesus or to people in other churches whom they do not know. However, their experiences of connecting with one those in the church school group provides a basis for incorporating that concept into their understanding.

The younger children in your group, and perhaps many older children, will find it diffi-

cult to grasp the metaphor of the vine and the branches. This is one reason the focus passage is set within a pretend community of the early church. They can imagine how that metaphor is lived out among the people and among the people they know. The focus passage is set within the story of the early church. In this way the children will come to understand that the people told these stories about Jesus over and over until they were written down.

Pray that the children in your group will continue to build a strong connection with Jesus and with the community of faith.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 15:1–8, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 79).
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with a gold or yellow cloth, white pillar candle, gold spiral and tealights (see resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)," p. 111).
- ❑ Bring matches, taper, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p.111); save copies for following Sundays.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Connected through Jesus](#)."
- ❑ For yarn web group, bring large ball of yarn and paper hearts.
- ❑ For Bible research group, bring copies

of today's resource sheet "[Vine and Branches](#)" and directions.

Respond

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

- ❑ **Art zone:** copies of [grape cluster](#) (p. 83), paper with wax film (cut into large circles so there is a generous border around the grape cluster), wax crayon shavings, small pieces of coloured tissue paper, iron, and newspaper
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Connections](#)" and directions
- ❑ **Community zone:** purple tissue paper (cut into 10 cm/4 in squares), green construction paper, and large sheet of poster board Draw a large vine with many branches on the poster board.
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "Look Up, Look Down" (pp. 24–25 in *Music Songbook*, Vol. 7; #9 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** access to computer and Internet
- ❑ **Easter zone:** question box from previous weeks, slips of paper

Bless

- ❑ Bring the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "[Somlandela/We Will Follow](#)," (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



May 2, 2021

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Scripture

John 15:1–8

FOCUS To discover that Jesus connects us together as the church

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce newcomers.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite children to gather in the worship space and explain that we are in the Season of Easter. Lead the children in the traditional Easter greeting used each Sunday of this season by followers of Jesus around the world:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Children: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Easter ritual Invite a child to read the "Gathering prayer" on the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p. 111), with the rest of the group responding with "Alleluia!" after each line. Invite another child to light the Christ candle and use a taper to light the first four tealights in the spiral.

Sing, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Human machine This game will provide the children with a visual image of being connected as they explore the idea of being connected with and through Jesus. Demonstrate a simple motion and an accompanying sound, such as pumping one arm up and down and saying "Chug, chug" in rhythm to the movement. Explain that the goal of this game is to attach each person to the "machine." They can make up their own movements and sounds, but they must attach themselves to some part of the existing "machine." Ask for a volunteer to start the "machine." As each person is added, all parts of the "machine" must continue to make their movements and sounds. Encourage the children to attach themselves to it, one at a time. Finally, attach yourself to the machine. As you are likely to end with lots of laughter, when the group is quieter, comment that the story today is about being connected to one another.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Review Resurrection events Help the children recall some things that happened after Jesus died. This will reinforce the Easter story and remind the children that we continue to celebrate it during these weeks before Pentecost Sunday.

The Bible story

John's gospel Ask a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Invite another child to find the gospel of John. If necessary, turn to the table of contents for help. (This will demonstrate the use of the table of contents for the children.) Ask:

- **Who are the stories in the gospel of John about?**

Once the children have identified Jesus, ask another child to find chapter 15. This gives you the opportunity to point out that the large numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Keep the Bible open to **John 15** as you tell the story from today's resource sheet "[Connected through Jesus](#)," which includes a paraphrase of **John 15:1–8**.

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.)

Yarn web group This activity will build on the idea of being connected and take it a step further as the children consider what holds us together.

Sit together in a circle on the floor. Hold the end of a ball of yarn and gently throw the ball to a child across the circle from you. As you do so, say, “(Child’s name), you are connected to Jesus and to me.” Explain that the person who gets the ball is to hold the yarn and throw the ball to someone else, repeating the sentence above with the name of the child who is receiving the yarn ball. Continue until everyone is holding the yarn. Then have the children carefully lay the yarn web on the floor. Distribute paper hearts and explain that everyone can place a heart on the web and name a way we can remember that we are connected through Jesus’ love. For example, one person might say, “The stories of Jesus connect us.” Another might say, “When we visit and send a card to someone in hospital, we are connected through Jesus’ love.” Provide suggestions for children who seem at a loss.

Vine and branches group Children more proficient at reading are ready to read this John passage and talk about it. Provide copies of today’s resource sheet “[Vine and Branches](#),” pencils, and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of “[Vine and Branches](#)” and a pencil.
- 2 Find John 15:1–8 in the box at the top of the page. Read it silently or take turns reading it aloud.
- 3 Then read the questions at the bottom of the page. Pause after each one to think about it on your own. Make notes about your thoughts, if you like. Then talk about the questions together. Discuss as many questions as you can together.

The Bible story and us

Play, if possible, “Look Up, Look Down” (#9 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) as the signal for everyone to gather at the worship table or other designated area. Have everyone create a yarn web.

Respond

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

- ❑ **Art zone: Window decorations** Invite the children to make paper sun catchers that will symbolize their connection to Jesus. Each child will need a copy of the grape cluster pattern and two circles of paper with a wax film. Begin by having the child write her or his name on the cluster. Place the cluster in the middle of one paper circle. Decorate the stained glass by arranging small pieces of paper around the cluster. Add a few crayon shavings around the grape cluster. Carefully place the second circle on top. Cover with one or two layers of newspaper. Iron on medium heat, checking to make sure the decoration is fusing and not burning. Let the decoration cool a bit so the crayon shavings are stable. Then punch a hole near the top and tie a piece of yarn for a hanger. Hang the decorations in a window until the children take them home.

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Word puzzle** This resource sheet activity summarizes Jesus’ words and helps the children think about what they can do to show their connection to Jesus. Provide copies of

today’s resource sheet “[Connections](#),” pencils, and these directions:

- 1 Take a pencil and copy of “[Connections](#).”
- 2 Read the directions at the top of the page. Unscramble the words in the paragraph. When everyone is finished, read the paragraph aloud together.
- 3 The rest of the page has suggestions for how you can stay connected to Jesus. Read the ideas in the grape clusters. Select one you might do this week.
- 4 Together talk about other ideas you have for staying connected to Jesus.

- ❑ **Community zone: Vine mural** If possible, make a vine mural on a bulletin board or on a large sheet of poster board that can remain in your learning area as a reminder of the connection with Jesus and one another. Children who are absent today can add their names to branches at another time. Prepare the vine as described

in Prepare. The children can print their names on branches and make clusters of grapes to hang from their branches. Scrunch up the purple tissue paper squares into balls for the grapes. Glue them in clusters. Children can also cut leaves from green construction paper to add to their vines. Talk together about a title for the mural.

- ❑ **Music zone: Song about connecting** If you have played the song “Look Up, Look Down” (#9 on Seasons Music CD, Vol. 7) as the transition music, the children will recognize the melody immediately. This activity provides an opportunity to explore how the stanzas of the song suggest ways for us to connect with Jesus and with one another. Sing each stanza and pause at the end of each one to talk together about how we can stay connected to Jesus, drawing on the suggestions from the song.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Connections among churches** The activities thus far have concentrated on the connections between the children and Jesus and among the children in the group. This zone offers a glimpse at connections beyond their group and the congregation. Ask your pastor or go to your denomination’s website for information and stories of how churches work together and how your denomination is connected. Bring appropriate information and stories for the children. Have the children prepare a brief article about one of the projects they find for the church newsletter or to read during the announcements in worship.

- ❑ **Easter zone: Question box** If a “Question box” was made on April 11 encourage children to add more questions.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candles.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God,
we thank you for your love.
help us to share the good news
of your love with our friends. Amen.

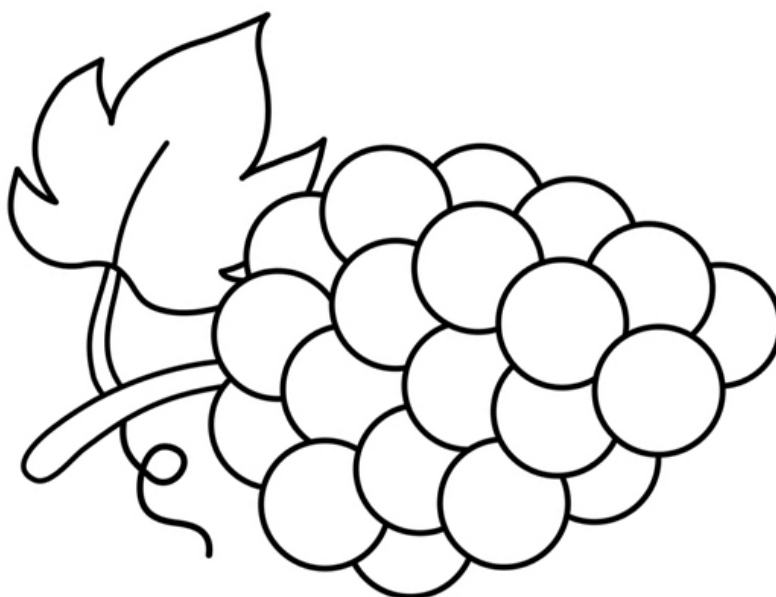
Sing the “Blessing song” (p. 110) or “*Somlandela/We will Follow*,” (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, “(Name), may God’s peace go with you.”

Reflect

In what ways did the children express their knowledge of being connected through Christ and to one another? Which children seemed to grasp something of the metaphor of the vine and the branches? What did you discover about their faith stages from their comments and questions? As you consider how you connect with Jesus, what do you find most helpful?

Grape cluster pattern
Enlarge as necessary





Connected through Jesus

including a paraphrase of John 15:1–8

**When the various people speak,
point as through you are
pointing to the
speaker.**

Jesus' followers and friends were still uncertain about their safety. Some had to return to their homes, but others stayed in Jerusalem. They gathered together often and talked about Jesus.

"His touch was so gentle," said someone in the corner of the room. "When he sat that child on his lap, you could see the love in Jesus' eyes."

From the other side of the room, someone else spoke. "Oh yes, his touch was enough to heal and bring great joy. The blind man could see people walking for the first time when Jesus healed him."

Then Peter spoke, "My mother-in-law was healed by Jesus too, in the early days. Jesus' way of healing and teaching has brought us together. We are connected through Jesus."

"You are right," came from someone at the table. "Jesus told us that would happen when he talked about the vine and branches. Jesus said:

'I am the vine. God is the gardener. In a vineyard full of grape vines, the gardener carefully cuts the branches so they will grow lots of grapes. That has already happened to my branches because I have taught you God's word.

'When a branch is broken from the vine, that branch cannot produce grapes. Stay connected to me just as the branches are connected to the vine. Then you will produce good works because we are joined together.

'Yes, I am the vine and you are the branches. Stay connected to my teachings and me so they become a part of you. Pray for what you need and you will receive it. When you produce good works, God will be pleased.'"

As the people looked around the room, they knew that they were each connected to Jesus and they were connected through him to one another.



Vine and Branches

John 15:1–8

¹Jesus said to his disciples:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. ³You are already clean because of what I have said to you.

⁴Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch can’t produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you can’t produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. ⁵I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you can’t do anything without me. ⁶If you don’t stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burnt in a fire.

⁷Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you. Then you can pray for whatever you want, and your prayer will be answered. ⁸When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored.

Scripture taken from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society.
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Read verse 1. Who is the “vine”?

Read verses 2 and 3. Who are the “branches”?

Read verses 4 through 6. What do we do to produce lots of “fruit”? What might that “fruit” be?

Read verses 7 and 8. What do you think Jesus was trying to say to the disciples?



connections

On the night before Jesus died, he had a special meal with the disciples. Jesus wanted to teach the disciples something very important. Unscramble the words in the scroll to read for yourself what Jesus said.

I am the grapevine and God is the rgedearn
_____. You are the cbshenar _____
that grow on the nvie _____. If you yats
_____ connected to me you will grow the fruit
of velo _____.

Read or listen to
some stories about
Jesus.
Go to church.

Talk about Jesus with

someone.
Show God's love the way

Jesus did.
Sing a song about
Jesus.

What ideas do you have? Share them with your learning group.

Rituals for Lent

Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

May God’s love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

Lent 1

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.
(*Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 2

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. (*Place a star beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 3

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. (*Place an object from nature beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 4

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for giving us hope when times are hard. (*Place a stone beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 5

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for your love that is deep in our hearts. (*Place a heart beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.



Easter Season Resources

Prepare an Easter worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold or yellow cloth and place a white pillar candle in the middle.
2. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
3. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
4. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

Gathering prayer

Reader: Loving God, we celebrate this Season of Easter, a time of new life and joy.

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to be witnesses to the new life in Christ. (*Light the central Christ candle.*)

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to spread the light of this good news. (*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

All: Alleluia!

Somlandela

Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Somlandela, yonke indawo.
Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Lapho eyakhona somlandela.

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
We will follow, we will follow him.
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
Wherever he will lead us we will follow.

Traditional Zulu song

Prayer lines (May 20)

I thank God for your gift of music in our church community.

I thank God for your leadership in our church community.

I thank God for the way you care for our church building.

I thank God for the ways you help lead worship.

I thank God for your visits to people who are sick or can't get to church.

Thank you hand cards (May 20)

Fold construction paper in half and trace a hand outline.
(See illustration #1.)

Cut out the shape, leaving the folded side intact to make a card.

Choose a prayer line, cut it out, and glue it inside the card.
(See illustration #2.)

Write your name below the message.

On the outside of the card, print the name of the person chosen to receive the card.



Illustration #1

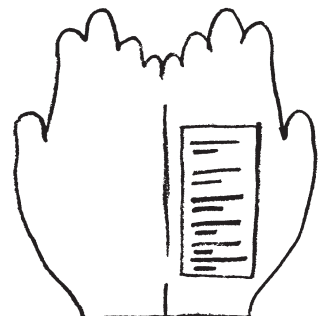


Illustration #2

