

Known by Goodness and Mercy

This week's readings remind us that living into our covenantal relationship with God and all creation means giving voice and witness to the work of God's liberating spirit. We do so as an imperfect people who are redeemed by the same goodness and mercy we are called to live out.

Focus scripture: Exodus 33:12–23

Exodus 33:12–23 It was one thing for the people of Israel to be freed from bondage; it was another thing to live as free people. The experience of captivity to an imperial system of domination was never far from their hearts and minds. It would take time for them to learn a new way of being and living together in community. Captivity in Egypt taught them there was little or no mercy in systems designed to keep people under control and to maintain power for those with authority and privilege. Nor was there much of anything representing goodness in these systems. Now, having so quickly failed God, failed Moses, and failed each other by breaking their covenantal relationship, the people have every reason to expect retribution.

In contrast to these imperial norms, Moses seeks reassurance from God that the people, once freed from slavery, will no longer need to live by these old patterns. In seeking reassurance, Moses is unwilling to relinquish the hope and belief that broken relationships can be mended, covenant can be restored. Yet, at the same time, Moses never minimizes or glosses over the harm done when trust is broken. Repair work is needed.

The verses preceding today's text make clear that the violation of trust has created distance between God and the people. God intends to keep that distance. Fortunately for the people, Moses never makes light of the broken trust, but instead calls upon God to show this newly forming community what it means to live as a liberated people of faith. Moses asks God to reveal God's glory, made visible and evident in God's goodness and mercy.

Psalm 99 is a song of celebration and worship for the one who is revealed as a lover of

justice, who establishes equity, and executes justice and righteousness. This is the one who guided the people of Israel out of slavery into an identity as a free people. The people were far from perfect, at times failing the guidance they were offered, but the resulting brokenness was never ignored and ultimately healed through the forgiveness of the one who sets them free.

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10 is an encouragement to the church in Thessalonica and the church in every age to carry forth their shared witness as those who embody the gospel of freedom and justice proclaimed by Jesus. They are to be "imitators" of mercy, goodness, and the love of God. By being imitators, they become "examples."

Matthew 22:15–22 echoes the choice faced by the people of Israel; return to slavery, guided by the rules enforced by systems of domination, or live as free people, choosing the mercy, goodness, and love of God instead. When the Pharisees put Jesus to the test with the emperor's image on a coin, Jesus makes clear it is a choice we continue to face.

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Moses understands the unique role we are called to have in the world. The people have not been set free from bondage in order to replicate the very systems of oppression under which they had lived. As a liberated people, we are known by a new identity, one marked by goodness, mercy and therefore the glory of the one who continues to set us free from all that oppresses. All of today's texts speak to our identity as a people redeemed and set free from the brokenness in our lives and our world.



Focus scripture

Exodus 33:12–23

Additional scriptures

Psalm 99

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Matthew 22:15–22



Seasons of the Spirit is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

Lover of justice, you set us on a path to freedom marked by the signposts of your goodness and mercy. Even when we fall short, you remain faithful, inviting us into right relationship. Help us to live as your people that we may be the witness to justice and freedom you would have us be. 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

As the children’s social development starts to move from “me” to “we” thinking, they begin to develop close friendships with others. Some children make friends easily, while others find it more difficult to connect with people outside of the family. As they start to choose their friends, being with friends becomes increasingly important. Younger children in this age group are beginning to be able to see things from another child’s point of view, though they still tend to be quite centred on self. Older children are more able to be less self-centred.

In this week’s session, children will explore Moses’ friendship with God. How children relate to God is as wonderful and unknowable as any great mystery. Interviews with children reveal that many of their experiences of God’s presence come quite naturally. God’s presence becomes real as children experience love and friendship from those who talk about God. Pray for the children, that they will continue to grow in their understanding of what it means to be friends with God.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Exodus 33:12–23, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- Set a worship space with green cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and basket of green, flat-bottomed glass stones.
- Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- Bring, if possible, the song “Come, Holy Spirit” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- Bring three copies of resource sheet “[Moses Speaks with God](#).”
- Poem group:** no additional materials needed
- Research group:** Bibles

Respond

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

- Story zone:** book binder with pages from previous weeks, copies of resource sheet “[Meeting with God](#)”
- Art zone:** black construction paper, pastels or coloured chalk
- Drama zone:** copies of resource sheet “[What to Do?](#)”
- Craft zone:** small rocks, fine-gauge wire, needle-nose pliers, key rings or lengths of cord
- Music zone:** lyrics and recording of the song “I Feel God around Me” (p. 18 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)

Bless

- 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).



October 18, 2020

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Scripture

Exodus 33:12–23

FOCUS To hear about Moses' amazing time with God and wonder about friendship with God

Gather

Welcome the children. Introduce any newcomers to the group and share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Point out the green cloth, reminding the group that green is the colour of the Season after Pentecost. This is a time to learn about what it means to love and follow God's ways.

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: We are on a journey and

God's light goes with us.

(Invite a child to light the candle.)

God's Spirit is deep inside and all around, helping us as we learn and grow.

(Invite children to place glass stones in a spiral leading out from the candle.)

God breathes love into everything.

All: Thank you, God!

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); if singing the song, choose several verses to focus on this week.

Pray *(Invite children to repeat each line after you.)*

Loving God, thank you
for each person here.

May we feel you with us, as we learn
more about our relationship with you. Amen.

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

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to think about their friends at school and in their neighbourhood. Ask:

- **What do you like to do with your friends?**
- **How can you tell when people are friends?**
- **In what ways do our friends influence your life?**

In this week's Bible story, we hear about Moses' close relationship with God.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Exodus.

Remind the group that we are reading stories from this book about Moses, who was a leader of the Hebrew people when they made the long journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom. Print the following key words on a chalkboard or whiteboard, or read them aloud: mountain, Ten Commandments, Moses, God, golden calf; and help children recall the stories from **Exodus 20** and **32:1–14**.

The Bible story

Read the top section of the resource sheet "[Moses Speaks with God](#)" to set the scene for this week's story. Then distribute copies to three volunteers and invite them to read the play, based on **Exodus 33:12–23**.

Wondering Invite discussion on the following questions:

- **What do you think Moses told the people about meeting with God?**

Moses chose a quiet place to talk with God. We too can sometimes feel close to God in a quiet place.

■ **What would you like to talk with God about?**

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.)

Poem group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to learn a poem that speaks of our relationship with God. Read the following poem, pausing after each line for children to echo the words:

God was a friend of Moses.
They met and talked each day.
We can be friends with God, too,
and spend time in the same way.

Then ask the question:

■ **Where would you like to go to be with God?**

Research group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to find out what happened after Moses' experience of God's presence. Help

them to find **Exodus 34:30–34** and read the verses together. Discuss the following questions:

■ **Why do you think the people were afraid to go near Moses at first?**

■ **How do you think this experience might have changed the way Moses lived and acted?**

Reporting Invite the poem group to share their ideas of places to meet with God with the rest of the group and invite the research group to share their discoveries about what happened next.

The Bible story and us

Moses found a place to spend some quiet time with God. Invite children to close their eyes and imagine speaking with God, as Moses did, and experiencing God's presence all around them and deep inside. Ask:

■ **How could we get to know God better and become closer friends?**

■ **How could this closeness affect the way you live each day?**

Respond

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

- **Story zone: Group book** *(Option: ongoing project)* Look together at the book that has been created. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Meeting with God" and invite children to use art supplies to draw a picture that depicts a quiet place where they might go to talk with God. It could be a real place or an imaginary one. Have them write their names on the back of their pages and place them together in the binder to form the third chapter of their storybook. Encourage children to look at the book regularly.
- **Art zone: Abstract art** Moses had an awesome, mysterious encounter with God's presence. Invite children to think about how they might portray a sense of God's presence in abstract art images. Distribute construction paper and art supplies and encourage them to add colours and shapes that suggest mystery and awe. Demonstrate how to make swirling patterns using the sides of the pastels or chalk.

- **Drama zone: Role play** *(for older children)* Our deep relationship with God affects the way we live our everyday life. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "What to Do?" and divide the three scenarios among the group. Ask groups to read their scenarios and identify the main problem in the story. In response to the question posed, have them decide what options are open to the main characters and consider how knowing that a loving God is close by might affect the choices made and the results of the choices. Provide time for groups to role play their scenarios with the solution they have chosen.



❑ **Craft zone: Reminder rocks** Hidden inside a crack in the rock, Moses was reminded of God’s closeness and presence. Invite children to make reminders of God’s closeness and presence. Distribute small rocks and lengths of wire and have them wrap the wire securely around their rocks, making sure the wire goes around all sides of the rocks. Show them how to twist the ends together tightly and wrap the twisted wire around a pencil to make a loop, using the pliers to close the loop and cut off any excess wire. The rock can be threaded onto a key ring to attach to a school bag, or made into a necklace by threading onto a cord.

❑ **Music zone: Action song** (for younger children) After meeting with God on the mountainside, Moses knew that God was deep inside and all around him. Play the recording of the song “I Feel God around Me” (p. 18 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #20 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9). Invite children to listen to the words and join in singing the song as they feel comfortable. Then, invite them to create actions to accompany the words of the song. Enjoy creating new verses to insert into the song, such as “feeling the wind” or “playing with friends” or “helping my mother.”



Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

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).

Blessing Lead the group in the following litany of blessing, inviting children to repeat the last line after you:

Let’s go out into the world
remembering that God’s love is all around us.
God is with us. Amen.

Reflect

What did you discover about the children today and their relationships with God? How might you encourage them to continue to deepen this relationship?



Moses Speaks with God

based on Exodus 33:12–23

I came down from the mountain and found the people worshipping a statue of a bull calf. At first I was so angry with them for making such a thing I didn't know what to do. I destroyed the statue as quickly as I could. Now I must go back to the mountain and talk with God. I must ask God's forgiveness. God has spared us, but things have changed. God has told us to move into the new land and has even promised to send an angel to guide us, but will God still be with us? What will happen? Without God, we are lost.

Narrator: When Moses told God what had happened, God was not happy. God told Moses to take the people to the land, but God said, "I will not go with you, for I am angry with the people." When the people heard this message, they mourned and were very sad. So Moses went back to God on behalf of the people.

Moses: Look, God, you tell me, "Lead this people to the land," but now you are abandoning us. You keep telling me how special I am to you. If I'm so special, let me know what is going to happen. Don't forget, we are your people. You chose us. You can't just leave.

God: All right, Moses, you make a good argument. I will go with you. I will see this journey to the end.

Moses: If you are not going to come with us, don't make us leave you. Are you coming with us, or not? If you don't, how will we know that we're special to you?

God: All right, Moses! I've heard you! I already said I will do this for you, because you are special to me.

Moses: If I'm special to you, let me see your glory.

God: Why do you need to see my glory, Moses?

Moses: I just want to see you with my eyes. Just once, so I can know you better.

God: This isn't an easy thing you ask of me. I am so much bigger than you can begin to imagine.

Moses: I know. I just want to see your glory.

God: All right, I will do as you ask. I will let you see my glory. However, you must understand that you can only see a small part of me. There is a rock not far from here that has a large crack in it. Hide in the very back of the crack and then I will pass by.

Moses: I see the rock, but there isn't a much room in that crack.

God: It doesn't matter. Hide in the crack of the rock, Moses. I will pass by it. You will not be able to see the whole of me for that is impossible for your mind to grasp.

Moses: What will I see?

God: You will see my back, but you will not see my face.

Moses: That is enough.

God: Before I pass by in all my shining glory, I will cover the crack with my hand. You will only catch a glimpse of me. I will protect you from being overwhelmed by the bigness of my presence.

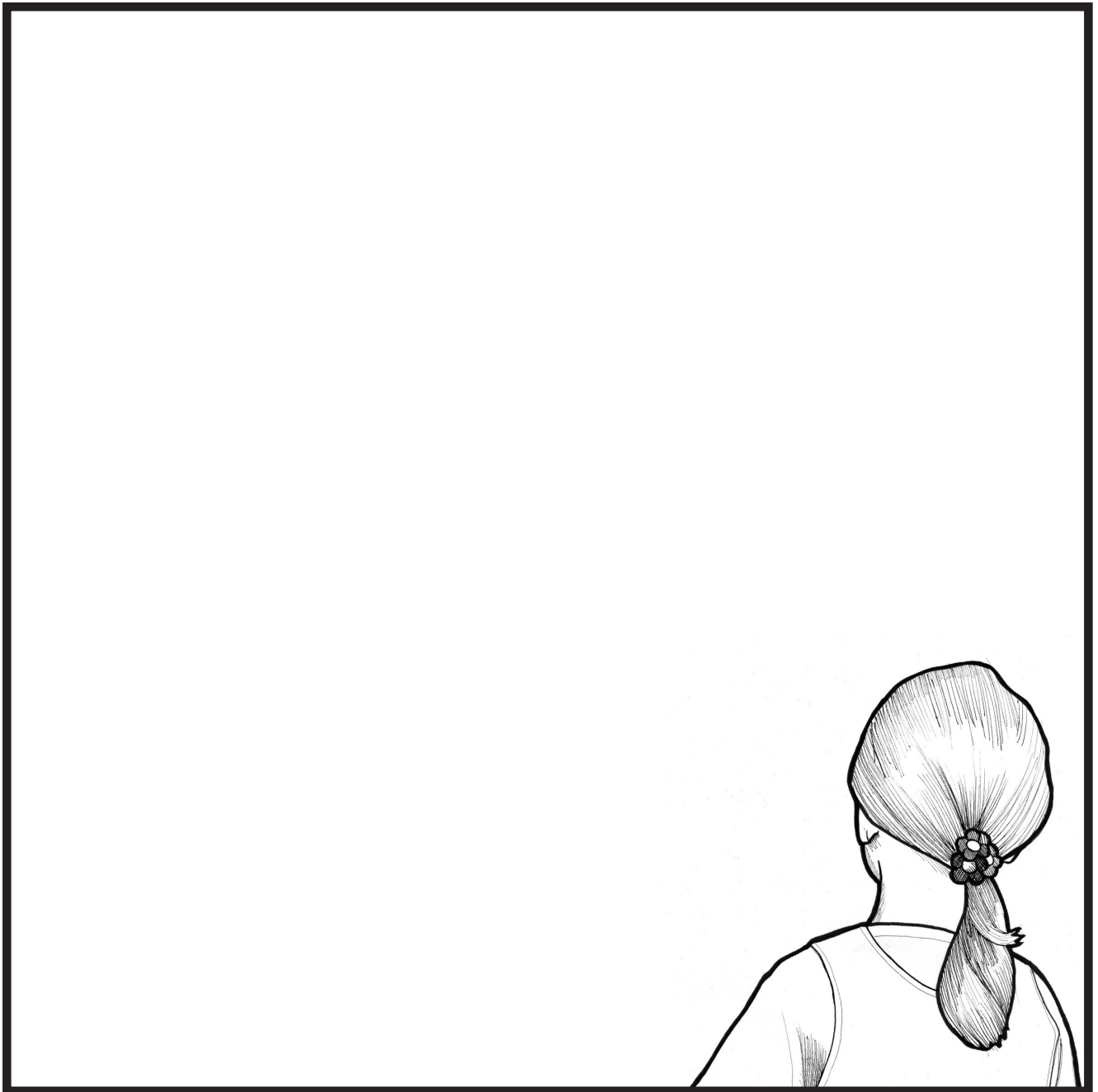
Moses: I am ready, God.

Narrator: This is the end of the story in the Bible. I wonder how Moses felt and what he told the people.



Meeting with God

In today's story Moses wanted to see God's glory, so God had Moses go to a safe place inside a big rock. Then God passed by.



Where might be a quiet place where you could go to be with God?

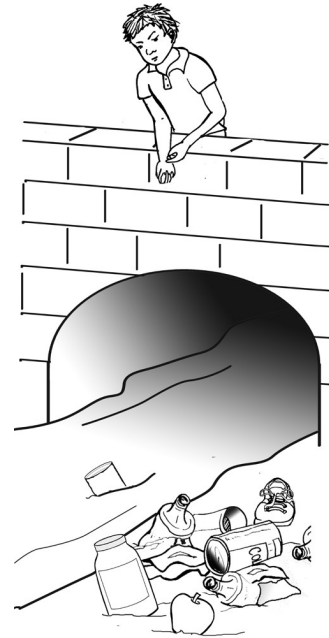


What to DO?

Standing up for the land

Each day as Shane walked to school, he walked over a bridge. It was a small bridge and there wasn't much water under it. However, litter seemed to pile up along the sides of this stream. It looked pretty bad. He realized one day that he never saw anything living in the water. No fish, no frogs, nothing.

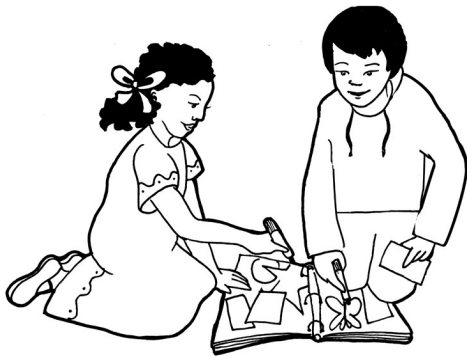
What could Shane do to stand up for the stream?



Standing up for others

Elena was new in the class at school. Her English was slow and her vocabulary limited. The teacher seated her next to Mei who had learned English after she came to this country too. Other children in the class, none of whom had to learn English as a second language, made fun of Elena behind her back. They mocked the way she pronounced words. Mei knew that Elena could hear them. Even if she didn't know what they were saying, she could tell by how they spoke that they were not saying nice things.

What might Mei do to stand up for Elena?



Standing up for friends

During the school holidays, Joseph played with Hassan, who lived next door. They had lots of fun, playing games and watching the television shows they both enjoyed. At school, they were not in the same class, so Joseph didn't see Hassan often. One day, some of Joseph's friends began to talk about Hassan and his family. They called them names that were rude and not nice. They said things about them that were not true.

How might Joseph stand up for his friend Hassan?

