

Do You See Me?

This week's scripture readings take as a given that the transcendent love and justice of God stand outside historical time, thereby providing a way of seeing that is unfiltered by the biases of domination powers. This apocalyptic, end-time way of seeing enables us to recognize and respond to the justice manifest in the realm of God.

Focus scripture: Matthew 25:31–46

Do you see the people who are suffering, especially those who are most often neglected? According to Matthew, this is a critical question for the early Christians who were seeking to live the realm-of-God values proclaimed by Jesus. It remains a crucial question for Christians today. Our responses make clear how we understand and live in faithfulness to the commandments upon which Jesus says all the law and the prophets hang, "You shall love the Lord your God.....and You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–40). "Do you see me?" is a question that clings to the lips of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. According to Jesus, if love allows us to see those who suffer, the least among us, then we also see Christ.

Biblical scholars refer to this week's gospel passage as the "Last Judgment" coming as the climactic conclusion to Jesus speaking about the end times. This, however, has nothing to do with who believes the "right" things about Jesus or who belongs to the "right" religious tradition. The final judgment is a theological metaphor that directly addresses the commandment of loving God and loving neighbour. In short, "Do you see me?" is an ethical end-time question drawn from apocalyptic theology. It sharpens the contrast between the world as we know it and the world as it will be when the realm-of-God values of love, justice, and liberation are fully realized.

"Do you see me?" broadens the boundaries of neighbour-love to include all those Jesus directly names as the least of these. In our day, this most certainly includes all creation. For the early Christians to whom the gospel of Matthew is written, "Do you see me?" and its inevitable counterpart, "How will you respond?" comes with no small measure of risk. Surrounded by the casualties of Roman imperial domination, it was certainly easier and safer to avoid seeing. Not only could you focus exclusively on your own needs and desires, but your failure to see also

meant you were less likely to garner the attention of the powers who kept this unjust system in place.

Drawing upon the ethical clarity of this apocalyptic end-time theology, Jesus makes it clear to the early Christians, as he makes clear to us, that the only way to participate in the realm of God is if we see and respond to the most vulnerable in our midst. Feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the imprisoned. These are our neighbours. According to Jesus, if you see these members of my family and respond, you see Christ and respond. If you love them, you love God. "Do you see me?" might seem overwhelming, except for the assurance given earlier in Matthew that the one who calls us to see has first of all seen us (Matthew 6:25, 26).

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24 imagines an end time in which a clear distinction is made between living in faithfulness to God's liberation and justice, and aligning one's life with the forces of oppression.

Psalms 100 reminds us that true love of God and a life of deep joy go hand in hand.

Ephesians 1:15–23 continues the association of seeing with one's heart, identifying such seeing with hope, and the working of Christ in whom the fullness of God's love and justice reside.

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If this week's apocalyptic texts were only or primarily about a final judgment, coming at the end of the world or the end our lives, they might easily be dismissed. Instead, these scriptures challenge us with the opportunity to see and respond to the world today through the lens of God's transcendent love and justice. How do you see the love of Christ's presence among those most often ignored? How might you respond with dignity, respect, and mutuality, rather than a paternalism that fails to see their fundamental value, that fails to see Christ?



Focus scripture
Matthew 25:31–46

Additional scriptures
Ezekiel 34:11–16,
20–24

Psalms 100
Ephesians 1:15–23

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

**Holy One, just as
your eye is on the
sparrow, grant us
vision to both see
and respond in
love to the most
vulnerable among
us. Amen.**

Lesson 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 in this age group have a strong sense of fair play and justice. Younger children usually apply this to their daily situations at home, school, and play. Older children can apply standards of fair play and justice to a wider range of local and global issues. This week's focus scripture reading is the third in a series of three parables from Matthew 25 about what it means to care for others.

Many children will grasp that what Jesus asks of his followers in this week's parable can sometimes be difficult. Standing up for the child at school who is being bullied or left out takes a good deal of courage. Sharing what you have with others requires sacrifice.

The mandate to extend love and follow Jesus' example in the work can be a challenge if children feel that they are acting alone. Most children will feel more confident undertaking these types of initiatives with a friend, and will welcome the news that we are called to extend love as the whole church community. Like the followers of Jesus in the early church, the children will discover that when we are like Jesus together in community, we are showing God's love to the world.

Pray for each child by name, that they will feel supported and nurtured by their church family as they grow in understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 25:31–46, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 91).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white 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 resource sheet "[Small Acts of Love](#)."
- ❑ **Poster group:** print each of the four statements (see Engage section) within a circle on a sheet of newsprint, leaving space to write suggestions around each circle.

- ❑ **Research group:** copies of resource sheet "[A Choral Reading](#)," Bibles

Respond

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

- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of leaf shapes on resource sheet "[Giving Tree](#)" (copied onto card stock/ heavy paper), branch, pot with sand or gravel, yarn
 - ❑ **Quiet zone:** no additional materials needed
 - ❑ **Game zone:** recording of lively music
 - ❑ **Music zone:** new print, lyrics and recording of song "Be God's" (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9); available for purchase as downloadable MP3s at www.seasonsonline.ca
 - ❑ **Craft zone:** wide craft sticks, self-adhesive craft materials (such as craft foam flowers or insects, pom-poms, stickers)
- ### Bless
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the refrain for 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).



Do You See Me?

Scripture

Matthew
25:31–46

FOCUS To explore Jesus' teaching about showing compassion

Gather

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

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Explain that this is the last Sunday in the Season after Pentecost, and next week we begin the Season of Advent, a time of preparation leading up to Christmas.

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).

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 how to live in your way. Amen.

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

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to share stories of times when someone took care of them (such as when they were babies, when they were sick, at a day care). Ask:

■ **What does it feel like to be helped or looked after by someone?**

Then invite them to share stories of times when they were able to help someone.

■ **How did you know that the person needed help?**

Comment that in this week's story, Jesus talks about what happens when we give and receive care.

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 gospel of Matthew. During the last few weeks we have been hearing stories (called parables) that Jesus told. Remind the group that a parable is a story about something that didn't really happen but has a message that helps people understand how to live in God's way. Today we hear one more parable that Jesus told to the disciples to help them understand what it means to care for and help others.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Small Acts of Love](#)," based on **Matthew 25:31–46**, to tell the story.

Wondering Invite discussion on the following questions:

- **Who were the ones who showed love in this story?**
- **What did they do?**
- **What do you think Jesus wanted people to know about compassion?**

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.)

Poster group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to discover how God’s love grows through acts of compassion. Gather around the sheet of newsprint printed with the following statements in circles: **When someone is hungry or thirsty, we can...; When someone is frightened, we can...; When someone is lonely, we can...; When someone is sick, we can...** Invite children to name some ways they can respond to each situation in love. List their suggestions around each circle, like spokes on a wheel, noticing how God’s love grows and grows.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to hear the parable again. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “A Choral Reading” and Bibles. Invite volunteers for the three

readers and form two groups to do the rest of the choral reading. Explain that the “Son of Man” refers to Jesus, as God’s chosen one. Discuss any questions about the reading and then draw their attention again to the verses that were read by everyone (vv. 45b, 46). Ask:

■ **What did this parable teach Jesus’ followers about compassion?**

Reporting Invite the poster group to share some of their ideas and invite the research group to share responses to the question.

The Bible story and us

Jesus’ parable is an important one for Christians today. Ask:

■ **Who are some of those who are hungry, homeless, and lonely today?**

■ **If Jesus were here today, how might he ask us to show compassion?**

Respond

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

- **Outreach zone: Giving tree** Jesus’ parable teaches us that as part of God’s family we are called to reach out and care for others. Distribute “leaves” and follow the instructions on the resource sheet “Giving Tree” to make an outreach display for the church family.
- **Quiet zone: Poetry** *(for older children)* Invite children to express Jesus’ teachings in a simple form of poetry. Have them choose a line from the first section of readings on the resource sheet “A Choral Reading” and use the ideas in that statement to write a haiku poem in the format: 5 syllables in the first line and last line, and 7 syllables in the middle line.

For example:
 I was so hungry.
 When you came with a hot meal
 I was so thankful.

- **Game zone: Follow the leader** *(for younger children)* When we act in caring ways, like Jesus did, God’s love can be clearly seen. Invite children to take turns being the leader with the rest of the group facing the leader. This person will mime a loving action based on the focus passage (such as feeding, giving a drink, welcoming, clothing, visiting) and lead the group in doing the same action. Play a recording of lively music as the group does the action several times. Then choose another leader, and repeat the process until all who wish have had a turn as leader.

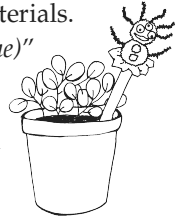


- **Music zone: Reflection** The message in the song “Be God’s” (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9) encourages us to live in God’s way of mercy, justice, compassion, and inclusion. Print lyrics on a large sheet of newsprint and read or sing together with the recording. Then read the verses again, pausing after each phrase to name some ways that group members can “be God’s justice,” “be God’s joy,” “be God’s smile,” and so on.



❑ **Craft zone: Plant markers** Many congregations give flowers or potted plants to members who are in hospital, seniors residential facilities, or those who are housebound. Invite children to make messages to add to the plants that will be distributed. Distribute large wide craft sticks for children to decorate with

markers and self-adhesive craft materials. Have them print "Love from (name)" on their craft sticks and, if desired, a message of encouragement. Make arrangements to give these to clergy or the pastoral care team.



Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the refrain for 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
ready to show compassion to all we meet.
God is with us. Amen.

Reflect

If this is your final session as a group for this season, please take a moment to complete the evaluation form (at the end of this resource or in Library at www.seasonsonline.ca). The developers of the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources appreciate hearing about your experiences with the materials.



Small Acts of Love

based on Matthew 25:31-46

Simple gestures indicating a group of people to one side or the other will help the children follow the story.

Jesus was full of parables, those stories about everyday kinds of things. That day, one story came right after the other. Jesus had been teaching the disciples for a long time. There was the story of the ten young women who were to lead the groom to the wedding hall. Remember? Only five of them went because the others didn't have enough oil for their lamps. Then Jesus told the story about the rich property owner who was going on a long journey. The owner left three workers responsible for a lot of money. The owner was happy that two workers had made more money. The owner was not happy that the worker with one bag of money had buried it. To finish off the day of teaching the way of God and God's dream for creation, Jesus told this story about a king and the people in the king's country.

The king called all the people in the country together, to stand before his throne. He had his servants separate them; some on this side, and some on the other side. The people wondered what was going on. It was like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats in the pasture. But they were not sheep or goats and they were not in a pasture.

To the people, the king said, "I have watched you for many days. This is what I saw."

Turning to the people on one side, the king said, "You are blessed by God. This is why:

I was hungry, and you brought me food.

I was thirsty, and you gave me a cool drink.

I had no friends here, and you welcomed me with a smile.

I was cold, and you gave me warm clothes.

I was sick, and you stopped what you were doing to visit me.

I was in prison, and you came to be with me."

The people looked at each other amazed. "But, your majesty, we didn't see you hungry and give you food."

"No, we didn't give you a drink when you were thirsty."

"I don't remember smiling at you or being welcoming."

"And I certainly didn't give you any clothes."

"When were you sick?"

"Surely you were never in prison, my king."

Then the king said, "Any time you did one of these kind acts for anyone, no matter how small or unimportant, it was as if you did them to me."

Then the king turned to the other people and said, "But, you, you didn't give me food when I was hungry, or water when I was thirsty. You didn't welcome me when I was lonely or give me warm clothing when I was shivering. When I was sick or in prison, you stayed away."

These people couldn't believe their ears. "Your majesty, had you needed anything, anything at all, we would have been glad to help if we had known."

The king shook his head sadly, "Ah, all around you were people who needed food, water, a friend, warm clothes, someone to help them. And you didn't do a thing. That is not God's way."

The story ended. The disciples were quiet. When had they failed to help someone who needed a drink of water or a little food, a robe, or a place to stay? They would remember this story for a very long time.



A Choral Reading

based on Matthew 25:31–46

Reader A reads Matthew 25:31 from a Bible.

Reader B reads Matthew 25:32–34a from a Bible.

Reader C: “Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

Group 1: I was hungry and you fed me,

Group 2: I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,

Group 1: I was homeless and you gave me a room,

Group 2: I was shivering and you gave me clothes,

Group 1: I was sick and you stopped to visit,

Group 2: I was in prison and you came to me.”

Reader B reads Matthew 25:37–38 from a Bible.

Reader A reads Matthew 25:39–40a from a Bible.

Group 1: “Get out, worthless goats! You’re good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because –

Group 2: I was hungry and you gave me no meal,

Group 1: I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

Group 2: I was homeless and you gave me no bed,

Group 1: I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,

Group 2: sick and in prison, and you never visited.”

Reader C reads Matthew 25:44–45a from a Bible.

Everyone: “I am telling you the solemn truth: whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me – you failed to do it to me.”

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Giving Tree

When I was hungry you gave me some food. *Matthew 25:35*

Next time you purchase your groceries, buy some extra for a food pantry or to give to someone you know.

When I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. *Matthew 25:35*

Look for new ways to conserve water this week. Every time you do, place money in a jar. Give the money to an organization that provides clean drinking water to those in need.

When I was a stranger you welcomed me. *Matthew 25:35*

Do research to find out what your denomination or congregation is doing to support refugees arriving in your country or community. How can you help?

When I had nothing to wear you gave me clothes to wear. *Matthew 25:36*

Buy some new clothes and give them to a local agency that helps those in need.

When I was sick you took care of me. *Matthew 25:36*

Visit someone who is in hospital or housebound. Or send a card.

When I was...

Write the ways you love and care for others in the space below:

Directions

1. Place a branch in a pot filled with sand or other weighted material.
2. Copy the resource sheet onto card stock or heavy paper to make as many cards for the tree as you desire.
3. Have children cut out the cards and hole punch one corner.
4. Use yarn to tie the cards to the tree branches.
5. Place the Giving Tree in a prominent location in the church building.
6. Invite people to take a card and perform the suggested action. Place the card in the collection plate during worship as part of the offering.