

I Am Because We Are

The texts for this week describe the miraculous and mysterious nature of God's love. These readings tell stories of God choosing the people who are ignored by their contemporaries. We might hear them as stories of people restored to the community. It may be easy to think they are restored to the community because it is easier for the community to accept them once God's blessing is evident in them. On the contrary, the characters in these stories challenge their communities in the same ways they did before they became known for God's blessing and influence in their lives.

Focus scripture: John 9:1–41

John 9:1–41 tells of a person who was born blind. Blindness would have put him in a vulnerable position his whole life. Reflecting the current opinion of the time, the disciples ask whose sin has brought about this blindness. Jesus responds by teaching that this man can testify to miracles that those with perfect eyesight cannot see; he tells the Pharisees, "if you were blind, you would not have sin." Jesus explains that this person is not broken because he is blind; we are broken when we believe this man (or any person) is defined by their sins. Jesus took away the option to scapegoat this man. In response, with his sight restored, the man testifies again and again and balks at his critics' lack of faith when they've witnessed a miracle. He shrewdly sidesteps their interrogation. He immediately worships, as if he's been believing and seeking Christ his whole life. Jesus observes that the Pharisees, able-bodied as they are, have come to rely on their own ability rather than on faith in God.

Psalms 23 is a much loved and well-known psalm. It tells the story of someone who is lost and alone. Tradition attributes this psalm to David – the very same king we read about in **1 Samuel 16:1–13**. If this is true, we can read the psalm as though it were written by a man who was overlooked during his childhood. He may have been left alone in the depth of night many times. He was a shepherd and low-ranking among the other shepherds – his older brothers. His family found it easy to believe he would never amount to much. They didn't think he mattered except to tend the sheep when they had more important things to do and more important people to meet. Not a desirable position for a young man to be in. Now he writes with the wisdom of one who was once in charge of sheep, but things have changed. Suddenly he feels more

like one of the sheep: stubborn, powerless and lost without a guiding, protective hand. He doesn't write as though he is on a mountaintop looking down at an enemy; he doesn't even write from the perspective of a lowly shepherd boy.

This psalm describes restoration from a sheep's perspective. The author is vulnerable and looking for comfort in the tools he would have used to correct a lamb's ignorant or risky behaviours. And yet, we can tell that the psalmist admires the sheep because a lamb can be guided, and it can be taught to trust the shepherd. We read about the author's earnest desire to recognize and trust God's guidance. He recalls being protected – even anointed – when he least expected it. The anointing could refer to the moment David was anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16).

Ephesians 5:8–14 readers may be tempted to remember the fear they feel when they are alone in the dark. Darkness is not always a negative thing. Psalm 23 reminds us that it is in the shadows of the valley we find God's comfort. Paul writes about darkness as a sort of liminal space. It's the place where seeds germinate, and tender roots are protected from the heat of the day. He writes with ambivalence about the light: we come into it because we are drawn to it, but we have no need to fear the dark.

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The writers in the valley, in the shadows, who cannot rely on eyesight to decipher what or who is chosen, discover they are reliant on God. The person born blind doesn't lack vision at all. All testify to the miraculous and surprising goodness of God. Samuel, David, Paul and Jesus' contemporaries were trying to see the world in a new way, seeking to see and bless that which God has chosen.



Focus scripture

John 9:1–41

Additional scriptures

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Psalms 23

Ephesians 5:8–14

God of song and heartache, you know that the most challenging places cause our hearts to sing the prettiest songs. The shadow of death makes it dark in the valley, but in these moments we are like seeds in soil, waiting for the right moment to put down roots and send up shoots toward the surface. Cause our hearts to rest in what we cannot see with our eyes; to hear what the ear cannot decipher, and to love the mystery of your love. 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 in this age group will be able to identify the rules and regulations that are enforced at home and school. They can sometimes be somewhat legalistic, considering situations as either right or wrong. Older children are beginning to be able to see situations in terms of shades of grey, instead of only black and white.

Children today don't usually experience Sunday as a day with special rules or prohibitions and may not understand why Jesus' actions were upsetting. However, they will have experienced times when family rules were stretched for a special occasion.

As with all healing stories, we should be sensitive to children with disabilities or those who have relatives or friends who are sick. Children may wonder why Jesus does not cure them or the persons they know too. If a child raises the issue, you might explain that we don't know why some people are healed and others are not, and assure the children of God's presence and love while avoiding making promises about what God will do. Pray that the children in your group will be encouraged by this week's amazing story of healing and of God's love.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 9:1–41, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 27).
- ❑ Set a worship space with purple cloth, candle, and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 6) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 6), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring purple construction paper.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song, "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).
- ❑ Bring a recording of sound effects (such as bird sounds, car motor, wind chimes, dog barking) from a public library.

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[My Amazing Story](#)"; recruit a storyteller to come in costume and tell the story.

- ❑ **Discussion group 1:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Discussion group 2:** items (such as scissors, book, television remote control, computer mouse) in a covered box

Respond

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

- ❑ **Lent zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Finger Labyrinth](#)" (p. 118)
- ❑ **Game zone:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Craft zone:** paper plates, red construction paper, glitter, thick yarn
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Parchment Cards](#)," wax-covered paper, tissues, coloured paper, pressed flowers and leaves, glitter
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Dot Puzzle](#)"

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song "As We Go Now" (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).



I Am Because We Are

Scripture

John 9:1–41

FOCUS To learn more about the extent of God's great love in the story of Jesus healing the one born blind

Gather

Welcome the children and remind them that we are in the season in the church year called Lent. Invite newcomers to trace around one of their feet on purple construction paper, cut out their footprints, and print their names in the middle of these. As they work, explain that Lent is a time to think about God and learn more about what it means to follow in God's ways.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and point out the purple cloth, reminding children that it is the colour for Lent. Purple is a colour that reminds people in the church to be sorry when they forget to follow in God's ways and to keep trying to follow Jesus' example. Light the candle. Invite

the children to place their footprints around the worship space. Explain that these footprints are a sign that we are ready to travel with Jesus through Lent.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

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

Loving God,

thank you for the special Season of Lent.

We are glad that you are always with us.

Help us to grow strong in your love. Amen.

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

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to close their eyes and listen to a recording of sound effects. As they listen have them guess aloud to identify the sounds. Then ask:

■ **How important would listening be if you could not see?**

After they have discussed this, explain that the story today is about someone who listened carefully.

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 John. Recall that there are four gospels in the New Testament, each one telling the story of Jesus in a different way. Review the stories heard from the gospel of John the last two weeks: Nicodemus' visit (**John 3:1–17**) and the woman at the well (**John 4:5–42**). Explain that Jesus had been travelling through different towns and villages, teaching people about God's love. In this week's story, Jesus meets a man who had been born blind.

The Bible story

Introduce the guest storyteller as the one who had been born blind. Have him tell the story on the resource sheet "[My Amazing Story](#)" based on **John 9:1–41**.

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

- **How did Jesus help the one who had been born blind?**
- **What amazing thing did this man learn about Jesus?**
- **What do you think Jesus and the man talked about after the healing?**

■ **Why were some of the religious leaders upset when they heard about the healing?**

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.)

Discussion Group 1 This group will have the opportunity to explore the themes of conflict and growth in this week's story. Talk together about some of the conflicts between characters in the story. Invite children to talk about how this story can help us grow in our understanding about what it means to live in God's way.

Discussion Group 2 This group will have an opportunity to talk further about rules. Invite children to close their eyes and take turns choosing an item from the box. Have them guess what they have in their hand before pulling it out. For each item, invite children to describe a rule in their house

about the item (such as not running when holding a pair of scissors). When all have had a turn, ask children to describe other rules they have in their house. Talk about times when the family rules are broken (such as having a later bedtime for special occasions). What did Jesus do to show that rules shouldn't get in the way of sharing God's love?

Reporting Invite Discussion Group 1 to share some of their thoughts about ways that people can help others, and invite the Discussion Group 2 to share their responses to the question.

The Bible story and us

Jesus helped people to see that God's love should be shared every day and that rules shouldn't get in the way of sharing God's love.

■ **When does it seem hard to do loving things for other people?**

■ **What helps us to share God's love wherever we are?**

Respond

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

❑ **Lent zone: Meditation** *(for older children)* Lent is a time to pray and listen for God's voice. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Finger Labyrinth](#)" (p. 118) and review the information at the top of the page. Play a recording of meditative music and encourage children to follow the pathway with their fingers; when they reach the middle invite them to think of those in need of healing in their families or community or in the world. What might God be asking them to do? Encourage them to take the labyrinth home to use during times of prayer and meditation.

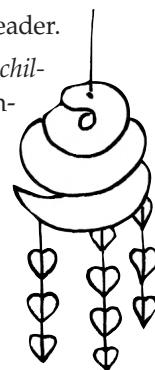


❑ **Game zone: Zoom** When the blind man was healed by Jesus his whole world changed. Recall the words of the song used in the gathering worship: "Behold, I make all things new." Invite children to play a game to name some of the things that Jesus Christ can make new through them: gather in a fairly close circle and pass the word "Zoom" around the circle, from person to person, saying it faster and faster, as if changing gears in a car. Finally



the leader applies the brakes by sticking out a leg and shouting, "Behold!" Everyone freezes while the leader names something he or she can do to follow Jesus and witness to God's love. Take turns being the leader.

❑ **Craft zone: Mobile** *(for younger children)* Jesus showed the whole community that God's love has no limits. Show the children how to draw a spiral on a paper plate and help them print the words "God's love has no limits" along the spiral. Have them cut along the drawn lines to form a hanging spiral and decorate with glitter. Have them each make three strings of hearts by cutting heart shapes from construction paper and glueing two shapes together with a length of yarn sandwiched between. Add three pairs of hearts to each length of yarn and staple these to the bottom of the spiral. Attach a short length of yarn to middle of spiral for hanging.



❑ **Outreach zone: Cards** (*for older children*) One way that the church participates in helping to heal others' spirits is through keeping in touch with church members who cannot leave their homes. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Parchment Cards](#)" and the supplies and help children create cards for distribution through the church staff or pastoral care visitors (or cards can be mailed). Encourage the children to write messages of support and love and to remember these people in their prayers.

❑ **Quiet zone: Word puzzle** Nothing would stop Jesus from showing God's love. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Dot Puzzle](#)" and review the information at the top of the page together. Invite the children to complete the puzzle to discover the special message. (*Answer: God's love has no limits.*)

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 "As We Go Now" (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

O God, we thank you
for your love that surrounds us every day.
Help us share your love with others. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: "As you leave this place remember to reach out to others, as Jesus did."

Reflect

What insights did the children have into this story of healing? What questions did the story prompt in them? How might you help children to deal with their questions about healing and their concerns over relatives or friends who are ill?



My Amazing Story

(based on John 9:1–41, as told by the person Jesus healed)

I was blind. I could not see well enough to work, so my work was sitting here on the side of the road, begging for money or food. Every day I came to this same place. I could not see, but I knew what was going on around me because I listened carefully.

One day I heard some people ask, “Rabbi, teacher, who sinned that this person was born blind? Was it the man or his parents?” I knew they were looking at me, but I didn’t say a word. The rabbi, Jesus was his name, answered, “Neither this person nor his parents sinned. But I will bring him sight so that God’s way is shown through him. The time is coming when I will not be here to do these works of God.”

Then this teacher spat on the ground. I was used to people doing that because they thought spitting at me would keep them safe from me. But this Jesus didn’t hurry on. He took the dust where he spat and made mud from it. He spread that mud on my eyes. Then he said to me, “Go, wash your eyes in the pool of Siloam.” I did what he said. Well, I had to wash my eyes anyway, so why not? But, to my amazement, when I washed away the mud, I could see!

I went back to the road where I sat every day. The people who knew me said things like, “Is this the same man who begs here every day?” Some said, “Yes.” But others said, “No, it can’t be.” I told them that I was the same man, but the teacher Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and when I washed my eyes I could see. But Jesus was gone when I got back.

The people took me to the Pharisees. They asked me lots of questions about what happened and who did this. So I told them, “He put mud on my eyes. I washed my eyes. Now I can see.” They argued about who Jesus was. Some thought he was of God, but others said that he couldn’t be because he had healed me on the Sabbath and that was against God’s laws. They asked me, “Who was this man?” I said, “He is a prophet, one who speaks for God.”

They still didn’t know what to believe, so they had my parents come to them. But they just said, “Our son is an adult. We weren’t there. Ask him.”

The Pharisees asked me again, and I told them the same story. I was really getting tired of repeating my story. Weren’t they listening the first time? I said, “If this teacher, Jesus, was not from God, he could not have made me see. What is your problem?”

That made the Pharisees angry. They yelled at me, “You would try to teach us? Get out!”

Someone told Jesus what happened and he came looking for me. When Jesus found me, he asked, “Do you believe in the Messiah, the One sent from God?”

I was puzzled by this question, so I said, “Tell me, teacher, and I will believe in the Messiah.”

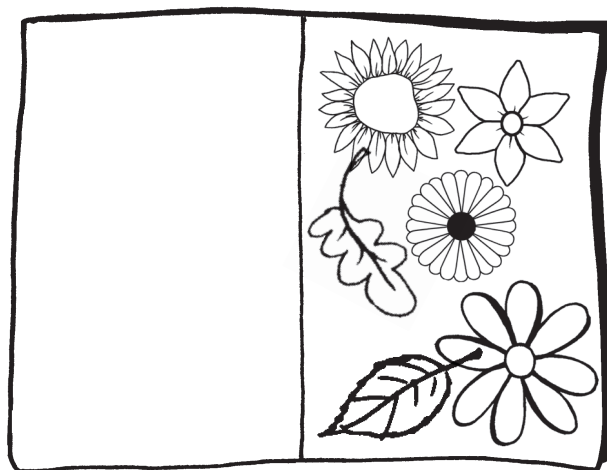
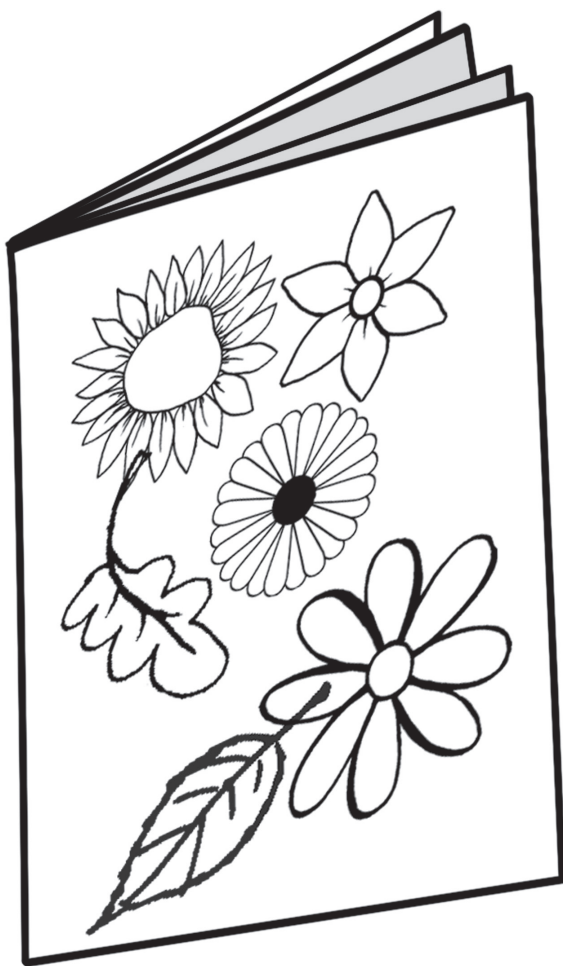
Then I was amazed again, for Jesus said, “I am the one.” At that moment, I knew that I believed.



PARCHMENT CARDS

Materials needed

- ☐ paper with a wax film
- ☐ tissues, separated into layers
- ☐ container of white glue mixed with equal parts of water
- ☐ paintbrushes
- ☐ dried pressed flowers, dried pressed leaves
- ☐ craft materials such as glitter, sequins, metallic confetti
- ☐ sheets of coloured paper



Directions

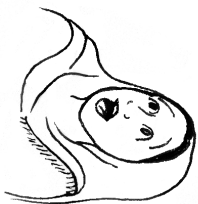
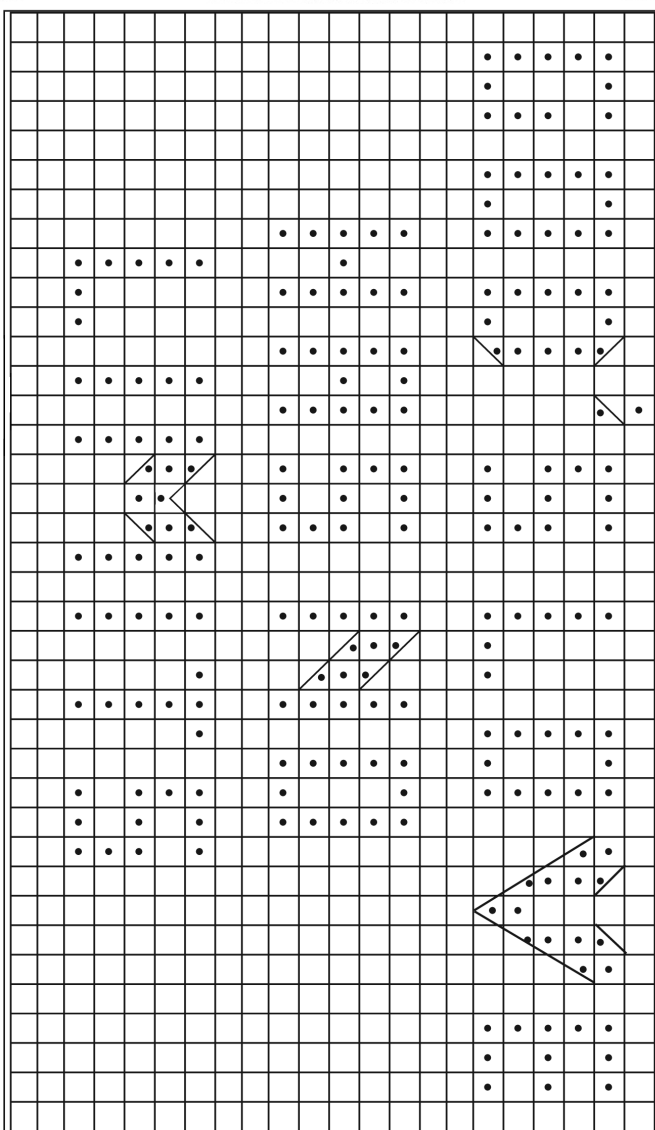
1. Cut sheets of paper with a wax film a little bit larger than the size of an open tissue.
2. Use a paintbrush to brush the glue mixture over a whole sheet of waxed paper.
3. Place pressed flowers, leaves, and other craft items on the right hand side of the waxed paper.
4. Place one layer of a tissue over the whole sheet of waxed paper and gently brush more glue mixture over the tissue.
5. Place flat to dry (the tissue will wrinkle a bit as it dries). When dry fold the card in half so that the pressed flowers are on top.
6. Fold a piece of coloured paper in half; print a message on the inside of the folded paper and then place inside the dried "parchment" card.



Dot Puzzle

One Sabbath day Jesus met a man who had been born blind. No one believed that the man would ever be able to see. Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud, and smeared it on the man's eyes. Then Jesus told him to go wash in a pool. When the man came back he could see! Everyone was amazed! The man who had been born blind and the people in his community discovered something very important about God. What do you think it was?

Fill in every space
that has a dot to make
the answer appear.



Finger Labyrinth

- A labyrinth is a tool that helps us to quiet our minds for deep down listening.
- Begin at the opening of the labyrinth and using your finger follow the path into the middle. Notice that the path sometimes turns back on itself. That gives more time to relax and quiet your mind.
- When you get to the middle, stay for a while and pay attention to your deep down thoughts and feelings. What might God be saying to you?
- When you are ready, begin your journey out, breathing in and out slowly.
- With your finger, slowly follow the path out of the labyrinth. When you get to the end, pause and give thanks for God's guiding, teaching, and leading.

