

Living as a Liberation Community

This week's readings centre around the conflict between fear and bold faith to walk with God despite the obstacles the world throws at us. Using the story of a golden calf as a mirror for the times we fall short of God's vision, let us put on the robe of faith and justice?

Focus scripture: Exodus 32:1–14

Exodus 32 contains what is likely one of the most confusing and dramatic stories in the Hebrew scriptures. It has been interpreted in myriad ways, but mostly as a cautionary tale of turning toward other gods. However, a reader with strong interfaith allegiances can glean different – perhaps deeper – meanings from the story. Meanings that centre on liberation, fear, and the challenge of working toward the social justice and liberation that is God's vision. The people, afraid that Moses will not return to them, turn to Aaron's leadership. They turn in all of their gold to create a golden calf to worship. Moses returns to deliver a message of God's simultaneous anger and forgiveness. We might call the people impatient, unfaithful, jealous, fearful – but we might also call them tirelessly determined, even though misguided, in their quest to find their freedom in the promised land. In a way, they are like all of us, doing the best we can with the information and ideas that we have. The people are fearful and one could argue that they turn their backs on God. But do they? They might lose some faith in God, but in turning in their gold they continue to participate in the quest that is most precious to God: their freedom.

In the story of the golden calf, Moses stands, according to **Psalm 106: 1–6, 19–23**, “in the breach” that has developed between God and the rest of the community. Moses repairs the broken trust on both sides, calling God and the people back into covenant. Who stands in the breach today? How can we be people who repair broken trust between different entities? What kind of faith, leadership, and patience would that entail?

Having a sense of centredness helps. Paul calls for such a state of being in **Philippians 4:1–9** writing the iconic phrase, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” His is a plea, like Moses' plea, to not be afraid, even when the world seems to let go of the possibility of liberation, physical or social or spiritual. But how does one not fear? Paul seems to suggest that the lack of fear comes from a grounding in the promise of a higher, more loving order.

Amid these calls for peace and freedom from fear, **Matthew 22:1–14** seems jarring. At a surface level, it appears that the people who do not dress right are the ones whom God punishes. Why would God do this, forgetting a preferential option for the poor and oppressed? God is the one who teaches that fineries matter less than spirit.

This is a parable, and parables speak in symbol and irony. Read on a deeper level, the clothing signifies our spiritual preparedness for what God provides. Perhaps the robe is a robe of justice, or equality, or community. When are we so busy or fearful or distracted and forget to clothe ourselves in these values?

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Together, this week's texts ask us to slow down and recalibrate. When we pray, do we search for security or justice? Comfort for some, or comfort for all? When, in the search for freedom for ourselves and all people, do we also miss the mark? Perhaps we can aspire to do the best we can to love God and to fight for freedom and equality for all?



Focus scripture
Exodus 32:1–14

Additional scriptures
Psalm 106:1–6, 19–23
Philippians 4:1–9
Matthew 22:1–14

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

God of freedom, your invitation to a life of liberation never ceases. You call us to give faithful witness to your love, justice, and freedom. May we be steadfast in faith, and may our lives and community be marked by our thanksgiving and joy. 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

Younger children in this age group are still developing a concept of time. Their ability to tell time and intuit a span of time varies greatly. Like the people of Israel in this week’s scripture reading, they, too, can become impatient and find it hard to wait, often complaining until someone gives in. Since most children usually live in the present, they have a tendency to make decisions based on satisfying immediate needs and wants rather than thinking long term. It is not unusual for them to become anxious and impatient if people or events do not arrive when they think they should.

This is a difficult story for younger children and we need to be careful that we don’t focus on the misdeeds of the people and God’s angry response, as we might send the message God will punish us if we make a big enough mistake. Behind all the action, it is a story about love and relationship. Most of the children in your group will try hard to please the people they love.

As they explore the deep friendship between God and Moses, they can discover that what they do matters to God because God loves them and wants the best for them. Pray for the children as they explore their relationship with God and learn about what really matters.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Exodus 32:1–14, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 43).
- 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 resource sheet “[An Incident in the Wilderness](#).”
- Activity group:** resource sheet “[Moses’ Story](#)”
- Research group:** make a copy of section “Story strips” on bottom of resource sheet

“[Being an Advocate](#)”; cut strips apart and add numbers to the back of each strip, in consecutive order.

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
- Quiet zone:** writing materials, newspapers and newsmagazines
- Drama zone:** no additional materials needed
- Discover zone:** sticky notes
- Discussion zone:** copies of top section of resource sheet “[Being an Advocate](#)”; option: invite members of the congregation involved in advocacy to speak about their work.

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).



Scripture

Exodus 32:1–14

Living as a Liberation Community

FOCUS To be reminded, through a story about Moses, that what we do matters to 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
 about what matters to you. Amen.

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

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to recall stories of times when someone has stood up for them, or for somebody that they know, when something went wrong. Have those who wish to describe their experiences and what the person did to help them. Explain that people who stand up for someone else are called "advocates." Ask:

- What might make it hard to stand up for someone else?
- What would help you to stand up for someone else?

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. This week's story begins when Moses went up a mountain to meet with God. He was away for 40 days. Invite the group to count to 40 and comment that 40 days is a very long time.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Incident in the Wilderness](#)," based on **Exodus 32:1–7**, to tell the story. Take time during the drama to discuss the questions. Then summarize **Exodus 32:8–14** by explaining that Moses stood up for the people when they had done something wrong, and God paid attention to Moses.

Wondering Invite discussion on the following questions:

- What do you think they could have done instead of making the golden calf?

Moses had a close relationship with God.

- **How did Moses' words and actions make a difference?**
- **What do you think can help us to have a close relationship with God?**

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.)

Activity group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to review the stories from last week and this week by participating in an echo story. Follow the instructions on the resource sheet "[Moses' Story](#)" and encourage children to repeat the words and phrases, adding actions if they would like.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to review the story of Moses and the Hebrew people that led to the building of the golden calf. Distribute the "Story strips" from the resource sheet "[Being an Advocate](#)" and

invite the group to work together to put these in chronological order, using the numbers on the back if necessary. Have them tell the story of the journey from Egypt by reading the strips together in order, and then summarize this week's story in their own words.

Reporting Invite the activity group to perform the echo story and invite the research group to share this week's story in their own words.

The Bible story and us

Hebrew people found it hard to wait for Moses to come back. Invite children to share stories of times when someone they knew went away and they had to wait for him or her to return.

- **What was it like waiting for that person to return?**

Moses found courage to stand up for the people when they did something wrong. Invite children to think of those in need of advocates today.

- **What are some ways that we can be advocates for others?**

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 started last week. Distribute sheets of construction paper and encourage children to make several hand shapes and write or draw things on the handprints that they might do to show love. Have them write their names on the back of their pages and place them together in the binder to form the second chapter of their storybook. Encourage children to look at the book regularly.
- **Quiet zone: Prayer letters** *(for older children)* Just like Moses, we can come before God to advocate for those things in the world that concern us deeply. Invite children to review the newspapers and newsmagazines and choose a concern for which they would like to advocate. Provide writing materials and have them write prayer letters to God, explaining how they feel and why they think something should be done to change the situation. Suggest that they continue to pray about their situations in the coming week, and consider what they could do.



- **Drama zone: Freeze frames** This week's story reminds us that when we act in good and kind ways we are showing love for God. Invite children to help you make a list of ways to act kindly as a group. Then name each suggestion and encourage the group to act out that activity. Say, "Freeze" and have the group hold their pose for a short while. Repeat using each suggestion from the list.
- **Discovery zone: Notes** Moses let his community know that what they did mattered to God. Invite children to name some of the different ways a faith community might show God's love. Then travel around the church building together. When the children see evidence of loving actions, print the words "What we do matters to God" on a sticky note for them to place near that area.



□ **Discussion zone: Advocacy** Moses demonstrated that standing up for others can have a powerful effect. Distribute copies of the top section of the resource sheet "[Being an Advocate](#)" and read the stories together, providing time for comments. If guests are

present, invite them to speak about their advocacy work. Talk together about ways that group members can be advocates and help make a difference. Plan some ways to become involved in the advocacy outreach work in the church or community.

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 the *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 what we do matters to God.

God is with us. Amen.

Reflect

In what ways did the children connect with the idea that what we do matters to God? Keep the children in prayer as they continue to deepen their relationships with God.



An Incident in the Wilderness

based on Exodus 32:1-7

Israelite 1: How long has it been?

Israelite 2: I don't know! Why are you asking me?
I don't keep track of these things.

Israelite 3: It's been 40 days, at least!

Israelite 4: What are we going to do? Moses was the one who led us out of Egypt. He told us what to do and where to go. When we needed something, Moses got it for us. Now he's gone. Who will lead us now?

All: **Yikes! What are we going to do?**

Israelite 1: Something has to be done.

Israelite 2: And quickly.

Israelite 3: Let's ask Aaron to make us a statue of a god to lead us.

All: **Why Aaron?**

Israelite 4: Moses left him in charge. You want something done, go to Aaron. You got questions, ask Aaron. You need extra food...

All: **Ask Aaron, we get it.**

Israelite 1: Let's go and speak to him now.

Israelite 2: Hey, Aaron, we don't know what has happened to this man Moses who led us out of Egypt, so make us a statue of a god.

Aaron: What? Why?

Why do you think the Israelites want a statue of a god?

(Pause for discussion.)

Aaron: Let's wait for a few more days. Surely Moses will return soon.

Narrator: A few days pass, and still there is no sign of Moses.

All (chanting): **We want a god. Make us a god. We want a god. Make us a god.**

Aaron: What shall I do? If I wait much longer there could be trouble, someone might even get hurt. Should I make that statue?

All (chanting): **We want a god. Make us a god. We want a god. Make us a god.**

What do you think Aaron will do?

(Pause for discussion.)

Narrator: So Aaron sent out a message.

Messenger: Take off all your gold earrings and bring them to me immediately.

Narrator: Aaron delayed making the statue for as long as he could, but Moses still did not return.

All (chanting): **We want a god. Make us a god. We want a god. Make us a god.**

Narrator: Finally Aaron knew he couldn't delay any longer and made a statue shaped like a calf.

All: **Hooray! We finally have a god we can see! Let's have a party to celebrate!**

Narrator: Meanwhile up on the mountain, God and Moses were meeting and God was not happy.

What do you think will happen?



Being an Advocate

Advocates are people who stand up for the rights of others as well as themselves

Two advocates

Malala Yousafzai was born in Mingora, Pakistan, in 1997. Most parents wanted baby boys, but Malala's father was very happy to have a baby girl. He was a teacher and ran a school for girls, even thought lots of people that than only boys should go to school and be educated.

In 2011, Taliban extremists with guns came to her town. They put a stop to many things, like television and listening to music, and they closed the school, saying girls couldn't go. In 2012, Malala began to speak out in public saying that girls had as much right to go to school and learn as boys. This made the Taliban very angry and one day when Malala was on a bus, a gunman got on board and shot her. Fortunately, Malala survived and was flown to England where she had surgery.

In 2014, Malala won the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest person to ever win the prize. Malala is now an advocate and speaks out around the world on behalf of education for girls and women.

Greta Thunberg was born in Sweden in 2003. In 2018, when she was only 15, Greta began a movement that, in only one year, has spread around the entire world, calling on governments to take immediate action to address the harmful changes that happening to the earth's climate. But at the start, she was all alone. She stopped going to school and instead sat all by herself outside of her country's parliament buildings (like the Capital Building in the U.S.) to protest the government's inaction on the climate change crisis.

But her idea caught on, inspiring school children, as well as youth and adults, to participate in "climate strikes" by walking out of classrooms and taking other actions. Coordinated climate strikes have taken place in cities around the world, involving more than one million students.

Greta spoke at the 2018 Climate Change Conference, and was nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize (she didn't win).

For more information about speaking out go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the Links tab.
See links for October 11, 2020.

Story strips

Moses leads the people out of Egypt.

God parts the waters of the Red Sea so the people can go through.

The people move to an oasis, but the water is bitter and the people complain about the taste. God shows Moses how to make the water taste sweet.

The people complain that God has brought them out to the wilderness to die, because there is no food. God provides manna for them to eat.

The people complain that they are bored of eating manna. God provides quail for them to eat.

The people complain to Moses that God has brought them out to the wilderness to die, because there is no water. God provides water from a rock.



Moses' Story

based on Exodus 19, 20, and 32:1-14

This echo story combines the stories from October 8 and October 15. A leader reads the line, and then reads the words in parenthesis for the children to echo.

The thunder went "Crack!" (Crack)
The lightning flashed. (flashed)
The trumpets blared. (blared)
When God spoke to Moses, (When God spoke to Moses)
"Take these rules for loving (rules for loving)
to my people." (my people)

But the noise of God speaking (God speaking)
made the people tremble. (tremble)
"You talk with God, Moses. (You, Moses)
We are too afraid." (too afraid)

So Moses went up the mountain. (up the mountain)

But Moses stayed a long time (a long time)
The people of Israel gave up. (gave up)
They went to his brother Aaron. (his brother Aaron)
"Give us a god we can see!" (a god we can see)
Aaron made a golden calf. (golden calf)
And, on the mountain, (on the mountain)
God was not happy. (not happy)