

# Planning



Sunday, November 12 – Saturday, November 18 • 2023

## Wholehearted

A story with shut doors invites us to choose to trust in God's abundance and share all that we are.

### This Week...

#### Ecumenical prayer calendar

Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia

As listed in *Pilgrim Prayer: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*, edited by Ester Pudjo Widiastih and Karen L. Bloomquist. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2018.) <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle> offers valuable aids for intercessory prayers, prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others.

#### Personal reflection

In her book *Wholehearted Faith*, Rachel Held Evans writes, "Wholeheartedness means that we can ask bold questions, knowing that God loves us not just in spite of them but also because of them – and because of the searching, seeking spirits that inspire us to want to know God more deeply." We find this truth in the women pushed outside the wedding banquet. They ask questions just as the church in Thessalonica asked bold questions about what it means to welcome the reign of God.

- **What questions do you have about God's kin-dom?**
- **How do you engage these questions with God?**

*The planning page is provided in text format for copying, adapting, and adding to your bulletin or online worship resources or website or social media (see Text folder, Worship Outline).*

#### November 12, 2023

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 27 (32)

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

#### Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25

Psalm 78:1–7

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

#### Matthew 25:1–13

the focus in age-level materials



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

**Liturgical colour** Green

The Season after Pentecost is a time to tell stories about God and who we are as Christ's disciples. Use the Storytelling Starters each week as an opportunity to encourage new stories. "[Where Is the Good News?](#)" on page 149 might best support the preacher or the Bible study groups meeting this week, but it might also offer inspiration to the youth as they wonder about what other stories we share to reflect our values and hopes.

### Online Resources

#### Lection Connection

Essays and discussion prompts linking current events with this week's scriptures. Use for sermon preparation, Bible studies, and small groups or share on social media at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/10/>.

#### Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home

An easy-to-share, weekly online resource supports the spiritual lives and faith formation of individuals and families at home. It is provided in the [Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home](#) folder.





Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25  
 Psalm 78:1–7  
 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18  
 Matthew 25:1–13

the focus in age-level materials



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

Holy One, we come into your presence with our whole selves, ready to trust in you wholeheartedly. May it be so.

# Wholehearted

What do we do with the liberation we receive from God? Congratulate ourselves for becoming insiders? Or challenge the holders of the keys to open the doors to those who have been excluded? How does what we know of the realm of God shape our response to the stories we hear today?

Note the internal tensions in **Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25**: the embrace of an imperial theology of domination and a divinely sanctioned elimination of the people who presently reside in the land, with the call for communities of liberation to be faithful witnesses to a God whose liberation and justice are for all. Each person and community must discern the nature of the God they choose to follow with their whole selves, and the type of world for which they are preparing. **Psalm 78:1–7** in particular, and the breadth of the psalms together, reminds us of our commitment, as God's people, to tell our stories wholeheartedly and honestly, including the hard stories of times we turned from God, of times we experienced pain. **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18** reminds us that there is no place, including death, where hope no longer resides. The promise of God's liberation, justice, and love unite us in life and death.

**Matthew 25:1–13** This picture of the “kingdom of heaven” appears in a series of confronting passages in which preparedness for the coming age seems to be an urgent matter of life and death. We are reminded of Noah's story and God's devastating response to the people's ways of wickedness. Thieves coming to steal us away give rise to images of “the rapture.” On either side of the parable of ten bridesmaids there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (24:51; 25:30). Some translations use the term “virgins” in this passage. The risks of naming women for their sexual status include

reducing women to sexual objects and consequent cultural ideas of “purity” and devaluing women as whole human beings. Characterizing these women as “wise” or “foolish” may make a pertinent point about paying attention. However, “foolish virgins” may dismiss and diminish women if the parable is taken to tell us about women, bridesmaids, or virgins; it does not. We honour women with the care we take engaging with this parable.

The war in Rome and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem may be raw memories for the community for whom this gospel account was composed. For this community, there is an urgency to keep in good stead with the Roman authorities in a volatile situation (22:15–22). Reeling from the losses through war, the people find comfort in the hope of resurrection with Christ. We might feel the grief of the Matthean community as they lament the fractures and bruises of broken relationships as they establish a distinct identity as followers of the Christ.

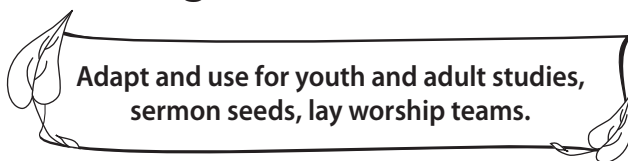
Strikingly and urgently, this parable and the passages around it tell of a need to prepare a light, to pay attention for Christ's coming. Look for the realm of God. The message for every Christian in every age is the transformative moment for the realm-of-God change. Half-hearted or half-prepared, will never do it. If we fail in a wholehearted response, we will miss the opportunity when it arrives. Christ is coming, now, and we will miss it if we are not prepared and not watchful.

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Wholeheartedness is a feature of the people of God: honest in telling our whole story, raw and vulnerable in the aftermath of war, bold as we strive to embody the liberation and justice we have experienced with God, and careful with the story and one another.



## Reflecting on the Word



### Connecting with life

Brené Brown and Rachel Held Evans are two writers in our time exploring themes of wholeheartedness. Brown's research questions evoked responses that pointed to a type of person who knew joy and peace. She came to name the quality shared by such people as "wholeheartedness," which involves cultivating such practices as gratitude, rest, creativity, and play, and letting go of perfectionism, comparisons, and anxiety as a way of life. Brown presents this research in *The Gifts of Imperfection* (Brown, 2010).

- To what extent do you feel held by perfectionism, comparison, and anxiety?
- What practice (gratitude, rest, creativity, play) might you concentrate on cultivating this week?

### Scripture

Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25

- What is your response to the words "choose this day whom you will serve" (v. 15)?
- What are the "gods" that attract your attention? What do they offer you?
- How are you keeping faith?

**Psalms 78:1–7** We tell the whole story (warts and all), not to wallow in the hard times, but for the remembering of God's presence even there. We tell our whole story for the part each chapter plays in who we are today.

- What are the hard stories we as a community avoid telling, afraid of shame or pain?
- How have difficult stories helped you in your faith journey?

## Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

Opening and closing doors rarely requires thought in our everyday life until, of course, there is someone on the other side of the door that is denied entry like these five women. They are excluded. They are denied grace. Unlike every other time that Jesus makes a way, here the door remains shut which gives us pause to consider who we have personally and communally shut out.

Let your worship, learning, and serving choose the adventure of wholehearted faith where there are no worries of unworthiness and bold questions are expected. Use

**Article** "Where Is the Good News?" (p. 149)

**Matthew 25:1–13** In biblical times, oil was associated with anointing and indicated the presence of God's spirit with a person. Oil also was a metaphor of God's presence in a person's life, as demonstrated in her or his acts of love and mercy.

- What do these meanings of oil add to your understanding of the parable?

Matthew's community was waiting for Christ's imminent return.

- What does it mean for Christ's coming to be not a future event, but a present unfolding?
- How urgent is it for us to look for hope, peace, justice, and life here, now?
- How might our living wholehearted, cultivating gratitude, rest, creativity, and play, and letting go of perfectionism, comparisons, and anxiety as a way of life prepare for life in God's reign now and in the time to come?

### Connecting scripture and life

Review "Where Is the Good News?" by Vicky Balabanski.

- What, if in this parable of shut doors, we find Jesus outside with the ones on whom the door has been closed? Might this wondering provoke us to ask the ones inside to look for those excluded and challenge the host to open the doors for them?
- What is needed for the shut door not to be the last word?

Rachel Held Evans' book *Wholehearted Faith* engages with the search for spiritual wholeness. The search involves wrestling with God's grace and love in an imperfect world and exploring with courage universal human questions about becoming and belonging.

- Where do we find ourselves, individually and as the church, as we tend to our spirits and kindle the flame of God's love, mercy, and compassion that all may live wholehearted?

"Where Is the Good News?" on page 149 to ground your understanding of this challenging parable as you push to find a way through every door to greater love, compassion, and justice for this world and its people.

May there also be joy and blessing in this search for justice in the ways that you choose to uplift and support each other in this wholehearted quest. Lean into the last verse in the letter to the church in Thessalonica and allow for a time of anointing with oil.



# Wholehearted

## Prepare

NOTE: The following suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs and context. If a community is gathered in person, they may speak the **bolded** lines. If worshippers are not all physically present, consider having a different individual say the bolded responses. Instructions are *italicized*.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Matthew 25:1–13. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present “Enough for All” on p. 150. Alternatively, for younger children, arrange for a storyteller to present “Open to Us” in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials. For Choosing your own adventure, arrange for 11 actors (ten women and one man) to enact the scene. They might also imagine possible endings in preparation.
- ❑ Bring items for setting the worship space: small votive or tealight candles and matches for the prayers of the people, oil for the dedication.
- ❑ You might choose to print *Desert Dancing* on or in your bulletin (in the Images to Project and Images for Printing folders). See “Connecting with the Art” on p. 8 for background to the art and artist.
- ❑ Bring song such as “People of the Word” (*Seasons Songbook, vol. 3, #24 on Seasons Music CD, vol. 3*). Printed music and recording are also available for purchase

and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/).

- ❑ Set stations as described on pp. 151–152.



### Music Suggestions

**As Long as We Follow/Na Nzela Na Lola**

Joseph Kabemba; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

**The Anointing**

James Maher; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 9*

**All We Long For**

Trisha Watts; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

**As We Go Now**

Stephen Fischbacher; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

**Are You ReaDEE**

Linnea Good; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

**I Want Jesus to Go with Me**

African American Spiritual; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

**Open My Heart**

Ana Hernandez



A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 *Seasons of the Spirit* Music Volumes can be found at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca). Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

## Gather

### Call to worship

Give ear, O people, to God’s teachings.

**For in parable and story God’s wisdom is revealed.**

Let us listen for things we have heard and known,  
for the stories that are so important that we keep telling them  
over and over again.

**Let us remember God’s glorious works in our own words.**

People of God, be a witness and a light.

Share what you know and trust in the goodness of God.

Together, let us raise our hope and remember every opening  
and possibility.

**Let us worship God in wonder and truth.**

### Opening prayer

We come with our whole hearts ready and waiting to share  
in your graceful abundance.

**Come, O God, open to us.**

We come uncertain and indecisive.

**Come, O God, open to us.**

We come hopeful and curious.

**Come, O God, open to us.**

We come expectant and eager.

**Come, O God, open to us.**

Open all the doors and welcome us in.

Invite us to share in your story, O God,  
where there is more than enough love and even more grace.

**Come, O God, open to us.**



## Worship Outline • November 12, 2023

### Prayer of confession

In another time and another place, Jesus says to his disciples, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8).

Invite the congregation to wonder in quiet contemplation:

- What doors need to be opened to you today?
- What doors have you shut to others?
- What is God asking of you today?

### Words of affirmation

Jesus assures you today and every day:

Ask, and it will be given to you.

Search, and you will find.

Knock, and God will always answer with love and grace.

Thanks be to God.

## Engage

### Opening the word

**Matthew 23:1–13** *the focus scripture for age-level materials in ENCORE*

**Introduction** Brené Brown writes, “Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, ‘No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.’ It’s going to bed at night thinking, ‘Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am worthy of love and belonging.’”

It is too easy to become overwhelmed by all the needs in this world, leaving many of us paralyzed. In today’s parable, there’s an opportunity to bring our courage, compassion, and desire for connection in the way we find meaning in Jesus’ wisdom. Let that wisdom extend to the grace you share.

Choose from the following.

**Bible story** Arrange for a storyteller to present “Enough for All” on p. 150. Alternatively, for younger children, tell the story “Open to Us” (in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials).

**Choosing your own adventure** Arrange for ten women and one man. Invite these characters to act out the scene as Matthew 23:1–10. Freeze after the door is shut and then turn to the congregation and ask, “How do you think this parable should end?” As worshippers offer suggestions, invite the actors to portray the events.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13–18** After the reading, read verse 18 again and invite the congregation to speak a word of wholehearted encouragement to the people sitting next to or around them.

If gathering in person, invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word. For those participating at home, you might encourage them to use materials that have been sent.

## Respond

**Sing** or listen to a song such as “People of the Word” as people gather again (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 3, #24 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 3. Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/)).

### Prayers of the people

So many doors remain shut, O God.

We have shut some of those doors.

Others have been closed to us.

Systems and institutions have refused to see another way.

So many doors have slammed, leaving your children out in the cold.

Deadbolted away from hope.

**O God, we believe in another way.**

With our whole hearts, O God, we believe that your kin-dom has no shut doors.

Every door is open wide because there is always enough grace.

Love flings wide the portals of our hearts, and there is so much love to give.

In a world of increasing division and hostility, we pray for a world in need.

We pray today for those shut out and ignored.



*Worship leader offers these instructions:*

You are invited to come forward with your prayer, light a candle and voice your prayer for those, like the young women in today's parable, who are neglected, overlooked and even locked away. Conclude your prayer with, "This is my hope" so that we might all respond,

**O God, open to us.**

### **Prayer of dedication or offering prayer**

*Explain that, as in biblical times, oil is used in the church for anointing. It recognizes God's presence, generosity, and blessing.*

*As part of the offering, invite those who wish to come forward and be anointed with oil. Mark their foreheads or the back of their hands*

*and say words such as, "The Spirit is with you, so shine out with love." Alternatively, have people anoint one another in their seats as a bowl of oil is passed from one to another. Sing or have sung "The Anointing" (Seasons Songbook, vol. 9 and #5 on the Seasons Music CD, vol. 9. Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/)).*

With these gifts, O God, we commit ourselves again to tending the light of Christ and opening every door to welcome love. Fill us, and these gifts, with your grace and wisdom. Amen.

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## **Bless**

Prepare yourself to share the love of Christ.

Ensure that there is oil in your lamp and fire in your belly.

Live your lives as an expression of the activity of God.

**Amen.**





# Where Is the Good News?

## Matthew 25:1–13

By Vicky Balabanski

There is no doubt that Matthew 25:1–13 is a difficult parable. Its primary difficulty is that it says something about the “Reign of Heaven” via a story in which the main characters – the “wise” young women and the bridegroom – act in ungenerous ways. Their words and actions appear distinctly *unlike* those of Jesus Christ, who sided with the outcasts and welcomed those who had failed. If this difficulty weren’t enough, there are others: the point of the parable in verse 13 is to “keep awake,” yet all the young women, both foolish and wise, fall asleep. And a further difficulty is the plausibility of the story itself – the lateness of the wedding feast and the oil sellers being open after midnight, for instance. This is indeed a difficult parable.

There are two main ways of interpreting it. One interprets this as a plausible wedding scenario, and the other sees it as an allegory shaped by the early church. Because neither approach is persuasive, recent scholars have taken this as a parable of Jesus that has undergone reshaping by the community of disciples.

When the early church retold parables of Jesus, the original – often polemical – context in which Jesus had spoken these stories changed. What had originally been a means of surprising and confronting Jesus’ opponents became a means for building up Christian communities. Consequently, the emphasis of some of the parables has likely shifted, often in the direction of heightened symbolism.

In the case of this parable, the original hearers may not have assumed that the bridegroom was to be identified with Jesus. The story of a group of wise and foolish young women may have initially seemed to be a comic tale to a male audience. The shock would then come when the male host, with whom they had identified until that point, behaves in an ungenerous way and rejects the foolish girls. The story would have been disturbing, and they may have been surprised into identifying with the “foolish” young women and questioning whether they were really “insiders.”

*In the context of Matthew’s gospel*, it is a story about being prepared to face the final judgment and enter the eschatological banquet. Matthew is the only gospel that records this parable. For Matthew, the bridegroom is none other than Christ, coming as judge and dividing not simply outsiders but also his own followers into two groups (cf.

Mt. 25:32). The shock of the story is that those who seem to be insiders prove at the final judgment to be outsiders. This recalls the shock described in Mt. 7:21–23 when those who call Jesus “Lord, Lord” and do mighty deeds in Jesus’ name are rejected because Jesus never *knew* them. For Matthew, the oil in this parable has become a symbol of being prepared to do the will of God as expressed in the commandments of Jesus. Such symbolic oil, which refers to an individual’s actions and attitudes, cannot be shared but must be constantly ready.

For contemporary readers, the context has shifted again. We find the unwillingness of the “wise” young women to share, and the unfair ending make us look for an approach that is more compassionate and relational. Suppose this is a story about God’s reign. In that case, we expect the “wise” characters to model something of the great commandment – “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt. 22:39) and the golden rule – “in everything do to others as you would have them do to you” (Mt. 7:12). The young women without oil request that they are treated as neighbours and that those with oil act consistently with how they wish to be treated. While there is always a need to remember justice as well as the mercy of God, this parable seems one-sided.

As contemporary readers, we can look to the wider context for our approach. The closed door is the symbol of final separation in this story. In Matthew’s gospel, the word “door” (*thura*) is to occur again at 27:60, where it refers to the door of the tomb of Jesus, shut after Jesus has been laid inside. But here, what seemed to have been shut permanently, with all hope gone, is found opened on the third day by the God of new hope. The shut door does not have the last word.

Alternatively, as we search for a symbol of Christ in this story, we can invoke the one who said, “I am the door” (*thura*) (Jn. 10:9) to be present as liberator and to open the door to the marginalised. Only if the closed door becomes open can it enable us to glimpse Christ as liberator in this story. If it remains shut, Christ’s presence is hidden among those outside.

*Rev. Associate Professor Vicky Balabanski is Principal and Director of Biblical Studies, Uniting College for Leadership and Theology, Adelaide, South Australia, and internationally recognized for her work in ecological hermeneutics, receptive ecumenism and feminist studies over more than twenty years.*



# Enough for All

Based on Matthew 25:1–13

Jesus went to talk with a group of people. He told them stories about God's dream. The dream was about a community where everyone was loved, healthy, and happy. People would be treated well, everyone would eat and be filled, and the place where they lived would be beautiful. Some called it the kingdom of God, and some called it God's reign.

This community was so big and beautiful that it was hard to describe, so Jesus told stories to help the people imagine such a place. The stories also helped the people imagine, wonder, and think deeply about how we should live in the world God wants for all people.

In this story, he said that the community would be like ten women going to a wedding. They had to walk a long distance, and it was dark, so everyone had lamps to help guide them. The lamps needed oil to make them work, but some women needed more oil for their lamps. Other women carried extra oil for the lamps.

After travelling for a little while, the women became tired and decided to rest. Everyone slept.

Suddenly, a voice woke them up – it was time to get ready to go! The women all hurried to prepare their lamps for the wedding banquet. But some women did not have enough oil to keep their lamps alight. They asked the other women if they could share. But the women with extra oil said no; if they tried to share, there would not be enough for everyone. They encouraged the women who did not have enough to go and buy extra oil.

The women with extra oil walked on to the wedding banquet. The women who did not have enough oil went to the store. After they had bought oil, they hurried to the wedding banquet. But they were too late. The wedding banquet had begun. The women learned that they should always be ready because they do not know what would happen.

The disciples thought deeply about that story and what it might mean. "Perhaps," said one of the disciples, "we should be ready at all times to keep the light of God's love shining."

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder.



## Bible story

### Materials

- Recording of "Enough for All"
- Alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story
- Paper or drawing pads
- Basic supplies

## The practice of storytelling

### Directions

1. Listen to the story "Enough for All."
2. Using the materials provided, imagine yourself ready to share God's love.





## Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space, or in other places around the church, in your home, or outdoors. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions for all to see onscreen or in person. Adapt stations for use when physically distancing and above all, follow the safe practices of your congregation and local health officials.

**For your convenience, directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder.**

### Health and Safety Practices

**Basic supplies** pens, pencils, markers, crayons, white glue/glue sticks, scissors, handsanitizer, wipes placed in a basket or bin, two containers marked "clean" and "used"

**Setting the space** Utilize large spaces where people can maintain a safe physical distance. Spread out chairs around a large table or use tape to mark off the space around stand alone chairs.

**Keep it clean** Wipe down and disinfect places used for stations. Provide enough arts and crafts supplies to reduce sharing and mark containers "clean" and "used." Remind people to use hand sanitizer as they begin and as they end stations.

### Breaking down every door

#### Materials

- Legos or other small-world play toys that include doors
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



**Suitable for all ages working together**

#### The practice of play

##### Directions

This parable has many different people in it, but it also has a physical door that keeps people out of the celebration of a wedding banquet.

1. Consider the doors in your home, church, school, workplace, and wider community.

- **Who do these doors welcome?**
- **What barriers do these doors present?**
- **What awaits on the other side of each of these doors?**

2. Imagine a community where doors are open to everyone and celebration awaits around every corner. Use the small-world play toys to begin building. Add to each other's rooms, hallways and entryways to create a way for welcome for all.
3. Wonder how this experience might change how doors are used in your community.

### Kin-dom art

#### Materials

- Chalk pens
- Large chalkboard or large dark-coloured sheets of paper
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



**Suitable for all ages**

#### The practice of building community

##### Preparation

Set a large chalkboard or a long length of dark paper where it is visible to the public. Title your board/wall/mural "The kin-dom of God is like..."

##### Directions

In today's parable, Jesus told a parable to get people thinking about God's kin-dom.

1. Use the chalk pens to add words, images, or drawings that describe what you imagine kin-dom of God to be.



## Wholeheartedness

### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Paper
- Paint
- Copies of the directions – one for each person or pair



**Suitable for all ages  
working together**

### The practice of reflection

#### Directions

In today's reading from Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25, Joshua must choose which gods he will serve. The wedding guests in the story from the gospel of Matthew must choose how they will respond when the door is shut on the young women who've returned with oil for their lamps. This is heart stuff where a hard decision must be made. It won't be easy, but it also can't be half-hearted. It will take all the best of us to put our faith into action.

1. On your paper, draw a large heart. This is your heart. It's the heart you put into everything you do and all that you love. Embellish your heart with the art supplies provided, as desired.
2. Reflect on a difficult decision you have had to make recently or one that you are discerning right now. Maybe you must decide between insiders and outsiders, like in the gospel. Or perhaps, like Joshua, your choice is about how you will live in God's way. As you reflect on this decision, consider these questions.

■ **What parts of me do I need to put into this decision?**

■ **What do I need to be strong enough to use my whole heart muscle?**

3. As you reflect, write or draw the things you want inside your heart, such as courage, community, and even a good breakfast.
4. You might notice that there are things that you will want to guard against. Write or draw those things outside of your heart. Add more embellishments as needed.
5. Ask God to fill your whole heart with these things so you can do the hard thing, and then take this paper home to remember what God has given you.

**Younger children** might not have the language to name all they need to be wholehearted, but they might benefit from finding the courage to believe that God is in their hearts. Invite them to draw a heart on the page. This is their heart, and then encourage them to draw ways we show God's love inside their heart.

## Art engagement

### Materials

- Poster of *Desert Dancing*, or prepare to project the image or display it on a tablet (in the Images to Project and Images for Printing folders)
- Basic supplies
- Additional art supplies (art paper, pastels, paint, brushes, and so on)
- Clean-up supplies



**Suitable for  
ages 12–adult**

### The practice of contemplation

#### Directions

The wise ones in the story tended to the lamps, so they were ready to light the way for the bridegroom. What are some of the things that nurture/tend us as we shine God's way of healing, justice, kindness, and love in the world?

Some women in the story were included in the wedding banquet, but some were excluded. Today, we also have stories of inclusion and exclusion – times when we have felt part of a group and times when we have felt left out.

1. Spend some time viewing the painting *Desert Dancing* by Karan Hudson and wonder.

■ **What is happening between these two figures?**

■ **How are they separated? What connects them?**

The article "[Connecting with the Art](#)" on page 8 provides background to this season's posters and art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might add an Art station and select one of the art engagement ideas.



Story and activities for the very young to use in church or at home.

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## Open to Us

A story based in Matthew 25:1–13

Long ago, Jesus told a story about a door. This door was shut and closed.

The room was being prepared for a wedding celebration.

Outside the door, there were ten girls who were waiting to go to the wedding.

It was their job to begin the party. They had special lamps with oil that would light the way into the celebration.

Outside the door, they were waiting. It was a really long time.

It was so long that one of their lamps ran out of oil. The light went out.

And then, another light went out.

Five lamps ran out of oil. The girls were sad. They hadn't brought any more oil. They didn't know they would be waiting so long. They wanted their light to shine, but they needed more oil to keep their lights bright.

The girls asked their friends to share their oil, but they said no. They needed the oil for their own lamps. Without any light to shine, the five girls had to go to the shops to buy some oil.

While the five were at the shops, the door opened. Five girls went through the door and into the wedding party. They shined their five lights, but five lights were not there.

The door was shut again. When the other five came back from shopping, they were too late, the party had begun. They knocked on the door, saying, "Open to us."

But no one heard, no one responded. The door stayed closed.

Who will open the door to let the girls in? Would you? How would you open the door to welcome with love, kindness, and care?

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## Candle Holder

Are we prepared and ready to open the door of God's love, kindness, and care?

Decorate a candle holder as a reminder that we are called to be shining lights of God's love.



**You will need** a glass jar with labels removed, scissors, pencils, tissue paper, white glue thinned with water to the consistency of starch, coloured sand (from home-ware or craft stores), votive or tealight candle.

### Instructions

1. Cut tissue paper into various sized strips and squares.
2. Paint the outside of the jar with a glue solution.
3. Layer the tissue paper, so the pieces overlap.
4. When the jar is covered, paint the outside with glue solution again. Do this carefully, so you don't disturb the tissue paper.
5. Put about 5 cm/2 in of sand in the jar.
6. Place a candle in the jar, pressing it down into the same to make it stable. Alternatively, use a tealight candle or battery-operated tealight.

Doors can be open or shut. They can keep people inside together safe and warm or locked tight, so people are left in the cold. Think of the doors in your house, school, church, and other places you go. What makes you want to go inside those doors?

Decorate this door to be welcoming, where people want to go inside and know they will feel loved.

