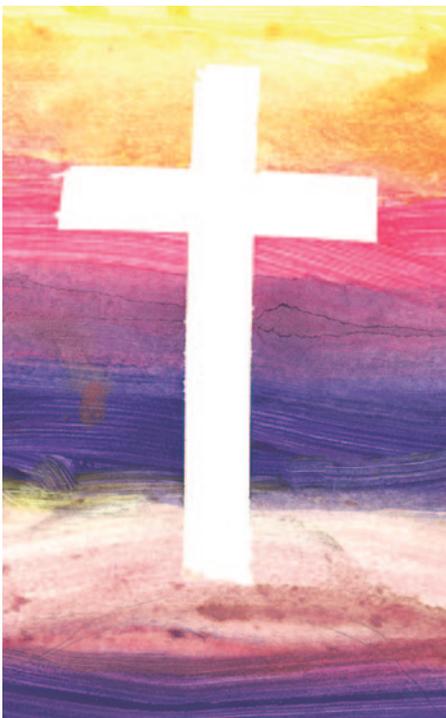




Walk This Way

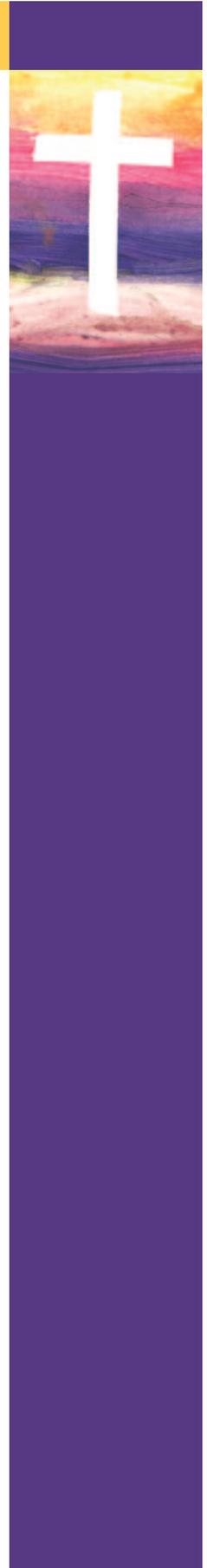


**A Lenten
Resource
for Families**

By Laura Alary



The
Presbyterian
Church
in Canada



About Lent

Lent is a difficult season, even for adults. During these weeks we are confronted with truths that scares us: the reality of change, the inevitability of loss, and the paradox that life and death are bound together. Try as we might, we cannot get away from these truths. They are part of being human. With its themes of sacrifice and self-emptying, and its inexorable movement toward the cross and the suffering and death of Jesus, Lent has the potential to be particularly confusing and frightening for children.

As adults, we may have figured out that these fearful realities ultimately serve a life-giving purpose. We can't have new life without death. We can't have transformation without change. So we carve out time and space to ponder these things. As scary as Lent seems, there is something essentially positive about it: it is a time for cleansing, renewal, healing, and transformation. At its heart, Lent is about getting rid of what we don't need—what does not help us—so that there is space for growth and change and new life. But how do you convey this to children?

One of the defining stories of the Lenten season of is Jesus in the Wilderness. Jesus goes out alone into the desert. He leaves behind clutter and distraction. He seeks out a still place where he can listen and wonder about his own identity and the way he needs to go.

The path he chooses is also defined by making space. Jesus continually makes room and stretches the limits of who is welcome. He does not cling to possessions or power or prestige or even to life. Jesus empties himself to make room for something new—something better. No matter how young or old we are, we can all make more room in our lives for God to come in and do new things. This is good news!

About This Resource

The purpose of this resource is to help you guide children through the season of Lent in such a way that they experience it as good news—as a time for spaciousness, freedom, choice, and participation in the transformative work of the Spirit.

The guide has a very simple structure. For each week there is a recommended picture book, accompanied by a brief written reflection and questions for wondering. Reading aloud with children is both a pleasure and a wonderful way to begin important conversations. Read the book together and look at the artwork. Comments and questions are provided as a starting point for your own wondering. Feel free to pick and choose or adapt and simplify to suit the ages and abilities of the children.

Every session concludes with some kind of prayer, either spoken or expressed through art. These various elements may be spread out over a few days. There is no need to do them all at one sitting.

In addition to the books for each week, two others are suggested: the first introduces the season of Lent; the second concludes it by presenting practices that are part of the ongoing journey of following Jesus.

The first of these books, *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* by Laura Alary, offers an overview of Lent. It tells the story of Jesus as an integrated whole, presenting his death and resurrection not as isolated events, but as an essential part of his life and ministry—a final expression of his message about openness and self-giving and deep trust in God. Alternating between the biblical story and reflections on experiencing Lent from the point of view of a child, *Make Room* invites children to see themselves as part of this bigger story. All the things we do to observe this season are rooted in the story of Jesus and are part of what it means to follow him.

Reading a small section of *Make Room* at the beginning of each session helps to introduce the weekly theme, and also provides continuity throughout the season.

The five picture books—one for each week—are as follows:

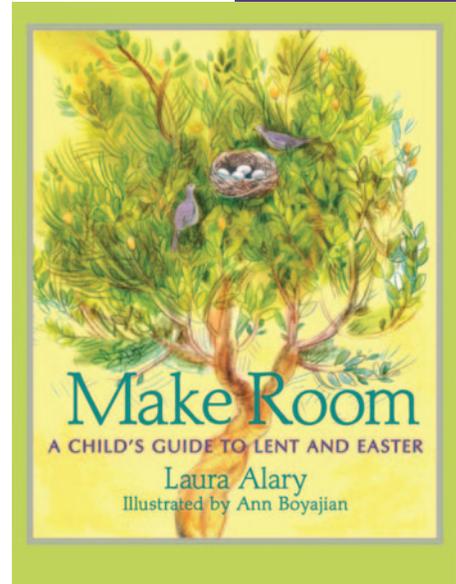
The Light of the World: The Life of Jesus for Children by Katherine Paterson
Come With Me by Holly McGhee
Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña
Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too by Jennifer Grant
Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco

Some of these picture books are explicitly Christian; others are not. But they all encourage us to look for God in the world around us, and to see ourselves as part of the life-giving work of growing the Kingdom of God in the world.

Each of these five picture books is connected to the themes of the PCC's study for adults based on N.T. Wright's *Lent for Everyone*. If you are participating in the adult study, you will recognize these weekly themes, but you do not need to be taking part in the adult study to use this resource.

Finally, we conclude with one more book: *The Very Best Day: The Way of Love for Children* by Roger Hutchison. While *Make Room* invited us to join Jesus on the long road to Jerusalem, *The Very Best Day* calls us to continue the journey and keep travelling with Jesus along the way of love, which is characterized by these seven practices: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. Each is introduced simply, with rhyming text and bright illustrations that root each practice in the example of Jesus.

Enjoy these weeks of reading and wondering together. Blessings on your journey.



Week One:

The Coming of the Light



Get Started

Read *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* (pp. 3-9)

Think

When we think about Jesus coming into the world, what comes to mind first is usually the stories we tell about his birth. Our imaginations are full of shepherds and angels, magi and stars, and the newborn baby sound asleep in the manger. But the Bible has other ways to talk about the coming of Jesus.

"In the beginning..." That's how the writer of the gospel of John starts his story about Jesus. But he doesn't mean "when Jesus was a baby" or even "when Jesus was just starting out to do his work." No, he means the *very* beginning—the beginning of space and time.

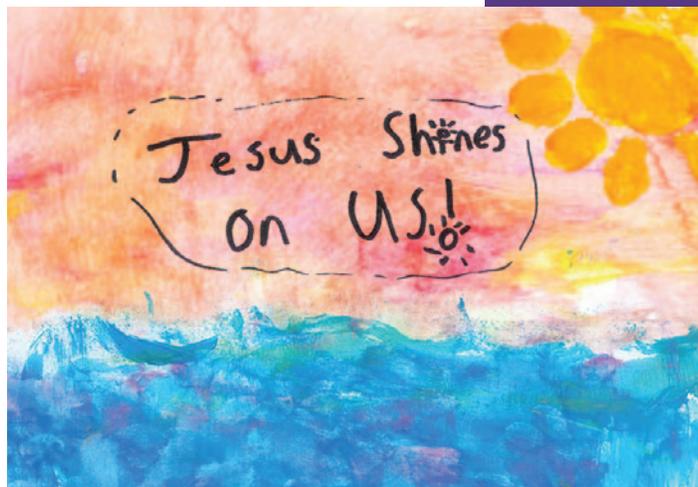
Maybe the writer of the gospel was remembering the very first words in the Bible:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Now the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Now listen to how John starts his story about Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.

If this sounds strange or hard to understand, think about it this way. Imagine you have a really great idea. The idea comes from you and is part of you, but if it is going to become something—to *do* something—it has to leave your mind and go into the world. That's what John says happened with the Word—God's Great Idea. The Word helped bring everything into being. The Word was Light in the



darkness, and the Life that makes everyone and everything truly alive. But then, says John, the Word became flesh—a real human being.

That's when the story about the Word becomes the story of Jesus.

In other words, the life of Jesus—everything he said and did—is part of a much bigger and older story, a story so mysterious and wonderful we need poetry to help us tell it. This is a story big enough to include everything and everyone—including you. Because the Light that was in Jesus is in you too!

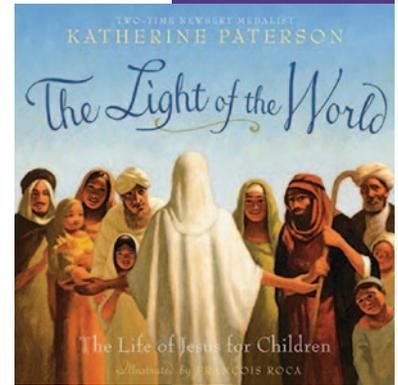
So if you ever feel small or unimportant, remember this:

When God made light,
a universe lit up,
a dazzling display of big, shiny stuff.
And all that light—
every bright golden hue
is the very same light that God put inside you.

When God Made Light, Matthew Paul Turner

Read

The Light of the Word: The Life of Jesus for Children by Katherine Paterson



Wonder

- The bible uses different images (or word pictures) to talk about Jesus. Sometimes Jesus is called the *Good Shepherd*. What does a shepherd do? What does this name tell you about Jesus?
- Jesus is also called *the Light* and *the Word*. What do these names tell you about who Jesus is?
- Do you have a favourite name for Jesus?
- Did you have a favourite part of the book *The Light of the World*? Was there a part you did not like? Or did not understand?
- How does it feel to know that the Light that was in Jesus is in you too?
- When do you see the Light in other people?
- When do other people see the light in you?

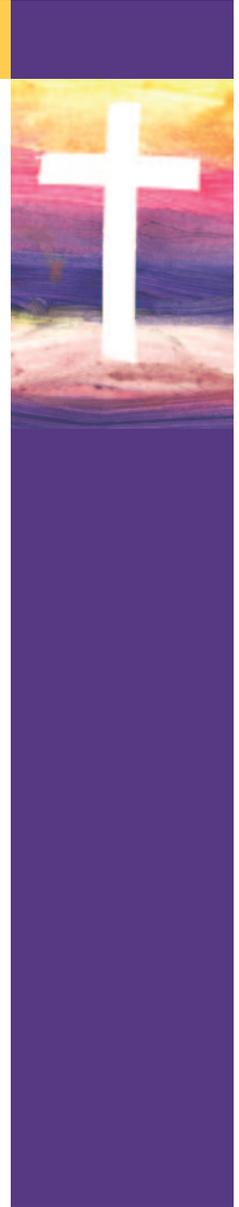
Pray

With the help of a grownup, light a candle. Sit in silence for a few minutes and enjoy the light. When you are ready, you can pray together:

In the beginning, Light shone in the darkness.
The Light shines in Jesus.
The Light shines in me too.
Thank you, God.

Week Two:

What is the Kingdom of God Like?



Get Started

Read *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* (pp. 10-16)

Think

Last week we started at the very beginning and heard the “big story” of Jesus coming into the world as the Word—God’s Great Idea—and Light. We thought about how amazing it is that the Light that was in Jesus is in us too. This week we join Jesus as he starts his work, telling everyone who will listen about God and the Kingdom of God.

But what is the Kingdom of God?

The people around Jesus had the same question. Is it a place? Where is it? How can we get there? Jesus did not answer their questions in a straightforward way. Instead, he told parables—little stories that make us think and wonder for ourselves. Parables don’t tell us what to do or what to believe. They help us see things in a different way and imagine new possibilities.

So what is the Kingdom of God like? Jesus said it is like a woman baking bread who stirs yeast into a batch of dough. Or like a tiny mustard seed, so small you can hardly see it, but it grows into a huge tree. The Kingdom of God is not a place you can point to on a map. It can be in many places. It is not just somewhere out there. It starts inside us. It is happening here and now, but it is not finished yet.

This is important. As we read in *Make Room*, “the Kingdom of God is the world the way God imagined it in the very beginning, the way God wants it to be.” But we can all see that the world is full of problems. Bad things happen. People get hurt and feel sad and scared. Does this mean the Kingdom of God is not here? No! The Kingdom of God is always *becoming*, but it is not finished yet. It needs people to help it grow.



Jesus was always asking people to come with him, to follow him, so they could see what it looks like to live in a way that helps the Kingdom grow, a little bit at a time.

In the book *Come With Me*, a little girl is scared and worried about things she sees on the news. When she hears stories about people hurting each other, and fighting with each other, she gets upset. It makes her feel that the world is not a safe place, but there is nothing she can do about it. But her mother and father do something very wise to help her get through her fear.

Read

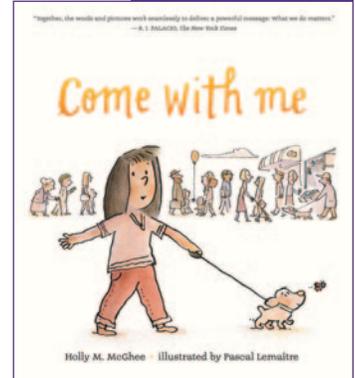
Come With Me by Holly McGhee

Wonder

- Do you ever worry? What kind of things do you worry about?
- What do you do when you are worried? Is there someone you can talk to?
- In the book *Come With Me*, when the little girl is scared, her mama and papa say, “come with me.” Why do you think they say this? What do they want to show her?
- While she is out with her parents, the little girl sees a lot of good things, even in a world where bad things happen. What sorts of things does she see?
- Where do you see goodness? Who helps you look for it?
- What kind of things do the little girl’s mama and papa do? Do these actions make a difference in the world?
- I wonder if it was hard for the mama and papa to let their little girl go out alone to walk the dog? I wonder why they said yes?
- I wonder if the little girl and the little boy will invite others to come with them?
- Both *Make Room* and *Come With Me* talk about things we can do to make the world a better place. Can you think of other ways you can make the world a bit better for someone else?
- When people didn’t understand what he meant when he talked about the Kingdom of God, Jesus would say, “Come with me. Let me show you. Let me show you the way God wants us to live and look after each other.” I wonder if the little girl and her parents are following Jesus? I wonder if you can follow Jesus without knowing it?

Pray

With the help of a grownup, light a candle, put on some gentle music, and set out art supplies (crayons, markers, paint). Think about something good you have seen—a glimpse of the Kingdom of God growing. Make a picture of it. Or make a picture of something you could do to make the world a better place. Or imagine the world if the Kingdom of God was everywhere. Make a picture of that.



Week Three:

Finding Beautiful



Get Started

Read *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* (pp. 17-21)

Think

Sometimes we don't notice the Kingdom of God around us because we aren't paying attention. This happens to all of us. We get distracted or bored. Sometimes we worry about things that have already passed. Sometimes we worry about things that might happen. Our minds are not here and now. The trouble is, when we miss all those little signs we start to feel that maybe God's Kingdom isn't even real.

In *Last Stop on Market Street* a little boy called CJ and his Nana take the bus from church to another part of the city. Maybe that doesn't sound very exciting. CJ didn't think it was so great at first. His friends could go home from church in warm cars, but he has to trek across town in the pouring rain. Why is he stuck riding the bus? But his Nana shows him that there is a lot to see when you pay attention, and the more you see, the more beautiful things you discover.

Nana has learned how to pay attention. She is good at "finding beautiful" where other people don't even think to look. Because she sees goodness everywhere—in all sorts of people and places—she is very content. Many people feel sorry for themselves because



of what they *don't* have. But Nana is so full of gratitude for what she *does* have, she is happy, and that happiness spills out of her and touches everyone she meets.

Nana is a Kingdom person—someone who helps the Kingdom of God grow. And she is showing CJ how to be a Kingdom person too.

Read

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña

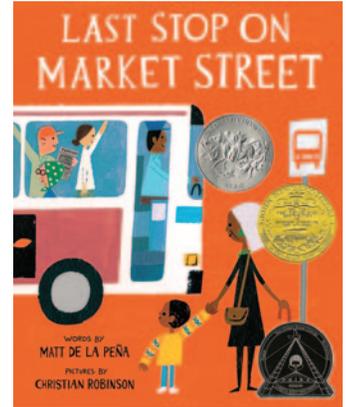
Wonder

- Nana is good at seeing goodness and “finding beautiful.” What does she see that is beautiful? Why can’t CJ see it at first? What does he see instead?
- Think about your day. Where can you “find beautiful”?
- Nana is very grateful, even for things CJ complains about, like having to take the bus. Why do you think she is so grateful? I wonder if she was always this way, or if she had to learn and practice?
- What kinds of things does Nana do to make the world better?
- At the start of the story, CJ and Nana are coming from church. Do you think worshipping with other people helps them pay attention and see goodness around them? Why or why not? Does going to church ever help you do this? How?
- Where do CJ and Nana end up? Where were they going on the bus? Why do you think they go there?
- Nana tells CJ, “Sometimes when you’re surrounded by dirt, you’re a better witness for what’s beautiful.” What do you think Nana means? Do you think what she says is true?
- What can you do to become a Kingdom person like Nana?

Pray

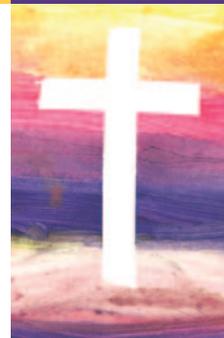
With help from a grownup, cut parts of flowers (centres, petals, stems, and leaves out of cardstock or construction paper. One each petal write or draw something or someone in which you see goodness or beauty—maybe something you have never noticed before. When you are finished, glue the petals on to the centre, and add the stem and leaves. Now you have made a flower to help you remember to pay attention and find beauty.

Thank you God
for beauty,
especially in places we forget to look.
Help us pay attention.
Teach us to be Kingdom People.
Amen.



Week Four:

The Kingdom of God is for Everyone!



Get Ready

Read *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* (pp. 22-25)

Think

Jesus said and did such wonderful things, maybe it's hard to imagine that some people didn't like him. But it's true. Jesus had a lot of enemies. Some religious leaders were jealous of him because people found his teaching more interesting than theirs. Others were angry with Jesus because they thought he broke laws that came from God—like not working on the Sabbath. But the thing Jesus did that upset his enemies more than anything else was *welcoming everyone*. Jesus' love was so big it stretched to include every single person who wanted to come to him, no matter who they were or how they lived. Jesus said God's love was that big too.

Welcoming everyone sounds good. But it's harder than it sounds. When my son was only two years old, we welcomed his baby sister into our home. Suddenly there was someone else in the house wanting attention—screaming for it—and he was not at the centre any more. Suddenly he had to share his mom and dad, his books and toys, even his room. One day when he was at the kitchen table playing with play dough, my son made a little bed, a little baby to sleep in it, and a tiny blanket to cover her. "How sweet," said his grandma. "Did you make a bed for baby Maggie?" Iain laid the blanket over the baby. "Bye-bye baby Maggie," he said, then angrily squashed his creation with one hard smack.

It can be hard to make room for outsiders—even a baby sister—when you like things the way they are. Imagine how scary it could be to have to make room for people you don't know: new kids at school; new families at church; newcomers to the neighbourhood who speak a different language, eat different food, and have different ways of doing things. How can we make room for them? Are we prepared to change? Give up some things that matter to us? Share? Be a bit uncomfortable sometimes? Welcoming everyone is not easy.

But that's what Jesus did, and he asked his followers to make room too. That's part of what it means to love your neighbour as you love yourself. And that—along with loving God—is what Jesus said is the most important way for a Kingdom person to live.



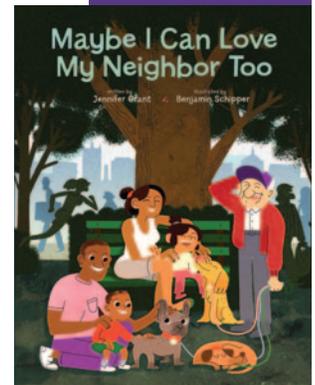
In the book *Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too* a girl watches a new apartment being built across the street. She imagines all the people who will live there and wants to know if they will all be her neighbours. If so, she wonders, how can she possibly love that many people? Her mom says she could start by noticing how other people show love. So she begins to pay attention. And of course, once you pay attention, you see all sorts of good things.

Read

Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too by Jennifer Grant

Wonder

- When her mama tells her that every single person is our neighbour, no matter whether they live next door, across the street, or far, far away, the young girl in this story is confused. How can she love so many people? What do you think? What would you say to her?
- Her mama tells her to watch how other people show love. So she pays attention. What does she notice? Look carefully at the pictures. What are some of the ways the people around her show love? Did any of these ways surprise you?
- After she watches other people for a while, the young girl comes up with her own ideas about how she can love her neighbours. What are some of the things she does?
- Can you think of ways you could show love to the people around you? How have people around you shown love to you?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider—like you didn't belong or fit in? Was there anyone who made room for you? How did they do it?
- Sometimes it's very hard to see people as our neighbour, especially when they seem very different from us. Sometimes it's very hard to make room, especially when that means change. Have you ever not welcomed someone because you wanted everything to stay the same?
- Think about other people who might feel like outsiders. Is there anything you could do to make room for them? To make them feel more welcome?



Pray

"All of us, at some time or other, need help. Whether we're giving or receiving help, each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world. That's one of the things that connects us as neighbours—in our own way, each one of us is a giver and a receiver."

Mr. Rogers

Think about things you can give to your neighbours—ways you can offer help. Then think about things your neighbours have done to help you. With the help of a grownup, cut strips of paper (construction paper or light card stock works well) about 5 by 30 cm. On each strip, write the names of people who are your neighbours. Or write words or draw pictures that show people helping. Then staple the strips together to make a chain. Hang it up so it will remind you that we are all connected. We are all neighbours.

Week Five:

Easter—It's Your Story Too!

Get Started

Read *Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter* (pp. 26-32)

Think

The stories that stay with us are usually the ones we can find ourselves in. For example, as sad as it is, the story of Holy Week feels like our story because at one time or another all of us have been hurt, or sad, or lonely. Maybe some of us have been bullied, the way Jesus was. Maybe someone you love—or an animal you love—has died and you have felt like a piece of your world was missing. Whether you feel more like Jesus, or more like his friends, you can probably find yourself in some part of this story.

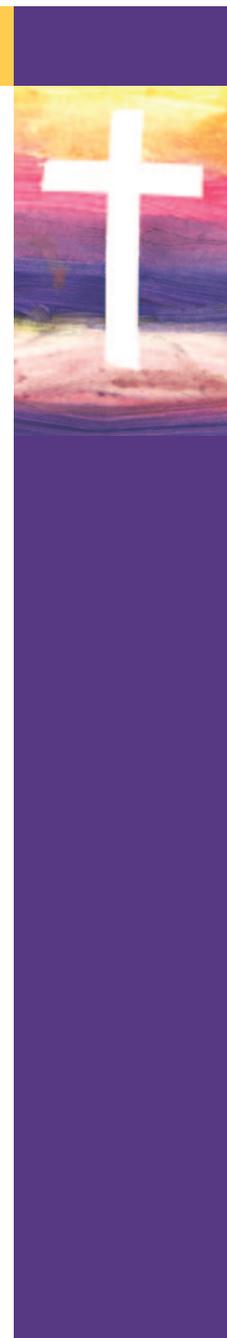
But the Easter story is different. What happens to Jesus is so strange and mysterious it does not seem like our story at all. Jesus was dead, but now he is alive again? He suddenly appears in locked rooms? Then disappears again? This never happens to us!

But maybe there is another way for us to get inside this story. Think about Jesus' friends. When Jesus died, they must have felt like their world had a big hole in it. Everything good was gone and there was nothing to hope for. But then God did something new and they discovered that life was not over. It was starting again in a new way.

Sometimes we all feel stuck in sadness, like the world we know has ended and we will never feel happy again. But God can do new things. No matter how sad or afraid or hurt we are, God can help us begin again.

In the book *Chicken Sunday*, three friends—Stewart, Winston, and Patricia—want to buy an Easter bonnet for Miss Eula. They hope to earn money by doing some work for Mr. Kodinski, the old man who makes and sells beautiful hats. But something happens and many people end up hurt and upset. The rest of the story is about how the three friends try to find a way out of the mess, fix what is broken, and heal the hurt they caused. This is not easy. They could have easily given up and stayed stuck in all the sadness. But instead, they chose to hope and work for a new beginning. Kind of like Easter.

So maybe *Chicken Sunday* is an Easter story. Maybe you have your own Easter story.



Read

Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco

Wonder

- Winston, Patricia, and Stewart have a plan to buy a special gift for Miss Eula. But their plan goes wrong. What happens? Who is hurt? Why?
- Have the children really done anything to hurt Mr. Kodinski? Can you hurt someone without meaning to?
- Why do you think Miss Eula is so upset when she hears the story? Why is it so important to her that the children show Mr. Kodinski they are good people?
- Why do you think Mr. Kodinski changes his mind about the children? How does he show them?
- Have you ever hurt anyone, even by accident? Has anyone ever forgiven you? Have you ever forgiven someone else?
- Why is Miss Eula so happy about her gift?
- Where do you see new beginnings in this story? Do you think *Chicken Sunday* is an Easter story? Why or why not? Can you find yourself in the story? What part connects with you?
- Have you ever had a new beginning? A fresh start? Do you think this could be your own Easter story?

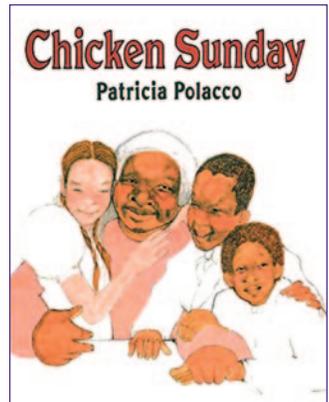
Pray

With the help of a grownup, decorate your own eggs. If you have time, you can try making your own homemade Pysanky eggs using crayons. You will find the instructions here:

<http://www.celebrationgeneration.com/blog/2011/04/13/easy-pysanky-how-to-aka-epic-easter-eggs/?cn-reloaded=1>

There are also lots of other ways to dye eggs. Hard-boil the eggs first. Then you can dip them in food dye, mix food dye with shaving cream and roll them in it for a marbled effect, or just colour the eggs with markers or paint. Check your library or the internet for other creative ways to colour your eggs.

God of eggs and gifts and laughter,
No matter how sad we are,
No matter how stuck we feel,
You are with us
helping us find the way
to a new beginning, a fresh start.
Thank you that the story of Easter
is our story too.



One More for the Road...

We have been travelling with Jesus for a long time now—through the whole season of Lent. We’ve listened to him talk about the Kingdom of God. We’ve watched as he showed us how to help it grow. We stayed with him right to the end, and—along with his friends—were amazed when Easter brought a new beginning.

Where do we go from here?

Easter is a beginning. Now we get to choose whether we will keep on following Jesus.

Those first followers of Jesus called themselves people of the Way. That’s because they chose to live in a particular way—the way Jesus showed them. We can still do that today. We can still make time, make space, make room, love our neighbours, pay attention, give thanks, and help the Kingdom grow. We can follow Jesus by trying to live in his way.

Here is one more book to help you along the way. *The Very Best Day* will help you remember some of the things Jesus did, and think about how you can do them too. The book talks about seven different things you can practice to help you keep following the way of Jesus—the way of love.

There are lots of good questions in the book too—and pictures! The paintings are all made by the author. He paints with his fingers. Maybe you might want to try making your own paintings this way.

Read

The Very Best Day: The Way of Love for Children by Roger Hutchison



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1-800-619-7301 | presbyterian.ca

Artwork generously provided by Presbyterian youth
Children: Cover page, page 10 – Sophie, age 10
Cross: Cover page, throughout – Miranda, age 5
Jesus shines: page 4 – Nadine, age 8
God’s creation: page 6 – Michelle, age 8

