

# Witness to God's New Way in the World



**Focus scripture**  
**John 2:1-11**  
**Additional scriptures**  
**Isaiah 62:1-5**  
**Psalm 36:5-10**  
**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

Sometimes, we fall prey to the tendency to see God's activity in predictable places. We expect God's activity in the past. We expect God's activity in moments of healing. We even expect God's activity when God's people go out into the world in helping, human service ministries. We forget that scripture shows us, again and again, that God acts in unexpected ways. Today's scriptures remind us to stay open to the new places and new ways that God's work is revealed. We must take notice of God's surprising activity in the world.

## Focus scripture: John 2:1-11

The miraculous act of Jesus at the wedding in Cana of Galilee is diminished in the minds of some interpreters because Jesus was younger at the time of the miracle and because Jesus seems compelled by his mother to act. But Mary's role shifts as we read the story of the wedding in Cana beside the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand in John 6:1-14. In both stories, Jesus performs a miracle that satisfies the physical needs of those gathered, turning water into wine and feeding 5,000 households with the offering of five loaves of bread and two small fish. Jesus' actions are swift and effective. In both stories, those who witness Jesus' work better understand Jesus' unique identity. In John 2, Mary draws attention to the need of the people, while in John 6, Jesus notices the growing hunger of the people gathered. Mary asks the servants to listen to Jesus at the wedding, while Jesus asks for the disciples' assistance at the feeding of 5,000. Mary knows of her son's divine power and encourages him to act even before he might believe he is ready. She plays a supporting role, serving as the midwife to his miracle. Once Jesus is encouraged to do a new thing, he opens to the idea and performs a sign. Jesus is then more able to fully take up his ministry of teaching, casting out demons, healing. Even Jesus needed to be awakened to his power to make something new. This passage reminds us that we need to be attentive to the people in our lives who point to the new thing that God is doing, so we, too, can be open to seeing God's new creation and new signs in our midst.

**Isaiah 62:1-5** promises vindication and salvation for Zion. By promising Zion a new name (v.2), this story is cast as a new creation story. It parallels the creation story in Genesis

when God names all of creation. By trading Forsaken and Desolate for the new names My Delight Is in Her and Married, God's people receive the promise of a new beginning and God's faithful presence. This stands in sharp contrast to the abandonment God's people felt following the fall of the Jerusalem and the time of exile. Isaiah 62:1-5 reminds the listener that even when the facts on the ground are terrible, God can surprise God's people with a new beginning.

**Psalm 36:5-10** offers praise and petition. The praise compares God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, and judgments to God's revelation in creation and lauds the sheltering and sustaining gifts of God. The petition asks for God's continued love and salvation for those who know God and are upright of heart. In Psalm 36, we hear that God's people prefer for God to show-up in predictable ways.

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11** explains that God gives manifestations of the Spirit to individuals; although there are a variety of gifts "it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." This letter is a reminder to all Christians that there is not one way to see God's work in the lives of God's people. There is not one standard or predictable way to see the Spirit working in our lives for the common good. Christians must stay open to the new expressions of the Spirit and yield to the surprise of God's work in the world.

• • • • •

Those who listen to John 2, Isaiah 62, and 1 Corinthians 12 hear that God is always willing to make things new. God is ready to work a miracle, God is willing to remake God's creation, and God can make the Spirit manifest in individual lives. God power is surprising, so let us stay awake.

**God of the river bank and the banquet hall, help us hear you and see you when you create, work, and teach, and heal in new places. We expect you in the hospital room but can forget that you also meet us at the wedding feast. Ready our hearts to welcome you and your work among us. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



## The Focus for Adults

The passages this week show and tell that God is about to do a new thing. God is doing a new thing in Jesus of Nazareth in John 2:1–11. Isaiah 62:1–5 anticipates the new creation and new beginning for Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 speaks in a new way about the gifts we make manifest by living in accordance with God’s Spirit.

Of course everyone has been given gifts of the Spirit. Maybe we don’t like the particular gifts we have received or maybe we just don’t know what to do with the gifts we have been given. Even Jesus was hesitant to use his gifts at the wedding in Cana. He said it wasn’t his time yet. And maybe it wasn’t. But perhaps he just needed encouragement from another to remind him he was ready.

The texts today invite us to embrace God’s overflowing love that has been shown to us both in the gifts we have received from the Spirit and in the presence and love demonstrated by Jesus’ life. As tempting as it may be to say, “my hour has not yet come” there is work for us to do and we have been equipped to do it. The wine overflowing at the wedding of Cana after Jesus used his gifts is a reminder of our opportunity to use the gifts we have been given to allow God’s overflowing love to heal and to help.

Pray for group members and for your leadership of this session. Seek a willingness to listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit as you explore this story that reveals a God of extravagant grace and generous love.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures, Isaiah 62:1–5; Psalm 36:5–10; John 2:1–11; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 49).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week’s session.
- ❑ Set a worship space with green fabric, an open Bible, and a candle.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, and [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 8) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 8), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “Spirit Come” (pp. 36–37 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #23 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet “[Symbols and Signs](#)” and photocopies of focus passage, John 2:1–11.

### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Dig deeper:** copies of resource sheet “[Symbols and Signs](#)”
- ❑ **Poems:** copies of resource sheet “[Poems](#)” (p. 92)
- ❑ **Prayer:** copies of resource sheet “[Reflection on Extravagance](#)”
- ❑ **Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** nothing extra required

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*” (p. 42 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).
- ❑ Bring copies of [biblical background](#) material for January 27 (p. 55).



# Witness to God's New Way in the World

## Scripture

John 2:1–11

**FOCUS** To explore what new “ways” God might be calling us to

## Gather

**Welcome** participants and introduce any newcomers or visitors.

### Opening ritual

**Gather** in the worship space and light the candle, reminding the group that we are in the Season after the Epiphany. Note that *epiphany* comes from a word meaning to “come toward” or “a revealing.”

**Pray** Form two groups to read **Psalm 36:5–10** as an opening prayer, alternating verses.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song “Spirit Come” (pp. 36–37 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #23 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

### Moving into the theme

Take a moment to consider a time when your understanding of how God is at work in the world shifted?

#### ■ What provoked this shift?

## Engage

### Setting the context

Recall last week’s story of Jesus’ baptism as told in the gospel of Luke. This week’s focus passage comes from the gospel of John and describes an event that happens at a wedding, an event which signals the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. This event is named by the gospel writer as the first of Jesus’ “signs.” Explain that in John’s gospel, “signs” are actions by Jesus that are intended to reveal something about Jesus. The purpose these “signs” was to bring people to belief.

### Exploring the texts

Invite participants to form three groups, giving each group one of the following words: Trust, Action, Revealing. Give each group a copy of the focus passage, **John 2:1–11**, and invite them to underline or highlight phrases that suggest trust, action, or something (or someone) being revealed. Then read aloud **John 2:1–11**, pausing after each sentence for group members to indicate any words or phrases they underlined. Jesus began his ministry, performed his first sign, in a very public setting:

- **When you attempt to live according to God’s will, do you make an effort to make these efforts public or do you attempt to make these efforts private?**

- **What is your motivation for seeking public and/or private settings for your actions and decisions that reflect your faith?**

Jesus says, “my time has not yet come.”

- **What has been your experience of expectations that you were unsure you would be able to fulfil?**
- **What has been your experience of being asked to perform a task when you didn’t think it was the right action at that time?**

Read the information in the section “Signs” on the resource sheet “[Symbols and Signs](#).”

- **What symbols and signs can you identify in this story?**

Read John 2:11 and recall that the purpose of signs in the gospel of John is to bring people to belief.

- **What do you think is the meaning of the phrase “the disciples believed in him”?**

**Other readings** Isaiah 62:1–5 These verses offer assurances about God’s future actions on behalf of God’s people.

- **When you hear these words, to what extent do they sound relevant to your Christian community?**

Psalm 36:5–10 affirms that God’s steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and judgment are seen in the elements of creation.

■ **What do you know and/or believe about God because of God’s ordered and created world?**

1 Corinthians 12:1–11 Paul writes that each person receives a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good.

■ **How have you experienced this to be true in your own life? In the life of the Church?**

**Making life connections**

■ **Knowing that God continues to create and work in new ways, how will you, individually and as the church, be attentive to God, the Creator, Saviour, and Sustainer?**

---

## Respond

---

Choose one or more of the following options.

- ❑ **Dig deeper: Symbolism** To discern more fully what is revealed in the story of the wedding at Cana, invite participants to explore the meaning of some of the words and symbols in the gospel reading. Distribute copies of the resource sheet [“Symbols and Signs”](#) and use the questions on it to guide your discussion.
- ❑ **Poems** Psalm 36 speaks of the abundance of God’s extravagant gifts for all. Invite participants to choose a word or phrase from **Psalm 36:5–10** on which to base a poem about their experiences of God’s abundance. They might wish to create an acrostic poem, using the letters of a word such as “abundance” to form the first word of each line of a poem. Or they might create a “Diamante poem” following the style on resource sheet [“Poems”](#) (p. 92).



- ❑ **Prayer** The discipline of prayer invites us to seek God’s help in perceiving and receiving the gifts God offers. Distribute copies of the resource sheet [“Reflection on Extravagance.”](#) Review together the information about Archbishop Camara and read the prayer in unison. Invite conversation about his vision of God’s generosity. What does it mean to trust in God’s extravagance? Invite group members to write their own prayers and offer these during Bless.
- ❑ **Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** *Lectio divina* or “holy reading,” is an ancient practice of meditating on scripture. Invite participants to engage in a reflection on the following passage. Read **Psalm 36:5–10**. Listen to these words in the context of the day ahead of you, or behind you. Write down your thoughts on those connections. Offer prayer that attends to the movement you hear in this passage and in your life. If time is limited, encourage them to use this discipline to guide devotion time at home.



---

## Bless

---

**Gather** around the lit candle again. Say: “God calls us to...” and invite group members to name ways that they would complete the sentence. Next, say: “We trust God’s extravagant love in order to...” and again, invite group members to complete the sentence. If prayers were written in Respond, invite members to offer them.

- Sing, or listen to**, if possible, the song “You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*” (p. 42 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).
- Pray** the prayer on the resource sheet [“Reflection on Extravagance”](#) or the prayer on the [biblical background](#) page (p. 49).
- Distribute** the [biblical background](#) materials for January 27, (p. 55).

---

## Reflect

---

What did you observe in this session as participants reflected on God’s generous gifts and what it means to trust enough to use them? In what ways might you foster a sense of trust in God’s good gifts as you lead this group?



# Symbols and Signs

(John 2:1–11)

## Cana

Cana is a town in Galilee, and is the setting for Jesus' first "sign" in the gospel of John. It is also the place where Jesus' second "sign" took place, as told in John 4:46–52. In that instance, Jesus' initial response to the official, "unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe," is followed by the official's belief, which leads to the entire household believing.

- **If Jesus' signs are aimed at generating belief, why do Jesus' words in John 4:48 seem to question belief that is grounded in "seeing signs?"**

## Signs

John 2:11 describes what happens at the wedding as the first of Jesus' "signs." Signs in the gospel of John are not simply deeds, which are described by other gospels as miracles. Signs are evidence of God at work through Jesus for the purpose of bringing belief. The wedding story ends with the disciples believing. Jesus' sign has borne fruit.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Mary's trust precedes the belief of the disciples? Why?**

## Hour

In the gospel of John, *hour* is often used metaphorically. In John 2:4 and elsewhere, the phrase "my hour has not yet come" refers to the time of Jesus' identity being revealed in the events of his final week in Jerusalem, culminating in death on the cross.

- **In what ways might honouring the "hour not yet come" serve as a discipline for developing trust?**

## Stone jars

Stone jars were judged free from ritual impurities (Leviticus 11:33), in contrast to earthen jars. The capacity of the jars noted in John 2:6 makes the sign/miracle of water to wine extravagant – more than 150 gallons of wine! Unfortunately, Jesus' actions have sometimes been twisted into an argument that Jesus "replaced" Judaism with a "new" religion, rather than honoured as a story of how Jesus – a faithful Jew – used elements from his tradition to point the way to faith in God.

- **How might studying Jesus' use of his faith traditions and those of the community in which he ministered shape our witness to God's abundance of love and grace in our communities?**

## Glory

John 2:11 says that this sign "revealed" Jesus' glory. The Greek word translated as "revealed" is *phaneroo* – the root for "epiphany." The glory of God, especially in Hebrew scriptures, was not simply the "mystery" of God's holiness, but also the immanence of God's presence. The glory of God in Exodus 13:21 is associated with the cloud (*shekinah*) that leads Israel by day. God's glory is God's presence among us. (See also John 1:14).

- **By what actions might we reveal or bear witness to God's glory and presence?**

## Believe

John 2:11 reports that the disciples "believed in him." Faith is the purpose behind Jesus' signs. In Greek, unlike English, *faith* can be a noun or a verb. "Trust" may be a better translation of our response.

- **What do you hear this story of the wedding at Cana calling you to trust?**



# Reflection on Extravagance

The late Dom Helder Camara served as the archbishop in one of Brazil’s poorest regions. He was an individual of passionate concern for social justice. Dom Helder Camara once remarked: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist.”

Archbishop Camara was also an individual of passionate faith, who was able to continue trusting God in difficult situations. Listen to one of his prayers – written in the midst of extreme poverty – and how it reflects the gracious extravagance of God.

Lord,  
isn't your creation wasteful?  
Fruits never equal the seedlings' abundance.  
Springs scatter water.  
The sun gives out enormous light.  
May your bounty teach me greatness of heart.  
May your magnificence stop me being mean.  
Seeing you a prodigal and open-handed giver,  
let me give unstintingly like a king's son,  
like God's own.

Dom Helder Camara

Camara also said “It is useless to dream of reforming the socioeconomic structure...as long as there is not a correspondingly deep change in our inner selves.”

■ Do you agree or disagree with Camara. Why?

Write (or draw) a prayer that gives thanks for the extravagance of God you observe in your community and the world. For what inner change are you seeking God’s help?

Large rounded rectangular box containing horizontal lines for writing a prayer.

# Poems

## Hope is the thing with feathers

Hope is the thing with feathers

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the  
words,  
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is  
heard;

And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest  
land

And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me

By Emily Dickenson

## Diamante poems

**DIAMANTE POEMS** are seven-line poems written in the shape of a diamond.

**Simple version:** Write a sixteen-word sentence and change it into a diamante poem by following this pattern for each line: one word, two words, three words, four words, three words, two words, one word.

**More challenging:** create a poem with the first and last words having opposite meanings:

