

The NC Synod Reads Together: Lutherans Learning Luke



June 12-July 9, 2016

a summer reading adventure
brought to you by the NC Synod Book of Faith Team

Greetings NC Synod!

Pack your bags. We're hitting the road this summer with Luke! Not lightsaber Luke, not football Luke, not even country singer Luke, we're setting out with the gospel according to Luke. We'll read a chapter and devotion together each day, ponder a question or two, and pray along with our fellow Lutherans around the state.

Your NC Synod Book of Faith Team hopes this experience will allow you to encounter Jesus wherever you roam this summer, expand your familiarity with the gospel according to Luke, and discover God's grace along the way.

Many thanks to all of our contributors and readers! Without you, this summer reading opportunity would not exist. May God bless us in our journey together; may the Holy One open us to consider what it means to be church here in North Carolina and the mission we share in Christ!

Read in peace! Share the good news!

On behalf of the Book of Faith Team,

Jennifer M. Manis
Diaconal Minister for Campus Ministry
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church + Lutheran Campus Ministry-Raleigh
Raleigh, NC

Your Book of Faith Team is:

Pebbles Cloninger
Catherine Fink, Synod Staff Liaison
The Rev. David Fox
Jennifer Manis
The Rev. Todd Rauscher, Chair
Dan Voelkert

JUNE 12, 2016

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

*Open my eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.
To reach out and touch him and show that we love Him.
Open my ears, Lord and help us to listen.
Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus.*

This hymn (# 98) in the *African American Lutheran Resource Book* is used by various races of people as the Gospel Proclamation in Sunday worship. The words of this powerful hymn guide us as we strive to encounter the living Word of Scripture.

Open our eyes, we pray. Oh Lord, let us see the will of God for us. Let us see with our mind's eye the wonderful work of God enfleshed by the prophets in their words and deeds holding in tension the laws and the justice of God.

Open our eyes, we pray. Oh Lord, let us see the unconditional love of God for us. Let us see with our mind's eye the unconditional love and mercy of God visible in the work of Jesus to make that which is broken whole. We see it in the ultimate self-giving love of the crucified and risen Jesus.

Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Oh, Lord, help us to hear; to listen deeply to the pain and troubles of the world.

Open our ears, Lord. Empower us to hear the proclamation of Jesus's love for us and for the world.

As we reflect on the words and the deeds of Jesus as written in the Gospel according to St. Luke, help us to see and to hear the living Word and what that message means for our lives. For when we are attuned to the words and the Word of Jesus, we strive to reach out and touch Him and say that we love Him.



The Rev. Dr. Julius Carroll enjoys going to the movies, reading African American fiction and non-fiction, and watching his favorite professional football team, the Philadelphia Eagles.

GOSPEL TRAVELS

In a small villa on a hillside overlooking the harbor in Patras, Luke pauses from his work to watch the ships leave for destinations beyond the horizon. His attention is drawn back to his work as the warm Mediterranean breeze rustles the pages of eyewitness accounts of a man called Jesus that Luke has poured over for days. This may not have been how Luke wrote his gospel, but it's how I see it with my faith-filled imagination.

This gospel that Luke was recording had been on an epic journey to get to this little villa overlooking the shipping lanes of the Gulf of Patras. Sixty or more years earlier, an angel appeared to a virgin named Mary who was engaged to a man named Joseph. This gospel traveled the rocky roads to a little town whose name means house of bread; we know it as Bethlehem. Along the rolling hills of the Galilee, this gospel meandered; through the wilderness it wandered; on the seas it voyaged. This gospel went up to Jerusalem and hung on a hill far away where an old rugged cross stood. In a tomb, this gospel lay and from that tomb this gospel sprung. Through women and men, along highways and byways, down the coast and over the hills; year by year, voice by voice, this gospel traveled until it came to the ears of a man named Luke.

This gospel is good news about a man named Jesus. He came to preach and teach and heal. He came to die and rise. He came to give life and peace and grace. He came to walk with us, and walk he did! This is why I imagine Luke writing this gospel overlooking a great seaport. The gospel of Jesus had been on the move since day one!

Luke's gospel is one great travel narrative. This gospel found Luke and it wasn't to be contained; it would find others - even to the corners of the earth. Perhaps Luke's hope in writing this gospel was to one day see it head over the horizon on those ships to find anyone and everyone. This gospel that began 2,000 years ago with an angel appearing to a virgin has journeyed its way and found us. Now it journeys with us and invites us to journey with Jesus as Mary and Luke and so many others have down through the ages.

Look Out Moment: Through what people, places, and experiences has the Gospel of Jesus found you today? In your life?

*Lord Jesus, you watch over our pathways and you neither slumber nor sleep.
Watch now, we pray, over our going out and my coming in from this time
forth and forevermore.*

A long suffering South Carolina Gamecock's fan, Pastor Jonathan Schnibben is a connoisseur of brightly colored socks and a wannabe scratch golfer. In his spare time he enjoys cooking, spending time with his family, and exercising.



GOSPEL CURE

The Early Church Father Eusebius observed that “Luke has left us...two medical books [the other being Acts], whereby not our bodies but our souls may be healed.” Paul tells us that Luke was a physician (Col. 4:14). It should come as no surprise then that Luke sees the gospel of Jesus with the eye of a doctor. That’s important! We are found by the gospel in whatever particular stage or phase of life we’re in. We aren’t asked to become something we aren’t simply to see the gospel. We begin our journey with Jesus from the unique vantage point we occupy.

Luke was a doctor. He was concerned with illness and disease and with bringing an end to suffering. More than any other gospel, Luke concerns himself with diagnoses and medical words. But more so, Dr. Luke sees the suffering brought on by the “sin sick soul” as the hymn goes. The remedy is Jesus.

Sickness is a curious thing; it doesn’t discriminate. Female or male, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, good or bad - sickness is an equal opportunity oppressor. As such, Luke presents Jesus as the remedy for this sin sickness for all, not just a remedy for a select group of folks.

More than any other gospel, Luke concerns himself with the outcast, the forgotten, and the downtrodden. Women and children were often the most vulnerable people. But there were also Gentiles and slaves and Samaritans, oh my! All these were seen as less than people by many. Luke concerns himself with such a people as these.

And there’s more! Luke concerns himself with those who found themselves on the top of the heap as well. The Pharisees, often seen in our eyes as the Bible’s boogeymen, are pictured most positively. So are Centurions and others of their ilk. It’s funny, isn’t it? No matter what station in life you find yourself, there are always *those people* we set ourselves against. According to Luke, Jesus says all *those people*, whoever they may be, are his people.

So here’s the thing: It doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done or left undone. You are not the sum total of your accomplishments nor are you defined by your failures. If there’s breath in your lungs, then this gospel of Jesus is for you, and what it says is this: You are God’s precious child and nothing can ever change that fact!

Look Out Moment: How has Jesus’s life-giving cure breathed life into you?

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits - who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases; who redeems our life from the grave and crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.

The Rev. Jonathan Schnibben serves at St. Paul’s in Dallas, NC.

LUKE 1: FAITH-FULFILLED SONGS

One hazard of seminary training is the daily chapel liturgies. They were lovely, of course, at the time, and very grounding, but in the years since they have made a habit of commandeering my mind without warning. As I read through Luke 1 in preparation for this devotion, I could barely begin Mary's song (vv. 46-55) before her words took flight to their tune in Marty Haugen's *Holden Evening Prayer*. Zechariah's song (vv. 68-79) evoked the beautiful 4-part harmony to which it is set as the Gospel Canticle in our own hymnal's *Morning Prayer* (ELW, p. 303). My mind was singing the bass line.

Mary's song and Zechariah's song are prominent in the liturgies of Christ's church because they are beautiful examples of what we seminary types like to call salvation history. Salvation history is any recounting of God's faithfulness to creation and to God's people throughout time and space. Salvation history reminds us of our rootedness in God and God's saving action, which is why it is an essential element of our long-form Eucharistic Prayers. These prayers aim to set the words of institution ("In the night in which he was betrayed...") within the context of God's grand, sweeping action for all time. Jesus is alive for us at the table always and only as the fulfillment of what God has been doing all the time and everywhere. We encounter there an eternal mystery and a happening story. The Eucharist is our lifeblood as participants in God's ongoing Christ event for the restoration of the world.

Even before the liturgical hijack, I noticed Luke's repeated emphasis on fulfillment (vv. 1, 20, 45). This orderly account, Luke knows, presents the fulfillment of salvation history. Jesus is God's new thing, but he is no do-over. Jesus is the long-awaited fruition of seeds sown even before the foundations of the earth.

Look Out Moment: Reread the songs of Mary and Zechariah (vv. 46-55 and 68-79). What kind of God is being recounted in these two canticles of salvation history? As we read on together, consider how this does or does not align with the character of Jesus in the narrative of Luke that is to come.

God, your faithfulness extends throughout time and space and reaches even into the womb. In the womb of Mary your eternal Son materializes as one of us. In Elizabeth's womb, John leaps for joy at your Spirit's in utero inspiration. We pray for all who are experiencing new beginnings, and we ask you stir up your Spirit in us as we begin our journey together through this holy gospel according to Luke. In the name of Jesus, your new thing, we pray.

The Rev. Richard Goeres serves at Macedonia Lutheran Church in Burlington. He is thankful for both the incredible richness of the Christian Tradition and the constant creativity of God's Spirit in the world. He is energized by (re)discovering as a church what it means to live as a sacramental community in Christ.



JUNE 16, 2016

LUKE 2: JESUS SURPRISES

It feels a little strange to be reading “the Christmas story” at this time of year. Echoes of Christmas carols ring faintly in our ears but seem out of step with our summer weather. As a soundtrack to this story, instead of a crackling fire, we hear a chorus of birds which adds new and unexpected voices to the heavenly host singing the good news of great joy. So perhaps “the Christmas story” still has the ability to surprise us after all this time. After all, we are talking about the Incarnation – God-made-flesh.

In contrast to Caesar Augustus, living in a grand palace, who claimed to be the son of a god, the true Son of God was born in the humblest of settings and placed in an animal feeding trough. We know the story well, but at the time, only a few recognized who this child was: some shepherds, and Simeon and Anna – two strangers who had each been praying for Israel’s redemption. And, of course, his parents. Or did they? They knew what Gabriel had told Mary, yet they continued to be “amazed” by this child.

Perhaps the biggest surprise yet came when he was an adolescent. His parents had raised him for 12 years now – they knew him well. Yet when he went missing they were “astonished” to find him in the Temple – the place which the now-found child claimed was the most logical place for him to be – his Father’s house.

Mary treasured all these things in her heart, pondering who this child of hers was, who, though she knew him well, continued to surprise her because he was also God’s Son, sent to accomplish God’s mission. And God will not fit neatly in our preconceived notions, but continues to surprise us with love and grace.

To Ponder:

- Mary and Joseph *assumed* Jesus was accompanying them as they left Jerusalem and headed back home, and were *surprised* to find him in the Temple. How do our assumptions about Jesus cloud our vision and keep us from seeing him for who he really is?
- Maybe it’s time to look around. Have we marched ahead in life or ministry, assuming Jesus is following us instead of seeking to follow him?



Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the incarnation of your Son, Jesus, who became one of us in order to save us. Keep us from becoming complacent and assuming we know where he will lead. Continue to surprise us with your love, and grant us grace to follow him, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The Rev. Laura Weant serves as pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Boone, NC.

LUKE 3: MINISTRY STARTS

In chapter three, Luke is a shameless name-dropper. He begins and ends the chapter listing famous and important people. At the beginning, he nails down the timeframe by listing high government and religious muckety-mucks of the time. He ends the chapter with a genealogy of Jesus that reads like a Who's Who of Jewish history. He also happens to mention two itinerant preachers, one John, son of Zechariah, later called the Baptist, and this guy named Jesus. And, ironically, the names best remembered 2100 years later are not the rich and powerful but these two itinerant preachers.

Luke is setting the stage for the start of Jesus's ministry which begins in earnest in chapter 4. For Luke's readers, it is no surprise that the word of God came to John in the wilderness and that he begins his proclamation of repentance and preparation. Since chapter one, we knew Zechariah's boy was destined for this. He is preparing the way for one whose sandals he is not worthy to untie. His baptism is not a mere ritual but a call to repentance—to turn from all that leads away from God.

This is not some abstract concept for John. Repentance has real consequences. It shows in how we live our lives. If you have two coats, share with one who has none. Share your food. Tax collectors, collect only what is due. Soldiers, don't rob or extort folks. It is not enough not to harm others, we are to look for ways to help others.

Luke wastes no words describing Jesus baptism. Matthew has the scene where John demurs at the thought of baptizing his Lord but not Luke. Jesus's baptism is mentioned almost as an afterthought, but as Jesus prays following the baptism, he receives a visible and miraculous sign of God's blessing as the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and a voice declared Jesus's sonship. This event is viewed as Jesus call to ministry.

A theme in the gospel according to St. Luke is the universality of God's saving act in Christ, but he is also aware of its place in Jewish history. Here he lists Jesus's genealogy in part to show he was the son of David as the prophecies said. But Luke traces Jesus's lineage through David and Abraham all the way back to Adam the father of humanity... actually back to God, but Adam is the last human listed. Luke knows that Jesus is the Son of God. He then traces Jesus line back to the last time God had "hands on" involvement in an individual human's conception namely Adam, son of God. In this long, and honestly boring, list is the revelation that God is restoring us to his original creation as daughters and sons of God. His new creation starts in Jesus. It continues today as the Spirit works in us.

Heavenly Father, your word came to John and he was compelled to act. You blessed your Son as he began his ministry. Send your Holy Spirit that we may show your love to your world. In Jesus's name.

Dan Voelkert from Macedonia, Burlington as pictured by his granddaughter.



JUNE 18, 2016

LUKE 4: WONDER AND CONTROVERSY

This chapter of Luke gives us a look at the beginning of Jesus's ministry in Galilee, and it sets the scene for us with four distinct stories: the temptation of Jesus, Jesus preaching in the synagogue of his hometown, Jesus casting out an evil spirit, and Jesus healing Simon's mother and others. Though each story has its own message, the overarching theme of the chapter is the establishment of Jesus authority, and the wonder and controversy this brings.

In the desert, Jesus answers each temptation with words of scripture and demonstrates authority over the devil even in his weakened human condition. In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus reads from Isaiah and tells his friends and neighbors that the scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing. Imagine the uproar! Jesus demonstrates his authority over evil spirits by casting them out. His authority over sickness and infirmity is unquestionable as he restores health to Simon's mother and many others. Wonder and controversy become Jesus's constant companions as word of his ministry grows.

"Isn't this Joseph's son?" This seems to be the critical question at the beginning of Jesus's ministry. Who is he to speak with the authority of God? Isn't he just the carpenter's son? Why does he preach good news to the poor, the sick, the prisoner, and the oppressed? The marginalized people of Jesus's day were the ones filled with wonder. The self-satisfied, comfortable, and self-righteous people tended to dislike, distrust, and show outright hatred for Jesus.

Before we start to feel too judgmental, remember that we have the benefit of hindsight. We know that the carpenter's son from Nazareth is also God's son. We know where his authority comes from. We have some understanding of the good news that Jesus was preaching.

But are we really any different from the people of Jesus's day? Does the message of the Gospel penetrate us when we are comfortable and self-satisfied? Or does it make us uncomfortable? Aren't we filled with wonder when God meets us at our most desperate hour of need? Are we willing to take Jesus's message of good news to today's marginalized people? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to Jesus' authority? Whatever they may be, God's own son has the power and authority to restore you, heal you, and free you.



Dear Lord, thank you for your son, Jesus. Not just for his saving action on the cross, and the forgiveness we have through his death and resurrection; but also for his life and ministry here on earth. His words and deeds show us your heart. Help us respond to your love every day in our words and deeds, so that others may also know your heart. In Jesus's name.

Julie Russell is a member at Macedonia Lutheran Church in Burlington, NC.

LUKE 5: CALLED TO FOLLOW AND FISH

Like most of the gospel of Luke, chapter 5 is filled with stories and lessons that speak to all of us. In fact, in most story Bibles, one would find three to five stories that come from this chapter...so many stories, so much to ponder.

We begin as Jesus, a carpenter's son and teacher, borrows Simon's boat and then proceeds to tell the fishermen how to fish. Simon and his business partners, James and John, have been fishing all night without success and now their nets are filled to overflowing. Jesus then calls the fishermen to "catch people" and these three (four if we include Simon's brother, Andrew) ordinary men become the community that Jesus spends significant time with throughout his ministry (v 10). Jesus then meets and cleanses a leper who, most likely, lived in a community with other lepers on the fringe of a small town. Despite living in a marginalized community, this leper had heard of Jesus and came to seek Jesus's healing touch. We then learn about the paralytic man who is carried by his friends and lowered through a roof to Jesus so that he can be healed. Obviously, his friends had faith that Jesus could heal him and so they brought him to Jesus. Next, Jesus invites Levi, a tax collector, to "follow me" and then Jesus attends a banquet with Levi's community of tax collectors and other sinners (v 27).

Throughout these stories, the Pharisees, their scribes, and other teachers question why Jesus is spending time with those who are considered sinners, outcasts, cheaters, the unclean, etc. In other words, the church leaders want to know why Jesus is spending time in community with the "wrong people." And Jesus responds in verses 31 and 32. The good news for us is that God calls ordinary sinners like you and me, not just pastors and theologians, to follow Jesus and, thankfully, God will transform and equip each of us to do God's work.

To Ponder:

- Who first invited you to "follow" Jesus?
- Who are the faithful people and ordinary saints/sinners in your community who help bring you to Jesus?
- Who are the unclean, marginalized, tax collectors, and sinners of today? How much time have you spent with them?

Gracious God, your Word transforms our lives. You call us, forgive us, and send us to do your work. May we faithfully be your hands and feet in our homes, communities, and the world as we follow and serve in your holy name.

Pebbles Cloninger is a member of Philadelphia Lutheran Church in Dallas, NC, and has served on the synod's Book of Faith Team since 2010.

JUNE 20, 2016

LUKE 6: FRUIT FOR THE JOURNEY

As I reflect on Luke 6, I find a powerful message for many areas of our every day living. Healing, blessings, loving, leading, judging, being good fruit, and foolishness all wrap together in one chapter. Awesome!

Luke is telling us the story of Jesus and his wonderful ministry here on earth. Relating closely to the Jewish laws and traditions but mainly giving the lesson to the Jewish people that the Messiah is good news for all people.

The Pharisees were watching and waiting to be able to accuse Jesus of wrong doing, especially on the Sabbath. What is this man doing? He knows the law, they said. But Jesus let them know right from the beginning that he is Lord over the Sabbath. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus may have been amusing himself by providing the blessing of food and performing healing on the Sabbath. Maybe? You think?

One of the most difficult things to do is to love unconditionally as Jesus loves. But that is our command to obey. Love one another but also love our enemies. When we can accomplish this, we have truly loved. When we can judge not, we have truly loved.

Jesus ask us an important question and one that we should ask ourselves, "How can a blind man lead a blind man?" (v 39). How can we lead others to Christ if we are blind to God's commands? Why do we always see fault in others and cannot **or** will not see our own faults? But praise be to God for he sees us, his followers, as a "good tree," bearing good fruit, storing his words in our hearts so we may tell others what God has done for us. And more importantly what God expects us to do for others. Remember also that our actions sometimes speak louder than our words. I recall a profound statement made by my dear husband, "Don't tell me you are a Christian, show me."

Lookout Moment:

When did you see Christ in another person today?

Thank you God for your holy word to read and meditate on. Make it form our good foundation as we travel our journey with Jesus Christ our Lord.



Kay Lineberger was born and raised Baptist. In 1957, she joined her husband, Alfred, in the Lutheran Church. They became members of Lutheran Chapel Church in Gastonia in 1963 and have, and will continue to, serve our Lord through the ministries of Lutheran Chapel. Kay and Alfred have 3 children, 7 grand children and 2 great grand children. GOD IS SO GOOD!!!!

LUKE 7: THE OUTSIDER

The four stories in Luke 7 come immediately after Jesus calls the disciples and gives the Sermon on the Mount (or plain). Two of the stories take place in Galilee, so it is possible that the other two did also. All of the stories deal with the outsider. In the first story a servant belonging to a Roman centurion stationed in Capernaum was sick. Jesus performs the healing and says "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (v 9). This is one of many encounters where Jesus reaches out to Gentiles.

Next he raises a widow's son from the dead. This was in Nain (Nen), near where Elisha had raised another woman's son from the dead. After the dead man sat up and spoke, the crowd who had followed Jesus were fearful and glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" (v 16). The third story is when John's disciples come to Jesus and ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (v 19). In Matthew, Jesus was in Galilee and John was in prison in Jerusalem when this happened. All four gospels have Jesus being anointed by a woman. Luke sets this earlier in Jesus' ministry. The focus here is on forgiveness – the woman is identified as a sinner and Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven" (v 48). Then later he says, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v 50).

To Ponder:

- Where do we see faith playing a role in healing or in forgiveness in our world today?
- When responding to John's followers, Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard." Do we share what we have seen and heard with others so that they might also believe?

Dear God, help us to learn from the example of Jesus by sharing our stories with others, including outsiders.

Debbie Franke is a member of
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC.



LUKE 8: YOU ARE GOD'S CHILD

"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (v 48). No matter how many times I've read this line, it strikes a chord with me every single time. "Daughter..." Jesus could have simply said, "Your faith has made you well; go in peace," but he didn't. He called this faithfully healed woman, "daughter." What a wonderfully intimate term! A member of God's family. And not just any member, but God's daughter.

As a father of two young children myself, I know that they will make mistakes and try my patience. But through all of the frustrations, I love them more than life itself. They try so hard, and bring me such joy. How wonderful it is to be viewed in this way by Jesus! Through all of our mistakes, God the faithful parent continues to nurture us so that the seeds of God's grace and love can grow and flourish. May we be the light on the lampstand by reaching out to each other saying, "sister, brother, I'm here for you." After all, we are all family.

To Ponder:

- As you go about your day, try and remember just how God sees you: as God's child. God's loving gaze is shining on you, and reminding you to go in peace, trusting in God's eternal, undying love for you. How will this viewpoint change the way you think of yourself and mistakes you may make?
- As God the faithful gardener tends you to make you good soil, how can you continue to sow the seeds of God's love and grace? Perhaps you can literally plant some seeds, and grow a tree to flourish. Maybe it's by reading a book with your child if you have one or visiting a relative or friend for some quality time. There are countless ways, big and small, to keep the love going!

God, thank you for calling us your children. As we go through our days, help us to go in peace, trusting that through all successes and mistakes, joy and trials, your loving hand is holding ours.



Patrick Bradshaw worships at St Paul's in Wilmington, NC with his wife, Chelsea, and two curious, strong, and beautiful children.

LUKE 9: TRUST AND TRAVEL LIGHT

And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic (Luke 9:3).

Many of us are "process people." We want to know what we need and we prepare accordingly. Leaving for any trip can require meticulously planning, creating lists, and agonizingly trying to fit everything into a carry-on bag. While traveling light is often the goal, achieving it is difficult, so taking nothing seems impossible to many of us. Yet those were the rules. Jesus called his disciples to follow him and told them to take nothing. He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Jesus gave them "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases" (v 1).

With no preoccupation with possessions, the disciples were free to trust in God's providence. They had everything needed for the journey. The disciples set out with specific instructions and did what Jesus called them to do. They were not to be discouraged by rejection but to shake the very dust off their feet and continue preaching and healing.

God has given us gifts, abilities, talents, and the promise that he is with us. We are also called to go where we are needed, to follow Jesus, to care for our brothers and sisters, to tell the Good News and to trust that God will be with us and will provide us with everything we need.

To Ponder:

- Where is Jesus sending you and how have you been gifted for the journey?
- Pray for or with someone you know who is in need of healing. Consider sending a note of encouragement to that person.

Good and gracious God, prepare us to trust and follow you and to confidently share the Good News of your kingdom and your love with others. Fill us and this world in all its need with the life that comes only from you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Diana Haywood celebrates the risen Christ at Church of the Abiding Savior, Lutheran in Durham, NC and through her service to the NC Synod as Synod Council Vice President.

LUKE 10: ENEMY HERO

God's love and care for all people is strongly emphasized in this chapter. Universal, very practical love is a persistent theme of Luke's gospel. God, our Creator, loves every person and wants their needs met. Asking "Who is my neighbor?" suggests limits to God's love and care.

Samaritans were looked down on as half-breeds, part Jew and part Gentile, the result of intermarriages some 800 years earlier when Assyria deported natives of Samaria and imported Gentiles from various places. Furthermore, Samaritans worshipped in a temple on Mount Gerizim, in competition with worship in Jerusalem. Jealousy and hatred between Samaritans and Jews had festered for centuries.

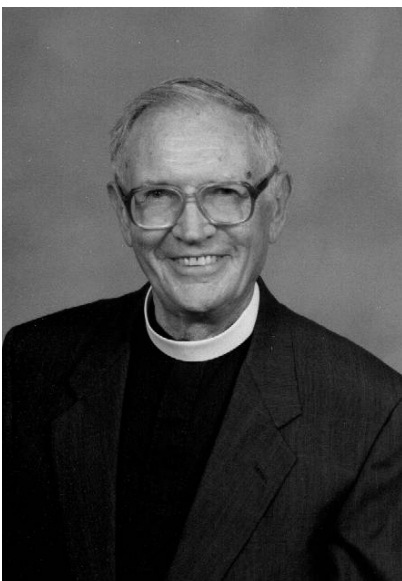
Jesus and his disciples had just been treated harshly in a Samaritan town (Luke 9:51-56). How could God love such people?

By choosing an outcast as his hero and having him help a stranger in need, Jesus dramatically demonstrated his love for everyone, regardless of status or nationality. Every person, especially someone in need, is our neighbor. I am a neighbor to every human being!

That Jesus sends seventy people into areas he would be visiting also suggests, by its very size, the universality of God's love. Seventy was considered the number of Gentile nations. To reach all people in all these nations, Jesus prays for many workers in the harvest field. His prayer continues today. The ELCA's motto "God's work. Our hands." is a modern expression of this call. Let us live it out!

To Ponder:

- If Jesus were telling his parable today, who do you think would be the hero? A Muslim? A Chinese person?
- If you were telling the story, who would be the hero? Are you ever that hero?



*Dear God, use us as your hands to bring your love to every person.
Make us respond to Jesus's words, "go and do likewise."*

The Rev Frank Perry is Pastor Emeritus at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and Lutheran Campus Ministry in Chapel Hill, NC.

LUKE 11: SLOW DOWN

As a youth involved in the church today, it is often times easy to lose sight throughout the journey and sometimes focus more on the destination. I know that I often rush through things simply to say that I have completed what I have set out to do. Through the times I find myself rushing towards the destination, I begin to lose sight of the cross and find myself down a road that has me questioning, not only the journey, but what is my purpose?

A verse found in Luke 11 stands out to me in a way, that is almost a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path:

So I say to you, 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. (Luke 11:9-10)

I digest this verse as a reminder to the ones who rush: slow down, pray, ask for guidance; knock on the doors of our neighbors, and realize that we cannot do it alone. As a youth, I struggle. I constantly want to do things on my own. I have a typical teenage mindset that no one is able to help me, that I am able to stand alone. I have found though that it is merely impossible to walk through this life without guidance from those around me. But with prayers and peace between my journey and God, my paths are set straight.

To Ponder:

- Reflect on a time in your life that you have struggled through a rough spot or situation that has left you feeling helpless.
- What did you do to help yourself, and how could you use what you learned during that time, and share it with others?
- What were you able to learn about yourself during this time?

Dear Heavenly Father, as we walk through our journeys of everyday life, we ask for peace, guidance and understanding. Let us seek you, to find what we need in order to continue walking on the paths you have placed us on. In your name we pray.

Allison Tice is a rising senior at Fred T. Foard High School in Newton, NC. She rocks out all things LYO.



LUKE 12: DO NOT WORRY

There are plenty of things for us to worry about in this world, plenty of things for us to fear. Stressors seem to pop up everywhere. Here we see Jesus teaching about many things that cause angst - needless worrying, waiting, divisions, disputes, and much more! These teachings linger on, much like our anxiety. But thankfully, God is greater than our worries and greater than our fears. God's very being creates peace and comfort. Yet when we look around, that's sometimes terribly difficult to see! Our society is messy, and finding the good is often tough. Yet, at the heart of this chapter we hear Jesus's voice calling us: "Do not be afraid, little flock." We, the flock, sometimes feel feeble, barely hanging on, bogged down by our fears and worries. We find ourselves scattered, lost, and in need of God's herding.

Maybe that's why Jesus tells us "do not be afraid/fear" twice in this chapter and "do not worry" four times in this chapter. That's six exhortations from Jesus. Six times Jesus urges us towards peace and comfort. Six times we receive reassurance from Jesus. Jesus cares for the holistic well-being of his people...and perhaps we need to hear that again and again.

To Ponder:

- At this current moment, right now, what do you see as messy in your life?
- How is God calling you to find peace and comfort in this midst of this chaos?

Nurturing God, we boldly pray that you will meet us in the midst of our fears and anxieties. Guide us, your flock, towards your life-giving peace that we seek.



Molly Markley is a candidate for ordained ministry in the NC Synod and a third year student at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. This summer she begins her internship with St Philip Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC. She is an alumna of Meredith College and Lutheran Campus Ministry-Raleigh.

LUKE 13: LIVING SCRIPTURE

What are you looking for in the Bible?: Lessons, themes, narratives, history, meaning, or life? What could four parables, two short stories, and a lament have in common?

We may choose to focus on characters, e.g., Jesus, Galileans, a woman healed. We study places like Siloam, Jerusalem, or interpret parables, the barren fig tree, mustard seed, yeast, narrow door. Through this process, we go in many directions and still don't have a "center." The desire to unify and make sense of narratives impose Jesus as their center of gravity. We don't like unanswered questions, loose ends, feelings of incompetency, of not knowing. What if there isn't a common theme for these stories? What if these stories aren't about God or Jesus? What if these stories are about Luke's contemporaries, every reader, you and I, and human nature?

I grew up in northern Mexico, a semi-desert region without a recorded history of ancestors. They were fishers, hunters, and farmers. My uncle said our ancestors were too lazy to build big and long-lasting homes or temples, or to do many other tasks that may count as "civilization." They were too smart knowing that the present really matters - their present both as individuals and as a community.

I have come to conclude our approaches to scripture, God, and Jesus have become more an intellectual exercise than a source of life. We spend too much time digging into the past and looking into the future that we forget to live our present. We want a legacy that endures the brevity of time. Often we forget we are the history of our ancestors! Through us Jesus lives and loves our neighbors! Scripture lives through us!

To Ponder:

- What are you looking for when you read the Bible?
- How will you live out scripture today?

Gracious God, help us to find life in scripture, through what you tell about us, humanity, and our neighbors.

The Rev. Alfredo Oviedo shepherds
Iglesia Luterana Gracia in Hendersonville, NC.



JUNE 28, 2016

LUKE 14: THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

Probably like some of you, when I read through Luke 14:25-33, I have a lot questions coming to my mind. Is Jesus teaching us a new commandment of hating people? Did he really mean that I must hate my loved ones to be his disciple?

However, as I read through to the end, it becomes clear that, Christ is teaching us, his true followers, to be willing to put him first in everything we do; and place the most important people in our lives in second place. Should we find ourselves in a situation where we have to choose between Christ and anything else, Christ is saying we must choose him. In Sudan, where I originally come from, before separation and during the war, many starving Christians were usually forced to deny their faith in exchange for food. Others were given the choice to deny faith or face death. However, in every situation when Christ was put first, no matter what happened to physical bodies, Christians always emerged victorious. You can see them more blessed, joyous, and even in peace. Yes, joy and peace even in the middle of suffering; and usually leaving the enemy astonished and clueless.

Yes, brothers and sisters, putting Christ first in everything can be achieved through faith in him. And when Christ is first in our lives, blessings, joy, peace, hope, love and many other gifts follow. In today's world, we have many challenges which make it difficult to put Christ first in everything. When tempted, put your full trust in Him, and Christ will never let you down.

To Ponder:

- Is there an area of your life where Christ is second?

Dear Lord, through your Holy Spirit, help us to meditate daily on your holy word so that we can grow stronger in faith and put you first in everything we do.



Joseph Agolory worships at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in High Point, NC.

LUKE 15: SPICY LIFE

Here we have three parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. In all three parables the actions of the main characters, the shepherd, the once coin-less woman, and the father are offbeat. What shepherd would leave ninety-nine sheep to save one? What person would fret over losing a coin and then once they find the coin blow it on a party? What father, with such status, would run to greet and forgive his son, a sign of weakness, after his son had sapped his entire inheritance? No one in first century Israel would have done these things. The very thought of these actions is crazy.

Just prior to this chapter Jesus asks, "...if salt loses its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" With our preconceived notions we believe that salt can never restore its taste; but maybe Jesus's words, following this question, "Let anyone with ears listen," an invitation to hear how salt could regain its saltiness. Sure, when talking about table salt, we cannot cram the flavor back into the grains. However, Jesus is not talking about table salt; he's talking about you and me, the church. We are the salt.

These parables tell us how to kick up our taste a notch. By living out the actions of the main characters found in the parables of chapter fifteen, we can add some zest to the world. We are called to walk to the beat of a different drum, to venture off the path to reach those who have wondered off, to celebrate with others the gifts that God gives us, to forgive even if it does make us look weak.

There's no such thing as a "normal Christian." We're supposed to be weird. We're supposed to add spice to life by sharing the limitless love of Christ.

To Ponder:

- What odd thing is Christ calling you, your church, or our synod to do in order to spice up the world in which we live?

*Almighty God, you gather and call us to do weird things for the sake of the world.
Send your Holy Spirit to empower us for this life calling.*

The Rev. David Eric Fox serves at
Daniels Lutheran Church in Lincolnton, NC.



JUNE 30, 2016

LUKE 16: TRULY RICH

The parables that make up this chapter are "The Shrewd Manager" and "The Rich Man and Lazarus." The first parable concerns two men who are so wrapped up in themselves and their worldly possessions that they have no chance of salvation. Jesus says that a person cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve both God and money. The second parable is about reversal. The rich man who has everything and Lazarus who has nothing reverse their situations after death.

What does this chapter say about the rich? Can possessions get in the way of our salvation? Can a person possess much and still serve God? Does living in the United States, the "land of opportunity," make it harder to serve God? We live in a society that often tells us that "more is better" and "that we should get it, while we can" and that, "If it no longer pleases you, throw it away and buy bigger and better."

How easy is it to not think about the sick, drive by the homeless, turn the channel on the oppressed, look in the other direction of the poor, or simply fear the refugee?

The Easter season is a time when we celebrated the ultimate reversal. It happened the moment that a sinless innocent lost his worldly life so that we, the lost sinners, can have access to eternal life through his death and resurrection. Thanks be to God for showing us what makes us truly rich!

Lookout Moment: As you go through your day, notice commercials and magazine or radio ads. What are they trying to sell you? What life-improving changes do they claim these products or service will make? Is that what you need? Will it last?

O God, we are so thankful that you sent your son, Jesus, to save us from our sins and be our conduit to heaven. Help us to be ever mindful of those in need, and give us the ability to use our assets to help those who are less fortunate. In Jesus's name we pray.



Bruce Yount attends Trinity Lutheran in Vale, NC.

LUKE 17: JESUS SAID WHAT?!?

Several years ago I was sitting in Startown Tire Center in Newton waiting to have a tire repaired. The owner knows that I am a pastor, and so did everyone else, because I was wearing a clerical collar. A stranger approached me and said, "You read the Bible, don't ya?" I replied, "Of course I do." He then asked me a question.

"What's a person to do with all those hard things that Jesus says, like forgiving others who have sinned against you time after time?" This stranger made a great point; so much so that it became the fodder for a sermon that I titled: "Jesus Said What?!?" That sermon text is the same as the text we read today and we hear Jesus say:

Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent," you must forgive (Luke 17:1-4).

"Jesus said what?!?" Indeed, to forgive one's enemies almost makes hanging a millstone around one's neck and jumping into the sea, look like a good option; especially when Jesus tells us to forgive, and forgive, and forgive (multiply by 7). Yet Jesus's words make perfect sense when we consider Jesus prayer while being crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

It's been said that withholding forgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die. Jesus suggests that forgiveness is based on our need to forgive rather than on the need of the other to be forgiven. Resentments are similar to a severe infection. Eventually one's resentment will spread and destroy the person who holds onto it. Jesus also taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us" (Luke 11:4). Forgiveness seems difficult, but only when we are obsessed with retribution. Perhaps we might consider God's own desire to forgive us.

To Ponder:

- Do I consciously consider my words when I pray the Lord's Prayer?
- Am I holding a resentment toward another person that needs to be resolved?

Dear God, by your Holy Spirit, allow us to have a forgiving heart. Let us remember the extent to which you are willing to forgive us.

The Rev. Robert A. Sain shepherds the community of Old St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Newton, NC.



LUKE 18: PRAYER PESTS

My pre-ministry career included some years working in retail computer sales and services. As for all retailers, customer service was a key concern of our general manager: Happy customers keep coming back; upset customers tell anyone and everyone about their horrible experience. But, nobody's perfect – our store included – so we had our share of complaints. Most were handled quickly with wrongs or missteps corrected.

But then there was “that” customer – the one for whom no proposed solution was ever good enough. They'd start their resolution experience chewing on a customer service rep, then chew on the manager, then chew on that manager's manager, and so on, eventually reaching the CEO's office. That customer was the epitome of persistence! Their ceaseless pursuit of the solution they wanted usually succeeded. The squeaky wheel very often received far more grease than anyone could imagine.

This chapter's opening parable and closing encounter in Jericho reveal that persistence is important. In both stories, a character's persistence results in something good: justice for one wronged and restoration of sight to one who is blind. We're told that Jesus tells the parable so hearers learn “about their need to pray always and not to lose heart,” – to be persistent (v 1).

How often do we pray and then just sit back, waiting for the result, and are bummed that God doesn't seem to be listening? Why aren't we squeaky wheels in prayer? Are we afraid we might tick off God by praying too much? With Jesus encouraging us to do just that, why not believe him and become absolute prayer pests?!

Imagine what might happen in our world if everyone everywhere never ceased praying...

Lookout Moment: Jesus is encouraging us to pester God with prayer. Think about the community in which you live and the challenges present in it. What challenge rests most heavily on your heart? Now be a prayer pest: commit to praying to God about that challenge once an hour today.



God, grant us the strength and attentiveness we need to never stop praying to you for our needs and the needs of our neighbors; refresh our hearts with the knowledge that you hear us – your children – and that you rejoice each and every time we come to you in prayer; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Rev. David T. Drysdale II, serves as pastor of Holy Communion Lutheran Church in Dallas, NC.

LUKE 19: FROM JERICHO TO JERUSALEM, FROM YES TO WHOA!

Yes! Whoa! Yes! Whoa! Yes! Whoa! As I read through the 19th chapter of Luke, I am like “yes” and “whoa.” Yes, Jesus is my kind of man; but whoa, not that kind of man. I always find it interesting that Jesus seems so unpredictable and unorthodox. While I find it comforting, I also find it discomfoting. While I attempt not to do so, I construct boxes in which to place Jesus. If only he would remain in my constructed boxes, I could get a handle on and form him into the image or images which comfort me most. But I am not able to do this.

The Jesus who encounters Zacchaeus, who rides into Jerusalem on a colt, who spellbinds his teaching audience, and who cleanses the temple, fits neatly into the box I’ve constructed. I am comforted with the Jesus of this box because this Jesus says to me, “Yes! Yes, I like you as you are here!” The Jesus who tells difficult to understand parables, who predicts destruction, and who angers religious leaders doesn’t fit so neatly into the box I’ve constructed. I am discomfoted with the Jesus of this box because this Jesus says to me, “Whoa! I’m not comforted by this Jesus.”

So I wonder what is up with me, and what is up with Jesus. In my wondering I remember Jesus’s words while in the synagogue in Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18).

While you and I may have our ideas and expectations and boxes into which we want Jesus to remain, Jesus will not be deterred from fulfilling the mission for which God sent him. Jesus’ dedication to his mission may, in fact, bring me both comfort and discomfort. And that is okay, in my estimation, because Jesus has all humanity in mind.

Lord Jesus, in the midst of our comfort and discomfort, help us be ever mindful that you have our best interest at heart as you encounter us in the words of scripture. Help us to accept you as you are. In your holy name we pray.

The Rev. Tommy Lineberger cares for the flock gathered at
Trinity Lutheran Church in Vale, NC.



JULY 4, 2016

LUKE 20: BEAR THE IMAGE

Who do you look like? Maybe your mom or dad, maybe even another relative? It's been said that everyone has a doppelgänger, a twin look-alike out there somewhere. Whoever that person is for you, you bear their image in a particular way to the rest of the world. We often say that we "belong" to those whom we look like. For instance, I look a lot like my mother and her side of the family. I "belong" to them. I'm a part of their family. We support one another, care for one another, pray for one another. But this phenomenon isn't limited to just the family.

Jesus was questioned about whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. Instead of giving a simple yes or no answer, Jesus asks to see a denarius. "Whose head and whose title does it bear?" Jesus asks (v 24). They answer that the image belongs to the emperor. Jesus then tells them that they should give to the emperor the things that are his, but also to give God what belongs to God.

I'm not convinced that this is as much about paying taxes as it is about whole-life stewardship. Not only do we bear the image of those who created us biologically, but we all bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26). If we then follow Jesus instructions to give to God the things that belong to God according to whose likeness we bear, then we should give all of ourselves to God. Not only do we bear the image of our families, but we bear the image of God to the rest of the world to see. Everything we are, everything we have, belongs to God. That doesn't mean that we should go and donate everything we have to a charitable organization, but it does call us to think about how we use our selves, our time, and our possessions. Maybe we're called to loosen the grip on the things we hold dear so that all that we have and are may be used for glorifying God and his kingdom.

Holy and gracious God, you have formed us from the dust of the earth into your likeness. Help us to bear your image well, that all we have and all that we are may be given in service to your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.



The Rev. Greg Brown is the pastor of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Hickory, NC. Pastor Greg is also a Chaplain in the Army National Guard. He enjoys college football (Go Gamecocks!), golf, and music.

LUKE 21: CHANGE

In 2004, I spent a summer in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco working with an organization that hosts middle and high school youth groups of various Christian denominations doing week-long mission trips. One of our non-profit partners was a ministry that provided hot meals for the hungry, clothing, job training, addiction recovery, transitional housing, and even footwashing with free socks (a powerful experience, indeed). I brought the youth groups here to first worship with God's children who were generally experiencing homelessness and addiction, and then serve and share a meal and conversation with the guests. For most of the youth group students, just being in this environment was completely out of their comfort zone, but when the pastor took up an offering during worship, they really felt out of place.

"You can't be serious," a student whispered to me; all the students traded nervous glances over the clink, clink of loose change and copper coins hitting the metal plate. These people can't even afford food, and they're taking an offering?!? How insulting, how selfish, how...empowering? How uplifting? Suddenly, I started crying. Later, the pastor confirmed the source of my tears: The point of the offering wasn't to collect funds, little as they were, but to give people who feel they're worthless a tangible opportunity to share their gifts. In that moment, I was forever changed.

Following the parable of the woman with the copper coins, Luke 21 spirals into abject misery. You may have experienced poverty, homelessness, or addiction, but even if you haven't, there's a very good chance you've experienced loneliness, hunger, despair, injustice, sickness, job loss, or betrayal. Like the people at the ministry in San Francisco, when we're experiencing hardship, we yearn for the "fires of justice" as the author of the "Canticle of the Turning" refers, where the "hungry poor shall weep no more," and "God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp." I am heartened by Luke 21:33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but [God's] words will not pass away." May we continue to yearn for justice and to listen and share our experiences as a community to empower, lift up, and just be with all of God's children.

To Ponder:

- Has there been a time you've been moved by an unexpected gracious act?
- Is there an opportunity for you to listen, be present, and work for justice in your community?

Life-giving Spirit, thank you for reaching into us when we feel we have nothing to give and showing us the bounty of gifts we've had all along. May we use our gifts, and be gracious recipients of the gifts of others, to bring healing and justice to ourselves and all of your children.

Charles Williams is the life-partner of the amazing Jennifer Manis and teaches Middle School Faith Formation and Confirmation at Holy Trinity, Raleigh. He loves adventures, making sure people make logical financial choices, and Luke 21.



JULY 6, 2016

LUKE 22: BUSY? STOP AND PRAY

Many of us lead hectic and very busy lives running from one thing to the next, sometimes feeling like we have no time to catch our breath. Deadlines, schedules, after school events, and family obligations all pull us in a lot of different directions at the same time. Sometimes we can't enjoy the present, because we know what is coming down the road.

The 22nd chapter of Luke is similar to this hectic, break-neck pace that we all live. We find:

- Judas agreeing to betray our Lord;
- Jesus sending folks to prepare for the Passover meal;
- the Last Supper;
- the disciples arguing over who is the greatest;
- Jesus is betrayed with a kiss, arrested, and heals a severed ear;
- Peter disowns him;
- Jesus is mocked by guards, beaten, and dragged before Pilate and Herod...

Wow! There is a lot going on in Jesus's life all here in one chapter. And to make things worse, he knew what was coming down the road. Death on a cross.

But in middle of it all Jesus stopped and he went to the garden to pray. He paused in the midst of all of this, and he got on his knees and spoke with God.

How wonderful it would be if we could follow that example, and stop in the midst of our crazy lives and reconnect with God. If we intentionally pause every day and pray, maybe we would find the bread we need for our journey.

Let's try this prayer challenge: For the next 40 days, set your alarm clock to 2pm. At 2pm each day, stop and pray. Regardless of where you are or what you are doing, pause and offer up a prayer that God will give you the strength that you need for your journey.

God, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.



Rev. Timothy Taylor is the pastor/redeveloper at the Church of the Abiding Savior, Lutheran in Durham, North Carolina.

LUKE 23: PASSIONATE FORGIVENESS

Where do you see yourself in this familiar passion story? Do you see yourself in Pilate, in Jesus, in the crowd that cried out for Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, Joseph of Arimathea, or one of the two criminals? Wherever you find yourself in this passion story, you are a child of God. Before the crucifixion, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luckily for us, those words reach us even now. In a season where political opinions determine a person's value, where refugees are told they are unwelcome, and debates about bathrooms alienate and further divide us. Jesus's words, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing," remind us to be gracious and forgiving as well, even when we disagree, and even when we think we are right.

The passion story in Luke 23 reminds us of the amazing things God has done for us in Jesus. That same Jesus who died on the cross to save us from sin and death, calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27), and throughout his ministry helped the poor, sick, and excluded. May this story of Jesus passion remind us to be forgiving, loving one another, as Jesus loved us.

*Gracious and loving God, forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing.
We put our own needs before the needs of others;
we argue and fight with our brothers and sisters in Christ,
and we forget to love our neighbors as ourselves.
Let your abiding Spirit guide us as we seek to love and forgive one another.*

Cassie McIntosh-Overcash is a candidate for ordained ministry in the NC Synod and attends Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.



JULY 8, 2016

LUKE 24: JOY ABOUNDS

The final chapter of Luke's gospel account really has it all. This story of the resurrection covers amazing power and transcendent grace, both of which are present in Jesus's conquering of death and the grave. The rolled away stone shows us how uncontainable Christ really is. The women at the tomb remind us that God uses unlikely, even fearful people to share God's message of hope. We hear about Jesus both hidden from view and recognized in the breaking of the bread. Jesus brings peace and reaches out to the disciples in multiple ways, showing his scars and eating a piece of fish, trying to help them believe that he is truly risen from the dead. Jesus provides one more teaching moment, opening up the scripture so the disciples may understand that he is the Messiah. Finally, in the midst of providing a blessing for his friends, he ascends into heaven and joy abounds on earth.

It's this abounding joy that is so striking to me. It's a complete reversal of the Good Friday narrative. In the midst of Jesus departing from his followers for a second time in just a few short days, he leaves them with a blessing as they praise and worship God. Although their friend will still be gone, they are now "clothed with glory" as they are filled with great joy. And as they return home, this joy is infectious for those around them. They may no longer have their teacher with them, but through the power of his resurrection they truly do have it all.

To Ponder:

- Where is God providing you with great joy?
- How might God be using you to spread joy to others?

Holy God, help us to recognize that in you we really do have it all. Continue to provide signs of your presence among us, and lead us into the abounding joy of being your servants.



Patrick Ballard is an approved candidate for ordained ministry in the ELCA with roots at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC. Patrick is a 2016 alum of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg and an alum of NC State University where he was active in Lutheran Campus Ministry.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Thanks for taking this journey with us through the Gospel of Luke. From the “topic sentence” of Luke’s Gospel, Mary’s Magnificat, it is clear in this narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in particular that God, in Jesus, is turning the world upside down. Or, from God’s perspective and plan, right-side up! It’s also abundantly clear from Luke’s narrative that Jesus intentionally does ministry to and for and through those on the margins of society. Luke’s Jesus challenges us to do the same.

Of course, now you’re poised to delve into the only continuation of a Gospel narrative in the New Testament. Whereas Matthew, Mark, and John end with various emphases and accounts, Luke keeps going in the book of Acts which he also authored. In it we see the missional nature and mandate for the Church unfolding through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We’re profoundly grateful to all who have contributed to this resource through devotional writings but also through planning, editing, preparing, and distributing. Special thanks to our Book of Faith Team whose commitment to scripture and to our synod’s ministry envisioned and made this resource a reality. Blessings on your summer, and may you abide in the Word that gives abundant life!

Bishop Tim Smith



