

Minneapolis Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2014 Lenten Devotional Booklet



The Minneapolis Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is blessed to be in a global companion partnership with The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and The Leipzig District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Saxony, Germany. Additionally, about 55% of our 152 congregations partner with other Lutheran churches represented on virtually every continent around the world.

Last year the Global Companion Table of the Synod initiated a venture with our many partnering congregations to develop a Lenten Devotional Booklet, *Companions Following Jesus to the Cross*, for daily use during the 2013 Lenten season. The purpose of the venture was to promote both the existence and importance of these relationships within our domestic synods and those abroad. As such, the goal was to encourage other un-partnered congregations to consider establishing a partnership for themselves.

Since we received many fine comments on last year's booklet, the Global Companion Table decided to re-issue the booklet for Lent 2014. As our companion partnerships grow, we hope to offer this booklet annually and include new partners each year.

The booklet is compiled from both overseas and U.S. based partners and is available by e-mail. Contributors have written a short devotion that may address one of three basic questions:

- In what ways does Lent help you or your congregation to grow in your relationship with God?
- What special things do you or your congregation do during Lent?
- How has your companion partnership affected your congregation's relationship with God?

As you make your journey to the cross this year, use these devotions and prayers from our gifted and talented partners to reflect on your congregational partnership and how God is working through your global companionships to strengthen God's mission in the world.

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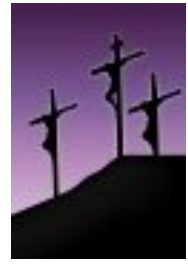
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Ash Wednesday

05 March 2014



Scripture Text

2 Corinthians 5:20

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Be Reconciled to God

Reconciliation is all that this season is about. It is God’s hand reaching out, urging us to turn back to Him, to be reconciled to Him. God Himself paid the highest price in order to get the reconciliation in place. He, the Holy One, left His Heaven and came and lived on this sinful earth where He walked around preaching, teaching and healing and died on the Cross for you and me.

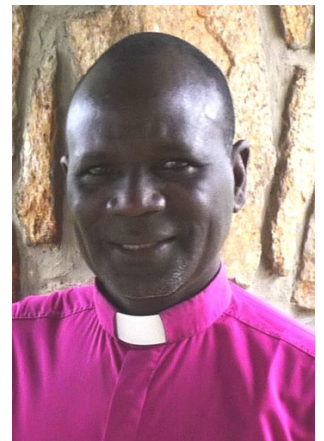
Today you and I must carry this message to our fellow men and women. It is the assignment left for everyone of us. We may have been given different places of work and different abilities, but as Paul says further in 2 Corinthians 6:1, *“As God’s fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.”*

Finally, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we reflect on the love of God for us on this Ash Wednesday, we pray for wisdom and strength for the task ahead of us, and also that we may be able to forgive those who sin against us just as we have been forgiven in Christ.

Prayer

Father, we pray that you give us the heart of forgiveness for those who have caused confusion and fear amongst us and even killed our dear ones. Father, reveal yourself to them. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!

Companion Partner



The Most Rev. Nemuel A. Babba

has served as the Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria since 2002 having previously served as Bishop of the Todi Diocese from 1996.

The LCCN has approximately 600 pastors serving 2,500 congregations and a membership of 2 million members. Evangelism is their highest priority, and they are growing by 10,000 new members each month!

They celebrated their Centennial anniversary on 05 October 2013 with all of their partners (Mission Afrika/Denmark, ELCA, MAS, and Global Health Ministries).

Ash Wednesday

05 March 2014



Ashes To Ashes, Dust To Dust

Scripture Text

2 Corinthians 4:7

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not for ourselves.”

Prayer

Gracious Lord God, our desire to be in your presence gathers us into our beautiful sanctuaries where we feel safe and at home. We look for you in the mighty wonders of nature and often find you there. During these 40 days, teach us also to draw near to our neighbor in need wherever s/he may be found, that we may experience the power of your presence, often revealed in the least of these. Amen.

The Christian community is moving into the season of Lent. We begin this holy season with the liturgy of Ash Wednesday. This is when we remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Many of our brothers and sisters in Tanzania live their entire lives in dust. Dirt floors, dirt roads and even homes made from the dirt on which they stand.

I have a friend named Murrow who serves as a hospice nurse at Machame Lutheran Hospital on the lower slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. One day I got in an old pickup with Murrow to accompany him as he made his rounds visiting dying people in the surrounding villages. The old pickup wouldn't start after Murrow stopped to pick me up so a couple of the girls working at the small inn helped to give us a push down the drive so Murrow could pop the clutch and, off we went.

The rest of the day Murrow would need to remember to park in such a way that the truck was facing downhill before he shut it off so we could get it rolling to start it again. Eventually, we got out of the truck and hiked our way up a dusty trail to the first home we would visit. We came to a small shack and were welcomed inside the dark little front room of the two-room house. The room was very warm and filled with the smoke from a charcoal fire burning in the rear of the house. Several neighbors also soon appeared and squeezed into the little shack.

The woman being cared for is 103 years old and suffers from breast cancer. She was sitting on a wooden chair and has the kind of look you see in a National Geographic photograph with deep smiling eyes peering out from a face which has been over a century living on that mountain. She was visibly happy when she was told I was “mchungaji” (a pastor). Murrow checked her condition with great compassion and you could see how much she appreciated him.

After I prayed for her and all those present in that dark, smoky, warm little shack made of the dust of the earth, the old woman reached out for me and took my face in her weathered old hands and then put them on top of my head as she prayed blessings upon me in her native tribal language.

There are moments in our lives when God draws closer to us than usual and that moment, right there in that shack, was as much as I could take.

The smudge we receive on Ash Wednesday is made in the shape of the cross and that makes all the difference. It goes right on top of the invisible cross we were marked with in our baptisms. The first cross promises that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not even that second cross, made of ash, the one reminding us of our need to repent and of our own mortality.

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. For some of our brothers and sisters in Christ, their entire world is a daily reminder of this reality.

Companion Partner



Rev. Chad Brekke

After serving congregations in Southeast Pennsylvania for more than 20 years, Chad Brekke currently serves as Senior Pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He has been leading group trips and developing mission connections with the Lutheran church in Tanzania for more than ten years. Prince of Peace supports the Neema Orphanage Center and several other ministries in the Kilimanjaro region.

Ash Wednesday

05 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 22:41-42

“He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, many of our people in Tanzania are struggling with poverty and disease. Even in the midst of fear and great sadness, you have encouraged us to come to you in prayer. As we move toward Holy Week and the remembrance of our Lord's death and resurrection, we give you thanks for your promise to walk next to us and to hold us close. Fill our hearts with hope and lead us into your promised future together. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen

Thy Will Be Done

Jesus went to Gethsemane garden on the Mount of Olives to fight his lonely battle. He was only thirty three; and no one wants to die at thirty three. He knew what crucifixion was like; he had seen it. He was in an agony. This was the very hinge and turning point in Jesus’ life. He could have turned back even yet. He could have refused the cross. The salvation of the world hung in the balance as the son of God literally sweated it out in Gethsemane.

Jesus went to Gethsemane in an agony; He came out with the victory won and with peace in his soul because He had talked to God.

Jesus said, "Thy will be done". He said that with the accent of perfect trust. He was speaking to one who was Father. He was speaking to a God whose everlasting arms were underneath and about him even on the cross. He was submitting, but He was submitting to the love that would never let him go.

Life’s hardest task is to accept what we cannot understand; but we can do even that if we are sure enough of the love of God.

Sometimes we find ourselves in terrible, difficult, frustrating or agonizing situations. It may be serious sickness of our loved ones; it may be economic crisis; it may be torturing temptations, etc. Like Jesus, we must go to God in Prayer. He is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. But when we go to Him we must go in total trust, respect and obedience. We must be ready to receive and accept an answer from God not according to our will but His will in all circumstances. Our loving and caring God always knows what is good for us better than we think.

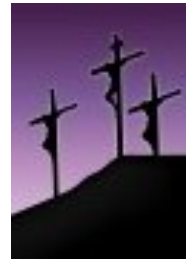
Companion Partner



Saltiel Munisi has recently retired from many years of service as the Deputy General Secretary of the Northern Diocese, ELCT. Saltieli has helped make the in-country travel and lodging arrangements for hundreds of Lutheran visitors from the United States as they have been hosted by the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Saltieli has many friends from all over the world and has the gift of helping people from vastly different cultures develop lasting relationships and ministry partnerships. Pastor Chad and Saltieli climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro together in 2005 in an effort that raised over \$60,000 toward the construction of the Neema Orphanage Center located on the lower slopes of that same mountain and is operated by the Lutheran church in that region.

The First Thursday in Lent

06 March 2014



Scripture Text

Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Being Still...in the Busy-Ness

Our lives are busy---full of lists, appointments, chores and obligations. Needs to be met, projects to organize, jobs to be finished, people to care for. But, above the flurry of activity, is a sense of needing to be away. The “I’m just so busy” mantra that we proudly repeat, doesn’t make us more content with our lives. We find ourselves needing time and space just to be; a chance to let the merry-go-rounds of our lives circle on while we remove ourselves to let calm overtake us, let the dust settle.

I love the image of empty space as in bowls. It soothes me to know that I can carve out of the day a place of empty time, a still calm center in the storm of activity. I imagine a smooth, thick-walled, well-used empty bowl that can hold and protect me, leaving me open to receive. I’ve nothing more to do than be still. There is God.

*He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
Psalm 23:2-3*

Here, too, is a lovely image of quiet, refreshing space. We are assured that God will lead us there. The water will be still. We will abide in the peace of quiet. And our souls will be refreshed. All, if even for just this moment, will be well.

Prayer

Lead me, God,
quiet me, restore
me. Let me be
still. Amen!

Companion Partner

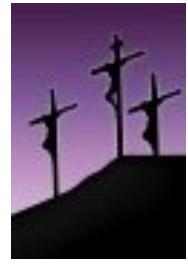


Carolyn Hirsch is a member of Light of Christ Lutheran Church in Delano, Minnesota, the partner congregation of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) Nyanya since 2006.

In 2010, Carolyn joined the annual Minneapolis Synod Trip to Nigeria and visited their partner congregation, LCCN Nyanya in Abuja, for the first time. Prior to this trip, the congregation had sent letters and packages to their friends in hopes of meeting one day. Light of Christ has subsequently raised funds to purchase insecticide-treated bed nets for Nyanya’s rural partner congregation with the hope of eradicating malaria in that community.

The First Friday in Lent

07 March 2014



THE KING WHO TOOK THE PUNISHMENT OF HIS MOTHER

Scripture Text

Isaiah 53:5

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

In one of the very rural villages before the coming of Missionaries to northern Nigeria, there was this story told in this village about a powerful King. There was a king who lived in a village called Bogga (not the original name of the village). He was so powerful that he was feared by his subjects. He was strict on his rules and anybody who dared to break any of the rules would face punishment without mercy. One day the king made a very severe rule to ban brewing of the local beer of the village called “BURKUTUK”. And anybody caught brewing in the village would be brought to the village square to be punished by flogging in the public for breaking the rule.

One morning a report came to the king by his guards that the king’s mother had broken the rule, and brewed the local beer in the village. The king’s mother was in her old age. The king summoned all the community to the village square and presented his mother to be punished for breaking the rule. But because his mother is aged and would likely die if she was flogged for her offence, he came down from his seat on the throne and said to his guards, “I AM TAKING THE PLACE OF MY MOTHER, PLEASE FLOG ME AND LET HER FREE”.

As we grew up in the village as children, we listened to this tale and when I became a Christian I understood what the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 53:5 “... *He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*” When I became a Christian, I understood what the Prophet **Isaiah in chapter 53 verse 5 said**, Christ took our place on the cross to be punished to death for our sins. The innocent became the victim and bearing upon him the offence we were to bear. That is the message of this season. That someone bore your punishment to set you free to live. **Romans 6:23 says**, “*While we were sinners Christ came and took our place and set us free.*” The question I want you to ask yourself now is this: How much can you pay back for what Christ has done for you? Nothing! All that Christ wants from you is to make him your Lord and personal savior to rule in your heart. Today you will be saved!

Prayer

God of mercy, thank you for conquering death through your precious son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Companion Partner

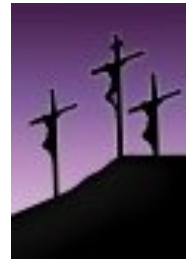


The Right Rev. Benjamin Fuduta has served the LCCN as Bishop of the Abuja Diocese since its formation in 2010. Prior to that, Bishop Ben served as District Pastor in Abuja.

The Minneapolis Area Synod has been blessed to have Bishop Ben as our friend for many years. While he was District Pastor, he gave his time to accompany our synod trips and serve as tour guide and teacher. His wife, Jessica, now serves LCCN Nyanya as pastor; they are the companion partner of Light of Christ Lutheran Church in Delano, Minnesota.

The First Saturday in Lent

08 March 2014



Scripture Text

Psalm 8:3-4

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

“God calls us to His banqueting table, His banner over us is love”

Simple song... profound message. Advent Lutheran Church of Anoka is privileged to walk side by side with the people of LCCN Nazareth Mayo Belwa. In our 2008 visit, we presented our partner congregation with a banner made by one of our members that reads, "I have called you by name. You are mine." An identical banner hangs in our sanctuary at Advent. Our two congregations are linked by these banners, by prayers for each other and by e-mails we exchange. More importantly, we are linked in a common faith under the banner of God's love.

More humbling still is the banner of God's love, big enough to cover the whole planet. The Psalmist asks, *“What are human beings, that you are mindful of them?”* God is far more than ‘mindful’ of us. God has opened God's arms of love and mercy to us in the person of Jesus. God has spread the Word of love to the ends of the earth so we might share with Nigerians, Germans, and others in the joy of the Gospel. In Christ, God has called us by name. His banner over us is love.

Prayer

Loving God,

We give you thanks and praise that indeed you have chosen us and called each of us by name in your redeeming love. How fortunate and blessed are we! We especially are graced that this loving call extends throughout the world and that we are forever connected to one another. May your banner of love be over us all. Amen.

Companion Partner



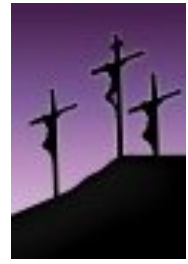
Rev. Bob Linstrand has been solo pastor of Advent Lutheran Church in Anoka, Minnesota since 2001. He traveled to Nigeria with a group from our synod for the first time visit in 2008.

Advent is a congregation of 450 baptized members. We are grateful for our partnership with LCCN Mayo Belwa. We are humbled by their faithfulness and their joy as they share the Gospel, and by their wonderful hospitality during the 2008 visit.

We share in mutual prayer support, and Advent has been pleased to help support their growing education ministry. Hopefully we can send an Advent member on a future visit to deepen our relationship and partnership.

The First Sunday in Lent

09 March 2014



Scripture Text

Philippians 2:6-7

“...who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”

Lent and Our Transformation

Almighty God, our maker and redeemer, we humbly pray thee to grant us thy spirit to lead us into perfect companionship with Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lent is a period of self-sacrifice, commitment, dedication, and a sober determination to the attainment of salvation. Salvation was won on the cross by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ death and resurrection have provided the safe passage for all those who believe in him to attain everlasting salvation.

Since Lent is a period of sober reflection and meditation on the suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the period should help the congregation in their relationship with God. Thus:

- At Lent, we are spiritually transformed to share in the suffering that Christ went through; this act strengthens our faith and growth in Jesus Christ
- At Lent, our relationship with God becomes stronger because we acknowledge and recall the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross to save us
- When we come together at Lent, our top priority is fellowship as a congregation so we can fulfill and renew our covenant with Jesus, which promotes our relationship with God
- The humility of Christ, his obedience unto death, even the death on the cross, is a pillar of our faith and growth in God
- Jesus, being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation and not equal with God, but rather took the form of a servant. This manifest humility is what our congregation should emulate.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we beseech thee to grant us the knowledge and wisdom to comprehend the depth of your sacrifice on the cross and grant that our companionship with you should lead us to follow you to the cross, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Companion Partner

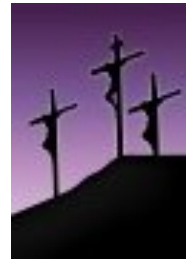


Yusuf Ayuba is a member of LCCN Nazareth Church Mayo Belwa in the Todi Diocese of Adamawa State, Nigeria.

LCCN Mayo Belwa became an official companion partner of Advent Lutheran in Anoka, Minnesota in 2007. Advent has visited once in 2008 and hopes to travel there again to strengthen this growing partnership.

The First Monday in Lent

10 March 2014



Following Christ

I love the book of James. Oh, I know that Martin Luther didn't have much time for him, calling his writing an "Epistle of straw." But, James is a man after my own heart. He is task-oriented, a man of action, who likes to get things done. And I like that because I'm the same way.

But I also understand why old Marty was a little concerned about James – after all, in the 1500's, Luther was fighting against the notion that we needed to earn our salvation through the payment of things like indulgences and good works. So, I get that any talk of doing anything made Luther a little nervous. But, I wonder if sometimes we Lutherans get so hung up avoiding any idea that good works are required that we forget that our actions are, in fact, important. Not for earning our way into heaven. Not for ensuring our salvation -- Jesus has already done everything that needs to be done for that. But as a reflection of the faith and trust we put in the God who provides.

You see, James is addressing a very important question to first century Christians – what does it mean to be a follower of Christ in the world – when there no longer was a Christ to physically follow? The James who wrote this letter knew Jesus. He followed Jesus in a very real way – and now Jesus is no longer there. Remember all the times the disciples pulled Jesus aside after he had taught or told a parable and said, "Jesus – what on earth are you talking about?" And now there is no Jesus to pull aside.

So what does it mean to be a follower of Christ in this new reality? Isn't that the same question that we ask today? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ here in 2013, when the world looks dramatically different than it did in Jesus' day? In other words, what does it mean to be a "Doer of the Word?"

There is a stark contrast between the "implanted word" we see in James 1:21 and the "cravings that are at war within you," in chapter four. I love the idea of the Word of God that has been implanted in us in our baptisms, that God's Word is now a part of who we are. But James points out another reality of the cravings that are also at war within us – cravings that arise from a lack of trust in God's provision. There is an internal battle within each of us between the implanted Word of God and the cravings that result of our reliance on the world.

So, in order to be a "doer of the Word" we must first trust in that Word that has been implanted within us. We must trust that whatever is needed will be provided so we can step out in confidence to love and serve God and one another.

Scripture Text

James 1:21b-22

"Welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

Prayer

Gracious God, through the gift of Baptism, you have implanted your Word within me. Help me to trust in that Word so that I can confidently do your Word in the world. Open my heart to see how you are calling me to be a doer of your Word, as I reflect the love and grace that you have first bestowed upon me. I pray in the name of the one who came to set me free so that I can proclaim that freedom to others, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Companion Partner

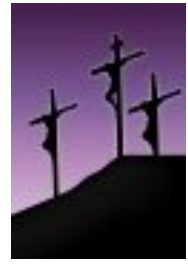


Rev. Jacqueline Thone has been associate pastor of Saint Barnabas Lutheran Church since 2011.

In 2007 Saint Barnabas entered into partnership with LCCN No. Majami'ar Almasihu in Hong, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Andy and Ann Dybvig traveled to Nigeria in 2008 to meet their partner congregation. Since a follow-up trip in 2012 was cancelled, Pr. Jacqui hopes to travel there in 2013 to help celebrate the LCCN's Centennial Anniversary.

The First Tuesday in Lent

11 March 2014



Scripture Text

James 4:1

“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?”

Selfishness is Harmful

The cross of Jesus Christ marks the end of many things in a believer's life, such as slavery, impurity, wickedness, corruption, selfishness etc. [Gal.5:19-21]. And also, the cross marks the beginning of new life, such as freedom, righteousness, reconciliation, holiness, faithfulness, endurance. etc. In this lent season I want us to focus on ‘selfishness is harmful’.

In every society, organization or conflicts and disputes are all the time harmful, destructive and degenerating. And as James has rightly observed, it occurs as a result of evil desires and selfishness. Selfishness is caring for oneself rather than others. This kind of attitude causes greediness, envy and wanting to own every thing to oneself. Also, it corrupts the mind and is prevalent among believers. When one's mindset is so badly to own worldly possessions, it leads to fighting, quarrelling and killing.

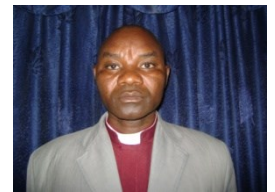
But then, instead of aggressively trying to grab what we want as it is apparent in today's politics, James suggests to us to submit to God's will and plan in prayer. He says prayer requires good and clear motives, so that it can be effectively answered.

Therefore, in this Lent season we shall all as a church embark on what I call ‘general spiritual cleaning’. That is to say, we are going to reflect on our personal life and mark out selfishness in our life so that our society and the church will live in harmony, peace and unity. We can do that by:

- Praying with good motive
- Submitting to the will and plan of God
- Focus on the kingdom of God and its righteousness
- Living a life worth of our calling

With this, our journey together with Jesus Christ to the cross will be fruitful. Amen.

Companion Partner



Rev. Bitrus I.

Abbas serves as pastor for LCCN Hong in the Arewa Diocese of Adamawa State, Nigeria.

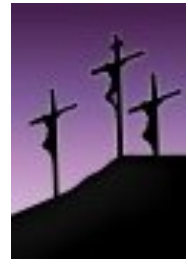
LCCN Hong was visited by their MAS partner, Saint Barnabas Lutheran Church in Plymouth in 2007. Since then, they have partnered together on strengthening education for the children of Hong.

Prayer

Most gracious God, as we travel through this time, help us to focus more on you the desires you have for your people so that we may continue to root out the selfishness that keeps us from truly living a life worthy of our calling. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Second Wednesday in Lent

12 March 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 6:31-33

“Do not be anxious, saying What will we eat? or What will we drink? or What will we wear?” Your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. “

Prayer

Thank you God, for inspiring examples of your faithfulness. When we question your provision, or whine about what we may lack, help us to remember the testimonies of your servants in whose lives your light and love shine through. Amen.

Rich in Faithfulness

When my wife and I were teachers at Tumaini University in Tanzania in 2004, I taught a class on the Old Testament prophets. All the students were preparing to be parish pastors so I had them choose a text from a prophet and preach on it. After one particularly hard-hitting sermon based on Amos’ attacks on greed, the class discussion got very personal. One student asked the question, *“If God calls us to be pastors, are we also called to be poor?”* (This was when the average pastor’s salary was \$10 per month.) The conversation really picked up after this.

Everyone grew quiet when Kimbavala spoke up. *“When God called me to seminary we didn’t know if our family would eat. As an evangelist, my wife earned 500 T-shillings per month (about 50 cents). The students gasped. “We only had two cows and two goats. But I can tell you that my children have never gone hungry. We now have 7 cows and goats. And when our baby was born last week, we didn’t use one T-shilling for medicine. I can tell you that if God calls you, God will support you.”*

The class applauded.



Companion Partner



Rev. Rolf Olson has served Richfield Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota since 2006. With his wife, Nancy, he taught at Tumaini University in Iringa, Tanzania in 2004. Richfield Lutheran is partnered with Mbigili parish near Iringa, and two groups from Richfield Lutheran have visited there. As part of this partnership, Richfield Lutheran has sponsored secondary students, helped build satellite congregations (“preaching points”), helped to develop a grain grinding ministry, and provided a motorcycle for the pastor and bicycles for the evangelists.

The Second Thursday in Lent

13 March 2014



Scripture Text

2 Corinthians

5:1-5

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens...”

Prayer

Dear creator and re-creator God,

Make us again in your image, O God, so that we may reflect the glory of your Son. Take what is worn in us, what is ragged in us, what is faded in us and give them new purpose for those who lack compassion, healing, and hope. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

The Scrap

The box of old material had been in my garage for months. It contained the remnants of old clothes, scraps of cloth from dresses and shirts, table cloths and curtains from people and rooms now long past. I had intended for months (or was it years?) to move them out of this storage to some greater purpose, meaning I simply wanted them gone. They were rags, or out of fashion, or even worse, my body had out grown them. So one day I set out to clean the garage and grabbed the box from its shelf intending to toss it in the car to haul it away. But there, peeking out from the top layers of old curtains, was a corner of a piece of cloth from my memory. It was a sleeve from one of my father’s old shirts. I had not seen it for many years and had forgotten it had been stored away. I pulled it out of the pile and rubbed it between my fingers as if I could wring my father’s presence out of it by kneading it hard enough. The memories of him washed over me for a time until I placed the shirt back in the box and gave the lot over to the quilters at my church to be used for some new purpose.

Christians often look back upon their lives as if they were a box of old scraps of cloth. Often they are torn, or worn out. Sometimes they bear the muddy marks of struggle or the bloody stains of loss. We clutch our pasts and rub the ‘fabric’ of them in our minds in hopes of wringing out the sins and mistakes. But they belong now to the past.

The quilters accepted my box of rags and memories with glee. For months the remnants disappeared into their sewing rooms and cutting boards and I forgot about them until one day when a picture appeared on my desk. It was of a young girl wearing a dress made of scraps of material from our quilters group. The girl was smiling, very proud of her new attire. As I gazed at the picture, I also began to smile as I recognized the pattern of cloth that could have come only from my father’s old shirt. The very thing I had thought was only a part of the past had been made very new and given new purpose by the hands of faithful people.

God has taken our ragged and worn out souls and retrieved them from the waste cans to repurpose them for a new day. Such is the power of faith in our God. Such is the reality of faith in our lives. Such is resurrection.

Companion Partner



Rev. David

Folkerts is the lead pastor of First Lutheran Church of Crystal, Minnesota.

Pastor Dave had hoped to travel to Nigeria to meet their partner congregation in Mubi last year; however, the trip was cancelled. He now hopes to travel there in 2014.

The Second Friday in Lent

14 March 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 27:24-31

“So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’”

Prayer

Holy God,

You who strengthen the weak in faith, help us so that we do not through our own fears and inattention be lulled away from the cross. There are many distractions and evils around us. Guide and protect us, we pray in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

Courage to the End

More than twenty one centuries ago, there was a pathetic procession outside the city of Palestine to the place of skull - Golgotha. Pathetic indeed for those who knew Jesus as the Preacher of Truth, salvation and the kingdom of God, but jubilant for the mockery soldiers, Sadducees, Pharisees and other enemies of the Truth, who were disturbed by the new preaching and doctrine that stood against the traditions of the Jews who now succeeded in their wicked plan to get rid of the new preacher. For that was *“man’s hour and the power of darkness”*(Luke 27:52-53). And that was the will of God too!

In weakness, fear and sorrow, Peter and 'the other disciple' (presumably, John the Apostle) followed and stood by Jesus during his trial (John 18:15).

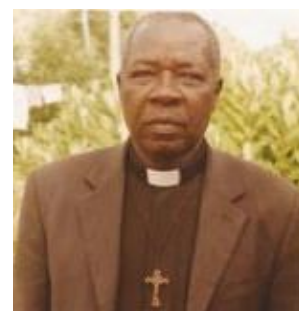
We must not be warming ourselves with the things of the world in the King's palace only to be intimidated and deny our master (Matthew 26:69-75). We must be courageous to reach the end like the four women and the beloved disciple (John 19:25-27).

Alas! In this worldwide Islamic 'man's hour and power of darkness' many Christians will give up!! Why? This is because they are entangled with the things of the world.

Let every true Christian clean his/her hands from the devil's game and repent to face the challenges of this end-time. There remain only a few steps to reach the destiny to drop the cross and receive the crown. Amen!

During the Lenten season our congregation visits the sick at their homes and hospitals telling them, “Jesus loves you; He died for you that you may be healed in body and spirit and have life eternal.

Companion Partner



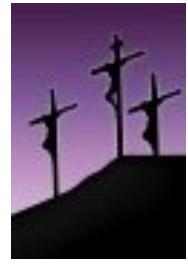
Rev. Ishaku M.

Pwapo is Pastor of LCCN No. 1 Mubi as well as the District Dean of the ShallHolma Diocese in Adama-wa State, Nigeria.

In 1996 LCCN Mubi became the companion partner of First Lutheran Church of Crystal in Minnesota. Since then, First Lutheran has traveled to Nigeria four times to meet their partner. LCCN Mubi hopes to receive them as visitors again in 2013.

The Second Saturday in Lent

15 March 2014



Scripture Text

Ephesians: 2:13

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Companions Bonded Together in Christ’s Love

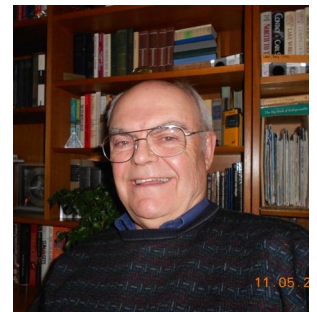
Our church has been richly blessed by our 19-year relationship with St. Catherine’s Lutheran Church of St. Petersburg, Russia. Change has been a central and constant theme in the lives of both of our congregations over these years. For St. Catherine’s.

- it has meant opening the church doors again and experiencing freedom of worship;
- regaining possession of the church building from the government;
- losing members to both age and emigration to the West;
- and continuing to struggle with financial challenges.

For us, we have been buffeted by an aging community and benefited from a more recent infusion of younger members amidst a struggling economy.

Through it all, our partnering is undergirded by an unchanging and eternal God, who comes to both congregations, secures the bonds between us with his love, and walks with us on our Lenten path. Jesus promises to never separate us from His love. This promise extends to all near and far. Both congregations realize that through Him, who gave himself for us, we are His children and related as brothers and sisters in Christ. Both congregations pray for each other during this Lenten walk and throughout the year.

Companion Partner



Gary Lehr has been a member of Calvary Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota for over 30 years. He has been involved in Calvary’s partnering with St. Catherine’s Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Russia since its inception in 1993.

Lehr’s background is in business, which included international assignments. He has visited St. Catherine’s four times during this relationship.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, walk with us today and this Lenten Season. Through your love strengthen the bonds of spiritual friendship and cooperation that we share with our partnering congregations. Amen.

The Second Sunday in Lent

16 March 2014



Scripture Text

Romans 4:18

“Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become ‘the father of many nations,’ according to what was said, ‘So numerous shall your descendants be.’”

Prayer

Dear Lord, Help us to remember your dark hours on the path to the Cross and your death and resurrection for all. Help us to never forget those who struggled to preserve the faith during our dark times and to know that our ultimate victory is in Christ Jesus. Amen.

From Darkness to Light and Hope

About 75% of Russian population call themselves Christian. I think it’s awful. “God exists”, - for them it’s so clear. Is it possible that they don’t see all things which contradict the faith, all terrible things and events in the world which literally cry: “There is no God, there should be no God”?

On the cross, Jesus cried: “My God! Why Thou left me?” The cross is the experience of being left by God. There are people who are desperate, who are exhausted, who can’t accept this world as the wonderful one, who think: “God is dead,” who can’t stand the lack of justice and peace on the earth. On the cross, Jesus became intimate to them all. He’s dead in order that they can get a hope in the middle of their suffering, in order that their unbelief became the true faith.

To struggle against God, to seek Him and not find Him, to feel him- or herself left by Him, to find no sense in faith... and after that look at the Cross... But most of the people don’t need it: they are already believers, what they confess so easily...

It shouldn’t be easy. Therefore, during the Lent we try to remember about the darkest time of Jesus life, about the darkest times in the life of our Church which suffered for so many years. And find a new hope and a new light for our future. The hope, which is not so easy. The hope, which weighs so much. The hope, which is given by the Cross.

Companion Partner



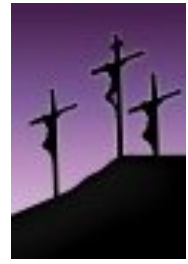
Rev. Anton

Tikhomirov is pastor of St. Catherine’s Evangelical Lutheran Church on Vasilevski Island in St. Petersburg, Russia.

He also serves as Rector of the Theological Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Russia located in Saratovka, a suburb southeast of St. Petersburg. Since September, his term as Rector was recently extended in the General Synod’s Assembly of the Russian Church. He has made several trips to the U.S. on behalf of his seminary duties and partnering activities.

The Second Monday in Lent

17 March 2014



Scripture Text

Philippians 2: 1-2

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."

Prayer

Gracious God, you have made the world wide and diverse. Help us who have so much to not only be aware of those who are suffering, struggling, who don't have enough, but to reach out to share. It is in the sharing that we learn that we are not so very different after all, and we go from helping to receiving more than we give. We do it all in Jesus' name, Amen.

Grateful to be Lutheran

I've been a Lutheran my whole life. I know the hymns and the liturgy by heart. Recently, I've had the privilege of traveling quite a bit as "the pastor." Every place that I've traveled, I've participated in or led worship. I've discovered how thankful I am for the Lutheran Church in the world. I've also heard from Salvadoran Lutherans and from Argentine Lutherans how grateful they are to be part of the Lutheran Church.

It's comforting to find Lutherans all over the world. I had shivers when, while standing next to a fellow congregant one Sunday morning in El Salvador, we sang a familiar hymn. While I was struggling with the words in Spanish, the English words were going through my head and for once I understood what I was saying in Spanish, and what was being sung.

We worship together as we worship in our own churches throughout the world. We stand in solidarity as the Lutheran Church, reading the same scripture, singing the same hymns, being cared for by the same God. We are bound together by this common bond - our trust in Jesus Christ, and our tradition in the Lutheran Church. We are never far from home.

Companion Partner



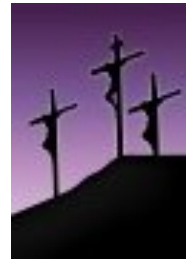
Rev. Carrie

Scheller (left) is Associate Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Long Lake, Minnesota. She is seated next to Rev. Kristie Hennig (right) of Family of Christ Lutheran Church in Chanhassen, Minnesota, leading a worship services at Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church in El Salvador. Both congregations have mission partners in El Salvador through the Seeds of Hope Program.

Trinity has traveled to El Salvador for the past two years. They have two trips planned in 2013 over spring break and again in the summer.

The Second Tuesday in Lent

18 March 2014



Scripture Text

Hosea 6:1-6

"...For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Conversion of Heart

Lent is a time to get in to us, think and reflect. But think about what? Rethinking our way of being Christians, about the call that God has made us and we have accepted. We are loving and loving our neighbor and others, as God loves us? Are we working to build an inclusive and participatory Church?

God calls us to a sincere conversion of heart. Our duty as Christians is to ensure that all have their place, which the marginalized by society are not also marginalized by us but teach by example to include them and claim them as human beings. We are called to be a healing community, that will help the needy to the helpless, to the needy, which is different from us. Many times our own human selfishness does not allow us to see beyond our own needs. Therefore, we need to continually rethink our attitudes, not only in the Church but especially in our daily life and ask ourselves, "Am I doing as Jesus would?"

Maybe once we see that our conversion was not sincere, and that we must come to God to ask for forgiveness for what we are not doing, God will help us, dispossessed of all arrogance and selfishness, ourselves completely in it, build on the basis of our differences and sing "...all are welcome... all are welcome in this place."

Prayer

God of all, we thank you that as we meet each other where we are, you are always there to guide our way. Thank you for the guidance of your Holy Spirit, that opens our hearts and minds, and sends us out of our comfort zones to be your hands and feet in the world. Amen.

Companion Partner

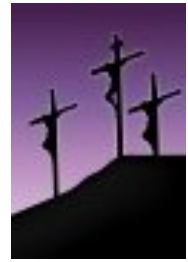


Rev. Fabian Kreischer is pastor of Congregation of San Pablo Lutheran Church in Buenos Aries, Argentina, the companion partner of Trinity Lutheran Church in Long Lake, Minnesota.

A group from Trinity traveled to Argentina in 2011. In September of 2012, Pastor Fabian was able to spend a week with Trinity in Long Lake. Trinity works with Lutheran Partners in Global Ministry to develop and nurture this partnership.

The Third Wednesday in Lent

19 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 9:23

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

What am I to do with this gift?

Hear these words spoken by Jesus in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Meditate on these words and the meaning they have for each one of us Christians.

To follow Jesus requires a total commitment to Him and His teachings. Jesus took His place on the Cross for us. He suffered, was humiliated, scorned and died for us. From the sacrifice He made, we have received the greatest gift...FORGIVENESS of our sins. He has offered us a new life.

The question we ask is, “What am I to do with this gift”? The answer may seem simple -- Follow Jesus. However, to follow Jesus requires a new way of living. Looking to Jesus as our mentor and model, we must take up our cross daily. Jesus is saying we, too, will experience scorn, be humiliated and suffer because of our identity with Him.

His last directive is to FOLLOW ME. As disciples of Jesus, He will give direction to our new life. He will direct where we go and what we do for Him. He will be there with us as we take up our cross and follow Him. We are not alone. We are not powerless, but empowered by the Holy Spirit.

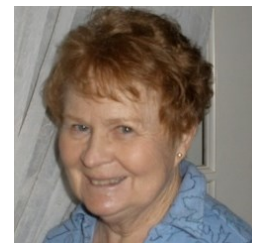
We will truly rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus remembering all that He has done for us and what we can do for Him.

Thanks Be To God. Amen.

Prayer

Thank you Lord Jesus for the sacrifice you made for me. I accept your generous free gift of forgiveness and new life. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is my desire to follow you. Amen

Companion Partner



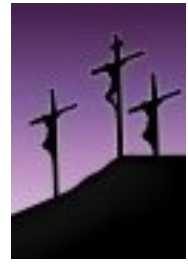
Catherine Martignacco is a member of Valley of Peace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota.

Valley of Peace entered into partnership with LCCN No. 1 Mayo-Gwoi, Jalingo in 2009 and have been looking forward to a trip to Jalingo to meet their new friends in person.

In the meantime, they have been working on a project entitled Books for Bronnum, to send theological textbooks donated from the USA directly to Bronnum Lutheran Seminary in Mbamba, Adamawa State-Nigeria. Catherine has been instrumental in leading this effort.

The Third Thursday in Lent

20 March 2014



Scripture Text

Hebrews 12:1-2

"...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."

Prayer

God of all grace, we stand amazed before the blood soaked cross where Christ paid our debt. In the midst of fights and feuds, we yearn for your peace. In your strength, give us grace to live for you, help us to understand and feel your power, especially when things go wrong. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Companionship with Christ

The cross is wisdom of God for dealing with the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of this life. By the cross, the power of self-life has been broken. On the cross, Christ cancelled all the written code, with its regulation, that were against us and stood opposed to us - he took it away, nailing it to the cross. By the cross, he disarmed the powers and principalities of the devil, made a public show of them, openly and triumphantly. It is essential for us as Christians who are regular companions of Christ to understand that Jesus brought this subject of carrying the cross to his followers when he was telling them the nature and kind of death he would face. He is unveiling the secret behind his victory over sin and the power of Satan. He is not addressing the issue of either placing the sign of the cross made out of wood or iron in our churches and homes, nor to print it on our T-shirts. But he is rather talking about his death and death on the cross as our source of power and victory over sin and Satan.

Therefore, as Christ's companions, we are in a race. He has set an example for us to follow as we are determined to worship him in truth and in spirit. There are no conditions, challenges and dangers associated with following Christ to the cross, yet we are expected to remain firm in the faith and finish well in this race, like our master, Jesus. We must look unto him, see how he ran his own race and then follow his example so that we do not become casualties on the way (Heb 12:2-3). The race involved a lot of sacrifices, including losing our life as Christ did.

In addition to that, we are to become like Christ in self-denial, obedience, and trust. God is not interested in half-hearted commitment, partial obedience and left-over trust. He desires our full devotion, not little bits of our lives. Therefore, total sacrifice is not just the best way to live our lives, but is the only way to live as regular companions of Christ who are always ready to follow him to the cross whenever there are difficult situations, troubles and most annoying provocations. In the midst of all of these, we are able to say, "Lord, if these problems, pains, sickness and circumstances that are passing through are needed to fulfill your purpose and glory in my life or in other people lives, please don't take them away."

Companionship with Christ involves sharing all our life experiences with him. He wants to be included in every activity, every conversation, every problem and every thought we carry on (Col 3:17). Friends, we are yet to feel your impact in respect to our partnership and with you and we are looking forward to seeing that happen, but as faithful companions of Christ, we should not by any way allow our bitter experiences to stand as a barrier in terms of following Christ to the cross. We are to remain firm, even when things seem to go contrary to our expectations and desires. Until we are mature enough to understand that everything that comes to us, God allowed it for a purpose.

Companion Partner



Kinison Alfred is a member of LCCN No. 1 Mayo-Gwoi in the state of Jalingo, Nigeria. His congregation has been a partner with Valley of Peace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota since 2009.

The two congregations have been corresponding through email and are anxious to meet one another in person. By God's grace, they hope to welcome friends from Valley of Peace in 2013.

The Third Friday in Lent

21 March 2014



Scripture Text

John 1:4-5

“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Prayer

Gracious God,
As we take account of our lives during Lent, help us to embrace the pain and suffering in our communities and, at the same time, reflect your Light, which cannot be contained.” Amen.

Light Shines in the Darkness

Lent’s heaviness was all around us in the spring of 2010 when our congregation’s delegation visited El Salvador. Survivors told us stories of the 75,000 “desaparecidos”

(disappeared ones) from El Salvador’s decade-long civil war. We visited the martyred Monsignor Romero’s crypt and a former revolutionary camp. In the sleepy town of El Mozote, where all but one person were massacred in 1981, we were introduced to one of many nightmares of those years.

The beautiful, light-filled Jesuits Chapel at the University of Central America, memorialized another of the nightmares. There, the Stations of the Cross, a familiar Lenten ritual from my youth, are portrayed as graphic sketches of the bodies of six Jesuit priests and two women who were tortured and murdered on campus in 1989.

Everywhere we turned were stunning reminders of the darkness of pain, suffering, violence, injustice, untruths and dire conditions. Yet, I came away changed by light and hope that the people could not contain. I think of visiting Casa de Esperanza (House of Hope) in San Salvador. As we walked through the jammed dining area of the day center, homeless men greeted us, smiled warmly at us, and sang along to a Beatles song on the guitar while awaiting that day’s meal. In El Mozote, next to the memorial of a massacre of children, we got to know some young children who were curious about visitors.

Salvadoran Lutherans, in particular, are committed to walking with the poor and pressing for truth and justice while proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their deep faith keeps their focus on the Light that the darkness has not overcome.

Companion Partner



Eileen Supple is a long-time member of Edina Community Lutheran Church (ECLC) and was part of the congregation's delegation to El Salvador in spring 2010 to identify potential partners. ECLC is now in companionship with Iglesia de Cristo de Paz in Galilea and another delegation visited in June 2012. At our 2012 Advent Fair, all ages were invited to draw what peace means to them. Then each person's photo was snapped and the art and photo will be sent to our partners at Cristo de Paz.

The Third Saturday in Lent

22 March 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 28:8-10

“So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples...Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’”

A Light of Hope and Strength

With having experienced so much together for three years, Jesus, his disciples, and the women who followed him in his ministry, it would seem, immediately at his crucifixion and burial, that now there is no cross, now there is no hope, that there only is defeat, profound emptiness, loss, grief, failure, no courage or strength. And others believed the followers of Jesus to be beaten and defeated because they are found dispersed, hidden with fear and dread because of what happened to Jesus. **However, at the break of dawn of that far off day, is born a light of hope and strength.**

When the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, visit the tomb of their Lord, they receive the wonderful news. Jesus appears to them, they converse, he cheers them, and then he sends them to take the News to the disciples that soon he will be reunited with them so that he can bring them together to inspire and cheer them, to accompany them and strengthen them in their faith. The women run carrying with them the good news, surprising the disciples.

So it is that God surprises us in Christian life. Fraternal relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ are born and grow that which promotes solidarity and mutual love. It is when we realize that even if there is pain, suffering, vulnerability, it is in that precise moment, that Jesus is at our side and tells us, “Don’t be afraid.” He comforts us because the crucifixión that occurred now has been converted to victory is his resurrection. Our lives are transformed, being strengthened in commitment to build with justice and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Dear God, help us to be like the women at Jesus’ tomb. Help us to run sharing the Good News with our communities, knowing that God is walking with us always.

Companion Partner



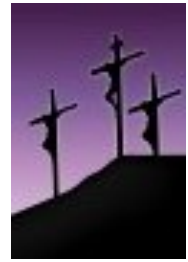
Rev. Concepción Marina Angel Vanegas is

Pastor of Cristo de Paz and Cristo El Libertador Lutheran Churches of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador.

Pastor Concepción serves two congregations deeply focused on meeting the spiritual and physical needs of their surrounding communities in El Salvador. She is also heavily involved in organizing health ministries throughout the Lutheran Church in El Salvador. Cristo de Paz in Galilea, El Salvador and Edina Community Lutheran Church began a companionship in 2011.

The Third Sunday in Lent

23 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 18:41

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Children of God

Blind, poor, ignored and disregarded as the crowds pass him by, Bartimeaus calls out for Jesus, and the people tell him to be silent. But Bartimeaus knows who Jesus is: “Son of David,” he calls Jesus, the promised Messiah, Savior. And so Bartimeaus also knows who he himself is, because he believes the covenant promise. And Jesus responds accordingly: “What do you want me to do for you?”

It is the same for us. We know who we are -- children of God in our baptism. And when we are children of God -- even when difficulties interrupt our lives -- we know God promises never to leave us. When we are children of God -- even when we may wonder about our worth -- we know we are supremely valued by God. When we are children of God -- even when we worry about what tomorrow will bring -- life is rich and eternity is certain. When we are children of God -- even when we feel alone -- we know God loves us and will never ignore us:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

* * * * *

About our partnership in Ethiopia: Good Shepherd initially supported the Victimized Orphan Children Rehabilitation Program in the Central Synod, Nekemte, through ELCA Global Mission; the Yubdo Project, an agricultural program in the BirBirDilla Synod, Aira, through the Minneapolis Area Synod; and the REAL Girls Scholarship Program, a local Minneapolis-based nonprofit. The congregation now has a companion congregation relationship with Lalo Aira Congregation as well as continuing relationships with the EECMY’s Aira Hospital and Onesimus Nesib Seminary, all in Aira, Ethiopia.

Companion Partner



Karen Walhof, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Minneapolis, has been involved with their global companions in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) since 2005. Groups from Good Shepherd have traveled to Ethiopia in 2006, 2007, and 2011.

Members of the congregation continue to support scholarships for girls in several locations through the REAL organization. In addition, Good Shepherd and Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church, Minneapolis, continue an ongoing ministry partnership.

Prayer

Loving God,
give us boldness
to call to you and
trust that you
always hear, be-
cause we are
your children.
Amen.

The Third Monday in Lent

24 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 18:42

“Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; our faith has saved you.”

Faith in the Heart of Lent

“As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people when they saw it, praised God.

Luke 18:35-43

Jesus was walking toward Jericho. The poor blind man who was sitting by the wayside, begging, heard that people were walking and passing by him. He was not only blind, but he was also poor man economically -- but rich spiritually. He asked what was going on. People told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, and he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me”.

“Son of David” is a title for the Messiah. Baritmaeus was not blind spiritually. His physical blindness did not hinder him to see the Son of God, the healer and savior of the world. He was sitting at the spots designated for the beggars on the wayside which took people to the Temple. He kept yelling for Jesus until he disturbed everyone around him. It was the crying of prayers; but it worked, and Jesus called him forward, restored his sight, and declared that his faith had healed him. Praise the Lord!

In Evangelical churches, Lent is the season when Christians remember the work of Jesus, his suffering, crucifixion and death. Jesus comes to the life of every Christian to heal and save. When Jesus comes to pass by us, we need to cry out to him like Baritmaeus; we need to follow Jesus like this blind man. He had faith and this faith healed him. The power of Jesus to save and heal is an ongoing source of hope, even as Jesus’ willingness gives renewed meaning to any relationship with him. Do we have such a faith to receive healing from Christ, the Messiah, for our sins and inequities?

Companion Partner



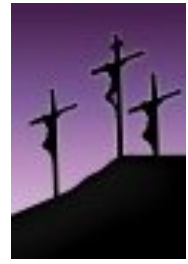
Rev. Tadese Disasa, a pastor of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), is president of Onesimus Nesib Seminary, a seminary of the EECMY located in Aira, Ethiopia. The seminary trains about 100 students each year to be pastors and evangelists. They offer both three-year certificate programs and four-year diploma programs. Recently they began an evening program designed especially for women entering congregational leadership positions.

Prayer

We thank you Lord, for visiting us with your gracious word, full healing and saving power which gave sight to the blind man. Open our eyes to see and understand the truth of your trials, crucifixion and death at this Lent season as we remember your suffering. In your Holy Name we pray to you. Amen.

The Third Tuesday in Lent

25 March 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 20:20-28

“...It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Prayer

Lord, you love us as much as any parent can love, and still we want more. We want what we want and that too often puts us at odds with what you will for us. Help us to understand that your ways are not ours and your ways are not the world's ways. Equip and enable us to serve others, so that we might be a blessing to you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Original Sin

What a heavy concept! It is always difficult to tell parents holding that sweet, innocent little baby who simply coos and smiles and eats and sleeps that they are holding a sinner! How can that be?

Yet we know that if that innocent little baby was left to its own devices; there would be trouble. Parents, good parents, raise a child with love and discipline, teaching her to share, teaching him to respect other people. And it is the same in our relationship with God. Left to our own devices, we would neither believe in God nor come to God. We would believe in ourselves! We would make “me” the center of our lives and leave no room for a creator God. So God instituted baptism as new birth – a new beginning. We are reborn children of God just as we are born first children of our parents. And in that baptismal relationship we grow to know God as our creator and Jesus as our redeemer. We grow to know the saving grace of Jesus who came to serve rather than be served.

Of course the disciples should certainly have known this and understood it. But sometimes we all need to be reminded. Sometimes parents work too hard to make sure their children get the best position on the team, first chair in the band, special attention from the teacher. Sometimes even parents have to relearn the example of our baptismal promise; “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave.” We are the apple of our Creator's eye, the beloved children of the Heavenly Parent. That should be enough for us. That should be enough to remind us that no matter what our state in life, we have been redeemed by the one who “gave his life a ransom for many”. Humility and thankfulness are the words we use to describe this baptismal relationship. The humility of our Savior and our thankfulness for such a gift as this.

Companion Partner

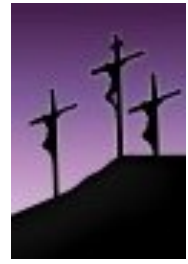


Rev. Craig Shirley is lead pastor of University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 2010 the church entered into a companion partnership with LCCN St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Jos, Nigeria (Plateau State). Since then, ULCH has hosted Rev. Amson Hamman twice on his visits to the US as well as his family.. ULCH hopes to visit Nigeria in 2014 for their first visit.

The Fourth Wednesday in Lent

26 March 2014



Ambition of James and John

Scripture Text

Matthew 20:22

“But Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking...’”

“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?’ They said to him, ‘We are able.’ He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.’ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”

This text captures sincerely of what every good mother would wish for her children. Here we see the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, asking Jesus for her two sons to sit, each on the right and left hands of Jesus. Probably her request is borne out of the consciousness of a family relationship with Mary, the mother of Jesus. She wanted a great position for her sons because they were companions of Jesus; having been called by Christ himself to be his disciples. Jesus, understanding that his companions must be people who will follow him to the cross, knew that the way is not an easy one; it has a price that must be paid.

Jesus said to her in verse 22 that she didn’t know what she was asking for because that kind of greatness, sitting at the right or left hand, comes with drinking from his cup of obedience, submission, self-denial, humiliation, sacrifice and suffering even unto death.

In this lent, let us call our hearts to the place of sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel; willful submission and obedience to God, as we pick up our Cross daily as companions of Christ. In this only will we be paying the price for being companions of Christ up to the cross.

Prayer

Holy God,
Be with us daily,
helping us to pick
up our cross and
carry it into our
places of work and
living as compan-
ions to your son,
Jesus Christ. For-
give us when we ask
things that we do
not know enough
about. May we re-
ceive your answers
as ones who follow
in Christ’s footsteps.
Amen.

Companion Partner



Samuel Emmanuel Nanle

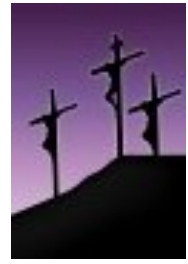
is a Catechist and Chairman of the Elders Board of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Jos, Plateau State—Nigeria.

St. Peter’s is located on the LCCN Dogon Dutse Guest House compound and is the partner congregation of University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

He is involved in Ecumenism and is a member of the National Directorate of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on national issues and social welfare.

The Fourth Thursday in Lent

27 March 2014



Scripture Text

**1 Corinthians
12:26**

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it”

Suffering or Celebration

I should be jet-lagged. I should be exhausted but excited, filled to capacity with new stories that need to be shared, new words on my tongue that need speaking, new songs in my heart that need singing. I should be returning from Nigeria--along with a group of representatives from our Minneapolis Area Synod who were schedule to make the journey in November of this year so as to spend time with our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.

I should be returning from Nigeria, but the violence in Nigeria prohibited our travels. There is much suffering in Nigeria during these days, and this suffering is felt in our hearts, too.

The Advent of the Christ Child brings the Word of God into human flesh. We call this incredible act of God the “Incarnation.” In the bones and blood and body of Jesus, God sends to us a message about our own bodies: we are worth redeeming, we are worth saving, we are loved and desired by God. The coming of Christ testifies to this truth. Our human condition matters to God--so much so that God sent his only Son to bring about the salvation of humanity.

What do we do, then, when we are confronted with the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria? We all may answer this question differently, but none of us can remain indifferent. “If one member suffers, all suffer,” Paul writes, and “if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” Whether in suffering or celebration, let our relationships with each other through Christ draw us more deeply into the mystery of God and into the body of believers that comprises Christ’s Church.

Companion Partner



Rev. Travis

Gerjets in associate pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Waconia, Minnesota.

Faith Lutheran entered into partnership with LCCN No. 1 Guyuk in 2007 and a group of four traveled to Nigeria in 2008 to meet them for the first time.

They look forward to traveling to Nigeria in 2014 to meet them again as they deepen their friendship.

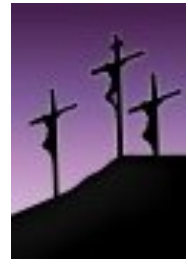
Prayer

God, help me to see You in everyone, this day and each day.

Amen.

The Fourth Friday in Lent

28 March 2014



Scripture Text

2 Kings 6:1-7

“...Then the man of God said, ‘Where did it fall?’ ‘When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. He said, ‘Pick it up.’ So he reached out his hand and took it..”

Get God Involved

The benefit of involving God in whatever we do cannot be over emphasized. He knows us, he knows our goals and dreams; he knows the way to our destiny. So if we get him involved in our plans, then we are on a sure way to success.

Nobody wants to be stagnant; we all crave for progress in our endeavors. This was the mindset of the sons of the prophets in our text. They had a plan to find a better place than the limited place they lived. But they also knew the importance of getting their master involved in the plan, so they tabled the matter to him. Elisha was pleased with their idea of expansion and even went with them as they request,

Verse 5 said that as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water, and it was a borrowed one. But thank God, the man of God was with them. At the cry of the servant, Elisha miraculously made the axe head to float. The servant took it and his joy was complete.

This teaches us that if we have God as our companion, we shall have no regret. Instead he will restore to us what the cankerworms and the caterpillars have eaten over the years. But if we ignore him, we shall face unavoidable challenges and storms of life, then we would be left helpless and vulnerable. So, let’s commit to God whatever we do.

Proverbs 16:3

Prayer

Heavenly father help us not to be in a hurry with our lives, teach us to consult you at each step in our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.

Companion Partner



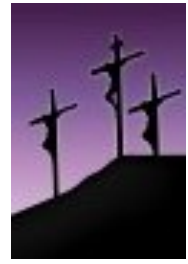
Ernest W.

Calvin is an Elder of LCCN No. 1 Guyuk in the State of Adamawa, Nigeria. He serves on the Council as the Secretary of the Congregation.

LCCN Guyuk looks forward to a second visit from their partner congregation, Faith Lutheran Church in Waconia, in 2013.

The Fourth Saturday in Lent

29 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 23:34

*Jesus said,
“Father,
forgive these people,
because they don’t know what they are doing.”*

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for leading us halfway around the world and more as we seek to partner in mission with your great and diverse family. Help us to reflect on the vast differences we embody as your people while keeping us steadfast in our focus on our common foundation, our faith and trust in you. Draw us ever nearer to you and each other through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

By Kathleen Schwartz

The Village of Hope is located on the Great North Road in Zambia, Africa. The Village is home to 42 orphans and vulnerable children. The School of Hope educates 175 children. Each day our children learn from the Bible and on Sundays we worship together, being led in worship by teams made up of the children from the Village.

In many ways children around the world are the same. So when children from the Village went to participate in African Children’s Day at a neighboring school, I warned them that sometimes children will make fun of others. Sure enough, it happened. Some girls started making fun of our girls.

Our children know their Bible and the stories and the directions that the Bible gives for disciples. In response to the unkind words from the girls from another school, one of our students, Mary B., went over to them. She said, “I forgive you. You don’t know what you are doing.”

Words said by Jesus from the cross can have meaning for us, even as His life and death empower us to live lives of caring, forgiveness and service. His words of forgiveness spoken as he was dying inspired a young African girl from the bush to respond with love and forgiveness.

In this time of Lent when we meditate on the sacrifice and love of God, are we willing to live lives of sacrifice and love for others?

In Zambia, one tenth of the population are orphans, the highest number per capita of any country in the world. From young orphans who have lost parents can come words of forgiveness and lives lived for the Kingdom.

Companion Partner

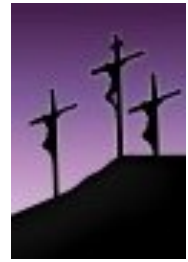


Rev. Luke Schmidt is associate pastor of Zion Lutheran in Buffalo, Minnesota. They have connected with All Kids Can Learn International and Villages of Hope in Zambia over the last few years through the sister, Minda (Zion member), of the director, Kathleen Schwartz. In 2011, we sent a couple from church, a large animal veterinarian and a landscape designer, to set up a dairy cattle operation.

In the summer of 2012, a dozen teachers and school administrators from the community traveled to Zambia and hosted a teaching forum for over 100 area teachers. We look forward to who God will send next!

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

30 March 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 23:44-24:9

“They left the tomb and broke the news.”

We Must Follow Jesus, No Matter the Roughness of the Road

The women had stood together, watched, holding one another’s hands, weeping. They kept vigil. They saw the pain, saw the dying, and saw him placed in the tomb. Then they did what women do. They went home and got busy, preparing spices, one more way to show their love of Jesus. Above all they broke the news the next morning.

As a member of Minneapolis Area Synod Women of the ELCA I am in a companionship relationship with The Women’s Fellowship of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. I was blessed to visit Nigeria in 2008 and met many, many of my African sisters.

These Nigerian women set a most wonderful example of “breaking the news”. They keep on telling, often walking to remote villages to share this good news. We sang a song together: ***We must go with Jesus anywhere. No matter the roughness of the road. We must go! We must go!***

Their witness has revitalized my relationship with God. Now we stand and witness together, holding one another’s hands, sisters in faith, devoted to our resurrected Savior.

Prayer

Jesus, help us to keep vigil with you this Lenten season as we follow you to the cross. We praise you for your sacrifice on our behalf. Make us bold in telling the Good News. Amen.

Companion Partner



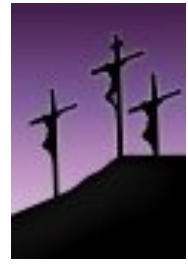
Susan Schnickel is a member of St. Peder’s Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 2006, The Minneapolis Area Synod Women of the ELCA entered into a companion partnership with the Women’s Fellowship of the LCCN. Carol Bell and Margaret Sorensen traveled to Nigeria in 2006 followed by Sue Schnickel and Jan Dubats in 2008.

Thanks to their efforts, the ELCA Deaconess Community is also partnering with the Women’s Fellowship and has graciously provided a three-year grant to furnish the teaching centers for the women in Nigeria.

The Fourth Monday in Lent

31 March 2014



Scripture Text

John 13:18

“He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.”

Have you ever felt betrayed by those you trusted?

When Jesus said the above words, He was on His way to Jerusalem and He knew all that was going to happen to Him there. He also knew that one of His closest friends, one of His disciples, was going to be the one to betray Him into the hands of those who would crucify Him, and He knew that the remaining 11 disciples all would run away and turn their backs on Him.

But He entrusted Himself into the hands of His Heavenly Father who also had to leave Him for a while when He was hanging on the cross. And so Jesus was totally abandoned. Compelled by His love for us, He endured suffering and pain in order to win salvation and eternal life for you and for me.

Have you ever felt betrayed by those you trusted? Have you felt the pain when someone you loved turned his/her back on you and even deceived you? Jesus experienced betrayal. Whatever you and I may go through, He understands us fully and He is there stretching His hands towards us saying, *“Come to me.....”*(Matthew 11:28).

In Nigeria, we do not necessarily have special Lenten practices or disciplines we follow, since we see Lent as a time of fasting and meditation on the last days of Jesus here on earth, and his suffering and death on the cross. Lent is a time that deepens our communion with Him as we wonder and marvel over his great love to mankind that brought Him from heaven to earth to suffer and die for us.

Companion Partner



Mrs. Mary Solomon

Mary Solomon currently serves as President of the Women’s Fellowship group of the LCCN.

The LCCN is comprised of over 2,500 congregations and each congregation has an active and vibrant Women’s Fellowship group.

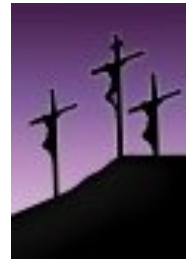
On our visits to Nigeria, we are treated to their generous and kind hospitality as well as much singing and dancing. Their work in the rural areas bringing the Good News of Jesus to the people along with food, Bibles, and Jesus’ love is a true inspiration to us all!

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, that you took my load of sin, and nailed it to the cross of Calvary. In you I am free. HALLELUJAH!

The Fourth Tuesday in Lent

01 April 2014



Scripture Text

John 19:16-22

“Then he handed him over to them to be crucified... Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’”

Do Not Be Discouraged!

Surprisingly, Pilate just made a statement “...the King of the Jews.” The Word “the,” according to Pilates’ statement, is a certainty an agreement, a force of nature that cannot be changed or reversed (protecting the kingship of Jesus Christ). The statement was read by many passers by because it was written in the three main languages of the time – Aramaic, Latin and Greek (John 19:19-20). The chief priest protested that the statement should be changed but how can such a statement be changed when it was made by one of the most powerful forces of nature, Pilate! Thus, he said, “What I have written is written.”

In spite of Pilates’ failure to enforce justice in the handling of Jesus’ case and the complaints of the Jews, his inscription on Jesus’ cross was a significant proclamation of who Jesus really was. Whoever might have accompanied Jesus to the cross must have been astonished by the noticed “The King of the Jews.” This statement may have posted a doubt in their minds about what the authorities said concerning Jesus Christ. No doubt, many people have repented. It was just a simple statement that changed history. This clearly demonstrates the love of God that he can use anybody whatsoever, whosoever, wherever to stand for you in any situation, to give a helping hand. Pilate was not a believer, yet God used him. He may have repented anyway after all, who knows God’s ways?

It is remarkable that in the midst of all his suffering, Jesus was still concerned about his mother. He committed her to the care of the apostle John who was with Jesus even at this time. The outcome of his pain was glorious. Whoever accompanies Jesus to the cross should never be discouraged. The outcome of your sacrifice will be glorious. Clearly, pain and God’s providence are not contradictory. Jesus’ suffering, despite his having done no wrong, became the most glorious provision to ALL humankind – a fitting sacrifice for the sins of all people of all generations.

Prayer

Gracious God,
Your son, Jesus,
brought to the
world the true
meaning of King-
ship and authority.
We give you our
thanks for such a
gift that came to all
people though his
suffering, the gift
of redemption for
people of all gener-
ations. Inspire us
again through this
wondrous gift.
Amen.

Companion Partner



Naomi Gisilanbe is a member of the LCCN Women’s Fellowship and is an author and writer. As she shares, “The ideas exchanged with the ELCA companion synods has helped the Church to strategize ways of empowering women in the LCCN. For example, many women’s schools have been opened at Dioceses’ headquarters to give opportunity to those who could not read or write. The impact that education can have on the lives of women, the church and in turn the nation is beyond description or explanation. Education is the main defense against the terrible destruction caused by AIDS, poverty and a host of other concerns. The companion partnership has enriched the lives of LCCN women beyond our expectations.

The Fifth Wednesday in Lent

02 April 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 26:39

“Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”

If It Is Possible

Visitors to Jerusalem today go to Gethsemane where Jesus spoke these words, see olive trees and are told theoretically that they could be the same tree roots Jesus lingered near during this prayer. The atmosphere of an olive grove, its soil and unique smells, and the rustling of leaves summons the beauty and value of creation.

Captivating to me are the words “if it is possible” which reveal the human dimension of Jesus. He wasn’t rushing off to the cross as an ecstatic martyr, but appreciated and valued physical life and ministry. Honoring this, he sought a path that might allow for both his mission and physical life to be preserved.

Jesus also values our physical livelihood and desires our healing and vitality. It’s partly why, as his followers, we don’t abandon the world’s needs, but pray for opportunities to invest ourselves further in bringing hope and healing to others.

And yet, “not as I will” functions as a hard reset button. It places all of our own agendas and hopes in perspective, even those we presume God must value. It causes us to decipher which dreams are ours, and which are God’s and place God’s present desires and mission above all else.

Prayer

Lord, help us to discern in this new season not where you called us to go yesterday, but the path you’re asking us to take today. Amen.

Companion Partner



Rev. Jon Pederson

has served Cambridge Lutheran Church since 2006 and previously served congregations in Mequon, and Muskego, Wisconsin. He and his wife Maria, pastor at Our Saviour’s, East Bethel, have two children.

In 2006, a group from Cambridge Lutheran attended a conference where they learned about the AIDS pandemic in Africa. Moved to do something, they prayed for an opportunity for a personal connection and way to make an impact. One member, it turns out, was already scheduled to travel with a synod delegation to Nigeria and make a stop at an AIDS clinic in Jos, Nigeria... Mashiah Foundation. Prayer answered. Three members from Cambridge have visited Jos and Cambridge has hosted Mary Beth and Bayo Oyebade on a number of occasions since then.

The Fifth Thursday in Lent

03 April 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 26:39

“And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want.’”

What does it mean to pray to God?

God’s will. The will of God. We talk about it. It rolls off our tongues, but have we ever really wrestled with it in our lives?

As humans, we are so used to planning our days, our months, our years. We make our plans and then ask God to bless *our* plans. That’s actually backwards, isn’t it?

How joyful I am when I discover that an idea has come from God. I never would have thought of it myself. In fact, if I would have done it my way, it would have been disastrous.

I have learned to pray that the Holy Spirit would give me ideas; I have realized my own finite ways of thinking are so limited. It makes sense that an omniscient God would have better ideas than a mere human.

Even Christ, fully God and fully human, faced this dilemma. Yet, he surrendered to the will of God. During this Lenten season, I pray that we will reflect on this verse, on this idea, and struggle through it on a personal level. What does it mean to pray to God, “Yet not as I will, but as you will?” It is a question that requires much contemplation.

Prayer

Gracious and giving God,

How often do we forget to listen to the ideas and plans you have for us to share in our lives and in the world? We ask you to help us to be open beyond our limited ways of thinking and listen and look for “your will” in our lives. May Jesus be our model and guide! Amen.

Companion Partner



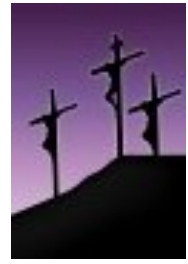
Mary Beth Oyejade

Mashiah Foundation is a multi-faceted Christian ministry among people living with HIV/AIDS in Jos, Nigeria that owes its origins in 1999 to the work of ELCA missionary Mary Beth Oyejade and her husband, Rev. Bayo Oyejade.

Recognized for its significant ministry by the LCCN, Mashiah has important ties with many ELCA congregations and members, and continues to receive support and endorsement from ELCA Global Mission. Their MAS partner is Cambridge Lutheran Church in Cambridge, Minnesota.

The Fifth Friday in Lent

04 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 8:29

“He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’”

Who is Jesus?

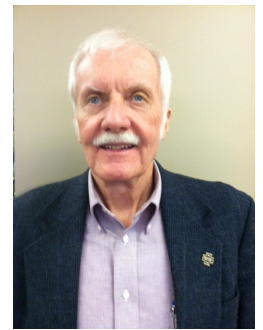
Who Is Jesus? When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.” However that didn’t answer the question, “What does it mean to be the Messiah?”

The answer: “Then [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Peter, rebuked Jesus. But then Jesus rebuked Peter with these words, “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things.”

Although I know well the story of Jesus death, I often wish it would end differently, that Jesus wouldn’t suffer and die. I find that I set my mind on human things, not divine things. Do you sometimes feel that you want Jesus to escape the injustices and the suffering? Although we might feel like we want a different ending, we know that indeed Jesus was carrying out his mission as Messiah - bringing life to us. He died that we might live.

This Lenten season we grow in our relationship to Jesus as we join Christians throughout the world in following Jesus to the cross, knowing that Jesus fulfilled his mission by dying and being raised to life.

Companion Partner



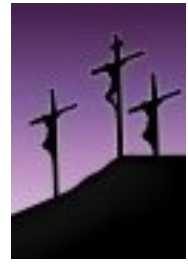
Jim Hougen is a retired pastor. He is a graduate of Luther Seminary. His first call was as missionary to Brazil for 14 years. He is now chair of the Global Missions Team at St Philip’s Lutheran Church, Fridley, Minnesota and a member of the Minneapolis Area Synod Global Companion Table. He visited St Philip’s Companion Congregation in Bille, Nigeria in 2008.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you with our words, worship and actions for the great gift of life you give us by fulfilling your mission as the Messiah, giving up your life for us. Amen.

The Fifth Friday in Lent

04 April 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 27:55

“Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.”

Passover and Lent

When Jesus’ teaching was in variant with the tradition and beliefs of the Jews, though Jesus revered the law as the commandment of God, both the Jews and the Roman rulers decided to put him to death. Many attended to witness his death, e.g. women from Galilee.

They followed Jesus from Galilee out of the desire to have him preach. They decided not to forsake him now. Our former services and suffering for Christ should be an argument with us faithfully to preserve to the end as Paul pointed out in 1 Peter 4:12-19.

During the crucifixion these women suffered in their feelings.

PASSOVER PERIOD: During Passover, Israel celebrates how they were saved when the angel of the Lord passed over their houses as the result of lamb’s blood that identified the houses of God’s people from the Egyptians houses:[Genesis 12:13]

Lent before Easter reminds us of Jesus, our Passover lamb, and of God’s promise that through Jesus we have ever lasting life.

DURING LENT-Christians give up some type of food or activity they enjoy in memory of Christ’s suffering. Religious fasting is of use in our ministry to both, as a sign of our humiliation and a means of our notification.

Daniel involved himself in prayer and fasting and God commended and communicated with him (Daniel 10:1-12)

Prayer and fasting brings us nearer to the creator (Acts 13:1-4)

So my congregation and I can organize a set time to instruct fellow Christians during prayer and fasting.

Companion Partner



Wycliffe R. Dah is a member of LCCN Bille. The Bille congregation has had a Companion Congregation relationship with St Philip’s Lutheran Church of Fridley since 2006. Projects that these congregations share are evangelism in a remote village, Nazareth Nursery School and scholarships for secondary students.

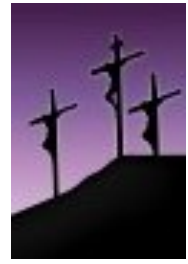
Prayer

Holy God,

Your ancient promise for a new Passover Lamb came true in the life and death of Jesus. During this Lenten time, encourage us to take on for ourselves an act that reminds us again of Christ’s suffering for our own sakes. We pray that we may be strengthened in our devotion to you in these days. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The Fifth Saturday in Lent

05 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 8:34

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

Prayer

Blessed Father, we give you thanks for your never ending love for us. We thank you for this time of contemplation. It is so hard to comprehend the depth of your love for us by giving your only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the sacrificial lamb to save us from our sins and allows us to spend eternity with You in Heaven. Please continue to show your people the way to You. In Jesus’ most holy name we pray. Amen

A Time for Thanksgiving

Lent is a difficult period of time. It is filled with many emotions that are difficult to think about and face. Have we ever wondered what it would be like in this world if Lent never happened, where would we be in relationship with others and God?

At St. Philip’s, Lent is demonstrated by Lenten plays, sermons and songs. We learn about sacrifice and what it truly means to follow Jesus and how this can enrich our relationships with one another and ultimately with God. We learn what it is to take up our cross and walk the path with Jesus, suffering with Jesus on the cross and the awe and wonder of Easter Sunday when Jesus beats death down and is resurrected. We learn how much God loves us and the sacrifice God made to show us that, so that we can have eternity with God in Heaven. What greater love is there than this?

Lent...time for reflection and repentance, but also a time for thanksgiving for all the blessings God has given us. Praise be to God!

Companion Partner

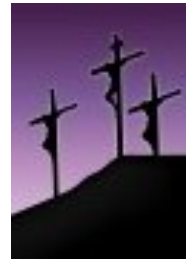


Linda LaFond has been a member of St. Philip’s Lutheran Church in Fridley, Minnesota since 1983 with her husband, Roger, and three children. They have nine wonderful grandchildren.

Linda is a member of the Global Missions Ministry Team and was thrilled when she learned that Bille was going to be their companion congregation. She enjoys the communications between our congregations and hearing the wonderful stories of our members who travel to Bille to meet the people there.

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

06 April 2014



Proclaiming to All

As an American Christian, I confess this verse makes me uncomfortable for the ways in which it has been used to justify forcing people to convert to Christianity. Many native peoples have been harmed by the actions of those seeking to convert them. Often the gospel has been so intertwined with western culture that it's been hard to tell where one left off and the other began, resulting in the frequent and sometimes violent rejection of native clothing, language and culture. And, before we "go into all the world," we need to do our homework so that we do not act like the group of zealous missionaries who roared into Palestine ready to convert everyone living there. They were oblivious to the fact that many Palestinians have roots in Christianity reaching back to the time of Jesus.

Still, Jesus commanded his disciples to "proclaim the good news to the whole creation." How might we do that? Perhaps we should dig deeper into what Jesus meant. After Jesus' baptism in the first chapter of Mark, the writer uses the same phrase to say that Jesus "proclaimed the good news of God." He did this with his words and actions. We see Jesus greeting outcasts like the Samaritan woman, healing those considered unclean, eating with despised tax collectors, challenging the authorities and standing up for those who'd been written off by the powerful. Mark says that the people were "all amazed." He adds that "news about [Jesus] spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee." (Mark 1:28) This kind of behavior stirred things up, breaking down the status quo and getting everyone talking. This was a new way of thinking which crossed societal and cultural norms. As Christians living 2,000 years later, it is easy to take these stories for granted. If we do, we lose the excitement of what Jesus was doing!

Jesus brings radical good news, not only to those who lived 2000 years ago, but to those of us living today. Like the woman in Jesus' parable who swept her home in search of one missing coin and then called her friends and neighbors to rejoice when it had been found, we must share our good news in that same spirit. The woman wasn't trying to convert anyone; she was genuinely sharing her good news because it held more joy than she could contain.

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, we are directed to share our joy and excitement with others, but we are not responsible for converting them to our way of thinking. We can trust that God already knows and loves them. It is wise to wear the spirit of humility while we honor the one in whom we believe, knowing that we don't have all the answers. In the meantime, we can also let our actions proclaim the gospel, just as Jesus did. As St. Francis said, *It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.*"

Scripture Text

Mark 16:15

"And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.'"

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to feel anew the excitement of a gospel which seeks to break down invisible walls isolating us from others and to build bridges instead. Our world yearns for joyful news; help us to share our joy in ways that bring hope and comfort to all your creation. Amen.

Companion Partner

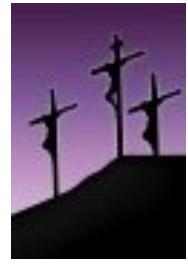


Gaye Guyton has been a member of Mount Calvary Lutheran in Excelsior, MN for almost 25 years.

She has been involved with the church's partnership with Nigeria since 1992, traveling there in 1996. Joshua Abu, his wife Larai and their sons were Gaye's host family in Jimeta, and despite the challenges of corresponding over great distances, they have maintained their friendship with frequent emails and occasional phone calls. They and their churches continue to work together to bring healthcare, clean water and education to remote villages in an outreach area called Bali through the work of native evangelists.

The Fifth Monday in Lent

07 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 16:15

“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.’”

Reconciliation

Lenten Season urges us to focus on regret of our past sins, on reconciliation, revival and renewal of our faith in Jesus Christ. It is about the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ as He proclaims God's love and forgiveness to us. This message we must share!

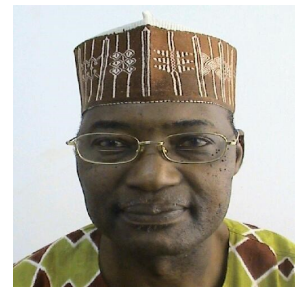
The Great Commission charges Christians to preach the Gospel of salvation to all men without exception - the good news of Reconciliation to God through a Mediator - Jesus Christ. The Gospel is to be preached without borders and without exception, because it is "a message of universal concern" and so it ought to have "a universal welcome" because it gives "a universal welcome."

The eleven disciples and the earlier converts could not do so alone and so are we today but we can support those who are willing to reach somewhere (cf Romans 10:14-15). As Christians we owe it a duty to carry the Gospel up and down the world with all possible fidelity and care. We are to tell as many as we can and request them to also tell others and by so doing we shall eventually reach everybody. May God help us!

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the supreme sacrifice paid on the cross for our salvation. We pray for wisdom and guidance as we carry the Gospel to a world in dire need of salvation. Amen.

Companion Partner

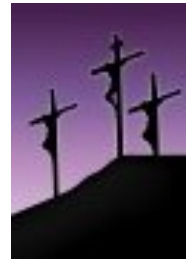


Joshua T. Abu is an active member of the Lutheran Church of Christ's Cathedral Church at Jimeta-Yola in Adamawa State, Nigeria and Chairman of the Bali Outreach Committee.

He is also an elected Elder in the Cathedral. Until his recent retirement, Joshua held various posts in state and federal government agencies and also worked on healthcare and anti-corruption initiatives.

The Fifth Tuesday in Lent

08 April 2014



Shake It Off

Scripture Text

Matthew 10:14

“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.”

In Matthew 10:14 Christ is instructing his apostles when he tells them “and if anyone will not receive you, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave”. In Acts 13:51-52, the disciples have done as Jesus taught. “They shook off the dust from their feet ...and went... and were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”.

Majami’ar Almasihu is Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church of East Bethel’s partner congregation in Jos, Nigeria. When Nigeria is mentioned, I flash back to a memorable trip with the Minneapolis synod to visit partner congregations. “Nigeria” summons up vivid memories of warm hospitality, gracious elders, brightly patterned dresses of the ladies of the LCCN. I hear the sounds of a city with millions of people talking, walking, and going about their business while sheep bleat, as they stand tethered to a post at the side of the street. There is the harsh cry of the man with the loud speaker up in the Mosque minaret calling the faithful to prayer. The smell of vehicle exhaust is mixed in with the smoke from all the small wood cooking fires. Jos is a bustling city in a developing country.

A highlight of the trip was going with the elders to the rural villages where our partner has outreach congregations. Evangelism is a very central part of our Nigerian partner’s mission. We turned off the main highway to the smaller paved, yet bumpy road - to the sand road - to two tire tracks with vegetation in the middle and finally - a single track for walking and motorbikes. Joseph just bumped his car along in the grass with the tires straddling the single path. As we rounded a bend we saw it – a small little building out in the sun with three lone trees standing a short distance away. The villagers walked us down the path to the river where the women get their water. The path is long and the path is dusty. The families farm, doing everything by hand. Nothing is mechanized. Cleaning up the dust and dirt must be an endless job for the village wives in order to keep their simple homes neat and orderly.

Like the village women, we need to clean up our lives and brush the dirt and dust out of our way. Anything that keeps us from the path Christ has set before us needs to be brushed away. As Christ said “shake the dust from your feet” and you will be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. As we continue our Lenten journey we are reminded that Christ has great plans for us and that includes brushing out the dust and throwing away our dirt.

Companion Partner



Susan Fanucci joined Our Saviour's Lutheran Church of East Bethel as an infant many, many years ago. In 2007 Our Saviour's decided to join the synod partnership program in Nigeria. In 2009 she traveled to Nigeria on the synod trip to visit Our Saviour's partner congregation, Majami'ar Almasihu in Jos, Nigeria.

Since then, Our Saviour's has had a malaria campaign which raised money for over 300 mosquito nets for Nigeria and the congregation also contributed money, along with Majama'ir Almasihu and the Global Health Ministry Team towards the digging of a well in Polchi. Polchi is a village in a very rural area. It is an outreach mission of Majami'ar Almasihu. A main source for drinking water had been the river where the cattle stand and drink, and the women wash clothes. Thanks to this partnership, Polchi now has a clean water source - the new well.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father and Gracious Lord,

Thank you for abundantly blessing us. Guide our journey through Lent with your hand on our shoulder. Give us the courage and strength to throw out the dust and dirt of our lives so we can get on with the business of your work. Surround us with the bright light of your Holy Spirit and the love of Christ. Amen.

The Sixth Wednesday in Lent

09 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 14:4

"But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way?'"

Costly Anointing, A Waste or Investment?

Welcome to today's devotional moment with the Lord. Lenten period is the time of great expectation. For one to become a great achiever, you must go through tough times that may cost you and look like a waste. Robert Murray McCheyne of Dundee, Scotland was a noted Hebrew and Greek scholar, qualified to converse with well-educated Jews in Eastern Europe, and he was a seraphic pulpiteer, but it was his daily weeping with God that earned him a prominent place among the finest scholarly preachers of his day.

The woman who came with a very expensive bottle of sweet-smelling perfume wasted the costly oil in the name of anointing Jesus. Why should she waste such an expensive perfume on Jesus's head? Her generous act translates foolishness and waste of resources to some of the guests who became angry and complained, "why such a waste?"

Her costly anointing wasn't a waste, but great investment. The woman's costly anointing on Jesus' body was a preparation for His burial. Money and resources are meant for advancing God's kingdom and to serve humanity; thus, an investment. Today, some Christians find it very difficult to invest costly resources. They view it as waste rather than preparing the body of Jesus. Just as some of the guests became angry and complained, some Christians today also become angry and complain whenever a situation leads to parting with their resources.

Prayer

Lord, help me to emulate the generous and true repentant heart like this woman who offers a costly perfume in preparation of the body of Jesus - Amen!

Companion Partner



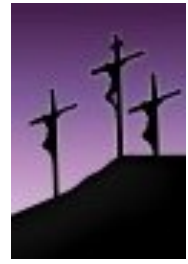
Rev. Shafa S. Salma serves as

District Pastor LCCN Jos District/Resident and Pastor of LCCN Majami'ar Almasihu Congregation in Jos.

Majami'ar Almasihu is the partner congregation of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church of East Bethel, Minnesota. In 2008 they welcomed Susan Fanucci and Donna Nelson for a congregational visit.

The Sixth Thursday in Lent

10 April 2014



Scripture Text

Psalm 121

"I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Where Do We Get Help?

In my relationships with co-workers, friends and family our conversations often lead to the challenges of the day. The stress of looming deadlines on major projects, aging parents, those facing addiction, unemployment and significant health issues, financial insecurity, homelessness. The list grows with each conversation and with every passing day.

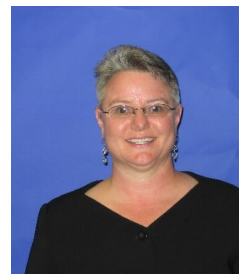
So how do we handle the challenges, how do we get by, where do we get help? Psalm 121 offers us incredible insight and guidance! It is the ever-present relationship with God that provides us strength to keep moving forward; facing challenges throughout our lifetime. God is with us on our daily journey not just some of the time but 24 x 7 x 365!

Knowing that God is with us all the time will bring us peace and inner strength, allowing us to move from chaos to stability.

Prayer

Dear Lord,
We thank you for your ever present help, both now and forever more. Be with all those who face difficult challenges and wash them over with you peace!
Amen

Companion Partner

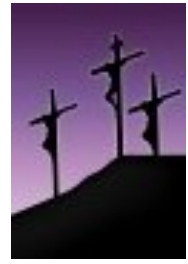


Barb Geiger has been a member of Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota since 2008. Prior to that she attended Epiphany Lutheran Church until its' closure in 2008.

The LCCN Kubi and Epiphany Lutheran Church partnership formed in 1996. The legacy of that partnership lives on at Lake Nokomis Lutheran, including a trip to LCCN Kubi in 2010. Lake Nokomis and LCCN Kubi have worked together on sustainable water through new and improved wells and have dreams to support health and educational causes.

The Sixth Friday in Lent

11 April 2014



Scripture Text

Hebrews 13:12

“Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.”

Outside the Gate

For us in the United States, the way Jesus took to the cross can be romanticized. When we visit the Old City of Jerusalem today, lined with shops and churches and crowded with tourists, we are thrilled to be where Jesus was 2,000 years ago. Still, our guides help us use our imaginations and our steps grow heavy as we walk the way pilgrims have taken so many millions of times — until we find ourselves in the semi-darkness of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Then the reality of Jesus' suffering and dying on a cross weighs on us.

For us, getting to Jerusalem is a long trip: a 12-hour flight plus time in a taxi or bus. A long trip to the gate. How surprising then to discover that it's easier (even sometimes faster) for us to get there than it is for our Palestinian brothers and sisters who live only five miles away. We count Palestinian Christians in a congregation the size of ours, Christmas Lutheran in Bethlehem, as friends. They have welcomed us and taught us something about the many difficulties they face in their lives, and we know much about their hopes and dreams. They are constantly in our prayers.

We see Christ in their faces and Christ's work in their hands, which are busy building up their community and caring for their neighbors. How poignant it is then to see that Christ still suffers outside the city gate. So the very least we can do is watch with them and wait — wait for a day of justice.

Prayer

God, in your great mercy guide us outside the gate to accompany those with whom we travel this earthly life — and so to you. Amen

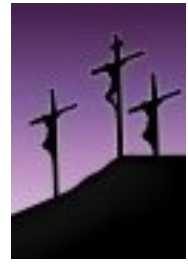
Companion Partner



Rev. Mary Albing has served Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer as pastor since 2003. LCCR learned in 1999 that Christmas Lutheran's pipe organ had become entirely unuseable. Built in Berlin in the 1890s, the German-provided instrument needed renovation. The Minneapolis friends launched a nationwide funding campaign and engaged the Rutz Organ Company of Morristown, Minn. They disassembled the Bethlehem organ, brought it to Minnesota for a complete rebuilding, then reinstalled the instrument for use at Christmas Lutheran's Christmas Eve service in 2000. LCCR's link to Bethlehem Lutherans has also led to hosting two Bethlehemites for study in the U.S. The Minneapolis congregation helped secure student visas and provided financial support. Baptized in other Christian traditions, both students have chosen to become Lutheran since arriving in the U.S.

The Sixth Saturday in Lent

12 April 2014



Scripture Text

Hebrews 13:12

“Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.”

Outside the Gate

The road to Jerusalem was for Jesus nothing but the way to the cross. Entering Jerusalem from that Gate, with people chanting on both sides of the street, was deceiving. While people were thinking glory, Jesus was already contemplating the cross. Soon he would be sent “outside the Gate” like an outcast.

Today, for Palestinian Christians living in Bethlehem the ancient road connecting Bethlehem to city of Jerusalem, just five miles north, is closed by a 25-foot high concrete wall. Palestinians are not allowed to enter Jerusalem.

At Christmas Lutheran in Bethlehem, we have had the habit to go on Maundy Thursday to Jerusalem to join in a procession leading from the Church of the Redeemer to Gethsemane’s garden. That is no longer possible. If some few get permits from the Israeli military, they have to go through a humiliating checkpoint that controls the way to the cross.

When our sister congregation, Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, visits us they spend their time in Bethlehem “on this side of the wall” sharing life, stories, bread and wine with their sisters and brothers in Bethlehem. This is true companionship on the way to the cross.

Prayer

God, in your great mercy guide us outside the gate to accompany those with whom we travel this earthly life — and so to you. Amen

Companion Partner

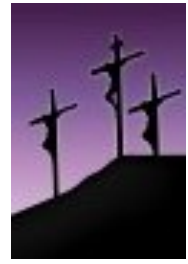


Rev. Mitri Raheb is pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church of Bethlehem in Palestine. They have been the partner congregation of Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis since 1989.

In the two dozen years since, numerous visits have happened, in both directions. In both locales, the pulpit has been occupied by the visiting pastor. And Christmas Lutheran has conferred honorary membership status on LCCR persons. Their learnings from Holy Land links have led LCCR folk to active advocacy with the U.S. government in pursuit of a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis. They have also urged members of Minnesota’s Congressional delegation, when visiting the Holy Land, to visit Christian leaders and church diaconal ministries, including the Lutherans’ Augusta Victoria Hospital on Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives.

The Sixth Sunday in Lent

13 April 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 26:38

“Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’”

Stay Awake

We hold this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane in our hearts and minds each Holy Week. Contrast this solemn procession of today’s Christians in Jerusalem with that night over 2,000 years ago. The place—a lovely garden—is the same. The people of today come in faith and reverence; they know what came next. The disciples did not know; they were exhausted by the events of the last few days. Even though Jesus had tried to tell them what was ahead, they didn’t want to believe it and, indeed, it was too much to comprehend.

As he was arrested a short time later, Jesus said, “All this has taken place so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

We are disappointed that the disciples did not stay awake and pray with Jesus. As we follow Jesus today, let us stay awake, watch, listen, and pray.

Prayer

Dear Lord,

Help us to stand without fear as followers saved by Your sacrifice.
Amen.

Companion Partner

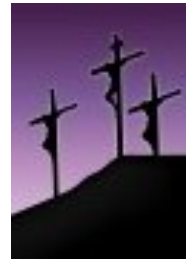


Karen Dahlen has been a member of Elim Lutheran Church in Robbinsdale, Minnesota for 40 years.

Elim has partnered with Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem since 2012. Elim members have pledged their support and are enthusiastic about their global mission focus.

The Sixth Monday in Lent

14 April 2014



Scripture Text

Matthew 26:38

“Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’”

“Stay with me. . . watch and pray.”

Each Maundy Thursday our English, Arabic, German, Danish and Swedish congregations gather at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer for Eucharist and then process through the narrow streets of the Old City to the Garden of Gethsemane. Along the way, we sing hymns while encountering the curious, the cynical, occasionally jeering people; some rushing by with their own agendas, and a few joining in solemn community.

In the garden, surrounded by flowers, ancient olive trees, and the night sky, we light candles, sing hymns, read scripture, and pray.

Our senses and Holy Week memories transport us back 2,000 years when another small group left the crowded city for this tranquil silvan sanctuary where they were invited simply to watch and pray.

Jesus, in a state of grief, fear, and sadness requested only their accompaniment—watching and offering support in prayer. Yet, they succumbed to temptation. Fatigue, darkness, possibly boredom and distraction won out until they fell asleep.

We are invited today to accompany those who suffer and are in need, to stay with them, learn from them, advocate for them, and witness to the truth.

Stay with me, watch and pray.

* * * * *

Special prayers for: Young Adults in Global Mission, Ecumenical Accompaniers, Christian Peacemaker teams, and mission personnel.

Companion Partner



Gloria Strickert is an ELCA Diaconal Minister who serves with her husband at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

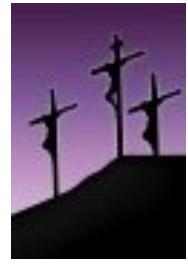
Gloria, with years of service as a chaplain, accompanies Palestinians and expats by providing pastoral care and spiritual support, prayer ministry, and hospitality to those in need.

Prayer

Compassionate God, as you reached out in love and mercy to touch those at the margins with your light, love and healing, we pray that you will continue to send dedicated workers to accompany the oppressed and suffering. Through your servants, bring your healing and help, that wholeness, justice and dignity might be restored to all.

The Sixth Tuesday in Lent

15 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 15:40-41

“There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.”

Prayer

Dear Jesus, our gracious and loving friend, help us be to each other the kind of friends these women were to Jesus. Empower us to stand by each other even across a vast ocean and to respond to each other in our daily needs and cares. Engage us together in creating a world in which you are celebrated and embraced as God of all who cares for each and every one of us. Amen.

Loyalty and Friendship

It has been said that only when things get tough do you find out who your true friends are. These women, some presented here by their names and others simply by their loyalty and service, stuck by Jesus even when the better known and publically acclaimed men had fled in fear or frustration. These women previously expressed their friendship through their providing for Jesus' needs.

In this text, they do so through the persistence and sheer bravery of their presence in his hour of greatest desolation and need. Even when they could not save him from his fate, they would not abandon him. Would that I could be that kind of friend in all my relationships of love, companionship and support!

Companion Partner

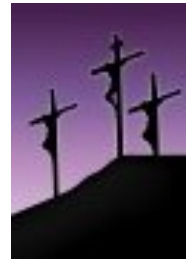


Rev. Keith Olstad has served as pastor of St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota for the past four years. They have been in partnership with LCCN Pella in Adamawa State, Nigeria since 2008.

During that time, delegations and individuals from St. Paul-Ref have visited Pella and several Nigerian students at Luther Seminary regularly worship at St. Paul-Ref.

The Seventh Wednesday in Lent

16 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 15:40-41

“There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.”

Prayer

Holy Jesus,

The women who followed you in ministry and in mourning set an example for us of what it means to be your companions. We want to walk with you, but there are too many times when we lack the faith and courage. Help us, we pray! Help us to stand firm with our eyes fixed on you. We pray in your name. Amen.

True Companions

A companion is a person who is so close to you and share with you in times of joy or in sorrow. He is the one whom you can call upon in times of trouble or in need. These women who followed Jesus were from Galilee, a region where Jesus Christ lived and did his ministry mostly in that area.

When Jesus was arrested, all his disciples ran into hiding for fear of being killed, even Simon Peter denied him three times to save his life. But these women followed him doggedly. They witnessed all the maltreatment and sufferings that Jesus went through. They were weeping and wailing. But Jesus told them not to weep for him but rather to weep for themselves and for their children.

Really, it was a period of mourning and lamentation for losing a beloved one. In some congregations our individual members fast for forty days to Easter Sunday. Others will fast for a week that is the Holy Week starting from Palm Sunday to Saturday. While others fast only on Good Friday. Some people wear black dresses to show that they are mourning for the suffering and death of Christ.

The amount of courage and faith these women had shown is what is expected from us today. We should stand firm in times of trials, tribulations, and persecution. By so doing, we would become good companions following Christ to the cross.

Companion Partner

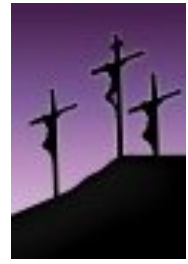


Rev. Hanis H. Falu serves LCCN Pella congregation in Adamawa State, Nigeria. They are the partner congregation of St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In 2009 they welcomed six women from St. Paul Ref who trained the local Pella community (both Christians and Muslims) on the importance of using treated bed nets for the prevention of malaria. Those trained then trained others. The Nigerian government has since distributed bed nets to nearly all throughout that community.

The Seventh Wednesday in Lent

16 April 2014



Scripture Text

Romans 8:28

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Angel Joan

Since Joan immigrated to Minnesota from Liberia, West Africa, she has been employed as a nursing assistant in a nursing home. She considers it an honor to care for these elders, and realizes that, “We are almost like the closest relatives to them.” Since family members visit less frequently than caregivers like Joan, it is her presence that causes someone to say “How am I? I’m good; my best girl is here today!” or to call her affectionately, “Angel Joan.”

Joan acknowledges that like a close relative, caregivers receive a lot of the frustration of the nursing home residents. “I just have to remember,” she says, “if she was in her right mind, she wouldn’t be here in this bed. We are the only ones they can put things onto.” Joan watches and learns the smallest gestures, so that she almost knows ahead of time when to bring a glass of water or to readjust pillows. This is not a job, but a calling, in Joan’s view. God has brought them together for a purpose: elders who need care, and caregivers like Joan from halfway across the world.

Prayer

God Our Great Caregiver, we thank you for the people you call to serve the vulnerable elders among us. Amen.

Companion Partner



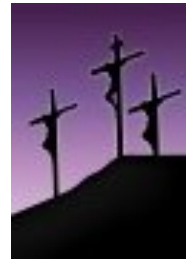
Rev. Lee Ann

Pomrenke

Since a single Liberian woman came to Zion, one of River of Life’s predecessor churches, in the 1990’s, the African contingent has grown to over half of this North Minneapolis congregation. In August 2012, River of Life hosted the first national convention for ALLIA, the Association of Liberian Lutherans In the Americas. Bishop Ann Svenningsen and Bishop D. Jensen Seyenkulo of the Lutheran Church in Liberia were present to install the officers of this new organization.

The Seventh Wednesday in Lent

16 April 2014



Scripture Text

Romans 8:28

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

A Caregiver’s Prayer

When I was approached by our pastor to write about something of interest, several topics crossed my mind, but two things stood up amongst them all. Service and humanity stand out as good virtues in life and brings out the passion our Lord Jesus Christ exemplified during his brief journey on earth. Jesus said love thy neighbor as thy self and do unto others as you would like them do unto you.

Liberia experienced a brutal civil war which claimed the lives of 300,000 people and displaced one million more to seek safety in West Africa and other parts of the world. I came to the United States of America to seek refuge and find a means to provide for my family members who were still in Liberia. I chose a career path in the United States as a nursing assistant to be of service to the most vulnerable individuals as a means of following the teachings of Christ to love your fellow men as you would like them to do unto you. I use this job as a pulpit from which I can show God’s love through service and humanity to others.

Day in and day out, I am reminded that God is using me to help vulnerable and needed individuals. I believe that my hands are the hands of those who cannot help themselves. My voice is the voice of those who cannot express their pains. My smiles are used to bring smiles and joy they want back into their lives.

God uses us as his helpers to help others.

Prayer

Dear God, I pray this day for joy to bring joy to those who are sad, for help to those who are helpless, for strength to help those who are weak and most of all, for your word to lead someone to you. Amen!!

Companion Partner



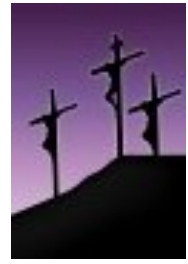
Joan Allegra

Nathan is a member of River of Life Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Joan is a native of Liberia - a tiny tropical West African Country made up of 43,000 sq miles and rich in iron ore, rubber, timber gold, diamonds and newly discovered oil. I worked as a training supervisor at the Liberian Tele-Communications company for many years and taught women how to read the Bible in a local Liberian vernacular, called Kpelle.

The Seventh Wednesday in Lent

16 April 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 18:9-14

“...I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The Humble Will Be Exalted

Jesus told a parable of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, who went up to pray in the temple. The Pharisee, who claimed to be much religious, quantified and measured his self-righteousness by fasting and tithing. But the tax collector, recognizing his weakness in sin and state of unrighteousness before God, confessed his need for God’s forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation. In penitence, he beat his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus makes it clear which one goes home justified.

In my home parish, Lenten season is a time of preparation for the Holy Week that eventually leads to EASTER. For us it is also a time of self-examination and reflection on the redemptive work of God through Jesus Christ for the world.

As an open secret, my country, Liberia, is still emerging from a devastating and bitter civil war, and still needs lots of healing, reconciliation, etc. It is a process that requires corporate involvement including that of the Church, which is viewed as a reconciling community.

Our celebration is characterized by the teaching and preaching of peace, love, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation, dwelling on God’s love for the world as the core of the message. We gather to worship and do community visitation to the sick, elderly, etc which includes members and non-church members.

Companion Partner



Rev. Edwin

Flomo is the pastor of the Sanoyea Lutheran Parish of 32 churches in the Lutheran Church in Liberia.

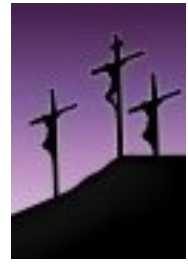
He was ordained in 2004 and has served the Sanoyea Parish for 8 years. Sanoyea is a town and district in Northeastern Bong county, central Liberia. The Sanoyea Lutheran Parish was established in 1917 by a group of LCA Missionaries headed by Rev. Joseph D. Curran. Rev. Flomo is married to Philomena J. Flomo, an RN who manages several small clinics in the Sanoyea District. They have 2 sons and one daughter. He is studying Congregational Mission and Leadership in the Master of Arts Program at Luther Seminary and worships at River of Life Lutheran Church.

Prayer

God, I thank you for the gift of LOVE given us a church and community through your GRACE. Thank you for regenerating us through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Help and lead us by your Holy Spirit to be your Mission to the World.

The Seventh Wednesday in Lent

16 April 2014



Much...In the Midst of Little

Scripture Text

Philippians 1:3-5

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."

Prayer

Lord of all,
Help us to hold each other in our prayers. We are one because of what Christ did on our behalf. We truly belong to one another, and are blessed to be in this wonderful Life in Christ together. We thank you for the joy of this family across the world. Amen.

In March of 2011, I had the amazing and humbling experience of traveling with my colleague, Rev. Mawien Ariik, to his home village of Alabek, South Sudan. It was, at the time, still Sudan of course, but independence came to the south in July that same year. The entire time I was there I was being welcomed and thanked for being there. I was told every day that I was an answer to their prayers. I was told every day that to have me in their midst was an honor to them. But I felt it exactly opposite. These delightful, generous, welcoming, hospitable, and loving brothers and sisters in Christ were the ones who were the answers to my prayers. They were the ones of whom I was profoundly honored just to be around. Their joy in their faith was palpable and infectious. Their love for Christ and His church was inspiring. Their generosity, though they had next to nothing, was overwhelming!

Juxtapose this reality with the fact that this is a people which has not known peace since 1954! Today their new country of South Sudan is being hewn out from nearly 60 years of an established norm of religious persecution, racial and political hostility, mistrust of leadership and just general anxiety. It is now seen on the world's stage as a system which produced nothing more than a total block of any development whatsoever of infrastructure, schools, or even economics. It instead created a system of economic injustice where poverty reigned supreme and all the issues therefrom ran unchecked for nearly 60 years. How easily understandable it would be to see the South Sudanese be cynical, jaded and filled with hate and/or vengeance. But they are not.

Today the South Sudanese living in Minnesota and in South Sudan are proud people who know their Lord has made an irrevocable promise to be their God and they will be God's people. Their faith in the resurrected Lord is dynamic and alive and the Lutheran 'flavor' of Christianity is beginning to take root there in country.

It is indeed right and good that we can hold each other in our prayers, for because of Christ, we belong to each other, and are in this wonderful Life in Christ together with people all over the world. We hold them in our prayers and they certainly are holding us in theirs.

What joy!

Companion Partner



Rev. Mark Tiede serves as associate pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Anoka, Minnesota

Zion Lutheran Church has partnered with a congregation of Lutheran Christians in Alabek, South Sudan and deployed our Pastor Mawien Ariik to serve them as their pastor. We also have assisted them in erecting a building which will be used during the week as a school for boys and girls and on the weekends worship will be held there.

The Seventh Thursday in Lent

Maundy Thursday

17 April 2014



Scripture Text

1 Corinthians
12:27

*“Now you are
the body of
Christ.”*

Receive what you are: the Body of Christ

“Now you are the body of Christ.” In his first letter to the congregation in Corinth, Paul the Apostle writes this short, seemingly simple sentence. But this sentence says it all!

Here Paul takes up that which we celebrate today. In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus changed the ancient ritual of the Passover and drew attention to a loaf of bread, which was passed around and from which everyone ate:

“Take and eat, this is my body which will be given for you.” According to the evangelist, all of his friends participated in this first communion, the ones who left him a few hours later and the one who betrayed him.

Paul applies this word of the Body of Christ and remembrance of Holy Communion to the congregation: Through you, Christ is present in the world. To this congregation with which he had conflict he says: You are the Body of Christ.

May that bind us all together today, wherever we remember the words of institution. We receive that which we are--the Body of Christ. That carries us and enables us for discipleship and witness in our world.

Prayer

God of grace and promise, this day we ask that you bless us with faith and faithfulness, with trust and discipleship. As we receive your presence among us in the bread and wine, help us to be your presence in the world.
Amen

Companion Partner



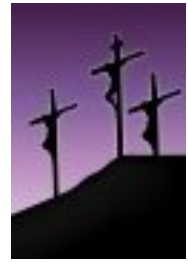
Rev. Martin Henker is Superintendent of the Leipzig District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. The Minneapolis Area Synod and the Leipzig District are partners in the ELCA's Companion Synod Program.

In 1989-1990 in Dresden, Henker was deeply involved in the Peaceful Revolution, the fall of the Communist government in East Germany. For his role in those events, he was honored in 2009 with the Freedom Medalion from the State of Saxony, Germany, and the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, from Augsburg College in 2012.

The Seventh Thursday in Lent

Maundy Thursday

17 April 2014



Scripture Text

John 6:1-14

“...When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’”

Teach Us to Share From Our Bounty

In Minnesota, we are blessed with wonderful summers and beautiful lakes. These two elements, mixed with a strong commitment to teaching our faith, leads to one thing: Bible camp!

One summer my son, Aaron, a soon-to-be second grader at the time, traveled with a group from our church for a day at a Lutheran Bible camp nearby. Before leaving that morning I handed him a ten dollar bill for treats with the explicit directions to “bring back the change.” Now I hadn’t planned to give a seven year-old that much money and responsibility but as it would be, it was all I had in my wallet. And I guess God had a lesson for me to learn through my son.

Upon returning that evening an excited Aaron told story after story of the day’s events. Swimming, hikes, crafts, singing, Bible lessons... they had done it all!

“Oh!” he exclaimed, “And then they even opened up the canteen so we could buy candy and popcorn!”

“Well,” I asked, “then where’s the change?”

“What change?” he innocently asked.

“The change from the ten dollars I gave you for treats. How much did you spend?”

“Well, I only bought a candy bar. But after I paid for it the guy said that the camp was collecting change to ‘change the world.’ They were going to feed people across the world in Africa.”

“So what did you do?”

“Dad, there are lots of hungry people so I said, ‘Keep the change!’

“All of it?”

“Yeah! And guess what...”

“What...?”

“...I changed the world!”

Companion Partner



Rev. Tom Olson has served as lead pastor of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota since 2007.

Seven years ago, St. Stephen teamed with Lutheran Partners in Global Ministry (LPGM) and entered into a congregational partnership with Maria Magdalena Mission of Resostencia, Argentina and St. Michael’s Lutheran of Corrientes in.

In 2013, St. Stephen made the prayerful decision to enter into a second global partnership with the Jekada-Fari congregation of the LCCN in Nigeria. They will send their first delegation to meet their new partner in November, 2014.

Prayer

Loving God, you have blessed us with time, talent and treasure. Grant us generous hearts to share these blessings with all the world. Amen.

The Seventh Thursday in Lent

Maundy Thursday

17 April 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 24:8-11

"...Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest...But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

Prayer

Loving God,
How good, O Lord, to know that we can find you in the blessings of community, family, and the everyday things of life. We thank you that you are the God of nearness, reaching out to touch all peoples. At this time of the year, help us to remember your broad and open arms for all. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Women of God

The text invites us to reflect on two aspects in the here and now. First, that the women who were with Jesus up to His last moments of suffering and His death, were the same women who were there at dawn the day after His burial.

Today, when a family member or friend gets sick, (someone is usually housebound - a handicapped son or daughter or an aging parents needs special care), it is usually the women who are there to help. It is said that women are the weaker sex but, nevertheless, we have demonstrated our strength in the face of adversity, even though, often times, male endorsement is required to receive recognition. In our text, for credibility purposes, a male disciple is needed to confirm that women have done and said just as Peter had to confirm what the women saw.

Second, I will reflect on the question, "Why are they looking for the living among the dead?" I can say that I looked for "something" among the living. Today, I can give Him a name and say I was blessed to find God. I found Him in my community, among my friends, and the everyday things in life. That realization is reflected in the faith I place in Him every day.

With God's help, we will all walk toward a common goal: From a gender perspective, equality of opportunity and rights.

Companion Partner



Angi Coseres is a member of the Maria Magdalena Lutheran Church in Resistencia (Chaco) Argentina.

Angie is married with children living in Resistencia and a very active member of Maria Magdalena. She is one of the female scholarship recipients of their partner congregation, St. Stephen Lutheran. She is working very hard toward her degree in order to better herself and her community. She has a very strong passion to help women realize their self worth and encourage them to become educated.

The Seventh Friday in Lent

Good Friday

18 April 2014



Scripture Text

Mark 14:32

“Sit here while I pray.”

Begin With Prayer

He said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” (Mark 14:32) The first event of Good Friday happened Thursday night: Jesus’ arrest. Moments before that, he prayed.

In the early 1980’s the East German church asked how it could be faithful in a dictatorship. The answer: Be a church for others. One way to serve others would be to pray for peace for everyone. And so the Monday night Peace Prayers started in St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig.

By autumn, 1989, the Communist government was desperately trying to maintain control. Then came October 9th. A huge crowd filled St. Nicholas Church and the square and streets around it. Following the Peace Prayers--despite warnings from police, despite Soviet military surrounding the city--70,000 people marched through the streets of Leipzig, carrying candles. They had joined with Jesus in prayer, then followed him to the cross.

But Easter came early. Not a shot was fired. Later police said they were prepared for everything, just not prayers and candles.

Today we remember Jesus’ passion and death. And we try to be faithful in following him, even to the cross. Let us begin with prayer, and perhaps a candle.

Prayer

God of life and light, today we praise you for your love for the world revealed on the cross, for the gift of life accomplished through the death and resurrection of your Son. Bless us, so that we might have courage to follow you into this world’s darkness as bearers of the light. Amen

Companion Partner

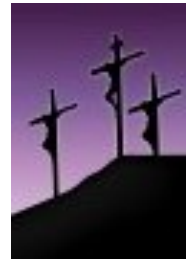


Rev. Paul Rogers is a retired ELCA pastor. In addition to serving parishes in South Dakota and, since 1995, in the Minneapolis Area Synod, he spent several periods 1965-85 living in Europe and working with the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran World Federation. 1998-2012 Rogers was coordinator of the Leipzig Connection, a Companion Synod relationship between the Leipzig District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony, Germany, and the Minneapolis Area Synod.

The Seventh Saturday in Lent

Holy Saturday

19 April 2014



Scripture Text

Luke 5:1-2

“Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.”

Let Go of Your Net

In the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is walking along the lake and he approaches the soon to be disciples as they were cleaning their nets. The nets the disciples are cleaning are the source of their livelihood, their everyday means of existence. When I think of this text, I think about how God comes to each of us doing our everyday duty, doing the things we need to do to feed our family, be a good employee and a valued member of the community. I think about how precious it is that God actually comes into the everyday places to say to us, I have something better for you to do. God, in Jesus Christ, comes to us and says, come and follow me for I have work for you to do to bring the kingdom of God into the world.

I recall the blessing it was for me when Bishop Johnson and members of my congregation came to me with the invitation to join them in the journey to visit the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. It was a wonderful invitation to let go of my nets and my busy schedule to see how God is touching the lives of our sister congregation in Bauchi, Nigeria.

I will forever remember waking up early that first night in Nigeria and hearing the amplified sound of Muslim prayer. I recall driving along the roadside in awe at the sight of women walking along the roadside in bright and royal colored dresses. I will never forget being greeted at each stop along the way by people with deep and amazing faith.

Lent, comes as the invitation to drop our busy nets and be open to God coming to us.

Prayer

Jesus meet us in the places in our lives where we become consumed by life's expectations. Bless us during these days of Lent and draw us close that we may be faithful in following you all the days of our lives. Amen.

Companion Partner



Rev. Kelly Chatman has served as lead pastor of the Ev. Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in North Minneapolis for the past 12 years. He also served the Minneapolis Area Synod as bishop's assistant for urban congregations and church innovation the past 1 1/2 years.

Redeemer has been the partner congregation of LCCN Bauchi since 2000. In 1999, Cynthia Stenson visited Bauchi and established the partnership. Pastor Kelly traveled to Bauchi in 2006. The congregation recently raised funds to help offset the cost of drilling a water well in a rural village that LCCN Bauchi supports.

EASTER SUNDAY

The Resurrection of our Lord

20 April 2014



Scripture Text

John 11:25

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."

The Last Word...Love!

Through Christ's resurrection, we know that life has the last word – that love is stronger than death. We know that God holds the future – for you, for me, for the world. It is that message of unconditional love and security, which frees us to truly live abundantly and creatively. The culture would have us live in fear – of illness, of crime, of strangers, of death. But, if we know we are united to the Risen One, we can throw ourselves into this life. As Helmut Theileke put it: If you don't need to be anxious about your last hour, you don't need to be anxious about the next moment. Secure in Christ, we can live this day, this hour, this moment in freedom and joy in the fullness of life.

Yes, if we follow Jesus, we will struggle. We will suffer. For the One who leads us isn't in sync with the values of the world. And when we follow Jesus, we'll surely encounter those opposing values – those powers and principalities – the rampant -isms (materialism, individualism, hedonism, racism, sexism, nationalism, pragmatism). Yet, united to the Risen Christ, we can courageously enter the struggle of discipleship. We are set free to risk hard work, isolation, even death, for we know that Christ has overcome death.

Suffering doesn't have the last word. Indeed, through the Easter message, we know that nothing in all of creation – nothing we will ever face – can separate us from the victorious love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

O Risen Christ,
make your power and presence
known in our hearts and in our church that we might be truly alive in your love,
this day and for all eternity.
Amen.

Companion Partner



Rev. Ann M.

Svennungsen was elected February 18, 2012 to a six-year term as bishop of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA. She has been a leader in congregations and church-related organizations for over 30 years. Following graduation from seminary in 1981, Svennungsen pastored congregations in Iowa City, Iowa, Edina, Minnesota, and Moorhead, Minnesota.

In 2003, Bishop Svennungsen was named president of The Fund for Theological Education followed by four years serving as president of Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Texas.

She and her husband, Rev. Dr. William Russell, a Reformation specialist, plan to visit the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria in November 2014. They have three children and one grandson.