

Pericope

PARTNERS

Lent and Easter 2006

*Pericope Partners, vignettes about ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, interpret the partnership we share as a whole church. These brief thematic illustrations of mission and ministry are suggested by themes from the Revised Common Lectionary Cycle B pericopes for Ash Wednesday through the Seventh Sunday of Easter (March 1, 2006–May 28, 2006). They **are not** exegetical expositions of the texts, but are intended to be suitable textual partners for use in Sunday bulletins and congregational newsletters.*

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Ash Wednesday (March 1, 2006)

by Cynthia Halverson
ELCA Foundation

■ “I JUST WANT OTHERS to know about Jesus,” was Esther’s response when asked what was important to her. No complicated plans. No special recognition. Just one request: “Help me direct my resources so that others might experience the love of Christ as I have.”

In my work, I am continually inspired and surprised by the Esthers of this world who truly do “store up ... treasures in heaven.”

Although one would never know it, Esther had significant earthly wealth passed down to her from generations of family who worked the land. But the real treasure passed on to Esther was one held deep in her heart: a faith rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was this quiet, unassuming faith that people remembered about Esther. It was her faith that led Esther to contact the ELCA Foundation and put into place the plans that directed her earthly treasure so that others might know Jesus. Because of Esther, new congregations are being developed; students are receiving scholarships to attend seminary; and missionaries are sharing the gospel with people throughout the world.

It is more than financial generosity that makes these people inspiring. The financial generosity is just the by-product. What is inspiring about the Esthers of this world is their deeply rooted faith that becomes a treasure for others.
(Inspired by Matthew 6:16–21)

The First Sunday in Lent (March 5, 2006)

by Cheryl Dieter
Worship and Liturgical Resources

■ THERE ARE PROBABLY FEW among us who will forget Christmas 2004. It was the day when the word “tsunami” entered our vocabulary, a day of bright sunshine and deadly waves, images caught on video that, a year later, were no less horrifying to watch than they had been a year earlier. And that event appeared to usher in a year in which the power of water headlined too many nightly news broadcasts, exposing our vulnerabilities, and changing lives forever. More words entered our everyday vocabulary, names this time, common names such as Irene, Katrina, Rita, and Stan.

Like many people around the world, I found myself unable to stop watching the television reports. I felt a strong need to do something to help, but my meager monetary gift seemed terribly ineffectual in the face of such overwhelming need. Then, in the midst of the horror, I received an e-mail, the same e-mail that went out to all ELCA churchwide employees. The disaster response team was unable to keep up with the number of people calling to make donations by phone. Would we be willing to volunteer a few hours over the weekend, so that phone lines could be kept open and people could continue to make donations?

That brief e-mail message gave testimony to a church eager to help a world in need, a world that had experienced the destructive power of water, and was now beginning to catch a glimpse of the grace and new life that follows. In the waters of baptism we join in Christ’s death and are raised to new life in that same water. In this season of Lent may we be renewed and refreshed in the promise made to us in baptism.
(Inspired by today’s readings)

The Second Sunday in Lent (March 12, 2006)

by Lisa Goodwin
Campus Ministry

■ “FOR WHAT WILL IT PROFIT them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?”—Mark 8:36

Students come to college for many reasons: thirst for knowledge, parental expectation, a desire to move to a new location. Along with all of these reasons, there is usually the expectation that a degree will increase salary potential. Questions of opportunity and salary occur when students decide upon their major course of study. Through campus ministry, the church helps students with such questions, and also encourages them to ask, “What is God calling me to do?”

Caroline was asking these questions. She had come to Illinois State University for a pre-med major, dreaming of being a doctor. But once her studies began, she realized that science didn't excite her, and that she wanted to be more involved with people. She had always planned on being a doctor, and certainly appreciated the rewarding salary a career in medicine could offer. Sharing many discussions with Caroline, I helped her see that God had a call for her. Prestige and salary were considerations, but as Christians we couldn't stop there. God has given each of us abilities, and asks that we see these abilities as ways of serving God's world. How could she best serve?

I don't know what kind of work Caroline will eventually do, but I'm so glad that campus ministry was there for her, helping her to see that her faith was not something separate from the rest of her life, but something that informs all of our decisions. A salary, which helps us “gain the whole world,” is nothing if it does not provide a way for us joyfully to embrace the call of God and to serve creation.

(Inspired by Mark 8:31–38)

The Third Sunday in Lent (March 19, 2006)

by Mary Campbell
Global Mission

■ “IF YOU WANT TO TOUCH the martyrs, you don't need to go to the catacombs in Rome,” Matthew Fox once said. “You can go to Latin America and touch the modern-day martyrs who died because of their faith.”

The most famous of these martyrs is Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed March 24, 1980, while celebrating mass in El Salvador. While the canonization process is ongoing, the people of Latin America already call him San Romero de Las Americas—St. Romero of the Americas. Every year thousands commemorate his life and death with a mass and march in San Salvador.

Romero didn't just listen to the poor; he amplified their cries for justice. Just like Jesus, who spoke the truth to the money-changers and then threw them out of the temple, Romero challenged power. It cost him his life.

When I visited El Salvador for the first time in 1991, I wanted to touch the modern-day martyrs and see what they could show me about faith. Visiting the places where the martyrs lived and died was indeed powerful, but just as meaningful was meeting Fr. Jon Cortina, SJ. During the war he didn't run and hide, in spite of threats to his life. He stayed with the people, and he survived.

After our meeting, I wondered. “Do I have that kind of faith? Could my faith withstand even a lesser challenge?” The next morning, I woke determined to stand with Fr. Jon and the people whose faith helps them to stand up for truth even in the face of fear.

Shortly before he was killed, Romero said, “As a Christian, I don't believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will arise in the people.” A song about Romero says, “They can kill the prophet, but the voice of justice, no. They can impose silence, but history will not be shut up.” History has not silenced Romero, as it did not silence Jesus.

(Inspired by today's readings)

The Fourth Sunday in Lent (March 26, 2006)

by Andy Krey
Maritime Ministry

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ “FOR GOD SO LOVED the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” —John 3:16

Does God’s love include those people who deny Jesus, say they don’t need Jesus, or have never heard the gospel?

My ministry often takes me aboard ships from around the world. Together with a team of Lutheran volunteers, we offer worship services and prayers for seafarers who are far from families and home. Once, in Newark, New Jersey, we visited a huge Swedish automobile carrier that was delivering 6,300 Volvos to the United States. While others from our team went directly to the Filipino and Kiribati crew members, Paul and I climbed up to the captain’s stateroom. When we stuck our heads into his office, it was obvious he was busy with officials from the United States Coast Guard. I interrupted them briefly to say that we’d be back in about 20 minutes. The captain replied tersely, “Padre, I make enough money; spend your time with my crew.”

How does one respond to such a command—on the one hand, concerned about the spiritual well being of his crew, and on the other, so callous about his own needs?

After leading a service with Holy Communion in the crew mess, Paul and I returned to the captain’s office. Our stated purpose for returning was to report that we had ministered among his crew and now we were requesting permission to go ashore.

To our surprise, our request for permission to go ashore was met with the captain’s quick, but unusual, response: “Permission denied! I want to talk to you.” We sat and talked for over an hour!

Many people, like this captain, will deny their need for God. But God’s love can overcome even denial.

(Inspired by John 3:14–21)

The Fifth Sunday in Lent (April 2, 2006)

by Amber Leberman
The Lutheran magazine

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ “BUT THIS IS THE COVENANT that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” —Jeremiah 31:33

Our world is full of covenants. Every time we use our debit cards, watch the FBI warning at the start of a DVD, or click “agree” to a Web site’s terms of use, we make covenants. We may see these as nuisances. We just want to pay, be entertained, or start working, not waste our time with contracts.

One of my responsibilities at *The Lutheran* is to make sure our freelance writers and photographers have valid, signed contracts—covenants—with us. For creative people, sometimes stopping to sign a contract seems like a waste of time. We could be creating!

However, if we look at the contracts in our faith lives, we realize they’re part of creation, the beginning of good things. Those who are married remember and celebrate the vows they made to their spouse, and vice versa. Our baptism is a contract—a covenant between us and God and our families to live in a faith community.

And here, in Jeremiah, every one of us has a covenant with God—a promise so much a part of us God has put it “within us.” It is so valuable that it is written on our hearts.

“I will be their God, and they will be my people.” This is a contract that is a comfort. There’s no fine print or fees associated with it. Just an agreement to be present: God with us, and we with God.

(Inspired by Jeremiah 31:33)

Sunday of the Passion/ Palm Sunday

(April 9, 2006)

by Mark Wilhelm
Education Institutions and Partnerships

■ IN 1963, GUDINA TUMSA came from Ethiopia to study at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, one of the eight seminaries now part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. After three years at Luther, he returned home to serve as General Secretary for the (Lutheran) Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus . . . and to martyrdom. After a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist government overthrew the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, Tumsa worked to help his church adjust to new political realities, but he also called on the new government to uphold righteousness. As Darrell Jodock, Tumsa's Luther Seminary roommate and now professor of religion at ELCA-related Gustavus Adolphus College, has noted, Tumsa said "No!" to the new government as few could or would. His unswerving public witness subjected Tumsa to arrest and eventually to an abduction and murder in 1979.

It is fitting that we remember Tumsa this Lenten season on the Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday because the date (April 9) coincides with the appointed date for the commemoration of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Like Bonhoeffer, Tumsa was a pastor, church leader, and martyr. With Bonhoeffer, Tumsa affirmed that when a person is called to follow Christ, that person is called to die to self and to live for the service of others, including literally giving one's life if necessary.

In 2004, Luther Seminary honored Gudina Tumsa posthumously with its Christus Lux Mundi award. All the ELCA seminaries continue to contribute to the education of Christians from around the world, developing leadership rooted in following Christ, a discipleship that Bonhoeffer and Tumsa exemplify for us all.

(Inspired by today's readings)

Easter Day

(April 16, 2006)

by Semu Mayang
Lae, Papua New Guinea

■ IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA, we have 800 languages. We learn to speak English and Tok Pisin to communicate with one another, but we are really satisfied when we meet a "wantok"—someone who speaks the same language. In our own language, we can speak from our heart.

Pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea use the first language of the area where they are called to work to express the meaning of the text. But sometimes, when they want to express something of deep feeling, they use their own language, saying, "In my language, we express it this way."

This is why Mary answered Jesus in her own language, calling him "Rabboni." She was so surprised by his presence that she spoke from her heart. In her own language, she could express her deep inner feeling about Jesus with eagerness and amazement.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), I am the president of the PNG Tertiary Lutheran Students and Graduates Partnership. I came to the Lutheran Student Movement (LSM) gathering in San Diego in December 2005 to meet with another kind of "wantok"—other university students. At LSM I was amazed to discover that we were all from the same age group. Many parts of the celebration surprised me. In San Diego, youth danced to rock and roll music. In PNG, if we dance, we dance to gospel music.

But like the students in San Diego, students in Papua New Guinea are looking for a place where we can fit into our church and become leaders. A place where we can speak our own language to express our amazement about Jesus's resurrection.

Many thanks to the LSM leaders for inviting me to this gathering, and to ELCA Global Mission for making it possible for me to meet my "wantoks" in the United States.

(Inspired by John 20:1–18)

The Second Sunday of Easter

(April 23, 2006)

by Greg Villalon
Leadership Development

■ IT HAD BEEN A LONG AND DIFFICULT day for me. There were so many things that needed to be completed, and deadlines were approaching quickly. My anxiety level was climbing, and it became difficult to accomplish anything at all. I had planned to take some work home and try to do some catch-up work. I knew that what I really needed was some time to relax, to release some of the pressure and anxiety and begin again refreshed, but that was not in my plans.

As I turned into my driveway, I saw my daughter's parked car and knew that my plans were not going to be accomplished tonight. I walked into our family room where my granddaughter Rebecca sat with a book in her lap. She must be the smartest five-year-old I know, but of course I am a proud and, perhaps, biased grandfather!

"Grandpa! Come and sit with me." As we read her book together, I could see the story come to life for her. She laughed and became excited about the words that were taking on life right before her eyes. I realized that Rebecca and I were living out one of life's greatest delights: reading and hearing the word, seeing it come to life, and wanting to share it with others.

One of the responsibilities of the church is to nurture this engagement with the living Word, so that all who hear can respond to God's call. Work with youth, campus ministries, seminaries, educational institutions, and leaders preparing for rostered service in the church is part of that nurturing ministry. (*Inspired by John 20:19-31*)

The Third Sunday of Easter

(April 30, 2006)

by Heidi Hagstrom
Youth Ministries

■ IT WAS CHRISTMAS EVE. Peder had just been told that Grandpa was coming home from Arizona ... alone. After almost 50 years of marriage, he was seeking a divorce.

Peder's grandpa was a pastor. He was retired from serving congregations, but still served the role of spiritual leader and mentor for Peder. He had been, in Peder's mind and heart, the ideal man of God and someone he hoped to emulate. Peder had always felt called to some church vocation, but he never dared to ponder ordained ministry, which for him was like going all the way—the way of the cross. Now he felt betrayed.

Peder didn't even want to look at his grandpa. His icon of holiness was deeply scarred, stained, broken. So, he rejected Grandpa's tentative advances, feeling good about communicating his disgust. But he couldn't avoid Grandpa's eyes.

He recognized the woundedness in Grandpa's eyes. At first he recoiled, threatened by the familiarity, but something (or someone) was inviting him to look. It wasn't long before Peder couldn't contain himself. Seeing wasn't enough. He reached for his grandpa's hands, hands that had held his in prayer many times. Touching his broken grandpa was like touching the broken Christ.

Ironically, Peder points to this moment as the one that opened his heart to the possibility of seminary. After that Christmas, which felt more like Lent, seminary was no longer such a scary option. In his brokenness, Grandpa had given Peder an experience of all the way. This was salvation in disguise, where the very wound itself functions as God's means of healing in forgiveness. This is grace, and Peder recognized it by touching his broken icon.

(*Inspired by today's readings*)

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

(May 7, 2006)

by Bob Sitze
Hunger Education

THE GOOD SHEPHERD JANET

“Just another ordinary Christian,” but Janet Jacobson is no ordinary North Dakota shepherd. Fiber artist, organic farmer, and environmentalist, Janet cares for about 125 head of sheep with her husband Terry. Through thick and thin, they shepherd these creatures to their eventual usefulness. Janet and Terry understand how Jesus’ shepherding was more than a photo opportunity featuring passive lambs on one’s shoulders.

Like Christ Jesus, Janet’s passion for sheep goes way beyond wool and tasty food. She’s aware of the good earth that enables her good shepherding. She’s wrestling with the meaning of “sustainable agriculture.” She’s learning and teaching about simple living. She’s grateful to God for every day of her earth-keeping. She’s a good steward. She’s following God’s will for her life.

Janet’s a political person, too. She understands her role as one of God’s people in the public sphere. She cares for people where she finds them: in her family, in schools, in her congregation, in neighboring farms and towns. She understands her role as bearer of God’s grace in the worlds in which she lives. Janet speaks up for what’s right.

On this Sunday of good shepherding, good earth-keeping, good witnessing, you face the same prospect as Janet: God gives you what you need to carry out God’s will, and by your faithful shouldering of responsibility, you care for creation and its creatures. Find what’s “good” in your shepherding, and go about it this day with God’s promises and God’s will in your heart. God keep you joyful!

(Inspired by Psalm 23)

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

(May 14, 2006)

by Valerie Peterson
Global Mission

UNLIKE PHILIP, who was transported by the Spirit to the desert road to Gaza, my husband John took the regular modes of public transport—bus, train, and light rail—to the district hospital of one of the outlying “new towns” of Hong Kong. But like Philip, there was a divine appointment waiting for him.

As had happened several times in his pastoral work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, John was going to meet a member of his church whose elderly parent had responded to the gospel and requested baptism. During the visit, the patient in the next bed, a Mr. Wong, said, “Pastor, when you’re done there, would you come and talk to me?”

Mr. Wong, in his sixties, and weak from surgery, diabetes, and dialysis, had come to faith in Christ through the Baptist church many years earlier, but had moved away to the “new town” before he was baptized. Now in the hospital, his life and health uncertain, he wanted to complete this obedience to Christ, and receive the promise and benefits of baptism. “Pastor,” he said, “I’ve been praying that God would send someone to baptize me. And God sent you!”

Sensing the urgency of the need and the cry of his heart, “What is to keep me from being baptized?” John baptized him then and there. His heart was comforted, his health improved, and the gospel is being passed on ... to his ex-wife, other friends of the family who visit, and another patient, who also wants to know more about “the good news of Jesus.”

(Inspired by Acts 8:26–40)

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

(May 21, 2006)

by Frank Anderson
Campus Ministry

■ ANGELA, WHO VAGUELY REMEMBERED the Presbyterianism or Lutheranism of a grandparent, had been raised “spiritually neutral.” Now she was confused by all the choices found on a college campus.

Angela sought me out because of this vague recollection of Lutheranism in her family tree. She was curious, but cautious, about God. I listened as Angela was both repelled from, and attracted to, God. There was a mighty battle going on, an ebb and flow of faith and doubt that was painful to watch. While I prayed she would present herself for Holy Baptism, and spoke to her of the option, she never stepped to the font.

I celebrate the words of Peter in Acts: “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people?” I understood Angela’s parents didn’t want to force a religious faith on her, reacting to their own experience of well-meaning, but harsh and condemning Christians. However, in an effort to give her freedom, they had left her adrift in a complex world. Fifteen years later, I continue to pray for Angela.

I arrived at the University of South Carolina six months ago as the Lutheran campus pastor. It’s just as challenging and exciting as I remember from years ago. Our culture has gotten a bit crazier, and I’m a lot older, but one thing, to my surprise, hasn’t changed. Midway through my first semester, Jessica showed up in my office. Never baptized, with no faith vocabulary to match her questioning heart, she timidly asked for some of my time. Here we go again ... thank God.
(Inspired by Acts 10:44–48)

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

(May 28, 2006)

by Brent Dahlseng
Evangelism

■ MANY PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITIES thirst for the good news the church has to offer, but seldom enter our doors on their own to drink this living water. They need someone like Matthias, a missionary to Cappadocia and Ethiopia who witnessed boldly to Christ. Matthias (Acts 1:23–26) models what it means for both lay and clergy to be evangelical leaders.

Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Virginia, empowers laity as evangelical leaders through Bible study, prayer, and community service. When Pastor Brad Hales accepted the call in May 2005 to transform the congregation, Reformation launched the Culpeper Senior Ministry. They offer “Lunch and Learning” twice-a-month for people aged 55 and over, inviting speakers from the community to address issues important to seniors. They also host a monthly Bible study for senior citizens.

An example of the impact of the Culpeper Senior Ministry is Linda, who lives alone and has no support network in her life. Through her participation in “Lunch and Learning” and the Bible study, Linda receives the love and support of a caring community.

Preparing and affirming the evangelical leadership gifts of the laity in our congregations is one of the greatest assets of this church. Now is the time to creatively, liberally, and generously share the living water with those around us.
(Inspired by Acts 1:15–17, 21–26)

These stories are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the pericopes for Ash Wednesday through the Seventh Sunday in Easter (Cycle B).

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