

Pericope

PARTNERS

The first half of Pentecost 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 Pentecost through the 12th Sunday after Pentecost (June 4–August 27, 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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The Day of Pentecost (June 4, 2006)

by Ronald McCallum
Global Mission

■ EARLY MORNING WALKS are easier now that the heat has returned. The road is dusty, and even before 7 a.m. there are many cars, motorcycles, donkey carts, and walkers on the road. From the left, someone greets a neighbor with a friendly “Bonjour!” Across the street, a mother gives her daughter instructions in Moore, the language of the Mossi people of West Africa. A little further on, a Lebanese man opens his shop, shouting orders in a language I don’t understand. Prayers are beginning at the mosque and the call to prayer is in Arabic. It is a typical morning in West Africa and the sounds of many languages fill the air.

This morning I am thinking about my friend Salif. Salif has been a Christian for about two years. He speaks beautiful French, his second language. His first language is Moore. Salif also speaks pretty good English. A former Muslim, he knows Arabic. He understands Jula and Gourmatché, two other ethnic languages of Burkina Faso.

Like many Christians, Salif also understands that the Holy Spirit is leading him and interceding for him every day. When Jews gathered in Jerusalem that first Pentecost and heard the message in their own languages, they were surprised. I suspect if they had lived in West Africa for a short while, they would not have been so surprised. There are indeed many languages, but only one God. There are many sounds, but only one Spirit. It is that Spirit which intercedes with sighs too deep for words...and God knows and understands.

(Inspired by Romans 8:22–27)

Holy Trinity (June 11, 2006)

by Ruben Duran
Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission

■ SOME THINGS ARE HARD TO EXPLAIN, but that does not make them any less true. Today, Ruth is alive and serving God as an associate in ministry at Chicago’s Iglesia de la Santa Cruz, a developing congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Ten years ago, she almost died.

Ruth was a student at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (LSTC) when she suddenly became ill and needed a liver transplant. Because she had minimal health insurance, no hospital would admit her. We went from hospital to hospital, until, with the help of former LSTC President William Leshner, she was admitted to Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

As we worked against the clock, our family experienced life “en conjunto,” that is, in community. Prayers poured in. The seminary students put on theatrical and musical productions to raise funds. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, many congregations, our synodical bishop, and the hospital staff all extended their love and care. The community sustained Ruth through her dramatic surgery and her recovery. She experienced new life “en conjunto,” in community.

It may be hard to explain, but it is true. Jesus tried to convey the same thing to Nicodemus. The loving God, the begotten Son, and the creative and uncontrollable Spirit, working as a team, “en conjunto,” can generate new life. These three persons, yet one God, have been working “en conjunto” in creation, in the incarnation, in the genesis of the Church, and beyond. This Trinitarian mystery may be hard to explain, but it is a way of life; it is life “en conjunto.” Any questions? Just ask my sister, Ruth.

(Inspired by John 3:1–17)

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

(June 18, 2006—Proper 6)

by Scott Hendrickson
ELCA Foundation

■ “A MUSTARD SEED...is the smallest of all the seeds...yet when it is sown it...becomes the greatest of all shrubs.” Mark 4:31–32

The story of the mustard seed brings hope. It reminds me of David and Goliath, of “The Little Engine That Could,” and other stories of the traditional underdog accomplishing the unimaginable. It speaks to me. It whispers in my ear and reminds me of the promise that each one of us has the capacity to produce amazing results.

My work in the ELCA Foundation is a constant reminder that individuals and congregations across this church have the ability to make an impact not only on their surrounding community but also on the world. These congregations vary in size and financial situations. Many have large endowments and can grant major donations. Many others are not in a financial position to donate large gifts. Sometimes they second-guess their potential for making a difference. However, like the mustard seed, small gifts multiplied grow into great things: food and clean water for villages in Africa and around the world; financial support for seminarians committed to serving the congregations of the ELCA; shelter for those ravaged by floods and disaster; resources for rural congregations across the United States; and much, much more.

I want others to see the mustard seed as a source of inspiration. I want them to realize the capacity within themselves. We can all help “the smallest of all the seeds” grow into extraordinary things.

(Inspired Mark 4:26–34)

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

(June 25, 2006—Proper 7)

by Kathy Haueisen
Melancthon Institute, Houston, Texas

■ I REMEMBER THE FEAR I felt in an old downtown church years ago on a youth mission trip. We slept on the third floor, but took showers three flights down in the basement. I was going back upstairs by myself one night when I heard and saw the chain on an outside door rattle. Petrified someone was breaking in, I froze, too frightened even to scream for help. Then I heard footsteps on the stairs above me. My fear instantly dissolved into relief when I saw the sponsor who’d come looking for me. He told me the church had arranged extra security for our group. What I had heard was the night watchman checking to make sure everything was secure.

We never outgrow our need to grow in faith and trust in God’s ability to provide security for us. Adult education reminds us of what we learned as children: Jesus loves the little children. Why are we afraid? Have we still no faith? God is always there to say, “Peace! Be Still!” The Melancthon Institute is an ELCA center for continuing education that, like its namesake Philipp Melancthon, is dedicated to educating lay people so they can grow in faith and the confidence that God is with us.

The need for quality faith education is just as great today as it was when Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon worked tirelessly to bring the message of God’s presence directly to the people. Let us be filled with the same great awe as Jesus’ disciples and ask with them, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Let us never stop learning new ways to know that God is with us and for us.

(Inspired by Mark 4:35–41)

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 2, 2006–Proper 8)

by Barbara Berry-Bailey
Worship and Liturgical Resources

■ “YOU HAVE TURNED MY MOURNING into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.”

—Psalm 30:11-12a

Albert Einstein once said, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” When I was a very young girl, my great-grandmother would offer this comfort whenever she heard of my shedding tears over an incident that would throw me into a period of sadness. I remember her whispering those words in my ear at my great-grandfather’s funeral. “What benefit could possibly lie in a loved one’s death?” I wondered.

Decades later, in the first congregation to which I was called, I learned the answer. I encountered several young people who, by their own admission had never (not yet) encountered heartache or anguish any kind. “I have never wanted for anything,” one teenager said. However, neither had she ever experienced the euphoria of having had her mourning turned to dancing.

It is much easier to praise God when we feel that euphoria. In the deep darkness it may feel as though God has forsaken us, punished us or, as in the story of Job, even allowed evil to have its way with us. In times like these, one of the fruits of faith is our lamentation. Crying out to God, whether for mercy or to express our anger, testifies to our faith that God is indeed with us even in the deepest darkness of despair.

Lamentations are not limited to our personal, confidential devotions. Lament can, and at times should be integrated into communal worship. The anticipated worship resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* will include a variety of hymns and prayers for this very purpose, to allow the assembly of the faithful to cry out to God from the depths of despair, affirming our faith in the one called Immanuel, God with us.

(Inspired by Psalm 30)

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 9, 2006–Proper 9)

by Vance Robbins Blackfox
Youth Ministries

■ As a youth, I found myself perplexed by my mother’s use of clichés that sounded “dorky” and seemed irrelevant to anything I was experiencing. She offered what I considered wisecracks when I was seeking wisdom, or concrete answers, or advice that would lead to “deliverable and sustainable outcomes.” She would say things like: “Be careful what you wish for.” “Don’t wish you life away.” “Good things come to those who pray.” Ugh! Like I said, “dorky!” There was one particular cliché that drove me up the wall. It made me sick, and I prayed she would never use it in front of my friends. It was the famous “Oh, just let go and let God!”

Today, this cliché that I dreaded so much as a youth is my mantra. We are called daily to surrender to God’s will, to be vulnerable, available, and discerning. However, adults tend to focus on those deliverable outcomes. Our call in the church and society is to allow our young sisters and brothers of the Millennial Generation, who are increasingly spiritual, vulnerable, and available, to be examples for us on how to steep our work and interaction and leadership in spiritual discernment. This means we must be more like our youth leaders. We must take my mother’s advice to heart and “let go and let God!”

(Inspired by today’s readings)

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 16, 2006—Proper 10)

*by Bill Kees
Youth Ministries*

■ IN CHRIST WE RECEIVE the name that is ours forever. We are brought to the font and we are baptized with water in God's name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This naming marks us as heirs of life, forgiveness, and salvation—giving us more than we can imagine.

William was at his great uncle's funeral service. He was there because his uncle had been a good uncle. He was always at important family occasions. When he arrived he would look at William and wink and speak nurturing words that lifted up William's sad heart. In some ways he was the father figure William never had.

Now in his late forties, William sat next to his mother near the back of the funeral home. There were a few people they knew, but not many. The service started; they sang some familiar hymns; then the pastor began the eulogy. At the beginning he named William's uncle and said he was the son of William Thomas. William was taken aback. He had not know he had inherited his name from his paternal great-grandfather.

In that very moment William received more than he had ever dreamed of from his father's side of the family. He was connected with the family through his name and there was healing. William wondered if his great uncle had connected to his own father, the elder William Thomas, through him, the younger.

William's experience illustrates the importance of what happens to us in Baptism. In Baptism we are adopted as children of God. We are named with God's name according to God's good pleasure and when we hear that for the first time we are changed for the rest of our lives, as was William when he heard his name spoken by the pastor at his great uncle's funeral. *(Inspired by Ephesians 1:3–14)*

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

(July 23, 2006—Proper 11)

*by Audrey Novak Riley
Lutheran Woman Today
Women of the ELCA*

■ YESTERDAY, JULY 22, the church remembered Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles. According to John 20:1–18, she was the first person to hear the voice of the Risen Lord—and then she ran to tell the others.

This dedicated follower of Jesus has long carried the reputation of a penitent prostitute, even though the Scriptures never even call her a sinner.

What do the Scriptures say about her? She was one of several women who sustained the disciples out of their own resources (Matthew 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:2–3). She stayed to witness Jesus' crucifixion and burial (Matthew 27:55–56, 61; Mark 15:40–41, 47; John 19:25). All four Gospels testify that she returned to the tomb early Sunday morning—and we know what happened then.

The Bible also tells us that Jesus had driven seven demons out of Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). No wonder she was so loyal to Jesus! She knew his saving power from her own experience.

Mary Magdalene gave of her own resources to support Jesus' mission; she believed in him through the darkest hour; she ran to carry out his command to spread the good news—she modeled discipleship, just as the many members of Women of the ELCA do every day.

(Inspired by today's readings)

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 30, 2006—Proper 12)

by Sue Edison-Swift

ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Response

■ “THERE IS A BOY HERE who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

—John 6:9

Earlier this month some 40,000 youth and youth leaders *Journeyed with Jesus* at the 2006 ELCA Youth Gathering in San Antonio, Texas. Each participant was asked to bring three “Hamiltons for Hunger”—three \$10 bills—to donate to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. These \$30 offerings will make a loaves-and-fishes life-saving difference.

Just one of these \$30 offerings to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal might provide the school supplies that allow a child to stay in primary school another year. Or it could support an animal project, bringing a pig or a goat to a family. It could offer a month of care for a child trying to live on the street. The \$30 might provide seeds and seedlings to help a family grow nutritious and income-generating crops.

The “Hamiltons for Hunger” offering may add up to \$1 million for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, but God’s math doesn’t just add up, it blesses and *multiplies*. For example, consider the \$10,000 investment that brought a source of clean, safe, drinking water to a community of 6,000 people. Or reflect on the value of the \$120 micro-credit loan that helped Milly Muyinga, a widow with eight children, buy a pedal sewing machine and fabric to begin making and selling school uniforms. This income-generating business allows her to care for her family and foster-parent two children orphaned by AIDS. Imagine the impact of that \$120.

With their “Hamiltons for Hunger” donations, the youth of our church answered Christ’s call to feed the hungry, and they invite us to do the same. It’s a “loaves and fishes” opportunity. (*Inspired by John 6:1–15*)

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

(August 6, 2006—Proper 13)

by Megan Jones

Lutheran Campus Ministry

■ AS A CAMPUS PASTOR, I have the privilege of living and learning with the people of God at a most amazing time in their journey. Each day seems to present new discoveries about who they are and who they are becoming. And while the demands and pressures are very real, in many ways, the world is at their feet. They are rocket scientists, biologists, engineers, and architects. They sing karaoke, march in bands, kayak, and fall in love. Their plates are full.

Still, they are very hungry, eager to ask difficult questions about the world and their place in it, about God and tradition, about faith and doubt.

“I want to know, God. Sometimes I feel like I am working so hard! Why does God seem so far away?”

“I think God may be calling me to be a pastor, but I really love what I am doing now. What should I do?”

“I’ve been a Lutheran all my life, but lately I feel like a hypocrite. I’m not sure I can be in church when I have so many questions.”

We all long to KNOW the answers, to get it right but so often the gift comes in the questions and challenges.

The manna that comes to us in our wildernesses gives us what we need to live in the world as it is. It feeds us for our life’s journey so that there is room, plenty of room, for the questions. God, full of grace and mercy is the faithful one. While our plates are full, I thank God for the hunger.

(*Inspired by today’s readings*)

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 13, 2006–Proper 14)

by Ron Duty
Church in Society

■■■■ DURING ANY GIVEN WEEK, Principal Christi Lines makes sure that her teachers at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, Iowa, have what they need to teach children the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, science, and about their relationship to Jesus. Pastor Jean Zietlow of First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, teaches her confirmation class about faith in Jesus. At Valparaiso University in Indiana, theologian Marcia Bunge teaches her students about Christianity, while pondering the significance of children for Christian theology today. In Mt. Prospect, Illinois, Diane Monroe uses a "prayer cube" to teach her second grade Sunday school class the practice of prayer so that they draw nearer to Jesus.

Every few months, these four women gather with others involved in both Lutheran and public education to learn more about all facets of education in today's world, to write adult study material for the church about education today, and to draft an ELCA social statement on education, "Our Calling in Education." Together they have arrived at a fundamental vision for education: The ELCA is called to educate all members for their vocations both as Christians and as citizens of society, **and** our society has a God-given calling to educate its members for socially productive roles that contribute to the common good.

In worship, we are drawn to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and to receive his flesh for the life of the world. We are sent to use our knowledge, skills, imaginations, wisdom, and talents for the sake of the world Jesus came to redeem.

(Inspired by John 6:35, 41–51)

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 20, 2006–Proper 15)

by Susan Greeley
Grace Matters Radio Ministry

■■■■ IT MAY SEEM STRANGE to think of Christmas in August, but I cannot read this gospel lesson without thinking of Bethlehem.

Why? Because the word "Bethlehem" is made up of two Hebrew words, *Bet* and *Lechem*, meaning "House of Bread."

I learned this from Mary Fuller when she was interviewed on *Grace Matters*, the radio ministry of the ELCA. Mary collects crèches from all over the world. A retired principal, she uses her nativity scenes as educational tools. She talks about the natural resources that indigenous people use to make them. She points out how the stable of Bethlehem becomes an igloo in Alaska or a coconut shell in the Caribbean. And to stress the importance of Christ's body being given for everyone, Mary Fuller teaches people how to make their own crèche from a round loaf of bread.

Long ago Jesus, the baby, was born in House of Bread. Today Jesus, the Christ, has become our house of bread. "This is the bread that came down from heaven.... The one who eats this bread will live forever."

(Inspired by John 6:51–58)

For more about Mary Fuller, including directions for making a bread crèche, go to www.gracematters.org/interviews/m.fuller.html

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 27, 2006—Proper 16)

by Mark Grorud
Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission

I AM CALLED TO WORK with the larger congregations in the ELCA. In reality, I am blessed to relate to a variety of congregations and congregational ministries across this church.

As I visit with pastors, there are some common themes and concerns that I hear expressed. Perhaps the most frequent ministry concern involves the struggles and frustrations of transforming members into disciples. Staffing issues are often shaped around that concern; volunteer efforts reflect it; stewardship, evangelism, and outreach all follow from it. I am also frequently asked a follow-up question: “Is anyone else out there dealing with these same issues?”

Of course! This is the struggle of the faith. Joshua dealt with this struggle when he boldly proclaimed, “Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Jesus dealt with this issue when some of his disciples thought he was asking too much of them. Jesus didn’t back down, and they went looking for someone or something easier to follow.

Discipleship has never been easy. It’s not easy in larger congregations, or in smaller congregations. But it is what we are called to do and to be. So we carry on...in our congregations, in our synods, and in the various churchwide ministries of the ELCA. We carry on in the work of making disciples because we stand with Peter in proclaiming, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

(Inspired by today’s readings)

These stories are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the pericopes for Pentecost through the 12th Sunday after Pentecost (Cycle B).

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