

Pericope

PARTNERS

Lent and Easter 2007

Pericope Partners are short stories that connect the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with weekly lectionary readings. This resource reflects the partnership we share as a whole church, based on the Revised Common Lectionary Readings Cycle C pericopes for Ash Wednesday through the Seventh Sunday of Easter (Feb. 21 – May 20, 2007).

Pericope Partners vignettes are suitable for use in sermons, bulletins, or newsletters. They may be downloaded from www.elca.org/pericope and copied for congregational use. Print copies are available upon request by calling 800/638-3522.

Ash Wednesday (February 21, 2007)

by Lowell Almen
Office of the Secretary

In my role as secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with responsibility for the archives, I periodically interview key figures so that memory of this church's history will not be lost.

In February 2006 I interviewed Mildred Berg, the first chair of the board of trustees of the Board of Pensions. Mildred had retired about two decades ago from her position as a senior vice president at a Wall Street bank. She knew, from the inside, the world of wealth and high finance.

Besides talking about her work with the Board of Pensions, Mildred reflected on her whole life. She talked about how grateful she was for the privilege of serving the people of this church through her work as chair and, before that, on various boards. She also talked about her confidence in the grace of God.

Three days after the interview Mildred died.

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Mildred knew what wealth is—she saw firsthand the meaning of treasures on earth. Yet, later, as I read the transcript of that interview, I realized that she knew even better the meaning of Jesus' words, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for your selves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Through God's grace, Mildred—and we—have been given treasure beyond measure.

(Inspired by Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21)

First Sunday in Lent (February 25, 2007)

by Ed Kruse
Evangelical Outreach & Congregational Mission

"Take the first part of your harvest to the temple and give it as an offering to God." —Deut. 26:1-11

Picture yourself as a farmer, anxious to get into the field to harvest. You've had no crop for four years. If you don't get a crop this year, you will lose the farm.

You have prepared the soil. You planted the seed. God gave the rain. You fertilized the young plants. You controlled the weeds. All seems ready. Then you hear the weather forecast, "severe thunderstorms and hail." You only have one day, today. You recall the hailstorm that destroyed your neighbor's harvest. He ended up with those dreaded words—"Farm Sale."

In 1980 I literally "sold the farm." It was not a big farm, but included a house, animals, fields of alfalfa, corn, and beans. Everything went for a pittance of what had been invested. It was a devastating experience, because I had wrapped everything—my job, my family, my values, my life—into that farm.

Farmers in Jesus' day lost their crops to drought or locusts. Even then God said, "Take the first part of your harvest to the temple and give it as an offering to God." The first part? Before saving next year's seed?

Good stewards live "one day at a time," in faith. We do not declare that everything will turn out okay; instead, we teach that God is with us even when it doesn't turn out okay.

Twenty-five years later, it's painful to think of that loss. Yet I know that even after you lose the farm, God is still there.
(Inspired by Deuteronomy 26:1–11)

Second Sunday in Lent (March 4, 2007)

by John Brooks
Communication Services

Fourteen months after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, I went with 16 members of my congregation to Louisiana to volunteer with Lutheran Disaster Response. We were assigned a duplex in Chalmette that was untouched since the storm. Everything the occupants owned was still there, ruined by at least 8 feet of floodwater. Most of the items were dry, caked with mud and debris. It was dark inside—a Good Friday experience.

We wore body suits, boots, gloves, goggles and respirators as we worked. The owner, a retired man living in a FEMA trailer, stopped by each day to witness our progress. He could never have cleaned up such a mess on his own. Eventually we cleaned out the duplex, took the walls down and left a house stripped down to the studs. The duplex was now ready to be rebuilt. Sunlight streamed in the windows and doors.

Before leaving we gathered outside with the owner and prayed—for him, his family, the people of Louisiana and Mississippi, disaster staff and volunteers, local government leaders—and in that moment we were all one. Easter had come.

In Luke 13, Jesus tells the story of the fig tree that is given one more year to bear fruit.

In the Gulf Coast, it will take much more than a year to recover, and there is much heavy lifting and careful tending still to do. The body of Christ suffers together, and it rebuilds together. I felt privileged to have been part of a team that gave at least one person a chance to restore his property and his life in the face of such overwhelming destruction.

(Inspired by Luke 13:31-35)

Third Sunday in Lent (March 11, 2007)

by Rod Boriack
Vocation and Education

“Just one more game!” That’s what I kept telling my son Jon as I wrestled with the video game control. I didn’t even look him in the eye as I begged for another chance to prove myself and claim success. I was just madly pressing buttons on the video control and hoping it would do what I wanted. Jon, on the other hand, wielded the control with skill. He had learned the skills by talking to friends, searching the Internet, reading magazines, and by playing it over time.

Jon was merciful with me. Sometimes he’d let me in on a secret to help me and sometimes he took a more direct approach. My awkwardness and impatience were met move for move with Jon’s patience and guidance. When I was worn out, he flashed me a smile that told me everything was fine and we’d pick it up another day.

What a gift it is to know that we have another chance and that there are people who will walk with us and attend to us patiently. What a gift it is to know that our imperfect, frantic lives are met move for move with God’s love, forgiveness, and guidance.

When I think about youth ministry, I keep coming back to the patient and loving presence of God expressed through the many adults who work with young people throughout the church. ELCA Youth Ministries and the ELCA Youth Gathering support these caring adult leaders in their day-to-day ministry, and hold them in prayer.

(Inspired by Luke 13:1–9)

Fourth Sunday in Lent (March 18, 2007)

*by Daniel Carlson
Mission Investment Fund*

With tears in her eyes, a woman in a wheelchair said, “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” to the building committee members at the dedication dinner at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Brainerd, Minn. “This is the first time I have been able to come to a church meal in the social hall and I have been a member here for many years,” she exclaimed. Thanks to a new elevator and new addition made possible by a loan from the Mission Investment Fund, this woman can now be included in all church activities.

Likewise, a Mission Investment Fund loan at First Evangelical Lutheran in Parkers Prairie, Minn., now allows the local nursing home to bring up to a dozen people to worship on a Sunday since the sanctuary is accessible by a new elevator. “It was like a homecoming for many of the elderly, who haven’t been to worship for years,” said Pastor Ken Bowman. Now a wheelchair-bound young adult can get to worship without help and the new multipurpose room has produced an increase in adult education and Bible study.

In the Gospel text we see what a celebration the Father has for the lost son! It was a new day, a time to truly celebrate. The Mission Investment Fund is more than loans for bricks and mortar. “Behold, I make all things new.” Not just buildings, but lives and ministries are renewed.

(Inspired by 2 Corinthians 5:16–21, Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32)

Fifth Sunday in Lent (March 25, 2007)

*by John Temmerman
Office of the Treasurer*

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” —*John 12:3*

This story to me is about our role in God’s plan. Mary saw what was needed to comfort Jesus and she made it happen.

One of the things I’ve learned in nearly 30 years as a financial professional is that I am more comfortable with numbers than with people. Working for nearly 10 years as a churchwide office staff member has taught me that one of my roles in God’s plan is to support churchwide ministries and the people who carry them out.

I am not suited to writing inspiring theological texts or preaching to the masses or giving care to God’s children around the world who so desperately need our programs. However, I am equipped to help and support those who do. That provides meaning to my work.

We are one body made up of many members. Some are on the front lines spreading the word, caring for the sick, disabled or other victims. Others, like me, support those folks.

What’s your part?

(Inspired by John 12:1–8)

Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday (April 1, 2007)

*by Bob Chell
Campus Ministry*

Jean, a university professor, came to the University Lutheran Center at South Dakota State University in September to learn English. He was so soft-spoken I was surprised to learn he had been jailed for speaking out against corruption in his homeland. Had his arrest not been filmed by CNN, he is certain he would have been killed. The American embassy secured his release and arranged for him to relocate to the United States, leaving his wife and children behind. He slept on the couch of a student who befriended him. He worked night maintenance and on Sundays he worshiped. He saved his money in the hope of freeing his family and bringing them to America.

He came to me in November. His wife had been instructed to come to the American embassy with photos and passports. He was full of excitement and anxiety. Freedom was at hand but he had saved only \$700 of the \$2,400 necessary for plane tickets.

We talked. We prayed. I asked permission to share his story with our student congregation and others. He asked me not to name his homeland. He worried.

People were anxious to help, eager to give, students, faculty, and others. His was a Holy Week experience—the pain of loneliness, jail and separation, the hope of new life. The money was in hand but there were delays, changed flights, problems with passports and visas en route. Their journey was delayed, then delayed again. Finally it was time, kairos, the right time. They arrived December 25. That Christmas became a Holy Week, an Easter experience. New life!

(Inspired by today's readings)

Easter Day (April 8, 2007)

*by Philip J. Knutson
Global Mission*

I will never forget the first hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa. I traveled there with a local pastor who had himself been detained by the security police and held in prison. The commission followed the first democratic elections in 1994, and it enabled thousands of victims to tell their stories and perpetrators to apply for amnesty.

Reflecting on this process Desmond Tutu wrote in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*: “If you can’t forgive, you remain a captive prisoner and victim of the perpetrator. . . . Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing him to the cross had asked for forgiveness. He was ready, as they drove in the nails, to pray to his Father to forgive them.”

Tutu concluded: “[South Africa] had a nightmare called apartheid. It has ended . . . your nightmare will end too. No problem anywhere can ever again be considered to be intractable. There is hope for you too . . . that because of forgiveness there is a future.”

This and similar testimonies of faith, suffering, and hope have deepened my understanding that Easter begins on the cross and that forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of God’s mission.

What the people of South Africa have learned can help all of us learn to be peacebuilders and peacemakers. Through ELCA Global Mission, we can connect with companion churches and savor some of their wisdom, finding resources for overcoming local and global conflict.

(Inspired by Luke 24:1–12)

Second Sunday of Easter (April 15, 2007)

by Catherine Fink
Heilig Resource Center, North Carolina Synod

The young pastor tells a familiar story, “Our youth Sunday school class has good attendance, but the teacher is really frustrated. The kids don’t talk!” The pastor leaves the resource center with several options for her teacher to preview.

“I’m writing curriculum for our upcoming retreats on the sacraments,” the camp director writes. “Sacraments are such image-rich celebrations; I’m feeling the need for images in the teaching.” Images of wheat, wine and water spring to mind and a box of videos is on its way to camp.

Another e-mail: “Are there any good resources on Amos? I think it will speak to American politics and life. I’m really feeling led to tackle this issue.” Preparation for an adult small group is under way.

These stories are prime examples of the ministry happening in resource centers, week after week, all across this church. ELCA Resource Centers can be found in over 60 locations, in various sizes, connecting congregational leaders with resources they need.

In John’s Gospel we read the story of Jesus’ surprise appearance. Because they were afraid, the disciples had locked themselves in a room. Suddenly, Jesus appeared with them. Wow! That’s what they had hoped for—Jesus’ presence. That’s still our hope today—Jesus’ presence. And, once we’re sure of that promise, we’re compelled to share the good news of Jesus with others!

Resource centers help congregational leaders show Jesus to others—to youth in Sunday school, to retreat participants, to adults in small groups—so that others can join with Thomas saying, “My Lord and my God!”

(Inspired by John 20:19–31)

Third Sunday of Easter (April 22, 2007)

by Jennifer Barger
World Hunger Appeal

“Do you love me? Feed my lambs.” What remarkably simple instructions from our Savior. Yet in a world where nearly one billion people go hungry, following these simple instructions can feel like an overwhelmingly difficult task.

It won’t be easy, but for the first time in history, we have the resources, technology, and know-how to end the silent disaster of hunger. The United Nations has agreed to a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that provide a road map and timetable for meeting the basic needs of all people. Your gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal support trusted partners around the globe in their work on the MDGs. Your voice, joined with millions of others through the ONE campaign (www.elca.org/advocacy), calls on our elected leaders to devote an additional 1 percent of the federal budget to supporting the MDGs. These concrete steps do make a difference!

This Sunday we also celebrate Earth Day. ELCA World Hunger Appeal and its trusted partners are working to care for the creation. Lutheran World Relief trains and supports farmers who practice sustainable and organic agriculture. ELCA domestic hunger grant recipients are turning empty lots into urban gardens in Chicago, Baltimore, and Omaha, Neb.; teaching kids how to take care of the environment in Fort Wayne, Ind., and Washington, D.C.; and promoting locally produced food in Iowa, Missouri, and Louisiana.

In the season of Easter, we revel in the joy of believing the unbelievable—the empty tomb, victory over death. And through your mission support to the ELCA and your gifts to ELCA World Hunger Appeal, you proclaim another joyful belief—we can end hunger in this world.

(Inspired by John 21:1–19)

Fourth Sunday of Easter **(April 29, 2007)**

by Bob Cochran
Campus Ministry

Five years ago, “Amy” dragged boyfriend “Mark” to our Lutheran Campus Ministry services at Western Michigan University. Mark was only marginally churched, but since Amy was a pastor’s daughter, Mark had little choice! Every week, “Markandamy” came to church together. We thought of them as Markandamy because they were very much in love, and we never saw them apart. They became inseparable from our ministry as well, so imagine our horror when, as a junior, Amy announced they had broken up. Amy sensed our terror and quickly added they’d decided that they had to remain friends because neither of them was giving up the ministry!

That year, Mark came to me and, in language reminiscent of the Ethiopian eunuch, said, “What would prevent me from being baptized?” We quickly put together a service, and Mark became the newest member of God’s family. And, just as Jesus was immediately whisked from his baptism into the wilderness, Mark was shipped out to the deserts of Iraq within weeks of being baptized.

Those of us left behind worried, cried, and prayed that this young man who had so recently joined the church on earth not be so quickly taken from it. Mark did return and became one of our best peer leaders.

Mark was able to walk through the valley of death fearlessly because he heard the voice and followed the one who knew him. He was comforted by the rod and staff of the great shepherd and led back to the still waters of his Baptism.

(Inspired by Psalm 23, John 10:22–30)

Fifth Sunday of Easter **(May 6, 2007)**

by Twila Schock
Global Mission

When the Communist era in Central and Eastern Europe came to an end, the tiny Silesian Church in the Czech Republic found itself faced with both a great opportunity and a tremendous challenge. In a nation where only 30 percent of the population has any affiliation with Christianity at all, Christians have often been viewed as an anomaly. How could a church begin to fulfill Christ’s command to love one another when so much of society seemed to be beyond the church’s reach?

“Christians are viewed with suspicion in our secularized society,” says Bishop Vladislav Volny. “The average person will not meet us where we Christians are—in our church buildings. So we must meet people where they are. They will come to recognize Christ through our acts of love and compassion for the poorest of the poor and for those in greatest need.”

Indeed, this tiny denomination, numbering only 35,000 members, has set out to do just that. In 1990, at the fall of the Socialist government, this denomination had no social service institutions and no social ministry personnel. Today this church runs Silesian Diakonia, the social ministry arm of the church. This “powerhouse” social ministry program now sponsors 43 social ministry service institutions—centers for the disabled, orphanages, after-school programs, and elder care facilities—throughout the country. This ministry now employs 370 workers and 70 volunteers.

Indeed, through the social ministries of this tiny church, Silesian Diakonia, Christ’s command is being fulfilled as their discipleship of Christ has been made known.

(Inspired by John 13:31–35)

Sixth Sunday of Easter (May 13, 2007)

by Bonnie Belasic
Women of the ELCA

What's in a name?

A link with history perhaps? Maybe you were named after a grandparent or good friend or world leader.

A perception of power or fame? Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Frank Lloyd Wright. Gloria Steinem. Maya Angelou.

Shall I name her Jane or Janie? Which will go further in the world?

A chance for justice? Martin Luther King Jr. Nelson Mandela. Marian Wright Edelman. Jesus.

A woman named Lydia was wealthy and a believer. The name "God" meant something in her life. She heard a message that called her to a deeper recognition of God, a message that inspired her to invite people to her table.

Through Women of the ELCA, women of the church are called to a deeper recognition of God in their lives through Bible study, prayer, education, and action. The Lydias of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—wealthy in resources and rich beyond dollars—are, in Jesus' name, constantly and continually inviting others to the table, where there is room for everyone.

Frances in Texas makes quilts to wrap the world in warmth. Eileen in Florida hosts fellowship meals with people affected by HIV/AIDS. Emily in Illinois oversees a grants program that empowers women worldwide to health and wholeness. Debra in Michigan publishes Braille books for children. Merle, an educator in North Dakota, allows no disrespect for opinions or cultures not one's own.

Women of this church mobilize to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. In God's name, they make room at the table.

(Inspired by Acts 16:9–15)

Seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20, 2007)

by Mary Streufert
Church in Society

Joy had gone to churches seeking help and affirmation that she, too, is made in God's image. But what happened? She was told: "Come back later." "The pastor is not here to see you right now." "The office is closed." "No, you may not use our bathroom."

Church workers were unable to embrace Joy's social impurity. Her fingernails and hair were dirty. Her eyes revealed drug use. Her clothes revealed her work. Vulnerable from years of emotional and physical abuse, Joy was possessed by a pimp and drugs. Joy's body was sold for her pimp's profit to men who purchased sex with her.

After nearly 20 years of being prostituted and trafficked across national borders, Joy was liberated from drugs and prostitution through Breaking Free, a St. Paul, Minn., nonprofit that works with women trying to escape prostitution and drug addiction.

In Acts 16, the girl with the Pythian spirit was vulnerable to the abuse of others because she had a gift of divination. Paul caused a cultural clash in Philippi by casting out the spirit that earned the slave girl's owners a profit.

Social ministry organizations affiliated with the ELCA work with women and children vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. The program for Justice for Women in the ELCA promotes a cultural clash through theology and advocacy to address situations in which women are possessed in body, mind, or spirit.

Does your proclamation of Jesus Christ bring healing? Does your "slavery to the Most High God" set others free?

(Inspired by Acts 16:16–34)

Pericope Partners, available for download at elca.org/pericope, are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the weekly lectionary readings for Ash Wednesday through the Seventh Sunday of Easter (Cycle C). Send your comments to **Pericope Partners**, ELCA Communication Services, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631, or e-mail the editor at ben.mcdonaldcoltvet@elca.org

Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 by the Division for Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and used by permission.

©2007 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Produced by ELCA Communication Services
8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631 800/638-3522
Photocopy permission granted to ELCA congregations.

