

Pericope

PARTNERS

First Half of Pentecost 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 the Day of Pentecost through the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (May 27 – Aug. 26, 2007).

Pericope Partners vignettes are suitable for use in sermons, bulletins, or newsletters. Download them at www.elca.org/pericope and copy them for congregational use. Print copies are available upon request by calling 800/638-3522.

Day of Pentecost (May 27, 2007)

by Marilyn Sorenson
Multicultural Ministries

The story of Pentecost is connected to language. On Pentecost many languages were spoken, yet all understood.

Language is a gift of love; it is integral to our identity. The active use of language adds strength to our identity. Culture survives through the use of language; traditional values and increased self-esteem are benefits of language. We use our first language because that is how we think and it expresses pride in our heritage, beliefs, values, culture and traditions.

Whenever leaders of the Multicultural Ministries unit of the churchwide organization gather around the table at staff meetings or program committee meetings, it gladdens my heart to see the variety of gifts created by God: gifts of color, culture, ability, and language, with each person celebrating and expressing their unique gifts, each anxious and willing to share their understanding and love of God.

Around our tables and in congregations across the country there are many native tongues: Dakota, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, and Toi Sham, to name a few. When ELCA congregations gather for worship, 40 different languages are raised in song, prayer, and praise. When we express our faith and the power of God's love in messages and song, it is a joy to behold.

Like the early church on the Day of Pentecost, we deepen mutual understanding of who we are as a church when we share our culture, values, traditions, and beliefs. As people created in the image of God, we are united in faith in Jesus Christ.

(Inspired by Acts 2:1–21)

The Holy Trinity (June 3, 2007)

by Bruce Heggen
Campus Ministry

John's construction accident left him unable to work. Unemployment compensation paid the rent, but he and his sons couldn't live on groceries provided by food stamps. He needed new skills for reemployment, but couldn't gain them and earn enough for additional groceries. A grocery club, organized by students in Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Delaware, helped him stretch his grocery income until he had retooled as a short-order cook.

For their part, the students gather monthly to order groceries from the Delaware Food Bank. They found that \$250 provides 20 families with groceries to sustain them. The students hold majors from art history to zoology, but they learned to put meat, potatoes, vegetables, pasta, sauces, and desserts together in combinations that are both inexpensive and healthy. And they have looked for and found funding to pay the bills.

From those they serve they have learned that social systems have cracks that the most well-intentioned people can't quite negotiate. More important: the students learned that they serve not a "clientele," but John and his sons. They have discovered that they're all part of a community offering practical help until John—and others like him—are on their feet again.

This Sunday is dedicated to the Trinity: a community. To live in community is to be the image of God. Learning to give and to receive from one another, John and the students at the University of Delaware have all learned that they are living images of God.

(Inspired by Romans 5:1–5, John 16:12–15)

Second Sunday after Pentecost (June 10, 2007)

by Kevin Jacobson
Global Mission

In the book *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, Mortenson describes the most important lesson he learned in his quest to build schools in the remotest parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is the lesson of the three cups of tea taught to him by the eldest leader in the village, “The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.”

This lesson of wisdom spoken by the elder Balti demonstrated for Mortenson his responsibility to engage in a deeper relationship of love, respect and honor for and with the Balti people.

In the ELCA, our relationships with companions and companion synods around the world depend on shared faith and an exchange of gifts that build and strengthen our ability to work together as God’s people in mission today.

When I read today’s texts, I learn to expect the unexpected, to listen, to allow companions to know and trust me, and likewise for me to open myself up to receive their wisdom and gifts. As Elijah became a member of the widow’s family, so we, in sharing with our global companions, receive the gift of hospitality and are welcomed in the family of God. As we engage in the world, let us share that spirit of peace over three cups of tea with each other.

(Inspired by I Kings 17:17–24)

Third Sunday after Pentecost (June 17, 2007)

by Anne Keffer
Deaconess Community

It isn’t easy being church. Being church means being vulnerable to all who have needs, and being wise enough to care for oneself too! Listen to these voices:

- Betty heard the young woman’s plea for help and promised to be there for her all the way—through the shame of being HIV/AIDS positive, through the pain, through telling her family. It isn’t about “facing the music”—it’s about letting God forgive us.
- The retired couple told Chaplain Joan that they had much to be thankful for—a beautiful apartment, a ready-made community and caring staff. Yet Chaplain Joan heard a painful note of doubt in their stories. This pastor and her husband who had long served the church now needed Joan’s hands-on assurance: You ARE loved!
- Sister Sylvia was called to serve in Palestine amid military occupation and economic deprivation, where she greeted visitors and visited schools. As she worked with staff and students, she found her own beliefs being challenged. She felt she was watching Jesus as he uprooted long-held beliefs and customs.

All of these stories are true to the call to *diakonia*—the call to those of us serving in the public ministry as deaconesses, diaconal ministers, or associates in ministry.

The diaconal call is bigger than this group of professionals. The diaconal call belongs to the whole church! We are called to move mountains to meet others’ needs—locally and around the world—and raise our prophetic voices to challenge systems and practices that create poverty and misery.

(Inspired by Luke 7:36–8:3)

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (June 24, 2007)

*by Kathryn Love
Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission*

In Luke 8, Jesus frees a man possessed by demons, and then insists on having that man deliver Good News to his community. Oh, how this man must have loved Jesus because of his new freedom! He desired to follow Jesus to another town, but Jesus told him to “return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.”

When people are freed from addictions they are often counseled to avoid the site of their addiction. In certain circumstances, however, this can be where their witness is most profound. Who can better talk to teens but teens who share similar experiences? People recovering from cancer, abuse, or AIDS are examples of people seeking full recovery. In their recovery process, often they are the best ones to provide counsel and inspiration for others who are “dwelling among the tombs.”

We too are called to walk in places within and outside of our sphere of influence. Fear not! Being present with others, aiding others in times of disaster and brokenness is a form of evangelizing—sharing the Good News. Listening to voices crying among the tombs is a way of evangelizing.

In revival services we hear the Word, share testimonies, and receive prayer for healing, commitment, and renewal for the purpose of leading others toward new lives of faithfulness. As the nameless man was instructed, so can we instruct others: Go back home and help others by sharing your story.

(Inspired by Luke 8:26–39)

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (July 1, 2007)

*by Kim L. Beckmann
Vocation and Education*

What does a call from God feel like to you?

A colleague was recently elected to a position both prestigious and challenging. This appointment wasn't something he had signed up for. The rest of us, seeing his gifts and the upcoming leadership vacancy in this particular institution, felt all the signs were pointing in this direction. “I never aspired to this,” he reflected. “It's more like I was...” “Fingered?” “Yes. Like that.” Fingered by God.

What does a call from God, a call to use your gifts for the sake and the need of the world, feel like to you? Elijah “fingers” Elisha to be his successor. He anoints him with oil for the prestigious and challenging position of continuing Elijah's prophetic role among God's people. Elisha is marked for this service. Each of us in our own baptismal vocation has been called out by God for service in the world every day.

When Elisha is chosen, he kisses his folks, literally liquidates his assets, and picks up a different yoke—Elijah's mantle. Each year in the ELCA about 500 women and men are called out by congregations, campus and outdoor ministries, family, and friends to consider living out their baptismal calling as public ministers of the gospel for the sake of God's world. Like Elisha, many of them leave work, family and comfort zones behind as they enter the candidacy process, seminary classes and work among the people of God that forms them for servant leadership.

How is God calling you today?

(Inspired by I Kings 19:15–16, 19–21)

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (July 8, 2007)

*by Anne Edison-Albright
ELCA seminarian at Yale Divinity School*

I was flying to China to begin a Global Mission short-term missionary program, and I was scared sleepless. I started scribbling my doubts into a notebook: Was I getting into something beyond my abilities? I thought about how I had practiced telling the mirror “I am your teacher,” only to have an anxious 21-year-old reflect back. I was about to encounter a culture that values age and wisdom; how could someone still in college presume to teach conversational English to adults who were already teachers?

I was so preoccupied preparing for my role that I was unprepared for the welcome. It turned out that my greatest obstacle was not my youth and inexperience, but rather my resistance to receive help and hospitality. I wanted to carry my own luggage, navigate my own paths, and prove that I could take care of myself.

When I came down with a serious sinus and upper respiratory infection, though, it was clear even to me that I needed help. My new friend, host, and translator for the team, Zhang Xiao, stepped up to take care of me. Her mom, an otolaryngologist (ENT), treated me with the best of Eastern and Western medicine, and a mother’s love. For the week I was ill, the Zhang family welcomed me into their home for dinner and rest between my afternoon and evening treatments at the hospital.

My six weeks in China were filled with the blessings (and lessons!) of grace-filled giving and receiving, offering and accepting. Thanks be to God and to my companions on the journey.

(Inspired by Luke 10:1–11, 16–20)

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (July 15, 2007)

*by Larry Westfield
Development Services*

As a regional gift planner working through the ELCA Foundation it is my pleasure to visit with people who know that loving God and loving others is what gift giving is all about.

The Greek roots of the word “philanthropy” could be translated as “loving others.” Every generous soul who loves to give is also a person who loves others deeply, passionately, and often doesn’t even get to meet them.

What motivates a person to open their heart to students at a school they never attended, who had no family attend and who have never met any graduates? Simply the fact that they realize their gift they can make a positive difference for someone.

In the story of the Good Samaritan in today’s Gospel text, the nameless man fell into the hands of robbers. But if we read further, we see that those were not the only hands he fell into. A Samaritan extends his hands and the man has the good fortune to find rest and relief in those generous hands. These were the hands of a stranger who loved and bandaged up his wounds and paid the bill. It may have been a very modest gift but it was given from the heart and was an act of philanthropy.

Most of us do not have a fortune to give away to make a difference. When we give from the heart we join other disciples of Christ who know it is all about loving God and loving our neighbor.

(Inspired by Luke 10:25–37)

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (July 22, 2007)

by *Julie B. Sevig*
The Lutheran magazine

You know the story: Martha is busy in the kitchen; Mary is seated at Jesus' feet. But you might not know the story about marymusicians or marthameals at Edison Lutheran Church in Bow, Wash., 60 miles north of Seattle.

In this tiny congregation, simple ministries bear the names of sisters Mary and Martha.

On a marthameal delivery to a cancer patient, member Julie Wilkinson Rousseau realized the meal nourished the recipient's family, "but her need was food for the soul."

So Rousseau started marymusicians, a small group that piles into cars at sundown every Wednesday during the summer, driving across a land marked by dairy farms, fields of berries, peas and potatoes. They make their way onto the porches of the ill and grieving to sing them to sleep. They'll even walk around to a bedroom window and sing from there.

"It's just a very simple ministry," Rousseau explained to me as I tagged along to do a story for *The Lutheran magazine* ("Porch Lullabies," September 2003). "We sing to people who are ill or when there's been a death . . . Sometimes you just don't have the words for a conversation, but you know a hymn you can sing."

And so it was on this overcast day that we drove through the countryside and sang—accompanied by guitar and accordion—on people's porches and in a garage filled with machinery and parts.

Food for the body, food for the soul. Both Martha and Mary had their ministries. Mine is telling stories like these.

(Inspired by Luke 10:38–42)

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (July 29, 2007)

by *D. Jensen Seyenkulo*
Vocation and Education

I grew up in Liberia, West Africa, in one of the busiest homes on earth! My dad, a kind-hearted man, had a house full of adopted children before his biological children were born. He seemed to have decided to make up for the time he had lost taking seriously the biblical mandate "be fruitful and multiply." Once he started having children it was like a levee had been broken. The children kept coming!

Prior to the arrival of his biological children, Dad was "King of the Hill" in his home. He had the best seat, the best clothes, and the best part of the food. Being one of the adopted, and thus one of the oldest, I had the privilege of watching what privileges Dad enjoyed, and I wanted to be like him.

Then life changed. Dad lost most of his "privileges" as his biological children demanded his attention both for themselves as well as for their brothers and sisters. Whenever one received a favor, they wanted the same for their siblings. They would request the same for the other kids and then run to tell those kids what they had received from Dad.

Like those children, Abraham negotiates with God on behalf of his "siblings." Like those children, the Vocation and Education unit of the churchwide organization addresses church members with the question, "What about those who do not have what we have?" and asks those outside the church, "Do you know the church has something for you?"

(Inspired by Genesis 18:20–32)

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (August 5, 2007)

by A. Craig Settlage
Synodical Relations

We live in a society where the accumulation of possessions is a key measure of success, so today's Scripture readings are jarring in their insistence upon a different way of looking at life.

Think of the number of advertisements you encounter every day—in print, on radio or television, on billboards, and the Internet. The goal of almost every message is to convince you that this particular product will enrich your life if you acquire it.

Similarly, we wonder about our material security in the present and our future. Are we saving enough, investing wisely enough, to insure a comfortable standard of living?

To which the writer of Ecclesiastes might say, “all is vanity.” It is the confusion of “those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches.”

Jesus' parable of the rich man who builds bigger barns, only to face the end of his life, confronts us with what really matters. Our possessions are not what define us ultimately as people—“one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” It is who we are as people “marked with the cross of Christ forever,” called to live our lives in response to the gifts given us by God.

Our management of money and our use of our money gifts to carry out the mission and ministry of Christ is an important part of what really matters in our stewardship of life. God's people, living in grace-filled abundance, can share their financial resources and demonstrate a generosity that makes a difference.

(Inspired by Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23 and Luke 12:13–21)

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (August 12, 2007)

by Y. Franklin Ishida
Global Mission

Traditionally in Japan, carrying on the family name has been important, a role delegated to male heirs. However, this does not mean it has to be a blood-line inheritance. I, for example, can trace my family heritage back many generations. But I have no real “Ishida” blood in me: at one point, with no children at all, one of my ancestors adopted a son to carry on the name. I am a proud Ishida, but only by name.

In modern Japan, much of this practice has disappeared. Inheritance, name, honor are less of an issue now. In the hustle and bustle of modern Japan, other priorities now exist. In the midst of this, one wonders if there is anything that people hold on to.

My father first learned of Christianity while reading the Bible in the library of his uncle's Buddhist temple. In the confusion of post–World War II Japan, he discovered that there is a God who cares and loves each person as a precious child. If there is anything to inherit, it is not family name or material things (especially at a time when there was nothing), but the truth of being God's child. He discovered a faith that passed on something more important than anything he had known before, the wonderful grace of God.

(Inspired by Genesis 15:1–6, Hebrews 11:1–3)

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (August 19, 2007)

by Amy Current
Wartburg Theological Seminary

I don't recall if they checked the box or if it just seemed time for a "Would you like to join the church?" visit. Either way, I found myself in the Scotts' home. The two boys were shy, probably expecting a white robe. But Brendan played "peek-a-boo" as his parents settled in with good and pointed questions. Every few moments, Brendan whispered in his mom's ear. She gently nodded and said, "Just wait."

Tim had been raised at this church and Dawn just a few miles away. Yet now, as parents of little boys, "going to church" meant something different. Their concerns became Sunday school, council, and worship times. Tim wondered about my pastoral role. They wondered aloud about investing their energies and time. The whole while I did my best to convince them that they were welcome, yet not a word was spoken about faith, promise, good news.

Brendan whispered with some conviction now. Dawn nodded and Brendan stepped into our spirited dialogue with forehead extended, eyes wide and standing very still, waiting. Dawn said, "He would like a blessing." I reached out, tracing the sign of the cross, I said, "May God bless you and keep you today and always." Brendan walked away satisfied.

Tim, Dawn, and I were silent. We remembered then what draws us together. It is not a particular program or possibility. Instead, the very Word of God draws us near—the Word of God received faithfully through the whispers and postures of a little one.

(Inspired by Jeremiah 23:23–29)

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (August 26, 2007)

by Cindy Muse
Campus Ministry

She is a walking praise to the Lord. Openly questioning, humbly honest, eagerly seeking, and enthusiastically friendly, Jamie's life declares, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name."

Jamie is a witness to the world. This 7-year-old sees no divisions, no inequality, no race, and no station. She has a smile and a hug for everyone. Last Sunday, as is usual at the call for the children to come forward for a message, Jamie was the first out of her seat. She sits right in front of the speaker, cross-legged and bright-eyed, and anxiously awaits hearing again how much Jesus loves her.

Her passionate and energetic love for the Lord is evidenced in her love for the world. With her enthusiasm for everything and everyone, the running joke follows that we should get her a costume so she can be our mascot.

Witnessing her faithful journey renews my faith, my soul, and my youth as I am reminded of all the Lord's benefits of forgiveness, healing, redemption, and satisfaction. It is in the eyes and the smile and the hugs of this child that I see the abounding, unending mercy and love of God.

In her very being, she challenges the rest of us to be the first to our seats (front pew seats, of course), bright-eyed, anxiously awaiting the hearing again of how much Jesus loves us. How can we not be transformed by the faith of this child?

(Inspired by Psalm 103:1–8)

Pericope Partners, available for download at elca.org/pericope, are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the weekly lectionary readings for the Day of Pentecost through the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (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.

