



Olive Tree Newsletter

February 2024

*But the greatest
of these is love.*

~1 Corinthians 13:13



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Minister's Musings



Thomas Fedorka, LLM

Things change. Times change.

Everything seems to change except the steadfast Love of our God.

Remember when the Sunday School classrooms were full of children. When VBS was packed with excitement from both children and adults. When we had more volunteers than we needed for fellowship and service projects. There was a time when it seemed like the Church was the center of family life.

Things just don't seem to be the same.

And that's OK.

It's nice to reminisce about the good old days. It can be painful too. We shouldn't beat ourselves up for the ways times have changed. We need to be who we are, and we need to learn who we've become.

We can use our rich heritage as a firm foundation to keep us steady as we lean into the future God has prepared for us. As we learn who we've become, we know that God is there and will never leave us.

As we grieve the past we've left behind and experience our collective loss, we can also remember with joy that same past. We have gained experiences that will help us in our future. As we adjust to our future as a small congregation, we will adopt new ways of doing God's ministry. As we adapt to the changed role of the Church in society, we will need to adjust our understanding of what it means to be a community of faith.

Reflecting on our history can help us see that what we are as a congregation, our core, will remain. We can bring the past with us without letting it hold us back. While we may never recreate the broad ministries that once were, we can honor our past while moving forward. Simple projects will replace complex programs. We can find programs that support neighboring congregations. We can build new relationships with new partners that will open new doors for witness and service.

Remembering our past can bring a deeper appreciation of our strengths and how we will use them to share God's Love.

We are stronger together.



Our Starfish Story

Submitted by Thomas Fedorka

A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

Some of you may have noticed an RV in our parking lot. The RV belongs to a family that GLC have been helping off and on in the past. After the family accumulated several hundred dollars of parking fines, the family asked if they could park in our parking lot. We graciously agreed. The family was looking to sell the RV and had several offers fall through or not pan out for some reason or another. Eventually the RV was sold and has left our parking lot.

The family is so grateful for the help and support they received from GLC as well as our patience and understanding.

We are not able to help everyone, but we have made a difference in the life of this family.



Our Relationship with God

Submitted by Jean Rolph

Words are only meaningless sounds until connected to real life experiences or objects. The Process of making these connections is called “ scaffolding” in Linguistics. As a Teacher of English for refugees and immigrants from many languages and education levels, I enjoyed the challenge of developing experiences and activities that facilitated my students’ acquisition of English words and concepts.

I only recently connected the concept of “scaffolding” to the way God made himself known to us. The Bible is filled with the experiences of others that help us to “know” God and to understand the redemption God offers to each of us. The experiences shared in it pages illustrate key vocabulary and concepts needed to understand God and his creation.

Brazilian Portuguese one of the languages I learned earlier in my life as a missionary has more than one word for “to know”. To “saber” means to know and understand facts or information. “Conhecer” is to have experienced a place or relationship. It is about actual participation. To be a Christian is to both “saber”: to know the facts about God, but to also “conhecer” him: to experience a personal relationship with him. The Bible is filled with concrete items and actions: fruitful trees, trees that wither, sheep and goats to be divided, seeds that grow and seeds that do not. And also the stories of people wandering and not finding the way. And a good shepherd who cares for his flock.

To be a Christian is to both ”saber” the facts about God and his plan for us, but also to have a personal relationship with him: to experience the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit who gifts us to make Christ known.

Explaining the Bible concepts and principles in abstract terms and concepts would not be nearly as successful as building our understanding through the images provoked in our mind by its stories and parables. The image of the coming of the Lord innocent of sin to suffer and die for our sins “speaks” powerfully and illustrates God love for us.



Lent in Brief, Part 1

Submitted by Hank Chary

Lent is undoubtedly the most misunderstood season of the church year. It carries with it the dark and lugubrious emotions of sacrifice (giving things up) and denial. Rather, it is, or at least should be, a season of joyful yet subdued meditation and penitence. We are blessed in Lent in that we already know “The rest of the story.” Christ is Risen! Yet Lent is the pathway we must tread to get there, and it is said, “Lent is to prepare us for Easter, not Good Friday.” Let us consider Lent more closely.

Simply put, Lent is the fourth season of the church year. Advent begins the church year and is four weeks of preparation for both Christ’s Nativity and the Parousia (His Second Coming). Christmas is but twelve days celebrating his nativity. Epiphany is of variable length leading us to Lent.

Lent is 40 days of fasting, penance, reflection, meditation, and preparation. Note that in the Western Church the 40 days are exclusive of the Sundays in Lent. Sundays do not count as days of Lent since Sunday is the day of the Resurrection of Our Lord, a day of celebration, not of fasting; thus we have the Sundays IN Lent and the Sundays OF Easter. The Eastern Church does include Sundays in their 40 days of Lent,

Lent is a season of preparation. During Lent we prepare for Easter, of course. Historically Lent was a period of preparation, of catechesis, teaching those who were to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. It was, and is, also a time of introspection and reflection for members of the church to look at themselves and their lives. And during this time, we review and reflect upon the journey of Christ from his ministry, to and through his trial, to his crucifixion, and most importantly, to his death and Resurrection.

Some sources have suggested that Lent is of Apostolic origin, others, however, dismiss such a claim. We know that in the earliest years of the Christian Church the church calendar was quite simple: Sundays (the Day of Resurrection) and Pascha (Greek for “Passover,” the annual anniversary of Jesus’ death and resurrection which took place during the Jewish Passover).

From the writings of St. Paul (especially in 1 Cor.) we know that celebrating the Passover and Pentecost were important to the earliest Christians. Clear testimony of Christian observance of the Passover appears first in the second century where it appears that Christians observed an all-night vigil which ended at dawn. They waited until the Jewish Passover was over at midnight before beginning their celebration of the Passover fulfilled in Christ.

The name "Lent" comes from the Germanic root for spring (specifically Old English lencten). Initially the word simply meant spring (“Lenz” in modern German), but later became associated with the fast. As such, use of the term Lent to describe the 40 days before Easter is unique to the English language. In Spanish we have “cuaresma,” in French “carême,” and in Italian, “quaresim.”

There are three traditional personal practices often taken up with renewed vigor during Lent:
prayer (justice towards God),
fasting and sacrifice (justice towards self), and
charity (justice towards others).

(Continued on next page)

Indeed, these are the same three pious deeds spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 6. These are largely personal practices.

Liturgically, the color of the paraments changes from the green of Epiphany to the purple (violet) of Lent. Purple (violet) is the color of mourning and repentance, somberness, and solemnity. (It is also the color of royalty.)

The primary liturgical changes in Lent are

- Flowers are not used to decorate the altar or chancel during Lent, though they may be permitted for funerals.
- Pictures, crosses, and statues that cannot be [or simply are not] removed from the church may be covered with veils of purple or unbleached linen to suggest that Lent is a time of austerity, purification, and spiritual cleansing.
- Usually at the start of the liturgy, in the Confession and Forgiveness the “declaration of grace” is used instead of the “absolution” (“By grace you have been saved ...” or equivalent words as opposed to “ ... I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness ...”.)
- The Kyrie is included; the Hymn of Praise is not.
- The omission of Alleluia goes back at least to the fifth century and possibly earlier. In the fourth century St. Basil the Great in his “Rule” (composed around 359) reports that Alleluia was discontinued during Lent and was resumed at Easter.
- The Nicene Creed is usually said.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, continues for five weeks marked by the five numerated Sundays in Lent (1st Sunday in Lent, 2nd Sunday in Lent, etc.), and after the fifth week of Lent we enter Holy Week with the Sunday of the Passion (aka Palm Sunday), the sixth Sunday in Lent. We then have Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Holy Week. These days have never received much emphasis, nonetheless, there have been readings appointed for these days in case they are observed.

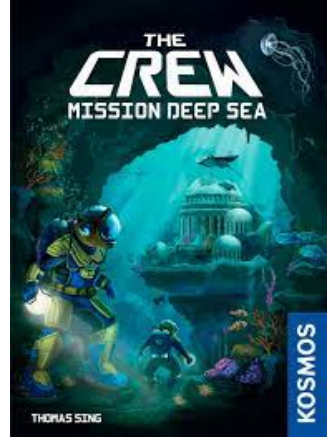
Holy Week concludes with the Triduum (Latin for three days): Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. These three days essentially comprise one elongated liturgy. The season of Lent ends liturgically at sundown on Holy Saturday, and the climax of the Triduum which began on Maundy Thursday is reached in the service of the Vigil of Easter which starts in complete darkness and ends in the brilliant light of the Resurrection.

The Lenten season of penitence begins with confession. The Maundy Thursday absolution is the structural response to this Ash Wednesday confession. Thus, throughout Lent a declaration of grace is normally used coupled with a plea for mercy. In this case, the absolution is to be understood as being postponed until Maundy Thursday when it is given before the Holy Communion and brings to a close the preparatory season of Lent before the celebration of the Triduum begins.

Holy Week, also known as the “Great Week,” culminating in the “Great Sabbath,” is a recapitulation of the week of creation which concluded with the Sabbath rest. The Sunday of the Resurrection, Easter Day, becomes the eighth day of the new creation. Holy Week is called “Great” which St. Chrysostom explained as referring to the great things wrought by the Lord.

Game Review

Submitted by Thomas Fedorka



The CREW: Mission Deep Sea

CREW is a trick-taking card game that plays in a cooperative fashion. Each hand is a mission that all players must complete together. The game is played by 3-5 players and is tons of fun. There are 4 “suits” that are distinguished by different colors and shapes (for the color challenged) and a “trump” suit. There are nine of each color suit and only four trump cards.

A round starts by dealing cards out one-by-one until all cards are gone. The mission captain is the player with the number 4 trump card. Mission cards are revealed and players (starting with the captain) “bid” on if they can successfully complete the mission. Once the mission is accepted all players work to complete it.

A mission might be, “take the red-6 card in a trick” or “take the last trick” or a combination. The captain starts play by leading a card. You must follow suit if you can. Play continues like other trick taking games until all cards are played. If the mission was completed, a new mission is selected for the next round. Missions get harder with each round of play.

Each round takes 10-20 minutes. The game can easily be paused or stopped between any round and picked up later if wanted.

Ash Wednesday

We will have imposition of ashes on February 14 between 11am-1pm in the sanctuary. We will also have an Ash Wednesday service at 6pm.



Lenten Mid-Week Services

Join us Wednesday evenings at 7pm during LENT for a Holy Lament worship series. Each week we will consider what it means to sit with our grief rather than try to push it aside. We will discover that many faithful believers have wrestled with grief, sorrow, and questions for God about why the innocent suffer. We will find a God who can take our grief and disappointment and transform them into holy joy and renewed hope. We will learn, ultimately, that Jesus' death on the cross—the place to which the season of Lent leads us—is the reason we never mourn as those without hope.

The plan is to meet each Wednesday starting 2/21 at 7pm by ZOOM. Let the church office know if you'd like to attend and we will send you the link.



Lenten Bible Study from Synod

The New England Synod will be offering a Lenten Collaborative Bible Study from February 19 through March 21. For more information, please visit nelutherans.org or email mwhyte@nesynod.org

ENCOUNTERING GOD:
Moving Forward with a Changing Church

God has been acting in our lives from the very beginning, in pain and chaos, through wilderness and travel, on the Ark and in locked rooms, as we doubt and question, in redemption and on mountaintops, in the quiet stillness and desperate grief, as buildings have risen and as they've crumbled, through imprisonment and gnashing of teeth, as we celebrate elaborate feasts and as we break bread in simple settings.

Join us, the New England Synod, including congregations, members, lay leaders, clergy, the curious, and some of our ecumenical partners, in a collaborative bible study, as we explore encounters with God through the lens of a nonlinear model of change.

Each Monday during Lent, one of our facilitators will release a 3-5 minute video introduction of our theme. You can review and watch these videos independently or you can use them and the accompanying questions as part of a midweek worship service.

On the following Thursday evening, we'll hold a Zoom session from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Our facilitator for the week will engage those gathered on Zoom in exploring our encounters with God today. We'll spend time in conversation, sharing, and prayer.

On the second Sunday of Easter, there will be resources for a worship service as a culmination of our time together.

A Lenten Collaborative Bible Study
Five weeks starting Feb. 19th through March 21st

Week 1 - Genesis 8: The Flood Subsides
Rafaela Radtke, LLM Santuario/ Nuevo Amanecer, Synod Council
Exploring the realistic pain that acknowledges the difference between how things are and how they COULD be.

Week 2 - Ezekiel 37:1-14: The Valley of Dry Bones
Rev. Elizabeth Nees, Transition Consultant, Coach (PCC), Dean Boston Metro
Looking at possibility not as the answer to pain but instead as worthwhile learning opportunities that exist in the midst of, alongside, and perhaps, because of, painful realities.

Week 3 - Matthew 15:21-27: The Canaanite Woman's Faith
Rev. Dr. Richard Simpson, Canon to the Ordinary, Episcopal Diocese of Western MA
Rev. Jennifer Gregg, Missioner for Servant Leadership
Challenging old assumptions and thinking out of the box so that we can build relationships with people who want to participate in ways not currently defined by existing structures.

Week 4 - John 3: Nicodemus Visits Jesus
Cassandra Wilson, Synod Council, Member of Redeemer, Woburn, MA
Stepping into the unknown to learn new ways of thinking, being, and doing, by sitting within that chaos and holding space open for questioning and deep discernment.

Week 5 - Luke 24: The Walk to Emmaus
Ryan Heckman, Christian Education Director, St. Matthew, Avon, CT
Moving toward testing, learning, re-ordering, and connecting new ideas and insights, to possibilities.

Inquiries and Zoom registration:
mwhyte@nesynod.org

Bible Study Update

Submitted by Janine Danzi

It has been a year and 4 months we have been studying women of the Bible on Wednesdays. We have just about exhausted the list. There are some others but lately they do not take up an hour's time. Have you heard of Ruamah, Cozbi, or Althalia? Some of these women you might not want to know. But with the women in general, many had roles that were a catalyst to the story's outcome. We have found it very interesting and learned much that is not in a sermon or a Sunday school lesson. Women we had not heard of before.

That being stated we are now starting on January 17, 2024 we will be starting the book of Psalms, starting with Psalm 1. We welcome any who are interested to join along with us. It's an informal group, you can bring you lunch or a snack if you would like. Thomas Fedorka is with us most every week. He answered our questions and supplied scriptural knowledge to help us understand.

ReachOut Update

Submitted by Crystal Bluto

We have continued to provide free community meals to those in Manchester the third Sunday of every month. It is a project that has become near and dear to many people's hearts. We had a guest at our January meal state that it was the best meal he had in a long time, and the first meal he had eaten in two days. It warms our hearts to be able to provide this service to our community, but we require more volunteers to keep the program going. We are especially in need of volunteers during the time from 2 pm to 4 pm, when we are packing and serving food. If you have never volunteered before and are unsure what it might be like, we would be happy to pair you with an experienced volunteer to show you the ropes. Please contact the church office or Crystal if you have any interest in volunteering. We would be very happy to have you join us!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28  9:30am WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00am Annual Congregational Meeting 6:00pm AA	29 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm AA MNWS	30 7:00pm AA WB2B	31 12:00pm BIBLE STUDY 5:00pm AA HHE	1	2 12:00pm AA WNBB 5:00pm AA HHE	3 10:00am AA NO NAME
4 9:30am WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00am Christian Ed 6:00pm AA	5 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm AA MNWS 7:30pm COMMUNICATIONS	6 7:00pm AA WB2B	7 12:00pm BIBLE STUDY 5:00pm AA HHE 6:00pm Prayer Service for Peace	8	9 12:00pm AA WNBB 5:00pm AA HHE	10 10:00am AA NO NAME
11 9:30am WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00am Christian Ed 6:00pm AA	12 12:00pm MARY MARTHA 5:00pm AA HHE 6:30pm REACHOUT 7:00pm AA MNWS	13 7:00pm AA WB2B 7:00pm FINANCE	14  12:00pm BIBLE STUDY 5:00pm AA HHE 6:00pm Ash Wednesday Service	15 7:00pm COUNCIL	16 12:00pm AA WNBB 5:00pm AA HHE	17 10:00am AA NO NAME
18  Community Meal 9:30am WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00am Christian Ed 3:00pm COMMUNITY MEAL 6:00pm AA	19 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm AA MNWS	20 7:00pm AA WB2B	21 12:00pm BIBLE STUDY 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm Mid-Week Lenten Service	22	23 12:00pm AA WNBB 5:00pm AA HHE	24 10:00am AA NO NAME
25 9:30am WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00am Christian Ed 6:00pm AA	26 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm AA MNWS	27 7:00pm AA WB2B	28 12:00pm BIBLE STUDY 5:00pm AA HHE 7:00pm Mid-Week Lenten Service	29	1 12:00pm AA WNBB 5:00pm AA HHE	2 10:00am AA NO NAME



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