



Pastor Kris' Chronicles

The Old Testament

We spent all of last year – from September through Easter – in Luke's gospel. It was an "off-lectionary" year. I opted to do that because in a time when the word Christian gets understood in wildly divergent ways, I really wanted to focus on Jesus and the teachings of Jesus. Following Jesus is after all what makes us Christian.

This year, we will return to the Narrative Lectionary. Last month's article dealt with the different lectionaries, pros and cons, and why we use what we do. The primary goal of any lectionary is really to let us hear the word of God set down in an ancient time, and help us to hear what it has to say to us today.

The number one struggle people seem to have with the Narrative Lectionary is the amount of time we spend in the Old Testament. Along with that is the prevalent idea that the Old Testament God is somehow a different God – an angrier more vengeful God.

There are surely difficult Old Testament stories to deal with. God's deep love for Israel – described as that of a loving parent – is the primary story. The God of the Old Testament is a God of grace and love and mercy. But like any parent, that God is also heart-broken and angry when the people's disobedience threatens their very existence and well-being. One of the most repeated strains in the Old Testament is that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

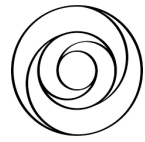
When we rightly read the Old Testament, we can grasp Jesus and his death and resurrection as the culmination of God's project to bless and save the earth, not a Plan B.

One of the sources I love to use is pretty much anything written by Dr. Amy-Jill Levine. Dr. Levine is Jewish, but she is a professor of New Testament. She has been the most helpful to me and many others when it comes to understanding Jesus and the early church within the Jewish context in which they arose. Jesus, the apostles, and all the earliest followers were Jewish. The scriptures which shaped Jesus and the early Jewish Christians were the Hebrew Bible – our Old Testament. Those early disciples would have been shocked to hear what some Christians over the years have said about the Jewish people.

In an interview, Dr. Levine was asked: "You've written about the common errors Christian preachers make when they talk about the Judaism of Jesus' day. What are some of the more egregious ones?"

Dr Levine responded: "That Jews believe in a God of wrath and Christianity invented the God of love. When I get that from my students I'm inclined to tell them, 'Fine, the Lord is my shepherd, his mercy endures forever, but you're condemned to the outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth.'" **Touché.**

Regardless what passage we read, we need to have a lens through which we read it. If we read everything with the idea that God is faithful and merciful, we can avoid some of the pitfalls of reading scripture, whether Old Testament or New. What we call the gospel is recorded in the story of Jesus. But, the entire Bible is shot through with the good news of God's love and mercy. There is gospel in the Old Testament.



Seeking the Spirit—by Virg Unverferth

There are many references to “walking with God” in the Bible. Two of my favorite verses are Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” and 2 Corinthians “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” These are beautiful verses and can give us a sense of comfort, but how do we really walk with God? One spiritual practice that can help with this is something that most of us can do if we enjoy walking. It is called a prayer walk:

1. Choose a time each day to take a walk by yourself
2. Pick a path that will help you feel relaxed
3. Invite God along on your walk and on the way talk with God, sharing your day, your joys, your concerns and anything that is on your heart. This can be done out loud or said in your head.
4. As your walk continues, take time to listen. What is God using to speak to you? What is God saying to you?
5. When you finish your walk, thank God for your time together.
6. You may want to jot notes about your experience in a journal.

Walking with God, means that we share our life with God, but also take time to listen to God speaking to us. As I work with my directees, we invite God into our time together and then I just allow my directee space to share what is happening in their lives and then listening to how God is speaking to them. James 4:8 “Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you.” Happy walking!!!

Virg Unverferth is involved in the Seeking the Spirit Within through the Nebraska Synod of the ELCA. She is participating in a three year course to become a spiritual director. Spiritual Directors meet with folks to help them discern the Holy Spirit’s presence and call within them. She offers these each newsletter to help you connect with the Spirit in and around you.

News from around the corner(s)



Bethlehem is getting ready for its annual potato bake September 14 from 5 to 7 pm at the Davey Community Building. Proceeds will go to the Raymond Central Backpack program.

Zion had their annual pork BBQ Sunday August 17. The weather was beautiful, the food delicious, the turn out was good, and \$3628 was raised. Zion uses proceeds from the BBQ to help support the Saunders County Ministerial Association's food pantry and emergency rental assistance fund.



Grace—Harvest Breakfast

Each October, Zion takes a Sunday during harvest to have a short prayer service and breakfast after which farmers can head out into the fields and others in the congregation assemble kits for Lutheran World Relief. This year's date is October 19.

Regular Sunday Worship Times

Bethlehem Lutheran—10:30 am—communion first and third Sundays

Czech Presbyterian—10:30 am—There will be no worship on the third Sundays until the first Sunday in Advent, November 30, then weekly worship will continue through Easter.

Grace Lutheran—9:00 am—communion second and fourth Sundays September—May

Zion Lutheran—9:00 am—communion first Sundays

Pastor Kris preaches at Bethlehem and Zion the first and third Sundays and Grace and Czech Presbyterian the second and fourth Sundays. Fifth Sundays are a joint worship.

Looking Ahead

Advent and Christmas are a ways off and more detailed schedules and plans will be coming when we get closer. The Joint Steering Committee will be meeting in the next month or so to talk about Christmas Eve worship for the four congregations.

The First Sunday in Advent is November 30, which also happens to be a 5th Sunday. We will worship together that day but I don't have any details at this point. It's also Thanksgiving weekend.

Technology News

Mike Unverferth and I have begun looking at combining our websites into one, with a page for each of the four congregations.

Grace is in the process of getting internet set up. With that we can do a livestream to Facebook. Mike is also exploring some options for better streaming to YouTube at Bethlehem. We'll probably stick with Facebook for Zion and Grace. Czech Presbyterian doesn't have internet and for the foreseeable future, we won't pursue it there.

With all of that will come the need for a tech team to help at each church with an internet presence to volunteer to help maintain the website and Facebook pages and to get the livestreams going on Sundays. If this is something in your wheelhouse, please let me know.

ELCA News

Each month I'll try to do a little article on news from our various church ecclesial structures. Since the ELCA Churchwide Assembly just elected a new bishop, we'll start there.

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly was held July 29—August 1. At the Assembly, a new bishop was elected—the Rev. Yehiel Curry. In the ELCA, congregations are self-governing, but a model constitution that congregations are requested to use is created at the Churchwide level (National level.)



Rev. Curry

Responsibilities of the presiding bishop:

- **Chief Executive:** As president and CEO of the churchwide organization, the Presiding Bishop oversees its administration, staff, and budget.
- **Leadership of Bishops:** Provides leadership and pastoral care to the other synod bishops.
- **Churchwide Assembly:** Presides over the ELCA's triennial Churchwide Assembly.
- **Ecumenical Officer:** Serves as the church's primary representative in national and international interchurch agencies.
- **Advisory Role:** Serves as an advisory member on all churchwide committees, boards, and units.
- **Public Witness:** Represents the ELCA in various national and international settings, advocating for the church's mission and theology.

The US is divided into 65 Synods which are clustered in 9 regions. I'll talk a bit more about that next time.

I've still got a LOT to learn about the Presbyterian structure, but I plan to share more about that, too.

Important information

Pastor Kris: phone 402-499-4993; krisbo90@gmail.com

Online worship info:

Bethlehem Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/bethlehemdavey>

Zion Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/ZionIthaca>

Websites:

<https://www.bethlehemdavey.org/>

<https://www.zionithaca.org/>

<https://www.gracelutheranswedeburg.com>

Documents for worship—scripture readings and worship resources will all be posted to Bethlehem’s website for now, and when we have one website, posted to that.

Newsletter submissions

Newsletters will be bimonthly and I try to have them ready by the first of the month. **I would encourage you to submit items for the newsletter—events, thoughts, pictures, and so on.**