



connect.

share the story. live in grace. serve your neighbor.

A 17-Week Series for Biblical Reflection,
Discussion, and Worship

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Introduction

This series was inspired by a love of connecting stories in the Bible to our own personal stories as children of God. Just as God's people in the Bible, our connection with God is sometimes unexpected, often poetic and always purposeful. Throughout this series we encourage you to be open to God's connection with you.

The elements you'll find in Connect is designed to use during the seasons of Advent, Epiphany, and Lent, however, please feel free to use any and all content in a way that suits your context and Biblical study needs.

Our hope is that you will *share the story* of Christ's love, to *live in the grace* which has been so freely given to each one of us, and to *serve your neighbor* as Christ serves us.

Recommendation

For a more in-depth (but accessible!) Biblical study experience, we suggest checking out Craig R. Koester's Course, *Reading Biblical Literature* (Available in DVD and Guidebook). This resource is available at the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Resource Center (<http://synodresourcecenter.org>) or through The Great Courses (<https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/religion/reading-biblical-literature-genesis-to-revelation.html>).

Thank You

For the creation of this beautiful and expressive logo, we give thanks to the talented Erik E.

Who We Are

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Connect

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Order of Worship

Welcome to Worship

Opening Prayer

L: God of all love and life, we seek to connect with you and our neighbors. May we work each day to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, to walk with one another in faith and life, and to remember that we are loved because You first loved us.

ALL: Amen.

L: We are grateful that You make a place for us at the table – a place for us to share the story, a place for us to live in grace, and a place for us to serve our neighbor. Through our common purpose to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with You, we commit ourselves again to making this place a place for all, a table long enough for all, so that there is space for everyone's story. Walk with us, God, and show us your love here on earth as we connect with You and with our neighbor.

ALL: Amen.

Gathering Song

Opening Litany

A: In the beginning

B: Created out of love

C: Inheritors of blessing

D: Called through promise

ALL: Guide us God, as we connect with your story.

A: Born of humble beginnings

B: Son of God, Son of man

C: Taught us unconditional love

D: Conquered death

A: Gives us hope, gives us life

ALL: Guide us Jesus, as we connect through your grace.

A: Learning to follow like Lydia

B: Giving generously like the widow

C: Seeking justice like Esther

D: Showing kindness like Ruth

A: Walking humbly like Hagar

B: Accompanying one another as disciples

ALL: Guide us Holy Spirit, as we connect to one another.

A: Share the story

B: Live in grace

C: Serve your neighbor

D: Find ways to build a longer table

A: A space for everyone's story

ALL: Empower us to do what we can when we can to continue the story...

Readings

Scripture Reading

Message

Song of the Day

Prayers

L: God of all love and life, our story is unfinished without you. You promise to be with us in every joy, every challenge, in our grief, and in our doubts. Help us to serve creation and our fellow human beings throughout the world with truthful words, bold action, and wisdom.

Lift up the body of Christ as we give our prayers to you:

(A moment of silence)

L: Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred,

ALL: let us sow love;

L: where there is injury,

ALL: pardon;

L: where there is discord,

ALL: union;

L: where there is doubt,

ALL: faith;

L: where there is despair,

ALL: hope;

L: where there is darkness,

ALL: light;

L: where there is sadness,

ALL: joy.

L: Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand

ALL: to be loved as to love.

**Insert any other petitions as needed here.*

L: God we trust that you hear all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, known to others or known only to you. Accompany us in faith, life and love.

ALL: Amen.

Sharing of the Peace

L: The peace of the Lord is with you always.

ALL: And also with you.

L: Please share a sign of peace with your neighbor.

Offering

[Each week we encourage you to choose a different organization within our Synod or your community to give the offering from this service. Toward the back of this booklet, you will find our list of suggested offering locations based off of local and global mission. Feel free to adjust as needed.]

Closing Litany

A: God connects to us

B: through promise

C: through song

D: to the Son of Man

A: through inheritance

ALL: Share the story, live in grace, serve your neighbor.

A: God connects to us

B: through hope

C: through blessing

D: through God's call

A: through patience

B: through diversity

C: through justice

D: to the greatest commandment

A: through accompaniment

ALL: Share the story, live in grace, serve your neighbor.

A: God connects to us

B: through a life of faith

C: through purpose

D: through grief and loss

A: to the new covenant

B: through relationship

ALL: Share the story, live in grace, serve your neighbor.

ALL: AMEN.

Sending Song

Sending/Blessing

A: May you know the love of God

B: May you experience the grace of Jesus

C: May you find community through the Holy Spirit

ALL: Amen.



Advent 1/Week 1

Connection Through Promise

Overview

Advent Week 1 begins to introduce the theme of this series. After the story of God's good creation, God strengthens the relationship with Abram and Sarai by establishing a covenant with them, promising a thriving future for their decedents who will number the stars, and blessings for the people of God. We see God connecting to creation through this promise, providing opportunities to live lives of faith in response to this gift.

God continues to connect with creation in Luke's gospel through the promise of a Savior, the Son of God, born to Mary, who will redeem humankind. This promise changes everything for us, and we join with Mary as we sing praise to God and serve with joy.

Preaching Texts

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed?"

Genesis 12:1-3

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

Guiding Notes

- As recipients of God's promise of blessing, we are connected to God and one another; in what ways might we be called to "be a blessing" in the world?
- What do these texts say about God's relationship with us?

Suggested Songs

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Blest Be the God of Israel

ELW #807
ELW #250

Suggested Offering

Outdoor Ministry

Advent 2/Week 2

Connection Through Song

Overview

We all have a song in our hearts that connects us to God and to one another. This week, we encourage you to explore how that song can be shared within your congregation or ministry setting. The song that Mary sings in “The Magnificat” in the verses of Luke compare to those sung of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2: 1-10. These verses speak to prominent themes of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Many people experience faith through song and worship.

Preaching Texts

¹Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. ²Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. ³Know that the Lord is God. It is he that make us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. ⁵For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100

⁴⁶And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1: 46-55

Guiding Notes

- This week, explore the gift of song and music in new ways
- Try new songs in worship.
- Use music to emphasize the prayers or gospel.

Suggested Songs

O Sing to the Lord	ELW #822
Lift Every Voice and Sing	ELW #841

Suggested Offering

Malawi, Africa Cathedral Choir

Advent 3/Week 3

Connection to the Son of Man

Overview

Advent Week 3 includes texts that connect us to Jesus, the Son of Man. We read Daniel's consoling words that God's kingdom, not the evil in worldly kingdoms, will ultimately be victorious. Luke tells the story of God coming to us as a baby - God's Son, a Savior, who is the Messiah – who will suffer, die and be resurrected for the sake of the world. And, a short verse from Mark circles back to the text from Daniel, deepening our understanding of the connection between God and God's people throughout history, and Jesus' power and glory in the world.

Preaching Texts

¹³As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being [Son of Man] coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

²In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20

²⁶Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory.

Mark 13:26

Guiding Notes

- The story of Jesus birth, life, death and resurrection is central to our Christian faith. Why do you think God connects to us through Jesus?
- When you hear “Son of Man,” what images or emotions does that spark for you? What might the listeners/readers of Daniel have been thinking or feeling when they heard this?
- In what ways does God continue to connect with you through Jesus? How might the Christmas holiday become a platform for us to share these stories with others?

Suggested Songs

Joy to the World

ELW #267

Rise, Shine, You People!

ELW #665

Suggested Offering

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin’s Resource Center

Advent 4/Week 4

Connection Through Inheritance

Overview

As children of God, and as receivers of the gifts that Jesus' death on the cross gives to us – salvation, grace, mercy, forgiveness, etc. – we inherit the promise made in 2 Samuel that the House of David will reign forever. The promises that were made by God in the Old Testament are solidified and we are reminded through Jesus' death and resurrection that God's promises are for all, forever. The verses in 2 Samuel are the basis for the messianic hope described in Old Testament scripture, as well as what we see in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The promise of God's kingdom for all is a promise that extends beyond a single dynasty. We are all heirs to David's throne as descendants of Abraham and part of the family of God.

Preaching Texts

¹¹From the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.

2 Samuel 7: 11b-14

² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; ⁵ and he shall be the one of peace. If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers.

Micah 5: 2-5

¹⁷If children, then heirs, heirs of God and join heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8: 17

²In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

Luke 2: 1-4

Guiding Notes

- When you think about the promise made to Abraham?
- What does that mean to you?
- What does that mean for your ministry setting and its future?

Suggested Songs

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

ELW #257

All Earth is Hopeful

ELW #266

Suggested Offering

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Lay School of Ministry

Epiphany 1/Week 1

Connection Through Hope

Overview

Epiphany Week 1 explores the presence of hope as we lean on the words of the prophet Isaiah and Paul's letter to the Romans. We are encouraged to challenge our own feelings of despair and see the possibilities of what the future will bring – reconciliation, justice, and peace in Jesus Christ. Aware of the brokenness in the world, we are called to embody hope, and joyfully trust God's perpetual presence in our lives.

Preaching Texts

²In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. *Isaiah 2:2-4*

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:22-25

Guiding Notes

- Surrounded by persistent divisiveness and damage, we are flooded with images of "groaning" in the world. Alternatively, we long for images of hope – what are some of the recent images or stories that have given you a sense of hope in Christ?
- What unseen things do you hope for? Do you find it difficult to wait for God to make these things visible? Why or why not?
- How does hope connect us to one another?
- Instead of New Year's resolutions, what hopes might we have for ourselves? In what ways do we hope that God will show up? Change things? Encourage? Challenge? Renew?

Suggested Songs

All Earth is Hopeful

ELW #266

Abide with Me

ELW #629

Suggested Offering

Feed My People Food Bank - Eau Claire, WI

Baptism of Jesus /Week 2

Connection Through Blessing

Overview

From the beginning of time, we have been blessed with many promises. Blessing has come to many people of God in unexpected ways, just as it had come to Hagar in the wilderness. God hears God's people and God cares about God's people. Just as we read in the Beatitudes, many are blessed – no matter who they are or where they come from. Abraham was the first to receive these foundational promises from God for land, descendants and blessing. Sarai could not bear children, so Abraham took Hagar and after she had conceived, she ran away in fear. In the wilderness, Hagar met the Lord and the Lord gave a promise of blessing to Hagar herself. Hagar names her son Ismael, which in Hebrew means "God hears".

Preaching Texts

¹Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, ²and Sarai said to Abram, 'You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³So, after Abram had lived for ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. ⁴He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵Then Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!' ⁶But Abram said to Sarai, 'Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her. ⁷The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸And he said, 'Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?' She said, 'I am running away from my mistress Sarai.' ⁹The angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit to her.' ¹⁰The angel of the Lord also said to her, 'I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.' ¹¹And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. ¹²He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.' ¹³So she named the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?' ¹⁴Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Genesis 16: 1-16

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5: 1-16

⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

Guiding Notes

- Think about this from the position of Hagar this week.
- Think about how you and your congregation can relate to Hagar.

Suggested Songs

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise ELW #310

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing ELW #807

Suggested Offering

Monetary or physical donations for your congregation's Women of the ELCA (WELCA) group or the Synod Women's Organization (Supplies for health kits, quilts, school kits, etc.)

Epiphany 2/Week 3

Connection Through God's Call

Overview

Epiphany 2/Week 3 draws attention to the different experiences that can help us discover God's call for us. Feeling particularly challenged by God's call to talk to the people of Nineveh, Jonah retreats, hoping to avoid the situation entirely. Mark and Luke share the story of Jesus calling the disciples, asking them to abandon their livelihood and follow him. And 1 Peter emphasizes that each of us has been called to share the good news of Jesus in our daily lives.

Preaching Texts

¹Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ²"Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." ³But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. ⁴But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. ⁶The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish."

Jonah 1:1-6

¹Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' ⁵Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:1-11

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:16-20

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

Guiding Notes

- Share a story of something God called you to do that you found challenging. How did you respond?
- In what ways does the congregation follow Jesus? What does that 'following' look like in action? Words?
- Sometimes, we have difficulty hearing God's calls for us – have you ever recognized and lifted up a call in someone else? What was that like? What did you say?

Suggested Songs

Will You Come and Follow Me ELW #798

You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore ELW #817

Suggested Offering

Campus Ministry (UW Eau Claire, UW Stout, or UW River Falls), Seminary Debt Reduction

Epiphany 3/Week 4

Connection Through Patience

Overview

Patience is a gift, a gift we nurture and a gift we tend throughout our lives. When the Israelites were lost in the wilderness, I'm sure they lost patience. But God remained with them in their struggle and their fear. God wants to be in relationship with us and has shown that through God's relationships throughout Christian history. Here God makes a second appearance at Sinai/Horeb. The Israelites encounter a God who not only brings them out of the wilderness but brings them to Godself. Israel's vocation here is one that is set apart for service. As a priestly nation, the Israelites are priests and have the privileges of intimacy with God.

Preaching Texts

¹At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.²They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.³Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'

Exodus 19: 1-6

¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,

Ephesians 4: 1-4

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²²But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸Then he

became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

Luke 15: 11-32

Guiding Notes

- Where have you been tested with patience?

Suggested Songs

You Are Mine	ELW #581
Our Father We Have Wandered	ELW #606

Suggested Offering

Local Food Pantry

Epiphany 4/Week 5

Connection Through Diversity

Overview

Epiphany 4/Week 5 includes a close look at God's diverse creation – embodied as different cultures, perspectives, and identities - and how we each have a unique and important function in the Body of Christ.

Preaching Texts

²⁸There is no longer Greek or Jew, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:28-29

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:12-25

Guiding Notes

- How would you identify yourself? How might others identify you?
- What does a creation filled with diversity say about God?
- Connecting with others whose story is different than ours can create opportunities for dialogue, understanding, and care for the Body of Christ.

Suggested Songs

One Bread, One Body	ELW #496
Let Us Go Now to the Banquet	ELW #523

Suggested Offering

Missionaries or Young Adults in Global Mission

Epiphany 5/Week 6

Connection Through Justice

Overview

As God's people and as the Body of Christ, we are called to love one another and we are called to stand up for our neighbor when they cannot speak for themselves. This week may be a good week to highlight one of the Social Justice Statements of the ELCA and get your congregation involved in conversation about social justice topics and how they can address needs in their own community or regional area.

Preaching Texts

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5: 24

³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Matthew 25: 35-40

²For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please’, while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there’, or, ‘Sit at my feet’, ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁸You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

James 2: 2-4, 8

Guiding Notes

- What are the needs of your community?
- Where do you think your congregation can help the most with those immediate needs?

Suggested Songs

Let Streams of Living Justice

ELW #710

We are Called

ELW #720

Suggested Offering

Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), or other local human service agency

Epiphany 6/Week 7

Connection Through the Greatest Commandment

Overview

Epiphany Week 6/Week 7 is the “greatest!” As Christians, we are commanded by Jesus to learn about and exemplify the love of Jesus Christ, and our love for God. As the greatest, or most important of Jesus’ instructions for faithful life, we are meant to speak, act, and interact with the same unconditional love that we have been given by Christ.

Preaching Texts

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you to day in your heart. ⁷Recite them to you children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so not I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:31-35

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Luke 4:1-13

Guiding Notes

- What does it look like to love God?
- Share a story of “loving a neighbor” that brought you joy?
- We can be tempted by greed, selfishness and power in many different forms, but we are reminded that our love of God and love for one another are the characteristics that can identify us as Jesus’ disciples – in what ways can we work to deny these temptations and trust God’s promises?

Suggested Songs

Lord, You Give the Great Commission ELW# 579

Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus ELW# 802

Suggested Offering

ELCA AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities.)

Transfiguration/Week 8

Connection Through Accompaniment

Overview

The story of Ruth is one about dedication, loyalty and walking with someone whom you love and respect. As people of God we are called to walk with one another in both faith and life. In this book, there is a story of loss and there is a story of belonging and finding your family. Ruth reveals the nobleness of her decision to stand by Naomi and follow Naomi's God without any expectation for reward or the promise of a better life. Ruth stands by the person who has impacted her life the most. Ruth shows us the importance of walking with others and walking together through a life of faith.

Preaching Texts

¹⁶But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

¹⁷Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!

Ruth 1: 16-17

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24: 13-35

Guiding Notes

- How can you walk with others in their journey of faith and life?

Suggested Songs

We All Are One in Mission	ELW #576
I Want Jesus to Walk with Me	ELW #325

Suggested Offering

Your congregation's youth group or youth program

Lent 1/Week 1

Connection Through a Life of Faith

Overview

Lent 1/Week 1 shares powerful stories of people discovering and living out their faith through their actions, in response to the good news of Christ. God's connection to us through faith relies on trust, community, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Preaching Texts

¹⁷Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us. ¹⁶One day, as we were going to a place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." ¹⁸She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And it came out that very hour.

Acts 16:11-18

⁴¹He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, the poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

Mark 12:41-44

Guiding Notes

- What are the faith practices that we engage in to continue strengthening our connection to God?
- What changes could happen in our faith when we do intentional listening to God? One another?
- How does faith impact stewardship? How does baptism impact faith?
- With so many elements of faith being "invisible" how do we "know" God is connecting with us? In what ways does God "see" us?

Suggested Songs

God Loved the World

ELW# 323

We Walk By Faith

ELW #635

Suggested Offering

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin's Malawi, Africa companionship

Lent 2/Week 2

Connection Through Purpose

Overview

Esther is a story of faith, of love, of hope, and of doing what is right in the midst of oppression and opposition. Esther was in a position of power during a time when her people were targeted and discriminated against. Mordecai encourages Ruth to live her calling, to speak up for the Jews, and to remember that the position she is in is a blessing in disguise. She was called to speak up at this time, mirroring the life of Jesus Christ who was called and chosen at a specific time in history to change the world and give us new life. Mirrored purposes, and both changed the world. Let's celebrate the story of Esther!

Preaching Texts

¹When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; ²he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

⁹Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹'All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.'¹²When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, 'Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.'

Esther 4: 1-14

¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being,

Galatians 1: 15-16

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to

another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

Guiding Notes

- How is this story of Esther related to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Suggested Songs

Bless Now, O God, the Journey ELW #326

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service ELW #712

Suggested Offering

Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM)

Lent 3/Week 3

Connection Through Grief and Loss

Overview

Lent 3/Week 3 rests in the ways God connects to us through our experiences of grief and loss. When loved ones die, or difficult and unexpected changes happen on our lives, we can be left with negative feelings toward God, or overwhelming emotions that consume our time and debilitate our faith. We need the community of others and the reassurance of our communion with Christ for healing and wholeness.

Preaching Texts

¹³One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, ¹⁵and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁷While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁸While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, ¹⁹and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead. I alone have escaped to tell you." ²⁰Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped.

Job 1:13-20

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' ¹¹After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹²The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the

life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

John 11:1-44

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as other do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Guiding Notes

- When was the last time you experience grief or loss? What was that experience like for you? What actions did you take?
- As we look at the story of the death of Lazarus, what does Jesus' response to that loss say about God or God's relationship with us?

Suggested Songs

Healer of Our Every Ill	ELW# 612
I Want Jesus to Walk With Me	ELW# 325

Suggested Offering

Your local or regional hospice and palliative care organization

Lent 4/Week 4

Connection to the New Covenant

Overview

Lent 4/Week 4 illustrates for us a narrative of forgiveness and renewal. With Christ's death and resurrection at the center, God makes a new promise to us – one that gives us a clean start, forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ. Through God's gift of holy communion, we are connected to God and one another by grace, a gift undeserved, but freely given. We are invited to respond to this gift - remembering what Christ has done for us - and share this gift with those around us.

Preaching Texts

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

¹⁴When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ²⁰"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²²For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to the one by whom he is betrayed!" ²³Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this. ²⁴A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ²⁷For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:14-27

Guiding Notes

- How do you think the disciples felt during the Last Supper? What might they have been thinking? What does participation in Holy Communion mean to you?
- What does the promise of forgiveness and grace say about God? God's relationship with us?
- In what ways can we give of ourselves in response to God's love for us?

Suggested Songs

All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly

ELW# 461

Lord of Glory You Have Brought Us

ELW# 707

Suggested Offering

Synod endowment fund for ongoing growth and sustainability of ministry.

Lent 5/Week 5

Connection Through Relationship

Overview

From the very beginning, God creates out of relationship and God seeks to be in relationship with God's creation. The creation story outlined in chapter 2 of Genesis emphasizes the need for relationship. God, in asking the first man, Adam to call and name the creatures invites Adam to establish identity and form relationship. Human's first vocation is to care for creation, to care for the creatures and to care for one another as God wants us to do. We are all invited into a new relationship through Jesus Christ, connected to each other through our common gift of freedom, love and life.

Preaching Texts

Genesis 1: 1- 2: 25 (Creation story from any preferred Bible)

⁴³He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Luke 23: 43

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Romans 6: 3-8

¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2: 19-20

Guiding Notes

- What strengthens our relationship with God and what are things that seek to bring us out of relationship with God and our neighbor?

Suggested Songs

All Are Welcome ELW #641

In Christ There Is Not East or West ELW #650

Suggested Offering

Boys and Girls Club, or other Youth Mentoring Program