

The Gifts of Discipleship

A Lenten Focus for the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in 2021

When a baptized Child of God in the Lutheran Church affirms the faith (often called confirmation) the presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism and asks the question: Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

- **to live among God’s faithful people,**
- **to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,**
- **to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,**
- **to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,**
- **and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?**

RESPONSE: We do, and ask God to help and guide us. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236)

And so begins a daily claiming and re-discovering of the God-given gifts of discipleship. These gifts overlap and are intertwined as one gift flows into another and into faithful living as disciples who are followers of Jesus.

The Gifts of Discipleship During Lent

Lent is an ideal season of the church year to promote the five gifts of discipleship. There are five weeks during Lent before Holy Week, and provide a great opportunity as we each make our Lenten journey to reflect on our call, invitation, and shared work and privilege as disciples. The following series is designed to be implemented during a mid-week Lenten series or on Sunday mornings, and could be used for in-person gatherings or online worship during this pandemic time. This resource is based on an [ELCA resource from 2016](#) and has been adapted for the Nebraska Synod and our current global pandemic context in 2021.

Explanation and Suggested Use of this Resource

This resource is meant to be utilized in whatever way it might be useful in the faith communities of the Nebraska Synod. Pages 2-6 offer a quick overview of each week’s theme which is one of the five gifts of discipleship, as over the course of five week’s we’ll dwell in each of them. An overview of the gift of discipleship is included as well as suggested texts of scripture to read.

Discussion questions are included for use in preparation, worship itself, or for additional conversation, reflection, and faith formation time outside of worship with your congregation and/or online across the synod. A suggested hymn that fits each gift of discipleship during the season of Lent is included too. Additionally, the voice from a synod leader who has volunteered to share a sermon on the gift of discipleship is also noted. Their sermon (video and manuscript) will be available separately through the Nebraska Synod website.

Following the theme overviews, on pages 7-9, is a basic outline of worship drawn especially from the “Service of Word and Prayer” found in *All Creation Sings*. This worship outline and suggested song(s) could be utilized as the liturgy for your mid-week worship. These resources and suggested liturgy and hymns, from *All Creation Sings*, the new hymnal supplement released by Augsburg Fortress in the Fall of 2020 should be available for download and use from *Sundays and Seasons* by early February 2021 at the latest.

Week 1- Wednesday February 24, 2021: Live among God's faithful people

Appointed Scripture: Philippians 1:3-11 & John 20:19-23

Introduction to This Week's Gift of Discipleship: Lent always begins with the reading of Jesus being tempted in the desert. Jesus of course is able to resist and choose God's way. Sometimes we are not as strong, choosing paths which are not healthy or of God. It is not easy. But God gives the gift of community to teach us, accompany us, and encourage us. This community isn't limited to a select few, but it is all of God's people. And together as God's people, we have the opportunity and privilege to do some of God's work in the world today.

In our scripture appointed for this week we are reminded of the joy and gift of being in community. We are grounded in gratitude for all that God has done, and connected with each other through prayer (Philippians 1:3-5). We are also reminded that it is God's peace which we are invited into community with, and with that peace we are invited to live a life of the Gospel- a life of truth, confession and forgiveness, real grace (John 20:19-23). This grace makes community with one another possible. It flows through our baptisms and guides and grounds our discipleship.

Discussion Questions: What does it mean for you to live among God's faithful people? What has this looked like during the pandemic and what might this look like going forward? And how do we remember that we are to live among all of God's people, moving beyond just being in worship together online or in person on Sundays, but truly living among God's people daily?

Prayer of the Week: Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of the church. We are especially grateful for those who have taught us what it means to be a disciple and Child of God, and for those who have modeled love, kindness, and mercy. Bless our church and guide us to be a model of faithful living today and always. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship: "Our Father, by Whose Name" (ELW 640)

Synod Preacher: Lisa Kramme, Nebraska Synod Director for Faith Formation

Week 2: Wednesday March 3, 2021: Hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper

Appointed Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 & Luke 24:28-35

Introduction to This Week's Gift of Discipleship: For centuries, Christians have been encouraged to give up something during the season of Lent, and in doing so, increase an appreciation of the sacrifice of Jesus. During this pandemic time, we have given up some of our usual church practices in order to care for our neighbors and keep our fellow Children of God healthy and safe. But in this, for a time congregations may have suspended the sharing of the sacrament. A sacrifice that was hard to make. But as a people together, we know we are not alone. Whether in-person or online, we know God is with us.

When hearing the Word from others and sharing in the sacrament, God does something new. We are opened up and filled. We are changed by God's very Word and life-sustaining and giving food. In our scripture appointed for this week, we are reminded that "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Corinthians 10:17). The Word, bread, and wine fill us and sustain us with God's promises. They give us strength for the journey of Lent and life. They fill us for our work and vocations, so that sustained by God's Word and good food, we might serve faithfully. Sometimes even in hearing the Word and receiving the sacrament, our hearts may even burn within us (as in Luke 24:32), as the promises and truth of the good news of God in Christ leads us to share that Good News through Word and deed with all the world.

Despite an on-going pandemic, these truths are still central in our walk. We have all found new ways as the Body of Christ in the world (the church) to hear the Word of God and to share in the sacrament. We have sacrificed some to be sure, to help our neighbors and ourselves stay safe and healthy. However, we have not been alone as God is with us always, and as God's people we have found ways to stay connected with one another in physically distanced ways.

Discussion Questions: What does it mean for you to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper? How have you experienced new ways of doing this during this pandemic time? In what ways has the Word and sacrament filled you in the good and hard days of life?

Prayer of the Week: Gracious God, we thank you for the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Open our hearts to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Open our lives to your freeing love; for you alone can feed our hungry spirits through your Word and satisfy our every need. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship: "Break Now the Bread of Life" (ELW 515)

Synod Preacher: Micah Spruth-Janssen; Ministry Assistant at Family of Christ Lutheran Church in Kearney, Nebraska; and student at University of Nebraska- Kearney

Week 3: Wednesday March 10, 2021: Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Appointed Scripture: Romans 10:13-17 & Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction to This Week's Gift of Discipleship: Lent invites us to go inward and become more contemplative. This is an important part of the Lenten journey, but Jesus did not die to keep it a secret. His death and resurrection are meant to be the good news proclaimed from the housetops. The Apostle Paul, for example, found courage to boldly proclaim Christ—despite imprisonment and threats of death. He even discovered how God used the negative experiences of his life to proclaim Christ.

We too are so moved that we can't help but share the good news of God through word and deed. Our scripture appointed for this week reminds us of the power of the Good News, power like that of how "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). That power is also part of our call as disciples. We have each been gathered, called, and sent. In another way, we have all been commissioned by God in Christ himself to share the truth and joy of the gospel with our neighbors near and far. Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). We proclaim the good news with joy and hope, filled and accompanied by God, for as Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

How could we not share this Good News of all that God has done, continues to do, and promises to do for us? It's a central stewardship and discipleship question. It's one with joy and gratitude at its core. Though the pandemic has certainly changed some ways we go about answering this call, it hasn't changed the call at all. We are all messengers entrusted with the opportunity to proclaim hope, healing, the truth about God's love and abundance, and be bearers of grace for the world.

Discussion Questions: What does it mean for you to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed? How have you shared in this during this pandemic time (perhaps through sharing the Good News via your online or social media presence)? How do you feel called to proclaim the good news now, and in what ways may God be calling you to do this going forward?

Prayer of the Week: Gracious God, we thank you for the good news of Christ Jesus. Use our lives to boldly proclaim your good news made known in Christ. Use our words and our actions to reflect the goodness of your love. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship: "What Wondrous Love is This" (ELW 666)

Synod Preacher: Pastor Don Marshall, Oaks Indian Mission

Week 4: Wednesday March 17, 2021: Serve all people, following the example of Jesus

Appointed Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-5:2 & John 15:12-17 (and/or John 13:5-20)

Introduction to This Week's Gift of Discipleship: We associate acts of loving kindness and mercy with the season of Lent. Through art, music, preaching, teaching, and other means, the church tells the story of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. But the example of Jesus is more than his death. Throughout his life, Jesus served. He was a servant leader, one who was willing to get down on his knees and wash the feet of the disciples.

As Christ's hands and feet in the world today, we are called to do likewise. Through our appointed scripture for this week, we are called to be "imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us" (Ephesians 5:1-2). More so, we are also commanded by Christ himself to do this, as in the words we often hear on Maundy Thursday, Jesus tells his disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The commandment and the example follow Jesus' own example and act of washing the disciples' feet (John 13:5-15).

During this pandemic time the way we serve has changed. The needs of the world too perhaps have changed. Needs for health care access and vaccines. Need for meaningful and gainful employment. Needs for food and shelter. The needs are as real now as they have ever been, and God's people continue to respond to them and serve. Though perhaps some of the service looks a little different, for example, like a local food pantry pivoting to a drive-through model of distribution. Or, a kitchen serving people in need of a warm meal through a "to-go" option instead of a sit-down meal at times. Either way, God's people continue to respond today to our neighbor's needs because that's exactly what Christ calls us to do.

Discussion Questions: What does it mean for you to serve following the example of Jesus? How might Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet be an example for us today of serving our neighbors in our daily lives? In what ways might we be "imitators of God" through how we serve and show love, grace, and compassion? How do you sense that God may be calling you to serve?

Prayer for the Week: Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of service. We are recipients of your love made known in Christ. Fill our hearts with compassion, so we might serve out of a spirit of love rather than under the mantle of obligation. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship: "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (ELW 708)

Synod Preacher: Divine Cubwa; Current Member of the ELCA Church Council and student at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln

Week 5: Wednesday March 24, 2021: Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Appointed Scripture: Micah 6:6-8 & Luke 24:36-49 (and/or Mark 12:41-44 or Mark 11:15-19)

Introduction to This Week’s Gift of Discipleship: Holy Week, the week we remember in a mere four days to come, tells the story of Jesus—a story filled with injustice and violence. Though innocent, Jesus was sentenced to a violent death. Where is the justice and peace in this? On our behalf, Jesus encountered injustice, violence, and death itself in order to bring a new order—one in which the lion and lamb might lie down together. Until that time comes, we continue to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. We press on.

We do this because it is what a disciple or follower of Jesus is to do. We work for peace and justice, knowing it is not easy work. Because at its core, this is work of change in our world. The work of God breaking into our world so that all might have life and live abundantly. The work of God to lift up the lowly and restore the brokenhearted. The work of repairing broken systems and institutions so that they might be bearers of restoration rather than conduits of hard lives of suffering and pain. The work too of confronting the lies of scarcity that society often tells us with the truth of abundance and that there is enough for everyone through God.

In our scripture for this week we remember the call of God to each of us through the prophet Micah to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our gospel options for this week are at least threefold. Jesus does so much work pointing to peace and justice, that it might be hard to pick the perfect Gospel passage. For example, after his resurrection he returns to the disciples saying, “Peace be with you” embodying his message of peace and hope (Luke 24:36). Or, in his final days before his betrayal and crucifixion, he points to the example of a poor widow who does what she can to support the work of God and to care for those in need (Mark 12:41-44). Or, the previous day when he had come to the Temple, Jesus overturned the tables (Mark 11:15-19), calling for justice and a better and more honest way of doing God’s work, without the corruption and brokenness that Jesus witnessed through the money changers and those selling doves and likely extorting the needy at great price. These stories are important and good reminders of the complexity and challenge of working for peace and justice. Yet, even though it’s hard, we are each called, equipped, empowered, and sent to be part of this work here and now.

Discussion Questions: What does it mean to strive for justice and peace in all the earth? What examples of this have you seen or witnessed in your community and world this past year? In what ways might you be called today and in the days ahead to “strive for justice and peace in all the earth” yourself?

Prayer for the Week: Gracious God, we thank you for the promise of a world of justice and peace. Your love for your beloved humanity is breathtaking. To send your son Jesus Christ to live among us and die for us is humbling. Allow us to partner with you to bring justice and peace in all the earth. Show us the way. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship: “Christ, Be Our Light” (ELW 715)

Synod Preacher: Deacon Karen Melang; Former Nebraska Synod Council Secretary and Former Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity (in Fremont)

Optional Suggested Worship Design Pattern and Elements for Mid-Week Worship:

Prelude/Gathering Music

GATHERING

Welcome and Announcements

Greeting

P: The love of God poured into our hearts, the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and the abundant life of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Opening Prayer

P: Let us pray. O God, rich in mercy, full of kindness, out of your great love, you raise us up from sin and death and make us alive together with Christ. Write your word upon our hearts and restore in us the image of your love that, by your Spirit, our way of life may become the way of Christ, through whom we pray.

C: Amen.

Opening Song: "Christ, Our Peace"

It would be recommended that your congregation listens to or sings through this short song at least three times each week to learn it and dwell in its depth of meaning. Note that this is an easy to learn and repeat melody by Marty Haugen. It would be particularly fitting for this pandemic time to reflect on, perfect for Lent, and a nice grounding melody for thinking about the gifts of discipleship. This song can be found in the new hymnal supplement from Augsburg Fortress, *All Creation Sings*, 1037, and will be available through *Sundays and Seasons* online by early February 2021.

WORD

Introduction for this week's gift of discipleship

The introduction text for the appointed week may be read aloud prior to or following the appointed readings from scripture.

Appointed Scripture(s)

For each of the five weeks of this series, the appointed scriptures for each particularly week may be read here. At the conclusion of each passage, the reader may say:

R: Word of God. Word of life.

C: Thanks be to God.

Sermon/Homily/Reflection and Discussion Questions

As part of this five-week series, the Nebraska Synod will be sharing different voices on each of the gifts of discipleship. These messages are intended to be gifts and opportunities to lift up other voices in preaching. These sermons could be read from manuscript form and/or adapted for your community, and/or viewed via video recording from the one who has prepared them. Discussion questions are included, to be used as may be appropriate in your context. Perhaps spending 5-10 minutes following the sermon in conversation in-person or online may be useful here? Or, these questions become the basis for an

additional Bible Study or forum time of discipleship and learning some other time during the week outside of this worship service. Or, these questions become the basis for your own preaching on this theme.

Hymn for this Gift of Discipleship

A hymn or song that fits the theme and focus of this week's gift of discipleship may be sung or listened to following the readings, preaching and/or discussion time. Hymn suggestions for each gift of discipleship are included in the previous section.

Prayer for the Week

Each week's focus has a specific prayer that is offered accompanying the theme. That prayer petition may be prayed here as a way of closing this week's theme before the service continues with the prayers of the people, a potential time for receiving the gifts of God's and offering of God's people, and the Lord's prayer.

IN COMMUNITY AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Prayers of the People

P: In Christ Jesus we meet the God who knows our weakness and bears the wounds of the world. Therefore, let us be bold as we pray, trusting that God draws near to those in any kind of need.

Petitions may be offered as appropriate for your ministry context, and that might also particularly relate to this week's gift of discipleship. At the end of each petition, the presider may say, "Hear us God," and the congregation may respond, "Your mercy is great."

The prayer may conclude:

P: God of all compassion gather our prayers in your mercy and grant to us what you know we need, that we may walk in the life and peace of your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our hope and our salvation.

C: Amen.

Passing of the Peace

The peace of Christ may be shared with the community in whatever pandemic safe way makes sense in your context here.

Offering and Receiving of the Gifts of God's People

P: We now return a portion of what God has first entrusted to us. Living our lives and responding and serving as stewards of God's love. Thank you for being part of God's work here and now through _____(this congregation)_____, and for being part of the whole church together. Through you, some of God's work is done near and far.

During the offering, a song may be sung or a story may be shared of ministry in action made possible through your congregation, the Nebraska Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Offertory Prayer

P: Let us pray. Thank you God for all that we have and all that we are. Use us, and use these gifts which we return to you now, so that all might be fed and that all might know your Good News. In joy and gratitude for you, we give and respond with abundant praise. **C: Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

P: Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

C: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING

Sending Song: "Deep Peace"

It would be recommended that your congregation listens to or sings through this short song at least three times each week to learn it and dwell in its depth of meaning. Note that this is an easy to learn and repeat melody by Ray Makeever. It would be particularly fitting for this pandemic time to reflect on, perfect for Lent, and a nice closing melody of blessing and peace to close a mid-week Lenten worship. This song can be found in the new hymnal supplement from Augsburg Fortress, *All Creation Sings*, 1018, and will be available through *Sundays and Seasons* online by early February 2021.

Blessing

P: Christ Jesus dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love, strengthened by the Spirit, and filled with all the fullness of God.

C: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude/Dismissal Music

This liturgy and order of worship is based on the "Service of Word and Prayer" including liturgy options appointed especially for Lent, as found in All Creation Sings, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2020), 42-45. It has been adapted to fit the five gifts of discipleship theme. If using this liturgy and/or suggested hymns in your congregation, please verify your congregation's copyright licenses and give proper credit to Augsburg Fortress, OneLicense, GIA and others where appropriate.

For questions on this resource please contact Deacon Timothy Siburg at: timothy@nebraskasynod.org. It is shared with you in the hope that it might be of help and meaningful for your ministry context during this pandemic time.