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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

the little church with a big heart!



Since I've been in the Backstory Preaching Mentorship for five months, I thought it would be a good idea to share with you how I go about writing my sermons. This is a specific process created by Lisa Cressman, founder of Backstory Preaching. It's called "Backstory Preaching" because she recognizes that every preacher has a "backstory" that is inevitably influencing our preaching. We bring all that we are and everything that has gone on in our lives into the pulpit, so it is important to see that as part of the gift of who we are as preachers. The goal of this platform is to help preachers integrate life, spirituality, and craft in our preaching. There is some free information on the platform, but there are two paid levels, the highest giving access to everything on the platform, which includes lectures, articles, a chat room and thousands of other things. I feel like I have barely touched the surface, but I intend to be a member as long as I am preaching. While there are several paid positions (Lisa, the director of education, mentors, tech) there are volunteers who also help. All but probably the tech people are preachers who have been through the mentorship program.

Every Monday morning at 10:00, I got to the Backstory Preaching page on Facebook, where we are led through live Lectio, which means reading something slowly and prayerfully, without analysis, but prayerfully opening yourself to leading of the Spirit. Lisa reads the Gospel three times, using three different translations, including the NRSVue (updated edition), the NIV, and the Message. The first time, she asks "What word or phrase stands out to you?", and people share that in the chat. The second time, "What questions do you have for the text?", and the third time, "What are the feelings that come up for you. This whole process, which starts out with breathing exercises and prayer, takes an hour. So, I start my week steeped in the Gospel text for the sermon I will write.

On Tuesdays, I turn on "do not disturb" on my iPhone and iPad, pray, then I listen to the podcast that I have mentioned several times in my sermons called Sermon Brainwave, hosted by three Luther Seminary professors, New Testament, Old Testament, and Preaching professors, which is about 30 minutes – 45 minutes. After that, I go to the commentaries on the passage, primarily written by Biblical scholars, many of whom are seminary professors. I can spend anywhere up to two or more hours on that. I read until something really grabs my attention or sparks my imagination. Then I might do some more reading on that specific topic if I can find it. I'm looking for what I think the Good News is in the text, for us, today.

By Wednesday afternoon again, I pray, re-read the Gospel, then I fill out a grid created by them called "The Heart of the Message". The sections are "Belief Statement: What is the Good News I believe?" "Hope Statement: Why does it matter that listeners believe this Good News, too?" "The Human Condition: What keeps us from believing?" "Invitation to Transformation: What does God want us to say "yes" to?" Once I have written those statements I am asked "What makes the message stick?" And finally, the sermon "Bumper Sticker" which is really hard because the goal is to come up with a phrase that is memorable that sums up the sermon.

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 2.7 million members in more than 8,400 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's Work. Our Hands." the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

Then, it's time to write the sermon, which can take several hours to write and then go back to edit it before I print it. Sometimes, it just all comes together in a few hours total.

Now, about content. Some folks have made it clear to me that you want me to "leave out the politics", but it's not politics. It's the integration of our lives with our faith. Our congregational constitution states in C4.02.d that the pastor is called to "Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations, and standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and committing itself to their needs." 20th century Lutheran Theologian Karl Barth said "I always write my sermon with the Bible at one hand and the newspaper at the other. This was his way of saying that if we are to be effective preachers, our theology must shape how we see the world. I read, watch, and listen to a lot of different things to keep up with what is going on in our country and the world. I read the Long Beach Press Telegram, The New York Times, The Atlantic, and frequent articles from the Wall Street Journal that friends share with me. I read daily columns written by a professor of American History, a retired sociology professor and many others. I listen to National Public Radio, and I watch MSNBC, PBS News Hour, ABC, and sometimes CNN and FOX. I believe I must get my news from several sources, just like we study the Bible from all different angles and writers. In our Sunday Morning Adult Education we are engaged in the life-long learn of the Bible and we read all kinds of books from all different perspectives to help open it up for us, realizing that no one has the definitive word on much of anything in the Bible except that God loves us and sent Jesus to show us how to love and makes it possible to love our neighbor. But even then, people would write that sentence in many different ways. So, I am committed to be as informed as I can possibly be about what is going on in the world because I am a preacher, and I feel obligated to that.

So, if I tell the story of Hmong man, a United States Citizen for decades, in Minneapolis who was hauled out of his house, practically naked in 9-degree weather in a snowstorm by ICE agents, who then drove him around for an hour until they manage to find out that was he a citizen, I tell it because it is incumbent on us as Christians to speak truth to power, to hold up the injustice done to that man. We must call our public officials to accountability. We must hold up our Constitution and show all the ways that it is being ignored and trampled on right now. People apparently do not have any constitutional rights now. Not freedom of

speech, freedom to gather peacefully, or the freedom to not be subject to unreasonable search and seizure. As Lutheran Christians we *must* **"advocate dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations, and standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and committing itself to their needs."**

As you can see from the process that I use to write my sermons, I spend a lot of time and prayer and work on them. I don't just pull something out of a hat, and I do not have files of old sermons. Every single one is written for the day it is preached. I seek to be faithful to God, to myself and to you, praying all the time that you will hear and feel the liberating Word of God Incarnate.

+Pastor Ruth

CONGREGATION UPDATE

Be intentional about showing God's love to each other and the world.

Thank you for attending our annual congregational meeting in January. It's a good way to start the year by reviewing the previous year's spending and approve our spending plan for 2026. Every month, at the church council meeting, we review the monthly spending reports that Gary Bockman prepares. We are so fortunate to have Gary's expertise! At our next congregational meeting in May, we will review the status of the spending plan for 2026 and elect Council members.

During the next Council meeting, we will review the various suggestions made on ways to honor the generous gift made to Gloria Dei by Nancy Sansum including; providing Pastor Ruth a one-time housing supplement for first and last month's rent as she moves, providing our Mission partners with an additional monetary gift, purchasing new paraments for the altar and, purchasing new outside banners. If you have other suggestions, please provide me or any of the Council members of your ideas and thoughts for consideration.

If you have considered memorializing banners or paraments to honor someone in your

family, please let a Council member or Sandy Nelson know. We would like to purchase some new banners for our sanctuary for the seasons of Christmas and Easter.

As we head into the Lenten Season, beginning on February 18th with our Ash Wednesday worship service, disposition of ashes and Soup Supper, consider participating in 40 days of giving. Kalani Caldwell and Terri Collins started this lovely tradition years ago. The idea is to 'give' something each of the 40 days during Lent. These items could be clothing, gently used household items, extra canned goods, or blankets. There is so much need within our community and setting one thing aside each day is a wonderful way to serve those less fortunate.

LSS: Our deliveries of food items and gently used clothing help to change the lives of the many people they serve. As you and your friends and family conduct your annual 'spring cleaning', please consider donating to LSS. Your donations are so important! Deliveries are made nearly every week and we'll be happy to arrange for a pick-up.

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The small, **brave act of cooperating** with another person, of choosing **trust** over cynicism, **generosity** over selfishness, makes brain cells light up with quiet joy. ~ Dr. Gregory S. Berns

Congregation Update...

Fe y Esperanza: The members of Fe y Esperanza appreciate the support we provide as they serve families in need through their food distribution program. They also support the needs of immigrant families with gently used household items and new medical supplies. Pastor Marta sends pictures and thank you notes to our church family every month. Our support is greatly appreciated. If you have items that need to be picked up, please call Sandy Nelson at church and we'll make arrangements.



The volunteer service and expertise of Pastor Ruth, Bob Siemer and Gary Bockman is greatly appreciated for their guidance as they assist Fe Y Esperanza in transitioning from Synod's administrative management.

Long Beach Men's and Women's Shelter (Lydia House):

Clothing items for men, women and children are always needed. A special 'Thank you' to Sandy Nelson for sorting clothing delivered to church, selecting the items most needed by the shelters, and then making the essential deliveries.

ELCW: On February 12th at 11:00 a.m. we will fill bags of rice and beans for the LSS and Fe y Esperanza food distribution programs and enjoy lunch and fellowship. All women, including friends and neighbors, are invited to attend.

Adult Education: Join us for wonderful discussions on Sunday mornings at 9:00 a.m. as we continue to read and discuss 'What is the Bible' by Rob Bell. Every week is a new topic that promotes thought-provoking discussions.

Coming Events:

- February 4th – Church Council via zoom at 7:00 p.m.
- February 12th – ELCW meeting at 11:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall
- February 14th – Valentine's Day
- February 15th – Birthday Cake Sunday and Noisy offering
- February 18th – Ash Wednesday Worship and Soup Supper beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Happy Valentine's Day to all the sweethearts in our church family as we joyfully share the love of the Lord with those we serve, and as we continue to demonstrate 'God's Work, Our Hands' all year long. We are a truly blessed family of believers!

Karen Como —Council President

We continue to rejoice in God's abundant blessings as we came together this year for our Annual Congregation meeting and luncheon in January — thanks to all who made it a priority to attend! Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!



ADVOCACY

Connecting Faith and Public Life

As members of the ELCA, we believe that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. God uses our hands, through our direct service work and our voices, through our advocacy efforts, to restore and reconcile our world. Through faithful advocacy...

the ELCA lives out our Lutheran belief that governments can help advance the common good.

ELCA advocacy works for change in public policy based on the experience of Lutheran ministries, programs and projects around the world and in communities across the United States. We work through political channels on behalf of the following **biblical values: peacemaking, hospitality to strangers, care for creation, and concern for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger and disease.**

Together, we achieve things on a scale and scope that we could never do otherwise.

Explore the opportunities to connect, be informed, and reach out to officials on relevant, timely issues as we stand up for policies that create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, and care for God's creation.

To our dear siblings in Christ,

As the national bishops of Lutheran churches in the United States, Canada and Denmark, we wish to send the Greenlandic people our full support in an unusually difficult situation. We pray for and encourage our own congregations and people to pray for and stand with Greenland and the Greenlandic people who want to maintain their independence. We pray for peace and respect between nations.



We unreservedly support the Church of Greenland and Bishop Paneeraq Siegstad Munk, whose statement has been quoted in several media outlets: "This is a question of human rights, dignity, and respecting international laws and treaties. We are a small people, but we are not invisible. Our future is not something to be decided over our heads. We have language, culture, ancestors, children, and a future tied to this place. We are people, not property. Greenland is not land to be bought. It is our home and it is not for sale" (*Christian News*, Jan. 14).

The Church of Greenland works closely with dioceses in Denmark and plays an active role in international affairs as a member of the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and other organizations. We wish that this close cooperation will continue and bring joy and benefit to the people of Greenland.

We invite you to write to your elected leaders and tell them to respect the independence of Greenland and the Greenlandic people.

In Christ,

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer

National Bishop — **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

The Rev. Yehiel Curry

Presiding Bishop — **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

Rt. Revd. Henrik Stubkjær

Bishop of Viborg — **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark**

LIVING LUTHERAN

Called to *Serve*



ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to accompany communities in need because we work with congregations in the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as other partners and Lutheran churches overseas.

Hunger Facts — Working for a Just World Where All Are Fed

- Today the futures of many communities are in jeopardy as the global hunger crisis remains. Amid rising costs, global conflict, the lingering impact of COVID-19, and intensifying effects of climate change, decades of progress have been undone.
- Food prices rose throughout 2024 and continue to increase in 2025, which makes it harder for many families to access a healthy diet. Worldwide conflict and turmoil have only increased the cost of food.
- Climate change means 3.6 billion people live at risk of climate-caused disaster, risking their lives and raising the cost of living.
- Extreme poverty — living under \$3 per day — affects 831 million people.
- In the United States alone, over 47 million people face food insecurity.
- Housing unaffordability has reached an all-time high in the U.S. — over 22 million households spend over 30% of their income on rent and utilities, which leaves less money to afford food.
- Even as so many of our neighbors struggle with hunger, funding to many aid organizations has been eliminated or drastically cut.

Take Action NOW: 50 Years of GIVING !

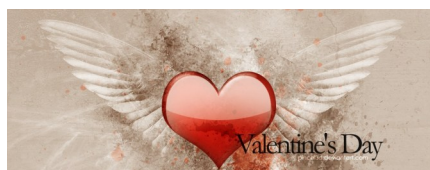
Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of people willing to be co-workers with God. ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

PROCLAMATIONS AND EVENTS



- 2 — **Bob Siemer**
- 5 — **David Thomas Fuller**
- 18 — **Roger Powell**
- 25 — **Sarah Fuller**

Birthday Challenge:
 What language would move your statement of faith out of your heads and into your hearts and hands and feet?



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Our name means
The Glory of God, so we try to live accordingly.
 Our life together as a family of faith is built on worship, service, education and friendship.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

JOIN US FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP!
February 1, 8, 15 & 22
 Enjoy Coffee & Fellowship

Our Biblical Values:
 peacemaking, hospitality to strangers, care for creation, and concern for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger and disease.



We invite you to **study, pray, reflect** and **give** with us during **ELCA World Hunger's 40 Days of Giving** — for our families, our neighbors and communities around the world.

These 40 days are a season to reflect and remember, to look forward and ahead. These are not easy times for many of us. We know the challenges our world faces. Yet the season of Lent reminds us that God is not yet through with us or our world. Amid our own dependence on God, we know by faith that God is even now at work, drawing us toward the resurrection and restoration of the world.

February 18
ASH WEDNESDAY
 Worship and Soup Supper
 at 5:00 p.m.

GLORIA DEI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May God grant us a hunger for him, which will cause us to pursue him in worship, as a way of life, a hunger, which will drive us to a closer fellowship with his people. This will result in a rich worship experience, characterized by unity, sensitivity, and understanding in loving God with our whole being.

We will love what he loves, hate what he hates, and long to see his purposes carried out through us.

THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SHIELD; MY HEART TRUSTS IN HIM. ~ PSALM 28:7
