

From the Pastor's Desk

The Gift of a Sabbatical

My sabbatical has concluded!! THANK YOU for this wonderful opportunity for renewal, education and rest. I missed you but knew you were in very good hands with the pastors who assisted with services and other ministry during my absence. It's hard to put into words what this sabbatical has meant and I will be processing what I learned and experienced over the next several months. Some of my sabbatical activities included:

Travel / Retreat: Right off the bat I traveled to Southbury, Connecticut for a week to visit a professor who taught me Biblical studies in the seminary and with whom I have developed a close friendship. We enjoyed visiting Walden Pond in Massachusetts where David Henry Thoreau wrote many of his works that I have enjoyed reading. Joan and I traveled to Mexico for a week of romance and intrigue ☺, visited family in Minnesota and North Dakota, attended a wedding of Joan's nephew in Fort Collins and took some R&R in Crested Butte. I rode in a 75 mile bike race in Boulder with 650 other bikers followed by a five day private camping retreat at Rifle Falls, CO.

Education: I attended Sunday services at Lutheran congregations and other Christian denominations to experience how they conduct worship and extend hospitality. Along with about 25 other pastors in Colorado Springs, I attended a forum where Jewish and Muslim leaders discussed the conflict in Israel. Later, along with two other Lutheran pastors, I attended a Muslim prayer service followed by discussion with the Imam and other members of their Mosque. In Pueblo, I had the opportunity to attend a Jewish service followed by a discussions with members of their synagogue.

Books I enjoyed reading during the sabbatical are: "Evolution's Arrow" by John Stewart, "The Apostle" by Brad Thor, "The Gift of the Years" by Joan Chittister (which I highly recommend for anyone who feels they are getting old), "Thank God for Evolution" by Michael Dowd, "An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches" by Ray Anderson, "Breakout Churches" by Thom Rainer, "The Portable Thoreau" edited by Carl Bode, "Putting Aside Childish Things" by Marcus Borg, "Natural Church Development" by Christian Schwarz, and I spent time rereading the New Testament epistles. Joan and I enjoyed viewing twenty five DVD sessions of "The History of Christianity in the Reformation Era" taught by Professor Brad Gregory, part of "The Great Courses" series. I attended a lecture in Boulder addressing the progression of spiritual development within people and society. I also reviewed the DVD series "Living the Questions", which you will find on the next page.

Probably the most valuable aspect of this sabbatical was the three month time period during which I had no pastoral responsibilities. This freedom allowed me to read, pray and play in a way I haven't done for many years. It helped me to get a taste of what it would be like to retire and I sometimes even had difficulty remembering what day of the week it was! It allowed me the time to look deep within my heart and for that I am very grateful. I will be reflecting on this experience for years to come.

~PB

Fall Adult Education Opportunity...

Living the Questions of Faith

Wednesday Evenings, October 13th – December 1st

It was early Fall and the class settled in for its first session of DISCIPLE Bible study. In introducing the Genesis material for the first discussion, the facilitator referred to Adam and Eve as metaphors and not historic individuals. The reactions that resulted were swift – and representative of reactions that might occur in many churches:

1) Anger. “What? How dare you question the Bible? I just knew you were one of those people come to dismantle everything in order to further some questionable political agenda.”

2) Panic. Through the quiet weeping, “Why are you trying to destroy my faith? How can I trust God if His word isn’t true?”

3) Puzzlement. “Really? You mean there are two Creation stories in Genesis? How come I’ve never seen this before? Hmmm, I wonder what else I’ve missed by not reading this more carefully...”

4) Relief. “Thank you, thank you, thank you. I’ve known in my heart that there was more to these stories than just a literal recounting of what happened – but I was afraid to say anything for fear of being thought of as a heretic.”

And these are just the people who are interested enough to commit to a Bible study. Many people just don’t care anymore. They have long since stopped going to church at all. Despite claims by church-growth gurus, the fields are not “ripe for harvest.” Far from it. As one Christian pollster noted, the large numbers of people not involved in faith communities are not just waiting to be invited but are “passionately disinterested” in the church.

The “graying” and abandonment of “mainline” churches is but one symptom of this disinterest. Many speak of being “spiritual” rather than “religious,” honest rather than hypocritical. The atrophy of the mainline church’s influence in society and its decreasing numbers is explained by evangelical and fundamentalist leaders as a result of their having not proclaimed the “true” Gospel. Meanwhile, superficial arguments over the preference of music styles and levels of formality in worship continue to serve as a distraction from what people are truly dissatisfied with: the core message, dogma, and practice of the Christian faith in today’s world.

Many people of deep spiritual integrity simply cannot suffer the shallow message they hear in many churches any longer. They have an intuitive sense that there is more to Christianity than the rigid rules and theological constructs of the past.

Living the Questions (LtQ) hopes to expose people to the ideas and concepts that have been taught and discussed for generations in our seminaries that seldom

Living the Questions continued:

get taught or discussed in our churches. It is for those who are yearning for something more than the shallow platitudes that pass for theology in many churches – for the folks in the “puzzled” and “relieved” categories above. LtQ is for those who are looking for a resource within the church that encourages questions and sparks open dialogue. It’s also for those who have stopped taking the church seriously at all.

Living the Questions seeks not to provide easy answers, but to be a resource for people who are in the midst of a life-long conversation about the mysteries of faith and life. It is an open-minded alternative to studies that attempt to give participants all the answers. LtQ creates an environment where participants not only interact with one another exploring the best of today’s theological thought, but together strive to explore what’s next for Christianity. Featuring 30 of today’s leading religious voices, LtQ is comprised of 21 sessions. The 20-minute video segments include conversations with leading voices of faith, sermon and lecture clips, digital stories illustrating aspects of an evolving faith, and concrete spiritual practices.

There is a re-visioning of Christianity already emerging in the world. It is our hope that Living the Questions will play a part in your discovering the relevance of Christianity in the 21st Century and what a meaningful faith can look like today.

Taken from “Living the Questions”, by Rev. David Felten & Rev. Jeff Procter-Murphy

People who will find LtQ helpful to their spiritual growth are those who desire to learn more about their faith, are comfortable with mystery and not having all the answers. They will understand that the Bible is to be taken seriously and respected, but “infallible” and “inerrant” are attributes of God alone and not the Bible or any person or institution.

Living the Questions Schedule

Sessions will be held in our Fellowship Hall on the Wednesday evenings listed below from 5:30 – 7:00 PM. Pre-registration is required. See sign up sheet in the Gathering Area. Soup and sandwiches will be served. There will be a \$5.00 per session charge to cover cost of the food, which will be catered. Excess money will be given to the Parking Lot Fund. Sessions will begin with soup / sandwiches followed by a 20 minute DVD by one of the Living the Questions presenters projected on our large screen followed by discussion. It will conclude with a Lutheran lens of the topic and distribution of take-home material. There are a total of twenty one sessions. These are the first seven.

October 13th 1. An Invitation to Journey (5:30 Soup/Sandwiches & 1st session)

FOCUS: Faith is not a destination, but a journey. Beware of the person who says: I’ve got God all figured out. Not even Jesus was that bold. Instead he opted for stories that demanded thought, raised questions, and often went counter to conventional wisdom.

“To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.”

From Living the Questions Study Guide

October 20th 2. Taking the Bible Seriously

FOCUS: The authority one places in the Bible plays a critical role in one's world-view and understanding of the Christian life.

"The Christian life is not primarily about believing the right things. The Christian life is about being in relationship with God which transforms us into more and more compassionate beings, 'into the likeness of Christ.'"

LtQ Study Guide

October 27th 3. Thinking Theologically

FOCUS: Being comfortable with ambiguity, metaphor, and uncertainty help us get the Divine "out of the box" and rethink theological ideas that have become barriers to our further spiritual growth.

A student exclaimed, "I don't believe in God!" The teacher replied, "Tell me about this God you don't believe in; chances are I don't believe in that God either."

LtQ Study Guide

November 3rd 4. Stories of Creation

FOCUS: How one perceives the creation stories is not only critical to the way one looks at the Bible, but how one understands the purpose of creation, the essence of human nature, and the attitude one takes toward the environment in which we live.

"When we delve into these ancient stories, we catch a glimpse of the answer to the eternal question, 'What's the meaning of life?' We are reminded that we are made in the image of the Divine – the one who brings order out of chaos and finds joy in the act of creating."

LtQ Study Guide

November 10th 5. Lives of Jesus

FOCUS: The many portrayals of Jesus in the gospels, in various traditions, theologies, and the arts, amount to a Jesus who lived many different lives – each of which helps us in learning what it means to be a disciple of this mysterious and profoundly significant phenomenon called Jesus of Nazareth.

The notion that Jesus might have been a short, dark, Middle-Eastern peasant rabble-rouser is so far from many people's capacity to comprehend, that all reason is rejected in favor of the delicate Aryan visions of early childhood. A blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, meek and mild, is such a stalwart icon of Western culture, that to suggest anything contrary or corrective to that image is tantamount to heresy.

LtQ Study Guide

November 17th 6. A Passion for Christ: Paul the Apostle

FOCUS: Little of what most people think of as Christianity has been untouched by the legacy of Paul's writing and influence. The many understandings of his interpretation of Christianity continue to be re-examined in the 21st century.

Living the Questions schedule continued:

“Idolized by some as the conduit through which God dictated an eternal and unchanging moral code and discredited by others as a misogynist crank, Paul is without question one of the most controversial figures in the history of Christianity. But one thing can’t be questioned: his passion for Christ and his apparent willingness to risk life and limb in propagating his interpretation of Christ’s message and purpose.”

LtQ Study Guide

November 24th (No meeting -Thanksgiving holiday)

December 1st Out into the World

FOCUS: There is a reformation afoot in Christianity – a re-visioning of the understandings of Jesus and the Christian life as a whole. Long held ideas of faith are changing and evolving to reflect 21st century thought and spirituality. Inspired by these fresh insights, progressive Christians can claim a distinctive voice by being in solidarity with the poor, proclaiming the Living Christ, countering the idolatry of wealth, practicing nonviolence, and by seeking justice and inclusivity in a culture dominated by fear.

“For medieval Europeans, it was understood that famines and plagues were sent by God as punishment for sin. Wars were divine earthly retribution. Feudalism, absolute monarchy, and slavery were ordained by God. In the not too distant past those seeking medical help submitted themselves to physicians who slit the skin to “bleed” patients and let the bad “humours” escape. The Bible was cited in turning women away from the polls and relegating African Americans to church balconies. The invention of the lightning rod was vehemently denounced by clergy as unwarranted interference with God’s use of lightning.”

“Stagnation in thought or enterprise means death for Christianity as certainly as it does for any other vital movement. Stagnation, not change, is Christianity’s most deadly enemy, for this is a progressive world. Jesus lives and is present in our midst. We share his compassion.”

LtQ Study Guide

Advent Service—Following the December 1st session please join us for the Holden Advent Evening Prayer Service in the Sanctuary at 7:00 PM.



Be part of the journey.

Fall Sermon Series - *The Good Shepherd*

The Lord Is My Shepherd! and I am thrilled to belong to him, for it is thus that I flourish and thrive, no matter what life may bring.

September 12th: "The Lord is My Shepherd"
September 19th: "I Shall Not Want"
September 26th: "He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures"
October 3rd: "He Leads Me Beside Still Waters"
October 10th: "He Restores My Soul"
October 17th: "He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness"
October 24th: "Though I Walk Through the Valley"

Adult Education

Meets at 10:15 in the Choir Room. Everyone is invited to attend.

Those interested in Adult Education classes will meet on October 3rd at 10:15 AM in the Choir Room to discuss future topics to be covered.

Natural Church Development—NCD

Over the next few months you will be hearing a lot about this topic. So what is it? How will it affect me?

The NCD process resulted from surveys that were conducted in over 20,000 different churches across the United States. Christian Schwarz developed the survey and analyzed the data. What he discovered was that in all these churches, regardless of size, regardless of whether they were growing or declining, regardless of location, there are 8 qualities that exist to one degree or another. The characteristics are: *empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships.*

This summer, during Pastor Bob's sabbatical, church Council members read the book Natural Church Development that described in more detail how NCD works. September 7th we met with Pastor Jim Hytjan, Assistant to the Bishop of the Rocky Mountain Synod to learn more details about NCD. At that time Council voted to approve going forward with the process. This is a 3 year time commitment and the process is meant to assist us by providing a regular and accurate snapshot of our church's health. With the help of a coach, in our case Pastor Hytjan from the Bishop's staff, we will take the survey and develop a plan for improving the overall quality of our ministry. This plan will help church leaders and the congregation to create an ongoing environment that releases our 'natural' growth potential.

A proposed timeline for implementation is this:

September 2010: NCD review/decision, Church Health Team members (CHT) recruited, CHT first training session.

October 2010: Congregation preparation and NCD survey conducted.

November 2010: CHT second training session and survey results reviewed.

January 2011: ministry plan created.

February 2011: implementation begins.

As we proceed with this process we will provide additional information so be watching. If you have any questions or would like additional information please contact Pastor Bob or any Council member.

- Linda Coffey, Council Chairperson



Pony Express Rides Again!

It is fall again and that means it is time for Shepherd of the Hills' annual stewardship drive. We will be using the Pony Express program once again. This is a great program but I think a lot of people didn't fully understand how it worked. So, I thought I would help clarify what this program is and also what this program isn't.

What this program IS: Pony Express is a great way to get members of our congregation involved in our stewardship program; it is a simple way to deliver the estimate of giving cards to members without wasting money on postage; it's an opportunity to say hi to one of your fellow members as you deliver the saddle bag.

What it is NOT: Pony Express does not require you to have a one-on-one conversation in someone's living room; you don't have to convince someone to give; and there is no pressure for anyone to fill out their intention card.

The trail routes will be neighborhood routes this year, so when you pass the saddle-bag off to the next member, it will be to someone close to your home. All you have to do is call them, set a time to drop it off, meet them, say hi, and hand off the bag. That's it.

I hope you will see this program as a chance to connect with your fellow members and help us all revisit our support of the ministries of this wonderful congregation.

We'll see you on the trail!

Dave Jarvis, Stewardship Team