

Central Lutheran Church

Narrative Lectionary Bible Study

Fall, 2020

Welcome

The Central Lutheran faith community has followed the revised common lectionary for decades. As a quick reminder, lectionary is the fancy “church word” for the assigned readings for weekend worship. It is a common lectionary because it is used by Lutherans, Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and many other traditions. The revised (updated) common lectionary is a blessing, uniting people of faith around the world in a shared reading of Hebrew and Christian scriptures. You may also remember that the revised common lectionary followed a three-year rotation, moving through Matthew, then Mark and Luke, with John used for the big festivals of the year.

Several years ago, a narrative lectionary was developed with the goal of hearing lessons that we do not often encounter in the common lectionary. A secondary goal was to move through these lessons chronologically, beginning in Genesis and moving through to Revelation. In this second goal a congregation would “travel” through the history of God’s love for the world. Some would add a third goal, as a culture that is not deeply immersed in the Bible, it invites a congregation into the arc of the love of God from the first pages of the Bible to the final word.

We will return to the revised common lectionary, for all the reasons I noted above. For this year, and perhaps next, in the midst of this life changing pandemic, your rostered leaders felt a tug to use the narrative lectionary as a way to ground us in the shared story of God’s love from the beginning to the close of the Bible.

Attend Each Week, or When it Works

As always, these Bible studies are more holy conversations. No previous knowledge is expected, in fact it helps to seek to enter the study as if for the first time. You are invited to attend the Zoom study each week, but the invitation is always open for when it works in your schedule. Remember, always join the conversation, no matter if you had a chance to read the lesson for the week. For this study, your Bible will be helpful to have in front of you. The lesson will be

printed here, but often there are sections that are jumped over for the sake of space.

Christ Care Prayers begin each lesson, it is a time when we pray for one another and the needs of the world. If you have a prayer concern that you do not want to share in front of the group, you can send a private chat to the pastor who is leading the study.

For the class time on Zoom, we will break out into conversation groups. We learned over the summer that they can go well, or not so well. For this study, one of the pastors will be in each of the groups to help facilitate the conversation. We may randomly assign groups, or over time we may find it helpful to have set groups for a couple of weeks at a time. We share this to encourage you to be a part of the study and not let the thought of break out groups scare you away!

Thank you for joining this Bible study, these holy conversations.

Schedule

September 9 - Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8 (Creation and "fall")

September 16 - Genesis 15: 1-6 (God's promise to Abraham/ Sarah)

September 23 - Genesis 37: 3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21 (Joseph's dreams)

September 30 - Exodus 12:1-3; 13:1-8 (Passover)

October 7 - Exodus 32: 1-14 (Golden Calf)

October 14 - 1 Samuel 1: 9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10 (Hannah and Samuel)

October 21 - 2 Samuel 7: 1-17 (David)

October 28 - 1 Kings 17: 1-24 (Elijah and the widow)

November 4 - Jonah 1:1-17; 3: 1-10; 4:1-11 (Jonah)

November 11 - Isaiah 6: 1-8 (Holy, Holy, Holy)

November 18 - Jeremiah 36: 1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31: 31-34 (New Covenant)

November 25 - NO Zoom Study, Thanksgiving Weekend

December 2 - Joel 2:12-13, 28-29 (Merciful God, promise of Spirit)

December 9 - Isaiah 61: 1-11 (Spirit of the Lord)

December 16 - Luke 1:26-45, 46-56 (Annunciation and Magnificat)

December 23 - NO Zoom Study, Christmas break

December 30 - NO Zoom Study, Christmas break

January 6 - Zoom Study Resumes

Narrative Study for Wednesday, September 23

Welcome

Christ Care Prayers

Overview of the study and the narrative lectionary

Tonight's Lesson: Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21 Joseph's Dreams

So, let's just get it out of the way right now, please sing all your favorite tunes from "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" now, I'll wait... While it's not my favorite musical, it does get one thing right, the heart of the problem for Joseph is that his father Jacob/Israel plays favorites. We are told right away that he loved this son more than the rest. This sets Joseph up for dangerous jealousy from his brothers once he shares his dreams. We skipped over the part of Genesis where Jacob tricked his brother Esau for his birthright from Isaac. Isaac who was the descendant promised to Abraham and Sarah, set up such a competition between his sons that they never got along. Genesis, at times can be read as one big family systems nightmare. God keeps trying to bless the people and the people keep hurting each other and playing out the hurt they have received from others.

This is why the Joseph story is so important. He breaks the cycle of being hurt and then inflicting more pain. He forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery and telling their father he was dead. He rises up and cares for them in their need out of his abundance. He can do all this because he trusted in the God of abundance to guide him and provide for him. Joseph believes in a God who gives him dreams to guide him and then Joseph acts on that guidance. Because he is able to be led in this way, Abraham's many descendants are saved from starvation. Because Joseph can forgive, the people are fed.

Lectio Divina

One of the oldest ways to enter into the holy conversation at a Bible study is to spend time reading the lesson slowly, and at least three times. This fall you will be invited to this way of reading called "lectio divina," or divine reading. You

can read the lesson silently, or even out loud if you are in a quiet place. There are many ways to engage in *lectio divina*, here is one way to consider:

1. The first time simply read the lesson for the information, the story that is being shared. At the end of the reading, what did you notice? What was interesting, or confusing? What was familiar or unfamiliar?
2. The second time, slow down and perhaps circle words that stay with you or even underline a sentence that jumps out at you. Here you begin to read with your heart, along with your mind. What emotions do you notice as you read and respond or react to the lesson?
3. The third and final time, really slow down. Perhaps you pause or stop at a verse, linger there. Here you begin to read with your soul. What is God or the LORD GOD saying in, with and under this story? What is God or the LORD GOD not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling? How are you open to God as you pause for this third reading?
4. Be sure to write down what you may have learned and the questions you may have at this point. Note what emotions were stirred up and what you may want to ponder. Note how the lesson draws you to God, how are you opened or where are you restless.

Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21

Joseph's Dreams

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

⁵Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

¹⁷The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill

him. ¹⁹They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." ²¹But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²²Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" — that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. ²⁸When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. ³⁰He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" ³¹Then they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. ³²They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not."

³³He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Chapter 50

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Conversation and Questions

1. What questions does this story bring up for you? What did you notice for the first time in this reading?
2. How do these stories make you feel? Notice your body when you read it, are there places you are holding the tension? Where are the moments of release in these stories?

3. How is God present in these stories? What do you hear God saying to you through these stories? What do you hear God saying to our whole community?
4. What more do you want to discuss with others about these stories? How are you called to integrate or share what you have learned?