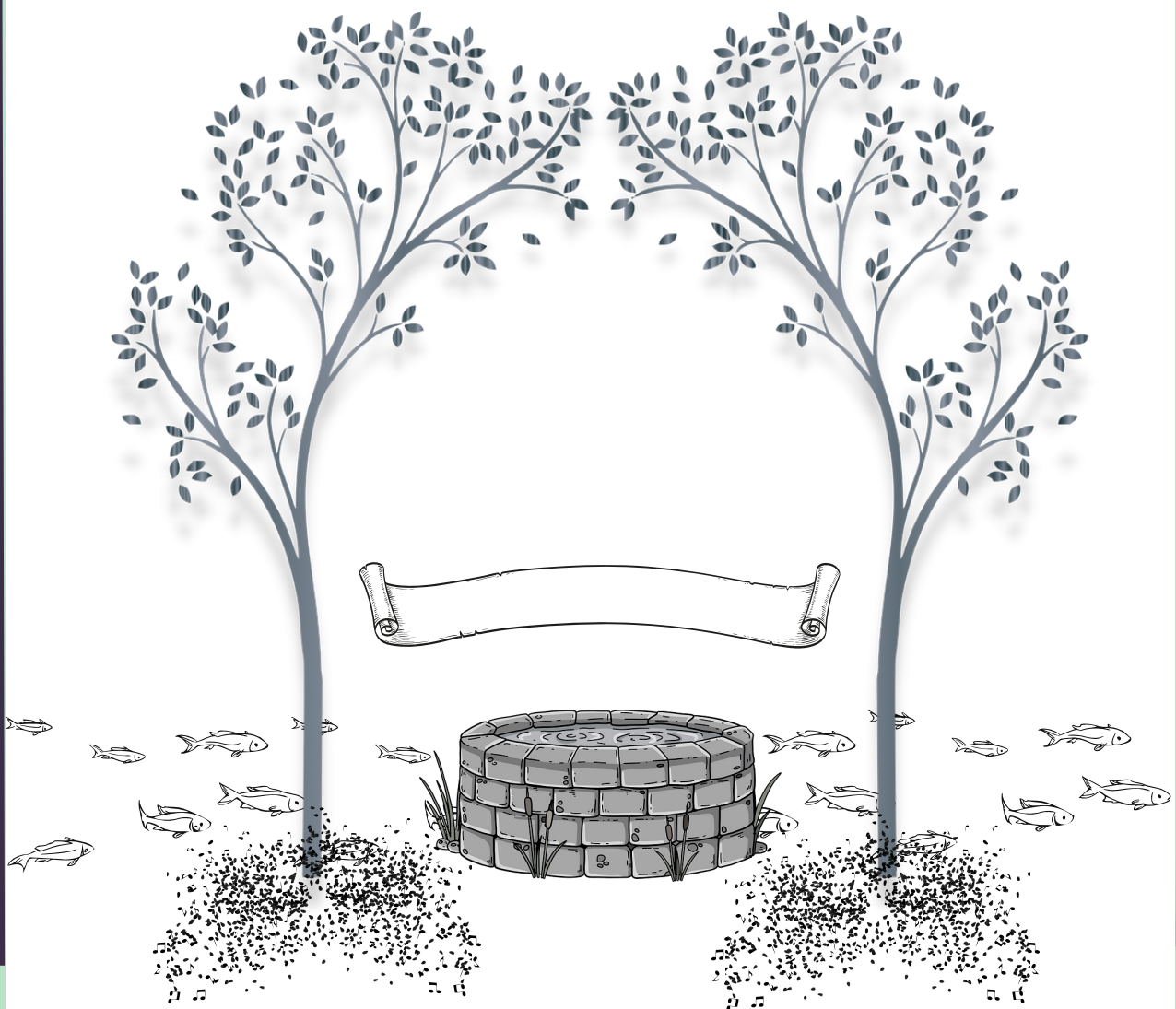


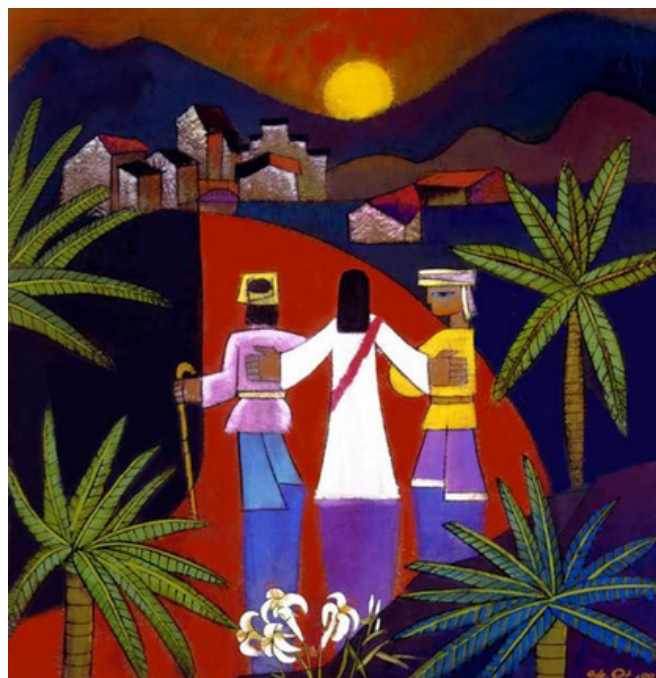
# The Story of Jesus



**NWOS Year of Story  
Bible Study**

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# Welcome to the Story

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus calls His disciples to be witnesses. To be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to witness... To tell... To share... the Story of Jesus with the entire world.

Welcome to **2023: The Year of Story**. Our focus this year will be on learning and telling the Story of Jesus. A story that many of us have been learning and telling our entire lives. The Gospel Story of Jesus matters, though many of our neighbors here at home and around the world, have not experienced the Good News of Jesus. Those of us who know and live the Story of Jesus have a great opportunity before us to lovingly share the Story of Jesus.

We are the followers of a crucified and risen Lord, and the work we are called to do is always centered in Jesus. And we are centered in Jesus to be sent into the world. The mission of the Northwestern Ohio Synod captures both our call to be centered in the Gospel and our call to be sent into the world. **“Sent by the Crucified and Risen Jesus to Make Disciples, Equip Leaders, Strengthen Parishes, and Nurture New Communities for the Renewal of Northwestern Ohio and the World”.**

What follows is a six-session Bible resource on the Story of Jesus. Open (or turn on) your Bible, gather with a group of friends, get outside the four walls of the congregation, to learn and share the Jesus story, to learn and share your story, and to learn and share the story of your community. But be careful. Be very, very careful, because the Story of Jesus has the power to transform us from who we are, into the people and communities that God longs for us to be.

Let us pray, **“Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord”.** Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship pg. 72)

Blessings,  
Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin

# Chapter 1

## Someone To Sing To




**By Pastor Sarah Schaaf**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: Luke 1:38-40
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!



## Chapter 1: Someone to Sing to

 eep, Beep, Beep. The school bus would back into our lane. I was the last stop on the winding bus route that led up into the hills of West Virginia. Ksssss. The bus door would release and set me free, but I would never go home. It was as if my feet had a mind of their own. I would come to the gravel crossroad between our family's houses and I would say to myself "just go home Sarah", but I never did. I instead would turn and walk up the hill to my grandmother's house.

I never knocked on the door. She knew I was coming. She had heard the bus in the lane and was already in the kitchen, her head buried in the refrigerator. I would open the door and hear her call out to me, "Maria". (My grandmother was the only who called me Maria. My middle name is Marie.) Soon there would be something to eat on her small kitchen table and my grandmother would take her place across from me "How was your day?" she would ask. Out it would pour. All of it: the sagas of the day, the laughs, the complicated relationships, the joys, the fears, the questions about who I was and who I was becoming and what I should do next.

Before long the bus would reappear in our lane beeping. Then my brother and cousins would make their way to my grandmother's table until we were all crammed around it, but for awhile I had her all to myself. And with that the blessing of learning how to give voice to my story, in the presence of someone who loved me.

Years later, we would discover that we had all been calling our grandmother on our drives home. At different hours, from different states, after doing very different work; we would get into our cars and instinctively dial her number to tell her about our day. She would always answer as if she had been expecting the call. "I knew it was you" she would say.

And with that blessing our stories would pour out.



Together, read a Jesus Story from Luke 1:41-45, NRSV.

Mary doesn't sing for the angel Gabriel, or Joseph her betrothed, or her friends and family in Nazareth. Mary goes, "*with haste*" to the Judean hill country, to the home of Elizabeth, her cousin who is also pregnant. At the sound of Mary's voice, John leaps in Elizabeth's womb and she is filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth's blessing ushers in Mary's Song.

## Chapter 1: Someone to Sing to

Who do you go to when you need to share big news?  
What blessing(s) do they offer that help you find your voice?  
*Example: the blessing of time, the blessing of truth, etc.)*

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What do you imagine Mary was feeling as she made her way to Elizabeth?



*Consider the artwork above from A Sanctified Art: What do you notice?  
What is a word or a phrase you would use to describe this picture?*

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What do you think is the blessing Elizabeth offers Mary?  
What does it do for her?

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Brainstorm a list of “big news” that is happening in your family, community, and world. Write a blessing for one of the “big moments” you have identified.  
*(Remember: everyone can bless and the world needs lots of blessings.)*

## Chapter 1: Someone to Sing to

Together, continue the Jesus Story from Luke 1:46-56, NRSV.

Mary's Song is known as the Magnificat, meaning "My Soul Magnifies the Lord". What is God bringing about in Mary's Magnificat?

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At points in history (in places like India, Guatemala, and Argentina) those in power have considered Mary's Song too subversive to be sung in the liturgy or in public. Why do you think they considered it subversive? Who do you think was singing Mary's Song?

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*Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes Mary's Magnificat this way:*

"It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings...This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind."

What stories do you have about the amazing things God has done in your life?

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What is one thing you can do to be a place of sanctuary for others?

**Closing Question:** What is your one take away from today's conversation? With whom might you share this one "take away" this week?

### Homework:

- ☐ Memory Verses Luke 1:46-48
- ☐ Work Through the Next Lesson
- ☐ Make an intentional effort to be the place where others can share their life. What stories do you hear?

## Chapter 1: Someone to Sing to

### **Closing Hymn: Magnificat by Todd Agnew**

*Performed by Pastor Beth Giller and Emily Hemminger*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_KrFyD36ww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_KrFyD36ww) (song begins at 29:31-33:51)

### **Closing Prayer: A Blessing Called Sanctuary by Jan Richardson**

You hardly knew how hungry you were to be gathered in,  
to receive the welcome that invited you to enter entirely—  
nothing of you found foreign or strange,  
nothing of your life that you were asked to leave behind  
or to carry in silence or in shame.

Tentative steps became settling in,  
leaning into the blessing that enfolded you,  
taking your place in the circle  
that stunned you with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again, to move without fear,  
to speak with abandon the words you carried in your bones,  
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing is that it will not leave you alone,  
will not let you linger in safety, in stasis.

The time will come when this blessing will ask you to leave,  
not because it has tired of you  
but because it desires for you to become the sanctuary  
that you have found—  
to speak your word into the world,  
to tell what you have heard with your own ears,  
seen with your own eyes,  
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved, precious child of God,  
beautiful to behold,\*  
and you are welcome  
and more than welcome  
here.



# Chapter 2

## The Unexpected Sacred



**By Caroline Guy**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: John 4:7-10
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!

## Chapter 2: The Unexpected Sacred

One day, while eating lunch at our campus' theater café, my friend Esma asked me to watch her food for her while she found a quiet corner of the room to pray. Esma is Muslim, and although I was familiar with the Islamic practice of praying five times a day, I was shocked to see her pray in the lobby, in front of everyone. Out of all the rehearsing, studying, and general shenanigans that happened in that lobby, Esma's prayers were what caught my attention.

At this point in my faith journey, I had totally left the church. I had experienced hurt and witnessed others being hurt to the point that I no longer considered a church building or a Christian community a safe space. So watching my friend pause her very busy daily life to prioritize prayer was something I struggled to understand. Especially at a point in our political and societal culture that has not been kind to women who wear the hijab (head scarf) for religious or cultural reasons. Why risk it?

This interaction was the spark for many observations about what it means to embody your faith. For my friend Esma, her faith is not something she performs. It isn't a one-hour-a-week activity. Her islamic faith is ingrained in who she is and everything she does. Over time as I witnessed Esma embodying her faith, I started to ask myself questions and dig deeper into the realities of my own faith.

Like the woman at the well, I had been made aware (directly and indirectly) of all the ways I was not "fit for the church". But my soul was drawn to the teachings of Jesus. I found myself getting curious about parables and scripture stories. I began calling my mom and asking theological questions of why she, a Lutheran pastor, believed the things she believed, and how could I reconcile that with the Christianity I was seeing on the news and social media. I may have lost faith in the Christian Church, but Jesus kept calling me back with messages of love, hope, and steadfastness.

The amazing part of this story, is that it wasn't someone in my own faith community that taught me these things. It was my relationship with Esma that made me realize how beautiful a personal relationship with God could be. It was learning about the Jewish practice of midrash that made me realize it's okay (and often necessary) to ask questions to which there is no clear answer. It was learning from black faith leaders that made me realize that, in order to survive and thrive, we must stay rooted in community. It was learning from the LGBTQ+ community that helped me realize how wide and wonderful God's love truly is. It was learning from indigenous faith leaders that made me realize the interconnectedness of God's creation. It was only when I listened to stories and nurtured relationships with people different from me that I began to heal and my own faith life was enriched. If God is at work in and through all of us, we will only experience the fullness of God's love when we enter into authentic community with all people.



## Chapter 2: The Unexpected Sacred

Together, read a Jesus Story from John 4:1-40, NRSV.

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Jesus and the Samaritan woman were not supposed to engage with each other, but it was only through their interaction that many people in the town came to know and believe in Jesus. Tell a story about a time that breaking away from cultural norms was a good experience.



Take some time to experience the image above by Chris Cook.

What do you notice?

What do you feel?

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Put yourself in the Samaritan woman's shoes.

How do you feel after your interaction with Jesus?

What was a time in your life that made you feel a similar way?

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My friend Esma and I come from two different faith traditions, but we were able to learn from each other and experience sacred moments together. Thinking about a faith tradition that's different from your own, what is something you're curious about. Share one or two questions you have with the group.

## Chapter 2: The Unexpected Sacred



In scripture we read that the disciples, and even Jesus himself, had doubts and questions throughout their ministry; one of the most famous being "Doubting" Thomas (as seen above). Tell a story of a time when you had a doubt or question. Is that question still lingering, or did you find an answer. If so, where did that answer come from? (There's no right or wrong answers here!)

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How do you live out your faith in your daily life? What is one thing you want to try for the next week to further embody what it means to be a Jesus follower? (Prayer, daily Bible reading, conversations with a friend, art, walks outside etc.)

**Closing Question:** What is your one take away from today's conversation? With whom might you share this one "take away" this week?

### Homework:

- ☐ Memory Verses John 4:28-29
- ☐ Work Through the Next Lesson
- ☐ Try one new thing that might help you further embody your faith this week



## Chapter 2: The Unexpected Sacred

**Closing Hymn: Ask the Complicated Questions** (ACS 1005) (1:52 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJdwOYF3OTs>

Ask the complicated questions. Do not fear to be found out;  
for our God makes strong our weakness, forging faith in fires of doubt.

Seek the disconcerting answers, follow where the Spirit blows;  
test competing truths for wisdom, for in tension new life grows.

Knock on doors of new ideas, test assumptions long grown stale,  
for Christ calls from shores of wonder, daring us to try and fail.

For in struggle we discover truth both simple and profound;  
in the knocking, asking, seeking, we are opened, answered, found.

**Closing Prayer: What Is the World Like** (ACS 1047) (3:03 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdgOQWhyA80>

What is the world like when God's will is done? Mustard seeds grow more than we  
can conceive: roots thread the soil; branches reach for the sun.  
This is how God moves us each to believe.

What is the world like when God's will is done? Witness the wandering child  
coming home; watch as the parent breaks into a run.  
This is how God longs for us when we roam.

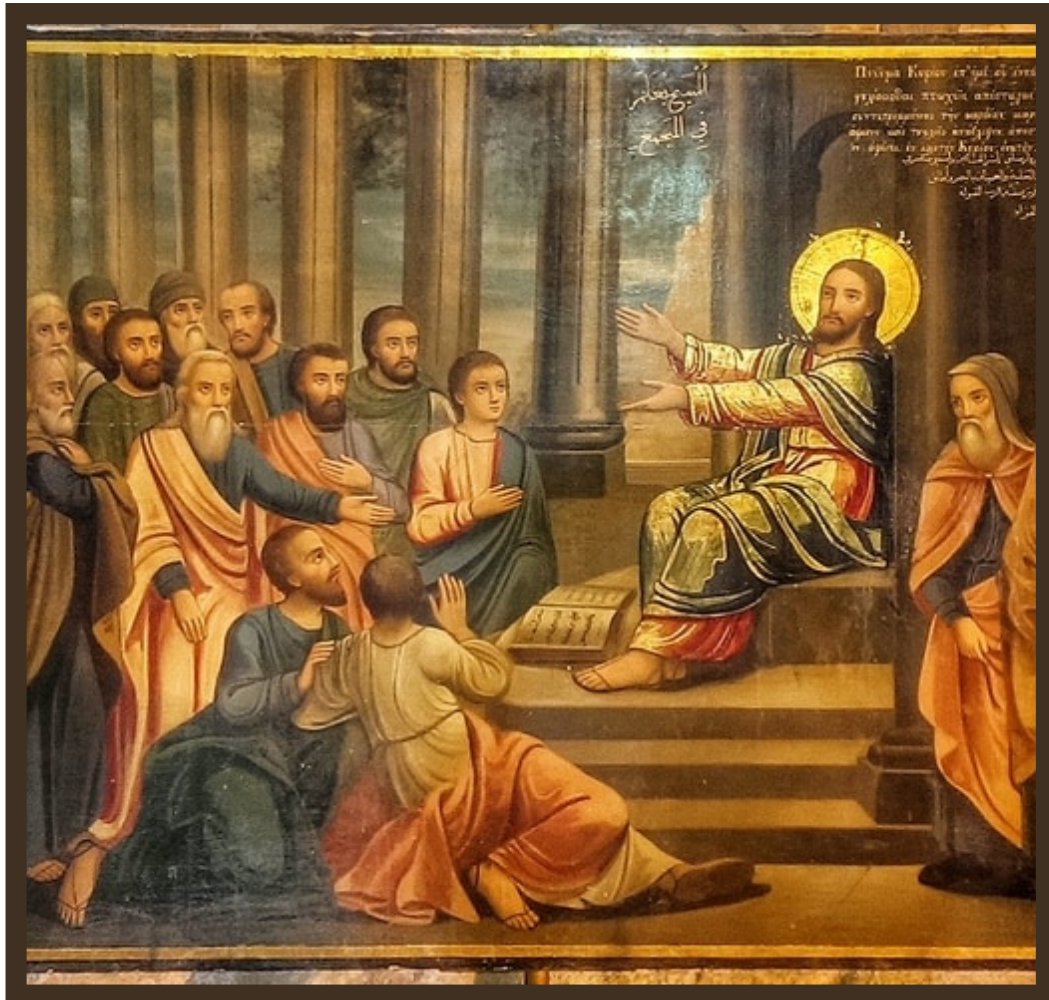
What is the world like when God's will is done? No more is neighbor just ally or  
friend; peace thrives in places where once there was none.  
This is how God works when rivalries end.

What is the world like when God's will is done? Ready for feasting, we watch  
through the night, tending our lamps till the new day's begun.  
This is how God readies us for the light.

These are the stories that Jesus imparts, filled with the Spirit who joins us as one.  
Born through our voices, our hands, and our hearts,  
this is a new world where God's will is done.

# Chapter 3

## The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me



**By Bishop Daniel Beaudoin**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: Luke 4:18-19
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!

## Chapter 3: The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me

**A**s a boy, I spent my summers with my grandparents in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, in a little town called Paradise, which is nestled on the shore of Whitefish Bay. In front of my grandparent's small house is Lake Superior. Behind my grandparents' small house is the Hiawatha National Forest. To the north sits the small town of Paradise, with a Post Office, grocery store, bakery, hardware store, motel, and Brown's Fishery. Between the small town and the small house runs O'Brien's Creek, which is full of Brook Trout. To the south is Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church. In that small stretch of town, we had everything we needed.

My grandparents let us roam and run. We spent our days exploring the forest, fishing for Brook Trout, visiting the neighbors at the Post Office, swimming in icy Lake Superior, and attending Mass on Tuesday morning, Thursday morning, Saturday night, and Sunday morning. And lest we forget Friday night fish fries at the Senior Center.

I learned some important values during those summer stays that continue to shape my life. The value of small. The value of neighboring. The value of God's beautiful creation. The value of faith and devotion. The value of simplicity.



Together, read a Jesus Story from Luke 4:16-21, NRSV.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## Chapter 3: The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me

Together, read a Jesus Story from The Message.

He came to Nazareth where he had been raised. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God's Spirit is on me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor. Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's time to shine!"

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

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**Luke 4:16 a** *"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up..."*

Share a short story about the place where you were brought up?

Paint a verbal picture of the community that helped raise you.

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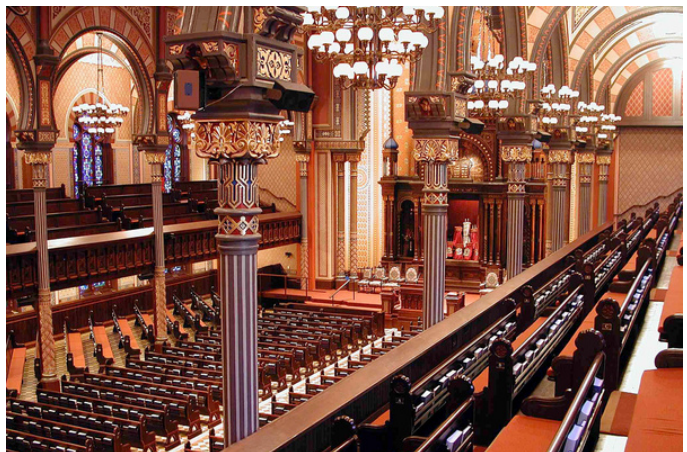
In **Luke 4:18-19**, Jesus shares the mission that He is sent to fulfill.

Retired Trinity Lutheran Seminary Professor, Rudolph Featherstone called Luke 4:18-19, Jesus' job description. As a follower of Jesus, his job description is also our job description. Think about your own God given gifts and skills, how might you use them in service to those who are experiencing poverty, imprisonment, and oppression?

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Have you ever visited a synagogue?  
If so, briefly share your experience with the group.

If not, reach out to a local synagogue and ask if your Bible Study group may schedule a tour or [take a virtual tour using this link.](#)





## Chapter 3: The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me

Take a look at Leviticus 25:8-13 and Isaiah 61:1-2.

The “*Year of Jubilee*”, or the “*Year of the Lord’s favor*” occurs every 50 years. During this 50th year of liberation slaves are freed, debts are cancelled, and ancestral property is returned to the original family. The Prophet Isaiah predicts that the coming Messiah will liberate the Israelites from oppression and exile.

From what does Jesus liberate or free us? Share a story of how you have experienced the liberation of Jesus in your life.

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After Jesus read the passage from the Prophet Isaiah, He sat down and said,

*“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Jesus announces to the congregation His God given mission, which will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. People certainly remembered that day in the synagogue. Can you think of a memorable and Holy Spirit filled moment that you experienced in worship? Share the story of that memorable moment.

**Closing Question:** What is your one take away from today’s conversation? With whom might you share this one “take away” this week?

### Homework:

- ☐ Memory Verses Luke 4:18-19
- ☐ Work Through the Next Lesson
- ☐ Check out this Bible Project Video on the Messiah (5:16 minutes)  
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/messiah/>



## Chapter 3: The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me

**Closing Prayer: Arise, Your Light Has Come!** (ELW 314) (in words)

Arise, your light has come!  
The Spirit's call obey;  
show forth the glory of your God  
which shines on you today.

Arise, your light has come!  
Fling wide the prison door;  
proclaim the captive's liberty,  
good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light has come!  
All you in sorrow born,  
bind up the brokenhearted ones  
and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light has come!  
The mountains burst in song!  
Rise up like eagles on the wing,  
God's pow'r will make us strong.

**Closing Prayer: Arise, Your Light Has Come!** (ELW 314) (in song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqGSBfD1Xr4> (1:19 minutes)

# **Chapter 4**

## **The Seed is the Word of God**



**By Calla Gilson**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: Luke 8:11
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!

## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

**I**n 2021 we, the dedicated folks who faithfully tend the local Community Garden, planted way too many tomatoes. I didn't ever think there was such a thing, but a bountiful harvest from too many tomato plants creates a mushy, sticky, smelly situation.

It was our first year gardening together as a community, and enthusiasm was high. In addition to the organic heirloom varieties kindly donated by a local couple who grow seedlings to give away plants to fight food insecurity, we accepted several more plants. Local families and church members were committed to gardening together, and found a place for each seedling in the rich soil. Hands, young and old, experienced worked side-by-side in the garden. Together we watered, watched, and waited with wonder as each plant slowly grew leaves, then tiny yellow flowers, then tender buds that swelled into juicy tomatoes!



In seemingly no time, we had green, orange, yellow, russet, purple and even striped tomatoes! We had softball-sized heirlooms, delicious plum and roma tomatoes, gobs and gobs of gob-stopper-sized cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes and even miniature versions of tomato plants whose entire stem and leaf and fruit together never grew larger than a soccer ball! We had so many tomatoes. The forest of tomatoes in each box grew so dense that it became impossible to see and retrieve tomatoes when they were ripe. The plants escaped their cages and ran wildly away from their tall stakes! Instead of bushels of gorgeous, shiny tomatoes making it out to the community produce stand for all to enjoy, the tomato plants became so encumbered by the sheer volume of the fruit they produced that they bent over and snapped under the weight of the bounty. Tomatoes began to rot on the vine. This sticky situation had an undeniable smell—tomatoes that had fallen off were decomposing and the tomatoes that replaced them were being feasted upon by insects!



In 2022, recalling the tomato-pocalypse of the year before, we only planted 8 tomato plants. Spaced the ideal distance apart and secured to sturdy stakes within tomato cages where they could grow upwards toward the sun, the 8 tomato plants were happy as could be. Remembering the volume of tomatoes produced the year before, we planned a Salsa Celebration to be hosted at the peak of tomato season.



## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

The whole community was invited to come and make their own salsa from the onions, peppers, and yes—tomatoes grown in the community garden. But 8 tomato plants produce significantly less tomatoes than 35+ tomato plants. I was panicked that we wouldn't have enough. So we asked the folks of the church to bring along any tomatoes they might have to share from their own gardens, to contribute to the Salsa Celebration.

If I had to write a parable, it'd probably start something like "The Kingdom of God is like asking the good folks of Fulton County to share tomatoes with their neighbors in September". In other words, the Kingdom of God is full of abundant generosity. Not only did we have way more than "enough" tomatoes to make salsa, we surpassed our wildest imagination! With bushels after bushels of tomatoes, poblano/cubano/habanero/jalapeno peppers, onions and more flooding the church kitchen, there was plenty of salsa to be made. From the generosity of many, we found ourselves once again with so many tomatoes. Those who came to the Salsa Celebration worked together to make 77 pounds of delicious salsa. Folks from Wauseon and Swanton who had come to know each other through community gardening prepped ingredients while laughing and learning more about each other's gardens. As in the garden where we spend more time practicing loving our neighbor than we do actually tending to seeds, so too in the kitchen did we learn and laugh as much as make sala. Somehow, there was enough for everyone to take home a few pounds of salsa, and still provide plenty to the staff and families of the church daycare, to hungry folks enjoying community meals in Toledo and beyond. At the end of the day, there were still so many tomatoes left over and we were able to share those with many more hungry people too. And that was good news.



## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

Together, read a Jesus Story from Luke 8:1-15, MSG; 13:18-21, NRSV

He continued according to plan, traveled to town after town, village after village, preaching God's kingdom, spreading the Message. The Twelve were with him. There were also some women in their company who had been healed of various evil afflictions and illnesses: Mary, the one called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's manager; and Susanna—along with many others who used their considerable means to provide for the company.

### **The Story of the Seeds**

As they went from town to town, a lot of people joined in and traveled along. He addressed them, using this story: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. Some of it fell on the road; it was tramped down and the birds ate it. Other seed fell in the gravel; it sprouted, but withered because it didn't have good roots. Other seed fell in the weeds; the weeds grew with it and strangled it. Other seed fell in rich earth and produced a bumper crop. "Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

His disciples asked, "Why did you tell this story?" He said, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom—you know how it works. There are others who need stories. But even with stories some of them aren't going to get it: Their eyes are open but don't see a thing, Their ears are open but don't hear a thing.

"This story is about some of those people. The seed is the Word of God. The seeds on the road are those who hear the Word, but no sooner do they hear it than the Devil snatches it from them so they won't believe and be saved.

"The seeds in the gravel are those who hear with enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm doesn't go very deep. It's only another fad, and the moment there's trouble it's gone.

"And the seed that fell in the weeds—well, these are the ones who hear, but then the seed is crowded out and nothing comes of it as they go about their lives worrying about tomorrow, making money, and having fun.

"But the seed in the good earth—these are the good-hearts who seize the Word and hold on no matter what, sticking with it until there's a harvest.

### **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

The story begins (like many stories of Jesus) with a roll call of who is present. Luke notes that women were present, as well as others who were companions of Jesus and the disciples, and made their ministry possible. We don't hear as much about these folks in the stories told by other gospel writers. Some of these folks were considered impolite company to keep, and were marginalized in both society and in the stories written about Jesus.

*Who might have been left out of a story about Jesus written today? What identities are pushed to the margins in our own stories and in stories of our communities? How might we change the narrative?*

Jesus talks about the seeds falling on good soil being people who hold fast to the word. *What seasons in your life might your ability to hold on to the good news have served you well? Were there times when the opposite was true and you found it difficult to hold onto the promises of God's goodness?*



It's winter as I'm writing this— a thick layer of sparkly white snow blankets all of the raised beds, and our tools are stashed away in the pole barn. Winter is a time for the gardener to reflect on the past growing season. What grew well? What plants struggled? Where did we notice plants growing in distress? Is the soil quality good or do we need to add some compost before next season?

*Where in your own life may the soft and quiet snow of winter invite you to reflect on your heart and faith journey?*



## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

We are not made to sow and reap alone. Maybe if the sower in the parable would have had a Master Gardener at hand, he might have been reminded that rocky and weedy soil aren't the best ways to grow good things!



*Seek out folks with expertise to walk alongside you. Who may you invite into your walk of faith? How have sunday school teachers, pastors, therapists, or spiritual directors been a part of your journey in seasons past? How might you invite them to walk alongside you in this season?*

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Just like the folks who care for the community garden spend way more time caring for our neighbors than actually growing food, the parable of the mustard seed reminds us of an important truth about our lives as Christians: **Sometimes we get to plant seeds, and sometimes we get to BE the seeds.**

*If you could scoop up a handful of seeds and plant them everywhere you went, what kind of seeds would you plant? Seeds of understanding? Seeds of compassion? Empathy? Kindness? Why?*

*How might you do this as a living "seed"?*

**Closing Question:** I love plants and growing food. When I talk about my faith, it's always about something that happens in the garden or at an ever-expanding dinner table. So this parable is quite special to me because it makes sense to me. Jesus used tangible things right in front of whatever person he was talking to / whatever crowd in front of which he was telling stories, to communicate specifically in that moment.

How would you put this parable in your own words? Instead of seeds, how would you teach this lesson? Maybe start with this phrase: *The kingdom of God is like...*

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What is your one take away from today's conversation?

With whom might you share this one "take away" this week?





## Chapter 4: The Seed is the Word of God

### Homework:

- ☐ Have you ever wondered what seeds Jesus might have plucked from the plants around him to paint a picture of this parable for those listening? Vivien Sansour might be able to tell you! She has been called “The Seed Queen” of Palestine for her remarkable work saving native heirloom seed varieties in the Holy Land that are in threat of extinction.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak> (24:44 min)
  - <https://viviensansour.com/Palestine-Heirloom>
- ☐ Has your congregation ever had a blessing of seeds? Read more about the tradition of rogation below:  
[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/What are Rogation Days.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/What%20are%20Rogation%20Days.pdf)

### Closing Hymn: Lord Let My Heart Be Good Soil (#512) (2:12 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47ggpDhylMg>

Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word.  
Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood.  
When my heart is hard, break the stone away.  
When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.  
When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.  
Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart be good soil.

### Closing Prayer: "The Romero Prayer" (often attributed to Oscar Romero)

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision...  
This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.  
We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and to do the rest.  
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.

# Chapter 5

## Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles



**By Deacon Sherry Krieger**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: Mark 6:30-44
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!

## Chapter 5: Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles

I watched Alice work, often. She was small, but so efficient. When she was a new worker, she took great care in learning what her job was, with all the duties, details and patterns of work that were expected of her. She learned where the corners of concern were and how to maneuver them. She would run up and down the floor, doing her job effectively: cleaning, picking up, humming along as if she liked her work. She was a pro. If she failed to complete a task or missed a spot, she cared enough to go back and get it right. And the great thing about Alice was that she was self-motivated and self-monitored. She knew what time she needed to go to work, she knew how long she needed to work, and as she went here and there and everywhere she did her job more efficiently and effectively.

But the amazing thing about Alice was and still is: when she got tired, low on energy or too filled with the “gunk” of the world, she headed back to her home to lay down, recharge and empty herself. She simply wouldn’t continue to work if she was too tired, feeling weak, or carrying too much “stuff.”

As I watched, I thought to myself, even this Roomba that was given to me as a Christmas gift, knew better how to take care of itself than I (and most humans) do.

We can all learn a lesson from Alice, the Roomba...it is vitally important to rest, recharge and empty out the “gunk” that clogs us up!



Together, read a Jesus Story from Mark 6:30-32, NRSV.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.



If you are like me, you’ve read this “feeding of the 5,000” story many times... but if you are like me, you’ve also numbed out, ignored or skipped over these very important verses that give us vital information: a glimpse of Jesus’ way of life and way of doing ministry... Jesus took time out! Jesus often took time to go away to recharge, to pray, and to REST before he went to work. And in this story, he teaches the disciples to do the same.

*Share with your group a story of your last vacation, a restful memory, or a favorite prayer practice that helps you recharge.*



## Chapter 5: Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles

Think about other times Jesus went off by himself or took time away before some big, busy, or important moment in his ministry. *Look up the story and read it to or share it with the group.*

(Hint: before starting his ministry, choosing his disciples, entering Jerusalem, etc.)

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The disciples are so excited about the ministry they have been doing in this story. *Share a story of something you are excited about that you have taught or newly learned, done, or experienced in the last month.*

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In this passage, the disciples had no leisure or even time to eat because they were so busy. Sound familiar? *As a follower of Jesus, what is one thing you can commit to do over the next month to follow Jesus' directive to take time out, to set healthy limits when you get tired, and to recharge from the busy-ness of life? What can you commit to in the next 6 months? What can you commit to for the year? Share your ideas and commitments with your group.*





## Chapter 5: Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles

There was a pastor. Over his 50 years of ministry, he faithfully served 4 major ministries in several different communities. He was a dedicated, deeply loving, fiercely spiritual, creative, genuinely faithful servant, who had forgone a full-ride scholarship to Princeton and an anticipated career at NASA to follow God's call to go to seminary and become a pastor. He was married, had four children, and was the kind of fellow who could fix the washer and dryer, replace the light switch, captain a small sailboat or a larger motorboat; he loved to fish, he loved the people he served, he loved his family, and he loved God more than anything.

In his life he also experienced tragedies: the early and untimely death of his 49-year-old mother to breast cancer just as he was being ordained, and the tragic, accidental death of his 12-year-old daughter to electrocution. He carried with him the struggles and bruises of hard Church Council meetings and financial crises, world political strife, a shifting culture, the continual movement of parishioners – young and old, expected, and unexpected. His family and the people he served often wondered how he had the faith to continue in ministry after facing such devastating losses, and the energy, stamina and deep compassion to minister the way that he did. Upon his death, they figured it out.

Although they had known that he did devotions every night and maybe kept a prayer journal (that no one ever saw)...upon his passing, this pastor's prayer books were the key to understanding his drive and the power of the Holy Spirit that lived in him, walked with him, and that he depended on for sustenance throughout life.

In his desk drawer were found many personal prayer books filled page after page, list after list of people's names, hard situations, relatives, friends, college roommates, parishioner's names, the sick, the old, the dying, the newborns, the confirmed, the Sunday school, the things he worried about, the things he felt guilty for, the issues that haunted him, the many things he gave thanks for... name after name after name, situation after situation after situation, all raised to God in prayer. And beside each were notes about how the prayers for each one of these had been answered.

The miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 was evident in this pastor's 5000+ prayers. Although he didn't feed 5000 different individual people at one time like Jesus did in today's story, the impact of his ministry was multiplied through the miracle of the Holy Spirit's movement in people's lives and situations through the simple prayers of a simple pastor. Loaves and fishes are multiplied through prayer and relationship, through each and every miracle that is promised to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This pastor knew this deep down. He lived it, he lived the miracle of feeding the 5000 and those of us who knew him were blessed by his prayers that were lifted up to the God he trusted.

## Chapter 5: Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles

Together, read a Jesus Story from Mark 6:33-44, NRSV.

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men [and women].

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In verses 6:35-37 the disciples are a little testy with Jesus, and Jesus asks them, actually challenges them to do something. *Have you ever been asked to do something that you didn't think you could do? Share that story.*

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This story offers hope for situations that we're concerned with in our lives. Read the story together and talk about a time or two that you may have lacked faith or experienced a situation that you just didn't know how it would work out, and then tell your group about the outcome.

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You and Me? We are not Jesus. We most likely cannot feed 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread, that's the reality – although I do believe in miracles when Jesus is involved! Yet this story gives us a glimpse of the power that Jesus possesses. *Share the story of a miracle you have experienced in your life.*

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*How have you seen the miracles of Jesus multiplied in your life? Who have you prayed for and how have your prayers been answered? Who has prayed for you? Share a few of these experiences and stories.*

## Chapter 5: Rest, Rhythm, and Miracles

**Closing Question:** What is your one take away from today's conversation?  
With whom might you share this one "take away" this week?

### Homework:

- ☐ Memory Verses Mark 6:31
- ☐ Work Through the Next Lesson
- ☐ Check out this lesson on the rhythms of life and the importance of rest based on the lessons of Building a Discipling Culture by Mike Breen, Making Room for Life by Randy Frazee, and The Rest of God, by Mark Buchannan:  
<https://lovefirstcoast.org/the-semi-circle-the-rhythm-of-life/>

**Closing Music:** Enjoy this music video!

Hawk Nelson - He Still Does (Miracles) (Official Lyric Video) (4:13 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNNbulojWcw>

**Closing Prayer: St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila**

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly  
where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities  
that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received,  
and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be confident knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones,  
and allow your soul the freedom to  
sing, dance, praise and love.

# Chapter 6

## A Story for You



**By Pastor Sarah Schaaf**

- ☐ Read the Opening Scripture Verses: Acts 1:8
- ☐ Prayer Requests and Opening Prayer
- ☐ Welcome and Introductions
- ☐ Announcements
- ☐ Tell the Story!



## Chapter 6: A Story for You

**W**hy are we still here?” my brother and I would groan, as we folded chairs after church or cooked the meal at the soup kitchen or waited for our parents to get done with the meeting. You know why, my dad would reply. Then he told a story we had heard many times before.

My dad grew up in a big Catholic family in Youngstown, Ohio. His dad was active in the local parish. In his father’s later years, he served as the custodian of the church. “We were always the last ones to leave the building,” my dad would groan. “Even the priest gets to go home before us!,” he would laugh. One day my grandfather was cleaning up something after church and recruited the help of his eldest son, my father. “Let someone else do it!” my dad retorted back. My grandfather looked at him and said, “you are the someone else.” And that story shaped my dad. It grew him into a man whose relationship with God is most often expressed through service to the church and community.

“You are the someone else,” my father would say. It grounded him in a story that shaped who he was; a story that he hope would shape who we were becoming.



Share a story, phrase, or inside joke that your family shared often?  
How has this story shaped you?



Use chart paper to make a timeline of major life and faith events.  
Where was God in the midst of these moments?  
What are two or three things others need to know about your life in order to understand you?



Explore the Bible Reading Plan for 2023.

What is one Jesus story that speaks to your story? Read through it slowly.

What is a word or phrase that stands out to you?

Describe who Jesus is in this story?

Where do you find yourself in the story?

What character do you identify with? Why?

What does Jesus want you to do? Who does Jesus long for you to be?

## Chapter 6: A Story for You

### Going Further:

To further explore how your story and Jesus' story intersect, continue to gather as a group to read:

- “You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing The Story of Jesus” by Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee and Chelsey Satterlee
- “Rockin’ The Front Porch: Sharing The Faith In The New Normal” by Harold ‘Jake’ Jacobson

**Closing Question:** What is your one take away from today’s conversation? With whom might you share this one “take away” this week?

### Closing Hymn: I Love to Tell the Story (5:03 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB-KSNQdhaY>

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,  
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.  
I love to tell the story, because I know it's true;  
it satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

I love to tell the story; 'twill be my theme in glory  
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story: how pleasant to repeat  
what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet!  
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard  
the message of salvation from God's own holy word.

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best  
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,  
I'll sing the old, old story that I have loved so long.

### Closing Prayer:

Come up with a word or a phrase that summarizes your prayer based on the Jesus Story you spent time with today. Share them with each other as a closing prayer. (Example: Mary & Martha – “Be Still, Just Be”)

## Blessing the Story

You might think  
this blessing lives in the story  
that you can see,  
that it has curled up in a comfortable spot  
on the surface of the telling.  
But this blessing lives  
in the story beneath the story.  
It lives in the story inside the story.  
In the spaces between.  
In the edges,  
the margins,  
the mysterious gaps,  
the enticing and fertile emptiness.  
This blessing  
makes its home within the layers.  
This blessing is  
doorway and portal,  
passage and path.  
It is more ancient  
than imagining  
and makes itself ever new.  
This blessing  
is where the story  
begins.

*Jan Richardson*



## Art and Resource Credits

Table of Contents: The Road to Emmaus by Dr. He Qi

[https://www.heqiart.com/store/p176/44\\_The-Road-to-Emmaus\\_Limited\\_Edition.html](https://www.heqiart.com/store/p176/44_The-Road-to-Emmaus_Limited_Edition.html)

Page 2: Jump for Joy - Mary and Elizabeth (2007) by Corby Eisbacher

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/54758766/2007-jump-for-joy-mary-and-elizabeth>

Page 4: Mary and Elizabeth Print by Lauren Wright Pittman

<https://sanctifiedart.org/poster-prints/mary-and-elizabeth-print>

Page 6: Magnificat by Todd Agnew (Performed by Pastor Beth Giller and Emily Hemminger)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_KrFyD36ww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_KrFyD36ww)

Page 6: A Blessing Called Sanctuary by Jan Richardson

<https://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>

Page 7: The Woman at the Well Art

<https://seattlemennonite.org/a-jewish-man-samaritan-woman-walk-into-a-bar/>

Page 9: Woman at the Well by Chris Cook

<https://chriscookart.net/woman-at-the-well/>

Page 10: Christ Shows Himself to Thomas

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20180409400323376&code=act&RC=54879&Row=11>

Page 11: Ask the Complicated Questions performed by Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Seattle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJdwOYF3OTs>

Page 11: What is the World Like performed by Halifax Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdgOQWhyA80>

Page 14: Central Synagogue Virtual Tour

<http://www.samrohn.com/360-panorama/central-synagogue-new-york-city/>

Page 15: The Bible Project - Messiah

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/messiah/>

Page 16: Arise, Your Light Has Come! performed by Niagara United Mennonite Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqGSBfD1Xr4>

Page 17: Sower at Sunset, 1888 by Vincent Van Gogh

<https://www.vincentvangogh.org/sower-at-sunset.jsp#prettyPhoto>

Pages 18-22: Photos by Calla Gilson

Page 23: The Seed Queen of Palestine by Al Jazeera English

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak>

Page 23: Palestine Heirloom Seed Library

<https://viviensansour.com/Palestine-Heirloom>



## Art and Resource Credits

Page 23: What are Rogation Days?

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/What\\_are\\_Rogation\\_Days.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/What_are_Rogation_Days.pdf)

Page 23: Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil performed by Alethea Wilhelm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47ggpDhylMg>

Page 23: The Romero Prayer

<http://www.romerotrout.org.uk/romero-prayer>

Page 24: Feeding the 5000 by James B. Janknegt

<https://www.bcartfarm.com/pp278.html>

Page 26: Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish by JESUS MAFA, Cameroon

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48287>

Page 29: The Semi Circle: The Rhythm of Life

<https://lovefirstcoast.org/the-semi-circle-the-rhythm-of-life/>

Page 29: He Still Does by Hawk Nelson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNNbulojWcw>

Page 30: The Lord of the Parables by Jorge Coco Santángelo

<https://jorgecocco.com/2018/07/03/the-lord-of-the-parables/>

Page 31: 2023 NWOS Daily Bible Reading Guide

<http://nwos-elca.church/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-Bible-Reading-Guide.pdf>

Page 32: “You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing The Story of Jesus” by Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee and Chelsey Satterlee

[https://www.amazon.com/You-Are-Witnesses-These-Things/dp/B0BKQ8G8KM/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=34B5M56ZGPZJD&keywords=you+are+witnesses+of+these+things+satterlee&qid=1674924957&srefix=you+are+witnesses%2Caps%2C114&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/You-Are-Witnesses-These-Things/dp/B0BKQ8G8KM/ref=sr_1_1?crid=34B5M56ZGPZJD&keywords=you+are+witnesses+of+these+things+satterlee&qid=1674924957&srefix=you+are+witnesses%2Caps%2C114&sr=8-1)

Page 32: “Rockin’ The Front Porch: Sharing The Faith In The New Normal” by Harold ‘Jake’ Jacobson

[https://www.amazon.com/Rockin-Front-Porch-Sharing-Normal/dp/1716893178/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=ID28VSOH65NE&keywords=rockin+the+front+porch&qid=1674925001&srefix=rockin+the+fro nt+porch%2Caps%2C107&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Rockin-Front-Porch-Sharing-Normal/dp/1716893178/ref=sr_1_1?crid=ID28VSOH65NE&keywords=rockin+the+front+porch&qid=1674925001&srefix=rockin+the+fro nt+porch%2Caps%2C107&sr=8-1)

Page 32: I Love to Tell the Story conducted by Sujit Mathews Vengal and performed by the 250 Voice Mass Choir in Bangalore

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB-KSNQdhaY>

Page 33: Blessing the Story by Jan Richardson

<https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/11/04/where-the-story-begins/>

Page 33: Road to Emmaus by Edward Miller

<https://lesedwards.com/en-us/products/road-to-emmaus>